

Inventing online journalism

*Development of the Internet as a news medium
in four Catalan online newsrooms*

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Abstract

Online journalism has developed in several directions and rhythms, taking different shapes in different online news projects. Scholars have offered empirical evidence that these directions are, in many occasions, far from the utopias envisioned in the 90s. We are still inventing online journalism. A comparative research focused on four case studies of Catalan online newsrooms traces the material and organizational constraints in the definition and use of hypertext, multimedia and interactivity –those hyped Internet features– by online journalists.

Professional routines and values of the four online newsrooms are analyzed, with the aim of finding the similarities and divergences among different media traditions: a national newspaper (*El Periódico*), a public broadcasting corporation (*CCRTV*), a local newspaper (*Diari de Tarragona*) and a public-funded news portal (*laMalla.net*). Observation of the journalists at work and in-depth interviews provide a close look at the context and development of each case, interpreted with a constructivist approach to the social adoption of new technologies.

Some of the findings of the study include: immediacy is the main value in three of the online newsrooms; the rest of the online journalism utopias are shaped by this decision; news wires are the main –and almost only– source for most of online news; small sized staffs and the culture of immediacy discourage online journalists from going out or contacting first-hand sources, specially in traditional media online newsrooms; online journalists in traditional media environments tend to downgrade the value of their work in regard to their offline mates; the online-only project overcomes some of the problems with a specialization strategy, having each journalist focused on particular topics, and they are more sensitive to explore utopias.

The author argues that more comparative studies at an international level on the organizational and material structure of online newsrooms are needed to offer media companies a realistic stand point to continue the invention of the internet as a news medium.

The Internet's identity as a communication medium was not inherent in the technology; it was constructed through a series of social choices. The ingenuity of the system's builders and the practices of its users have proved just as crucial as computers and telephone circuits in defining the structure and purpose of the Internet. (...) The Internet had to be invented—and constantly reinvented—at the same time as the technology itself. I hope that this perspective will prove useful to those of us, experts and users alike, who are even now engaged in reinventing the Internet.

Inventing the Internet (Abbate, 1999:6)

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1. Introduction

“Online journalism is a very new and very fast-evolving branch of journalism, with academic research about it lagging far behind. One of the reasons is certainly that, by the time a researcher has developed a research question, set up the design for a study (...) the object of scholarly curiosity might no longer exist or may have changed dramatically since data collection first began” (Kopper *et al.*, 2000:499)

Kopper's reflection is still valid. Change might be included as a variable in your research and in the end you may have the feeling that “Internet time” is not moving as fast as the media hype tended to suggest. Nevertheless, one cannot avoid the vertigo of being the observer of a newborn which is still discovering its language, finding its rhythm, inventing its routines. At one of the media companies analyzed in this dissertation, *Diari de Tarragona*, the very object of my inquiry melted away in one month between my stages in the online newsroom and my interviews with relevant members of the team. The owner of this local newspaper had decided to dismantle the three-person online newsroom and to externalize the management of the website. Just one of the editors of the paper would be overseeing the work of the external team, made up of graphic designers and programmers, with no journalists at all. Production routines obviously changed and, under the new circumstances, I had to revise all my interpretations. The feeling that what you analyze will probably be different when you publish your results is always hovering over research into online journalism. However,

underlying principles and definitions about news production in the online newsrooms seemed to be quite stable, and luckily enough, the sign of change was positive in most of the cases I followed.

This research emerged out of a personal double disappointment: the disappointment of mass media journalism, trapped in the logic of business behind the alibi of objectivity, and the disappointment of what I call *online journalism utopias*,¹ which promised salvation for the profession and a regained commitment to citizens and society but ended up by mostly recreating old journalistic habits. Much of the research in the 1990s concentrated on building up the utopias (with an enthusiasm that I also once embraced), and later on denouncing that the media industry was not living up to the potential of the Internet. Empirical evidence suggested that the utopias were not being developed in current online projects, even though professionals used them as the definition of what online journalism should be. This dissertation follows the voices that advocated refocusing online media research in order to overcome the intrinsic technological determinism found in utopias and to produce results that would allow to explain the factors that shape the actual development of the Internet as a news medium, as a platform for the delivery of news products.

¹ This concept is inspired by the work of historians of technology (see section 2.3) that remark that one of the definitional attitudes of Western societies is technological utopianism: the tendency to think that innovations will change society dramatically. Constructivist studies on technological innovation suggest (see section 3.2) that the process of adoption of a technology is much more complex and the initial utopias usually do not materialize as they were formulated. As it will be discussed in the dissertation, some of the online journalism utopias have been adopted in online newsrooms, other adapted to the needs and culture of journalists and other disregarded. The concept of "utopias" tries to describe the distance from reality of the initial definitions of online journalism and their role as ideals that journalists in the studied cases mostly depict as unreachable.

This study attempts to describe the current characteristics of online news production in real settings, something that has been rather unheeded within the research in the field of online journalism. My point is that we need to enter online newsrooms if we are to fully understand how a new technology such as the Internet has met the journalistic culture and developed as a news medium. Most studies have focused on website feature analysis and provide few explanations for the decisions that are shaping online news. I have tried to go beyond the computer screen and the virtual world and meet the flesh-and-blood people who are inventing online journalism. Borrowing from the conceptual framework of research in technological innovation, I argue that the Internet as a news medium was neither spontaneously adopted by media companies nor designed beforehand and offered to them as a plug-and-play system that could be attached to the existing working routines and structures with an easy-to-use manual of instructions that would solve any problem in the development of online products. Utopias could be seen as this ideal manual, but the fact is that technologies are adopted and adapted by specific people in particular social and organizational settings. We need to meet online journalists, learn their routines and their expectations about the Internet if we are to understand why online journalism is being done the way it is. Obviously, this approach lets us talk just about specific cases, at a specific moment in their history. As the theoretical background of the study, based on constructivist approaches to technological innovation suggests, the internet as a news medium is a social product that has to be interpreted with historical perspective and contextual awareness. And this needs to be done in concrete cases in order to open the black box of online newsrooms.

This research is not meant to be a refutation of online journalism utopias. We will compare them with actual developments in four different cases of Catalan online media, not in order to reject them, but to reinterpret their role in the decisions made within the newsrooms when defining newsgathering practices, newsworthiness criteria, ethical principles and writing conventions for the Internet as a news medium. With this perspective, utopias are not the predefined path for online journalism, neither are they discarded as useless. They are one among many other factors that influenced the decisions of each media company to embrace online journalism. To what extent these factors –some restricted to individual companies, some shared as the utopias– have pushed online journalism towards homogeneous or heterogeneous solutions is one of the aims of the study. Utopias transformed in another factor undermine the deterministic approaches of much of online journalism literature. We defend that the future of online news is open and this dissertation does not try to predict it: this study just pretends to describe the maturing models of online journalism production in four Catalan cases and interpret the factors that shape them and the consequences they have to the reporters' work. Utopias may some day be achieved, or they themselves may evolve. I argue that there are many factors that make it difficult for current online journalism utopias to be put into practice in news media companies. But the path is open and, to some extent, in the hands of the daily decisions of online journalists.

By making visible the historically embedded and locally produced processes of adopting the Internet as a news medium in four media companies, I wish to provide online journalists some insights and interpretative tools that may empower them to take more informed decisions in developing their still nascent news medium. A decade has passed

since the first experiences of newspaper websites were developed, but the title of this dissertation tries to highlight the fact that the process by which the Internet is to become a standardized delivery channel of news is still open: we are still *inventing* online journalism.

1.1. Object of study

Before going any further, we should clarify the framework of the research in terms of its object of study. *Online journalism* is the widely used term in scholarly literature to refer to news production and distribution over the Internet, mainly through websites. Deuze *et al.* suggested the following definition for online journalists: “Media professionals who are directly responsible for the Internet content of news ventures (be it existing print or broadcast media or be it independent online ventures)” (2004:20).

Most of the research specializing in this form of journalism has concentrated on a particular element of the phenomenon: the product (news websites), the producers (online journalists) or the consumers (Internet users). We will concentrate on the second element, as the theoretical foundations for the present study –found both in the sociology of newsmaking and in constructivist disciplines devoted to the analysis of technological innovation in order to overcome the interpretative limitations of deterministic research paradigms– suggest that the research focus should be on the social context of the use of the technology. In this study, our attention focuses on the point at which journalistic culture and the Internet meet: the social context, in this case, is media companies and, more specifically, the newsrooms where journalists work with the Internet as a news medium. It is here that the process of adopting the technology took place and where the definitions of what online journalism is are put into practice through working routines and professional values.

The constructivist theoretical background invites for a broad approach to the object of study. Researchers must be aware of the multiple factors that influence the use of a technology, from business logic to professional culture. In this study, the product and the audience have been regarded as part of the production process, but nevertheless the focal point in research design and research questions is online newsrooms and journalists, the creators of the Internet as a news medium. Relationships of the online staff with other departments of the companies were also explored and the ethnographic work suggested that the technical staff (responsible of developing the tools for online publishing) and the traditional newsroom played an important role (not always active) in the shaping of online news products and routines. The marketing department did not have any explicit presence in online journalists everyday life and, as the focus of this dissertation is on the journalistic aspects of online news media, it was not considered relevant extending the analysis to that area of the companies.

For news media companies, the process of exploring a new medium is not being easy. "The issues surrounding creation, maintenance and staffing of online products go far beyond changing a single tool. In effect, they involve launching whole new lines of business – lines that will require major commitments of personnel, money and attention from newsroom managers to succeed" (Singer *et al.*, 1999:32). Research can help in this process, making companies aware of the implications of their decisions and the constraints that surround them. "Also needed is an exploration of the workings of online newsrooms, including their organizational structures, work routines, staff interactions and ethical decision-making processes. In short, a thorough exploration of the sociology of online news work would be valuable not only because it would

enhance our understanding of online journalism but also because it would enhance our understanding of the professional as a whole and its changing role in our changing society" (Singer, 2003:157).

Catalan online media have followed similar development paths to other European and American media. As will be discussed further below (see chapter 5), there was an initial exploratory phase in the mid-1990s, a boom at the turn of the century and then an important recession. The fieldwork for this research was conducted between 2003 and 2004, when it was still not clear whether the recession had been overcome and there was a great deal of skepticism about the Internet in Catalan media companies. The study attempts to put this period into its historical context, and to interpret it as a phase in the evolution of online journalism. A phase during which utopias were conceived by online newsrooms as ideals that material and social constraints made unreachable.

Four concrete cases were selected for the analysis, trying to have a maximum variation sample among Catalan online news sites, as reasoned in section 4.1:

- ☞ A newspaper online venture: *El Periódico Online*
- ☞ A purely online project: *laMalla.net*
- ☞ A broadcaster online news portal: *CCRTV*
- ☞ A local newspaper online version: *Diari de Tarragona*

1.2. Research questions and hypotheses

This research tries to shed some light on questions for which online journalism research has not been able to provide thorough and empirically grounded explanations. Literature has mostly been prospective, normative, descriptive and/or intuitive, but little data has been gathered to help interpret the current evolution of online media – i.e. *the process of adopting the Internet as a news medium and the online news production culture resulting from this process*. The aims of this study can be summarized in the following research questions:

- 1) Why do media companies produce online publications the way they do nowadays?
- 2) How have online publications evolved and what factors have influenced this evolution?
- 3) Which are the differences between online and “traditional” journalism working routines, audience definition and product features?
- 4) Does technology determine news production routines?

The impressive social weight of online journalism utopias among professionals and scholars, balanced with the teachings of technological innovation research about previous cases of media and social evolution, suggest two complementary hypotheses as a basis for answering these questions:

1. Online journalism utopias are an influential model, but they do not directly shape actual online media. The uses of the Internet as a news medium are

shaped by contextual factors that are primarily found inside the media companies. Therefore, there may be different models of online journalism and technology is not the driving force, but socially shaped in each local case.

2. The tradition of a media company, which could be simplified to the media logic (broadcast, print, purely online) stated by Altheide and Snow (1991), is the main factor that determines the use of the Internet as a news medium. Therefore, independent online projects are more likely to develop along the lines suggested by online journalism utopias while online projects embedded in print or broadcast companies will tend to reproduce their parent medium routines, definitions and features, thus minimizing the influence of the utopian model.

1.3. Dissertation outline

This study aims to provide empirical evidence to answer these questions and validate these hypotheses. It will be argued that an ethnographic and social constructivist approach to the process of adopting the Internet in online newsrooms is a worthy theoretical and methodological framework to fulfill the research objectives. "The combination of detailed empirical research with growing theoretical sophistication about science and technology offers genuine new insights into technical change", argues Pinch (1996:35).

The first part of the dissertation constructs the theoretical and methodological background of the study. Scientific literature about the object of study is reviewed and evaluated in chapter 2, starting with the historical background on innovation processes in media companies prior to the Internet and on the origins of the network of networks. Online journalism utopias are described and empirical research into online media is analyzed. Chapter 3 discusses the sociology of journalism and constructivist research on technological innovation as the theoretical framework of a non-deterministic approach to the adoption of the Internet as a news medium. The research design and methodology are explained in chapter 4.

Part two shows the results of the ethnography. Chapter 5 starts by reconstructing the evolution of the four projects analyzed. Online news production cultures in the newsrooms are discussed in chapter 6, with particular attention to routines and values

in daily work. Chapter 7 analyzes the context of online newsrooms in order to determine the factors that shape the adoption of the Internet and the work of online journalists. Technology and social relations with other departments in the company are explored. Chapter 8 summarizes the findings and draws conclusions. An index of the names of people and companies mentioned in the study can be found in the final pages of this volume.

PART I: Theoretical and methodological background

“It is when technologies such as the telephone or the computer cease to be sublime icons of mythology and enter the prosaic world of banality –when they lose their role as sources of utopian visions– that they become important forces for social and economic change”

The digital sublime: myth, power and cyberspace
(Mosco, 2004:6)

2. Literature review

Not much more than a decade after the first news websites were set up, research on online journalism is still shaping itself. The challenge of analyzing a nascent communication medium is very attractive, but the metamorphic nature of its early stages demands solid theoretical and methodological tools in order to understand the trends and interpret the founding principles of this developing profession. The maturing process of online journalism studies has largely suffered from too little reflection about which research strategies are most appropriate to the object of study, dominated by the persuasive attraction of the new technology, that resulted in a powerful set of utopias about what the Internet as a news medium should be.

This chapter critically reviews the research literature on online journalism by putting it into its historical context. Section 2.1 recalls innovations in news media companies previous to the adoption of the Internet and section 2.2 reconstructs the history of the Internet before it became a news medium. After this contextual perspective, the chapter analyzes scientific approaches to online journalism. The 1990s were dominated by a first wave of research that concentrated on prospective analysis and provided utopian and normative statements about what online journalism should be (section 2.3). This research had a profound influence over the empirical studies (section 2.4).

Early reviewers of online journalism research literature compared the object of study to “a landscape in the process of discovery” (Kopper *et al.*, 2000:500) that needed more

scholarly attention. In one of the most complete critical research reviews to date, Pablo Boczkowski defended the need to map the existing studies “because both object and inquiry are far from being stable: the more unstable the phenomena and their analyses, the more effort should be put into mapping the territory before embarking upon any particular journey” (2002:271). Since then, scientific production on the subject has boomed. However, the phenomenon is still evolving and the interpretative limitations of the dominant approaches urge to bring the map of research up to date. Furthermore, we need to evaluate the evolution of the phenomenon from the birth of online journalism studies to the present day in both theoretical and empirical scientific production, in order to point out more fruitful research strategies and focuses.

2.1. Innovation processes in media companies preceding the Internet

Media companies, as any other social institution, have always used technology in their production and distribution processes. They have been sensitive to innovation in communication technologies, mainly due to economic reasons. In the last decades of the 20th century, newspapers were a profitable business, but all the indicators showed warning lights: readership was declining steadily, specially among young readers – more attracted by audiovisual products–, and their advertising share was disputed by the increasingly fragmented television market (Santinoli, 1988; Heinonen, 1999:42; Boczkowski, 2004b:4). Mario Santinoli, technical director of *El Periódico de Catalunya* (one of the case studies analyzed in this research) argues that a foreseen economic crisis was “the actual impulse for technological renovation” in newspaper newsrooms – computerization of the production process– (1988:81), while Boczkowski (2004b:4) and Mercè Díez (2001) extend its influence to the early experiments carried out with digital distribution such as videotex.

Santinoli (1988) added the increasing price of paper (raw material of newspapers) and the growing visual culture imposed by television as factors that promoted a strategy of technological innovation to improve the product and lower production costs at the same time. Page composition and pre-print processes were the first ones to be digitalized and the responsibility for design was fully concentrated in the newsroom, allowing newspaper companies to get rid of many workers in the printing workshop. When newswriting was also computerized, this trend was even stronger. Many parts of

the technical production process were simplified and automated in the computer system and therefore technical staff could be drastically reduced, with obvious savings in costs and production time (Christopher, 1998:139). A side effect of this strategy was that journalists would have more control over the final product, which was generally welcomed and contributed to convince most reporters of the idea that adaptation to work with computers was worth the effort. Nevertheless, other journalists argued against these trends because they thought they should not be assuming some tasks that computerization added to their duties. The risk of overloading the journalist with technically-oriented tasks is one of the drawbacks of computerization (Bromley, 1997:345). Christopher points out other risks in a complete summary of the history of the digitalization of newspaper newsrooms: overflow of wire dispatches, isolation of the journalist, more time devoted to production processes than content itself (newsgathering, editing), diminished content quality. Furthermore, technological innovation usually created new organizational problems due to the lack of effective leadership, skilled staff or appropriate resources for the new hardware and software (1998:135). Soriano (2004:130) also reported that digitalization of newspaper layout was seen as diminishing flexibility and creativity, as easy-to-use templates substituted the handcrafted work. Computer-assisted newsgathering, based on online databases and, in the 1990s, the Internet, was a promise for better investigative journalism, but in the end it tended to aggravate the increasing passive reporting trend, lacking a direct contact with the sources (Christopher, 1998:133).

Broadcasting companies also followed a similar evolution when electronics in the 1970s and digitalization in the 1990s made it possible to work with smaller and smaller

equipment and semi-automated and easier production processes. Until the 1980s technical processing of video and audio, from recording to editing, was regarded as non-journalistic tasks. Under the supervision of the reporter, technicians worked with the equipment to produce the actual news stories. Little by little, broadcasting journalists assumed many of the technical tasks, but there was a limit: they had to be directly related to content decision-making. Bromley (1997:344) argues that, in the 1990s, business logic gained even more weight within media companies and technological innovation was used to completely dismantle these principles. Media managers talk about the virtues of *multi-skilling* –when a reporter assumes the whole production process of a news story for different media outlets–, but in reality journalists sometimes get stressed and feel that the quality of their products worsens (Cottle, 1999). The reason is that the logic behind this adoption of digital technologies is usually to make roles in the newsroom more flexible and, this way, producing more with the same human resources. In other cases, the overall perception of journalists is positive, as they have gained greater control over the final product, but they admit that assuming technical tasks takes time from the journalistic routines, such as fact checking (Avilés *et al.*, 2004:98-99).

In Cottle's case study at the Bristol news center of the BBC, managers explicitly argued that technological innovation was supposed to lower production costs by making the processes more efficient. Empowered reporters and better story coverage with the help of online newsgathering resources were some of the managers' arguments when defending multi-skilling at the eyes of the newsroom. Nevertheless, these were not compatible when the aim of cutting costs supposed increasing the journalists'

workload. "All our interviewees acknowledged and welcomed the benefits [of new technologies] in terms of enhancing their professional practices. Where journalists are critical (...) is with respect to the increased workloads and pressures that have accompanied the use of new technologies –not because of the technologies *per se*, but rather because of the reduced numbers and redeployed journalists now expected to work with these for multi-media ends" (Cottle, 1999: 34-35). They stated that they had no time to explore the potentials of the Internet and digital production. For Cottle, this case demonstrates that "technologies of news production are in fact *socially and culturally shaped* and *embedded* within corporate and professional contexts and practices" (1999:22; italics in the original).

In Catalonia, the introduction of the Internet in the newsrooms has been much faster than the adoption of computers, but "improvised and fragmented" (Masip, 2004:272), initiated by individual journalists and not planned beforehand by the management. Before 2000 there was scarce access, but in 2002 the adoption of the Internet in newsrooms was almost complete. Masip interpreted the late adoption as a result of a slow computerization and online database access, which started in the 1990s in many newsrooms, much later than in most of Europe and the US: by 1989 only 50% of the newsrooms used computers and by 1994 there was only one Spanish journalistic database service. "While in the United States browsing electronic information resources had been incorporated to journalistic routines long before the spread of the Internet, the process in Spain has been in the opposite direction. Journalists discovered the possibilities that electronic information resources could bring to their tasks just once the Internet appeared in the newsrooms" (Masip, 2004:273).

Beyond technological innovation in the production practices, the development of digital technologies offered the possibility for media companies to explore a new distribution channel for their content production. As it is the case of the Internet, media companies did not lead the development of these technologies: most of them were mainly developed by governments (specially in Europe) and telecommunication companies (mostly in the US) initiatives,² and the media just entered the field when they perceived it as a possible threat for their business (Boczkowski, 2004b:20). Newspapers were the first media to explore the possibilities of digital distribution of information, starting with videotex services. During the 1980s, multiple technologies were experimented, but most of them were discarded as they did not generate consumer's enthusiasm rapidly (Boczkowski, 2004b:19). After years of prototypes, most of them never widely deployed, the Internet was the only digital technology to be consolidated as a massive alternative to print distribution. Boczkowski argues that, at least in the case of US newspapers, this choice was mainly due to the perception within media companies that the World Wide Web was becoming the preferred environment for users to browse for digital information. Previous experiments with other technologies provided some expertise in how to deal with the new medium. Boczkowski describes these experiments as reactive –newspapers “followed technical and social trends rather than proactively preceding them”–, defensive –trying to guess if the new technologies were a threat to their traditional print business rather than looking for new markets– and pragmatic –aiming for short-term benefits without affecting the core print business, rather than exploring projects that could extend it in

² The most clear example are videotex systems. In Europe, the cases of Spain (Díez, 2001), France and Germany (Schneider, 2000) have been analyzed from a constructivist approach until their final decline with the expansion of the Internet. Boczkowski (2004b) recalls the history of the US videotex systems, from the perspective of experiments carried out by newspapers.

the future– (2004b:20). This logic would also apply to the adoption of the Internet as a news medium (Boczkowski, 2004b:51). “The business rationale for newspapers’ online efforts [was] often based on the threat scenario of their continuing to lose ground in the media field because of new online competition” (Heinonen, 1999:43).

The computerization of newspapers production was an accelerator for the experimentation on digital delivery, as content was by then already digitally stored in local databases. Techno-deterministic discourses were also common in the 1980s and promoted the idea that digital delivery was a necessary move for newspapers. However, after the first consumer trials took place, discourses changed rapidly. Videotex trials, the technology that most investments received in the 1980s, were abandoned after some months or years because revenue expectations were not met. In many countries the number of users was always below the optimistic figures of the business plans and many stopped using the service just after some weeks. Some of the reasons that explain this lack of user’s enthusiasm were the high cost of dedicated terminals (alternative videotex versions for personal computers were neither popular, as the PC industry was still nascent) and per hour usage rates, the lack of original news content (newspapers just repurposed the daily paper to the format of videotex) and the slow data transmission rate over the telephone line (Carlson, 2003:41-42). While the trials were free, there was some curiosity in users, but they clearly showed that they were not willing to pay for what videotex provided. The case of the French version of videotex, Teletel, one of the few success stories of this technology, is also paradigmatic. Newspapers were the first content providers, but news did not seem to be appealing to users. As new content and service providers got into the system

focusing on entertainment and messaging services (an important part was erotic content) and users seemed to be more interested in interpersonal communication than in browsing news, newspaper videotex projects moved in that direction during the second half of the 1980s. Except for very specialized professional audiences, there was no social demand for a continuously updated feed of news, which was the only actual feature of the videotex that was innovative in regards to traditional media (Díez, 2001: 147-148), and in many cases the service would not even satisfy this promise, as production resources devoted to it were not able to guarantee up-to-the-minute news (Fidler, 1997:152). Users' active role in videotex was something that most experiments on electronic newspapers were not able to grasp (Carslon, 2003:42), as they conceived their service as a one-way advertising supported news delivery medium. Based on these disappointing results,³ most experiments concluded that digital delivery was not a threat to the print edition of newspaper and, therefore, they lost the appeal to be developed any further (Boczkowski, 2004b:28).

Teletext (using television broadcast signal) and audiotex (automatic voice information systems over the phone) were also explored in the 1980s and still survive nowadays, but only as complementary and mainly free services. Before the Internet started to be seen as the right choice, there was huge uncertainty over the most appropriate delivery artifact for digital information. CD-Roms became a viable but not comparable alternative to network digital transmissions in the 90s, while flat panels as substitutions for the print paper were piloted although they have not undergone any commercial exploitation yet (Fidler, 1997:239-242). At the beginning of the 1980s decade personal

³ Fidler (1997:151-159) offers a comprehensive analysis of the problems that lead to the failure of ViewTron, one of the biggest videotex systems in the US.

computers were still an anecdotal industry. Nonetheless, there were some common features in all these different experiments: newspapers “usually replicated existing information artifacts and practices, rather than creating something different” for the new digital delivery medium (Boczkowski, 2004b:33). The newspaper logic was applied in developing the new products as a closed system of information. A videotex subscriber could only access the content provided by that specific service, not other videotex services, and news content never developed beyond repurposed print news and providing wire breaking news updates. Users’ feedback was not considered an interesting feature for these services.

The first consumer online services based on PC terminals took a central role in the turn of the 1980s to the 1990s in the US. Commercial networks similar to the Internet but yet not connected to it (it still was a network for universities) provided an easier ground for newspaper content to reach a mass of consumers that videotex never was able to create on its own. The change from a dedicated terminal to the more polyvalent PC was capital, and the poor proprietary graphical interfaces of CompuServe, Prodigy or AOL were not a problem for newspapers to move their experiences to the new digital environment, as early explorations of what the World Wide Web would mean in few years (Carslon, 2003:43-48).

Boczkowski (2004b:70) believes that, even being a commercial failure in most of the cases, these early experiments favored the sensitivity of media companies to digital delivery technological evolution and made it easier to start testing the Internet as a new medium once it began to be a massive communication tool. In the early stages of

the commercial boom of the Internet (1992-95), the revolution rhetoric surrounding the new medium and the high rate of user growth triggered a “must be in” impetus in media companies, probably stronger than the attitude towards other previous technologies. The World Wide Web user-friendliness and openness rapidly converted it into the *de facto* standard for digital delivery of newspapers (Carlson, 2003:48). Broadcast media followed this trend with more hesitation, but in 1996 most media companies already had some kind of web presence. Boczkowski (2004b:42-48) describes this process as a settlement, both in the sense of closure of the technological dispute among different options and of the beginning of an exploration of a new territory, with all the uncertainties that this implies. However, when going online in the 1990s, the lessons of videotex and other digital delivery platforms had been forgotten: “Despite scholarly and anecdotal evidence suggesting that [unchanged] content reproduction [of the traditional medium] was not well received by users of those services, a decade later online newspapers on the web –at least in their first years– have been following the same path” (Boczkowski, 2002:274). But before further analyzing the early history of online journalism, we need to go back some years to trace the origins of its technological platform: the Internet.

2.2. The Internet as a social product

As most of other digital delivery technologies, the origins of the Internet are distant from the media industry. Newspapers and broadcasters got in the development of the Internet as late actors in the evolution of a technology that has been shaped by many hands over three decades. "As all technologies, the Internet is a social product of its social environment" (Abbate, 1999:2). Janet Abbate is clear-cut in the most complete history of the Internet to date.⁴ Her theoretical background is built up on the studies of the social construction of technology (see section 3.2.2). The historian argues that the evolution of the global computer network is a paradigmatic example of how actors participating in the technology invention and adoption shape the artifact. The Internet has evolved through the years not only in technical terms, but also in social uses and definition. "The notion of what is the Internet, its structure, its uses and values have changed radically throughout its existence" (1999:2). Actually, the Internet today hosts multiple uses and users and a wide range of communication practices, from virtual communities and interpersonal chats, to corporate management, e-commerce or mass media. "The Internet is fundamentally heterogeneous" (Flichy, 2002:147). It is worth revising the origins to see how it has developed to the current situation.

Up to the late 1960s, computers were calculation tools and they were not usually interconnected. The technological basis of the Internet –an standardized protocol for the remote connection of computers to enable transparent data exchange– is the

⁴ This section will mainly follow Abbate's account. A critical review on studies about the origins and the evolution of the Internet (including Abbate's one) can be found at Rosenzweig (1998).

result of a process with an objective that had nothing to do with the idea of the communication medium now used to define the global network. Each one of the few supercomputers that existed around the world was specialized in concrete mathematical calculus, and scientists had the need for an easy remote access to them to conduct complex calculus without having to travel to the host university (Winston, 1998:324-325). This is the initial social need for network computing, but the Internet is the result of a long process of 30 years of evolution not foreseen by its first actual technical developers in the 1970s. Abbate explicitly identifies technological “choices” to explain how the Internet turned into a communication medium. Social, political and technical decisions shaped the technology. Several researchers and managers participated in the invention and evolution of the network, and each of them had a specific set of priorities and goals. The Internet as we know it nowadays is the result of the collaboration, and the conflicts, among all these actors.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the US Department of Defense played a central role in defining and promoting the first specific developments of the Internet (Winston, 1998:327), although it was not named in this way yet. The Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), dependent of the Department of Defense, funded the first functional and stable computer network, putting together several existing or drafted technical solutions, while the computing research community at universities had not taken any crucial step further on theoretical definitions, mainly because of the high cost of technical development (Rosenzweig, 1998:1535). The military origin of the Internet did not define most of its initial uses, which were mainly scientific, but the design of the first network “supported military values” (Abbate, 1999:5). This

contradiction is a key element in the history of the Internet to understand the way in which the system evolved during the 1970s because of the “strange (and sometimes difficult) relationship between military and civil interests” (Abbate, 1999:2). Winston (1998:326-328) argues that both groups and their own necessities joined up in the supervening social necessities (see 3.2.1) that accelerated the development of the Internet after unsuccessful computer network prototypes in the 1960s.

The military values of the Internet design were flexibility and redundancy of the system, features that would guarantee its survival and reliability even in war conditions. These aims were more valuable for the US Department of Defense sponsoring the project than other values such as low cost, simplicity or commercial viability, which would have been more important in a market-oriented context. The scientists who participated in the project provided the values of collaboration, decentralized structure without hierarchies, and openness in the exchange of information. They were at the same time the technical designers and the first real users of the network, and this fact was crucial in shaping the technology. From the initial stages of the project there was an agreement among the researchers for transparent technological standards open for any user to suggest improvements, new uses and developments. This is how, spontaneously, the technologies that support some of the most popular uses of the Internet nowadays were technically designed in its origin, namely e-mail and file transfer (FTP). Rosenzweig (1998:1545) highlights that the cultural context of the 1960s can help to understand the “open” model proposed by the first Internet researchers: besides the “closed world” of the military logic of control in the Cold War era, there was an “open world” of the countercultural

aspirations for more democracy, a very lively movement in US universities, within which some computer enthusiasts started the *hacker* movement that claimed for an open access to computers for everyone. However, further research is needed to know to what extent researchers in the ARPA network project shared this counterculture. The scientific culture of knowledge sharing can explain most of the initial decisions. Actually, military and scientific values (whether they were countercultural or not) sometimes clashed when the Department of Defense showed reluctance to the open access to the network (Rosenzweig, 1998:1542), but the initial size of the project made these conflicts anecdotal and both set of values were embedded in the technological shaping of the Internet.

The first version of the Internet was called ARPAnet, and connected four supercomputers of US universities in 1969. The managers of ARPA justified the project as an interesting military communications tool: it was supposed to be cheap and reliable transmission method for sensitive information. Nevertheless, under this discourse addressed to the Army, engineers had complete freedom to design the project. Abbate found that researchers developing the network did not consider the military objectives, as they had "the impression that they and their colleagues were the *only* users of the ARPAnet" (1999:101). In the end of the 1970s, military uses of ARPAnet grew, and soon the network that connected different Army bases was separated from the one of universities and renamed as Milnet in 1983. At that moment the Internet was not a military project any longer, but its scientific and social uses among university researchers were already so consolidated that the network survived the shift. In fact, the military project helped to create the first virtual community, the

one of computer scientists, both users and developers of a technology that satisfied their initial scientific need (i.e. the interconnection of supercomputers) but also their social need of sharing knowledge more easily in a fast evolving research field (Rosenzweig, 1998:1548).

The Internet has survived these and other changes until today due to its “flexibility and diversity in technical design as well as in organizational culture” (Abbate, 1999:6). Technically speaking, it is a very robust, modular, scalable and adaptive technology; in social terms, the decision to keep protocols open to all the users and the collaborative culture in the development of tools allowed the Internet to grow following the needs of its changing users. ARPAnet regarded uncertainty as a variable in its technological principles and this guaranteed its ability to evolve.

During the 1980s, several processes led the Internet to universal access. Up to 1989 several networks besides the original ARPAnet connected computer research centers in universities. The US government offered the management of the ARPAnet to the National Science Foundation, and this organism decided to use the name *Internet* to refer to that network of networks that had already been formed, not only in the United States, but also connecting hundreds of universities of the rest of the world. Between 1991 and 1995 the management of the network was opened to the private sector, a coherent move in the American liberal economy parallel to the general decline of public services underwent in the 1980s.⁵ It was the last move after ARPA unsuccessfully

⁵ Likewise, in the European Union there was a strong policy towards telecommunicationunications deregulation that also helped in the rapid development of Internet commercial services beyond the US (Schneider, 2000:322).

explored commercial uses of the technology in the 1970s and after regional commercial networks were created at the end of the 1980s. Non-profit organizations were set up to coordinate the technical evolution of the open Internet network. The virtual community of the computer scientists created around the networks that blossomed in the 1980s was the initial critical mass for the Internet of the 1990s. They developed new tools such as news groups and chat, pushing the network towards uses that focused on personal communication (Abbate, 1999:200-204; Rosenzweig, 1998:1543).

The inventions of the World Wide Web (1989) and graphic Internet browsers (1993) were essential for the massive adoption of the Internet outside universities. In the end of the 1980s, when operating systems were already graphical and intuitive, the Internet was still based on text commands that users had to know if they wanted to do any task. The WWW did not change the Internet infrastructure: it is based on it, and adds a graphical interface that changed users' perception of the network. Abbate does not consider the WWW as a product of individual inspiration, but the answer to a growing necessity. "It also needed the proper context: an increasingly generalized access to the Internet (made possible by its privatization) and the necessary technology for the users to use a web browser (personal computers⁶)" (1999:215). For Abbate, the WWW helped to consolidate the decentralized philosophy of the Internet, for it created a system that allowed the open, horizontal and democratic exchange of information (1999:218).

⁶ Personal computers appeared in the beginning of the 1980s and its spreading social use formed the base of users for the commercial Internet, in contrast with other technologies as videotex that mainly relied on dedicated terminals and usually suffered of a lack of critical-mass problem for their success (Rosenzweig, 1998; Schneider, 2000).

The active role of the users in the evolution of the Internet and the definition of its underlying collaborative culture is one of the constant signs that can be found in the history of the network. This philosophy that connects to the countercultural movement of the 1960s was incorporated to the political program by alternative and anti-capitalist movements that arose in the 1990s, which soon started using the Internet as a tool for social change and a platform for free speech (Castells, 2001:160-165). Once the open network definition had survived the military logic, a new logic seemed to raise to compete with it: the one of corporate capitalism and mass media (Rosenzweig, 1998:1549-50; Flichy, 1999; Hall, 2001). For those companies working on hardware, software, services and content, the Internet meant a platform for business and to reach new audiences. Winston (1998:333-334) interprets the adoption of the Internet by the industry as a clear example of technology "radical potential suppression": they entered the network before it could be a threat to their economical system and are trying to adapt it to the logic of mass consumption, with vertical top-down products. Heinonen (1999:43) points out that the main reason for newspapers to be online was "to defend the potential markets of the future" at the light of the moves of telecommunication companies towards turning themselves into content providers (portals) and the birth of new online-only content producers, that may become competitors in the logic of online mass communication.⁷ He states that initially "the features of information networks did not fully coincide with the basic needs of

⁷ Punie (2003) describes the evolution of the online media sector in Europe during the critical period 1997-2001, when there was the boom (and in the end the crash) of start-up and telecommunication online services, which had the aim of "keeping the user connected to portal site[s] as long as possible" (2003:11). During this period, portals had a mean user reach of over 80% and 95 minutes sessions, concentrating what in traditional media would be considered mass audiences. Newspapers and broadcasters sites attracted significant audiences too (30% user reach and 23 minutes sessions), but they were always behind the portals, which combined content and a broad range of services (specially e-mail and network access).

journalistic publishing”, but the Internet has always been adapted “to better meet the needs of diversified content” and the WWW set up a feasible context for news distribution (1999:69). For Heinonen, news products had to be adapted to the initial technical shortcomings of the medium (low bandwidths, low resolution screens) by prioritizing text content, but at the same time news media contributed to push forward the evolution of the Internet towards richer multimedia capabilities and hardware infrastructures that would support mass audiences. Rosenzweig (1998:1550) states that corporations push the network towards a “closed Internet” model with centralized control of content production and infrastructures.

While Winston (1998) feels that this new mass media definition of the Internet is becoming hegemonic on the network over time, Flichy (1999) considers that the philosophy of the open horizontal Internet is so appealing that it has been assumed by most of the politicians, professionals and businessmen, and therefore will survive. Rosenzweig (1998:1550) diminishes the importance of this optimistic statement by revealing that corporations and many Internet gurus of the 1990s have adopted and reshaped the original concept of “open Internet” to transform it into a “liberal Internet”, a network ruled by the capitalist laws of free market. Despite of this fact, the strength of horizontal communication practices on the Internet is not at all declining. Phenomena such as P2P music and video sharing, blogging and podcasting are examples of how users with an open-sharing model still keep on developing new applications for the Internet that are adopted by millions of people who do activities that have nothing to do with mass media consumption.

2.3. The utopias of online journalism

“Today we are witnessing the early turbulent days of a revolution as significant as any other in human history. A new medium of human communications is emerging, one that may prove to surpass all previous revolutions (...) in its impact on our economic and social life” (Tapscott, quoted in Mosco, 2004:18)

In the mid-1990s, when web browsers appeared and the Internet began to enter into the daily life of our communication habits, journalism professionals and scholars alike were seduced by discourses such as the cited above, the visions of gurus like Nicholas Negroponte (1995) and John Perry Barlow (1996).⁸ The “technological utopianism” that has dominated Western societies since the beginning of the modern era⁹ was once again leading the discourses on the social adoption of the Internet (Katz, 2005; Carey, 2005:445). Governments made ambitious plans to adapt their countries to the “information society”, offering funds and deregulation to stimulate social change (Heinonen, 1999:32). New companies sprang up to provide new services and content in the online world. Internet usage statistics grew exponentially in just a few years. A digital revolution seemed to be taking place.¹⁰ Journalism would not stand aside. The

⁸ Mosco (2004:36-41) and Katz (2005) offer a profile of these and other Internet gurus.

⁹ It is worth revisiting, for example, the predictions made when the telegraph (Standage, 1999:161-163), the telephone (Marvin, 1988:63-67), electricity (Kline, 2000:1-3), the radio (Douglas, 1989:320-322) or computers (Kling, 1996:40-58) were in their early stages of adoption. The parallelism between the rhetoric of these predictions and the utopian discourses about the Internet is astonishing (Flichy, 2002:140; Mosco, 2004:117-140). Standage makes a point that might well be applicable to the Internet: “The irony is that even though it failed to live up to the utopian claims made about it, the telegraph really did transform the world” (1998:211).

¹⁰ See Garnham (1996) and Mosco (2004) for a systematic criticism of the assumptions of digital technology utopias –“myths” in Mosco's words. He summarizes these technological myths in three big

media not only gave voice to the utopian discourses on the Internet, but was also defined as one of the central scenarios of change. "Journalism is undergoing a fundamental transformation (...). A set of economic, regulatory and cultural forces, driven by technological change, are converging to bring about a massive shift in the nature of journalism" (Pavlik, 2001:xi). John Pavlik, one of the most prolific crafters of online journalism utopias, predicted in 1997 that "in the future, there may be no need for a news organization at all", as "software packages are now available that will write stories automatically based on electronic data feeds transmitted directly by various news sources" (1997:201). In the introduction to his more reflective book *Journalism and new media*, he argued: "I do not offer a technologically deterministic view of new media. Rather, I assert that convergence merely holds the promise of a better, more efficient, more democratic medium for journalism and the public in the twenty-first century" (2001:xiii). His words suggest that he showcases possibilities and opportunities for journalism offered by the Internet, but very soon he started to talk about these possibilities as *inexorable* and current changes:

"New media are transforming journalism in four ways. First, the nature of news content is inexorably changing as a result of emerging new media technology. Second, the way journalists do their work is being retooled in the digital age. Third, the structure of the newsroom and news industry is undergoing a fundamental transformation. And, fourth, new media are bringing about a realignment of the relationships between and among news organizations, journalists, and their many publics, including audiences, sources, competitors, advertisers and governments" (2001:xiii).

concepts: "the end of history, the end of geography and the end of politics" (2004:13).

Pavlik's statements were accompanied by examples of concrete technical developments that supported them and anecdotal cases of experimental or real uses of these devices.

Thousands of articles in media trade publications and scientific journals around the world joined Pavlik in hyping the utopia. "Journalists and researchers alike seem to have developed some kind of (un)conscious consensus", concluded Deuze in a literature review (1999:385). Detailed descriptions of the new journalism to be born from the communicative singularities of the Internet were stated, quoted and repeated. The bottom line was that authors firmly believed that digital technologies would make a better journalism possible, after years of profound crisis of the professional standards. Journalism had to reinvent itself or die. The Internet was the salvation – or it would be the killer (Heinonen, 1999:42).

From his skeptical and far-from-enthusiastic position about the possibilities of the Internet, Peter Dahlgren (1996:61-62) summarized the main trends in "the waning of classical journalism" before the new technology entered the game:

1. Journalism is losing the audience's attention in an increasingly crowded communication arena;
2. Distinctions between journalism and entertainment are blurring;
3. The professional boundaries of journalism are becoming vague and journalists are having to take on new tasks, more related to marketing;
4. A self-referential media world is consolidating, detached from the daily life of people;

5. Audiences are becoming more and more fragmented, with increasing inequalities of information access.

Blumler and Gurevitch (1996:124) described yet another force that increasingly threatens to diminish the public interest role of journalism, which is often stated to be the most fundamental:¹¹ the increasing pressure of market and commercial factors on the definition of *structures* and content of the media, due to the fierce competition that both the multiplication of distribution channels and the fragmentation of the audience produce. Hall puts it crudely: "Journalism as infotainment is produced to the demands of the marketplace rather than to those of its audiences" (2001:155). For him, journalism is undergoing a crisis of legitimacy because the media no longer regard their readers as citizens.

Some particular developments in contemporary journalism which seem to follow this path are:

☞ *Information subsidies* (Gandy, 1982): The professionalization of public relations initiatives has fostered desk journalism. Institutions and organizations are aware that creating the adequate materials and events will help journalists at their work and make it easier to get in the newshole the view they want to promote (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1996:127; Schudson, 2003:138; Manning, 2001).

☞ *Desk journalism*: The convenience of constant feed from wire services and

¹¹ Schudson (2003) doubts that this has been the primary aim of the press at anytime in its history. Ever since the 19th century, with the birth of the professional production of news, the media have been organized as commercial companies. Nonetheless, the ideology of the profession praises the democratic function of journalism as one of its core values (Singer, 2005:145). See section 3.1 for a discussion on research in journalism and newsmaking.

press releases, together with the availability of the Internet to check detailed data and the trend to reduce newsroom staff for the sake of cutting costs discourages street work. Therefore, journalists increasingly produce their news from their desks, using passively received materials rather than actively explored issues (Christopher, 1998:133; Soriano, 2005:603, 606-8). This increases the influence that sources have on driving the journalistic agenda (Manning, 2001:105).

∞ *Immediacy over analysis:* The development of 24-hour news channels in broadcasting journalism has led to real-time news coverage where immediacy is more valued than analysis (Seib, 1997:103; McNair, 1998:130; Lewis *et al.*, 2005).

∞ *Lack of accuracy:* Desk journalism coupled with the immediacy push and the increasing workload of the journalist due to multi-skilling –the assumption of technical tasks that digitalization has eased and companies have used to get rid of part of the technical staff (Bromley, 1997; Cottle, 1999)– exacerbate the risk of lack of accuracy in reporting, as journalists may relax traditional professional conventions such as fact checking and verification (Seib, 2002:142; Lewis *et al.*, 2005:462).

Dahlgren warned that there were signs that these general trends were also developing in the online world: “The optimism for a democratic society once associated with the role and capacity of modern journalism has become more ambivalent. This ambivalence does not decrease as journalism moves into cyberspace” (1996:61). Nonetheless, he was still confident about the potential of the Internet: “In its

cyberspace version, journalism has unprecedented opportunities for enhancing democracy; it remains to be seen how well it takes advantage of them" (Dahlgren, 1996:63). Some years later, Cohen (2002) argued that "market-driven journalism" is a reality that the development of online news has hardly countered: "The Internet itself does little to alter the macro- [corporate ownership] and micro-level [advertisers pressures] constraints on journalists (...) The influence of media conglomerates on news production functions in much the same way as in traditional media, if not more so" (2002:544).

Ben Scott (2005) agreed with Dahlgren that "journalism is in crisis" and through a historical review tried to demonstrate that online news is not an exception. The journalism industry in the 1990s became more and more market driven and less devoted to its public service principles. There was a clear trend to cut costly journalistic practices, to rely on press releases and infotainment. Increasing the profit margins was the main objective. For Scott, the main problem with online journalism is that both the critics and proponents of the professional status quo saw the Internet as a great opportunity: "The former hoped it would alleviate or redress the conditions of crisis and lift journalism back into its hallowed role as public servant. The latter saw it as a vast new market, a streamlined delivery system, and a rhetorically legitimate way to deflect the claims of public service journalism to an enclave in cyberspace. (...) In theory, the Internet does hold the potential to change the way information is produced and consumed. (...) It is my contention that not only has the Internet failed to stem the crisis, it has aggravated it. [Media companies] have concentrated production, limited coverage, and laid in a course that promises to further restrict the number of

voices in the mainstream of the political discourse" (Scott, 2005:91-92).

The main body of 1990s literature on online journalism is strongly normative, arguing what online journalism should be, but it often tends to be plainly prospective, without any empirical background. "The debate on online journalism in Germany consists in many theoretical articles and speculations (...). The main focus is on potential rather than the reality of online journalism", stated Quandt *et al.* (2003) in a literature review focused on their country. Quinn and Trench, for example, pointed out that it is not clear whether Pavlik's statement about the decline of the inverted pyramid as a format in online news "is an extrapolation from observation of past and present trends, (...) a prediction, or (...) the expression of a hope" (2002:6). When concentrating "on the effects of technological change" rather than on "the processes generating them", authors overstated "the revolutionary character of online technologies and the web" (Boczkowski, 2004b:2). It was assumed that technology would drive change automatically. "The Net probably will not kill the mass media, but it will most certainly reshape them", argued Newhagen and Levy, adding the warning that it was "professionally dangerous and more than a little short-sighted for newswriters to deny this broad-gauge certainty" (1998:20). Technological determinism¹² guided their arguments (Boczkowski, 2002:279) in a moment that seemed to be offering both unprecedented opportunities (again borrowing Dahlgren's words) and the menace of making the profession unnecessary in a medium based on many-to-many communication. The pervasiveness of the dominant ideology describing the Internet as a space of free exchange of ideas and information was overwhelming: "Data

¹² Technological determinism and theoretical alternatives to it will be discussed in chapter 3.

concentration is unnatural in distributed network architectures that facilitate dispersed message production. Thus, the application of canons or standards produced to deal with mass media systems may be unnatural, unrealistic and practically impossible to apply" (Newhagen and Levy, 1998:16). The basis for this reasoning is an apparently logical but surely dubious principle, which states that "the characteristics of a medium can be inferred from its technological make-up" (Flichy, 1999:33). "The rhetoric draws a picture of something already shaped, a clear phenomenon with identifiable and significant consequences in media and journalism" (Heinonen, 1999:35).

"There is a significant scholarly consensus in highlighting three singularities of the journalistic language in cyberspace: hypertextuality, interactivity and multimediality" (Salaverría, 2005a:517). This is the starting point of most of the contributions to the development of online journalism utopias:¹³ "Online journalists have to make decisions on what is the best format to explain a story (multimediality), has to allow the public to answer, interact and moreover, adapt the news to their needs (interactivity) and have to consider ways to connect the news piece to other news, archive, online sources and other elements through links" (Deuze, 2001a:5). The communicative features of the Internet formulated by theorists from literature studies, computer-mediated communication and human-computer interaction (Lister *et al.*, 2003:13-37) were borrowed by online journalism advocates to build the foundations of the new profession. These proposals neglected the context and the history of the adoption of the technology in the newsrooms. One of the most critical accounts of the first decade

¹³ Synthetic but complete compilations and discussions of the utopias can be found at Bardoel (1996), Dahlgren (1996), Pavlik (1997), Deuze (2001), Hall (2001), Pauluseen (2004). This section will present them by taking these and other key texts and critical compilations as references.

in the evolution of online journalism is clear-cut in its diagnosis of the work of the most quoted scholar in the field: "Pavlik painted a rosy picture of the virtues of online news without exploring how their development will come to pass" (Scott, 2005:123).

A remarkable fact is that online journalists themselves embodied this vision, and contributed to the production of utopian literature (Bromley and Purdey, 1998: 78). European surveys of online journalists show considerable agreement: "More than two-thirds of the Flemish respondents believe that the future of online news production lies in interactivity (67%), hypertextuality (82%) and multimediality (70%)" (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:22). In the Netherlands, 73 per cent "support the claim that building a stronger and interactive relationship with the public is the best way to do online journalism" (2004:24). Dahlgren acknowledges that hypertext, interactivity and multimedia "constitute historically new elements of media logic¹⁴", but is more cautious than other early approaches to online journalism: "...exactly how they will develop, how they will be put to use in journalism, and their consequences are by no means self-evident" (1996:65). Ari Heinonen (1999:41) summarized that the utopian literature focused in particular on the effects of these communicative characteristics in three areas of online journalism: publishing (features of online news products), newsgathering (Internet as a tool for journalists) and professional identity (the social role of journalism).

¹⁴ "Media logic", a concept borrowed by Dahlgren from Altheide and Snow (1991), "refers to the particular institutionally structured features of a medium, the ensemble of technical and organizational attributes which impact on what gets represented in the medium and how it gets done" (1996:63). Each medium has its logic. And so does the Internet. But technological features are not the only defining factor: the production settings and processes strongly influence the shape of the product. The theoretical background to this critical approach to the relationship between media and technology will be discussed further in chapter 3.

Focusing more specifically on our case studies, it should be pointed out that Catalan and Spanish professionals and scholars adopted online journalism utopias very quickly and enthusiastically. Most of the academic literature in the field concentrated on theoretical reflections and the construction of ideal models of online journalism. Empirical research was scarce. In the 1990s, professionals had a crucial role in importing, maturing and developing the utopias. Discussion e-mail lists for online journalists such as the one of the Grup de Periodistes Digitals (GPD)¹⁵, e-zines such as *En.red.ando*¹⁶, and professional congresses (specially the Congreso Nacional de Periodismo Digital¹⁷ held annually in Huesca since 2000) led the debate on the changes that the Internet could bring to journalism. Academics followed, deeply influenced by these early reflections. An early landmark was the 1st International Congress on Electronic Publishing in 1998, organized by the GPD, which systematized the first professional and scholarly contributions in the Spanish- and Catalan-speaking countries (Llombart, 2000).

Theoretical contributions by Spanish and Catalan academics in monographies and scientific papers tended to group online journalism utopias into models that included definitions of interactivity, hypertext and multimedia (Armañazas *et al.*, 1996; Cabrera, 2000a; López *et al.*, 2000) and arguments about the changes they may produce in the profession, from a broad range of perspectives: newswriting and the news story (Salaverría, 1999; Díaz Noci, 2001; Díaz Noci and Salaverría, 2003; Salaverría, 2005b), journalistic genres (Díaz Noci and Salaverría, 2003; Díaz Noci, 2004; Salaverría,

¹⁵ *Online Journalists Group*, founded in Catalonia in 1996, evolved from an informal e-mail list to a professional association in 2003: www.periodistesdigitals.org

¹⁶ *En.red.ando* disappeared in 2004 after almost 10 years of activity.

¹⁷ *National Congress on Online Journalism*, of Spanish scope: www.congresoperiodismo.com

2005b), news layout (Armentia *et al.*, 2000; Cabrera, 2000b), news production – specially newsgathering (Pérez-Luque and Perea, 1999; Luzón, 2000)– and the social role of journalism (García Iriarte, 2001; Palomo, 2004a; Sandoval and Yuste, 2005). Of particular note in this literature is the robust and detailed theoretical construction of the structure and characteristics that news stories can have in a hypertextual and multimedia context, the result of the work of a vast group of researchers in various Spanish universities led by Javier Díaz Noci and Ramón Salaverría. They describe their proposals as “an attempt to grasp the trends that will shape online newswriting in the next years” (2003:38).

Our own research confirms that journalists in the online newsrooms of the four case studies have also incorporated the set of utopias as an ideal model with which to compare their daily work. The role of this omnipresent reference will be discussed later, in the results section of this dissertation. However, the fact that the utopias of online journalism are still a crucial part of the mindset of today's professionals has to be taken into account when reviewing the literature that built the initial hype. “Myths are stories that animate individuals and societies by providing paths to transcendence that lift people out of the banality of everyday life. They offer an entrance to another reality (...). Myths are not true or false, but living or dead” (Mosco, 2004:3). And online journalism utopias are still alive. They have served as models for online newsrooms and scholars alike, to define products and working routines, training courses and research, even after the so-called “*dotcom* crash” at the beginning of the 2000s (see Bardoel, 2002; Lovink, 2003). Utopias are a consensual model among professionals and scholars alike, even if they are far away from reality. The optimism of most of the

proposals (Alonso, 2005) will be confronted with the findings of current empirical research in the next section and with our case studies in part two. Finally the role of the utopias in the evolution of online journalism will be discussed. Chris Paterson (2004) underscored how urgent and necessary this task was: "Research is desperately needed to test many of the utopian predictions once –and sometimes still– made for new technologies". Talking about more general cyberspace utopias, Mosco argues that we need "to understand these myths in order to develop a deeper appreciation of the power and the limitations of computer communication" (2004:13). By understanding why utopias are created, what they mean to people and why they survive the proof of the harsh reality, we can explicitly state the political and social program that lies beneath the myths and help to develop it from a much more solid base. Online journalism utopias can be interpreted as a program for creating a more transparent, comprehensive and dialogical reporting that would strengthen democratic participation in plural societies. If this is a worthy aim, then we need to know more about the real context in which it has been formulated, so we can assess how to make it real.

The utopias are a social construct that was shaped under the historical context of the social adoption of the Internet and the crisis of the social role of journalism. The utopian tone of the ideal models cannot be understood without the background that provides of the history of the Internet outlined in section 2.2, as they are the meeting point between 1) the technoutopian paradigm of those who developed the Internet thinking that it would help the world to be more democratic by opening up the access to knowledge sharing and 2) the critical discourses on the crisis of journalism as public

service in the era of entertainment. Taking into account the social construction of technology approach (see section 3.2.2), we can understand the utopian model of online journalism as one of the meanings proposed for the concrete application of the Internet as a news medium. It seemed to be quite pervasive in gaining consensus among all the active actors (media executives, journalists, academics), but empirical research showed (see section 2.4) that this discursive hegemony was not incorporated into the actual development of news websites and online newsrooms routines. In fact, online journalism utopias do not naturally derive from the technological features of the Internet even if they are formulated like if they actually were: the communicative features of the network are just a social construction on a very flexible technology and therefore could have been different and do actually evolve over time. The utopias are the adaptation to journalism of the ideology of the “open Internet”, which was not, and still is not, the only interpretation available for the technology. This is a crucial contextual framework to understand the development of online journalism routines and values.

The following three sections briefly synthesize the arguments of the utopian literature on online journalism research, and are structured following their own conventional division of Internet features in three main areas: hypertext, multimedia and interactivity.¹⁸ No discussion is made of the specific claims and proposals here: we will confront them with the results of the empirical research to date in section 2.4, and

¹⁸ As we shall see, other concepts such as immediacy or convergence have a preeminent role as online journalism utopias. I have respected the general consensus among scholars of dividing Internet features in this three main areas and placed other utopian concepts inside one of these divisions, as they actually are the consequence of one of these capabilities: immediacy derives from hypertext and convergence from multimedia.

with the data of the case studies in chapters 6 and 7. Even though most of the utopias have positive connotations and promise an enhancement of journalism on the Internet, some authors have raised concerns and regard them as a risk the quality of news and the role of the media. These positions are usually less dogmatic than the positive utopias, but to the basis on which they describe the current trends in online journalism is just as weak: theoretical reflections, inferences and anecdotes are their usual origin.

2.3.1. Hypertext utopias

Hypertext is the structure of the Internet, a new narrative form that was envisioned by postmodern writers and computer scientists in the second half of the 20th century, which was made real on the World Wide Web (Landow, 1992; Engebretsen, 2000; Cores, 2004; Díaz Noci and Salaverría, 2003). Although Ted Nelson, the coiner of the term "hypertext", argued that the WWW is not a fully developed hypertext, there is a vast consensus among scholars that the Internet represents the most important hypertext structure to date (Díaz Noci and Salaverría, 2003:89).

A hypertext is a nonlinear group of pieces of text¹⁹ linked together by explicit references based on semantic or structural associations. Each piece tends to have some autonomy of meaning and the whole hypertext can be read in multiple directions, following the links from piece to piece. It is, therefore, a decentralized structure, with no single reading thread. It is the user who chooses the path. The

¹⁹ As will be argued later, hypertext allows the interrelation of any format of communication: written word, audio, video, still graphics and pictures. Therefore, "text" is used here in the Barthian sense, meaning any piece of communication, whatever format it may be (Landow, 1992).

beginning and the end are relative concepts then, and the author gives the reader considerable control over the text (Landow, 1992).

Strictly speaking, the Internet is a hypertext of hypertexts, a huge library of interconnected texts. Websites are hypertexts and online journalism utopians argued that news can also be hypertexts. Fragmenting a news item would make it possible to provide multiple perspectives of facts and events, a structure that is much more suited to representing complex social realities than the productivity-driven inverted pyramid (Fredin, 1997). This argument was quite often oversimplified with techno-deterministic statements: “[Hypertext] is a structure that is assumed to be more compatible with the inherent characteristics of digital media than traditional narrative forms, such as journalism’s inverted pyramid” (Huesca, 2000:5). From this point of view, it was natural that journalism adapted to the natural narrative structure of the online world.

The use of hypertext in online news has been justified for many good reasons: virtually endless writing space, open and flexible updating, direct access to related documents. The journalistic hypertext utopia uses these features to promise radically better reporting. For Pavlik, “no longer is news constrained by the technical limitations of analog media” (2001:17). “The only real limits on the Internet as a journalistic medium are bandwidth [network capacity to transmit data], connectivity [to the network], and credibility of content” (2001:4).

One of the most commented changes foreseen in online media is the flexibility of publication timing. Because of the digital and modular nature of hypertexts, they can

be open constructions, easy to update and extend. Online news sites are not tied to daily periods as newspapers are. Unlike TV or radio, they do not require scheduled airtime for the audience to know when the news will be available. Users can browse a website whenever they want, 24/7, and it is technically feasible to update websites at any moment. Online journalism can be "at the same time real-time and timeless" (Heinonen, 1999:45). The obvious temptation for journalists is to have the perfect news medium: continuous news updates, following minute by minute what is happening around the world. The temptation is reinforced with the assumption that audiences "aren't willing to wait for the evening news or the next day's paper for developments in a breaking story. They want to know right now" (Pavlik, 2001:21). For newspapers, websites are the opportunity to compete with broadcasters in a realm of immediacy that was denied to them until the advent of the Internet (Seib, 2002:97).

This endless update would affect the life-cycle of news: in a hypertextual system, each piece of news would be work-in-progress, an open process. The reporter would add information items to the piece as soon as events develop or data reaches the newsroom (Giussani, 1997; Jankowski and Van Selm, 2000). The starting point could be considered a "first draft" (Hall, 2001:55), the first basic data about the issue to be completed in the coming minutes, hours or days, depending on the rhythm of current events. This ideally ever growing news stories would combine "the lessons of television (timeliness) with the lessons of print (depth, accuracy and context) in order to produce the sharpest products in this new medium" (Kansas and Gitlin, 1999:73). A user can read both breaking news as it develops and the final cumulative report that explains the ins and outs of yesterday's bigger story.

Some analysts from inside and outside online journalism questioned the benefits of the endless update (Kansas and Gitlin, 1999; Singer, 2003:152). They argued that these updates would probably reinforce the audiovisual culture of immediacy that undermines analysis and context (Seib, 2002:37), and fact-checking, verification and confirmation (Seib, 2002:142; Hall, 2001:133) as key journalistic practices. The risk of publishing errors, hoaxes or just an absurd chain of reactions denying a false statement increases in these conditions (Hall, 2001:133-135). Journalists can become more "vulnerable". Kansas and Gitlin (1999) argue that the Internet did not invent 24-hour news, but that it has accelerated the rush style. Seib recalls experiences in TV and radio with live news coverage and states that the "emphasis on speed" has always challenged journalistic "judgments about relevance and taste" and threatened the "commitment to accuracy" (2002:2). TV news as entertainment is partly the result of live broadcasting possibilities: "speed is assumed to compensate for superficiality" (2002:37). 24-hour news channels (paradigmatically CNN) pushed the idea of "real-time news" to the limit, and the Internet just "carries forward the process begun by radio and television". Therefore, with online journalism we are not facing "a loss of some impeccable news standard of steadiness and thoroughness that we not so long ago held dear (...). It is not just an Internet problem – the 24-hour beast is creating challenges for all news organizations" (Kansas and Gitlin, 1999:73-74).

Pavlik (2001:94-95) acknowledges that in breaking news the pressure of immediacy in online journalism may be "even more intense", but he defends that the overall result of not having a deadline –or, as he himself puts it, having a continuous deadline– will be "an era of journalism dominated less by the clock and more by the need to get the

facts –and the story– right” (2001:95). His point is that journalists will be continuously improving their developing stories following the rhythm of their newsgathering, not of publication logic. Seib (2002:141-150) stresses the need to reinforce journalistic ethics to handle the never ending update without weakening the quality and trustworthiness of news.

Hypertext not only breaks with the limitations of time but also with the limitations of space, which are at the heart of the main journalistic routines in the print and broadcasting media. Journalists learn to condense stories to a summarized version which tries to be fair and precise as well as short. It is unlikely that a such a piece of news would satisfy the curiosity and previous knowledge of every single member of the audience. The public is diverse, but traditional journalism treats them as a homogeneous mass. On the Internet, the time slot for audiovisual content or the newshole for a written report are old-fashioned concepts. Hypertext pieces in a digital network environment can be as long as necessary and there can be as many as necessary. Therefore, journalists may rethink their condensed-news strategy towards a new form of “contextualized journalism” (Pavlik, 2001:23). Furthermore, this hypertext feature can help to compensate for the pressure of the endless update, complementing up-to-the-minute coverage with background information (Seib, 2002:75).

Hypertextual news can provide different levels of depth: some pieces quickly summarize the main facts while others give detailed accounts of what happened. The work of the journalist, then, is less one of selection and more one of analytical structuration of the widest possible range of information (Giussani, 1997; Fredin,

1997). Through storyboarding and non-linear writing the online reporter might organize a “bottomless pit of resources for the reader” (Deuze, 1999:382). “Completeness and context” will be the new aims in newswriting (Kawamoto, 1998:186), compensating for a “commonly heard criticism of traditional news” (Kawamoto, 2003:26). “The tasks of reporting and writing shift from content delivery to information development and design. News reporting and editing undertaken from this perspective must be focused on creating narrative structures that facilitate user navigation through a variety of information resources” (Huesca, 2000:7).

This approach allows reporters to overcome the central criticism of the sociology of journalism:²⁰ source reductionism. Utopian authors forgot that the reason for news media to privilege official sources is not only the limited newshole, but mainly the need for a constant and efficient incoming news flow. Nevertheless, their argument was that, in online news, reporters would not be prevented from giving voice to all the points of view on an issue. Every person and institution involved would have equal status, a hypertext piece explaining their position. Hall (2001:46-47) argues that this would allow the online journalist to offer a more “honest” picture of reality than traditional media. “This literature suggests the abandonment of the widely accepted journalistic tenets of truth and accuracy about the world in favor of an orientation that values a polyvocal, fragmented, and contradictory reality” (Huesca, 2000:7). The old myth of objectivity could finally be substituted by an “honest and analytical subjectivity” (Hall, 2001:46). A good addition to this attitude would be the chance to

²⁰ The sociology of journalism has extensively analyzed how journalistic working routines affect the quality and characteristics of news. The findings of this discipline and its limitations for online journalism research are discussed in section 3.1.

provide a more transparent picture of the news making process, with the journalist telling the user how did he/she gathered the information and contextual facts in the process (Paul, 2005).

Furthermore, the non-linear nature of hypertext, its fragmented, multidimensional shape, can extend beyond the news piece. Links cannot only relate different aspects of an issue to provide an open narrative, but can also refer to other documents inside or outside the news website. For Dahlgren, this can be the perfect solution to the eternal problem of journalists when facing newswriting: how familiar is the audience with an ongoing issue. Links to previous stories and to related websites allow users to “fill in what they need” (1996:66).

Endless space allows online media to keep every news piece in a constantly growing digital archive. A good linking policy would relate a breaking news piece with previous developments of the same event (Jankowski and Van Selm, 2000). This would profoundly change the news life-cycle: a piece will not be useful only on the day (or at the moment) that it is published (or broadcasted). On the Internet, when a story becomes history it may still be available to the users at the news archive or through links from newer pieces. This challenges “the traditional journalistic mentality of ‘writing once, forgetting immediately’” (Heinonen, 1999:72) and obliges the reporter to be more responsible for the content and aware that it can be used for a longer period.

The Internet can be a crucial source of information for the journalist (Pavlik, 2001: 80), and links to the websites that originated a story are an easy and valuable exercise in

transparency, as users can check for themselves the data provided by the sources if they want more details than the journalistic report (Heinonen, 1999:49). Huesca argues that the Internet is a “faster and vaster” tool that expands the range of existing news sources (2000:8), while Dahlgren thinks it will foster in-depth reporting: “Investigative journalism becomes economically viable for many more media organizations, since so much of the legwork can actually be done on the keyboard” (Dahlgren, 1996: 67). Heinonen adds that “with the Internet, journalists do not necessarily have to rely on the interpretations of spokespersons or other institutional sources, at least not without the possibility to check the original documents themselves, or to verify or dispute information from alternative sources. (...) Naturally, the precondition is that sources use the Internet for enhancing access to original information” (1999:47).

Thus, hypertext turns the Internet into a huge network of knowledge for both journalists and the audience (Fredin and David, 1998; Pavlik, 2001:16). This improves the contextualization and transparency of news, the visibility of sources and their own arguments, and the users’ ability to get as many details as they want on a single topic.

2.3.2. Multimedia utopias

A digital environment for news production enables multiple media formats to be combined and the content to be delivered through several, coordinated distribution channels. These are the two sides of a “pragmatic contemporary definition of multimedia journalism” (Deuze, 2004:140). The bottomline of these developments is

technological convergence: the digitalization of every single step in media production makes it possible to reduce all the formats (video, audio, text, graphics, pictures) to long or short series of bytes, units of information that can be easily stored, retrieved, edited, reshaped, embedded and distributed. A movie and a news text are just the same for a computer: rows of binary data. For the authors of the online journalism utopia, this may lead to a revolution in the way that journalism is done.

In the context of online news production, the multimedia capabilities of the Internet open a window of creative freedom for reporters. They can choose the most appropriate format for each of the fragments that make up the hypertextual news story: video, text, infographics, depending on the kind of data to be explained (Deuze, 1999:379; Jankowski and Van Selm, 2000). It is not only a matter of creativity, but also of communication efficiency: online journalists are responsible for using the format that will guarantee that the audience best understands the events.

This challenge requires a two-stage effort from journalists: they must gather information using multiple tools and skills (video recording, still photography, note taking, database mining) and suitably combine multiple format elements in a single interface. Bromley (1997) warned that the multi-skilling and technical knowledge required would affect the quality of journalistic work, because reporters would be more focused on technical routines than on fact interpretation. Pavlik (2001) countered that reporters would have increased control over the whole production process of their story, and therefore it would better reflect their knowledge on the event they are covering. As digital multimedia news gathering equipment gets more and more

compact and portable and incorporates wireless access to the Internet, reporters should be able to work constantly on the street. They will have with them all that they need to produce the news story without being in the newsroom but at the same time constantly connected to the newsroom (Heinonen, 1999:47; Pavlik, 2001:107). Digitalization, then, will break with the trend in newspapers of more desk work and less street work, which is regarded by journalists as one of the threats to quality of their work (Soriano, 2004:129). It will also lead to “faster” reporting, as news can be produced where the events take place in real-time. This could promote more narrative, developing news formats, congruent with the hypertext utopias.

Just as the utopia of multimedia news was being questioned by the empirical research, which demonstrated that text overwhelmingly dominated online news sites (see section 2.4.1), a second wave of multimedia utopianism arose as vigorously and deterministically as the first. The buzzword was *convergence*, and it applied the logic of online journalism utopias to traditional mass media, bringing the digital revolution to the whole journalistic profession.

At this second level of implication, multimedia would lead to the coordination or merging of the newsrooms of different media outlets (television, radio, newspapers, web, mobile devices) to produce multiple-platform news (Quinn, 2005:29). Digitalization allows content sharing among newsrooms and, furthermore, an integrated management of content produced by different newsrooms. There are many forms of convergence, from product cross-promotion to multiskilled journalists producing the same story for several platforms, but for many authors the ideal model

is the integrated newsroom(s). In this case, newsrooms would merge into a single news workflow, based on a coordination desk or on complete integration of journalists in a multiskilled team that would simultaneously produce materials for multiple channels. Multimedia editors would allocate the appropriate resources to cover an event after planning what mediums are best suited to the story, in which order information is to be delivered to each medium, and which aspects of the news shall be covered in each case (Quinn, 2005:32).

The synchronic multi-channel production and delivery approach requires “significant organizational change” (Quinn, 2005:29) and a considerable amount of teamwork, a challenge to the rather individualistic work of the journalists (Deuze, 2004:146) that requires training and flexibility. But the benefits seem to be worth the effort: 24/7 coordinated coverage of events, which allows the public to get the news whenever they want, wherever they are through the most convenient media device in every situation (Quinn, 2005:29); improved content in each individual medium, as the resources are allocated more thoughtfully for each issue and each particular news piece is produced in the context of a broader picture; brand cross-promotion among coordinated media. From a business perspective, this is attractive because it could foster audience loyalty across the different outlets of a company (or a partnership) and increase productivity. On the other hand, critics such as Bromley (1997) foresaw a drastic reduction in the workforce of newsrooms as the main objective of convergence and therefore argued that integration and multi-skilling would lead to increased workload and poorer quality of reporting. In the US, media experts think that the main criterion of editors is business, and Quinn argues that the key to successful

convergence is for the business perspective of convergence not to dominate over the journalistic perspective (2005:30): convergence can help to do better news and this will surely not be cheaper. It is a strategy for growth, not for saving money. He argues that convergence with quality is a must for journalism to “survive” in the changing media environment, to adapt to the new “information-seeking behaviour” of news consumers (2005:33-34). Lack of media deregulation, resistance from unions, physical distances between the newsrooms, lack of management commitment and poor organizational flexibility are seen as the main “barriers” to convergence.

2.3.3. Interactivity utopias

“[Internet] breaks the traditional concept of ‘journalists know and can decide what people need’” (Deuze, 1999:385). The interactive features of the Internet have always been the epicenter of online journalism utopias: “The fact that the response of –and interaction with– the audience is the key element of the online news site could allow for a cultural change in journalism” (Deuze, 1999:378). The Internet is a medium that halts the unidirectional paradigm of mass communication. It is a mass medium, but not only that; and surely the mass communication uses of the Internet are not the main ones (Morris and Ogan, 1996). Online users can establish interpersonal communication one-to-one and many-to-many through e-mail, web forums, chats and instant messaging. They can also publish information, opinions and data quite easily on their own websites or weblogs. Thus, one-to-many communication is no more the sole prerogative of mass media: “Information sharing going on in cyberspace tends to increasingly bypass the classical role of journalism. The hierarchical, top-down mass

communication model of journalism is being challenged in this new media environment" (Dahlgren, 1996:70).

Hall names this phenomenon "disintermediation" (2001:53), because the journalist's role as mediator weakens and concepts such as gatekeeping or agenda-setting are apparently condemned to disappear. The new scenario turns the utopia into a real threat: if journalists do not start to listen to their audiences, online users may look for other spaces to share information in a more horizontal, many-to-many way. "New media technologies for the profession challenge the most fundamental *truth* in journalism, namely: the professional journalist is the one who determines what we, the public, see, hear and read about the world around us" (Deuze, 2001b:15). "Everyone becomes a content producer" (Punie *et al.*, 2001:7) and journalists "may find themselves increasingly irrelevant, left behind by a new generation of communicators" (Seib, 2002:14). In a world where anyone can publish and actively search and select what is worthwhile, the functions of journalism will be shared by every citizen. "Will professional journalists be needed in an era when people can get their news 'unfiltered'?", echoed Lasica (1996:49). He presented the counterargument himself: because of the sheer amount of information available online, journalists will be more necessary than ever to filter what is relevant (Singer, 1997a), although their functions and their relationship to the audience might change quite dramatically.²¹ "Journalism evolves from the provision of facts to the provision of meaning" (Bardoel, 1996:297).

²¹ Dahlgren (1996) adds a structural argument that questions the extent of the possible democratic revolution of interactivity: "The reality is that there is a 'disciplining' process currently at work. Transnational soft- and hardware industries, as well as governments, are shaping cyberspace in ways which are compatible with their interests, in a sense curtailing its interactive potential. (...) we can expect that it will become even less symmetrical and more contained than it already is" (1996:66). See section 2.3.4 for a more complete discussion on the historical context of online journalism utopias.

The real gatekeeper is now the reader (Hall, 2001:5). The old journalist gatekeeper was determined by the limited newshole. Once it has disappeared and users can reach original sources by themselves, the journalist has to stop "telling the story" to become a qualified selector and commentator of the most worthwhile websites and online documents. A news piece, then, shall be a navigation guide, a set of recommended readings (Newhagen and Levy, 1998:18), and the reporter would just add his chronicle if he or she has been a direct witness of the event.

It is worthwhile looking at how the concept of interactivity (Williams *et al.*, 1988:10-12; Rafaeli, 1988; Downes and McMillan, 2000; McMillan, 2002) has influenced journalism. Interactivity is basically the power of the user of a medium to control the communication flow or even alter the message sent by the producer. At the most extreme degree of interactivity, Internet technologies enable users to become producers. In this context, most authors point out that the concept of *audience* is completely outdated because it implies a passive attitude. They prefer to talk about "users" (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002:10) or even "active users" (Deuze, 2004:146): "The recipients of this news and information tend to be more than just passive receivers of content (...) They are more appropriately described as 'information seekers'" (Kawamoto, 2003:5). McMillan (2002:166) identifies three levels of interaction in new media: user-to-user, user-to-document and user-to-system. Potential changes in online journalism under the impulse of interactivity relate to these various facets of interactivity, ranging from interface and content customization, to users' feedback to reporters and users' discussion of current events, and direct involvement of citizens in the production processes of news. The bottom line of

interactivity utopias is that journalists will know their users better and this will allow them to provide "more specific and hence more relevant" news (Hall, 2001: 25).

The digital management of news makes it technically possible to filter content on the basis of the preferences of each user. This empowers users, who will be able to customize the product and consume it in the way that best suits their needs. Hypertexts already provide multiple paths, but customization is an automated path choice that makes the user's experience more convenient and satisfactory (Kenney *et al.*, 2000). Hypertext can be confusing and tiring, and customization reduces the risk of overwhelming the user with too many options that do not match his/her interests (Pavlik, 2001:22).

Automatic selection of news topics or keywords predefined by the user is the most common form of product adaptation. Homepages of news sites and newsletters can vary for different users. Adaptive recommendations and targeted news are another option. Based on other user's choices and the path of the present user, the website can offer dynamically generated links to related news or documents. Online media need to know about the user if they are to provide these choices (Deuze, 1999:378; Seib, 2002:132-3).

Several authors have stated concern about the consequences of customization: the social cohesive role of mass media might be in danger (Jankowski and Van Selm, 2000:87). Users can remove from their diet of news those current events that editors believe to be of general interest from journalistic criteria. The news to be consumed

will be selected automatically, and will be influenced less and less by professional decisions. Dahlgren (1996:62) noted that this is a general trend in journalism due to the multiplicity of television channels and specialized magazines. Audiences are becoming fragmented and online customization might just worsen the effects of this trend. However, in the case of online news, the development of software and websites that automate the content aggregation of multiple news producers (Hall, 2001:24) may just render the debate on news websites customization sterile: online media may lose their status as the main news source for users. They might become just one more feed in the user's personal news aggregator (Pavlik, 2001). Dahlgren wants to believe that other forms of interactivity can compensate for the drawbacks of customization: "While such preselectivity may both eliminate elements of serendipity in user's news experiences and further fragment the public, interactivity nonetheless does open up the potential for new relationships between journalists and their publics" (1996:65).

One of the specific materializations of these possibilities is enhanced audience feedback. The public availability of reporters' e-mail addresses on news websites, next to their news stories, turns readers and viewers into commentators, critics and collaborators. Even the old-fashioned letters-to-the-editor have been speeded up because they can now be submitted by e-mail. The relationship between journalists and their audience can be richer, and for the first time reporters can systematically know what does their audiences expect from them (Deuze, 1999:378; Seib, 2002:89).

Journalists will discover that they are not the only watchdogs in the public sphere: users can be the most demanding news quality checkers, pointing out wrong data or unsatisfactory coverage (Bowman and Willis, 2003:47). They can also be the eyes of

the journalist, uncovering new hot topics and submitting first-hand accounts, photos and videos that can enhance a story: "The cyber-public can begin to function as very handy sources for journalists, providing access to information -and perspectives- which normally may be remote for journalists" (Dahlgren, 1996:69).

A second development that could counter the effects of customization and news aggregators is the promotion of citizen's debate in online news sites, which bring to the public arena discussions that are often restricted to close family and friends (Kawamoto, 2003:13). Unlike mass media, the Internet can easily be a platform of many-to-many discussions, open to anybody and continued over time without limitations (Hall, 2001:53). The asynchronous nature of web forums and mailing lists helps users to drop in on any conversation, read the previous contributions to get an idea of the context of the current debate and post some thoughts whenever is most suitable for them.

This debate space can create solid virtual communities around news websites, increase user loyalty to the brand and increase knowledge of the audience's mindset, interests and attitudes. Journalists can take advantage of the content generated in the debates to decide what issues deserve more coverage, to explore new topics and to feed editorials. Once again, interactivity will serve journalists to respond better to audience expectations. The global diffusion of every news website can shape virtual communities in ways that the mass media cannot: "limited less by geography and more by factors such as language and topics of interest" (Boczokowski, 1999:108), contributing to the specialization of online media outlets.

Some authors push the interactivity utopia a little bit further, to the limits of the concept. If online users can become "citizen journalists" (Gillmor, 2004), the media would rather have them in the team rather than competing with them for the hard-earned reader attention. "Online news has the potential to make the reader/user part of the news experience" (Deuze, 1999:377). Users can be part of the news production process.

The influential text *We Media*, by Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis synthesized years of proposals about how to make this aspiration real (2003:57-59). Online media should incorporate autopublishing tools for NGOs, and civic, cultural and sports associations so that they could produce news pieces in sections of the website. They could also encourage individuals to become neighborhood reporters or expert commentators on topics they are keen on. Journalists can also use the Internet to post the issues they are working on and to ask readers for personal experiences, ideas, data and suggestions that would improve the resulting news story.

Yet another step away from traditional journalism, advocated by pioneering online journalists, would be to transform the online publication (a unidirectional producer of news) into a fully horizontal virtual community, where sources/users (both will be readers and producers) would exchange information and opinions fluently (Guissani, 1997). In fact, it is at this point that the journalist might no longer be required. Guissani argued that journalists do not have to resist this loss of power, they just have to reshape their function to become facilitators of the process: they must ensure that different voices can access the production space, make it possible for all those

involved in a conflict to participate, encourage debate, etc. There is a place for them as “conductors of the public debate” (Bardoel, 1996:299). They would once again be mediators, but with no monopoly on producing the news. In this scenario, news would no longer be an “objective” story, but a heterogeneous narration made up of multiple voices, a dialog of different experiences of the very same event.

Participatory online journalism seems to be a very powerful and appealing utopia, since it has emerged once again after being dismissed several times. The MUDIA Project (Punie *et al.*, 2001; Punie, 2003) that analyzed new media developments in Europe moved participation of users in production from the first (in 1999) to the least (in 2001) important driving force in the evolution of online media (see section 2.3.4). But the weblog phenomenon strongly reactivated the utopia. Much of the discussion around weblogs has concentrated on defining whether this form of extremely easy personal publishing is or is not journalism, as it might finally make the theoretical many-to-many *threat* a reality (Matheson, 2004a; Singer, 2005; Wall, 2005). Even though most of weblogs have no journalistic aspirations, Donald Matheson noted: “A number of weblog writers see their sites as instant critique of newspapers and television. Others have emphasized the speed with which weblogs have reported events, others praise the depth and thoroughness with which a network of bloggers has followed up a story. (...) Such thinking values weblogging by bringing together conventional ideas of quality journalism as fact-based, up-to-the-moment and in-depth with the anti-establishment, anti-corporate liberalism of much commentary on the Internet” (2004a:452). Participatory journalism was seen as the only way for the media to keep active Internet users visiting online news sites when weblogs provide them

with a more satisfactory information experience that involves participating in the collective sharing of facts and comments on events (Gillmor, 2004; Deuze, 2005). Again, the evolution of the Internet placed online journalism at a crossroads where utopias seemed to be the only possible path to the future.

2.3.4. Utopias in the context of online media history

The analysis carried out by historians suggests that, despite of the wide diffusion of online journalism utopias, the actual logic of media companies when entering the global network had more to do with mass communication than with the horizontal sharing of knowledge (Scott, 2005:111).²² They mainly tried to reproduce the model that was applied to the press or broadcasting, the one that they knew well. One of the few critical observers of the late 1990s, based on the evidence of technological innovation in the newsrooms through the 1980s, pointed out: "While new opportunities for participation arise out of new technological and media forms such as the Internet, even here it is likely that the logic of capital and accumulation will influence, if not shape, social choices in a manner that constrain the liberating potential of these new forms" (Christopher, 1998:139-40). Nonetheless, Boczkowski (2004b:52) argues that once the web settled as the preferred technological option for digital distribution, US newspapers started "hedging" by pursuing different strategies in online media development, in order to maximize the chances of success. But the results, in his view, are rather contradictory:

²² Even though most of the historical and social constructionist analyses on the evolution of online media have focused on the United States, Catalan and Spanish media have also followed similar trends. See section 5.1 for an approximation to the history of online journalism in Catalonia and Spain.

“On the one hand, newspapers often appropriated new technologies with a somewhat conservative mindset, thus acting more slowly and less creatively than competitors less tied to traditional media. On the other hand, the cumulative transformations should not be underestimated. By the end of the 1990s, online newspapers exhibited a technical infrastructure, nascent communication and organizational patterns, and a suite of products that looked very different from those of a typical print counterpart. It appears that in a relentless pursuit of permanence, newspapers ended up undertaking substantial change.” (Boczkowski, 2004:52)

With a different perspective from that of John Pavlik (1997:36; see 2.4.1), Boczkowski (2004b:55-64) identifies the same three strategies in online media projects of the 1990s, but he interprets them as strategic explorations, not as degrees of development. In many cases, the same project merged together the three models: “repurposing” print content, “recombining” that content with new features (archive, related links, customization), and “recreating” original content for the websites (constant updates, special features). The hedging strategy was also used on the business model side, specially in the 2000s: online news sites tried advertising, sponsoring, subscription, pay-per-story and other revenue solutions (Hall, 2001:162-174; Punie, 2003). The feeling was of uncertainty and online divisions were designed to have change and adaptability as their core values: everyone assumed that things were yet to be defined and technology evolved rapidly, and therefore exploration required adaptability. For Boczkowski (2004b:72), their main aim in exploring the new technology was “to remain the same”, to maintain their social function and business

health in a changing scenario. Keeping that in mind, the conservative approach to the Internet by media companies has actually innovated and produced new media products that do not necessarily have the same features as print or broadcast products. New features are the result of adoption and design processes that can be more adequately understood analyzing particular cases.

During the second half of the 1990s there was a remarkable investment in media companies to develop websites and even specific companies were established to run the new online business (Scott, 2005:92-96). Initially, websites reproduced the business model of traditional media: selling audience to advertisers. Ben Scott, in a critical review of the recent history of news media,²³ hypothesizes why online media did not charge for content at first. As content was repurposed from the established mother medium or from agency wires, websites were mainly moves to show that traditional media were technologically on the edge. The Internet philosophy seemed to favor the free flow of information and for this reason media companies did not think at all on making their users pay for the content. Free content became "normative" (Hall, 2001:161). Media companies "were also unwilling to calculate the real cost of online news", argues Hall (2001:160). "[Their] superficial view of the web does not alter the fundamental economics of news production since it merely offers a new channel of distribution for existing categories of information; in the case of shovelware it barely changes content" (2001:161). The most aggressive companies would explore new content formats and develop original materials for the web. Nonetheless, advertising was not such a big revenue as it was expected and companies started to get anxious

²³ See also Hall (2001: 162-169) for another critical review of the economic history of online media.

as their online divisions remained in red numbers. "It turned out that it was almost as expensive to produce high quality journalism online as it was in the brick and mortar world -except no one was willing to pay for content on the web" (Scott, 2005:96). Prado and Franquet (1998) found similar mixed feelings among media companies regarding the digitalization of the audiovisual sector in the US during the 1990s: digitalization was seen as a revolution any company should follow to succeed in the future but, as the transformation was expensive and traditional models were well tested as profit-makers, the exploration of digital television and webcasting was full of hesitation and conservative approaches.

The hype of utopias, the often so-called *dotcom bubble*, burst in 2001 and the initial high expectations collapsed. A powerful example of this shift was the research carried out by the MUDIA Project, an industry-funded initiative that analyzed online media trends in Europe: they felt the need to review their "drivers of change" chart that year (Punie *et al.*, 2001). The initial chart (first drafted December 1999) "identified six key drivers affecting, to a larger or lesser extent, the existing and emerging media content industries" (2001:7). Many of the utopias were among the list:

- 1) Everyone becomes a content producer.
- 2) Customization of content.
- 3) Co-existing development models: horizontal integration (telecoms enter the content industry), vertical integration (media controlling production and delivery of content) and start-up initiatives.
- 4) New types of content demand, niche markets.
- 5) Flexible delivery strategies.

Researchers acknowledged that there was a “deficit of validated information on the sector trends” that made the impact of these factors “unpredictable”. In a media executives and consultants’ workshop which took place in 2001, drivers were rethought, regrouped and extended. While in the first model “demand-related drivers” were seen as the ones having greater influence, in the new list, “industry-related drivers” were regarded as the crucial definers of change and the most important factor in 1999 was downgraded to be the least (Punie, 2003):

- 1) Finding a revenue model. “The main concern will be making a healthy business out of online content provision but it is not clear (yet) what the revenue model will look like. (...) Some user demands will not be met because they are not profitable for suppliers” (2003:10).
- 2) Branding. Having an important brand presence is crucial to get a loyal audience.
- 3) Technological innovation. Mobile communication was regarded as an attractive market.
- 4) Dominance of mass media model for content production.
- 5) Consolidation and concentration of the strongest online media companies.
- 6) Customized and niche content was not profitable. It will be only viable in paid services and some specific publics, not the broad audience, which is not demanding such options.
- 7) Democratization of content production is not seen as a threat to the media industry anymore: “The entry level for new media initiatives or players is low (...). The potential of low barriers to content producing is thus related to the issue of profitability, and not, as is often implied, to the ‘democratic

potential' of the Internet" (2003:10). Empowering the users in online media sites did not seem to bring in significant revenues.

"The original assumptions were overly optimistic, at least for the immediate future. The Internet could potentially lower the entry levels for content distribution, but this does not imply that everyone will be able to survive and make a business out of it. The production of content, for instance, in contrast with its distribution, remains quite expensive" (Punie *et al.*, 2003:3). The situation in 2001 for most online media was unsustainable: there was a strong usage of free content, but since online advertising did not seem to get any strength, there was not enough revenue and online media mainly relied on offline revenues of their mother company. The industry explored subscription and pay-per-article models, in the hope that users would change their general attitude of preferring free content online (Scott, 2005:96-98). However, Scott was skeptical about this possibility: "The problem with the business model for online journalism is one of supply and demand. Supply has badly exceeded demand. The exact same content that news outlets sell in print publications has been disseminated so widely by so many producers and aggregators that its value has been driven to zero" (Scott, 2005:97). MUDIA researchers concluded that media companies were convinced that they could apply to the Internet the same business logic as media markets in general, and feared that innovation in online news products could be affected: research and development would be restricted to pay-for-content projects. Scott identified that successful online ventures had relied in "1) restructuring the production of news to use technology to cut costs and 2) the development of multiple micro-revenue streams that are insignificant on their own but sustaining when taken

together" (2005:101). He warned that this policy of cost cutting hindered any chance for the development of original and quality Internet content. In Scott's view, business logic rules over professional decisions and working routines in online media in the same way it does in the whole industry. For him, this logic left no room for the open philosophy of the Internet to influence online media development: "It is a true testament to the power of the big commercial media firms that they are able to reverse the course of network technology -a medium that favors decentralized production and consumption points- and build business models based on recentralizing information production" (Scott, 2005:111).

2.4. Empirical results of online journalism research

The first empirical approaches to online journalism were contemporary to the initial utopian prospective proposals of the mid 1990s. These two waves of research, the empirical one and the more theoretically oriented, have lived side by side for years, with an evolving relationship in their mutual influences. Clearly utopias were a strong driving force behind most empirical studies. The main research question was to what extent online news sites used the Internet features: interactivity, hypertext and multimedia. Authors tried to move from theory to practice: “[The interactivity in online journalism] debate has often concentrated on an abstract examination of the ideal possibilities of the Internet as a new meta-medium, rather than on the exploration of what has really happened”, argued Fortunati *et al.* (2005:419) in the introduction to their study on interactivity in European online newspapers. Such a statement, made in 2005, highlights that the utopian and theoretically-driven literature still dominated research into online journalism research after ten years of development of the field.

The initially dominant branch of empirical studies on online journalism dealt with the *products* of online journalism, news websites, and focused on the features they offered (see section 2.4.1). Results were overwhelming: most of the foreseen utopias were not being fully developed in the sites analyzed. Starting in the 1990s but growing stronger in the 2000s, a second branch of empirical research concentrated on the views of *online and traditional journalists* about the changes in their jobs (see 2.4.2). Surveys showed that there were different attitudes towards technological innovation and many

problems in the adoption of the Internet both as a newsgathering tool and as a news publication channel. These results, and those from website analyses did not usually challenge the utopian proposals: they just stated that reality was not achieving the ideal model. They neither attempted to explain the causes for this deviation nor suggested models for online journalism other than the utopias. *Users* were surveyed in an effort to understand their interests, expectations and habits when consuming news on the Internet (see 2.4.3). In this section, findings and methodological trends in each of these areas of focus will be discussed: websites, journalists and users. Even though most of the empirical production can be traced back to one of these three areas, we must acknowledge that some studies have tried to cover them all while others have addressed concrete issues (such as interactivity) in several of the areas. For analytical reasons we will separate our discussion into the stated areas, and comment on the relationships among them when necessary.

Since the very first years of online journalism research research arguments were put forward urging to explore more comprehensive methods of understanding the evolution of online news production (Singer, 1998; Deuze, 1998; Jankowski and Van Selm, 2000; Kopper *et al.*, 2000; Boczkowski, 2002). This section will close with a review (section 2.4.4) of what we suggest to label as the *third wave of online journalism research*, mainly based on ethnographic approaches that take into account the historicity of the adoption of the Internet and the social construction of technology (Boczkowski, 2004a), which seemed to shed some more light on the factors influencing the use of the Internet in media companies.

For this purpose, we will focus the review on scholarly research. Kopper *et al.* (2000:501) found that in the field of online journalism there have been too many market studies by private consulting firms, aiming to sell media companies ideas about how to make a profit from the Internet. In this broader context, the authors identified seven perspectives in online journalism research: market analyses, product analyses, user studies, occupational changes, quality assessment, online democracy and experimental projects. Scholarly research is, then, just one part of the wealth of data on online media trends. The literature review is based on an exhaustive analysis of papers focusing on online journalism published in international communication journals during the period 1995-2005. An attempt to retrieve other scientific productions (monographs, conference communications, dissertations) has also been made, conditioned by language (English, Spanish and Catalan texts were the most accessible ones for the researcher) and material limitations (accessing texts not published in journals is not always easy).

2.4.1. Website analysis

One of the most common empirical research strategies into online journalism to date has been a structural approach to the content of news websites. Studies have taken online journalism utopias and hypertext or interactivity theories as their starting point, to confront a sample of sites to the ideal models. Analyses try to quantify, with indexes, the percentage of development of Internet features, or "relative innovativeness", as described by Gristock (2002). Researchers construct the indexes by transforming the utopias into observable items to be checked on the websites.

Elements might be very abstract, such as *choice complexity*, and therefore a big deal of qualitative analysis precedes the quantification, obtained by summing up the positive inputs collected. Deuze summarized the basic results of this branch of research by stating that “most of the websites do not offer any ‘online extra’ in respect to the traditional version of the medium, they do not use hypertextuality, multimediality nor interactivity” (2001a:2).

Some of these studies conducted broad overviews of features while others focused on specific aspects. In the general approach we find Jankowski and Van Selm's (2000) comparison of websites of US and Dutch newspapers and US and Canadian TV broadcasters; Tanja Oblak's (2005) study of Slovenian online newspapers and global sites such as *BBC* and *The New York Times*; or the comprehensive pan-European study of the COST A20 project (Van der Wurff and Lauf, 2005). Some researchers used this approach as a first step in their research strategy, in order to have a first overview on the object of study: Neuberger *et al.* (1998) in Germany, Gristock (2002) in the United Kingdom, Paulussen (2004) in Flanders, or Franquet (in press) in Catalonia.

Interactivity has been detected as one of the least developed options in online news sites and it has received most of the attention from specific feature analyses. Kenney *et al.* (2000) measured several dimensions of interactivity through elements in the home page of 100 online news sites from around the world (62% were US based). The average level of interactivity was low and did not allow users to influence significantly on their information consumption experience. The aim of interactive elements was, in the eyes of the researchers, “to attract users’ attention”. Quinn and Trench (2002)

found similar results in a cross-European comparison of 24 news websites and pointed out that purely-online news media ranked a little bit higher in interactivity features than those linked to traditional media.

While a 1997 analysis of US online newspapers found that 94% of the websites provided at least one e-mail address to contact the newsroom (Kamerer and Bressers, 1998) and in 1999 it was 100% not only in the US (Schultz, 1999) but also in Asia (Massey and Levy, 1999), just 64% of the websites in the global sample of Kenney *et al.* (2000) had e-mail addresses of the newsroom, and 69% of reporters who were sent an e-mail did not answer at all. Paulussen (2004) found a better response ratio in Flemish news sites (only 25% did not answer).

Forums were not a common option in 1999 US online newspapers: only 33% provided them (Schultz, 1999). On Asian news sites forums dropped to 20% (Massey and Levy, 1999). In the global sample of Kenney *et al.* (2000) only 17% of the sites had forums, while half of the Flemish sample of Paulussen (2004) offered this feature in 2000. Deeper research has actually analyzed the content and dynamics of news sites forums: Fortunati (2004) found that on an Italian lifestyle magazine website the use of forums in comparison to the whole web traffic was low, but users were active in redefining discussion topics beyond the magazine proposals. Other studies have not been as positive regarding forum participation. Fortunati *et al.* (2005) compared the case of thirteen online newspapers of Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland and Italy to assess the kind of interactions fostered by the sites. The policy towards content generated by users in the forums varied: in most of the cases forum topics were proposed by the staff and users

discuss on them under the supervision of a moderator. Forums were usually completely isolated from news content, but some newspapers published selected excerpts into the print edition and others related the forums to the news stories. Most of the forums were based on anonymous participation (usually just a nickname) and moderation, and many messages were deleted because they used inappropriate language. They concluded that the hierarchical power relationship between journalists and audiences in mass media prevailed in these online newspapers. Nonetheless, they acknowledged the limitation of the content analysis methodology: "in fact, our data is inert, because they are not supported by interviews with the same journalists who manage [the forums]" (2005:421). Dolors Palau (2005) reached similar conclusions after observing two Spanish online newspapers forums, in which she complemented content analysis with interviews with online editors.²⁴

Van der Wurff and Lauf (2005) coordinated a cross-national team of researchers in 2003 to do an analysis of the features of the biggest newspapers' websites in 16 European countries. The homepage of 60 online newspapers and the front page of 62 print newspapers as well as 15 news stories in each outlet were analyzed on a single day. They also analyzed some online-only news websites, but found no relevant differences in comparison to online newspapers. Even if online newspapers had more feedback opportunities than print outlets, interactivity was scarce, with only 40% of the websites having a user forum.

The use of other features such as multimedia material or hypertext links is also

²⁴ *Online editor* is the usual concept in Anglosaxon scientific literature to refer to the person coordinating online newsrooms.

addressed in structural website analyses, although not as closely as interactivity. Kenney *et al.* (2000) found that 52% of the websites provided some sort of links in news stories. Oblak (2005) detected that only 13% of homepage news had links to other websites (specially in online-only news Slovenian sites), while internal links were more common in the online versions of Slovenian newspapers (62%). Van der Wurff and Lauf (2005) pointed out that few of their 60 European online newspapers sample had links to external sources. The use of multimedia was very low in most of newspaper sites (Massey and Levy, 1999; Dibeau and Garrison, 2001; Van der Wurff and Lauf, 2005) in comparison to broadcaster sites (Jankowski and Van Selm, 2000).

Greer and Mensing (2003) introduced a historical perspective to assess the evolution of online news sites features from 1997 to 2003. They focused on 83 US online newspapers that represented different market sizes and moments of online publishing adoption. Based on a literature review of early data and an annual assessment of the presence of web features, they concluded that most of the features increased along time, and some of them were becoming widespread standards: use of headlines and short leads for the news on the homepage, updates at least once a day, paid news archives, animated infographics, reporter's e-mails publicly available, among others. In general, the trend was that online newspapers kept on adding features to their websites, which suggests that they did not stop investigating the new medium. Audio and video grew dramatically, but only to reach 45% of the websites. Interactivity features are the ones with a weakest growth over time, even though forums raised to 75%. Customization expanded very slowly to reach 24% in 2003. The size of the newspaper market determined the extent of the development of web features: smaller

newspapers had less features than bigger ones. Medium-sized companies caught up with the large ones over time, while the smaller ones lagged behind.

Van der Wurff and Lauf (2005) concluded that even though online newspapers in Europe had quite homogeneous characteristics, there were many different strategies on their exploration of Internet as a news medium. Taking as the main analytical axes the homepage model, the type of news stories, the development of Internet features and the business model, authors identified as the largest subgroup the ones concentrating in providing general news for free, with a "cautious approach on all dimensions" (2005:51). This was 13% of the total. Few of the cases could be characterized as adopting "a really ambitious Internet strategy" (*ibidem*). "The logic and culture of print publishing remain largely intact online", summarized (2005:279).

Another research strategy, still concentrated on news websites, shifts from their structure to the actual content of the sites, usually comparing the print edition of a newspaper to its online version. Samples are usually smaller in this case and results corroborate that websites tend to be mere reproductions of the print counterpart, usually just a part of it and almost without any editing work. Neuberger *et al.* (1998) considered five German newspapers, and the portion of print content which was repurposed online was 37% in the highest case. Armentia *et al.* (2000) found similar results in their analysis of Spanish online newspapers, noticing that part of the print content, particularly photos, was lost in the repurposing process. In the European study coordinated by Van der Wurff and Lauf (2005), 70% of online news homepage news coincided with print newspapers stories.

Researchers were also interested in the proportions of local versus national and international news in print and online versions. They wanted to test the influence of the global scope of the Internet on online news sites. Singer (2001) compared the print and online versions of six US local newspapers to trace the differences in news selection. In her sample of seven days of 1998, print versions had twice the news of online versions “despite the unlimited newshole available online” (2001:71). Most of the online news was exact replicas of their print version. Only 11% of the online stories were wire-based breaking news which were not published in the paper version of the same day. The selection of stories for the online version privileged local news, which represented 44% of the pieces in the web in contrast to 31% in print. 78% of the news that was not repurposed from print to web was not local news. Singer concluded that the stress on local content online is a logical choice for local newspapers, as Internet users can easily reach other media for national and international news.

Gasher and Gabriele (2004) conducted a similar study on a Canadian metropolitan newspaper and its website. They analyzed the news of two composite weeks of 2001 to check if the online product had different aims in terms of content and target audience from those of the print edition. As structural studies have shown, continuous updates were more common as the years went by, and in this case the website contained more than twice the news of the print edition due to this phenomenon. Only few stories from the paper were selected to be online. The print version was far more local in focus than the web: 61% of the news was about Canada while foreign news were mostly about the US (18%). Website figures were quite different: 37% was news about Canada while news on the US accounted for 36%. Marc Lits (2004) compared

the homepages of online editions with the front page of offline editions of four Belgian newspapers over a five-day period. He found that companies tried to maintain editorial coherence between both editions and the only difference was news updates online. Most of the website content was the mere reproduction of print articles.

The updating rhythm and the sources of online news have also been examined, since the utopias suggested that online journalism would tend to concentrate on continuous production losing its dependency on newspaper content. Kutz and Herring (2005) developed an analytical framework based on content analysis to assess news updating patterns in *CNN*, *BBC* and *Al-Jazeera* websites. They found that the top news story was replaced every six or seven hours approximately, and the picture associated with it about twice as often (Herring, 2004). Moreover, they detected that almost half of the changes were mere revisions of the text (to clarify a term, to correct a linguistic mistake, to add interpretative connotations) that did not update the content of the story to add new information. "Thus while frequent changes may give the appearance that a site is regularly providing new content, most such changes are non-substantive" (Kutz and Herring, 2005:1). They also noticed that updates mostly took place in business hours, a fact that denies the 24/7 constant update that online journalism utopias promised. Whereas, utopias were met in one point: news evolved on these websites, with a maximum average of 6 changes on *CNN*. The authors argue that this approach "makes the editorial process of a website more transparent" (2005:2). Nonetheless, they are conscious of the limitations of this claim, and state that the method "can be of particular value when no other ways of gaining deep access [to the production processes] are available" (2005:9).

Concerns about the quality of continuously updated news inspired several studies in Spain. De Ramón *et al.* (2001) analyzed anecdotal cases of economical and political news in the online and print versions of several Spanish newspapers and concluded that breaking news coverage online lacks the process of interpretation and analysis of the print edition. Online news just portray official sources, while the print edition adds independent analysts. In fact, online updates in different online media were almost the same, as they were based on news wires and there were fact checking problems. Guillermo López *et al.* (2004) analyzed the coverage of three events in more than 700 Spanish-language online media, using Google News as collecting tool. In a secondary news story, only 3 websites added some original details to their reporting compared to over 80 pieces which were strictly based on a wire text. Original coverage was found on subscription-based online newspapers (*La Vanguardia, El País*) and the biggest radio network website (*Cadena SER*). A front-page developing story had wire texts as the basis for half of the news coverage. Spanish nationwide online media were the ones with more original reporting, compared to regional media or Latin-American news sites. López *et al.* (2004) concluded that agency wires are the main source for online news production and there are many news sites that rely completely on them and provide to their users information that has no differentiation or comparative value. The increase of news outlets online does not mean, then, a broadening of information sources but a homogenization of the news coverage. Only reference media overcome this trend in big news. The authors qualify this phenomenon as “information McDonalization”, as “the diffusion speed is more important than the qualitative value of news data” (López *et al.*, 2004).

David Sancha (2005) focused on three reference Spanish online newspapers to assess the use of wire stories. Over 95% of the news pieces were originated from a wire in *El Periódico* and *La Vanguardia*, while *El Mundo* declared the use of wire pieces for 74% of their stories, even though many other had also wire ingredients complemented with reporters first hand data and were not attributed to the agency. Therefore, there is a tension between the push of immediacy and the need to differentiate the online product from the competitors. Over 73% of the news stories were mere transcriptions of the wire texts without any subsequent elaboration, even though the interviewed online editors argue that there is a process devoted to reinterpret, contextualize, simplify and keep on updating news stories. Immediacy and the trust in the agency are the reasons given for this lack of editing on the wire texts. Instead, 65% of the headlines are deeply edited by the journalists, as they deem the wire headlines as unclear and the Internet requires unequivocal statements. Sancha notes that the headlines are the element that online media use to offer their editorial interpretation on events, their differentiating strategy. The hierarchy of news on the homepages is the other strategy used. In the Canadian newspaper analyzed by Gasher and Gabriele (2004) the print edition had news built up on a broader range of sources than the ones on the web and the reporting work was mainly originated by their own journalists: 40% of the stories were produced by staff reporters. On the web, only 9% was produced by the print newsroom and the source of 89% of the pieces were wires (compared to 20% of the print version).

Salaverría (2005c) compared the coverage of the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 on eighteen online newspapers of ten countries, and concluded that the Internet

was still an immature news medium in technological and editorial terms. There were so many unpredictable events in two hours that some rumours were reported as facts without stating the source. The website did not correct the pieces even when the rumours proved false. "It seems that online media journalists tend to give more importance to speed than to accuracy, and that they adopt some sense of impunity justified by this need for speed", concludes the author (2005c:79). Coverage focused on transmitting events as they developed, with very few cases of contextualization, background information or analysis. A good development in this sense was the one experienced in the field of infographics, which some online newspapers were able to publish soon after the event, but in the area of user participation there was a significant lack of resources available.

Many authors elaborated theoretical interpretations to explain the findings of these website approaches, based on their personal knowledge on the industry. Pavlik (1997:36) proposed a classification of online media that regards the use of Internet potentials that had been developed: the least advanced were the ones that just uploaded the traditional media content to the website; a second level included those publications that added new elements (links, customization) to repurposed content; finally, the maximum degree of development was characterized by the production of original content for the website. In 2001 he ratified this classification and added that "stage three is only beginning to emerge, and only a handful of sites have attempted to enter it" (Pavlik, 2001:43). Hall would argue that "old media, both print and broadcast (...) did not really seem to understand the principles of interactive media and Net culture" (2001:28). He argued that "many of the possibilities offered by the

technology (...) may be inexorably foreclosed upon" by the business structure of the media industry, focused on maximizing profit with standardized production of content (2001:183).

These reflections found little empirical grounding in website analyses, as just the finished product and not the production context was explored. Kenney *et al.* (2000) worked on the hypothesis that interactivity would be more developed in US online media rather than in the rest of the world, in autonomous outlets rather than in traditional media dependent ones, and in those promoted by media companies rather than non-profit organizations. The first two hypothesis proved valid, but not the third. Authors admitted they could not explain the reasons for these results and argued that it was necessary to use other methods to further explore these trends such as interviews with the editors, observation of journalists at work, and experimental analysis of the use of interactivity by the audience. Jankowski and Van Selm (2000:93) also admitted that the differences they detected among newspaper and television websites and among US and Dutch projects could not be interpreted using the data of their study. They acknowledged the website analysis as a good exploratory method in the initial stages of the research on online media, and defended the analysis of the companies, their internal dynamics and their immediate context to find further clues. In a review of online content analysis research, McMillan also defended that it is mainly useful as a tool to describe the characteristics of online communication, "appropriate for early studies of an emerging medium" (2000:91).

2.4.2. Surveying the journalists

This approach to online news explores two sides of the same coin: 1) the perceptions of journalists on the capabilities, advantages and menaces of digital technologies, and the attitudes based on these assumptions; and 2) the experienced and/or foreseen changes in working routines and the actual profile of the professionals in online production environments. Closed-answer surveys have been the most used method to deal with these research questions, with several degrees of structured or open in-depth interviews (Riley *et al.*, 1998; Heinonen, 1999; O'Sullivan, 2005; Franquet, in press) being the second preferred option, in many cases as a complement to a broader questionnaire (Brill, 2001; Quinn and Trench, 2002). In most of the cases respondents are online editors-in-chief representing the views of their company (Harper, 1996; Jackson and Paul, 1998; Neuberger *et al.*, 1998; Peng *et al.*, 1999; Singer *et al.*, 1999). Online reporters have also been surveyed in some of the studies (Brill, 2001; Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002; Quandt *et al.*, 2003; Paulussen, 2004; Meso *et al.*, 2005; Franquet, in press). E-mail and web forms are widely used as the tools to retrieve the answers, since researchers take advantage of digitalization, too.

Deuze, Paulussen and Neuberger –in a research summary of their previous work surveying online reporters in Flanders, the Netherlands and Germany– concluded that “there seems to exist a gap between, on the one hand, online journalists’ perceptions of the Internet’s potential and, on the other hand, the actual use of interactive features, hypertext and multimedia in practice” (2004:22). This can be regarded as the

general outcome of this branch of research, although the details offer a much more diverse picture.

A first group of surveys did not address online journalists directly as an object of study, but as respondents, i.e. they tried to fill in the gaps in website analyses. Researchers asked the crafters of the new medium about the features and evolution of their products. The business model was one of the big questions, and researchers found that there were no systematic solutions. In 1996, most US online newspapers from a sample of forty had advertisements and planned to charge for the news archive. Furthermore, thirteen of them were already charging for content (Harper, 1996). Peng *et al.* (1999) had similar findings in 1997, adding the fact that most of the online editors they surveyed admitted that income only covered 10 to 50% of the costs of the website. Harper (1996) concluded that despite the fact that the starting investment for most of the projects was really low (under 5.000 dollars in most of the cases), online media faced a future of uncertainty. Reasons to develop a website were mainly these: reaching more readers (40%), adding new revenue through online advertising (27%) and promoting print readership (23%). Generating revenue was a stronger reason for nationwide newspapers than for local media (Peng *et al.*, 1999). In Germany, though, very few editors admitted that their main aim with starting news websites was making profit. Their main argument was that advertising was very reluctant. They massively agreed that their aspiration was "getting into a promising sector as soon as possible" and "improving the newspaper image" (Neuberger *et al.*, 1998). Several researchers pointed out that journalists did not have the leading role in developing many of the projects and marketing departments had had an strong influence in the decision-

making process (Singer, 1997b; Jackson and Paul, 1998; Riley *et al.*, 1998). Singer *et al.* (1999) found that making a profitable product was the second main worry for US online editors preceded by the finding of skilled staff. Profitability was not at all a concern for the newspaper editors they surveyed. Quandt *et al.* (2003) found that in Germany, some years after Neuberger's study, the attitudes and strategies of online media were closer to the US results.

In the realm of attitudes towards online media, Singer (1997b) found that among twenty-seven US newspaper journalists the most common profiles were the "nervous traditionalists" and the "rational realists" who saw the Internet as a new diffusion channel that would not change the profession. Heinonen (1999) found the same attitudes among Finnish print journalists. Early developers of US online newspapers were more enthusiastic than their traditional counterparts, but the former admitted that the Internet was just a supplement to the print product, not a substitute (Jackson and Paul, 1998; Peng *et al.*, 1999). They unanimously agreed that online journalism standards should be based on the same principles that preside over traditional journalism and disagreed that websites should be seen more as social spaces rather than as information products (Jackson and Paul, 1998). In a specific survey on online journalism ethics in the US, Arant and Anderson (2001) also found complete adherence to the traditionally established principles, even though almost half of the respondents were concerned about rigor and accuracy, which may be at risk due to constant updating and small-sized online staffs. Deuze and Yeshua (2001) in the Netherlands and Heinonen (2004) in Finland found that online journalists defended the same principles and shared similar concerns as in the US case, but acknowledged that they

needed to be developed into specific policies (e.g. linking, mistake corrections) in order to deal with the online reality.

Surveys of online reporters, instead of editors-in-chief, supported this adherence of new media to traditional standards (Brill, 2001), even though they defended that online news was a “distinct form of journalism” (Paulussen, 2004). There is a group of studies that take Weaver and Wilhoit's (1996) work on professional values in journalism as a reference: Brill (2001) in the US, Deuze and Dimoudi (2002) in the Netherlands, Quandt *et al.* (2003) in Germany, and Paulussen (2004) in Flanders. This fact makes these surveys very comparable among them and also to traditional journalism views. While print reporters state that their main functions are interpretative and investigative, online journalists highlight information diffusion as their main duty. Some traditional journalistic skills (news judgement, sharp writing) were ranked very high (over 60%) as well as knowledge of the Internet. Reporting, generating story ideas and computer design skills, though, were not deemed as important (Brill, 2001). In the German survey (Quandt *et al.*, 2003), 97% found that the most important criterion for online journalism to succeed in the future is quick news updates, followed by awareness of user needs and cost consciousness. Original content had 80% endorsement and interactivity 79%, with multimedia as the least valued feature, with 60% of the answers. The researchers concluded that “some of the most prominent ideas about online journalism from its beginning in the mid 1990s have a lower ranking than expected” (Quandt *et al.*, 2003). Paulussen (2004) found similar statements about the crucial elements of online media among Flemish online journalists: disseminating information quickly (90%), interacting with readers (80%), providing

depth through hypertext (77%), providing discussion forums (69%) and making use of multimedia (67%). Basque online journalists defined getting and publishing information quickly and interacting with the audience as the main benefits of the Internet. However, they acknowledged that producing stories in less time led to ethical problems (Meso *et al.*, 2005). Quinn and Trench's (2002) respondents from four European countries gave more priority to accurate reporting and providing links in their news stories than to interaction with users, even though they were positive about it.

Edgardo García (2004) criticizes these studies on online journalists because they focus on what do they "think or believe", but "scarcely wonder for the context in which these actors execute their tasks" (2004:202). A more qualitative approach, based on interviews, showed much less enthusiastic attitudes towards Internet features. In a US online newspaper journalists were "horrified" with the idea of having audience's feedback and argued that they would be already working on a new story when users may be sending them comments on a previous one. Accordingly, there were few interactive features on the website (Riley *et al.*, 1998). Print journalists in Finland argued that they did not have time to interact with the audience and feared e-mail could overwhelm them (Heinonen, 1999). Schultz (2000) found a slightly more positive attitude in a small survey carried out among the New York Times online journalists in 1997. In the nineteen answers, they accepted e-mail as an interesting tool to communicate with readers, but admitted they had not used it thoroughly yet. Quinn and Trench (2002) and Fortunati (2004) pointed out that the structure of online newsrooms remained the same as in traditional media, which kept users out of the news production process. Actually, respondents said that they did not notice a strong

willing from users to participate and admitted that they did not read forum posts and hardly answered users' e-mails. O'Sullivan (2005) concluded that journalists welcomed Internet features when explicitly asked about them, but they were not as willing to develop them and they did not consider them as fundamental. Immediacy and the archiving capabilities of the Internet were seen as the main defining features of online media, while interactivity, multimedia and linking were far less supported. "Any appreciation or recognition of radical potential is counterbalanced by the normative culture that is rooted in the perspective of the established industrial institutions, and in the journalism of mainstream media" (O'Sullivan, 2005:66).

Some surveys actually asked for details about the real working conditions in online newsrooms and results usually contradicted some of the online journalists' visions and attitudes and provided more grounding to the pessimistic accounts of the qualitative interviews. "This apparent contradiction between what online journalists believe is the right thing to do and what the published evidence indicates they actually do is perhaps one of the more revealing results of the survey", stated Quinn and Trench (2002:39) when comparing online journalists answers to a content analysis of interactivity use in several European websites. Paulussen also found "a gap between the (perceived) potential and actual use of the Internet added values in online news production" (2004). One of the main reasons for this distance, as stated by some online editors, were small staffs, which have been the rule during all the decade, except for online ventures of the biggest traditional media, which in the 1990s had online newsrooms separated from the print or broadcast staff in most of the cases, and as much as 55 journalists in some companies (Singer *et al.*, 1999). Jackson and Paul (1998) found an

average of less than five people working for the surveyed US online newspapers, with almost 30% with no full-time journalist on duty. Besides this, 69% respondents thought they did not have enough technical resources to do what they wanted to develop. Singer *et al.* warned that the "excitement of doing something new" could easily turn into "a routine of overwork laced with bitterness and, before long, burnout" (1999:45) if there was no change in the management policies of online newsrooms. Arant and Anderson (2001) found an average of six workers in US online divisions of newspapers, including management, ad sales, technical staff and writers and expressed the same concern as Singer, for journalists were assuming tasks that in offline products were separated in different departments. Staff numbers in Europe were similar to the US (Neuberger *et al.*, 1998; Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002; Quandt *et al.*, 2003; Paulussen, 2004).

Technical knowledge among the online staff was valued by around half of the US online editors surveyed by Jackson and Paul (1998), but respondents of other surveys valued better journalistic skills (Brill, 2001; O'Sullivan, 2005). Dutch online journalists strongly agreed that technological knowledge is a must for an online journalist, but only 63% thought that html skills were specifically required (Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002). In Germany, technical duties were an important part of the daily routines, at least in 1998. In this case, 61% of the journalists were familiar with html language (Neuberger *et al.*, 1998). Basque online newsrooms combined journalistic and technical profiles (20% of the staff), and only 30% of the reporters stated that their company offered them technical training (Meso *et al.*, 2005). McCombs (2003) also found that learning technical tools was usually a personal effort of online journalists.

Online content production routines were less creative and innovative than proposed by utopias and stated by online journalists. In the early US study by Singer *et al.* (1999) only 41% of the largest online newspapers, and 8% among the smallest, produced original reporting for the websites. 70% of the companies with separate online newsroom enhanced the print content when repurposing it online, mainly by adding links and editing headlines, but texts were seldom edited. Brill (2001) also found that 75% of online journalists were not doing original reporting for their websites. In Arant and Anderson's (2001) study, 21% US newspapers published all of the print content online, 23% at least half of the print edition and 39% selected stories, mostly unchanged. 60% of online newspapers added links to print-originated stories, but few edited the structure of the text. Original online content was mainly service and entertainment oriented (half of the answers) and, to a lesser extent, news (31%).

Some years later, 80% of German online journalists concentrated their routinely tasks in writing, online investigations (much more than offline newsgathering), news selection and editing of news material from wires and press releases (Quandt *et al.*, 2003). User contact was also a routine for 60% of the journalists, but they devoted just 21 minutes a day, in comparison to the 107 minutes devoted to news writing. Researchers detected that "most online journalists had the pressure of permanently updating the content" (Quandt *et al.*, 2003): 30% said they updated their website several times an hour and 31% several times a day. "This implies they spend time for this that is not available for other jobs". Martínez *et al.* (2004) conducted in-depth interviews with editors of Spanish online media on their elections coverage strategies. They detected a "well-established professional culture that resists change" and

reproduces traditional media values and routines even in purely-online ventures. The lack of resources, the vision that the audience is not ready for a change, the bet on immediacy as the main informative value, interactivity as just a misused strategic ritual, and the journalistic claim to be the main interpreters of current events were some of the signs of the inertia against change.

Jackson and Paul (1998) reported that the relationship between online and offline newsrooms was weak: in most of the companies, there were no daily joint meetings, paper journalists did not directly contribute to the website and paper editors did not supervise online content. Online journalists felt like "second-class citizens", in Singer *et al.* (1999:45) words. Nevertheless, other studies report online journalists as being satisfied with their job (Brill, 2001; Quandt *et al.*, 2003).

Franquet (in press) interviewed the online editors of six leading Catalan news websites and complemented the study with the analysis of the websites and a survey of online reporters. The study found that online newsrooms in print and broadcast media companies replicated the organizational model of their traditional counterparts, having little autonomy in defining their own routines and news agenda. Online newsrooms were smaller than traditional ones, with more flexibility in decision-making, as their hierarchy was more simple, and based almost completely in desk work. The consequences of the routines and structure of Catalan online newsrooms to news quality concerned Franquet (in press). In a framework of continuous updates of news stories, young online journalists (the average age at the newsrooms was 33, with 25 being the most frequent) dealing with news wires could have trouble to evaluate

newsworthiness and accuracy. Most of the newsrooms did not identify the authorship of the news stories.

Aims, business culture, human and technical resources and budget were identified by Franquet's research team as the main factors of shaping the differences among the analyzed online news project. She found different attitudes in private and public companies: in private media ventures, online editors opted to wait and see, not willing to take much risks. Their main argument was that the Internet had not consolidated as a profitable business. "The prevalence of an accelerated production rhythm with a small staff is not the ideal context to foster an innovative and creative use of technology", added Franquet (in press). Only in special coverage of events there was an effort to explore new forms of online journalism.

Based on interviews with online media managers and relevant examples, Nora Paul (2005) reviewed the list of utopias mentioned in one of the first seminars about Internet and journalism, held at the Poynter Institute in 1995. She highlighted that "only some of those forecasts have become reality". Offering more information online than in the traditional medium is not a common practice. Actually, websites are mainly relying on wire copy and they feel that users do not ask for more than efficient up-to-date brief content. "The web has become an alert service, the place for time-starved but news-hungry consumers". There is related material associated to stories, but deep coverage is usually found outside mainstream online media. Few news sites provide links to other websites because "it takes time to find and verify the authenticity of the sites you send your customers to" and they also fear to lose their readers when they

check the other sites. Internal links are more usual, but only some media have built flexible structures to offer “story shells” that provide comprehensive contextual and historical depth to very specific issues. Discussion forums are not connected to editorial production, as online reporters do not even read them, and e-mails from readers are still regarded as a nuisance by many journalists. Multimedia and structurally rich news storytelling are being explored, but they are very time consuming and tend to be concentrated in special features.

The last not least branch of surveys performed to journalists concentrates on how traditional journalists have adopted the Internet as a newsgathering tool. Results report the rapid diffusion process to reach complete adoption during the 1990s in the US (Ross, 1998; Garrison, 2000) and in the first years of the 2000s in European newsrooms, e.g. Finland (Heinonen, 1999), Spain (Palomo, 2004b) and Catalonia (Luzón, 2001; Masip, 2002, 2004, 2005; Soriano and Cantón, 2005). All of these studies are coincident in their assessment of the expectations and concerns of journalists when using online sources. Government sites followed by search engines were the most commonly visited websites for newsgathering. Internet sources are evaluated by journalists with the same standards as other sources: respondents valued reputable sources websites with accurate information. The main routines on the WWW were browsing online newspapers and searching for specific information to complete a story. Few journalists used the Net to find new issues and sources. The main benefit perceived by the journalists in using the Internet was “speed of information gathering” (Masip, 2002). The most common problems when using the Internet as a newsgathering tool reported by US respondents were the difficulties to verify online

data (58%), unreliable information (51%), information with unclear source (51%) and lack of credibility of the site (45%) (Garrison, 2003). Actually, only 5% of the surveyed Catalan journalists used the Internet as their regular first source because they heavily mistrusted the Internet (Masip, 2004). Soriano and Cantón (2005) reported that journalists acknowledged the same problems, but admitted that the Internet helped them to save time. They actually blamed online research for the fact that they were doing less street reporting and, therefore, working more from the newsroom. Basque online journalists had similar views to the ones of traditional journalists (Meso *et al.*, 2005): They primarily used the Internet to check e-mail (that has become as usual as the phone as a communication tool), fact-checking and browsing other online media websites. But they stated that there was too much bad-quality information online and still preferred face-to-face, press releases and news agencies as story sources rather than web searches, and mainly visited other media and official institutions websites.

The common ground to most of the research in this branch of online journalism research is that the utopias of the first wave are again used as the standard towards which reality is faced. Results are usually rather pessimistic, but they do not offer alternative solutions to the development of a better journalism on the Internet. As we shall see, the third wave of research tries to address this limitation focusing on the production context of online news products. Before this, we will review the last empirical approach of the second wave, focused on the users.

2.4.3. Surveying the users

Paradoxically enough, although interactivity and the active user's role were the main arguments to predict a revolution in the media, users have probably been the most neglected piece in the puzzle of online journalism academical research. Market surveys and statistical tools for websites keep close track of what online users do, but scholars have concentrated in the product and the producers. Efforts to research users have been devoted to two main issues: on the one hand, online news consumption habits and attitudes and, on the other hand, forum participants' motivations and practices. Selecting a statistically representative sample is the main problem for research on online news consumption and self-selected respondents through web forms are a usual solution to avoid the enormous budget of sample selection. This strategy presents obvious weaknesses in terms of validity of the resulting percentages, but it can be a good starting point to detect trends and several studies have showed that results are not necessarily biased in comparison to statistically representative data (Weir, 1999:69-70).

Heavy online news users in the US, Germany and Flanders tend to be also consumers of print newspapers and actually regard the websites as a complement of the print edition (Chyi and Larosa; 1999; Althaus and Tewksbury, 2000; Rathmann, 2002), which they prefer if asked to choose (Neuberger *et al.*, 1998; Beyers, 2005). The print edition was regarded as being more important, reliable, useful and informative than the website, while the online edition was described as more time-consuming and

complicated to read (Rathmann, 2002). In his survey on Flemish online news users, Beyers (2005) highlighted that online newspapers were the first news choice for just 7% of the respondents, far behind television (34%) and print newspapers (23%). Immediacy ranked high as one of the main reasons to read online news in surveys that explored motivations (Neuberger *et al.*, 1998; Rathmann, 2002; Beyers, 2005), but for other reasons results varied. In Germany free content was more valued than in Flanders. Contact with the editors or the chance to express oneself were hardly appreciated by users. In Germany, only 35% of respondents would accept paying for the online version (Neuberger *et al.*, 1998). In Flanders, half of the surveyed users said they would never pay for online news. Archives, specialized content and in-depth reporting were the products more likely to be accepted as fee services. Breaking news, video and classifieds lagged behind (Beyers, 2005).

A more experimental approach has dominated studies whose focus was on how Internet features affect news consumption and recall. Bucy (2003) found that websites with more interactive features produced a stronger feeling of complexity and confusion to the testers, who also found them more participatory and involving. In another experiment (Sundar, 2000), those users who visited a text-only version of the same set of news could recall more accurate details on the stories than the ones who visited a multimedia version. Tewksbury and Althaus (2000) found that those news which were less hierarchized and were displayed on a more open layout on a website also lessened the ability of users to recall political news in comparison to the print edition of the same newspaper, as they paid less attention to them and had less prominence cues. In addition, newspaper news had also a greater agenda-setting effect on readers than

online news (Tewksbury and Althaus, 2002). Whereas, D'Haenens *et al.* (2004) found no significant differences in news consumption and recall patterns among readers of the print and online version of the same Dutch newspapers. Rathmann criticized the fact that these studies that focused on the actual reception processes of online news "do not take the actual user and his/her use of and demands for online newspapers in a natural setting into account" (2002:486).

Surveys of forum users have shown that active participants are a small portion of the total number of visitors of a news website. Light and Rogers (1999) surveyed the users of the *Guardian* online forums during the 1997 elections. Most active participants said that the reason to post was to state their opinion (80%). Only 53% said they were reacting to a previous post, and therefore the author suggests that there was not a true deliberative attitude in the forums. Newcomers were less likely to post comments than experienced forum users and, in case they did, it was more as an experiment than to engage in discussion. Forum users' profile was that of an active newspaper reader, as 75% of them had written a letter to the editor of the print edition of *The Guardian*. Nevertheless, many respondents explained their unwillingness to post or to visit the forum regularly due to the lack of time. "Public discussion of politics and news will continue to be a minority activity", the authors conclude. In a similar survey on users of a Flemish online newspaper forum, Beyers (2004) found that only 36% of the respondents did actually post messages in the forums and less than 5% posted more than five messages a week. Users from 35 to 55 years old represented a higher proportion of active forum users. Schultz (2000) surveyed forum users of the New York Times website and found that the average user sent twenty-five messages in ten

months, with a small group of very assiduous users that tended to dominate discussions. Political debate was the main reason to engage.

Critical reflections on the literature on online news users highlight their methodological limitations: "For all the useful knowledge that studies based on experimental, survey, interview and traffic log data can provide, they tend to fall short on shedding light on the habits and meanings that constitute the 'flesh and blood' of using online papers. Thus, more research is needed that examines the discourse and practice of users" (Boczkowski, 2002:280).

2.4.4. Constructivist approaches

As it has been shown, empirical research tends to be critical on the evolution of online journalism, but mainly from a position that simply denounces the distance between the ideals and the reality (Sandoval and Yuste, 2005), providing no historical perspective (Deuze, 1999; Boczkowski, 2002:271) or social context (Carey, 2005:446) and lacking the sort of empirical data and theoretical frameworks that are needed to interpret the causes and consequences of the described trends. This leads most of the research towards the tendency to "build analysis upon a usually taken-for-granted technologically deterministic matrix" (Boczkowski, 2002:279): "When only short temporal sequences are examined, and when actors' actual practices are not observed, analysts may be more inclined to think that a technology enters a society from outside and impacts social life, [describing] a form of cultural lag, during which adaptive problems arise" (ibid.).

The conclusions reached in website analyses and surveys define an almost catastrophic landscape for online journalism if the situation is to be mirrored to the utopian ideals. In this sense, media organizations are portrayed as really conservative entities in the research results. "Journalists seem to embrace the new media insofar as these facilitate the existing workflow or make the established organization of newswork easier" (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:20). "The Internet functions exclusively to extend existing journalistic practices – such as fact checking, generating story ideas, gathering background material, and monitoring competition. (...) reporters and editors interpret and use new media in ways that conform to traditional tenets of journalism and established news industry practices" (Huesca, 2000:10). However, these arguments do not solve the problems they are supposed to decry. We might need to rethink the research questions in order to move forward, and turn the utopias into a factor, rather than an aim. The question, then, would be what factors (specially those inside media organizations) shape the adoption and use of the Internet in the newsrooms and define the features of news websites. The answers to this question may allow us to describe the real chances for change in journalism within the online world.

"Much of the scholarly research has been to explain what it is, not how it's done. Little research has been conducted from within online newsrooms" (Brannon, 1999). "The economic and professional conditions that prevail in the industry are not carried over into the discussion of the new digital forms", argues Scott (2005:93), and Dalhgren extends the point: "We need to study the practices and circumstances of cyberjournalism both at the macro, institutional level as well as at the level of concrete daily practices" (1996:70). García stresses that there should be an analysis of the

newsroom routines complemented with the evaluation of “the existent interrelation between labor market conditions, characteristics of professional formation, internal formation (in the media outlet) and publishers’ requirements in order to advance in the understanding of the conditions and possibilities in which online journalism is developing” (2004:209), and defends an ethnographic approach as the most suitable method to answer these questions. However, while there is a vast body of ethnographic literature that has analyzed the production routines and practices in traditional media from the 1970s onwards, we still find that “there is virtually no equivalent literature in the realm of production for new media” (Paterson, 2004). Chris Paterson finds four reasons to explain the prevalence of research focused on online products rather than on producers. First, there was a general decline of ethnography in journalism research in the end of the 1980s and when the Internet boomed it was no longer the big methodological trend it had been in the 1970s. Second, the dominant paradigm within Internet research as a whole concentrates on the analysis of the network in itself: the content, structure and actors of the virtual world, with scarce attention to its links to the offline world. Third, access to the newsrooms has become more difficult nowadays, for media companies are aware of the critical research tradition that it is commonly found in the sociology of journalism. Finally, Paterson argues that “practicality” for conducting the studies may be another reason for the lack of ethnographic work in online journalism research: “it is cheaper, and easier, to analyze the Internet from one's own desktop than to locate oneself for weeks or months within a production setting. (...) Few academics receive the funding or time from their institutions for such work” (Paterson, 2004).

The existing, and scarce, corpus of studies that specifically focuses on the context and the people who develop online media offers very enriching research avenues. It is what researchers in other online areas of study had also detected in the end of the 1990s: "And so a transition is in the works, from a utopian understanding of the Internet to an understanding based on the technology's place in the larger institutional world" (Agre, 1998). These studies are quite close to the surveys of journalists aforementioned, but their theoretical background and methodology offer deeper answers and interpretative frames. Some of these works analyze the use of the Internet as a newsgathering tool in traditional newsrooms, others the changes in the profession, the factors that promote or block multimedia production and convergence, or the internal forces driving the birth and evolution of online projects. Some use in-depth interviews as their main method, others mainly rely in the observation of the newsroom. Nonetheless, besides the differences in focus and methodology, they all share a theoretical background based on the refusal of technological determinism, the historical and social construction of professions, routines and products, and the inevitable diversity of solutions for the use of any given technology.²⁵ These principles help resist the temptation of thinking on the utopias as the one and only way to do good online journalism, even though the first studies within this third wave still take them as a starting point.

One of the weak points of the approaches in these studies is that they have to rely on case studies to be able to apply their methodologies. This makes generalization of the results a risky exercise, and therefore the studies have to be regarded as fruitful

²⁵ This theoretical framework will be analyzed in deep in chapter 3.

comprehensive pictures of specific but relevant examples and first steps to obtain solid hypotheses. As they are holistic in nature and problematic to decontextualize, we summarize below, in chronological order, the methodologies and findings of the most relevant studies of the third wave.

Jane Singer (1997a) conducted one of the first on-site observations of the early routines in online media production, but her focus was mainly in journalists' attitudes towards new media, and ethnography was mostly a contextual tool. In mid 1995, she observed for a week the work of three online newsrooms (dependent of newspapers) and interviewed sixty-six reporters and editors of both the print and the online versions. She tried to confront utopias with the actual perceptions of journalists about a specific routine: the gatekeeping role. The "general feeling" she assessed was that the gatekeeper function was being redefined. Journalists thought that in the online world their job consisted more of a "digesting" the sheer amount of information already available on the Internet, rather than selecting events to be transformed into news. It would be more an interpretative job rather than a selective one, and therefore it should not aim at "regulating quantity but [at] guaranteeing quality" (1997a:87). Interviewed journalists considered that their ethical and professional values were still valid in the new context and a crucial differential factor for the public to trust them over amateur communicators.

Shannon Martin (1998) concentrated much more in the production process. Through two case studies in the US, she tried to understand the process of content repurposing from newspaper to the website, the main online journalism routine in 1996. Her

starting point were the assumptions of online journalism utopias, which pictured the Internet as a medium “with a function and a format all its own” (1998:66), and she tried to assess to what extent this was an actual fact in real settings. She observed twenty full production cycles to find general routines.

In both newspapers the print newsroom routines have not changed by the creation of the website. A specific online team was devoted to take the content (text and photos) from the print digital system and reformat it into web templates. This was a “tedious and time consuming” work, which was mainly technical and took several hours. They rarely changed the texts unless the headlines of the original did not fit the web space or if the meaning of the headline was not clear enough on the website section homepages, where it lost the context of other newspaper elements. After that, stories were expanded or complemented with wire service and, in one of the cases, with material from a partner local television station. Online journalists were called “editors” and they described their job as “facilitating the story transfer from a paper-based environment to a digital environment”, and they seldom mentioned news writing as part of their tasks. They actually produced some original materials for special sections that were created specifically for the web, usually partly based on archived material of the newspaper (there was not a systematic online news archive in the websites). In one of the cases the online newsroom was in a separate building from the print newsroom and this made it more difficult for the journalists to solve doubts in the repurposing process than in the other case, in which the online staff was in the same newsroom as the offline. This second one had the opportunity of attending daily meetings of the paper staff, too, in order to know which stories were more likely to

appear. Nonetheless in both cases there were no directions from the print editors on the content upload process and each online journalist took their own decisions in the thematic area assigned to them. An online managing editor was the responsible of planning website enhancements and special contents. Martin concluded that "many of the points reported in this two-case pilot study could not be gathered without direct researcher onsite observation" (1998:72).

Jody Brannon (1999) changed her role as online media manager to the one of an ethnographer, and observed the working routines in three online newsrooms in 1998. Her aim was to develop a theory that conceptualized the constrains of the performance in online journalism and help the industry to "maximize the medium". Her theoretical standpoint was openly rooted in technological determinism and a strong belief in the virtues of the Internet as a news medium. However, qualitative methodology drove her to assess the way organizational and cultural factors in the newsrooms influenced journalists' perceptions on what top-quality online media should be. Brannon's assumption was that these factors were just obstacles for a development that sooner or later will not only get through but also fulfill online journalism utopias. Despite this deterministic statement, her insights on the relationship between journalists and the Internet are very enriching. Brannon combined three techniques to gather a holistic and historically sensitive account of the working routines and perceptions of the online staff in three different and diverse cases: *USA Today Online*, *ABCNews.com* and *National Public Radio Online*. She spent five days in each newsroom and did a follow-up visit some months later; she interviewed 6-7 professionals in each case, selecting people with different levels of responsibility in the projects; and finally, to triangulate

her findings, she conducted an e-mail survey that was responded by 20% of the online staffs (twenty-seven people).

Brannon focused on journalists' routines and self-perceptions about their work. She found that online journalists were stressed by the conditions of their daily work: managers wanted reporters to develop more in-depth, complex, creative and multimedia stories but software and hardware tools did not allow them to develop all that so easily and technical tasks were difficult and time-consuming; at the same time immediacy was the main priority in the newsrooms and wire management absorbed too much time to think about complex storytelling; and staffs were small, they did not receive any technical training and they felt that their mother companies did not understand or respect their hard work. They felt excited about the exploration of the new medium and believed that they were experiencing an initial phase with no clear rules and a technology that was still in its infancy. Therefore, they expected improvements in the near future, for they were fully convinced that the Internet had its own characteristics as a news medium. However, "time-consuming practices of teams functioning much like a wire service impeded efforts, desired by both managers and producers, to develop richer, more appropriate material", concluded Brannon (1999).

Eriksen and Ihlström (2000) visited three Scandinavian newspapers' online newsrooms in 1996 and 1999 to analyze the evolution in the design of online news features, in contrast to print and broadcast news. They interviewed reporters, observed them at work and explored the resulting web products. The researchers detected that online

newspapers were evolving from a digital replica of the print edition towards a “live scheme of news reporting” (2000:9). In 1996 this permanent updating feature was not envisioned by online journalists as the preferred evolution of the product, because it might compete with the newspaper print edition. Online competition and “a more relaxed attitude towards web media” pushed the changes, and hard news became the core of the websites, leaving aside “deep reflection and stories not related to current events” (2000:9). There was a clear separation between hard and soft news, and different mechanisms to access them. Hard news structured in streams of headlines, ordered chronologically, was the main diversion from print journalism and at the same time highlighted the new centrality of reporting events as fast as possible in online media. Soft news was in many cases generated from hard news, which were reedited several times to add new information and to recast the article for its longer term life in the soft news sections. Websites were defined by the authors as “fluid media” (2000:10): articles changed over time, headline location on the homepage also did.

Pablo Boczkowski (2004b,c) analyzed the adoption process of the Internet as a news medium by three US newspapers. He conducted 4-5 months observation in the online newsrooms, 142 open-ended interviews and document analysis. Chosen cases had in common the production of original content for the web, but Boczkowski tried to have diversity (different uses of multimedia and interactivity among the cases) to test his hypothesis that different contexts produce different uses of the Internet in the media. He explored the factors and processes shaping these variations. “In contrast with the discourse about revolutionary effects that has been prevalent in the dominant modes of understanding online technologies and the web, my analysis shows innovations

unfolding in a more gradual and ongoing fashion and being shaped by various combinations of initial conditions and local contingencies" (Boczkowski, 2004b:4). Boczkowski defended a research approach based on three elements: historical perspective, local focus on specific actual social contexts, and an emphasis on process. This would make "more visible the ongoing practices that generate the occasionally anticipated but more often unforeseen consequences of technological change" (Boczkowski, 2004b:5).

For Boczkowski, the diversity in the uses of the Internet among the three cases can be understood by two related phenomena: "variations in the dynamics of technology adoption processes" and "production factors having to do [at least] with organizational structures, work practices and representations of the users" (2004c:208). He found that "the more work undertaken by online personnel to align their processes and products with those of their print counterparts, the more reproduction of print's ways of doing things in the online newsroom" (2004c:204). Online newsroom with less coordination with the offline routines and content were more active in developing interactive and multimedia features in their websites. These diverse situations originated in strategic decisions that were taken in the founding processes of the online projects. The participation of the audience as producer, regarded by utopians as the most radical form of interactivity, depended at least on the definition of the role of the journalist in the online medium: in projects where the gatekeeper model was the reference, production was designed as top-down one-way communication to an audience that could participate in forums that were separated from the editorial content. In those projects in which alternatives to this model were sought, a more

open production model was in practice. Another factor that determined the use of more or less multimedia resources was the expectations, from the online newsroom, on the target-user's technical expertise in web browsing, i.e. their representation of the audience. Even though these results cannot be generalized and the historical context of the cases might explain their diversity, Boczkowski's work clearly refutes the deterministic model of online journalism utopias and suggests that "technical considerations" are part of the definition of online news products and newsroom routines (Boczkowski, 2004c:209). The researcher highlights two challenges for further research within this ethnographical approach: the processual nature of the adoption of the Internet in the studied newsrooms should be better captured; and other settings might need to consider the role of some other factors besides the ones he identified.

Regina McCombs (2003) was interested in understanding "how some organizations have been successful at overcoming [the] barriers, and how they have introduced the skills necessary to produce multimedia for their websites on a regular basis" (2003:2). She opted for focused interviews with online staff in three US newspapers with award winning web multimedia products. With this case study, she expected to identify a wide range of possible influences on these success stories and explore unexpected issues that may emerge beyond the initial research questions of the researcher (2003:41). She chose newspapers because research literature suggests that theoretically they have fewer pre-conditions for multimedia development than broadcasters. She framed the cases under the theory of "learning organizations", which describes the requisites for a company to be able to cope successfully with innovation. The theoretical assumptions are that job flexibility, managerial involvement

and leadership, training, routinization and team diversity are positive factors for success. McCombs found that most of these factors were present in her case studies. She interviewed three multimedia producers, their manager and this manager's supervisor in each case. They all felt like pioneers and firmly believed that "multimedia served news consumers better than just text and photos" (2003:62). They admitted that they were constantly rethinking their products, "still inventing what multimedia is" (2003:64), therefore flexibility was a core value for them. Teams were diverse in backgrounds and experience. Journalists hesitated in saying what they were and preferred to describe their tasks, which which embraced a whole variety: "We do everything. We update the website, we maintain the website, we report, we do audio, we do video, we do graphics, we do photo galleries, we do everything" (online editor cited in McCombs, 2003:66).

Producers had had little formal internal training and, as tools evolve constantly, skills sharing and personal research are the most common ways to learn new software features. There was a big deal of automation and templating in text production, but not that much in multimedia authoring besides some video rendering and encoding processes. Some producers argued that automation limited creativity and the ability to innovate. Managers stated that employees needed to have work time for this learning processes and there was a strong commitment from the top of the company for multimedia production. These last factors were perceived as essential by the journalists, as well as having "a journalistic reason behind the multimedia", a communicative purpose, not "video just for video's sake" (2003:89). The main problems perceived by the online staff were the lack of understanding showed by

newspaper journalists and the time-consuming technical tasks that constituted their job, particularly the repurposing of the print content online, which did not have any added value.

Pere Masip (2005) extended his research on the Internet use in Catalan newsrooms with ethnographic work on a radio, a television and a newspaper newsrooms. He conducted forty-three interviews and observed the working routines for the production of the main breaking news stories of three days. He also analyzed those news stories to check which was the final use of Internet gathered data in the pieces. He confirmed the results of the 2002 survey: journalists use the Internet as a secondary option for information retrieval, and they rely on a narrow universe of trusted websites which is very similar to that of traditional sources structure (public administrations, political parties, other media). Masip argues that the ethnographic approach let him “give more focus to the image that quantitative methods showed a little bit blurred” (2005:565).

He found no relevant differences among the three cases. The first thing journalists did when they started their daily work was checking their e-mail. Little organizations that did not have regular access to the media before the Internet sent e-mail press releases to the newsrooms, but the fact is that they were usually neglected, as agency wires and official sources still defined most of the agenda. When they needed more details on a specific issue, journalists preferred to call their sources on the phone rather than send an e-mail, because they thought that they could get a faster answer that way. Online media (mainly digital versions of Catalan and Spanish newspapers) were used by the traditional journalists as a parallel service to the agency wires. They did not

offer original information through the day, but journalists found extremely useful that they filtered and hierarchized the wires. Nevertheless, this role did not affect information gathering: online media may point towards a direction to follow, but direct sources (mainly by phone or face-to-face) and wires were their main resources to get the facts in daily news. The use of the Internet was generally limited to statistical and background complementary data. Institutional and corporate websites were generally regarded as poorly updated and ill conceived, not very useful for journalists. Journalists's general attitude in these case studies was considering the Internet important but not essential for their daily work: they were able to find precise information more quickly, but this did not enhance the core reporting on a story.

Singer (2004) studied four cases of newsroom convergence (in different sizes from metropolitan to local media partnerships) to assess journalists' perceptions and the organizational and cultural factors that influenced the development of integrated news production. She spent a week in each newsroom and interviewed 120 journalists across different areas and levels of responsibility, triangulating the findings with a questionnaire that was completed by almost all the interviewees. In her results she stresses the quantitative results, modulated by quotations from the interviews, but Singer's newsroom observations were seldom referred to in her report. These cases were actually working more on collaboration of television, newspaper and online newsrooms rather than on complete integration. Only case with the smallest staff had all the reporters sharing the same space and even this way there was a differentiated staff for each medium. Based on the diffusion of innovations theory, Singer concluded that "while many journalists have problems with the current practice of convergence,

far fewer have problems with the idea or principle itself" (2004:17). They mostly thought that their companies were going the right way, disagreed with the idea that convergence led to less quality and did not see different newsroom cultures as a big obstacle. The positive results were, from the journalists' point of view, that convergence and multi-skilling help journalists to foster their curriculum and gain respect in other parts of the news company. Journalists mildly believed that audience reaction to convergence has been positive. However, most of them were convinced that the main driver of convergence was business logic, and they felt that they were pushed to work more without earning more, and that they had less time to talk to sources. Journalists demanded more training: they were not scared to learn new technological tools. They considered that convergence demanded different degree of effort to different parts of the newsrooms and newspaper journalists did not feel comfortable with the idea of scooping themselves on the web. Convergence was imposed top-down, but the particular developments were not defined by the management of the companies, letting journalists adopt different attitudes towards the new challenge: online journalists were the eagerest to explore innovation. Some paper and broadcast mates followed, but most of them were more cautious and had mixed feelings about the practice of convergence. T For this reason, newsrooms preferred to wait for what would happen next.

2.5. Discussion: the challenges of online journalism research

The scholar agenda in the field of online journalism has been clearly dominated by the research produced in the United States, partly because of the leading and referential role of the US in the development of the Internet as a news medium. European research has usually followed the steps of theoretical and methodological proposals as they evolved in the American scientific production. In the previous sections, three overlapping waves of studies have been identified within the first decade of online journalism research:

1. Normative and prospective studies
2. Empirical research based on the theoretical assumptions of the first wave
3. Empirical research based on a constructivist approach to technological change

The three waves of research were born in the 1990s, but the weight of each one in terms of scientific production and consensus has shifted slowly from the first wave to the second one. The third wave is still struggling to be central in the research field. The dotcom crash in the beginning of the 2000s may have helped to relativize the utopias and favored the less deterministic approaches to the object of study that overcome the understandable initial technological fascination.

American media, and specially online versions of print newspapers, are clearly over-represented in the studies performed to date. Broadcasters' online strategies have

been hardly analyzed and pure-online initiatives have only been part of broader studies and deserve deeper attention. Newspapers seem to have based their exploration of online news on their journalistic culture, and trends may be slightly different in other contexts. Furthermore, other forms of online news in the boundaries of professional journalism may offer interesting alternative models that should not be disregarded. Deuze (2003) opposed open-participation and connectivity-based projects to the moderated-participation and editorial-content centered mainstream online media. This theorization has been empirically explored in case studies of experiences such as Indymedia (Platon and Deuze, 2003; Jankowski and Jansen, 2003) or content analyses of weblogs (Matheson, 2004a; Wall, 2005; Singer, 2005) and interviews with bloggers (Matheson, 2004b), but further research is needed to assess its relative position in the Internet news sphere and its mutual influences with established media. This is obviously over the scope of this work, as it tries to contribute to the third wave of online journalism research, which concentrates on the changes that the development of online journalism has brought to traditional professional routines.

Another important need, specifically in the third wave of research, is cross-country and cross-media comparison. Deuze (1998) already defended this idea in the early years of online journalism research, and Jankowski and Van Selm (2005:206) underscored similar challenges for Internet research in general: "We believe it is time to go beyond the individual, often isolated case studies, and strive towards projects encompassing multiple methods, across time, intended to elaborate on central theoretical perspectives". The theoretical building of online journalism research is still under construction, too. Technological relativity might be the key to overcome the limitations

of deterministic approaches, but international comparison is crucial to prove it and find common trends and local singularities. To date, website analysis and survey approaches have highlighted the commonalities rather than the differences, but we do not know much about the variations in contextual and processual factors that shape online journalism in different settings. The main difficulty is creating comparable case studies and, to accomplish this challenge, it is crucial to have a solid theoretical grounding. This study attempts to contribute in the building of this framework and test it through a cross-media comparative case study.

3. Theoretical framework

Some early literature on online journalism research (Deuze, 1998; Singer, 1998; Kawamoto, 1998) already urged for an effort from scholars to explore old and new theoretical and methodological frameworks in order to better understand the ongoing evolution of this new form of news production. In the broader context of studies on the Internet as a social phenomenon, Jankowski and Van Selm warned that methodological innovation should not lead scholars to start research in the field from the scratch: "A frequent swan song is that Internet research is, in some way, 'different' from other forms of social science investigation and, therefore, requires unique, yet-to-be-redefined methods of study" (2005:200). Following Williams *et al.* (1988:13), they defended that new media research²⁶ should better build on conventional research methodologies and theoretical frameworks and explore alternative methods and designs from the ones assumed as standard. In fact, Jankowski and Van Selm point out that most of the innovations in Internet research are limited to the micro level of data gathering and analysis techniques, in many cases with the adaptation of existing methods to best manage the digital/virtual environment of the studies. Therefore, contributions in the mezzo and macro levels are scarce: innovative research design strategies, consideration of different theoretical and disciplinary approaches, reflections on epistemological principles. This dissertation aims to overcome the limitations of current research on online journalism by addressing the mezzo level of methodological

²⁶ *New media research* has been used widely to name the research on communication and technological innovations since the late 1970s and specially in the 1990s, specially to refer to Internet studies (Lievrouw *et al.*, 2001).

innovation in particular. For this purpose, we explore existing theoretical and methodological approaches of different disciplines that may be more adequate to address relevant research questions on online journalism that most of the studies to date have not satisfied. This chapter tries to open up the range of disciplines that may be illuminating the research questions and rethink the paradigms assumed by new media research, such as the principles informing the sociology of journalism. The starting point for this move was intuition. This was progressively supported by other researchers' work (Cottle, 1999; Boczkowski, 2004b,c), which encouraged a closer look to journalistic work organization and routines, and a non-deterministic approach to technological innovation. Furthermore, they suggested that the study of social change might be a fruitful strategy for an online journalism research that goes beyond the limitations of analyses which are simply based on the assumed potentials of the Internet. While in the late 1990s the trend in Internet research as a whole was clearly driven towards the growth of social constructivist approaches that questioned the initial deterministic scientific production (Lievrouw, 2004:13; Wellman, 2004), technological determinism in the form of utopias has driven most of the research on online journalism in the beginning of the 2000s, as showed in chapter 2.

The first section of this chapter is devoted to the sociology of journalism, as one of the established references that can be useful to build up the theoretical framework of this study. Sociology of journalism has half a century of tradition in the study of news organizations and professionals, and has created a solid theoretical corpus to describe rules, roles and processes in the newsrooms and analyze their interrelations and consequences. In this sense, it serves as an ideal guideline for the observation of the

routines in online newsrooms. Moreover, empirical evidence on mass media news production can be confronted to online routines in order to check for the variables of continuity and change. Nevertheless, it will be argued that this body of literature has important limitations, because it has usually neglected a historical perspective and processes of change in news production routines. Technological innovation, a central factor of change with the adoption of the Internet, was overlooked in the crucial studies of the 1970s. In our research we need theoretical tools to analyze how newsrooms deal with technological change, a facet that sociology of journalism is not able to answer *per se*.

The second part of the chapter reviews the work carried out throughout several disciplines that have produced theoretical frameworks for the study of the relationships between technologies and social groups. The authors, taken from different perspectives such as history, sociology and anthropology, built up the epistemological principles needed to frame technology as a social construction, which allowed them to explain those facts that break away with any empirical legitimacy for technological determinism: the success of a technique with less features than its contemporary loser; the development of different uses of the very same technology in different social settings; or the rejection of an innovation by the consumers. The detailed argumentation and conceptualization of these phenomena offered by technological innovation researchers will be the most useful one for the analysis of the Internet adoption in online newsrooms. In this exploration of disciplines, which usually have not had journalism as their object of study, we will follow the path opened by proposals such as the work of Pablo Boczkowski, who as early as 1999 suggested to explore the

experience of constructivist approaches to technological innovation to analyze the development of online newspapers, “the processes that mediate between the technological input and the editorial output” (1999:111).

3.1. Sociology of journalism

Until the end of the 1960s the study of news production and producers did not mature as a research field. The most direct precedent was the *gatekeeper theory*, formulated by David M. White in 1950, an oversimplification of journalists' tasks that nonetheless was really useful to conceptualize the selection process that news undergo. Further research found that news selection was very homogeneous among all the newspapers and more concerned with production goals and routines than with personal attitudes (Schudson, 2000:177). In the 1970s, several American sociologists rejected the functionalist principles of these initial studies and tried to analyze the whole process of newsmaking, extending and contextualizing the gatekeeper analysis into the whole media company structure, roles and routines (Tuchman, 2002:80).

Schudson (2000) contextualizes this *sociology of newsmaking* using other research approaches to journalism: political economy, which took a macro perspective to interpret news as the product of the economical and political structure of society; and cultural studies, which emphasized the influence of social traditions and symbolic systems shared by journalists and readers as the main constraint to their choices. In contrast to these perspectives, sociology of newsmaking focused on the production logics as well as its processes and the organization of work to understand the shaping of news stories. During the 1990s, researchers' attention has extended to news sources, the relationship between journalist and audience, and technology has entered the research agenda as a factor to be considered (see section 3.1.2).

Sociology of newsmaking originates from the epistemological principles of phenomenology, symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology (Tuchman, 2002:81), which argue that reality is a social construction mediated by processes that can be identified and analyzed. Taking this constructivist approach, the researchers of news production tried to determine which was the influence of journalistic working routines in the representation of an event in the media. Research demonstrated that newsrooms have a high degree of routinization and their methods to gather, select and narrate news are very standardized throughout all the media (Tuchman, 1991:83-84). Routines and standardization mediate the subjectivity of the journalist, who applies assumed professional rules to transform information into news efficiently (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991:85-112). Therefore, all the mass media tend to *construct* news with the very same particularities: institutional sources are privileged, *status quo* is legitimated and punctual events and conflicts are privileged over processes and positive situations (Schudson, 2003:48-55).

Methodology is at the common core of the research under the umbrella of the sociology of newsmaking: ethnography is the main tool for the researchers to analyze the production routines in the newsrooms (Tuchman, 1991:84-85). The units of analysis are neither the news stories nor the journalist, but the whole media organization, as a complex institution. There was a clear political bias among researchers during the 1970s (Tuchman, 2002:80): they wanted to deconstruct the myth of media objectivity, showing that there are structural factors that make the media over represent the official versions of events (Manning, 2001:51-52). "News obfuscates social reality instead of revealing it. It confirms the legitimacy of the state

by hiding the state's intimate involvement with, and support of, corporate capitalism", concluded Tuchman (1978:210) in one of the seminal ethnographies of newsmaking.

Research on newsmaking identifies work organization in the newsrooms as the main factor determining the content of the media. Professional values legitimize working routines and neutralize journalists' personal bias through a positioning "characterized by detachment from the society represented in the news and (...) by a strive for authority of the news" (Heinonen, 1999:18). The cult for objectivity –and the routines it shapes– is the best mechanism to neutralize professionals' ideology and ease journalists' adaptation to the editorial bias of the medium. It is also a strategy towards the readers, to gain credibility and to be able to reach massive and heterogeneous audiences. Research has shown that journalists undergo a socialization process (Schudson, 2000: 186) in which they learn the non-written rules of the medium through their supervisors' corrections, the chats with their colleagues, reading the product and attending work meetings. Professional values, partly solidified in ethical codes, have built a "self-identity" for journalists with which they try to defend their social function and protect their autonomy, even though the daily routines in the newsrooms provide a picture of the profession that does not match the ideals in many occasions (Heinonen, 1999:19-20).

Research on the journalist social and professional profile corroborates that journalists attach a social function to their jobs which guides their work. Weaver and Wilhoit (1986, 1996) work is the most comprehensive and influential research effort focusing on journalists' profile and personal values so far. They surveyed US professionals and

found that their respondents agreed in the identification of four main roles. The most important one was the interpretative and investigative function, mainly focused on analyzing and explaining the complex problems of our societies to the public. The second one was the dissemination function, that is, providing information to the public quickly and avoiding unverifiable information. The third one was the adversary function, namely being constantly skeptical on the statements of the government and business interests. Finally, a small part of the journalists defended the role of populist mobilizer, the one who aimed at developing the audience interests, providing entertainment and helping ordinary people express their views. These surveys of journalists have also tried to assess the influence of their personal background (ideology, ethnicity, gender, social origin) on their reporting, with findings that suggest that these factors do not play an important role in news production (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991:64). The analysis of news production insists on the idea that the high routinization of the journalist's work reduces individual bias in the process. Professional values are embodied in the socialization process in the newsroom, and are better described as organizational outcomes rather than as personal features (Schudson, 2000:186; Manning, 2001:54).

"News *is* a product –manufactured, sold and consumed daily" (Tuchman, 2002:82). The sociology of newsmaking emphasizes that working routines have been designed to guarantee a constant, controlled and predictable flux of incoming information to elaborate the news (Schudson, 2003:33-34). The production logic of mass media consists of rationalization of work, cutting costs and production time to the minimum and maximizing sources reliability and continuity. These are the reasons why there is a

very clear labor division inside the newsrooms, built around the hierarchy of decision-making. Hierarchy guarantees that decisions will be taken fast and easy, even when shared newsworthiness criteria are debated in complex cases. The professional culture defines journalists' social mission and the concept of news, and therefore it legitimizes the standard routines of news production (Manning, 2001:68-69).

Newsworthiness criteria define the requisites for an event to become news and to rank it among other stories (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991:90-91). They allow media to standardize the process of identifying an event as newsworthy and plan the resources it deserves and the best way to narrate it. Criteria aim at easing the selection process. In everyday routines, they are applied automatically by every reporter. Although they are informally shared and poorly justified, they are solidly rooted in journalists' mindset. They do not originate from deep reflections on the social role of journalism, but are a practical instrument deriving from daily experience. A newsroom can make them evolve or change to adapt to current events or internal organization demands, but they tend to be very stable because they guarantee efficiency.

Journalists build a stable network of news sources around them in order to get the continuous and predictable information flux that media need. Sociology of newsmaking has proven that reporters tend to privilege institutional sources with social hegemony (public administration, parliamentary political parties...) because they have the appropriate infrastructure to guarantee a "reliable and steady supply of the raw materials for news production" (Schudson, 2000:184). Sources that do not have this communicative ability tend to have difficulties to access media. Due to the fact that the

formation of a network of sources has an effect on the social visibility of the ones that do not get in the network, many organizations are seriously considering their public relations investments, trying to satisfy the needs of a content-hungry media industry (Manning, 2001:59).

The final presentation of news to the audience follows a narrative ritual that attempts to erase the fact that news are the result of a meaning construction process, the result of a complex production. Journalists use structural, syntactic and semantic techniques in the writing and editing processes in order to make the news resemble a mirror of reality. The use of quoted sources, the invisibility of the reporter's presence, the inverted pyramid in newspapers, the distant-observer style of television news filming... are some of the tools used. News stories are presented decontextualized from their original social environment, but the journalistic product recontextualizes them in a group of news stories that seem to have a *raison d'être* (Tuchman, 1978:104-132).

Journalists claim that they think of the audience when they select and elaborate news, but researchers have shown that direct contact with the public is minimal and many professionals feel that it would threaten their autonomy. This way, they have a paternal attitude towards the public and idealize the audience in a stereotypic image, which is what they are thinking of when they produce news (Altheide and Snow, 1991:58-59).

Beyond the profound social and political implications of these findings, the work of the sociology of newsmaking has had a crucial role in defining the network of individuals,

routines and decisions that converge to produce a news story. In few words, the process starts with the planning of events to be covered and the contact between journalists and sources; it continues with the supervision of senior editors, who evaluate the story in the context of current events; then the journalist collects complementary testimonials, reactions, opinions on the event, as well as contextual documentation; these elements have to be selected and organized in accordance to a hierarchy in order to prepare the news story and fit the newshole it has been assigned. This process is quite flexible even when it is based on very specific rules.

It is important considering the fact that newsmaking ethnographies do not only describe the rules of journalistic work but also demonstrate that they are a social construction with very clear goals: legitimize journalists' social function and guarantee the efficiency of the news production process. They are not natural, unmotivated routines, but a set of conventions which have been decided and consolidated throughout years inside the newsrooms. "Journalism's professional norms and values would be seen [by these studies] as the sociohistorical constructions of a commercializing culture rather than as transcendent ideals" (Schudson, 1997:79). The most crucial corollary of this constructivist revelation is that social norms can be challenged and evolve to adapt to social changes and, maybe, technological changes. There is empirical evidence that during the 20th century journalistic standards have evolved to follow political, economical and social changes (Schudson, 2000:195). Heinonen (1999:17-18) recalls the birth of the interview and of investigative reporting as important shifts in the profession. Furthermore, there is a certain degree of diversity at any given moment of this evolution: Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) found differences in

the self-perception of journalistic roles in professionals working in different media (press vs. broadcasting) and companies of different sizes (national vs. local). Newspaper journalists adhered more to the adversarial role than broadcasters. Cross-national surveys in the 1990s (see Deuze, 2002 for an overview) revealed that the dissemination function was the most shared one around the world (Weaver, 1998), with the interpretative function also ranking high in Western societies (Deuze, 2002:141). Newsmaking research also suggests that journalistic routines tend to be basically stable and homogeneous among different media around the world (Tuchman, 1991:83; Schudson, 2000:187).

The hypothesis that derives from the sociology of newsmaking is that the adoption of the Internet as a news medium may promote the evolution of professional journalism routines. Technological change should be understood as a factor among many others, such as socio-cultural change, business logic and professional-normative considerations (Heinonen, 1999:19-26). Studies on online journalists reported in section 2.4.2 show that journalists perceive that their routines have somehow changed in comparison to traditional media journalists, but that at the same time many principles have survived the technological evolution. Nevertheless, there is scarce comprehensive data about their daily routines, their values and standards; the kind of data that the sociology of newsmaking produced in the 1970s, can let us interpret the extent and direction of change when the Internet is used as a news medium.

3.1.1. Limitations of the sociology of journalism for technological innovation research

The sociology of journalism might offer good theoretical tools for the analysis of online journalism routines, but Schudson (2000:194) points out a shortcoming that must be taken into account when analyzing the adoption of a new technology such as the Internet in the newsrooms: the microsociological approach and the political agenda of newsmaking studies usually neglect the historical perspective and any comparative efforts in the research design. Change in production routines is not at all the central aim of these studies, which concentrated on highlighting homogeneity and constants rather than on diversity and evolution. Cottle (2000) argues that there are theoretical and strategic limitations in the “first wave” of newsmaking ethnography that explain this stress on homogenization. He points out that researchers focused on mainstream and high-reputation media, neglecting other forms of journalism that may have other professional values and routines. In the current diversifying media ecology there is a need for a more flexible account of news production, sensitive to phenomena such as infotainment formats.²⁷ Comparative ethnographic case studies are the most appropriate strategy to address this research challenge, in his view. Recent studies focus on the diversity of news models and the ongoing creation of new ones. Other studies, more relevant from the point of view of online journalism research, are cases

²⁷ In fact, both Schudson (2000) and Cottle (2000) feel that the public interest servant model of journalism is no longer (and might have never been) the actual reference for most of the journalists at all. Schudson (2003:70) asks for research in the “costs and benefits of commercialization” of journalism, a trend initiated in the 19th century and therefore as central in the configuration of news media as “professionalization” of the journalistic work –which has clearly been the object of study of the sociology of newsmaking.

such as the study of the production of a TV news sub-genre, which concluded that “journalists in fact define their understanding of their particular new form in relation to other forms of news” (Cottle, 2000:32).

In this same critical perspective on the lack of historicity in newsmaking research, several authors have recently stated that technological innovation has been also mostly neglected in the studies on news production (Cottle, 2000:33; Boczkowski, 2004c:197). The profound transformations in media technologies during the 1970s and 1980s, with the computerization of the production process in newspapers and the introduction of more compact and automatic equipment in radio and television (which enabled ENG reporting), were not analyzed by newsmaking scholars.²⁸ Cottle (1999:22) argues that they did not have any theoretical background to analyze the interactions between technological evolution and production organization. The birth of the Internet as a mass medium was not predictable for researchers, who faced a very stable media landscape in the 1970s: press, radio and television. Technological change was internal to the production process and was not at all the priority of their research agenda. In the 1990s, the Internet could not be neglected and researchers who were interested in studying the adoption of the new technology by media companies complained that they had no valid references in the newsmaking literature: “Most of the studies that have entered the newsrooms (...) haven't paid attention to the role of the artifacts that journalists use to gather, process and deliver information” (Boczkowski, 1999:113).

²⁸ There are actually some (few) contributions to the analysis of these changes, from rather technological perspectives in the 1980s (see the summary of Shoemaker and Reese, 1991:176) and more balanced among social, professional and technological perspectives in the 1990s (summarized in Bromley, 1997; Christopher, 1998; Manning, 2001:75-80; McCombs, 2003:23-25; Avilés *et al.*, 2004:87-90). The most relevant results of this research have been synthesised in section 2.1.

Based on the findings of his own research on online journalism, he argues that technology "is important in the work of journalists" (*ibid.*) and must be incorporated to news production analysis: "Although materiality may not always matter in every traditional and new media settings, the centrality of technical considerations in the present cases at least implies that *a priori* overlooking the technological dimension of editorial work in studies of news making may run the risk of either missing important dynamics or misunderstanding their causes and implications" (Boczkowski, 2004c:209).

This does not mean that the findings of the sociology of newsmaking are not valid anymore. Even after the criticisms on it for neglecting the relative degree of self-determination that each individual journalist can have inside the structure of the routines, Manning (2001:53-54) admitted that recent research corroborated the works of the 1970s: budget and human resources cuts in media companies to be competitive in an increasingly crowded industry favored "routinization and standardization" of journalism. The point is that the elements of the news production process tend to be stable, but their mutual relationship and specific articulation may vary through time and from a medium to another.

Ari Heinonen suggests that online journalism research should acknowledge the *historicality* of journalism to be able to conceptualize change, something that even though the sociology of newsmaking did not have in its research agenda was nevertheless implicit in the constructivist approach of the discipline. "Journalism is a social phenomenon: it emerged as a consequence of certain social (including technological and economic) developments and it is attached to certain cultural

(including political) formations" (1999:11). Professional journalism was born in the 19th century, linked to the rise of the industrial society and parallel to the birth of the concept of the public sphere around democratic nation-states.²⁹ Technological innovations in printing, transportation (train) and communications (telegraph) provided the appropriate material resources to consolidate a new information industry based on news as a commodity product (1999:15-17,29-30). "The work process and corresponding organization evolved to resemble the assembly-line, the icon of the Industrial Society. As in factories, the tasks in newsrooms were broken down into smaller parts, with each editorial worker adding a piece to the final product" (1999:17). This Fordist organization of the journalistic work, a socio-historical construction heir of the times when the profession was born, has been well depicted in the newsmaking literature. What those studies do not explain is that, as any other social construction, it may change as society evolves. Heinonen argues that social transformations in the turn to the second millennium may be promoting such a change. The Internet and online journalism would be the most visible contexts to assess evolutions in the newsrooms, but the so-called *information society*³⁰ logic may also influence traditional media. The

²⁹ Historian Jean Chalaby (1996) specifically traces back to the United States and the United Kingdom the birth of the standards, values and routines broadly shared among professional journalists around the world nowadays. Schudson notes that news do also exist in modern dictatorships and warns that "it does not necessarily promote active, empowered citizenship" (2003:197). He argues that the press in a democratic society has usually helped in making politicians more responsible and in offering citizens a shared sense of public issues, "but the press itself is not democracy and does not create democracy" (2003:198).

³⁰ Both the terminology and the connotations of the concept of *information society* have been challenged (Tremblay, 1996; Webster, 2002), but the empirical data gathered by authors such as Manuel Castells (1996-98; 2004) suggest the existence of actual change trends in the economical and political organization and dynamics of society. In addition, it seems fair to moderate the revolutionary hype of some writings and rather talk about an evolution of capitalism in democratic Western societies leading towards an even more "globally interdependent social structure" that has appropriated digital network technologies (Castells, 2004:43) as a convenient tool for its needs and has placed an increasingly strategic value in theoretical knowledge (Webster, 2002:271).

false “eternal nature of journalism” shall be questioned more than ever and research should focus on the evolution of the profession (Heinonen, 1999:33).

There are other criticisms to the main body of the sociology of journalism that may be relevant to an adequate approach to online journalism. The main argument is that newsmaking research is too focused on the journalists' role in news production and underestimates the strategies of sources as a crucial element in the process of a news story (Manning, 2001:67). News selection by the journalists must be reframed in a bigger picture in which sources play an active role to access the media and influence journalistic decisions. Schlesinger (1990) proposed a theoretical model where sources would compete to access the media. The key point was that there is an unequal starting point for this competition: each source has more or less political and economical power, as well as cultural capital, and both determine its initial accessibility to media. Besides their position, sources' strategies and messages shall be analyzed to understand the success or failure of their communication to media. Messages have to be adapted to the journalists' needs if they are to increase the chances of publication. Sources' final goal is to impose their vision of an event or an issue as the “dominant definition”. There is a constant fight among sources for this dominance. No dominant definition is stable, and any given one can be swept away by another at any moment. Empirical research in the 1990s corroborated the importance of sources' strategies in the process of news selection (Soriano, 1998:33-35; Manning, 2001: 67). In the new scenario provided by the Internet it is obvious that sources have new tools to develop their strategies and it seems that their pressure on the media has increased.

Other scholars have pointed out that the audience role in news production has also been underscrutinized (Schudson, 2000:194; Cottle, 2000:28-29). Sociology of newsmaking has never defined a theoretical approach to the integration of the audience in their systematic description of processes. They laterally mention the image that journalists have of their readers or viewers. Nonetheless, there is some worthy empirical evidence about journalists' attitudes regarding audience inputs on their work. Herbert Gans (1979:229-241) found that reporters usually argued that letters to the editor which complained about their stories "were not representative of the whole audience". Most of the letters were critical, and there was the assumption that satisfied readers did not write to tell them. Journalists argued that audience preferences were not an adequate guideline for news selection: news would lose quality if compared to the ones selected with the *objective* criteria of professional standards. Cottle (2000) pointed out that since it is very difficult to articulate direct research on the audience while doing newsroom ethnography, the image that journalists have of the audience is a decisive factor in defining newsworthiness and news products and therefore should have a more central role in the research design.

All these criticisms have caused "a progressive stepping out [of researchers] from newsrooms" in the 1990s (Soriano, 2002:259). Cottle (2000) argued that the changes in the media industry demanded a "second wave of news ethnography" which would build on the findings of the newsmaking tradition and, at the same time, would be conscious of its limitations. He argues for giving less emphasis to the idea of organizational routines shall be deemphasized as long as journalists are more conscious of and self-critical about professional values and their implications, especially

after more than two decades of being subjects of scientific scrutiny. Therefore, a renewed approach should acknowledge journalists' reflexivity and agency in the context of the organizational structure. Soriano also defends that ethnographic research inside the newsrooms still results worthy, and points out the need for a similar shift, in his words, from the "naturalistic" approach of the sociology of newsmaking to a more explanatory one. Researchers should try to reveal the mechanisms, "the factors that regulate the production process in a newsroom" (2002:260). Newsmaking research has showed the moments and elements of news production, but Soriano argues that this should be now regarded as a starting point for the researcher and not the main goal. The *mechanistic* approach could be the meeting point between the sociology of journalism and the research on technological innovation.

Boczkowski urged for the need to "extend the valuable tradition of sociological studies of newsmaking" to examine key issues of online journalism only partially addressed by scholars (see section 2.4): "1) the routines and values of online newsmaking, and their relationships to those of print and broadcast journalism,³¹ 2) the construction and reconstruction of occupational identities in the new work environment, 3) the negotiations among the different occupational groups as they influence the news-

³¹ Boczkowski further extends this research issue adding five aspects more: 1) the differences and similarities in newsmaking routines for shovelware [content repurposing from traditional media] and original content, 2) the comparison between newsworthiness on the web and in traditional media, 3) the acquisition of new technical and narrative skills and their relationships to existing ones, as well as the decrease in use of existing skills, 4) the changes in gathering, processing and delivery of news content in relation to having multiple media for storing and conveying information, and 5) the presence or absence of tensions derived from the encounter of the different newsmaking cultures of print and broadcast journalists, as well as their relationship to computer-oriented cultures of information production" (2002:280).

making process, and 4) the relationships among all agents of production – not just editorial workers, but also design, technical, advertising and marketing personnel, users when they become co-producers, and the artifacts the different actors use” (2002:278-9). In his view, a research approach exploring the social shaping of the Internet as a news medium will be able to address relevant questions that will undermine the determinism that dominates online journalism research: “1) the presence of resistance to new technologies within organizations adopting them as well as among the audiences for their products, 2) the emergence of unexpected uses broadening the repertoire of activities consciously inscribed by producers in their design of media artifacts, and 3) situations in which the same technical potentials are realized in diverse ways, and different potentials are domesticated into relatively similar uses” (*ibid.*). The present study attempts to address most of these research questions building on the merging of the sociology of newsmaking and the constructivist approaches to technological innovation. However, before exploring the theoretical proposals of technological innovation research, it is worth reviewing the few existing approaches to the analysis of technology in the sociology of journalism.

3.1.2. Technology in the sociology of journalism

As it has been stated before, technological factors have been seldom analyzed by classical newsmaking studies, but there are some exceptions. Gans is one of the few authors of the 1970s that explicitly addresses the relationship between technology and journalism as part of a thorough comparative description of news production routines in two television newscasts and two printed weeklies, all of them distributed all over

the United States. His perspective is a good example of the ways sociology of newsmaking addressed technology in its research agenda. He underscored that the comparison of different media and working rhythms revealed that news selection criteria were similar in all the cases, and concluded that “technology is not a determining factor” in that part of the production process (1979:80). When evaluating the final products, Gans questioned deterministic media theories: “Marshall McLuhan notwithstanding, I soon learned that despite the differences between the electronic [television] and print news media, the similarities were more decisive” (1979:xii). Both media look for news stories with a narrative structure, action and spectacularity, and treat them using the very same routinized point of view.

Regardless these general reflections underlining homogeneity, the detailed analysis leads Gans to admit some differences between television and press (1979:157-167). Every medium, understood as a set of technological production and delivery tools, has its own requirements and possibilities. Journalists try to take advantage of them to distinguish their product from the one of other organizations that use a different technology. Television, for example (1979:158), looks for immediacy and visual immersion of the audience in the story. This is the reason why an event is more unlikely to get in the newscast if there are no images about it, and spectacular images can make an anecdotal event appear among the selected news. Gans argues that technology influences the production process indirectly, through what he names the *format*, that is, the structural features of the news product. In television, the format is the time structure of the newscast, the number of pieces that fit in that structure, their order and their grouping. The format also defines the standard duration of different

types of news, and its narrative structure. It is really useful, because it helps the audience to predict the kind of content they can expect from the program and it also helps the journalist to select and organize information quite automatically. The newsroom tries to provide a balanced product each time. A news story having low newsworthiness will be judged much more in terms of the general equilibrium of the product.

Formats tend to be stable, but Gans found that they may evolve. Because he did several visits to the newsrooms during a ten year period (1965-1975), he was able to apply a diachronic perspective to his research that lacks in most of newsmaking studies. Technological innovation was not, from his observations, the main factor to explain format evolution. Strategies to increase audience share, adaptation to current events and the pressure that journalists have to improve the product are the crucial reasons for format changes. "Technological improvements come into being from time to time, but they do not seem to alter the format or story selection" (1979:166). Gans offers an example: the technological leap from cinema to electronic cameras in television newsgathering did not produce immediate changes in production routines. The new cameras allowed the broadcasters to provide live coverage of an event, but this feature was not used for years in newscasts, because it did not fit the short and standardized news format.

Christopher (1998) explains that newspapers incorporated computers during the 1970s and 1980s with the aim of optimizing production processes (reducing production timing, costs, human resources), but they did not have any intention of changing the

existing journalistic model. This could explain Gans' interpretations: diversity in media technologies partially influences the format of different products, but the shared journalism model is so strong that neither technological differences nor innovation produce big deviations. The model may obviously evolve, but the changes are slow and technology does not seem to be the leading factor.

The elusive exercise of guessing the bottom line of Gans' findings may be better solved with empirical data gathered in a more systematic research on technological change dynamics in newsrooms. In the 1990s technology started to be in the focus of news production research (Cottle, 1999:24-25). Boczkowski (2004c:198) summarizes that the approach of most of these studies has concentrated on the effects of technological innovation in editorial dynamics and products. "This dominant focus has made a valuable contribution by stressing the significance of technology's potential effects. But it has also limited our understanding of these complex phenomena by making less visible the adoption processes that shape whether and how these effects may arise in the various sites where technologies are used" (2004c:198-99).

Some theoretical proposals in the sociology of journalism have incorporated the technological factor in the analytical framework. Brian McNair's stand point is close to technological determinism. He considers that "the form and content of journalism is crucially determined by the available technology of newsgathering, production and dissemination" (1998:125). Hanno Hardt (1990) interpreted technological innovation in the newsroom as a capitalist imposition that attempts to increase efficiency and control in the working process. His proposal consisted of analyzing the companies'

management and workers' attitudes towards technologies from the perspective of class conflicts. Altheide and Snow (1991) offered a systematic model for the *format* concept envisioned by Gans, for which they argued that it "always shapes and limits content" (1991:54). The form of a media product, what they call the *media logic*, depends on three groups of factors: the historical context, the organizational setting of the media company, and the features of the technical artifacts for production and diffusion. They argue that the combination of all these factors is the basis for the journalistic criteria for news selection and production.

Simon Cottle (1999:26) is not satisfied with any of these approaches. He considers that they still do not offer a satisfactory, developed and solid theoretical framework for the analysis of the interactions between technology and news production. He decries the lack of detailed empirical research on which scholars would be able to build grounded theory. This is why he suggests taking the experience of anthropology of technology and communication historians, who consider that technology cannot be considered an external factor to the social context that is being analyzed. Technology cannot be regarded as an independent variable that we evaluate only in terms of its influence over news production. On the contrary, it must be regarded as an element that is incorporated to the context and is adapted to it in a process of mutual influence. Soriano (2002) also stresses the need to put news production in the frame of a dynamic social context (the media company and the social relationships inside it and with other actors and institutions), which will help us conceptualize routines as an evolving frame and detect the mechanisms of change. These approaches would let the researcher understand not only which are the current online journalism production

routines, but also which has been the process for the adoption of the Internet in the newsrooms and why it is used the way it is.

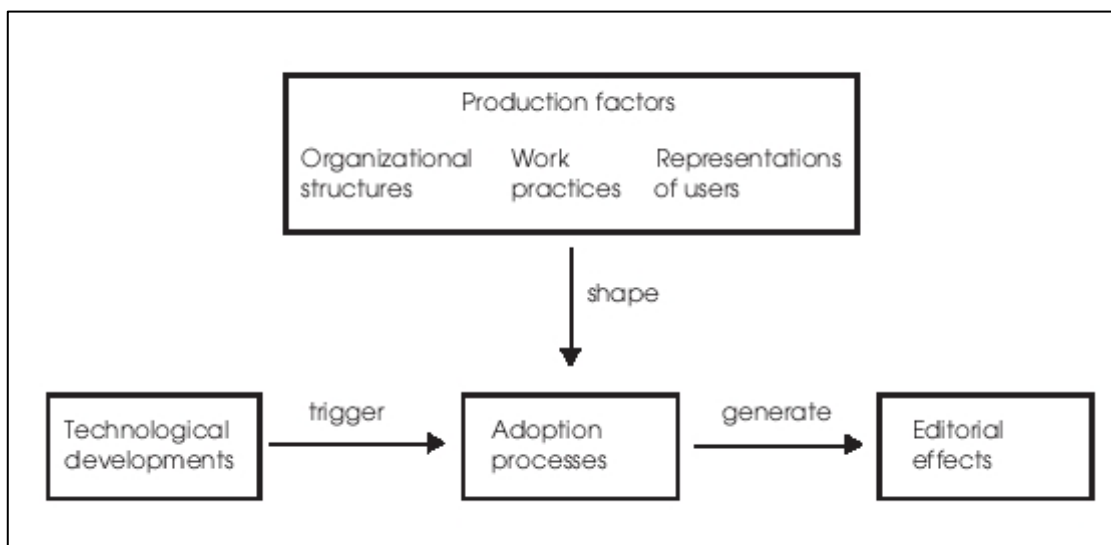
In the specific field of online journalism research, Jane B. Singer (1998) felt that the pioneering studies on online journalism should have questioned traditional media concepts. She pointed out that there had been very little research on the changes in the production process. In Singer's view, the sociology of newsmaking is still useful, but there was a need for new theoretical tools to conceptualize the processes of technological change, on the one hand, and to define the features of the new medium, on the other hand. The latter was quickly achieved in the utopian literature while the former was mostly neglected by the authors.

Singer (1997a) experienced herself the exercise of critically reviewing classical newsmaking theories to enrich online journalism research. She confronted the gatekeeper theory with the interactive utopias of the Internet: "The gatekeeping theory offers an interesting exemplar for a study of journalists' perceptions of interactive media in particular because the role of gatekeeper, as traditionally defined, is among those most clearly challenged by technological change. With interactive media the primary content providers may just be the consumers themselves" (1997a:74). Her focus on attitudes left out of the picture the description of particular working routines and changes in the newsrooms even though part of her research was based on on-site observation.

Boczkowski (2004c) argued that his ethnography of online newsrooms, grounded on

the epistemological principles of research focusing on the mutual shaping of technological and social change, contributes with some “initial building blocks” to incorporate a broader conceptual framework into the sociology of newsmaking (see an schematic representation in Figure 1) for the analysis of technological innovation in the newsrooms. His work shows the importance of considering the technical dimension of journalism and describes the role of contextual factors and specific decisions in the adoption of innovations. In the next section we display a set of different research traditions that provide comprehensive theoretical tools for the analysis of these processes.

Figure 1. A model for the analysis of technological innovation in newsrooms



Source: Boczkowski, 2004c:199.

3.2. Constructivist research on technological innovation

A comprehensive analysis of the social adoption process of a technological innovation such as the Internet requires the understanding of technologies as a socially constructed multifaceted reality, and not a monolithic element that appears from nowhere and imposes its own logic to social actors such as media companies. Many of the proposals mentioned in chapter 2 tended to treat the Internet with this simplistic approach, quite common in the discourses of politics, the industry and the academy itself (Tremblay, 1996; Flichy, 1999; Webster, 2002; Mosco, 2004). Technological deterministic approaches assume that “the nature of technologies and the direction of change [are] unproblematic or pre-determined” and they have “necessary and determinate ‘impacts’ upon work, upon economic life and upon society as a whole: technological change thus produces social and organizational change” (Williams and Edge, 1996:868). Historical and empirical data have shown that “technological determinism is unsatisfactory because technologies do not, in practice, follow some predetermined course of development” (Mackay and Gillespie, 1992:686). “The history of developments in information and communication technology during the 20th century is replet with events in which supposedly ‘unnatural’ or ‘unrealistic’ uses of new artifacts became not only ‘possible’ but also major commercial turning points” (Boczkowski, 2002:279). “There is never a single technical solution”, argues historian Patrice Flichy (2002) offering some lessons of the past. Researchers need to study both “successes and failures” (2002:137).

In the last decades of the 20th century, communication historians, scientific innovation sociologists, anthropologists of technology and evolutionary economists have searched for an adequate research strategy to understand the processes that the invention of a new technology undergoes as well as the social adoption of such an innovation, as a way to overcome that simplistic approach.³² The common ground for these approaches is to understand technologies as a product of society: there is a social context where they are invented, which determines the “intention” of the researchers in developing them (Williams, 1974:7), and a social context where they are adopted, in which users negotiate with the proposed definitions of the technology to adapt them to their needs and adapt themselves to the requirements. In this process of “mutual shaping of technological and social change” (Boczkowski, 2004b:10) both artifacts and users can change to an extent, and an innovation could even be rejected if it cannot adapt to the context of use. “Innovation is thus seen as a contradictory and uncertain process. It is not just a rational-technical ‘problem-solving’ process; it also involves ‘economic and political’ processes in building alliances of interests (...) with the necessary resources and technical expertise, around certain concepts or visions” for the use of a technology (Williams and Edge, 1996:873). The processes of innovation occur not only in the design phase of a technology, but also when it is adopted by new users, who reinterpret the technology according to their needs and expectations and explore or ask for further developments (Williams and Edge, 1996:875). In the case of online

³² Bijker (1995:254) describes the scientific evolution of sociological research on technology as a pendular phenomenon: before the 1940s there was almost no interest on technology, then the pendulum swung to a overstatement of technological effects on society, falling in technological deterministic approaches. In the 1980s the pendulum swung again towards an extremist social shaping of technology approach, and in the 1990s there are attempts to find an equilibrium where technology and society have their own inertia and influence each other in the context of *sociotechnical systems*. It seems obvious that journalism research is lagging behind this process in social sciences, led by the sociology of science.

journalism, the Internet is an already existing technology adopted by media organizations for a new unpredicted purpose: the diffusion of news and associated services. The context of the negotiation and definition of the Internet as a news medium are media organizations and, more specifically online newsrooms, framed under the highly standardized set of rules and processes of the institution of mass media (McQuail, 2000:14), the industry that was born in the 15th century to manage the commercial development of technological innovations that allow the massive production and diffusion of symbolic forms (Thompson, 1995:52).³³

Boczkowski summarizes the core of these disciplines in a “conceptual lens” that:

- œ historicizes new media;
- œ highlights the situated character of the practices that enact their construction and use;
- œ emphasizes the process dimension of these practices;
- œ pays special attention to restoring the visibility of material and social dynamics that tend to become less visible when new media become institutionalized; and
- œ accomplishes these goals through a methodological commitment to reaching intimate contact with, and detailed knowledge of, the phenomena under study.” (2004a:145)

The next sections provide the discussion on theoretical frameworks proposed by these diverse but converging group of research traditions.

³³ It is important to point out the differences between the concepts of *institution* and *organization*: the former is the abstraction of the common features and social functions of the latter (Williams, 1981; McQuail, 2000: 14-15). Empirical research can only be conducted within the organization level (McQuail, 1987: 82).

3.2.1. Communication history

Among the disciplines that have addressed the research on technological innovation processes from a non-deterministic perspective, communication history is the only one that has a direct relationship with the object of study of this dissertation. Historians have concentrated on identifying the big trends in the evolution of mass media in the last centuries and, having this framework, they have shown great interest for the analysis of communication technologies' invention and development. Their diachronic approach, focused on the "real agencies" –i.e. the actors and social factors involved– (Williams, 1974:140), has let them ascertain that there are successful technologies and other that are a complete fiasco, as well as technologies that end up being used for other purposes than the ones initially intended. The history of technologies such as the radio or VHS and Betamax are the best antidote against technological determinism and the basis for the theoretical constructs of these scholars' regarding the relationship between technology and society.

Raymond Williams considers that a technology can be defined as a "social institution" that includes "technical inventions" (devices, artifacts), "techniques" (particular skills to use them), the "body of knowledge" to develop both devices and skills (in the scientific and engineering world) and, finally, the knowledge to use them in a particular social setting (1981:226-7).³⁴ If we follow Patrice Filchy's arguments (1991:12) on the

³⁴ A more systematic definition of information and communication technologies is provided by Lievrouw *et al.*: "Technology includes the artifacts or devices that enable and extend our abilities to communicate, the communication activities or practices in which we engage when developing and using those devices, and the social arrangements or organizations that form around those practices and devices"

development process of a technology, we can divide Williams' definition into the following elements:

- ∞ Technical design of the invention
- ∞ "Technical uses", or the functions it is designed to provide.
- ∞ "Social uses", or who finally uses that technology and for what.

These elements of a technology could suggest a chronological and step by step evolution, but historians show that each case has its own logic. The reason is that any technology is "the product of a particular social system". The scientific innovators usually take existing or foreseen social needs as the object of their research and look for technical solutions for particular social activities (Williams, 1974). In this initial stage, technology is already a social product: its features are usually based "on the representations that the designers [of the invention] share about the possible social uses and the most efficient strategies to commercialize the product. In other words, decisions are more social than technical" (Flichy, 1999:34). Depending on science know-how at a given moment, inventors will be able to develop a technology with more or less easiness. Power relationships between the social group promoting the technological innovation and the rest of society will also influence the creation and adoption of an invention. Williams (1974:7) talks about a "social history" of technologies and Flichy (1991:12) reminds us that it is a history of "controversy", social debate and contradiction.

Williams stresses that there is always an intention behind any technological development. "This element of intention is fundamental (...). Original intention

(2001:272).

corresponds with the known or desired practices of a particular social group, and the pace and scale of development will be radically affected by that group's specific intentions and its relative strength. Yet at many subsequent stages other social groups, sometimes with other intentions or at least with different scales of priority, will adopt and develop the technology" (1974:132). He argues that this approach not only denies technological determinism, but also social determinism. The evolution of a technology is not predefined or foreseeable: it is "a process in which real determining factors –the distribution of power or of capital, social and physical inheritance, relations of scale and size between groups– set limits and exert pressures, but neither wholly control nor wholly predict the outcome of complex activity within or at these limits, and under or against these pressures" (1974:133). Therefore, technological innovation is an open process in which even "alternative uses" of the technology that develop beside the mainstream practices have room.

In the development processes of communication technologies media companies have seldom been the initial promoters of innovation. Many times technologies had been designed to be used by another institution, but media companies adopted them *a posteriori* to give them a brand new use. There are other possibilities: the technology of radio, instead of being adopted by already established media institutions (newspapers) was developed into a new mass media institution by brand new companies (see Williams, 1974:13-22). The combinations are multiple, because both processes (communication technologies innovation and the evolution of mass media institutions) do mutually influence each other and several media institutions and technologies coexist in the same historical period. In his influential essay on the history

of television, Raymond Williams argued that most of the content of television was an evolution of existing “cultural forms”, like the ones developed by newspapers, radio or cinema. In the few innovations that Williams considered truly “new forms” pioneered by television, he warned that “there is rarely absolute innovation” (1974:70).

Williams and Flichy's considerations shape a very suggestive broad theoretical framework, but it is difficult to transform them into systematic methods of analysis for the present situation, in which we have little historical perspective. Brian Winston (1996, 1998) proposed an operational model to analyze the real implications of the development of the Internet as a mass medium. He argued that the statements about an “information revolution” are exaggerated when confronted to the evolution of communication technologies in the last 150 years. For Winston, the invention and social adoption of the Internet is another step in a long, steady evolution.

Winston's efforts to systematize a model tend to simplify the social context of technological innovation, specially in the initial phases of ideation and prototypes, which he regards as “the formulation of technological problems has always followed the agenda set by scientific inquiry” (1996:19). This contrasts with the stress on the social context put by Williams and Flichy at every moment in the process, and has been repeatedly denied by the empirical results of the studies in social construction of technology (see next section). Nevertheless, Winston offers two useful concepts to make more visible the tensions in the process of technical consolidation (the proper invention after the initial prototypes) and social adoption of a technology: *accelerators* and *brakes* of technological change (1996:21-25; 1998:3-15). Accelerators are

“supervening social necessities” (1998:6) that push forward technological innovation and social adoption of a new invention. Winston locates the accelerators in different social scopes: they can be social groups’ demands, innovations in related technologies or commercial needs for new products in the industry, among others. A technical solution can be available, but it only will be established as a technology when a social need promotes its use. Brakes are actions of specific social actors that try to slow down social adoption of a new technology. Winston defends the existence of a “law of radical potential suppression” (1998:11): every technological innovation confronts social reactions to stop it, which gives existing institutions some time to adapt and change without losing their main attributes and power. Empirical evidence in the history of modern communication supports this dynamics. Carolyn Marvin superbly summarized the paradoxical relationship between accelerators and brakes, suggesting that it can explain the distance between utopias and reality: “Early uses of technological innovations are essentially conservative because their capacity to create social disequilibrium is intuitively recognized amidst declarations of progress and enthusiasm for the new” (Marvin, 1988:235).

Accelerators and brakes collide in a *tour de force* that determines the development and adoption of a technology: depending on the winners of the *battle* it will be rejected, accepted or redefined. This pair of concepts could indeed be useful to build reasonable explanations of the use of the Internet in online media. We would need to locate the social actors and situations that are acting as accelerators and brakes.

A complementary point of view is Roger Fidler's proposal, who elaborates on the

communication historians' theories in order to identify the logic of mass media technological evolution. Rather than an analytical model, Fidler (1997) suggests some useful concepts to interpret the history of mass communication:

- ∞ *Coevolution*: Mass media, based on different technologies, are an interdependent system which shares some basic principles. In their coexistence, they mutually influence each other in their respective evolution process. New media inherit most of the old media traditions, and the old ones try to evolve to adapt to the new context.
- ∞ *Convergence*: This has been a buzzword in online journalism research, but Fidler argues that there have always been exchanges of logics among different media forms.
- ∞ *Complexity*: Mass media system is complex and adaptive. All the elements resituate when a new one appears. Chaos theory could help to explain these processes.

Fidler groups these concepts under the neologism *mediamorphosis*. Similarly to Winston, his reflections could feed a research like the present one, but they cannot be easily turned into a methodological program. The most valuable contribution is the emphasis in the historical tradition as a referent to understand current dynamics. Such a perspective is crucial in the analysis of a new technology adoption: the system trajectory prior to the adoption of the innovation can determine much of the future directions. Fidler defends that "the slowness of change is the rule rather than the exception" (Fidler, 1997:8). He parallels Winston conclusions: the Internet will bring progressive changes, not big revolutions. There is a big deal of *technomyopia* in mass

communication history, he argues following technology forecaster Paul Saffo, director of the Institute for the Future in Menlo Park (California): “Technomyopia is a strange phenomenon that causes us to overestimate the potential short-term impacts of a new technology. And when the world fails to conform to our inflated expectations, we turn around and we underestimate the long-term implications.” (Fidler, 1997:11).

3.2.2. Social construction of technology

The starting point for the scholars who analyze the social construction of technology is their intention of challenging the common idea that scientists and engineers work on their inventions completely isolated from society (Bijker, 1995:241). This discipline,³⁵ born in the 1980s, aims to break the traditional separation between social and technological research to prove that every technical innovation and the knowledge that supports it are social constructs. Bijker and Pinch (1987) argued that the main consequence of this approach is the ability to understand and explain why a particular society (they tend to have a macro perspective) can adopt a different technological solution than another one when facing the same challenge. It also helps to explain why the same technology can be shaped into different uses and features in different social contexts. Authors argue that every society debates (explicitly or not) on the proposed technological solutions and they reach an internal consensus that can vary from one society to another. They also highlight that the development of a technology cannot be

³⁵ See Mackay and Gillespie (1992) and Jackson *et al.* (2002) for reviews on the principles of social construction of technology. Williams and Edge (1996) and Lievrouw (2002b) offer a contextualized panorama of social construction of technology and actor-network theory. Both traditions have similar epistemological approaches to the object of study and are often united under the umbrella concept of Social Shaping of Technology.

linear or predefined: there are several possibilities and the one that succeeds is usually the proposal of the most powerful social groups inside society. The aim of this approach consists of showing not only that technological solutions are the result of social negotiations and conflicts, but also that "the actual technical working of the system" is socially constructed (Pinch, 1996:27).

Bijker and Pinch (1987) suggest several concepts to describe the actors and processes in this "constructivist" model:

- ∞ *Interpretative flexibility*: In a given social context an artifact can be given different meanings by different social groups, causing competing definitions that will shape the final uses and features of that technology.
- ∞ *Relevant social groups*: Research can focus on the social groups that have an active attitude towards technology, a definition proposal. These relevant groups associate a set of problems and possible solutions to the technology, and these may be conflicting to each other. Identifying the groups, their characteristics and the meaning they give to a technology is a crucial step to understand the conflict around an artifact.
- ∞ *Stabilization*: Analyzing the evolution of the positions of each relevant group we can detect when the technology has stabilized. This happens when one of the definitions is accepted by all the groups. There can be two mechanisms to reach this point: "Rhetorical closure" of the problem, when a group convinces the rest that the problem has been solved (even when it has not); and "redefinition of the problem", when technology is adapted to the context with new, unpredicted uses.

In the evolution of the discipline, the initial focus on the design stage of the technology was extended to the diffusion and social adoption processes (Mackay and Gillespie, 1992:698-705). Researchers have stressed that closure is not an ending point in technological evolution, but a temporal phase in the process that can lead to new conflicts, problems and consensus depending on contextual factors, such as new users adopting the technology (Pinch, 1996:30). However, once stability has been reached, a “technological frame” is formed and new definition proposals will be strongly influenced by the adopted frame (Bijker, 1995:252). In this closure context, interpretative flexibility is reduced, but this does not mean that social groups can raise new alternative meanings for a technology and open up new conflicts. Authors have acknowledged that technological frames can reshape users’ identities and practices: as a new technology is adopted and shaped, its users also adapt to the definitions they finally give to it (Pinch, 2001:383). In fact, a technology frame defines a preferred profile of user and a set of uses, and this might influence both the adoption – marketing strategies are key for this– and future evolutions of an artifact (Mackay and Gillespie, 1992). The evolution of a technology can be understood as a path that the dominant actors draw and pursue to follow, while other actors may try to reconduct it towards other directions. The concept of path may be more historically sensitive than that of frame or closure. Anyway, what the social construction of technology emphasizes is that in every stage of technological change there are alternative definitions and paths available, and we would only understand the ones that prevail if we analyze why and how they succeeded over the ones that were left behind (Pinch, 2001:397).

This perspective has a more solid research program than most historical approaches (Pinch, 1996:28-29). Even though the similarities with Winston's position, the sociological proposal is much more flexible and invites the researcher to detect the actors that participate in the process of adoption of the technology, as well as to draw the scenario of tensions and proposals surrounding a technology and to follow their evolution. A media company can be understood as a social system inside which are able to identify "relevant social groups": departments and even individuals that participate in the decision-making process about the use of the Internet as a news medium. Inside a media company, consensus could be reached or a solution could be imposed by the management. Power relations inside the company will obviously influence the results, but every position may achieve "rhetoric closure" with the proper strategy. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that companies work in a competitive context and are not isolated systems: they constantly benchmark what the competitors are developing. We might think of companies as the societies Bijker and Pinch analyze, which actively import and export technologies that are adapted to the most convenient solution for the needs of the receptor society. This hypothesis of technological diversity is the basic principle of Bijker and Pinch's theory, but they did not develop enough tools to do comparative research. Their proposal is useful to understand the mechanisms that society uses to shape technology but neither provided tools for transcultural analysis, nor for trans-media analysis, as is the aim of this dissertation.

A complementary (and chronologically previous) approach within the same discipline is the one built around the concept of "sociotechnical system" by Hughes (1987),

integrated to the theoretical program of the social construction of technology by Bijker (1995) with the label of "sociotechnical ensemble". A sociotechnical system is the sum of all the elements (artifacts, organizations, scientific knowledge, laws, materials and social groups) that are needed to reach an objective. He reduces the objective to the transformation of nature, but it can be argued that other objectives such as news production and distribution could also fit in this theoretical model. Hughes argues that a system minimizes uncertainty and maximizes productivity. Social actors create the system through inventions and institutions that will manage them. If an element in the system changes, the rest adapt to the new situation, and any single element cannot be understood without taking into account its relationship to the rest of the system.

Hughes suggests some useful concepts on the dynamics of sociotechnical systems:

- ∞ *Momentum*: Once a sociotechnical system has matured, it gains an inertia that conditions its evolution through the logic that was defined during the invention and development phases. It may seem then that technology is autonomous from society, having its own logic, but this is just an illusion that can be challenged by social changes.
- ∞ *Transfer*: Exporting a technology from a society to another includes the transfer not only of the artifacts, but also the organizational model around them. Both things will be adapted to the new social context.
- ∞ *Style*: Social, legal and economic contexts as well as the historical experience influence the *technological style*, the variations in design and uses of a technology in every single context.
- ∞ *Reverse salients*: During the evolution of a sociotechnical system some

elements can become outdated in comparison to the rest, because they have not followed the process at the same pace. This is a functional problem for the system and needs to be solved. Sometimes the only solution is a “radical invention” that reformulates and recreates the whole system with a new set of rules.

This proposal adds some elements that were missing in Bijker and Pinch's model. Beside actors and artifacts, there are organizations, institutions, rules and laws around a technology. Nonetheless, this approach seems to have less mechanisms to analyze adoption and change processes. Hughes does not offer clear methodological directions to apply his concepts, which may just broaden the spectrum of elements to be taken into account.

This branch of research has been usually devoted to reconstruct the history of an already stabilized or rejected technology with some decades of perspective. The main methods have been “detailed reading of historical archives” (Boczkowski, 2004a:147) and interviews with the actors involved in the invention and adoption of the artifact (MacKenzie, 1996:263), with a qualitative approach that attempts to “recover the sociotechnical frameworks within which the actors worked (...) and look at the world through their eyes” (Pinch, 2001:396). In the case of online journalism we are dealing with a process that is still in its infancy, and therefore we have little historical perspective. “Describing the effects of any ongoing technological development instead of past developments is always a delicate task”, warns Heinonen (1999:34). When dealing with current developments, ethnography is the choice to address the research

objectives (Lievrouw, 2002a:132). This ethnographic approach is, in fact, the core of the anthropological approach discussed next, which may add some more interpretative clues, too.

3.2.3. Anthropology of technology

From an anthropological perspective, which has cultural diversity is at the core of the discipline, variations in the use of a technology in different societies are as logical as attractive. Lemmonier (1993:6-9) states that the adoption of a technology is a process of selection of technical features for an invented artifact or one imported from another social group. In this process, social actors decide the uses of technology, the working routines and the roles during its usage. These are a set of elections to be made among different open options. Lemmonier labels this process *technological choice*. His main hypothesis is that these decisions are not usually the result of a rational analysis of all the features of the technology, but they are based on other factors: the symbolic connotations of the invention, the commonly defined uses and its relationship to other technologies of a concrete production process. Each society will use a technology in a particular way, because its symbolic context is different.

“All techniques are thus simultaneously embedded in and partly a result of non-technical considerations” (Lemmonier, 1993:4). This fact can produce inefficient uses of an invention. Anthropologists of technology have documented cases of production tools that in specific societies are used in a way that produces defective material results. Lemmonier immediately argues that if we acknowledge that the reasons for

the usage style of a technology are not mainly technical, but social and symbolic, we will conclude that the labels "inefficient" and "defective" are ethnocentric: for the users of that technology, that is not inefficient, because it is completely coherent to their needs and logic.

Lemmonier admits that there are technical aspects of an invention that resist social shaping quite solidly. This would explain the reason why in different societies that have not had any contact among them, similar technical solutions have been set to solve the same need. Nonetheless, each society can attach different symbolic meanings to a technology. Artifacts may be the same, but their use may have different social implications. Any sociotechnical system is framed in a symbolic and social system. Both need to be studied to understand them. Individuals learn how to interpret the world by assuming the symbolic system of their society. They also learn socially the defined routines for the use of a technology.

This anthropologist focuses on technologies linked to production processes, and argues that inventions have to be analyzed in the context of their daily use. It is in this way that the researcher is able to grasp the uses and meanings of a technology and compare differences between places and people. Artifacts analyzed abstractly may seem homogeneous; it is the daily use that makes the difference and allows the discovery of plausible explanations for the variations found. In online journalism, this would suggest that observing the work at the newsrooms can be a very rich experience in order to get interpretation keys to identify different (or similar) ways in the use of the Internet. Marie-Claude Mahias (1993) proposed a concrete research

program to explore the origins of technological diversity in pottery production in India:

- 1) To identify the differences in the products.
- 2) To analyze the production process to find variations in the working routines.
- 3) To find the relationships of each variation with the following aspects: social or material limitations imposed by the context, symbolic connotations for the social actors, technical logic of the production process, social uses of the product.

Mahias' exercise is a pathway that works backwards: it begins with the identification of social actors' current assumptions on what they do with a technology; then it looks for the (usually unconscious) choices they have made, which have shaped the artifact as it is. Actors are usually unable to reconstruct this path of choices: "Technical problems always have several solutions, and the material constraints leave a margin of indetermination within which choices can and must be made. Conversely, once a solution has been adopted, the potter cannot change it and he becomes a prisoner of this solution, which now appears to be the only one possible, the most 'natural' or the most 'functional'" (1993:165). A comparative approach to the use of a technology in different social settings can highlight variations that will be the starting point to recover the history of technological choices.

Apart from the analysis of technological diversity, Lemmonier tries to provide explanations for the processes of adoption or rejection of an innovation as well as for the evolution of sociotechnical systems (quite similar to Hughes' definition). This matter is something that Mahias seems to neglect, treating actual technological

solutions as the end of a process instead of a moment in a constant evolution. For Lemmonier, a new technology must be “compatible” to the existing technologies and their symbolic representations. In fact, for him, there must be the need for innovation or it may be rejected (1993:12-13). Societies have a very concrete conception on how things should be done; if the innovation does not fit in this tradition it is very difficult for it to be accepted. In case it is adopted, the tradition, namely the assumptions on what a technology should be used for, will “interpret” the invention and shape it to fit the social and sociotechnical system. The invention, at the same time, can force some organizational changes and a redefinition of the sociotechnical system. It is a process of mutual shaping. If a technology is giving fine solutions to a need, innovation is unlikely to be adopted.

Lemmonier (1993:8) defends ethnography as the best methodological approach to study these phenomena, because only direct observation of the way users manipulate the artifacts in a real production set can help to understand the meaning that a given technology has got in that context.

3.2.4. Actor-network theory

Taking social construction of technology to the field of anthropology with the help of semiotics, Bruno Latour (1993) and Michel Callon (1987)³⁶ offer a very daring but rich theoretical and methodological proposal. They take the principles of the sociology of science, which denies science as an absolute truth, and therefore they do not impose

³⁶ Besides these founding works, there are useful synthesis of this theory in reviews by Bijker, 1995; Pinch, 1996; and Williams and Edge, 1996.

their own categories to the analysis of innovation, but prefer to use the ones of the actors involved in the process. They also extend the concept of *actor*, to every person, object and rule related to a technology: engineers, politicians, institutions, artifacts. They argue that what is social is not detachable of what is material. They are just one reality, and every element is an actor in the process of defining an invention: while human actors propose definitions of a technology, material actors may limit the spectrum of possible definitions with their own material limitations. Researchers can trace the relationships among these actors and draw an *actor network*. For Callon, the concept of network is much more attractive than the one of sociotechnical system, because it allows the researcher to articulate multiple degrees of relationship without the need to define a limit where someone or something is *in* or *out* of the system.

Each of the actors of the network has a simplified view of the whole, ignoring other nodes to get a useful perception of what it is and what can be done. Most of the actors are by themselves a smaller network of actors that can be neglected if the simplification is useful. If a simplification does not work, there may be a conflict inside the smaller network and it shall be described thoroughly to grasp the internal relationships and the tensions. The network of networks around a technology is constantly evolving: definitions of the technology are constantly being (explicitly or implicitly) negotiated by the actors and *translated* in concrete specific solutions and uses.

Latour and Callon defend that actor-network theory is particularly useful to explain nascent technologies. It is a moment in which actors are trying to define themselves,

the technology and the relationships in the network. The social network is very transparent for the researcher in that moment. Empirical research in this dissertation tries to check if online journalism is still at this definitory moment in the newsrooms, ten years after the first experiments. Tracing conflicting definitions and drawing actors' relationships may help to highlight the current trends in the evolution of journalism on the Internet. In this case, the actors are not only journalists, but also other departments in the company and outside it that participate in the definition of the use of the Internet to distribute news, the technical tools in use at the newsroom (computers, software) and the website itself, as the resulting product.

Latour (1993) insists in the need to use actor categories and definitions when describing a technology. This is the best way to understand why and how they use it. Any technological change must be interpreted in its full context: there are no social or technical factors that can be isolated for the analysis, or predefined by the scientist: explanations emerge from the observation, they should not be derived from a theoretical handful of concepts. *Actor* and *network* are the most neutral and open conceptual options to approach the field, and it is the network of relationships and conflicting interpretations of the actors what explains the use of a technology. Technology is not an object, it is an institution, the sum of people, processes, rules, routines and artifacts. The virtues of a successful technology and the defects of a failed one are not the cause of that fate, but its consequence: what actors expect from a technology and the needs that make them develop it are incorporated to the final technical features of the technology. It would only be viable if actors look for consensus and technology is adapted to satisfy, at least, the most powerful ones.

There is a constant negotiation process. As the principles of actor-network theory state that the evolution of a technology is relative and open, based on the relational definitions of each element in the network, "everything is uncertain and reversible" and therefore researchers have concentrated on understanding how "durability" is achieved, how a technology gets consensus and every actor assumes a stable pattern of links to the other actors in the system (Law, 1999:4).

The research outcomes of this theory have been criticized for overstating the power of individuals and local decisions in shaping a technology, neglecting the broader social context and existing structures of power and interests (Williams and Edge, 1996:889-890), but the fact is that the network approach can actually integrate this macro-structural factors into the analysis without many complications. Law has argued that actor-network theory has diversified in multiple variations that in many cases have tended to oversimplify the original standpoint; its main strength is precisely that it "combines –and elides the distinction between– structure and agency" (1999:1). Law defends the virtues of focusing on the "complexity of tensions" instead of trying to simplify reality to comprehend it. "This is already an important contribution [of actor-network theory] since it means that when one explores the structures of the social, one is not led away from the local sites" (Latour, 1999:18). This research tradition concentrates on the essentially fluid character of social relationships to understand how and why technological systems evolve: every aspect of a technology (artifacts, users, meanings, routines) is defined by its context, namely the local relationships among these elements.

3.2.5. Evolutionary economics

This branch of economy considers that technological innovation, analyzed in the context of companies that adopt it, is crucial to understand bigger changes in the economy of a whole country. Therefore, understanding the relationship company-technology is not for them a research aim, but a tool. Nonetheless, the theoretical models they have built may be useful for innovation analysis. López García and Valdaliso (1997) synthesize the principles of evolutionary economics, first proposed by Giovanni Dosi in the 1980s (see also Dosi, 2000):

- ∞ Companies must be the unit of analysis in technological innovation analysis. Different company sizes and strategies shall be considered to guarantee a comprehensive explanation.
- ∞ Technology is not an exogenous and deterministic variable: it can only be understood taking into account the context where it is adopted. The most efficient technology may not be the chosen one. Technological choice depends on how many decision-makers defend each option. The history of a technology is open and unpredictable if the adoption contexts are not taken into account.
- ∞ Technology includes some specifically accumulated knowledge that is only shared inside a specific company. This knowledge influences the way that the company will adopt a new technology (López García and Valdaliso, 1997:32).

Dosi, following Kuhn, labeled the accumulated knowledge as *technological paradigm*. The paradigm includes established working routines, definitions and innovation

strategies. As in scientific paradigms, there can be extreme situations in which a technological paradigm is abandoned for a brand new set of proposals. However, in normal conditions, a company would only adopt those innovations that are coherent with its paradigm. The evolution horizon (“technological trajectory”) is limited by the tradition: “The ability to pursue an innovation opportunity is very much local and specific to each company” (García and Valdaliso, 1997:27).

López García and Valdaliso add the institutional (laws, current political economy) and economical (industry structure, business models, production routines) context to the technological paradigm as the analytical elements to explain technological change in a company. The parallelism of this approach with the previous ones suggests that they may be adapted to analyze processes at company level. The economics perspective loses part of the richness of the other approaches (such as social and symbolic connotations of technology), but it makes sense that in a business context the logic of economy may be a strong factor.

A related branch of research focuses on the relationship between technological innovation and changes in work organization taking the social construction of technology approach to address this research problem (Jackson *et al.*, 2002). Their emphasis is in diversity and contingency in both technological and organizational development, trying to rethink the framework of technological paradigms and trajectories stated by evolutionary economy (Fleck *et al.*, 1990). For them, the study of a new technology adoption in an organization should consider the initial conception of the technology, the existence of intended work changes associated with its adoption,

the evolution of the technology and the working routines over time, and the diversity of solutions adopted in different settings. Based on this information, Fleck *et al.* suggest looking for the factors that affect technological and organizational diversity in order to trace if the trends can be identified as a convergent trajectory towards homogeneity or a divergent tendency towards different options. They state that "technological change is a *political* process" (1990:633), in the sense that it is based on managerial decisions and workers' attitudes which "lead to the adoption of some configurations or forms of technology and patterns of work organization rather than others" (*ibid.*).

Those decisions and attitudes are influenced by factors such as the philosophy of the design of the technology, the distribution of expertise and responsibility in the management of innovation inside the organization, the corporate objectives, the organizational culture in the company or the existing production routines. Jackson *et al.* add that workers try to get some sense of stability in an evolving environment and these efforts may affect the shape and use of artifacts "by evoking justifications, by displacing thinking, and by creating environments" (2002:243). In different organizational situations, the adoption of a technology can confront different cultural oppositions. In an integrated culture, without internal conflicts, a technology can be refused if it does not fit with the values and assumptions of the organizational culture. If there are different organizational cultures, a subculture can resist a technological change because it perceives it as a tool in the conflict, something that will favor other group's definitions of the organization.

Through several case studies of computerization of different industrial sectors, they argue that technological paradigms and trajectories are not always “clear and unambiguous”. In many cases, “there are tensions within the sphere of implementation [of the technology in the organizations] which served to frustrate the trajectory that was expected at the beginning of the life of the technology. Even when there appear to be clear-cut principles underlying the *design* of a particular technology, the *implementation* of these has not conformed to the stereotyped prediction which appeared in the early literature” (Fleck *et al.*, 1990:637). They argue that technical solutions are defined as ways to solve specific (production) problems and the visions to promote them embody not only technical elements but also “social arrangements”. These discourses are persuasive “predictions for technological trajectories”, but they may be easily diverted when put into the context of the real use of the technology. The patterns described by Fleck and colleagues resemble dramatically those of online journalism –the gap between the utopian predictions and the findings of empirical research– and therefore the authors’ advocacy for a “detailed examination of the implementation of technologies [to get] a more dynamic understanding of processes of innovation and the relationship between technological and organizational change” (1990:618) supports the arguments of this dissertation.

These and other authors in this research tradition (Williams and Edge, 1996: 886) have reached conclusions on software adoption and technological automation that are relevant to our object of study, though they do not explicitly address innovation in media companies. Technological changes are not usually paralleled with drastic structural redefinitions of working roles and routines, even if they were intended to do

so by the managers. On the contrary, they tend to be adapted to existing structures because, usually, the effort of introducing new software and the need for training are underestimated. This is particularly astonishing in the case of software developments that are local, made *ad hoc* to fit the needs of a single company. Authors identify the unequal sharing of knowledge as one of the crucial factors to understand how a planned and locally designed innovation does not produce the expected organizational changes.

Jackson *et al.* (2002:246) warn that a constructivist approach still has the risk of placing researcher's attention in either technological or organizational change. For example, organizational stability in a chosen case can lead the researcher to affirm that adopters shape the technology, while a fast-changing organizational structure may persuade the researcher to think that technology is producing important effects. A good starting point to avoid this is adopting an ethnographic approach focusing on the communicative intersection between technology and organization: the actions and discourses of the actors construct and define both.

3.3. Discussion: a constructivist toolkit for online journalism research

The lessons taken from different disciplines that have analyzed newsrooms, technological innovation or both, allow us to draw an analytical framework for this research. On the one hand, we take into account the characterization of news media companies, the context of newsrooms where journalists work, our research object. On the other hand, we consider the characterization of this context as the setting for the interaction between a new technology (the Internet) and the social actors that adopt it, the dynamics that we intend to analyze.

Media companies can be analytically deconstructed in the following elements:

- ∞ *Objectives:* These are defined by the social function of the institution of mass media and the particular strategies of the managers of the company. The broad goal of news media is producing and deploying information on current events, but private media also have the primary aim of making profits (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991:121).
- ∞ *Image of the audience:* Quite determining in the definition of the objectives is the image of the audience (geographical, sociodemographic and thematic scope) that the company (and its journalists) constructs, usually an abstract construct which is not based on direct contact with the actual readers or viewers (Altheide and Snow, 1991:58). Besides this, there is a process of framing the users in relationship to the product and the producers: they can be

given tools to be active users or passive consumers, the product can be designed for Internet savvy users or beginners (Boczkowski, 2004b:175).

- ☞ *Organizational model:* This is the structure the media company adopts to reach its objectives. It can be public or private, big or small, use different business models and define diverse social relationships among its workers. General social dynamics and media traditions strongly determine the organizational model of any company.
- ☞ *Journalistic culture:* The definitions of what journalism is, what it should be and how to do good journalism shape a professional culture shared with minimum changes across companies and nations. Sociology of newsmaking identified its main ingredients: newsworthiness values and objectivity rituals. This culture might be in tension with the organizational model and the company objectives, and is a crucial factor to understand journalists' adoption of a new technology.
- ☞ *Production routines:* Half the way between the organizational model and the journalistic culture, the media objectives crystallize in production routines that specify the technical and symbolical operations that a journalist has to undertake at every moment of the production process, and the best ways to perform each task: newsgathering, news selection, newswriting, news editing.
- ☞ *Technological paradigm:* Technology is a crucial tool for media companies to produce news in the most effective way. The group of definitions, symbolic interpretations, routines and rules that surround the technologies used in the newsrooms is what we can call technology paradigm, following Dosi (2000). This element is the contact point between newsmaking analysis and innovation research. The specific uses of a technology in a particular company are the

result of a process of mutual adaptation in which the technique is put in dialog with media objectives, organizational models, production routines and professional cultures. The process is full of technological choices made by the managers of innovation and the users of the artifacts (the reporters). Daily use may differ from the original intentions of the managers.

☞ *Product features:* Altheide and Snow (1991) argue that all the previous factors are entangled in the *format*, the shape of the product, including its structure, features and content. The media logic that shapes this format is partly a product of the technological choices, but all in all is the result of corporate and professional strategic decisions, from the objectives and organization of the company to the framing of the audience and the definition of working routines.

These different facets of a media company do interact and mutually influence each other, but also relate to external social institutions and actors, such as other media companies and technology developers and users. The evolution of each element and institution is a change that may affect (and promote change in) the rest of the system. Therefore, the context of the media companies has to be taken into account, particularly:

- a) Alternative definitions and uses of the technology by other actors (inventors, users). As it has been reported in section 2.2, mass media use of the Internet was preceded by many other users who proposed concrete technological paradigms that may have influenced media companies decisions.
- b) Traditional media have been maturing a news production model for decades

and dealt with technological innovation before the Internet appeared (see section 2.1). This general context has to be taken into account, for it may have influenced the adoption of the new technology.

- c) Competitors and other media using the Internet are models for companies decisions.

Heinonen also suggests broader socio-cultural factors to be considered (political context, communication policies, cultural trends) and synthesizes the “reasonings of change” of journalism in four “patterns of explanations as to why journalism is like it is and why journalists are like they are and why they work the way they do” (1999:21): socio-cultural, business (as most media are capitalist companies they have business objectives that shape the profession), technological and professional-normative (self-image of journalists, routines and personal attributes of professionals). Heinonen stresses that “the impact of technology on journalism is mediated by the internal rules of journalism” (1999:25) and therefore “when we are talking about the change of journalism and the journalistic profession in the age of new communications technology, the discussion cannot be limited to technology” (1999:24).

Having this broad context in mind, innovation research theories point out which are the focal points to analyze the process of adoption and the shaping of the technological paradigm or frame (understood not only as the technical features of online journalism, but also its definition, working routines and user skills) inside media companies (understood as sociotechnical systems or ensembles, or actor networks). These would include:

- ☞ Comparing variations in the uses and definitions of technology between

newsrooms. Identifying the *translations* of the online journalism utopias into daily routines in the production culture of online newsrooms.

- ∞ Detecting relevant actors (social groups, artifacts, institutions) in the decision-making process of adopting the Internet, interpreting their power relationships and their competing (or not) definitions.
- ∞ Checking if each actor (again, not only people, but also other elements such as technology) can be labeled as accelerators or brakes, by interpreting their needs and fears. More ambiguous positions should also be identified along with the consideration of change over time.
- ∞ Looking for "reverse salients", outdated elements in the new technological context. Do they create problems or brakes?
- ∞ Identifying actors' strategies: some may use verbal or written proposals, others with less power would prefer daily "activism", by altering proposed working routines.
- ∞ Finding the "rhetorical closures" that lead to consensus imposed by some of the actors and assumed by the rest. These should be the basis for the current technological paradigm or frame and define the main path (or trajectory) for further evolution.
- ∞ Locating technological choices in the process and differentiating elements of the technology that have more solidity against social adaptation and others that have been changed to fit the newsroom logic.
- ∞ Confirming that the newsrooms have reached the point where choices are assumed as natural.

At the present stage of development of online media projects, when they are already established and operating, our research attention must be placed in the newsroom, where technology is being used and definitions are applied and, maybe, disputed. It is obvious that the top management levels of media companies have been involved in the initial steps of the adoption of the technology and that the the business logic has played a role besides the journalistic logic that is more visible in daily newsroom routines. Furthermore, the offline newsroom in traditional media companies with online projects and the technical department are actors closely related to the activities of the online staff. Moreover, the active audience model proposed by Internet theorists suggests that users may play an important role in the definition of online products created by media companies. Exploring all these actors thoroughly would be impossible for a single researcher's project. They will not be neglected, but they will be considered from the perspective of the online newsroom: most of the time, users, offline journalists, technical and marketing department decisions, other online media, and other relevant actors will be looked through the eyes of online journalists, our main research focus.

Some authors have stressed that constructivist research is useful to empower social actors for further developing the technologies they use. Our approach makes the path of technology visible, as well as the taken for granted decisions and the structures that were built during the adoption of the Internet and were eventually challenged. For this reason, the actors may be able to have greater control over what do they want to do with the tools they have (Bijker, 1995:253; Pinch, 1996:34-35). In fact, these arguments are a reaction towards the criticisms for the "neutral" description of

innovation processes promoted by these researchers and the neglect of the role of ideology in shaping technological choice (see Mackay and Gillespie, 1992:690-92; Williams and Edge, 1996:890-92). Constructivists counter-argued that this is precisely the usefulness of their approach: "What the social constructivist work points to is that the design and adaptation of technology should be part of the political agenda. In other words, these issues should be opened up for debate among wider constituencies than at present. There is no one inevitable logic of development. There is choice" (Pinch, 1996:34).

4. Research design and methods

For this study, there seemed to be a clear path from theory to research design: most of the approaches analyzed in section 3.2 emphasize the need for a detailed tracing of social activities and decisions in order to be able to interpret the processes that form a sociotechnical system. Boczkowski stresses three conceptual principles in a constructivist approach to technological innovation that demand this “intimate contact with, and detailed knowledge of, the phenomena under study” (2004a:145): innovation happens in history, with the background of previous experiences and the present social context; innovation happens locally, it is performed by specific people in particular organizational structures and with concrete material resources; and innovation is a process “and transformations occur in technologies, practices and representations as time goes by” (2004a:146). Scholars among these traditions try to grasp these contingent and local processes through focused case studies and thick descriptions using qualitative data-gathering tools. Ethnography is a referential methodological approach when dealing with present cases. Sociology of newsmaking, anthropology of technology and actor network theory choose participant observation and in-depth interviews as their main research tools, both part of the ethnographic methodological tradition. Below, we will argue how comparison of carefully selected case studies can offer worthy interpretative keys for our study.

As it has been reported in section 2.4.4, similar approaches have already proven successful. Martin (1998) described the early online production routines in two

newspaper digital versions through ethnographic observation. Brannon (1999) was able to assess the distance between online journalists' perceptions and actual work conditions in three online newsrooms by interviewing, surveying and observing the professionals for a short time period. McCombs (2003) opted for in-depth interviews, concentrating on actors' definitions rather than on mapping working routines when trying to assess the factors that helped in successful multimedia production in online news projects. Boczkowski (2004b) showed that an ethnographic approach concentrated on the observation of working routines can provide rich descriptions of Internet project development in newspapers. Nonetheless, Boczkowski was a direct witness of the early development of those projects (1997-99), which is something that I was not able to do: my fieldwork started in 2003, eight years after the first online journalism projects were set up (and two years after the dotcom crisis).

This is why I found Mahias' proposal (1993), from the anthropology of technology, very appropriate for the particular research design of this study, without neglecting the conceptual proposals of the rest of the theoretical frameworks previously analyzed, but integrating them into the steps of this research program. Her aim was to explain variations in pottery techniques and products in a region of India. The link to online media is easier to establish than it may seem: pottery might be a simpler technology than the Internet, but both have a set of artifacts, definitions, routines and social roles. Mahias suggested starting the analysis with the final outcome of the technology, the product: vessels in her case, news websites in this study. The goal should consist of detecting the differences among the products of various producers. Once they are detected, the focus should be put on the work of the potters (journalists in this case),

in order to find variations in production routines, tasks and technology definitions. These variations can explain the differences between products, but they should be considered in their social context for their interpretation. An examination of the project evolution in the context of the media companies can help to understand the origin of the present differences, which are the result of “technological choices” of the actors even if they are not aware of the fact that they have been making choices.

The proposed strategy addresses the main research aims of this study in a very effective way. It implies re-constructing the evolution of particular cases of a technology in use, beginning at the end of the process, with the bare facts –the differences in the products–, and then going backwards to find the decisions that made up the different ways of understanding and using the technology. In this sense we needed to effectively translate this research philosophy into a specific methodological strategy that provides empirical data about both the present situation and the evolution of selected online media projects. For this reason, there was the need to combine multiple methods, which is a usual practice in case studies (Williams *et al.*, 1988: 107). These were the chosen methods:

☞ *Website analysis*: A previous research project was aimed at detecting the main features of Catalan news websites. Building on the experience of the research tradition on website analysis,³⁷ a comprehensive census of 445 non-specialized news sites was analyzed in a master thesis and the results were published in a conference paper and a monograph (Domingo, 2004a,b).

³⁷ Described in section 2.4.1.

☞ *Participant Observation*: As it will be discussed below, four cases were selected for in-depth analysis in this study. During the first semester of 2003, I did three-day stages in each newsroom every month. A complete description of actors' roles, working routines and technology definitions can be drawn from the observation. Differences detected in the website analysis help to focus the attention on the activities that may cause them.

☞ *In-depth interviews and document analysis*: One of the limitations of participant observation is that it is focused in the present situation of a particular case. Through observation, previous decisions and conflicts that have led to the current development of the technology may be inferred, but methods from the field of history are sharper in re-constructing the evolution of the case from its very beginning. Twenty-one in-depth interviews with actors relevant to the decision-making processes and the analysis of internal documents of the project complete the research design during the first semester of 2004. This phase guaranteed that a historical perspective was built into the interpretation of variations between online media.

This chapter offers a detailed and justified description of the choices, strategies and methodologies used for this dissertation. The starting point is the selection of case studies (4.1). The second hypothesis of the study is the basis for the rationale of the selection, and we provide a brief description of each case. Methodological discussion follows in section 4.2, which explains the phases of the research project and the techniques that have been used.

4.1. Case studies

Williams *et al.* (1988:116) argued in a seminal methodological book on new media research that case studies can be “specially valuable when studying the new media because many applications of new technologies are constantly changing”. “Additionally, it allows for flexibility in exploring unexpected issues that may emerge” (McCombs, 2003:41).

Miller and Slater (2000) insist on the necessity of doing ethnographical case studies in Internet research: “This focus on Trinidad [the society they analyzed as a case of adoption of the Internet], on the specifics of one ‘place’ is very far from a limitation, either for us as researchers or you as readers. It is not only necessary – the Internet as a meaningful phenomenon only exists in particular places – but is also the only firm basis for building up the bigger generalizations and abstractions: quite simply, one can use this particularism as a solid ground for *comparative* ethnography” (2000:1). Furthermore, they insisted that the uses of the Internet can only be understood in the context of offline experiences and practices.

4.1.1. Rationale

A research design based on Mahias' proposal and the testing of the research hypotheses require comparison to allow the detection of variations and similarities. This is why four cases were selected in order to have a sample that allows the

researcher to explore different settings and media cultures. The sample was limited to no more than four cases because increasing the number would have been unworkable given the in-depth qualitative methodological approach.

In order to test the second hypothesis (differences based on the traditions of media companies), diversity was a deliberated choice when selecting case studies. Having different backgrounds can be useful to verify whether media traditions have any influence in the shaping of online journalism. Maximum variation sampling (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002:123) was also sought in project lifespan, size of the online newsroom, scope of the media (Catalan vs. local audience) and property (public³⁸ vs. private). We also considered access easiness when evaluating similar initiatives. McCombs, based on Stake's definition of *collective case study*, argued that a comparative approach to selected cases "does not allow for generalizations across the industry, but it does at least give indications of similarities or dissimilarities that may be worth pursuing in further research" (2003:40).

The common ground to select the sample in order to address the research questions were set at the most complex form of online journalism in general news production: general news websites that provided regular updates through the day beyond repurposing traditional media content. Therefore, they were expected to have some journalists or a complete newsroom devoted to produce specific content for the website. The range of candidates was based on the data gathered in an earlier study (Domingo, 2004a,b), a comprehensive census of 445 Catalan news websites. As many

³⁸ In Europe, the tradition of broadcasting media owned by public administrations has been transferred to online media.

local and regional newspapers just reproduced online their print edition and radio and television stations mostly offered static corporate information (Franquet, 2005), just eleven cases accomplished –in the Autumn of 2002, when the case studies selection was made– the specified criteria of being produced by a media company, having a general news scope and constant updates through the day:³⁹

- œ Purely online news projects: Vilaweb⁴⁰ (private, since 1996), e-notícies (private, since 2000), laMalla.net (public, since 1999)
- œ Newspaper online versions: ElPeriodico.com (since 1995), LaVanguardia.es (since 1995).⁴¹
- œ Broadcaster news portals: Catnotícies.cat⁴² (public, since 1999), COMRadio.com (public, since 2000).
- œ Local news portals: Osona.com (private, purely online, since 1996), DiarideBarcelona.com (public, purely online, since 1999), Lleida.com (private, related to a local multimedia group, since 2000), DiarideTarragona.com (newspaper, since 2001).

As already stated, the rationale to choose one case of each media background was maximum variation among cases. *El Periódico* had a significantly smaller online newsroom than *CCRTV* and *laMalla.net*, the two public-funded selected cases. The late adoption of the Internet at *Diari de Tarragona* was an interesting testing ground for

³⁹ Franquet (in press) offers a complete overview of some of these projects: *El Periódico*, *COM Ràdio*, *Catnotícies.cat*, *LaMalla.net* and *Vilaweb*.

⁴⁰ López (2002) and Punie and Terzis (2003:59-67) offer an overview of Vilaweb.

⁴¹ Estévez (2002) explains the evolution of this two projects through interviews with their founders and editors. *La Vanguardia* online and print editions were analyzed in 2003 by Salaverria *et al.* (2005).

⁴² ICANN approved in 2005 the .cat domain for websites related to Catalan language and culture. See next note for more details on the naming of this online news project.

the influence of timing in online journalism models were the reasons to select it among other local cases. As it will be discussed in section 4.2.1, gaining access to the newsrooms is one of the crucial challenges of ethnographic case studies. Easiness of access was the final criteria when choosing among two equivalent projects. This was the case in *laMalla.net* and *El Periódico*, where I was already known by the online staff. The proximity of *Diari de Tarragona* to my workplace in comparison to the other local cases reinforced the choice with the easiness of access factor.

4.1.2. Selected cases

In this section we present, briefly, the cases that have been finally selected:

- œ A private newspaper online venture: *El Periódico Online*
- œ A purely online public-funded project: *laMalla.net*
- œ A public broadcaster online portal: *CCRTV*⁴³
- œ A local private newspaper online version: *Diari de Tarragona*

El Periódico Online (www.elperiodico.com)

This young newspaper, born in 1978 in the middle of the democratic transition in Spain, is produced in Barcelona and has the metropolitan area of the city as the main reference. Nonetheless, it covers the whole Catalonia both in diffusion and in news

⁴³ During the analysis period the name of the portal mirrored that of the Catalan public broadcaster radio and television news services: *Catalunyainformacio.com* and *Telenoticies.com*, two portals with the same content. In 2006 they were finally merged into a single portal, but preserving the dual name *Telenoticies – Catalunya Informació* and also the former web addresses. A third web address was also used: *Catnoticies.cat*. To avoid the complexity of this changing situation when referring to this project, we will use the name of the company in italics: *CCRTV (Corporació Catalana de Ràdio i Televisió)*.

content, and it also provides Spanish and international news which are relevant to the Catalan audience. It is owned by one of the main Catalan media groups, Zeta, mainly devoted to newspapers and magazines publishing. *El Periódico de Catalunya* (the full official name of the daily) was the first newspaper in Spain to be online, with a BBS in 1994. They started the news website in 1995. Since 1997, both the paper and the website offer a bilingual clonic version of the content (Catalan and Spanish). In 2000 they complemented the online version of the print product with a breaking news service that was constantly updated from 9:00 to 21:00. It is the leading newspaper in Catalonia in terms of audience, both online and offline. Print diffusion was over 170,000 daily copies, with 850,000 readers in mid 2005. The website had over 600,000 unique users, 3 million monthly visits and almost 19 million served pages.⁴⁴

The researcher has personal contact with the online editor⁴⁵ and adjunct editor as they share teaching responsibilities in the Online Journalism Postgraduate Program of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya.

laMalla.net (www.lamalla.net)

This project has been online since 1999. It was funded by the Diputació de Barcelona, the authority coordinating the Barcelona region municipalities, and managed by the

⁴⁴ Source: print circulation figures are audited by OJD (*Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión*), print readership is calculated by EGM (*Encuesta General de Medios*), and Internet audience figures are audited by OJD Interactiva.

⁴⁵ In the analyzed newsrooms, those with print background referred to the manager of the online newsroom as "director", paralleling the concept in print newsrooms. *LaMalla.net* also used this concept, while in the broadcasting company "editor" was the choice, as in the television newsroom (closer to the Anglosaxon tradition). We have homogenized the concept to "online editors", following online journalism research literature.

media company Lavinia. It is a purely online initiative, but it is partnered to other media projects of the Diputació de Barcelona: the *XTVL* (Catalan local television network) and *COM Ràdio* (Catalan local radio network). The website covers local and Catalan news in particular, with a stress on technology, without forgetting political, cultural, social and international news. It is updated continuously from 8:00 to 20:00. No audited audience figures were available.

The researcher worked in Lavinia in 2000 and 2001 as a strategic research consultant. I had contact with the staff working at *laMalla.net*, but my involvement in the project was lateral: I produced some feature articles, which made me familiar to the production processes, and I participated in brainstorming meetings in the initial stages of the version 2.0 (2001) of the website.

CCRTV (www.catnoticies.cat)

The Catalan public broadcasting company (Corporació Catalana de Ràdio i Televisió, CCRTV) set up its first website in 1995, but it only started offering news online in 1999, in a section of the television website. Created in 1983, the CCRTV is a public company owned by the Catalan autonomous government (Generalitat) and runs three analog television channels (one with 24-hour news) that will turn into eight channels when digital terrestrial television is fully deployed, and four radio networks (one is also 24-hour news). Since 2000 a separate company, CCRTV Interactiva (CCRTVi) manages the online portals of the broadcaster. In 2002 two standalone news portals were created, linked to the branding of television newscasts (Telenoticies.com) and the 24-hour radio news channel (CatalunyaInformacio.com). Portals were updated from 7:00 to 23:00,

and they provided news that was of Catalan general interest, including international and Spanish events. In 2006 these portals were merged in one, that preserved both names. Television and radio newscasts of the Catalan public broadcaster are the preferred news source for Catalan citizens, according to the periodic survey of the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió (2005): in 2005, 70.3% chose *Telenotícies* among other TV newscasts, and 48.1% preferred *Catalunya Ràdio* among other networks. The news websites served over 1 million pages a month.⁴⁶ The researcher had no relationship to the staff of the broadcasting company prior to this study.

Diari de Tarragona (www.diaridetarragona.com)

This is the local case chosen for the study. *Diari de Tarragona* is the leading newspaper in the region of the same name, in the South of Catalonia, where Universitat Rovira i Virgili – the employer of the researcher– is based. This was a reason to choose it among other local candidates, not to mention the fact that, being a veteran newspaper (founded in 1808) it had a very young online project: the website was set up in 2001, when most of the referential online media projects in Catalonia and Spain were already mature, and therefore that was an attractive peculiarity to analyze. They already started offering online the print content and breaking news updates, and had many and intense changes in the project in its first four years of existence, as it will be reported in section 5.5. Diffusion of this regional newspaper was almost 15,000 daily print copies.⁴⁷ No audited data about the Internet audience was available. The researcher had not met the online or the offline staff before this study.

⁴⁶ Source: OJD Interactiva.

⁴⁷ Source: OJD.

Figure 2. Homepages of the websites of the four analyzed cases (November 28th 2003)



TN telenotícies.com

SUMARI TN
VIDEOS TN
ELS ESPORTS
LA NIT AL DIA
INFO X

Divendres 26 de novembre de 2009
CJUI ERC i no hi haurà govern de concentració a Catalunya
Ibarretxe manté el pols amb el PP i no d

Portada

Internacional

Política

Eleccions

Parlament

Comarques

Societat

Economia

Cultura

Ciència i tecnologia

Comunicació

Esports

Opinió

El temps

Vídeos

Àudios

Especials

Documents

Fòrums

Usuaris

catalunya informació

FLOQUET DE NEU

BUSCAR

CALENDARI +

NOVEMBRE 2009

PDA +

WAP +

QUI SOM +

ESCRIBRE A L'EDITOR

PUBLICITAT

FES-NOS LA TEVA PÀGINA D'INICI +

el poeta del poble

SERVIS

Rocca

Aeroports

Transporte públics

Cartellera

Lobenes

Resum de premsa

Última actualització 20:00

Política + vídeo

Pastelacions

El PSC rebutja la proposta de CJUI ERC i no hi haurà govern de concentració a Catalunya



Ernest Benach i Jean Puigcercà d'ERC durant la trobada amb I Josep Antoni Duran Llerda i Pere Masias de CJUI. (Foto: EFE)

No hi haurà govern de concentració a Catalunya. El Partit dels Socialistes ha rebutjat la proposta que han fet pública Convergència i Unió i Esquerra Republicana, després de reunir-se al parlament en el marc de les negociacions per formar govern. El PSC, en una nota, refereix que no hi ha condicions d'excepcionalitat a Catalunya que justifiquin un govern de concentració i que, per tant, mantindran l'agenda prevista de reunions que es reprèn dilluns a la una del migdia amb una tercera trobada negociadora amb els republicans.

[més informació](#)

Notícies relacionades

- [CJUI i ERC osten per dilluns tots els equips interessats en un govern de concentració +](#)

Política +

Polèmica sobre el "pla Ibarretxe"

Ibarretxe manté el pols amb el PP i no descarta un referèndum encara que sigui il·legal

La decisió del govern espanyol de reformar el Codi Penal per convertir en delictes convocar referèndums com el que projecta Juan José Ibarretxe sobre un nou Estatut bàsic ha tornat a aixecar la polèmica. Un allau de crítiques han seguit l'anunci fet pel ministre de Justícia, José María Michavila, després del consell de ministres. Des del País Basc, Ibarretxe ha dit que si el Parlament basc, després de debatre el "pla Ibarretxe", "creu oportú plantejar un nou Estatut, es consultarà a la societat basca".

[més informació](#)

Notícies relacionades

- [PP i PSOE presenten mocions per forçar la dimissió de la consellera d'ensenyament basca +](#)
- [El govern del PP modifica el Codi Penal perquè el referèndum del "pla Ibarretxe" sigui delictiu +](#)

Economia +

Junta d'Andalusia

Andalusia desafia Madrid i aprova l'ajudada de les pensions més baixes

El Consell de govern de la Junta d'Andalusia ha aprovat tres decrets per apujar "de forma immediata" les pensions contributives i de viudetat. L'executiu de Manuel Chaves pren aquesta mesura després que el Congrés aprovés una llei que impedeix a les comunitats autònomes millorar les pensions. La Generalitat, per la seva banda, considera la nova llei del govern central una invasió de competències i ja ha anunciat que continuarà pagant els complements a les pensions de viudetat més baixes.

[més informació](#)

Notícies relacionades

- [CCOO reitera el fet de les comunitats autònomes per complementar les pensions mínimes +](#)
- [Catalunya seguirà complementant les pensions tot i la llei aprovada pel Congrés +](#)
- [Les comunitats autònomes no tindran potestat per augmentar les pensions +](#)

ENQUESTA

Quin pacte vols per governar Catalunya els pròxims 4 anys?

- CJUI-ERC
- CJUI-PSC
- CJUI-PSC-ERC-ICV
- PSC-ERC-ICV
- CJUI-PSC-ERC

[Votem](#)

Participa en el fòrum

CATALUNYA
 Comença a començar +

ANDORRA

ARAGÓ

BALARS

LENGUADOC-ROSELLÓ

PAIS VALENCIA

TN
 telenotícies en línia

EL TEMPS +

6/16°C Barcelona
 3/16°C Girona
 7/12°C Lleida
 10/16°C Tarragona

3 24

eliesports.net

ACN
 notícies a Catalunya

PROGRAMES INFORMATIUS

30 Minuts

60 Minuts

Àgora

Bon dia, Catalunya

De Vacances

El medi ambient

Info-X

Parlament

30
 EL VIDEO DE TANTAL



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Divendres, 28 de novembre de 2003 CDHMISSIÓ DE BARCELONA DE TV LOCALS (TVLC)

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resultats autonòmiques 2003
Diàluz comparativa, en línia, i reportages, recorregut, notícies

ENAMINA'N
El joc online amb més notícies

Autonòmiques 2003: Notícies

No hi haurà un Govern de concentració nacional

Genorahola i Unió i Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya han decidit, aquest divendres, fer un darrer intent (pel que sembla estèril) per aconseguir un Govern de concentració nacional que integri el PSC i ICV-EUIA. CIU ha acceptat no posar com a requisit que Artur Mas sigui el president de la Generalitat, malgrat mantenir la seva idea que ha de ser-hi. Han optat el PSC i ICV-EUIA a una reunió dilluns per parlar del tema. La trobada no se celebrarà ja que el PSC ha afirmat que no hi assistirà perquè "no hi ha condicions d'a-s-o-n-a-l-i-t-a-t a Catalunya que justifiqui un Govern de concentració".

Autonòmiques 2003: Notícies
Sessió maratoniana
PSC i ERC afirmen que no hi ha discrepàncies greus

CIU és el partit més votat pels catalans que viuen a l'estranger

Recomanem que el PSC ha de millorar la seva "consciència popular"
Maragall fa examen de consciència

En 23 anys
Per les mans de Pujol han passat 42 bilions de pessetes

Notícies: Catalunya
Durant tot el desembre i part del gener
Les Fires Nadalengues es despleguen per la geografia catalana

Notícies: Espanya
Segons una reforma penal anunciada pel Consell de Ministres
Ibarretxe cometrà delictes si convoca un referèndum per aprovar el seu Pla

Notícies: Internacional
Iran
Matja Rampey
Dush passa dues hores i mitja a Bagdad per sorpresa

Digitalia: Itzel Llanja
Itzel Llanja, una maza tècnica de hacking
Sense fils i sense protecció

Descobren grans forats de seguretat en el sistema de vot electrònic nord-americà

Enquesta de la setmana
? **Qui creus que serà el proper president de la Generalitat?**

Artur Mas
Pasqual Maragall
Josep-Lluís Cerdà-Rovira

VOTAR **Resultats**

laMalla.net recomana

Drets Humans: Notícies
Entrevista a Silvia Guel, presidenta d'Amnistia Internacional a Espanya
"Estem fent coses per a persones concretes"

Autonòmiques 2003: Notícies
Fòrum
Què penses dels resultats electorals?

El web del dia **més webs**

Terror a Molins
El Festival de Cinema de Terror de Molins de Rei (el Baix Llobregat) celebrarà la seva 20a edició entre els dies 28 i 30 de novembre de 2003.
[Envia'ns la teva recomanació](#)

Cultura: Cinema
L'eterna de la setmana
Cosmo, amb cent canons per banda

El temps: Notícies
Previsió per al cap de setmana
Més neu al Pirineu i una mica menys de fred

Esports: Notícies
Davis, per avui, l'homenaje de la República espanyola
Tempat a un en la primera jornada de la Davis

Atraquen Savinya al bell mig de l'autopista

Turisme: Notícies
La Seu d'Urgell
El món màgic de les muntanyes envaeix la ciutat

Cultura: Exposicions
Barcelona
El Museu d'Història de Catalunya mostra la realitat de les presons franquistes

Educació: Notícies
Cerdanyola del Vallès
Tancament dels actes de l'Any Europeu de les persones amb discapacitat
Els estudiants discapacitats linden la matrícula gratuïta a l'Autònoma

Cultura: Festes Populars
Yallgorguina
Del 29 al 30 de novembre
Reviviu la Catalunya rural

Barcelona
Del 29 de novembre al 23 de desembre
Per Santa Lúcia, un pas de puça

Mèdia: Notícies
Especial de TVE sobre el genèria albi
Flequet, l'animal mediàtic

La Petita Malla: Hem Escollit
Barcelona
Al Teatre Nacional de Catalunya
Una marató de contes per ajudar els nens del Brasil

Barcelona
Saló del Hobby
Mira, prova i... juga!

Què és?
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Software

Publicacions
Cerdas
Sostenible
Flash esportiu

Almanac
Ara és el Sant Esteuqu, Sant Ruf

Tal dia com avui:
1520 - Magallanes comença a crear l'Oceà Pacífic

Per reflexionar:
Cada fracàs encanya alguna cosa que l'homenaje ha d'aprendre. - Charles Dickens

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Regallem
Puntals
Tema de pantalla
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ESTRENO
Temas de pantalla
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SALA DE PREMSA VOTAR
El temps: previsió

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Captured by the researcher, except Diari de Tarragona (source: www.archive.org)

4.2. Methodological discussion

Ethnography includes a handful of qualitative methodologies that attempt to comprehend a social reality in a holistic way: observation of social routines, informal and formal interviews, analysis of objects and documents (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002:16-17). In a discussion on the use of ethnography for Internet research, Chris Paterson (2004) stresses that, among these techniques, observation of the actors in their own social setting is the central activity of the ethnographer. When complemented with the rest of the methods, it lets the researcher immerse in the culture that is being analyzed to describe it from the actors' perspective and interpret these discourses in the context of the thick empirical data that has been gathered on actions, routines and processes. If applied to technological innovation, ethnography can be useful to depict the different ways in which a technology is used, the different definitions it is given by social actors, the contextual factors that influence its uses and conceptions, and the social relations that are built around a technology. All this information is a very good starting point to have an open, non-deterministic perspective on any research project devoted to new media. It makes us bare in mind that technologies are social constructions and that social environments should not be out of the picture if we want to understand the shape and the fate of new media.

Nevertheless, we have to take into account that the results of an ethnographic study are based on case studies and therefore straight generalization of its conclusions is not advisable. In this sense, ethnography rather provides "thick descriptions" of social

processes that would be difficult to grasp with quantitative statistical approaches (Geertz, 1973; Jensen, 2002:242). At this stage of online journalism research, when we are still exploring most of the genetical questions of the field, a qualitative, comprehensive approach seems to be worthy enough to sacrifice generalization. Ethnography is especially useful to explore a new research territory, in order to map it without much pre-conceived definitions that could outshine some relevant phenomena. We might think of this epistemological approach as one that is looking for more accurate research questions rather than for straight answers.

Jensen argued that one of the aims of qualitative case studies is "to arrive at descriptions and typologies which have implications for other, or larger, social systems" (2002:239), but the step from specific cases to generalizations seems considerably risky. Lievrouw pointed out that one of the main limitations in Internet research is that "small-scale, descriptive, qualitative studies and the constructivist perspective may obscure larger-scale social, political and economic developments" (2004:13). The theoretical framework of this study, based on the social construction of technology and the sociology of newsmaking, mostly demands micro methodological strategies. Williams and Edge (1996) already highlighted that social construction of technology research was fiercely criticized for neglecting the broader social context when doing micro analysis of cases. In this study, we have tried to counter this problem with the awareness of the general historical context of the birth of online journalism (sections 2.1 and 2.2) and of the general trends of the Internet evolution in Catalonia and Spain (section 5.1, see also Moragans and Domingo, 2003; Domingo, 2004c; Díaz and Domingo, 2005).

4.2.1. Newsroom observation

As it has been already argued, newsrooms are the central unit of analysis of this research. With the observation of online journalists at work I intended to describe their routines, work division and roles, decision-making responsibilities, use of technological tools and definitions of their job and the products they produce. The data obtained through observation were useful to detect similarities and divergences among newsrooms and to suggest possible reasons to explain this diversity.

Paterson (2004) highlights that one of the most difficult steps in an ethnographic study of journalists at work is gaining access –as well as maintaining freedom of movement in the newsroom over time. “Contrary to local populations, media organizations have clear and physical borders that have to be transgressed in order to do fieldwork” (Puijk, 2004). In my case, initial access was not difficult to obtain. Several factors may have contributed. Firstly, in this research negotiations for access were directly made with the online news editors, the persons in charge of the online newsrooms, my object of study. Only in the case of the newspapers they felt the need to ask the managing editors of the traditional outlet for ratification of their initial positive response. Secondly, in two of the cases the online news editors already knew me which made it easier to contact them and present my research plan. Thirdly, in all the cases they got interested in the idea of being observed and having feedback about their work, as they acknowledge that online journalism was a learning process and having an “expert” perspective on their decisions could be benefiting. Edgardo García (2004) reports how institutional, personal and social factors where highly problematic

for him to gain access to Argentinean media. In his case he aimed at having access to both online and offline newsrooms, to get the whole picture of the dynamics among them. In my case, I preferred to ensure access to the online newsroom –my main focus of inquiry– to, later on, ask for permission to visit other departments accompanied by or negotiated through the online news editors.

A preliminary interview with each of the online news editors of the four selected cases was conducted in the final months of 2002 in order to specify my research intentions and needs. I simplified my research goals into the idea of describing the routines of online newsrooms, as well as justified the methodological design and specified what were my needs in terms of access and interaction with the journalists. As it has been already stated, at this managing level there was complete commitment in helping me in the study. The main concern of online editors was to get a detailed visit schedule defined beforehand and in one case I had to extensively justify the reason why I needed to stay in the newsroom “so many days”. Once I e-mailed a schedule proposal, everything was set quite easily. The only drawback of this access strategy was that my presence in the newsrooms in some cases was not negotiated in advance by the online editors with the reporters and some tensions arose during my stages when journalists felt uncomfortable with my constant observation.

I opted to define my role inside the newsroom as the one of a passive observer. This was crucial to negotiate access. An active participant role would not have been accepted by the online editors, because technical resources were already allocated and they would not be comfortable treating me as a trainee when they knew that I was a

researcher. These were the explicit or implicit reasons they gave me when I suggested my eagerness to collaborate instead of just observe. Finally, I just produced some pieces of news at *El Periódico Online*, during the fourth and fifth stage, after my asking the online reporters if they wanted some help and convincing them that it would be useful for me to experience the whole production process. Reporters seemed to be happy with my offering and would correct my work in a very didactic attitude. My conclusion from this experience was that, given the timing strategy explained below, the passive observer role was much more useful, because the active role implied a hard step-by-step reflection process that would have consisted of my adaptation to the rules of every specific newsroom, which would have implied to avoid the use of my previous knowledge. Learning by seeing the reporters at work was a much fruitful way to understand these rules.

Newsroom observation was scheduled from January to June 2003, consisting in five stages of three days in each of the four newsrooms; fifteen working days per case in total. Approximately each week of the month, three days were spent in one of the newsrooms (see Figure 3). Longer stages (weeks and even months) in a single spot are common in ethnography. However, I decided to limit them to three days and distribute them throughout six months because of logistic and epistemological reasons. Having four observation locations, I could have spent some weeks in each of them; the study, though, was intended to be time-aware, influenced by the historical perspectives of some of the theoretical frameworks. Scattering visits to the newsrooms during six months would allow the detection of change rhythms in each setting. It was, therefore, almost a parallel observation of the four cases: the weekly rotation let me

visit every media company from month to month, and this helped in checking if the product or the routines were evolving. Moreover, my teaching activities at the university limited the days of the week to work on my research to four. I decided to devote three days to observation and leave one day to transcribe and analyze my notes. Some weeks, unforeseen commitments obliged to reschedule the visits or even to cancel one of the days of the stage.

Figure 3. Schedule of observation stages

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LM: laMalla.net; EP: El Periódico Online; CC: CCRTV; DT: Diari de Tarragona.

m & a: morning and afternoon. Design and production are departments besides the online newsroom that were also visited in some of the cases.

Following the directions of ethnographic methodological debates (Burgess, 1984:21-25), I concluded that the initial period of my observation (which is the hardest in many cases because the researcher has to learn the rules, routines, roles and spaces of the

social group he/she wants to analyze) would be shorter than most of other ethnographic studies. As a journalism student, researcher and professional, I already know the professional mindset of journalism and the routines of newsmaking. After two years working for a new media company (even though not as a reporter), I also know the common definitions of online media, vastly shared by many online journalists, and the technical skills and tools needed to produce news for the Internet. Thus, I am not a sociologist entering a brand new world for him, but a former professional who has entered the academia to take an analytical point of view on a well-known reality. This fact has its own risks, as I will discuss below, but the benefit is that observation does not need to take very long to be worthy. Three-day periods allowed me to see the full life cycle of many news items. Furthermore, journalistic work has a strongly routinized and repetitive dynamics, which allows the researcher to look at the same actions many times in just one day. In fact, in the smallest newsrooms after the second stage I already had the *anthropological* feeling that I could have already stepped out (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002:224), because I was not going to get anything new, but the very same routines once and again. The last stage in three of the newsrooms was only two days long because of this very same feeling and the increasing tension among reporters due to the researcher's presence. A one-day follow-up visit was scheduled in the first months of 2006 to the four newsrooms, including informal interviews in order to check what changes had happened since the 2003 stages and the 2004 interviews.

During my stages I tried to see the whole daily cycle of news production. As I did not try to surpass eight hours a day of observation in order not to exhaust myself, I used

to change the work shift from stage to stage. This way I practically met every reporter and other staff related to the news website and could witness several times all the routines throughout the day. Weekend shifts were only visited in special cases such as the electoral evening of local elections in Catalonia (May 25th 2003), as the rest were described by the online editors as being very low-paced, with very few news activity and scarcely any special routine.

Through the observation period, there were several big news stories and events that allowed me to witness not only common routines but also special coverage efforts or what Tuchman (1978) described as “the routinization of the unprecedented”. These were the main issues and their implications for the newsrooms:

- œ Iraq war: it was a predictable event with the uncertainty of when it was going to begin; this kept newsrooms in tension for February and March 2003 and when the war started it absorbed most of the reporting efforts until April. Special shifts and content were devised for the coverage.
- œ Local elections: a highly routinized event for which online media had already some experience on how to cover. The fortnight campaign was difficult to follow because of the multiplication of news focus (over 900 municipalities in Catalonia), but the election night marked a record in visits to news websites thanks to up-to-the-minute results that television or radio could not provide in such a comprehensive way.
- œ Feliu case: after years of trial of a very controversial kidnap of the Catalan pharmacist Núria Feliu, the verdict was issued in April 2003 and online media competed to offer the full text on their websites.

On-site observation gives the researcher loads of raw, first-hand data. An inexperienced ethnographer like me would be overwhelmed at first: there is too much to see, to hear and to understand. Journalists in an online newsroom do not talk very often; everyone is concentrated on his/her computer, doing some tasks at the same time in implicit coordination with some other mates in the room. The first explanations of the editor who granted access to the newsroom were not enough to understand every step of what was going on. Nevertheless, after relaxing a bit, asking some questions to the journalists at work and detecting repetitions in their tasks, routines started to emerge clearly from the thousands of actions they performed. Once you grasp the rhythm of the newsroom, quiet observation of the actors is a very worthy way to examine the production routines. You go around the desks following the flow of tasks, some of them are parallel, some are completely independent, some others are consecutive. At first I rather looked around, without taking notes, in order to witness every little task. When I got home I tried to reconstruct in the field diary what I had seen, but it was extremely difficult to transcribe eight hours of actions just recalling my memory. I decided to keep track of my observations on a small notebook, where I wrote down the actions and conversations I was witnessing almost at the time they were occurring. This was quite easy to do while going around and quietly looking at what the actors were doing.

The most difficult data to transcribe to the notebook were the descriptions of specific actions undertaken by the actors working on their computers. Paterson reported that in television newsrooms "a great deal of negotiation and strategizing about the process of news manufacture and distribution takes place via e-mail" and he stressed the need a

“comprehensive ethnographic methodology to blend such online [activities] with offline research in the production setting” (2004). I combined two approaches to handle this challenge: *in situ* observation (over the shoulder of the journalist or sitting side by side) of the reporters operating the computers and *online* observation of the workflow through the web content management systems (CMS)⁴⁸ used in the newsrooms. In my cases e-mail did not play a crucial role in the internal communication among reporters and I did not try to do an exhaustive analysis of the content of the messages they sent to each other, as the *in situ* observation let me observe their nature and intentions. Regarding the observation of working routines using the computer (almost all the routines in the online newsrooms) it was easy to take notes on the aim of the actions (publishing a news story, searching for a link, editing a photograph), but coding the buttons they pressed and the options they chose was a very detailed work that was difficult to carry out if you did not know the tools first hand. This is why I found useful to become familiar with the CMS they used in each of the newsrooms, a software with a web-based interface that allowed reporters update news stories and manage most of the web (homepage, pictures, links) through convenient forms. I asked for access to the CMS whenever possible, and if there was a free computer they allowed me to use it, and this way I could not only explore the differences between the systems but also had a greater control on what was going on at any time, because I had access to the list of unpublished news stories. Thus, I could follow the actual workflow easily, combining the observation of the actors in the newsroom with the observation of the system logs.

⁴⁸ CMS are software with a web-based interface that allows reporters to update news stories and manage most of the web (homepage, pictures, links) through convenient forms.

Casual conversations with the actors were another productive source. In this case, the notebook was usually set apart during the conversation and picked up as soon as possible after the conversation was finished in order to transcribe it. I tried to respect the actors' words as much as possible, because the way he or she spoke about routines and artifacts was revealing of the role given to technology in the production process (Latour, 1993:381; Law, 1999). There were two main conversational situations: at work and off-work. The former offered the definition of what the journalist was doing, because the researcher asked him/her or because he/she felt that an action needed to be justified at the eyes of the researcher. When considered in the context of the quiet observation, these casual conversations can be very explanatory.

The latter conversational situation was an extraordinary finding for me: spending coffee breaks and lunch time with a group of journalists (usually without the presence of the editor) opened the door to off-work informal conversations that led to many *confessions* about job expectations, social relations, product definition conflicts and routines criticism. Journalists talked openly about what they would like the project to be and what were the brakes for those developments. This is a very sensitive material, because actors tend to assume that when the researcher is out of the newsroom he/she is not working, like them. Sometimes they explicitly claim to have told you an *off-the-record* statement, as in journalistic interviews, and ask you not to publish it in your study. I transcribed all these conversations in the notebook, with an "off-the-record" mark when it was the case. This material is very worthy for the researcher even when you are not going to publish it: in fact, it provides you new *foci* when observing the newsroom, and gives you possible hypothesis to explain the actor's

actions and decisions. Obviously, any *confession* could be interesting and misleading, and the researcher must be aware of this when interpreting them.

These off-work conversations usually help to understand professional/social relations within the group and ongoing conflicts, but the researcher him/herself can easily witness a specific episode of a conflict when conducting on-site observation. Sometimes the conflict is obvious: suddenly the editor shouts at the phone and after hanging up he or she tells you that there is a technical problem with the website. Other times it is very subtle: why does a journalist work doing the minimum effort? You hardly notice this until the editor tells you that he/she worries about that journalist and when the journalist tells you that his/her ambition is working for the paper –not the website– edition. Conflict situations are a very rich source of information about social structure, competing definitions of technology and power relations inside the studied group of actors, as they make visible what is usually taken for granted.

It is useful to type your field notes as soon as possible when you go out of the newsroom. The field diary is then more complete, because you can reconstruct what you have seen, heard and interpreted without the urgency of on-site notes. This way your fresh memory works better and you can easily complete what your notes were not able to set down. This rewriting work is very time-consuming and you got the temptation to leave it aside if you felt you had good notes. I tried to schedule my visits to the newsrooms in a way that left me the evening or the morning to rewrite my notes, but sometimes I had to postpone the work until the end of the three-days period, losing irretrievable details from the field diary. As journalists' work is very

routinized, the actions of one day overlapped easily in my memory with the ones of the next one.

The field diary is considered to be the main working material in an ethnographic research. It sets down the observer's experience forthwith in a mainly descriptive way. Analysis and interpretation are usually left to a second moment in the research, detached from the context of observation to allow a calm work through the gathered data. In fact, methodologists recommend the researcher to avoid immediate interpretation of what he/she is seeing (Hansen *et al.*, 1998:55; Lindlof and Taylor, 2002:162). Moreover, an initial general overview of the actors and their routines is the most sensible way to start the observation. This helps to escape from the main risks of an ethnographic study: taking an anecdote as a general rule and putting our own prejudices in the observation. If you let something impress you too much, you may focus your observation on that specific phenomenon, losing perspective of its relevance in the process as a whole. Part of the observer's work is to map routines, because these will be the main corpus for the analysis. Having a general overview of the processes at the beginning forces you to be inclusive, producing a holistic picture that will be very useful in the analysis phase. An anecdote set down in the field diary will be clearly interpreted as what it is, in this broad context.

To keep away prejudices is probably the most difficult exercise in the research fieldwork. The only way I have found to fight them away is to be aware of them. I am very critical with online media strategies that most companies are developing. I could have argued with the actors about lots of the decisions they did everyday, but I rather

left my comments for the notebook. The fact is that the biggest effort must be done when your prejudices coincide with the actors' behavior: then you may not be able to note what you take for granted. Burgess points out that "the main problems for researchers working within their own societies are recognizing culture patterns in familiar situations, and interpreting meanings attached to events" (1984:24) and suggests the ethnographer to adopt an "artificial *naïveté*", some estranged distance from the actors' activities, in order to avoid neglecting an actor's decision that would be seen as natural fact by both the researcher and the actor in an off-study social setting. Since I already had some experience on online journalism, I had to actively exercise my self-consciousness, being aware of my familiarity to the object of study. Focusing on the details of the actions (*how* journalists did them) rather than on a general description (*what* they were doing) and comparing the differences among the four cases in the same situations were useful practical strategies to guarantee thorough data gathering (Burgess, 1984:26-27). Nonetheless, there was an advantage in not being an "outsider" to the journalistic world: my quickness in interpreting what was happening in the newsrooms at any given moment.

The theoretical framework of the research helped in the estrangement strategy. In addition, it also guided the focus of my attention towards relevant actions and interactions after the first broad picture of the field was reckoned. Theories work like glasses: when you wear them, they shadow some parts of the scene and sharpen others. Sociotechnical change theories, for instance, teach that many social factors can be involved in a decision and this is why I was open to get into technical details talking to a programmer in the company or into marketing strategies with the editor. These

issues did not fit the core of my observation, but they could help understand journalistic decisions. An open-minded observation may allow to detect these lateral issues and devote some efforts in the final stages to know them deeply enough. Anyway, once again, as it happens with prejudices and familiarity, the researcher should be aware of the framework and refrain from fully interpret the actions through it (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002:238). A mostly descriptive approach is enough in the field. Interpretations based on the theoretical framework can start to be brought in when reading the field diary. This is a good exercise before returning to the field, in order to construct hypotheses to be verified and to refocus the observation towards poorly explored areas. Full theoretical analysis of the gathered data arrives when the observation period is over.

As it has already been stated, the relationship with the research subjects evolved through the observation stages. I did not have to set up any strategy to have the journalists telling me confidences in the coffee breaks. There was an initial ingenuity in the actors about my research that they rapidly lose. Gaining the actors' confidence is usually described as a tough job by ethnographers (Hansen *et al.*, 1998:53). Online journalists surprised me because they tended to treat me like a colleague from the very beginning, maybe because it was easier for them to think of me as a journalist rather than as a researcher. This "complete member-researcher" role was the one used by McCombs (2003:43) for her interviews, as she was working as online journalist at the same time she did her research. As I spoke their own language, it was a comfortable role for me as well, even though my first intention was to present myself as a learner, an outsider that wanted the actors to explain him what they were doing.

Nonetheless, when days passed by and my presence as a researcher was more evident –they saw me taking notes all the time, I asked things that could be interpreted by them as critical to the way they worked– the initial colleague relationship got colder and they started to see me much more as an expert supervising their job. The fact is that observation as a research method is awkward. People are not used to have someone for hours and days poking his nose into their work and they mostly prefer avoiding that situation. Depending on the dynamics of the newsroom I could become invisible more easily. Big workplaces like the ones of *CCRTV* and *laMalla.net* let me go around quite freely, because everyone was doing their business, too stressed to notice me. However, sometimes journalists got angry if I looked what they were doing without telling them, just stepping at their back. The strategy in these cases was to get close to them and asking for what they were doing. This was an interesting exercise, because they defined the actions they were performing with their own words. In the smaller online teams of the newspapers, with just one or two reporters in each shift producing news, this was the only possible approach: most of the time, journalists narrated what they were doing, as I was constantly by their side, not moving around the newsroom as I did in the ones with four to eight professionals working at the same time.

This way, circumstances forced me to adopt two different styles of observation that were quite complementary, each one with its own strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, quiet observation reduced researcher intervention in the scene and satisfied the editors because it did not interrupt the workflow. On the other hand, there were actions that were difficult to understand without an explanation and it was not always

easy to find the right moment to switch into a conversational attitude and ask for an explanation for something puzzling that you had seen. Commenting the activities was a very rich method for defining the journalists' routines, but it lost part of the freshness of their daily work, as they tried to show an "ideal" or stereotypical situation instead of getting into routines automatically.

As the actors became aware of me as a researcher, I did not detect a shift in their routines, but in their willingness to collaborate. Sometimes, they seemed tired of my presence and, in one of the newsrooms, reporters nicknamed me as: "the UN blue helmet". The fact that the editors had given me access to the newsroom could have been interpreted by journalists as if I was *working* for their bosses and maybe giving them reports on their performance. Whenever someone suggested that my task was "controlling" them I insisted that I was just learning how they worked, not judging them. In the last stages there was a further step in our relationship: actors started asking me about the other newsrooms and about my conclusions on them. These are risky questions to answer, because you still have no conclusions, but I felt I had to answer them as the price for observing them. One of the consequences I feared most was influencing their views and their definitions (Williams *et al.* 1988:38). I could alter what I was observing if I stated my points of view; but, in the end, after some conversations about the research with some of the actors I concluded that these colloquia were worthy if you used them properly. For example, I gave them some data about the other newsrooms and asked them what they thought about that. The answers were very fruitful indirect justifications of their own decisions.

4.2.2. Interviews

Qualitative interviews –what Burgess describes as “conversations with a purpose” (1984:102) to differentiate them from the structured interview– were used to complement observational data gathering with more thorough self-definitions of actors’ routines, values and products. It was also the main source for the historical reconstruction of the evolution of the projects, something that was difficult to obtain through observation. Burgess (1984:104-106) defends this open approach to interviews by stating that rapport with the interviewees can be gained more easily and the detail of the explanations is greater than in structured strategies as the informants feel freer to develop their arguments. Online journalism research to date has shown an interesting phenomenon: surveys on professional attitudes towards the Internet often support the utopian views while the daily routines do not translate them into real outcomes (Deuze *et al*, 2004:22; Masip, 2005:565). In my interviews most of the respondents held very self-critical positions that were very worthy to interpret their feelings, expectations and practices. The very personal and subjective tone of the interviews reinforced the approach that deals with technological innovation analysis defended by Callon (1987) and Latour (1993:376): Conflicting definitions are to be found in the actors’ plurality of voices. You have to let them use their own categories and confront these concepts to find dissimilarities.

Interviews were scheduled for the first semester of 2004 in order to allow the researcher to do a first analysis of the data gathered through observation, and this

way be able to use it as background information for the conversations. Furthermore, the elapsed time between the visits to the newsrooms (from seven to twelve months, depending on the newsroom) was useful to detect changes in the online staff, their routines and the website. While informal conversations during the observation have been kept anonymous when quoted in this dissertation, formal interviewees were asked for permission to be quoted using their names.

During my observation stages I identified the most adequate interviewees among the present staff for the aims of the second phase of the research. This first bunch of interviews was used to identify relevant actors in the past of the project that were also suitable to be interviewed. The selection of interviewees tried to include both veterans and newcomers, as well as people with different levels of responsibility in the newsroom, in order to have different perspectives on the issues to be discussed. As the observation phase showed that the relationship between online journalists and website programmers was crucial in the projects development and daily routines, I also tried to include at least one of the latter in the list of interviewees. A total of twenty-one professionals were finally interviewed, with an average of five individuals per case study (Figure 4). Most of them were interviewed between March and June 2004, and I tried to group the interviews of the same case around close dates.

Most of the interviews where conducted off the newsroom during working hours or just before the start of the interviewee's shift. Quiet cafeterias or coffee-break rooms where the most common scenario. Interviewees were in general very self-critical with the project, showing a high degree of sincerity and analytical ability. In many cases

Figure 4. Professionals interviewed in the research

El Periódico Online

25/03/2004 - Antonio Franco, newspaper editor, 1978-2006

04/03/2004 - Mario Santinoli, technical director and first
online editor 1986-1999

16/03/2004 - Victòria Ayllon, technical director 1999- to date⁴⁹

17/02/2004 - Pep Puig, online editor 1996-2005

04/03/2004 - David Sancha, adjunct editor 1998- to date

16/03/2004 - Ferran Cosculluela, online reporter 1997- to date

laMalla.net

15/06/2004 - Toni Esteve, president of Lavinia

26/05/2004 - Quim Cardona, website programmer and editor 1999-2001

27/05/2004 - Silvia Llombart, online editor 2001- to date

27/05/2004 - Anna Garcia, adjunct editor 2001- to date

27/05/2004 - Joan Escofet, online reporter 2002- to date

CCRTV

19/06/2003 - Marc Mateu (2000-2004) and Ferran Clavell (2002- to date),
online content division directors

17/06/2004 - Joan Besson, online co-editor 2001-2005

17/06/2004 - Josep M. Fabregas, online co-editor 2001-2005

17/06/2004 - Iolanda Garcia, online reporter 1999- to date

17/06/2004 - Emili Vinagre, online reporter 2001- to date

17/06/2004 - Núria Cuixart, linguist 1999- to date

Diari de Tarragona

29/04/2004 - Gerard Tost, online editor 2001-2003

28/04/2004 - Edurne Seco, online reporter 2000-2003

28/04/2004 - Carles Abelló, online editor 2003-2005

27/04/2004 - Joan Jordi, graphic design team leader 2000- to date

⁴⁹ In Spring 2006.

they insisted on having an interview that was not too long, because they were busy, and most of the conversations did not last more than one hour.

Interviews were designed as loosely directed conversations based on a list of issues to be covered. As recommended by methodological handbooks (Burgess, 1984:103), newsroom observation helped in building the interviews list of items to be explored. Depending on the interviewee, a historical narration occupied the first half of the interview, where the researcher only interrupted the interviewee to clarify aspects of the explanation. A second part of the conversation consisted on the perception of online journalism utopias by the actor, the value he/she gave to them and the justification of their use (or not) in the newsroom. This part was not presented to the actor as a discussion over "utopias", but over online journalism topics and routines compared to traditional journalism. The perception of the relationship with other actors such as the offline staff, the audience and the technical department was also an important part of the interview. Below there is the complete list of items that the researcher had as a checklist during the interview (Figure 5). The order in which they were covered during the interview was flexible, depending on the development of the conversation. In many cases, specific examples taken from the observation were used to illustrate some of the issues in order to get a justification from the interviewee or to question the arguments used.

Figure 5. Interview issues

- 1) *History of the project:*
 - *Initial aims and definition of the website and the working routines.*
 - *Teams, profiles, roles, organization.*
 - *Stages in the development of the project, milestones and redefinitions of the website and newsroom.*
 - *Influence on the project of: business logic, organizational decisions, professional culture.*
 - *Competitors as a reference for the project development.*
 - *Changes in the last year.*
- 2) *Differences between traditional and online journalism:*
 - *Social function of journalists work.*
 - *Newsworthiness values.*
 - *Newsgathering routines: sources and news selection criteria.*
 - *News writing routines.*
 - *Use and significance of: multimedia content, links, nonlinear storytelling.*
- 3) *Relationships with other actors:*
 - *User role in the product.*
 - *Online and offline newsrooms collaboration.*
 - *Technical staff involvement in product development.*

4.2.3. Complementary research methods

Besides the main methods used for this study, other techniques were considered. Documents and websites were analyzed as relevant research objects complementary to the journalists themselves. The strategy in each case is described below.

Throughout the process of newsroom work observation and interviews I tried to gain access to two kinds of documents: current working protocols and past project definition memos. For some different reasons, these efforts were not very successful. In many cases newsrooms had no comprehensive written materials regulating their work. Most of the rules were orally transmitted and negotiated among the journalists. Some material was regarded by online editors as sensitive and strategic and therefore they did not give me access to it, arguing that competition in the sector was fierce. Nevertheless, and overall, I had the feeling that in the end I did not devote enough time and negotiation to argue with the managers about how important documentation was for my research. Observation absorbed too much of my attention. Nonetheless, when documents were retrieved they have been used as another source for interpretation among the rest of the collected data.

Website analysis was used prior to the observation stages to identify structural elements in order to find similarities and variations among the cases. Once newsrooms were visited I conducted more *ad hoc* content analysis in order to compare updating rhythms of the four websites or the features that were developed for special story coverages. This allowed me to take the parallel analysis of the case studies beyond the observation stages, and therefore to keep track of all the newsrooms work even when I was not visiting them.

4.2.4. Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data shall be analyzed in progressive phases to extract regularity from anecdotal notes on the field and actors' quotations (Hansen *et al.*, 1998: 57-59; Lindlof and Taylor, 2002,214). The theoretical framework provided the categories into which the data obtained from the research could be organized as an starting point. However, this first classification was neither rigid nor closed. Some issues emerged as important from the very data itself –observations, interviews, documents, website analyses– (Jensen, 2002:245) and they were located in the grid of analytical *drawers*. After the provisional allocation of field notes, transcripts and other data into the grid, several issues were identified as the more relevant to scrutinize (Figure 6).

Chapters 6 and 7 reflect this structure. The first part concentrates on newsrooms daily routines, where online journalism utopias should be (or not) put into practice. The second one opens up the scope to the relationship of online newsrooms with other fundamental departments in their media companies, such as the offline newsroom or the technical staff. This second part analyzes business decisions affecting the media logic as well, and the way newsrooms manage innovation and change. These two chapters offer the conclusions of several layers of analysis over the gathered data. Thus, routines in every case were defined and systematized through comparing different observations, actors' narrations and documentation; I annotated the variations among companies in product features and/or the working routines used to produce them, and compiled actors' arguments that supported them. With this

material, I explored the reasons for the variations and commonalities in order to understand the logic of the routines and its relationship to similar traditional media routines. The theoretical framework guided these processes. I considered previous research on online journalism to compare the results of the analysis. The relationship of the actual routines and culture with online journalism utopias is discussed throughout these chapters and specifically revisited in the conclusions.

Figure 6. Analytical grid of research issues

1) *Online news production cultures*

Newsroom roles, labour division and shifts

News updating policy

Home page management

Newsworthiness scales

Newsgathering practices

Newswriting routines

Links management

Multimedia content production

User participation management

2) *Material and social context of the online newsrooms*

a) *The material constraints of online journalism*

Technical procedures in reporter's daily work

Technical problems in the newsrooms

b) *The social constraints of online journalism*

The relationship between online reporters and technical staff

The relationship between online and offline journalists in neighboring newsrooms

c) *Innovation edges and project development*

Special features as innovation edges

Website and newsroom structural evolution

The role of utopias in innovation

The historical evolutions of the projects, based on the interviews and document analysis, are initially offered to the reader as contextual background (see chapter 5), but the whole interpretation of the similarities and divergences found among the four cases is loaded of historical perspective, taking the moment of the observation stages as the main reference, but expanding it to the past and the future (the present time) to understand the dynamics of change in online newsrooms.

In the writing up of the final report of findings (chapters 5 to 7 of this dissertation), I have made an effort to anonymize the data gathered through observation as much as possible, in order to separate individuals from interpretations of the study. Since the unit of analysis are the newsrooms, references to any person are abstract, based on roles rather than on names, which would not provide much more useful information to the reader. Nonetheless, newsrooms were actually rather small in personnel and, as Puijk (2004) sharply points out, "it would be naive to think that this kind of anonymity prevents people from being identified in the text" by readers close to the cases. The decision of not using the names of the actors is, at least, "a way of underlining that I am interested in studying social positions and roles, not individual psychological processes" (2004). Quotes from the interviews, instead, are labeled with the name of the person and the company he/she belongs to. As the statements made on the interviews were recorded by the researcher as explicit material for study, there is less concern of revealing issues that actors would rather leave aside of scientific scrutiny.

Part II: Research results and discussion

“For it didn't occur to us to ask, nor to him to say,
in what part of the new world Utopia is to be found”

Utopia, by Thomas More, first published 1516,
commented edition by G. Logan and R. Adams
(More, 2002:5).

5. History and evolution of the projects

The four cases analyzed in this research reveal stories of contradictions, explorations and confronted definitions of online journalism both within and among the projects. A common feature that arises from the evolution of the cases is that the adoption of the Internet in news media companies has never been automatic or predefined. Different media have different timing and distinctive evolving conceptions of their websites and, at the same time, to some extent, converging aims. The second part of this dissertation presents research findings and discusses their implications. Chapter 5 attempts to describe the history of the four projects through their professionals' voices. Data gathered in the 2004 and 2006 interviews is the basis of the narration, which specially highlights the interpretations of the actors on the processes, decisions and results within the project evolution. Specific dates, names and web features have been corroborated by internal documents and the scarce references found in scholarly literature. Ethnography allowed to have a more comprehensive picture of the factors and actors' attitudes in one concrete period of the projects (first semester 2003), which helped to interpret the interviewees' explanations. A thorough discussion on the factors involved in the evolution of the projects will be presented in chapter 7, after the presentation of the daily routines in chapter 6.

Cases are presented in chronological order, based on the date of the first online news experience in each media company. They are not isolated experiences, and the professionals of each online newsroom looked closely to the development of the

competitors' websites to take strategic decisions. In order to have a contextual perspective on the cases, before describing each project history, we offer an approximation to the general evolution of online journalism in Catalonia and Spain, based on academic and journalistic literature and the direct witnessing of the author.

5.1. A decade of online journalism in Catalonia and Spain

The Iberian peninsula has not led Internet adoption among citizens. After a quick growth in the second half of the 1990s, usage almost stabilized over 40% in Catalonia and 35% in Spain in the first 2000s, with a very slow increasing trend. However, actual online citizens were intensive surfers, with 48% using the Internet daily and over 66% having broadband access at home.⁵⁰ Reading news online is not at all the most prominent activity of Catalan users: Castells *et al.* (2003, 2004) found it to be a usual activity of just 34% of online citizens, far behind of interpersonal communication, entertainment and other practical uses of the Internet. Regardless of this context, media companies and specially newspapers developed online editions as early as US and other European media.⁵¹

In ten years of new media evolution, the process in Spain has been quite similar to the global one (see Scott, 2005; Paul, 2005), with some peculiarities because of the size of the market and the structure of the media groups. Despite being considered developers of cutting-edge online journalism models in the European context, Spanish media groups have generally faced information and communication technologies from a conservative standpoint, observing the competitor's steps and trying not to cannibalize their traditional revenue sources (Díaz Noci, 2005). Several multimedia

⁵⁰ Source: INE (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*) and EGM.

⁵¹ Brief introductions in English to the Catalan and Spanish media landscape and the adoption of the Internet can be found at Moragas *et al.* (2002) and Salaverría *et al.* (2005), respectively. Other summaries of online media history: in Catalonia, Luzón (2001:16-26) and Domingo (2004b:23-28); in Spain, Armañazas *et al.* (1996:126-162), Palomo (2004a:21-29) and Díaz Noci (2005).

groups have been created through concentration processes in the last two decades (Díaz Nosty, 1998-2001; De Mateo *et al.*, 2005). Newspapers took their first steps into the online distribution channels in 1994, firstly on the Bulletin Board System (BBS) and soon after on the World Wide Web, almost at the same time as the US and other European countries (Armañazas *et al.*, 1996). Broadcasting companies followed somehow reluctantly, but they finally entered the game. In 2004, a comprehensive Spain-wide census identified 1,274 online media, of which just 23% were Internet-only ventures (López *et al.*, 2005). Catalonia had 206 online news media, according to this research.

From an analytical point of view, we suggest three stages in the first decade of new media development in Catalonia and Spain. They are clearly defined by the attitude and strategies of the companies and have had a considerable impact on online news products and production routines:

- a) 1994-1998: first experiments, being online becomes a trend.
- b) 1999-2001: dotcom boom, projects look for immediate profit.
- c) 2002-2005: dotcom crash, investment cuts and redefinition.

a) 1994-1998: Just got to be there

The technical departments and Internet-experienced journalists were at the forefront of the WWW discovery for traditional media. With low budgets and mainly experimental attitudes, companies just let them play with their new toy. The Catalan weekly news magazine *El Temps* set up the first journalistic website in the Iberian

peninsula, June 1994 (Capella, 2001). Newspapers *Avui*, *El Periódico* and *La Vanguardia*, based in Barcelona, followed in 1995 and soon the pressure to be online started to mount for those which were not on the Web yet (Domingo, 2004c). Among Spanish newspapers, *El Mundo* and *ABC* got online in the end of that year, and *El País* waited until May 1996 to set up its website. Catalan regional and local press got online progressively, starting with *La Veu de l'Anoia* or *Revista Cambrils* (Lladó and Pla, 2001). However, neither thorough business plans nor online content strategies were devised. Most of the website content was merely a copy of the print edition. Being online was a matter of prestige, not really a new medium.

Vicent Partal, the journalist that produced *El Temps* website, created *Vilaweb* in 1996, a purely online news project that became very influential in the evolution of online journalism in Catalonia, not only for its innovative news model (short interpretative pieces with links to original and journalistic sources) but also for Partal's effort in defining and diffusing the utopias of the Internet as a new medium. Another important trend-maker in Catalan, Spanish and even Latin-American online journalism was Luis Ángel Fernández Hermana, a science journalist in *El Periódico de Catalunya*, who initiated *en.red.ando* ["wiring"], an online magazine on digital life that was referent in promoting the reflections on the changes that the Internet may bring to journalism.

In this effervescent context of projects and professional debate, an informal online journalism association was born in Catalonia: Grup de Periodistes Digitals [Online Journalists Group]. It started in the Summer of 1996 as an e-mail discussion list and soon became the main debate space for Internet advocates. In 1998 it reached its

climax, when an International Congress on Electronic Publication was held in Barcelona, with hundreds of contributions to the previous online debate (Llombart, 2000; Domingo, 2004b:25). The definition of the online journalist and the new opportunities for news storytelling were cornerstones of the collective creation of a roadmap for Internet media in Catalonia and, more laterally, in Spain. GPD discussions mostly reproduced the utopias of the international arena.

b) 1999-2001: Up and down

When the number of Internet users began to increase exponentially and telecommunication companies created portals as a means to attract web surfers, media companies started to worry because they felt that the WWW could compete against traditional media and take their audiences away. It was the moment when the dotcom stock boom started: Terra, the portal of Telefónica, stated that they increased their shares value in 60 million euros on their first day on the stock exchange on November 17th 1999. Media companies decided that they had to be on the winning wave, too (Estévez, 2002). Media groups like Zeta (publisher of *El Periódico*) and Prisa (publisher of *El País*) created their own online companies (Zeta Digital and Prisacom, respectively) to build up portals and set up websites for their full range of publications and broadcasting ventures. Thousands of euros were spent on manpower, technical infrastructures, consulting and advertising. Once again, little attention was paid to business strategies for digital content delivery. Webs got new features, aiming to keep users surfing inside their pages as long as possible: last-minute news updates, newsletters, chat and forum boards. News production for the Internet explored the possibilities of the new medium in special reports with infographics, slide shows, etc.

The main Spanish online newspapers were recognized internationally. *El Mundo* won the Society for News Design's (SND.ies) gold prize in 2004 and 2005 for the work of their infographics team. Salaverría *et al.* (2005) point out that this development of multimedia content in the leading online newspapers in Spain is "high and clearly superior to the average" in other European countries.

In 2000, the book publishing company Planeta set up Geoplaneta, a multiplatform travel guides venture with a common database for website, mobile, print and broadcasting content, in a huge effort to broaden its traditional sale channels. They considered that banners and stocks would bring in the money, but online ventures got further and further into debt. The world dotcom crash also affected Catalan and Spanish media in several ways. Most of the online-only ventures disappeared dramatically, web teams were reduced to the minimum and media groups abandoned their stand-alone online projects. Prisa sold the portal *Inicia.es* to the Italian telecommunication company Tiscali. Zeta dismantled its Internet company and each of the traditional companies in the group assumed responsibility for the future of its own website. Planeta reduced most of its Internet projects and its travel venture went back to be just an online catalogue of travel books (Moragas and Domingo, 2003). Those which were not directly affected by the stock depreciation were caught though in a wave of skepticism towards the Internet.

c) 2002-2005: Rethinking online business models

After the crisis, news sites related to traditional media companies had a hard time, as the management would not trust such an unprofitable business, but they continued

operations with the reduced staff. Instead, few online-only news websites survived. A clear exception were online *confidentials* (*Libertad Digital*, *El Confidencial*, *e-Noticias*), opinionated news websites in which rumour had a preeminent space. Born between 1999 and 2001, the climax of online euphoria, they consolidated as a complement to traditional media.

For most online news initiatives it was time for pragmatism and reflection. Catalan and Spanish media groups began to explore new media again, but much more cautiously. Online advertising rose slightly in 2002-2004, but it barely surpassed 1% of the overall investment in media ads (Infoadex, 2005). Therefore, advertising was not a crucial income for Spanish websites yet and thus some time subscription models were explored (Sádaba and Portilla, 2005). Newspaper editors argued that direct revenue for websites was the only way they could be sustained (Parra Valcarce and Álvarez Marcos, 2004; Díaz Noci, 2005). Once again, companies tended to wait and see their competitors' strategy.

El País was the first to announce a date to launch the subscription version: before December 2002, all the content except the opinion columns was available for 80 euros per year. *El Mundo* moved quickly to launch a new website by October 2002 with a different model: original web content was free and only the digital version of the paper was to be charged (50 euros per year). Soon after this move, some Catalan newspapers tried other options, halfway between the models of the two main Spanish papers. *La Vanguardia* followed the example of the *NYTimes.com* and asked its users to register for free to access any piece of news in the site. PDF versions and archive

news older than a week were only available to subscribers (80 euros per year). *El Periódico* created a free registration process to access PDFs and last week news. Older archive news could be bought for 50 cents a piece (Cerezo and Zafra, 2003; Domingo, 2004c). After two years, the results of these different strategies in a small marketplace were clear: *El País* gained just 26,000 subscribers from the 500,000 daily users it had in 2002, and lost half of the home page hits. *El Mundo* and *El Periódico* (the ones with most free-access content) increased their audiences by 57% and 23%, and *La Vanguardia* remained stable (Pavis, 2003). Users did not seem eager to pay for information that they could get for free elsewhere. In June 2005, *El País* finally decided to reduce their subscription to several added value services (archive, broadband video, customization); they also decided to give most of its content for free in order to regain a place in the cautiously rising advertising market (Salaverria *et al.*, 2005).

Although television networks were the last ones within the media companies to go online (the Catalan public broadcaster was the exception, with a website in 1995), they exported the success of the SMS model in TV programs to their websites (Sádaba and Portilla, 2005). *Telecinco* and *Televisió de Catalunya* offered premium video clips that could only be obtained by sending an SMS to get an access key. Ringtones and screensavers for mobile phones of the most popular programs were sold on the TV portals through the extremely simple procedure of sending a short message. Parallely, through 2004 and 2005 there were clear signs of a steady increase in online advertising revenues. While text news seem to consolidate as a free service, newspaper quality content and broadband video are the added value proposition for an online news revenue model that is still under definition.

5.2. *El Periódico Online*

Innovation has been one of the main *leit motifs* of *El Periódico de Catalunya* since its foundation in 1978. As a newspaper born under the editorial boom of a brand new democracy in Spain, one of the ways to differentiate itself from the established Catalan dailies was offering details such as a colored heading title as early as 1981, a technological leap for a newspaper in the Spanish context. In the 1990s, innovation in *El Periódico* had a name: Mario Santinoli, an architect with a cross-disciplinary education who believes that “if you worry but you don't move, you keep on worried all your life”. He was the head of the Technical Department, and he was supposed to keep the newspaper ahead from the competitors in the technological battlefield. The adoption of the Internet at *El Periódico*, regarded to be the first daily to be online in Catalonia and Spain, followed the logic of this pursuit for innovation. An executive of Grup Zeta, the company which owns *El Periódico*, stated in 1997 that the main reason for them to be on the Internet was “to give our readers the satisfaction of identifying with a technologically advanced newspaper” (Palomo, 2004:20). However, the evolution of the website from a prototype to a relatively stable and socially integrated project within the media company made this initial limited definition turn into a complex group of online information services. That project which initially was just the Technical Department's experiment eventually, and unevenly, became a new communication medium.

November 8th 1994 *El Periódico Online* was available for the first time through the BBS (Bulletin Board System) of Servicom, a Catalan Internet provider (Canga *et al.*, 2000:155; Díaz Noci, 2005:25). Santinoli saw the Internet as an attractive

experimentation field. For him, the technical management of a newspaper was radically changed with digitalization. In the 1980s, he was supposed to solve problems such as guaranteeing a stable production in the printer at the minimum cost. In the 1990s his new responsibility was devising strategical business developments, grasping new technologies and defining how could the company take advantage from them to evolve. "We [in the Technical Department] were missionaries". They explored, *preached* the virtues of new technologies to the journalistic and managerial staff and led them through the first steps, until the content producers took control over the projects.

The interest on digital delivery technologies in *El Periódico* did not start with the Internet product but with an actually much more ambitious project: a digital tablet for news consumption that would substitute the print newspaper. It was not a project for immediate development, it rather was an exploration of future possibilities, "a technological and cultural reflection on how information can be envisaged with the new digital tools", in Santinoli's words. Code-named *Newspad*, the project received fundings from the European Union and the technical team of *El Periódico* partnered with several IT companies to develop the prototype between 1992 and 1997 (Armañazas *et al.*, 1996:132-133). Santinoli stresses that the conceptualization of the news product for such a portable device moved them away from the newspaper format to devise a multimedia platform in which texts and audiovisual material would complement each other. He now thinks that it was too early for *Newspad* to become a reality, but time has shown that the evolution of digital technologies leads towards the same directions they imagined, "but Tablet PCs still don't have all the features of the *Newspad*".

Hardware limitations, such as battery life, that in the early 1990s made the prototype unviable for commercialization, are being now solved by the industry. "Sooner or later, someone will make something that will include the features we imagined for the Newspad. It is a matter of time, a matter of cultural evolution rather than of technical availability".

The initial phases of *El Periódico Online* were led by the team of the Newspad project. Besides Santinoli, there were the journalist Joaquim Sans and the graphic designer Agustí Llansana. Santinoli is proud to think that the website project "was not started by chance", but because the company was on the track of technological innovation in digital delivery, looking for new revenue sources. However, Llansana remembers his estranged feelings when trying to explain layout proposals to the managers of the company. "They were thrilled, but they did not understand what we were doing. It was not easy to go on". Besides Newspad, they had also explored the CD-Rom as a way to distribute an annual archive of the newspaper in PDF format. The first edition, in 1994, sold 8,000 copies, a great success in the eyes of Grup Zeta (Armañazas *et al.*, 1996:134). These experiences were the previous products of this think tank, and were useful to define the initial the online newspaper. Nevertheless, Newspad was not the model for the website: the technical limitations of the Internet were too many to transfer the concept of Newspad to the web. Designer Llansana argued: "Still today, the layout of a website needs to be too rigid to be efficient. If you give more freedom to the journalists, they would be overwhelmed, because they wouldn't only have to write news, but also choose their layout".

Santinoli first knew the Internet when he traveled to the US in 1992, looking for ideas for the Newspad project. In Stanford University the researchers showed him what they were doing with BBS, sharing information with universities and computer geeks around the world, which impressed the technical manager of *El Periódico*. After a couple of years working on the Newspad project and defining digital layouts, the first online prototype was again “the product of a matter of chance”. In the Fall of 1994 he met Eduald Domènech, the founder of Servicom. This Internet provider, pioneer in Catalonia, had a BBS system in their servers and Santinoli decided to test it. In less than a week, the technicians set up a basic BBS site that provided a daily list of front page headlines, opinion articles, a TV guide and a summary of news (Díaz Noci, 2005:26). There were links to plain text version of the stories and to PDF documents of a *facsimile* version of the newspaper pages. *El Periódico Online* was the only online newspaper in Spain that provided a PDF version before 1999. The early adoption of this format in 1994 can be explained with the parallel development of the annual CD-Rom news archive, for which PDF was the chosen format.

“Our main objective, as we had no journalist in the Technical Department, was putting the newspaper online automatically, without human intervention”, states Santinoli. This was the reason for the content they offered: no more and no less than the news of the daily print product. For Santinoli, it was also the reason why *El Periódico Online* was not the first Catalan newspaper to be on the World Wide Web. *Avui* launched its website in March 1995, two months before *El Periódico* (Armañazas *et al.*, 1996; Estévez, 2002). At Grup Zeta, Santinoli did not want to set up a manually updated website and they did not went online in the WWW until the automatic generator of

html pages from the PDF version of stories was ready: "Our main preoccupation were the technological aspects, offering an image of modernity and gaining a national and international dimension for a newspaper that was mainly regional. In other newspapers there were diverging attitudes. Some would say in public that the Internet was not mature enough to invest in it. They had not understood that investing in innovation is a must". The first website had a very similar structure to the original BBS, but it offered online all the content of the print edition since the beginning, with the front page headlines, section homepages with lists of headlines of the day and the PDF version of the newspaper. They added a link to an e-mail with an icon that read "letters to the editor", the only *interactive* element of the website at that time. The journalists responsible of closing the print edition (around 2:00, after midnight) launched the automatic process to upload the paper content online. "The usability of the website was quite bad for years", recalls adjunct editor David Sancha.

The Technical Department had a high degree of autonomy to define and develop these initial online experiments. They created the site and then showed it to the managers to have their approval. Nevertheless, the control of the website was soon transferred to the newsroom, following the philosophy of Santinoli of being missionaries: "I defended that we were just animators of technical ideas and so we passed the relay baton (because this is a race) to the journalists". The transition was easy. All the interviewees in *El Periódico* stressed the fact that the technical and content departments in the newspaper had a very symbiotic relationship, while in other companies this relationship is apparently rather tense (see section 7.2). The technical staff kept a close relationship with the web team, with the role of consultants and

developers, even though they returned to the Newspad project and had to start new initiatives, such as the automatic translation tool to provide symmetric Catalan and Spanish editions of the newspaper or the supervision of the construction of the new printing facilities. In the early stages of the online project, Joaquim Sans stated the philosophy of the actual developers of the website: "We want to learn; information will have to be provided in some new way. The market has to be created. We have to learn how to do new advertising and new revenue models (online shopping, paid specialized information, ticket reservations, etc.). We have to keep on shaping the product to the new medium, but we still do not know how the new medium will be" (quoted in Armañazas *et al.*, 1996:135). One of the strategic decisions was the inclusion of the online team in the bigger print newsroom to guarantee that the product will be coherent in both versions. The newspaper editor, Antonio Franco, argues that they could not risk to compromise the prestige of the company and its journalists having a website with different content criteria. The drawback of this decision was that the human resources devoted to the online project were very limited, admits Franco, and original content for the website was not conceived as a possibility. "It was just a trial, to say we are here and see what happened". The automation of online publication of stories is interpreted by Llansana as a requirement imposed by this lack of human resources and a limitation for the development of a more creative online product.

Santinoli left the project in the hands of Joaquim Sans and Pep Puig. These journalists' first task was not taking editorial decisions either. Their main objective, with the help of the graphic designer Llansana, was trying to improve the format of the online texts,

which had initially lost the richness of the printed text: “A short wire piece looked the same as the main story of the day”. Puig was the head of the weekly magazine and had a close relationship to Santinoli in testing technical developments for that product. He was interested in technological innovation and followed closely the first BBS and WWW trials. In the transition from the technical to the journalistic staff, he was in charge of explaining to the people in the print newsroom what was the website about, but without leaving his responsibility as editor of the weekly. He agrees with Llansana that the initial automatic system may have influenced negatively the development of the project: “You just had to press a button and the content was uploaded to the website automatically, the website could be done *on its own*; but this was an error, because we did not create the basis [for an online team], as other companies did. They did not have such an advanced system and therefore they had to hire people for the website, teams that after a while surpassed us with bigger online projects”. After the technical staff left the lead of the project, defining the future of the website was nobody's main responsibility. However, for newspaper editor Antonio Franco, having people like Pep Puig, an experienced journalist in the print newsroom, in the online team was a guarantee that the website would grow according to the principles of the newspaper. He is sure that the project would not have consolidated if someone external to the company had been hired to set up the website.

The interest on the Internet in the newspaper managers grew in 1997 (see the homepage at that stage in Figure 7). Newsroom computers started to be connected to the Internet and *El Periódico Online* gained internal visibility. A Technology section was created in the newsroom to create specialized content for the print edition and the

website. Luis Ángel Fernández Hermana, the science journalist, joined Pep Puig to create the first online team of journalists. Fernández Hermana was the only reporter to have Internet access since the early 1990s and he had his own website with analytical articles about the evolution of the “online world”. Puig learned html and they added a documentalist to the team, because they interpreted the website as a digital archive and wanted it to be easy to use. “The website stopped being a mere experiment”, states Puig. They did not create original news content for the website, but now and then they would experiment formats and ideas with special features such as “24 hours in the life of *El Periódico*”, a sort of report on the production processes of the newspaper, or a web directory of travel websites. They were avid online surfers, looking for innovative experiences in other news websites.

Figure 7. Homepage of *El Periódico Online* in April 1997



Source: *www.archive.org*

The experience of the prototypical website faced, therefore, several accelerators and brakes (in Winston's terminology) when transforming into a consolidated project. The turning point can be identified in the moment when the project changed hands from the technical initiators to the journalists. The innovative spirit in Grup Zeta, the good relationship between the Technical Department and the newsroom management, and the involvement of people in the newsroom in the transition process helped to accelerate the acceptance of the website as another media channel for the company. However, decisions taken in the prototype phase, such as automation of web content production, clearly influenced the development path in the second phase and they could be interpreted as reverse salients in Hughes' terms. These decisions were taken by the technical staff without considering much of a journalistic perspective, but had direct consequences on news production: no original news content was produced by online journalists for some years. The decision of the newspaper editor to keep the website under close control also limited the autonomy of the online project staff: that decision impeded the evolution of the initial print content mirroring strategy. The journalists involved in the online team considered that Internet technology was not mature enough to develop more complex services, as those envisioned in the Newspad project. External competition was the main accelerator in the following years, as other online media took the lead in exploring possible models for Internet journalism.

As html design capabilities evolved, a new homepage was designed to offer a closer experience to the print edition in the design look and content layout, in order to stress the coherence between the two products. Four to eight stories of the newspaper were highlighted with different sizes in order to show editorial priority. Canga *et al.* (2000)

found that 24% of the homepages in a sample had a different main story than the one in the print edition. In 1998, the rest of Spanish regional newspapers of Grup Zeta, smaller than *El Periódico de Catalunya*, stated their interest in being online. Puig and the documentalist traveled to the newsrooms of the seven dailies and set up the automatic web update system. They shared the online-only content of *El Periódico de Catalunya*, which had grown over time.

In the spring of 1999 the website underwent a qualitative improvement. Some months earlier the company hired a web programmer, to work on developing applications for the online project, and another journalist, the freshman David Sancha, who had collaborated for a year or so in the print edition. Their first task was setting up a system to upload original content for the website in real time. Some competitors had already started to provide last-minute news updates in their websites, and the team in *El Periódico Online* tried to catch up. "We wanted to give some freshness to the web homepage, something more than the print edition", stated Puig. A journalist of the coordination desk in the print newsroom was assigned to produce online news updates by choosing two or three relevant agency wires twice a day (at 11:00 and 19:00 hours), as an added task to the rest of his duties. The application was embedded in the print edition content management system so that the journalist worked on an environment he knew well and had just to press a button to upload the content to the website. A moving ticker on the homepage showed the last-minute headlines and gave access to the news updates page.

The evolution of this news-updates application was actually the genesis of the present

web content management system (CMS), developed since then through the years by the Technical Department of Grup Zeta. In early 2000 they decided that last-minute news could not be properly covered by the print newsroom and changed the strategy: they recruited three journalists to produce news updates and created a web interface, separated from the print edition CMS. Ferran Coscolluela was tired of his job in the Politics section of the newspaper and was one of those who became online journalist. As David Sancha, he felt attracted by the novelty of the medium and its possibilities. The new last-minute service worked on a database which allowed to update and edit stories permanently. Following the experience of other news websites, the homepage was changed to be dynamic and incorporate news as they were produced. The layout was similar to the one already existing, inspired in the print edition, but the set of templates was integrated in the CMS to allow an easy update of the headlines throughout the day. They called the new service “El Periódico en Vivo [live]”, and “Vivo” has ever since been the nickname for the web CMS. In the early morning, the homepage showed the paper headlines. As new stories were published, paper headlines were taken down on the homepage and at some point disappeared, as there was enough fresh news. This concept of dynamic homepage was still ruling in 2006.

For some time, two different systems cohabited in the website. The dynamic updates working on a database, and the automatic upload of the print edition into html and PDF pages. In the morning, the online team reviewed the outcome of the automatic upload and corrected any mistake in the process. David Sancha recalls that he was not satisfied with this routine, because from 2:00 until 9:00 in the morning there was no control over the web content. In 2000 they decided to extend the CMS to include the

print edition content as well as the online news updates. The original automatic exporter of print content to html was adapted to have an outcome in xml format, more suitable to be introduced into the CMS database. This allowed to offer a permanent news archive for the first time as well as to redefine the working routines related to the online version of the print edition. The new system needed the supervision of a person for every story, to verify that all the data was correctly stored in the right place in the database. The journalists in the print edition closing shift could not assume that task and the online team had to grow to have a night shift responsible for the processing of the content. Users' forums were also developed in this phase of the project.

The media group management did not have a proactive involvement in the website during the early years of the project, but as the dotcom boom consolidated in 2000, they decided that Grup Zeta could not be left aside of the enormous business opportunities perceived. At the end of the year, a separate company was created to manage the online ventures of the group, as many other media companies had done to get into the wave of e-business. The idea had been in the the executives' heads for some time and Mario Santinoli was one of the strongest proponents about the need of expanding the company towards digital products, preparing for the future. The only staff in the company with Internet experience was the online team of *El Periódico*, and therefore they assumed the role of being the core of the brand new Zeta Digital. The three journalists producing news updates did not became part of the online company, as the newspaper editor defended that they were part of the print newsroom.

Since then and until 2005, the online team has had these two separate groups: one

was more devoted to print content online management and web services production; the other was strictly devoted to news production, and was called the “última hora” [*last minute*] section. The production section working for Zeta Digital moved to a new building in another neighborhood of Barcelona and it was assigned the coordination of the development of the websites of all the magazines and specialized dailies of the group, most of them still offline in 2000. The new company was dominated by executives from the magazine branch of Grup Zeta and *El Periódico* was not a priority, as it already had a mature website. However, inside Zeta Digital the online team of the newspaper was an autonomous branch with two web developers, three journalists (including Sancha and Puig), the documentalist and two graphic designers (including Llansana). “It was a good team, with a lot of synergy between the different specialists. We had a very fluent relation with programmers and Vivo was improved a lot”, states adjunct editor Sancha, who only regrets the distance to the paper newsroom.

Whereas, Puig feels that they lost a precious time for the development of *El Periódico Online* with the Zeta Digital adventure. “We were about to increase our team when we were moved to Zeta Digital. We could have done lots of things if the money had been invested in *El Periódico Online* rationally instead of creating those projects that were a fiasco in the end”. Millions were spent in paying external consultants to develop websites without clear business models and hiring a huge number of staff to coordinate the projects. At some point there were over eighty people working in Zeta Digital, while until then the online team in *El Periódico* had less than ten. In a year, the company started to be downsized and soon stopped operating. The online project of each publication was assumed by their respective newsrooms and the original team of

El Periódico Online and few other online journalists started a pilgrim-like process, staying provisionally in the newsroom of the sports daily of the company, until they finally went back to the building of the newspaper. Two web developers, a system administrator and a technical project manager of Zeta Digital were incorporated to the Technical Department of the Grup Zeta, where they kept on providing support to all the web projects, but particularly to *El Periódico*, as it was the only one originating from internal development.

Franco made a self-critical reflection, putting those days of gold rush in the context of the evolution of online news projects: "Media companies were at first afraid from the Internet, afraid of losing their monopoly as content producers. After that, they realized that they could play a big part online, as they had the know-how and the brand as information resources for the citizens. Then the fatal moment of the dotcom bubble came, and made companies think that they had found the miracle that would make them earn millions. After the burst, they admitted that the market was still not mature: there were many possibilities, but journalists and technicians did not know them well enough and the consumers were not demanding such a big bunch of services. Precaution was the rule after that". They then regretted having provided free online news for years in the beginning and started looking for a strategy to value the web product and make it profitable in the mid-term. "Producing quality information is expensive, but users got used to have it for free". It was a matter of measuring every step, controlling the teams' size and thinking of five-ten year horizons instead of short-term objectives. These became the rules after the experience of Zeta Digital. They knew the web needed to keep on evolving, but with no rush.

When the online team came back to their newsroom, they got back to the development of the online newspaper. In a way, they were out of the top executives' attention again, but the price was the lost of any ambition to get more investments in the online project. Within these limits and partly because of the pressure of competition, the CMS was deeply improved and a new consolidated version was online in December 2002. It incorporated a new content access philosophy. Users needed to register for free to access PDF files and earlier editions of the online newspaper, and for the first time they had to pay: 0,50 euro for every article in the archive older than a week (Domingo, 2004c:147-148). The pay-per-content strategy initiated by *El Mundo* and *El País* in October and November, much debated and forecast during 2002, accelerated the presentation of the new version of *El Periódico Online*, and some developments were left aside for future improvements. The stand of *El Periódico* was, paradoxically, the most open access of the reference newspapers in Spain. Pep Puig admitted that they had a wait-and-see strategy. He was not sure about which was the right model: the subscribe-or-leave option of *El País* seemed too extreme to him and the differentiation between free online content and subscription access to the digital version of the newspaper of *El Mundo* implied the separation of the website into two different products. For adjunct editor David Sancha, openness could be a model in itself to become a reference for quality news seekers who do not want to pay online.

Sancha feels that getting back to the newsroom was positive for the project. He interprets that the newspaper management showed a clear interest in the web project when they decided to get the online team back. Even though the production group of the online team was initially placed in a room in the basement, separated from the

print newsroom and the “última hora” section, they had an easier access to the newspaper editor and the technical staff were again in the same building (three floors away, though) as them. Cosculluela, however, feels that the separation between the last-minute news producers (sit side-by-side the coordination desk of the print edition) and the rest of the online team did not help in fine tuning the CMS and the website with the experience of those producing content constantly. He admits that the online newspaper had evolved a lot since 1999, gaining its own personality beyond the print edition, but he felt it could had gone further. Victòria Ayllón, the technical director since the Zeta Digital phase, argues that the CMS allowed to do a good deal more than what reporters used, but human resources in the online team (eleven journalists in 2003) were still limited to explore all the possibilities of the system. The chances to expand the online team were scarce: from 2001 to 2003 there were three job cuts in the whole Grup Zeta. The last one affected fifteen workers of the newspaper, including one of the online journalists who had been there since Zeta Digital.

Since the dual model of breaking news and print edition online was established, a standard that was not paralleled in many other online newspapers in Spain at that time, each new version of the CMS tended to consolidate the working routines of the online team. A rhetorical closure was established around the model, which conceptualized online journalists as the ones that followed news updates through wires and performed pseudo-technical tasks such as uploading the print edition and creating online services. The print newsroom, on the contrary, was the one beating news at the streets, producing original content. Nonetheless, there were internal tensions that challenged this model. Online journalists were not motivated with the role that the

evolution of the project had given to them. They were aware of utopias such as the multimedia creative journalist. At the same time, though, they would limit their aspirations because they knew the company was not willing to invest more in the project. The rhetorical closure was ensured by this alibi, and the dual model was seen as necessary and inevitable when it was actually the result of the origins of the project and its evolution as a reaction to competition. Since 2003, Puig himself had plans of redefining the structure of the online team and its relationship with the rest of the newspaper staff, in order to optimize human resources and be able to produce more online content, even original content. The turning point that broke the rhetorical closure and let these changes start progressing was a shift in the perceptions on the website by the print newsroom. Big news events –the Madrid bombing in March 2004 was the most determinant one– made the print newsroom realize that the website played an important role in breaking news and let them compete with radio and television. Newspaper editor Franco acknowledged this new awareness and value given to the website, and pointed out the need to rethink the organization of the whole newsroom: “It does not make sense that if the print newsroom has some expert statement on an issue, the website does not reflect it. We may reshape the newspaper sections and make them heterogeneous, with people working for the paper and others working on the web, together as a team”.

In 2006 these changes had not taken place, but the online newsroom was restructured and relocated, and an old vindication of the online editor came true. Since mid-2005 all the online journalists shared two desks at the print newsroom, in the same place where breaking news reporters had always been, besides the newspaper coordination

desk, and a new online editor with a more journalistic than technical profile was put in charge of the online team. Josep M. Ràfols shared this role with Pep Puig for some time until he got acquainted with the website rhythm and routines. Puig then was moved to a reborn Zeta Digital that managed the technical and business evolution of the group websites. For Ràfols, the integration of the team in the print newsroom was crucial for the online product to be aware of the issues and positions of the paper and cover news accordingly, even though he admitted that active collaboration between newsrooms was still scarce. The separation of the two teams was more flexible in this new context, and production journalists helped in breaking news when needed. Even after more than ten years of evolution, online staff states that they still have not found *the* model of online journalism. "Internet changes so fast that it is difficult for a media company to keep up with this rhythm", justifies Sancha.

5.3. *laMalla.net*

The birth of *laMalla.net* in 1999 seems to be the story of some online journalism pioneers trying to make real their dreams. Lavinia, a young broadcasting company based in Barcelona and specialized in managing local TV stations, had been experimenting with the Internet since 1996. The president and former TV reporter, Toni Esteve, and journalist Oriol Ferran were among the promoters of the influential Grup de Periodistes Digitals and solid proponents of the most radical online journalism utopias. They just needed the adequate enabling factors to materialize them in a viable project.

In this context of utopian excitement, *laMalla.net* had some short-life experimental precedents in Lavinia. A multilingual directory of media websites was the first initiative, named Mediapolis. Under this project, in 1998-99 Oriol Ferran coordinated one of the first experiences of online-only radio and television in Spain. Focusing on local content related to Arenys de Mar, Esteve and Ferran's hometown, a group of young journalists produced original audiovisual reports mainly comprised of small pieces of interviews linked together to a main text in the Mediapolis website. These trials and the discussions around them were the genesis of the project Lavinia presented to the Diputació de Barcelona, an intermunicipal public administration. Since 1997, the Diputació had an information society commissioner, Anna M. Miró, who was committed to promote the use of the Internet among the town halls and citizens of the region. They wanted a portal to share local information and the proposal of Lavinia fitted well

into their objectives. Esteve recalls: "I think they did not understand that we were proposing a news medium, but they were sure that it would be useful to transmit an image of modernity". The converging interests, as both parts would fulfill some of their priorities, catalyzed the transformation of the exploratory online journalism experiments into a solid project. For the Diputació, the website introduced their information society policies into the scope of media, a field in which the commissioner's team had no experience, as their background was in engineering. For Lavinia, they would be able to have a significant budget to develop their ideas, something they deemed as unreachable if working on their own.

Nevertheless, the differences between the journalistic approach of Lavinia and the engineering and social service approach of the Diputació marked the initial years of the project, when defining the portal aims and services was an ongoing debate. The original requirement from the Diputació was providing tools to local institutions for them to publish relevant information. For Lavinia this meant putting into practice the utopia of a decentralized journalism with which users would be recipients as well as producers at the same time. The name "la Malla", synonym for *network* in Catalan, reflected both aims and, thus, there was no apparent conflict. However, journalists in Lavinia also wanted to create a core of journalistic work that could become a referential Catalan purely online news medium, together with the online versions of newspapers and broadcasters and the scarce online-only initiatives, such as *Vilaweb*. Esteve argues that in his view a public funded initiative was the only guarantee for a stable purely online media project in those times of uncertainty. This position echoes Bardoel's arguments (2002), who called for public subsidizing of online news

production to guarantee that they would accomplish the social function of journalism adequately, and Esteve finds parallelisms to the local radio initiatives in the 1980s: most of them only consolidated after having the financial and structural support from the town hall, and the Diputació played a key role in coordinating their technological evolution and professionalization when they created the XTVL (local television network) and COM Emissores (local radio network). However, in the case of *laMalla.net* the Diputació did not want its project to be seen as a competition by the rest of Catalan online media and therefore they never advertised the portal to promote its audience reach.

The initial definition of *laMalla.net* included not only a portal, but many other initiatives to stimulate the use of the Internet in a moment that it was still incipient in Catalonia: a program of itinerant digital teaching on a bus with computers, free e-mail accounts for citizens of the region, traditional TV and radio programs explaining what is the Internet. Then, there was the PIC (Punt d'Informació Compartida, or information sharing hub), a database and web content management system that allowed any registered agent (a town hall, a local association, a local broadcasting station) to upload texts, photos and audiovisual materials to the portal. With all this information, they wanted to offer a customized portal with local information for every municipality. Ideally, *laMalla.net* would have been the one-stop access point to all the local information in Catalonia, "but we only got half the way in developing all this", admits Toni Esteve. Quim Cardona was the web developer who designed the first CMS for *laMalla.net* and argues that there were not enough human resources to materialize these ideas. "We had big ideas, but it was very expensive to develop them. Finally,

reality rules, you cannot do everything you wanted". In fact, there was still another initial intention that only started to be partially completed through the years: integrating the production of the local broadcasting networks (XTVL and COM Emissores). "I think we have created many of these things, but they were not fully integrated into a single project easily, the actors in each area were not conscious of the fact that they could be part of a bigger concept", summarizes Esteve and recalls that at that time they talked about the Internet as the metamedium that would integrate all existing media and create a new way of doing journalism.

Oriol Ferran coordinated the preliminary phase of the project, in which objectives were defined and developed, but he did not want to assume the responsibility of being the editor. Actually almost everyone in Lavinia participated in the genesis of *laMalla.net* and some new people were hired to develop it and later on they stayed in the company with other responsibilities. Quim Cardona is a pharmacist with a passion for computers who had created an online news aggregator in 1998, a hobby that turned into a business and put him into the online journalism mainstream. Esteve knew him through the GPD mailing list and enrolled him in the project. Coherent with its local focus, the first edition of *laMalla.net* was online June 14th 1999, a day of municipal elections in Catalonia, with a core team of four journalists (students of Toni Esteve's online journalism course at the university, some of them already part of the Mediapolis project), a graphic designer and Cardona as a programmer.

The first online editor was Joan Francesc Cànovas, a veteran journalist who was Toni Esteve's teaching mate at the university. He led *laMalla.net* for a short period of time,

as his other responsibilities made him quit. He had not participated closely in the definition process and had his own vision of the portal, close to traditional media from perspective of Cardona, who substituted Cànovas as editor in October 1999. During the first months, they produced a daily edition, uploaded early in the morning, with news distributed in thematic sections named “channels”, a proposal coming from Toni Esteve's audiovisual background. The most veterans were “Locàlia”, covering local news, and “Digitàlia”, on new technologies. They created new channels every now and then and the number grew so much that the reporters felt overwhelmed. Once Cànovas left the project, Esteve and Cardona decided to downsize the portal to fewer channels and concentrate on the PIC, the shared information system. The leading of a person with a more technical profile helped in setting up a more robust CMS, completing functions that in the first months had been left aside. At the end of 1999 they also set up a statistics system which had a crucial side effect to the working routines. The reporters realized that those news which did not appear on the homepage did not have almost any audience. Everyone wanted to have their story up on the homepage and they decided to publish the news as they produced them, making the homepage evolve during the day with new stories getting the first positions and taking them down the page as more recent ones were published.

Some of the channels were actually produced by more or less external collaborators, with different results in quality and constancy. These were the first real application of the PIC spirit before it was developed as a tool. Actually, the PIC was to be the spine of *laMalla.net* in the initial project, but in the first months the portal had developed much more as a simple online magazine. When Lavinia started developing the PIC with

a new programmer under Cardona's supervision, they were aware that, in contrast to the process in local radio and television, this was a top-down approach: the portal would set the tools and then stimulate local institutions to use them. This never worked. Very few institutions got the routine of feeding the website. "The technology was there, but maybe not the social need", argues Esteve. It may be also argued that the concept of the portal for the online journalists in the team was defined according to their deeming of traditional media as referents, with news production by reporters as the core; this way the portal was much easier to define and put into work as a daily routine. The first online editor's background strengthened this position and even though Cardona worked on the development and the promotion of the PIC, it never was integrated into the daily routines of the online newsroom, giving it few chances to consolidate. Therefore, the brakes for a new form of horizontal journalism were not only outside, but also inside the project.

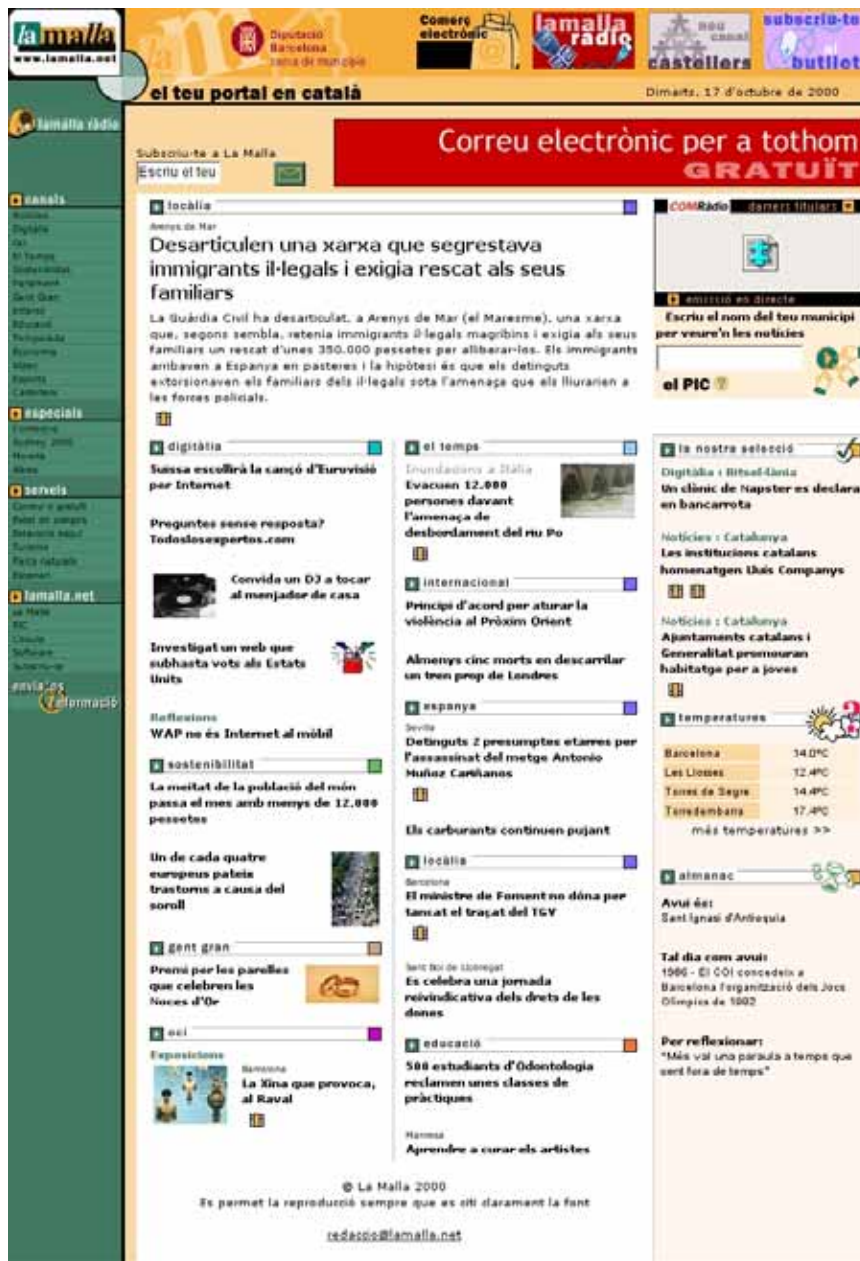
In 2000, during the big hype of the Internet, Lavinia started to sell its expertise in portal development to telecommunication corporations (*Eresmas* of Retevisión) and media companies (*Sport* of Grup Zeta). Many people in the team of *laMalla.net* turned into project managers of these new initiatives and ended up giving their places in the project to new journalists. Anna Garcia, the current senior editor of *laMalla.net*, entered in this second phase of the website. None of the initial reporters remains in the online newsroom. After consolidating a new website design and new CMS features (see Figure 8), Cardona himself left the project in the Fall of 2000 to co-ordinate the new CMS software division of Lavinia. Sílvia Llombart, a young journalist with background in radio and a very active member of the GPD (at the core of the

organizing committee of the 1998 congress), substituted the web developer as online editor of *laMalla.net* and the focus returned again on content rather than on development, as the CMS was already stable. She was asked to “shake” the website, define a clearer content strategy and make audiences grow. Even having this focus on content, Llombart led a new version of *laMalla.net* which added functionalities to the existing CMS such as users’ comments on news and customization of the homepage, following criteria of the online journalism utopias she had been actively promoting before entering Lavinia.

Esteve was conscious that Lavinia's growth could affect their first Internet project, and gave Llombart an important degree of autonomy, even separating physically the bigger company from the online newsroom, which stayed in the initial office while the rest of the people moved to a new, wider space. He values that the journalistic background of Llombart consolidated the project with good content and a clear identity, but he feels that many of the initial ideas had been left aside and news production has finally been the main activity of the portal. Actually, Llombart does not like to conceptualize *laMalla.net* as a portal anymore, and she prefers to talk about it as an online news medium (“diari digital” [*digital daily*]). Esteve acknowledges that to develop all the facets of the original project they would have needed a lot more human resources. The material limitations of the size of the team and the actual coherence between Llombart's perception of what *laMalla.net* should be and the previous evolution of the portal consolidated the journalistic core of the project. This does not mean that they neglected the exploration of participatory strategies. Llombart led many workshops around the region to show how to use the PIC, but from the online newsroom they

could not be constantly asking the institutions to produce information. They concentrated more on audience active involvement, not only through news comments, polls and forums, but also as content producers in special *minisites*: pictures of the world, literary writings, memories about historical moments in their anniversary.

Figure 8. Homepage of *laMalla.net* in May 2000



Source: www.archive.org

Nevertheless, traditional journalistic news production was surely the core. For Llombart, the main priority of *laMalla.net* since she took the project was gaining credibility as a professional news source. When they got some few more journalists they incorporated new channels and multiplied the daily production of news. Special events coverage also increased in quantity and content quality. They gained access to agency wires and subscription online newspapers and started to work more thoroughly every story. "We became a regular news medium", concludes Llombart. The fact that they worked with public support and without the pressure for revenue let the team in *laMalla.net* evolve and experiment at their own pace, always within the human resources limitations. Audience grew step by step thanks to mouth to ear of the users, a daily and weekly newsletter and viral marketing strategies on special occasions, such as original pro- and anti-Christmas online postcards that could be sent to friends.

Multimedia content was another utopia to be found in the initial project proposal. It was achieved by cooperating with XTVL, the local television network. At first, already in 1999, a reporter in *laMalla.net* newsroom encoded the news produced by the central newsroom of the TV network. In 2002 Lavinia set up portals for the television and radio local stations. Each station could have their own minisite and upload content through a CMS based on *laMalla.net* platform. This was integrated to the PIC, and *laMalla.net* online newsroom could pull news for their portal. The promotion of the use of these portals was a responsibility of the networks coordination teams, *laMalla.net* did not have to assume it. In radio the experience was quite successful, but few televisions responded with a frequent update of news. Video was even less viable, as stations did not have the software to encode their production into Internet formats.

The XTVL website coordinator encoded the videos created by the central TV newsroom and Anna Garcia was in charge of choosing and uploading to *laMalla.net* those she found newsworthy for the news website. The coordination was supposed to grow as the online newsroom was moved to the same space as the central TV network newsroom in September 2002, but besides some event coverage planning (if XTVL sent a reporter, *laMalla.net* waited for their story) and a more agile video sharing, each newsroom had its own routines.

When the time for the renovation of the contract with the Diputació came, in 2005, Llombart tried to redefine many of the things she would have liked to have before: a complete renovation of the technological platform, which would be open source and managed by a separate company; a programmer for daily technical assistance working in the online newsroom; new journalists in the team in order to have two of them in the weekend shift and another one mainly devoted to manage users' participation. In spring 2006 they released the new version of the website, a mere evolution in design but a significant extension of features that required the addition of new routines in the production cycle.

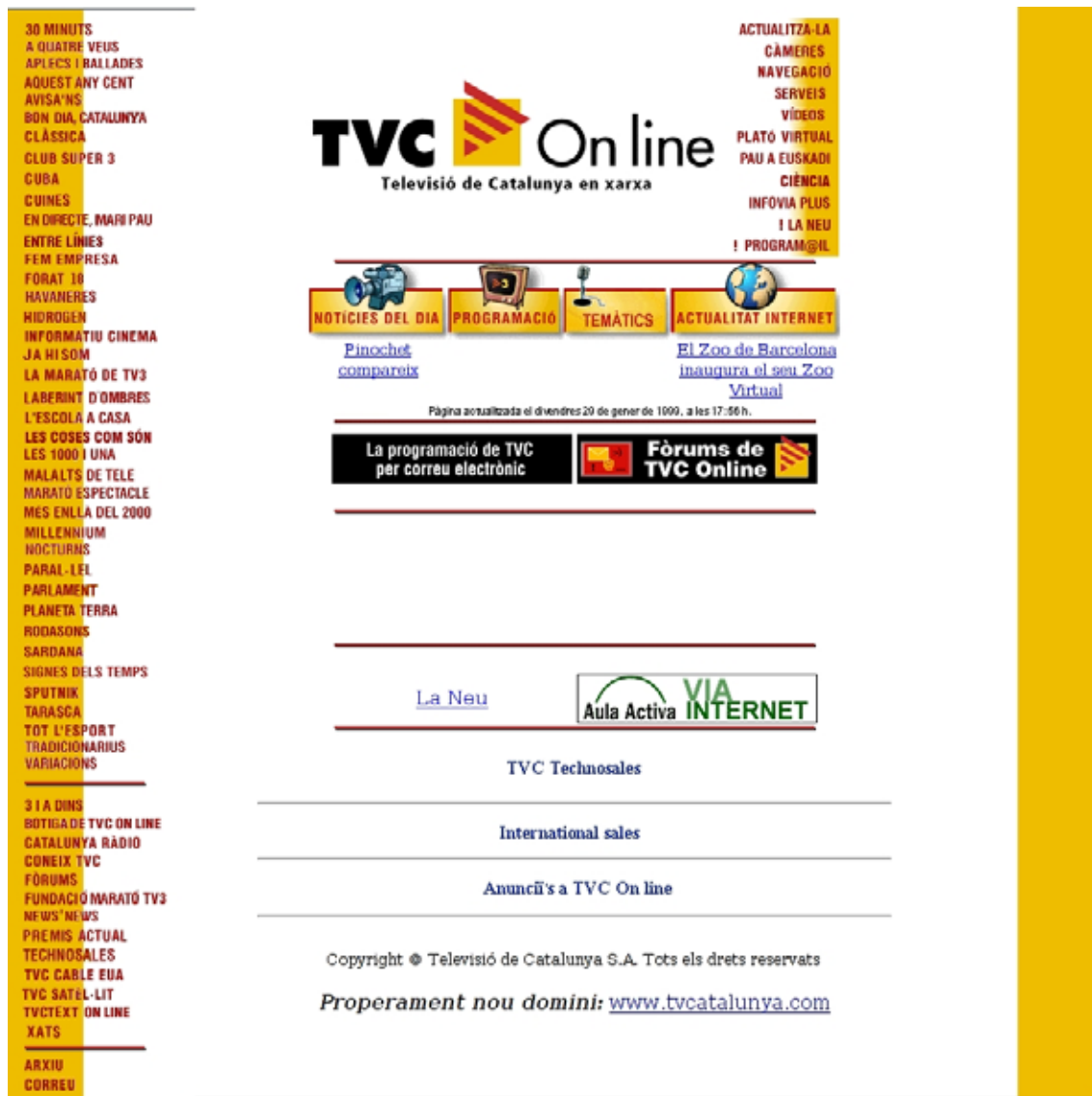
5.4. CCRTV

Televisió de Catalunya (TVC) was the first television in Spain to set up a website. It was in October 1995 and followed the model of US TV sites: programming guide, programs and series minisites, and information about the weather and traffic conditions. Later on, forums and chats were added (Luzón, 2001:23). Soon, the rest of TV networks in Spain offered similar online services. Whereas newspapers focused their online efforts on their news production, that was not a priority for broadcasters. In 1997, the website of *Catalunya Radio*, the other branch of CCRTV (the Catalan public broadcasting company), already provided a live transmission (Folch, 1997). In 2002, the CCRTV created two stand-alone news portals. Until then, the development of online journalism within the public broadcaster was a slow process where the traditional newsrooms showed a very aggressive attitude against the idea of the conceptualization of a new autonomous branch of online journalists besides radio and television.

As soon as 1998 there were initial talks about setting up a news portal of the television, but did not materialize in a project. That year, the first regular news contents on the *TVC Online* website were those from the automatic upload of teletext news, produced in the television newsroom since 1990. The most recent headline was promoted to the homepage of the website (Figure 9). The first experiments of original online journalism came in 2000: the *TVC Online* team produced a web dossier with information about the candidates and put online video reports from the television. As

they did some months earlier for the Catalan parliamentary elections, voting results were followed live online, with the same data and graphics as the TV program.

Figure 9. Homepage of TVC Online in 1999



Source: www.archive.org

In mid 2000, a separate company, CCRTV Interactiva (CCRTVi), was set up to manage the online presence of the broadcaster. The institutionalization of the Internet as a

third medium in the broadcasting company was a personal bet of the managing director, Miquel Puig, former commissioner for the information society of the Generalitat, the Catalan autonomous government. The team in CCRTVi, led by the online editor of the television website, August Puncernau, envisioned the creation of a stand-alone portal that would merge their television and radio news production onto the Internet through the work of an autonomous online staff. They conceived it as a new product with its own brand, *Catalunya Notícies*, but the whole proposal was too antagonistic for the conception of the Internet as a mass medium of radio and television executives. The competing definitions were that of a mere technical transmission channel to be added to the hertzian waves (dominant in the broadcasting newsrooms) and that of a new autonomous medium that would interplay with the existing ones (the position of CCRTVi). People in CCRTVi felt that TV news staff did not want them to become content producers and conceived them as mere technology providers. Furthermore, the tensions between radio and television were very strong and a joint product was seen as rejecting their respective personality. In this context of definition open conflict, the project had little chances to succeed and its development moved more in the area of power negotiation rather than in the area of product design.

In the meantime, Puncernau created the genesis of the news portal as a news section in the *TVC Online* website that he coordinated: a little team of four journalists, starting May 2001. There was one reporter per shift and they mainly worked in repurposing TV newscasts texts into the website. "We did not have time to check for agency wires, the news section was very closely linked to the television news", recalls Iolanda Garcia,

one of the reporters in that early online newsroom that still worked in the project in 2006. In the case of big breaking news, such as a terrorist bombing, the online reporter tried to get some information online from the wires as soon as possible, but the people in the TV newsroom did not appreciate it: "Every news text should be reviewed by a linguist and they asked me to wait until the TV story text was ready". Actually, Iolanda argues that TV texts were not always adequate for online reading, but they had too scarce resources to adapt them. The section, therefore, was understood as an extension of television news: the broadcasting newsroom definition of the Internet prevailed. The homepage of the site was redesigned to offer featured content: a highlight of a specific program that day, one news story, and a piece about new technologies. The rest of news were available in the news section, accessed through the main menu.

When the news portal project was mature enough, there was a change in the managing director position of CCRTV and Vicenç Villatoro, the incoming top executive, did not have his predecessor's passion for online media. CCRTVi had to compromise in this new context that restored the power back to the powerful traditional newsrooms, and the final decision was setting up two different brands, based on the existing radio (*Catalunya Informació*) and television (*Telenotícies*) news services brands. The two portals, online since June 2002, had a single newsroom with reporters hired by CCRTVi, but two editors, each coming from one of the broadcasting newsrooms (Joan Besson from the TV, Josep Maria Fàbregas from the radio) and two different addresses: www.catalunyainformacio.com and www.telenoticies.com. In fact, the content of the two portals was equivalent almost always, as the CMS was common and

the reporters replicated the same distribution of news on the homepage. The *TVC Online* homepage still featured headlines, updated by the online newsroom and linking to the news portals. From the beginning, the portals provided on-demand audiovisual news content from the broadcasters as an added value that other online news media could not offer.

“Having the strong brands of the public broadcaster news services has helped us a lot in becoming a reference for Catalan Internet users”, admits Besson. The online team remained in the television building, in a bigger room on the second floor, separated from the main newsroom, but they shared space with the children's daily newscast staff. Content was responsibility of the editors designated by the broadcasting news divisions, but the management of the evolution of the project was the concern of the journalists of CCRTVi. Actually, the editors of the news portals felt as autonomous from television and radio newsrooms as from CCRTVi, and they thought of the interactive division as a technology provider rather than as their strategic coordinators. In a way, none of the parts (broadcasting newsrooms, interactive company) superseded completely one another and none had complete control over the portals. Daily routines and some design decisions consolidated *de facto* the Internet definition of CCRTVi without the receding of any part in their positions. In this case, rhetorical closure was not the explicit victory of a definition over the others, but the quiet and probably unconscious result of an accumulation of actions that turned in habits.

The portal design was based in the newspaper websites, with different size headlines and photos and leads in the main stories, for that was the referential model for online

news: broadcasters had entered the online journalism field when dailies had already consolidated a text-driven model of news website. The format enabled space for more news than the *TVC Online* section, actually more than those produced daily by the television newsroom, the first reference as a heritage of the first phase of the project. Checking news agency feeds, which initially was an exceptional procedure, turned to be the initial routine and the information taken from the wires was expanded with TV or radio texts data afterwards. Furthermore, Fàbregas' experience in 24-hour radio brought a culture of immediacy into the newsroom. The initial core of journalists working for TVC Online was expanded progressively to keep up with a bigger production rhythm and autonomous newsroom routines were established. Fàbregas valued that the reporters were young, because they did not have veteran journalists' professional "vices" and adapted quickly to the Internet routines. In 2003, the Iraq war and the new 24-hour TV news channel of CCRTV let the editors increase furthermore the online newsroom and they reached fifteen reporters and three linguists (professionals that checked the quality of texts, see section 6.1) exclusively devoted to the news portals. "The broadcasting newsrooms finally understood that we were another newsroom, that we had our own product", states Fàbregas.

2003 was also the year in which another news portal was set up by CCRTVi, one devoted to sports news. It had its own staff, but the main shift was on the weekends. Thus, in the mornings during the week, the reporters of the main news portals had to feed the sports portal and viceversa in the evenings and weekends. There were some clashes between the two newsrooms, as journalists of Telenotícies.com and CatalunyaInformació.com complained that their text writing criteria were not shared by

the sports reporters. This was solved in 2005 as the sports portal consolidated and assumed all the production of sports news. Also in 2003, the main news portal started to provide live television transmissions in special events. The transmission of the special TV coverage of the Madrid bombings in the morning of March 11th 2004 was followed by many people who did not have a television in their office. Statistics of this and other days such as the 2003 Catalan municipal and parliamentary elections made the managers of the broadcasting corporation realize that the websites had a social impact.

A new change in CCRTV leadership resulted in another Internet enthusiast assuming the role of managing director. Joan Majó explicitly defended that the Internet was the third branch of activity of the public corporation. Both traditional newsrooms recognition and a more friendly management was perceived by the news portals editors as the sign that their project had consolidated as an autonomous news venture, differentiated from the broadcasters. But the fact is that it was in the most hostile context when the project had taken shape and defined its own routines and criteria. In material terms, 2005 seemed to confirm the perception of consolidation: the online newsroom was moved to the new building of CCRTVi and shared room with the rest of online content production teams for the first time. This was seen as a very positive step towards a better coordination between technical staff and online journalists by Ferran Clavell, the CCRTVi content director that supervised the relationship between both sides of the company.

During all the year they worked again in the project of a new single news portal. The

“You never stop looking for the best way to do online journalism. We have learned a lot these years, and now we have got some clear ideas that will be included in the next version of the website”, explained Fàbregas. *Telenotícies* and *Catalunya Informació* brands were joined into a unified heading of the website, and the name *Catalunya Notícies* of the initial project was not used even though the domain www.catnoticies.cat was active and used to host specials. The new portal would not be more autonomous than the previous ones. The brands of the television and radio newscasts were still there and a change in the direction of the online newsroom redefined the relationship with the offline counterparts: while Fàbregas had a strong discourse defending the autonomy of the online project, the incoming online editor, Joan Puighermanal, stressed the need to coordinate with traditional newsrooms: “We are their online window, it makes sense to coordinate our news agenda and criteria”. Coordination consisted mainly in Puighermanal phoning the 24-hour news radio and television heads throughout the day to share views on current events. Since access to radio and television news lists, texts and audiovisual contents had improved, it was easier for online journalists to use them as a source besides wires. Puighermanal acknowledged that he wanted his team to be within the broadcaster newsroom, to make coordination even easier. “We don’t really relate too much with the rest of CCRTVi, we have our own rhythm”, he admitted. “The ideal situation would be having a single newsroom producing radio, television and web stories, or at least the three teams working in the same room, but this is wishful thinking in a twenty-year-old institution. It’s not that easy to change structures”.

Figure 10. Homepage of the CCRTV news portal in May 2006



Captured by the researcher

The new portal version, presented in Spring 2006 (see Figure 10), integrated functionalities developed for other CCRTVi portals into the news website. The main change was that the homepage was much more flexible, but this meant more layout management work, which Puighermanal feared it could take time from a news production of a team that he felt it should be bigger. "But we know we cannot ask for more reporters", he regrets. Audiovisual materials, seen as their main competitive advantage, had an improved visibility on the homepage and repurposing of television and radio news was more systematic, as technical processing had also improved. However, the online newsroom structure did not change with the new version.

5.5. *Diari de Tarragona*

Regional and local newspapers in Catalonia entered the Internet gradually after the bigger dailies led the uncertain path. *Diari de Tarragona* was one of the latest to follow. In a centenary company (the newspaper was founded 1808) in which the computerization of the newsroom was done in the 1990s, online journalism was not a priority. This can explain why a project started in 2001 has already been started anew twice and has had three different management models: from an online team working close to the print newsroom with an off-the-shelf technological platform, to a full externalization of content production and technical development, passing through a very autonomous online newsroom with an in-house produced CMS. The fact was that the person in charge of the project in each of these phases had full autonomy to define the website model, as neither the company owner nor the newspaper editor felt able to take a decision about online journalism. Since personal and social factors truncated an initiative, the incoming project leader had a new perspective or background and gave the project a new direction, neglecting most of the previous experience.

The initial online project idea came from the art director of the newspaper, José Luis Mirondo, who felt very attracted by the possibilities of the new digital medium. In 2000 he put forward a proposal and newspaper editor Mikel Iturbe agreed to start working on the project. They already had the domain diaridetarragona.com, used for corporate e-mail, but there was no Internet expert in the company and they decided to hire an external consultancy company, Sarenet, to develop the website. Sarenet had an

standardized web production system that allowed an automatic exportation of the newspaper texts to xml, directly from the Quark xPress pages. Mirondo coordinated the project with the programmers of the consultant, but he looked for a journalist to work in the tasks of adapting the paper content to the website. Edurne Seco was young and with little experience in traditional journalism, but had a master in online projects management. She tried to have the whole newspaper online, including service information. Automating these special pages was not easy, but the result was a website that could compete with local online guides. Pictures were selected and uploaded manually. January 25th 2001 the first version of the website was released.

They paid a very big amount of money for a technological platform that had a predefined website layout and very rigid services. It was the time of the Internet hype and many web production companies provided very basic solutions as expensive products. Mirondo was not completely satisfied by the website structure, but they tried to take it as far as they could. There was a tool for updating news which allowed them to do last-minute coverage. In the website homepage these headlines appeared in a box on the right-hand column and open in a pop-up (see Figure 11). Soon after the website was online, another young journalist was hired in order to cover most of the day with two shifts. Wires were the main source for this last-minute news.

The close relationship between Mirondo and Iturbe made the online project a helpful complement for the print edition, but at the same time the online team had a big degree of autonomy to take decisions on the web content. Seco participated in the morning print newsroom meeting to know the issues of the day. The newspaper editor

Figure 11. Homepage of *Diari de Tarragona* website in April 2001

CONSELL COMARCAL DEL TARRAGONÈS

Premis Tarragonès
Sura, Eutyches, Floro

capdiari2.jpg

TARRAGONA 17 °
REUS 16 °
TORTOSA 16 °
SALOU 17 °

MERCADOS Al Cierre

Madrid	917,22	1,48%
Ibex35	9.601,80	1,57%
Ftse100	5.803	2,46%
Zurich-SMI	7.173,50	1,46%

Tamara, más de un mes desaparecida. Colabore en su búsqueda

¿Cómo se vive la Semana Santa religiosa en la costa?

Bájate la Portada

Lo + web

PORTADA

LA NOTICIA

IDEES
Editorial
Cartas al director
Revista de prensa
Artículos

LOCAL
Tarragona
Reus
Costa
Terres de l'Ebre
Comarques

PANORAMA
España
Mundo
Catalunya

ECONOMIA

ESPORTS

LA CONTRA

GUIA
Ocio y Cultura
Castells
Agenda
Cartelera

Holanda aprueba la eutanasia activa
Es el primer país del mundo en autorizar la medida

Después de convertirse hace unos días en el primer país del mundo que legalizó los matrimonios entre homosexuales, Holanda vuelve a hacer historia al pasar a ser también pionero mundial de la eutanasia legal. El Senado de los Países Bajos aprobó este martes la ley que autoriza la eutanasia y convierte así a este país en el primero que adopta una decisión de tal alcance sobre esta polémica práctica médica.

Cinco muertos y siete heridos al caer un autobús al río Viñoa en Ourense
Un niño de diez años entre los fallecidos al despeñarse el autobús por un terraplén de unos 40 metros

Uno de los siete heridos en el accidente acaecido esta mañana en la provincia de Ourense, al caer un autocar de pasajeros por un terraplén, se encuentra en estado muy grave, otro de ellos, grave, mientras el diagnóstico de tres de ellos es reservado, y leve el de dos.

ULTIMA HORA

20:00
[La Audiencia de Barcelona da la razón a un gimnasio que impedía a un transexual utilizar el vestuario de las mujeres](#)
La Audiencia de Barcelona ha avalado la decisión de un gimnasio de impedir el acceso a sus vestuarios de un transexual, al que ha invitado a utilizar el cuarto de lavandería, porque así lo requiere "la especial apariencia física" del afectado, lo que el tribunal no cree que sea discriminatorio.

19:56
[Dos osos matan al dueño de un parque recreativo en Alava](#)
Los dos osos que se encontraban en cautividad en un parque recreativo de la localidad alavesa de Sobrón atacaron esta tarde al propietario de éste y le causaron heridas que la

Source: www.archive.org

insisted on the importance of the reporters' collaboration, who should pass any dossiers and data they gathered during the day to the online team, in order to complement the stories: a reference was put in the paper article stating that readers could find graphics, documents and other related information on the website. They

used to produce a Flash infographics on one of the stories of the day. They hired an external web design studio in Cambrils, a nearby town, to create them. Joan Jordi, the designer and manager of the studio, confesses that they did not have any experience in journalistic products, but they accepted the challenge as the *Diari* was a big name to have as a customer. Seco talked to the journalist in charge of the story to get the data for the graphic and explained it to the designer. Infographics were first added to the web version of the story, based on agency wires and later on to the newspaper version of the story. Since only the biggest newspapers in Spain were providing such infographics at that time, it was a matter of pride for a local news website to be competing in this multimedia arena.

Mirondo was very creative and had ideas such as providing the web last-minute headlines in screens at the news stands. For Seco, even though those were highly utopian projects, they were a clear indicator that the project was meant to grow. Their main problem were the technical limitations of Sarenet's platform and their slow response time when there was a problem. They tried to put online every special issue of the newspaper, but for original online specials they felt very conditioned by the website layout and extended the contract of the web design studio to create minisites.

This first phase was unexpectedly over: in March 2001, just two months after starting the regular operation of the online news site, Iturbe and Mirondo left *Diari de Tarragona*, for a bigger regional newspaper hired them. Mirondo suggested the two journalists in the online team to write a memorandum for the newspaper owner for them to assume the leadership of the project. They were not comfortable with the

situation, but decided to work together, without hierarchies. They asked for a web programmer to have more flexibility, but before taking any step one of the online journalists left the company to coordinate a magazine. Seco was then alone and the new newspaper editor offered her Gustavo Hernández, a veteran collaborator in the print edition that had some Internet experience. The company looked for a person with a technical profile, as Edurne had suggested, to complete the team. In June 2001 Gerard Tost replied to their job advertisement and they liked his credentials: experience in web development and project management, entrepreneur of some successful online businesses (such as a Catalan banner syndication service). The company asked Seco, Hernández and Tost who was willing to lead the project, and the latest was the only one who wanted such a responsibility. One of the demands of the company owner was that the website should have benefits at mid term.

Tost analyzed the existing website and decided that they should start again from the scratch: for him, the Sarnet platform was too expensive and rigid and he was sure they could evolve faster having in-house programming. He hired a trainee programmer and taught him PHP to start developing a CMS. He also asked the web design studio to produce a brand new graphic interface for the website. Seco considers that Tost was too radical in starting the project anew. "He was too focused on renewing the technological platform and did not pay attention to the good content that had the first website". The xml extractor of the original platform was preserved, but the rest of the website was completely redeveloped. The new CMS did not have the possibility of attaching documents or adding photos to news, and many of the service sections were lost, as the new database was only prepared to include news stories. The design studio

was so absorbed by the new version development that they stopped producing infographics. Nonetheless, in the new version, breaking news took a more crucial role. The print edition content was on the homepage for just some hours in the early morning, until the morning shift online reporter started producing news updates. At 10:00, breaking news took the central space of the homepage and evolved during the day, making it much more dynamic. The print edition was accessed apart, through the main menu. "Internet users liked having this breaking news service: the audience doubled in two years", states Tost.

The process of renewing the website took much longer than desired. In Winter 2001, they had the new tool for breaking news production, but they still worked with the old design until Summer 2002, and even then the homepage had to be updated editing an html file. As in Mirondo's phase, Tost had many projects for the website, but many were never fully developed, because the pace of news made them obsolete before the technical part was ready (a special on the Afghanistan war, with lots of content ready to publish was never put online) or were abandoned after they were already designed (e.g. a very complete local sports section), because the human resources in the online team were too scarce. "Tost did not understand the rhythm of news... he was not a journalist and this affected the project", interprets Seco. She felt not motivated with the focus in breaking news production, the first development of the new website. She insisted on having original content for the online edition and proposed having a technology section. Tost finally negotiated with the newspaper to have a weekly page in the print edition that would be the basis for the online section, but this was never developed.

In a small company, personal relationships were an important key to understand the evolution of the project. With Tost, the close coordination between print and online editions was lost, as he did not have the relationship with the newspaper editor that Mirondo and Iturbe had. The online team was still located in the second floor, separated from the print newsroom, but while in Mirondo's time he was very involved in the print product management and they went downstairs very often, then they were more and more isolated. "There was not only physical distance, but also a mental one", recalls Seco. The website stopped being the complement of the print edition. As the print newsroom did not show interest in the website, Tost mainly presented his proposals to the company owner. In mid 2002 he started working on a subscription service and helped in the definition of the new digital documentation system for the newspaper, which he interpreted as a way of changing the working routines of the whole company, a way that allowed to have the website as the first publishing spot for print journalists.

The situation deteriorated quickly, as the print newsroom managers felt that Tost wanted to decide upon their work. They decided to move online reporters downstairs, to work with the print journalists, with the argument that this would help in having a closer relationship and coordination between the two products. Online journalists asked for stories under development that section editors of the print newsroom sent to them when the texts were ready in the evening. However, this new relationship also meant that online reporters were requested to produce stories for the newspaper, which they were happy to do. Furthermore, a newspaper subeditor, Carles Abelló, was supposed to supervise their work, and Tost interpreted all these changes as an attack to the

autonomy of his project. "I might have been too concentrated on technical developments, but the print newsroom was not respecting my authority upon the online staff", argues. Online journalists felt that Tost had forgotten about the daily work of the online edition and their motivation was minimal. Seco asked to be transferred to the print newsroom, in order to be able to do "real journalism".

Tensions remained for almost a year, until one of the newspaper subeditors, took the place of the old veteran editor. In September 2003 Tost was fired and the new newspaper editor entrusted a new proposal for the future of the website to the web design studio. "They were tempted of shutting the website down, but they knew they could not do such a thing in the 21st century", argues Jordi. The studio assumed the management of the online edition, with subeditor Abelló as content supervisor. The online team was dismantled and Seco and Hernández started working exclusively for the print edition. The studio created a new design and CMS for the website, starting anew again (Figure 12). They decided to stop publishing the print edition online, as the newspaper managers had the impression that the website was taking readers from the paper. "We did not want the website to compete with the newspaper", states Abelló. The mid-term idea was preparing a subscription version with the print content, something that was almost completely developed during Tost's phase, but it was never finished. A selection of the print edition news was uploaded every morning and after that two updates were made to the homepage during the day with material (wires, print stories under development) selected by Abelló. Therefore, there was no online newsroom anymore, and graphic designers were in charge of arranging news on the homepage, most of the time without any direct guidance from the newspaper

newsroom, as they were in a town 20 km (about 12 miles) away from Tarragona and Abelló was not always able to check the website. The subeditor sent them text documents with the stories and designers pasted them in the new CMS. "We want the journalists to concentrate on their work, make it easy for them", he argued.

Figure 12. Homepage of *Diari de Tarragona* website in June 2004

diaridetarragona.com edición última hora

PORTADA

16 de 18 del 16 de June de 2004

PAÑORAMA
Cinco investigadores contra el cáncer ganan Premio Príncipe de Asturias de Investigación
El presidente del jurado, el biólogo Julio Rodríguez Villanueva, hizo público a mediodía de hoy el acta del jurado, en la que se destaca que, desde sus distintas líneas de investigación, los científicos premiados se sitúan "en la vanguardia de la lucha contra el conjunto de enfermedades conocidas como cáncer, cuya resolución se ha convertido en uno de los más grandes retos científicos que afronta la Humanidad". El jurado reconoce el "enorme impacto" de su producción investigadora, "que supera las 256.000 citaciones bibliográficas", lo que supone "el más alto índice de referencias registrado en todos los campos de la comunidad científica internacional". El...

TARRAGONA
Ingresan en prisión seis detenidos por un alijo de 400 kilos de hachis
La Policía Nacional ha desarticulado una banda integrada por seis personas y se ha incautado de 400 kilos...

COSTA
Aprobado el colector para una de las zonas de mayor expansión de Altafulla
El Ayuntamiento de Altafulla ha aprobado el proyecto para la construcción de un colector de aguas...

REUS
Mañana abre la exposición sobre los 70 años de los museos de la ciudad
Mañana abrirá sus puertas en el Museu d'Art i Història una exposició que repasa los 70 años de historia...

COMARCALES
Versiónes contradictorias entre los dos procesados por un crimen en L'Arboç
El primer día del juicio que se sigue en la Audiencia de Tarragona, con un tribunal popular, por...

FERRES DE L'EBRE
Narbona anuncia que el viernes se derogará el PINN
La ministra de Medio Ambiente, Cristina Narbona, anunció hoy que el Gobierno aprobará el próximo viernes el decreto ley que...

CATALUNYA
CiU celebra la llegada del AVE en 2007 y la posibilidad de que pase por el aeropuerto
El diputado autonómico de CiU Josep Rull consideró ayer positivo el compromiso del Gobierno...

NACIONAL
Montilla: El gobierno del PP "no presupuestó nada" para el ITER en Vandellòs
El ministro de Industria, Turismo y Comercio, José Montilla, aseguró hoy que el anterior Gobierno...

INTERNACIONAL
Sadam ha sufrido tortura física y moral, según su abogado
El jefe del equipo de abogados defensores de Sadam Hussein denunció que el ex presidente iraquí ha sufrido torturas...

OPTICIÓN
Editorial
Roma locuta, causa finita

Editorial
Alex Saldaña

Editorial
Una presidencia para el Constitucional

Arzobispos
La Plunilla Antoni Coll i Gibert

ESPECIALES
Euro 2004 PORTUGAL
especial **Nàstic 03-04**
especial **Golf a la Costa Daurada**

ELECCIONES AL PARLAMENTO EUROPEO
especial **Juegos online**

L'humor de FAYO

¿busca piso?

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Source: www.archive.org

In June 2005 the newspaper editor was fired and Abelló also left the *Diari* to work as content manager of a competitor local media group. The new newspaper editor and his new team started to work in the redesign of the newspaper, while website renovation was a secondary priority. The designer studio continued doing the daily content production.

Significantly enough, beyond the radical shifts between the three phases in the evolution of the *Diari de Tarragona* online project, there is a common ground: online production of breaking news has always been a priority, the same key content as in *El Periódico Online* and *CCRTV*. A converging definition of online journalism seems to have gained consensus over time. Competition between online projects, the search for self-identity in contrast to traditional media and online newsroom sizes and routines are some crucial factors that have shaped immediacy as the main value of online news. Above all the other online journalism utopias, immediacy rules. Chapter 6 explores the specific connotations and consequences of this phenomenon.

6. Production cultures in the online newsrooms

Daily routines in an online newsroom tell a lot about the open paths of the development of the Internet as a news medium. It is a story of contradictions. A story of strong homogeneity trends in a scenario that shows extraordinary diversity in every detail, in which online journalism utopias are a constant reference at discursive level, and material conditions and journalistic culture play a crucial role in shaping a news production model that has few aspects in common with the utopias. The role and working routines of online journalists defined in the four cases analyzed vary significantly from newsroom to newsroom, but the weight of traditional journalistic culture, specially in non-online-only outlets, is so strong in the dialog with the Internet culture that there is common ground in defining the place of websites as a news product: immediacy as the main value in front of the rest of the media and over other Internet features.

The detailed exploration in this chapter of the routines and journalists' arguments to justify them highlights both the commonalities and the differences, which are sharper in the case of *laMalla.net*, the purely-online news venture. Each newsroom work organization, roles, tasks, definitions and products are understood as a sociotechnical system where there is a professional culture, a way of doing online news. This is why we suggest talking about "production cultures", in plural, because each case has its own singularities. Data for the analysis mainly derive from the newsroom observation stages in 2003 and the interviews in 2004. Some changes have occurred since then,

and they have been noted when relevant, but the core of the routines and values has not evolved drastically during the whole life of the projects. The observation moment can be regarded as the beginning of the maturity of the projects (truncated in Diari de Tarragona by internal conflicts, as explained in section 5.5): none of the models was fixed and considered definitive by the online journalists, but they had reached a point of certain stability.

After a general overview of newsroom roles, labour division and shifts (section 6.1), this chapter discusses the core activities in the studied online newsrooms, separated into relevant aspects of the online news production cycles:

- ☞ News updating policy: the news piece life-cycle
- ☞ Homepage management
- ☞ Newsworthiness criteria
- ☞ Newsgathering practices
- ☞ Newswriting and hypertext policies
- ☞ Multimedia content production
- ☞ User participation management

Journalists perform these activities indistinctively, the separation is just for analytical purposes and it is based on the qualitative interpretation of observation and interviews data (see section 4.2.4). We have concentrated in daily routines and left special events and products for the contextual analysis in section 7.3, as they have their own idiosyncrasy as innovation edges. Sections try to contrast findings with data from other empirical online journalism research, most of it based on surveys (see section 2.4) and

detect where online journalism utopias (described in section 2.3) are met and where are they disregarded or redefined by online journalists. The commonalities and differences with traditional journalism routines are also explored.

Text is the core of news production routines in these newsrooms. Photo and audiovisual content are mainly complementary. News update dynamics, based on immediacy as the main criterion, mostly constrain the rest of tasks. After a general description of newsrooms organizational structure, we analyze production rhythms and explain the news life-cycle. Homepage management is one of the most singular routines of online news production and a section is devoted to analyze its logic. Newsworthiness criteria remain close to those of traditional journalism, while newsgathering processes are profoundly affected by the continuous news update pace of the newsrooms. Agency wires almost become the sole source for most of the news production. Selection and fact-checking are simplified to risky extents that threaten online journalism to become not a new original form of newsmaking that compensates some of the drawbacks of traditional journalism, but a less quality version of traditional news production. Finally, we evaluate hypertext structure in news, multimedia content and interactive features of websites. Reaching conclusions, the research reveals that most of the online journalism utopias are not developed in the economical, technological and cultural context of the analyzed newsrooms.

6.1. Newsroom roles, labour division and shifts

The structure and dynamics of online media teams in the four cases are the silent result of accumulated decisions in a wide range of areas: web and content management systems (CMS) design, content and updating policies, quality check procedures and budget considerations. When I entered the newsrooms in 2003 many decisions had already been taken and translated into a specific labour division and working routines. The logic behind many of these organizational arrangements was not always transparent. Interviews and observation of the processes of decision taking during my stage allowed me to witness some of the mechanisms of change in the projects and understand the social construction of online newsrooms.

Online teams tend to be really small if compared to traditional newsrooms. Finberg and Stone (2001) found that of 72 US online news organizations 75% had less than ten journalists, 56% fewer than five and 25% just one person in charge of web content. If other labour profiles that contribute to a website (ad sales, technical staff, graphic design) are added to the count, numbers are still very low: Arant and Anderson (2001) found an average of six workers in US online divisions of newspapers, while Flemish and Dutch online newsrooms had an average of four people (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:22,24). In the main Catalan online media, 2004 data shows a range that varies from one to seventeen member teams (Figure 13). In the case studies of this dissertation, newspapers had less journalists working on daily news production: two at *Diari de Tarragona*, three at *El Periódico Online*, six at *laMalla.net* and eight at *CCRTV*.

El Periódico also had five journalists devoted to online production of the print edition, web services and specials. Besides this core, other crucial tasks for the development of the projects were performed by professionals in the company not exclusively devoted to the news websites. *CCRTV*, *laMalla.net* and *El Periódico* online news sites were

Figure 13. Labour profiles in leading Catalan online media projects (2004)

	Reporters	Web programmers	Graphic designers	Marketing	Editors	Other	Total
<i>Online newspapers</i>							
<i>El Periódico</i>	7	2	1	3	2	-	15
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	8	1	1	-	1	-	11
<i>El Punt</i>	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
<i>Online broadcasters</i>							
<i>CCRTV</i>	11	varying	1	varying	2	3	17
<i>COMRàdio</i>	5	1	1	-	1	-	8
<i>Ona Catalana</i>	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
<i>Online-only ventures</i>							
<i>VilaWeb</i>	4	4	3	1	2	1	15
<i>e-notícies.com</i>	4	3	2	1	2	-	12
<i>laMalla.net</i>	6	1	1	-	1	-	9

Source: Díaz and Domingo (2005).

produced by companies with other websites, and therefore web programmers worked for the project only when needed and were located away from the workplace of journalists. Graphic designers had a closer relationship to the projects, with one person

working almost exclusively for it, and even being physically in the newsroom in the case of *laMalla.net*, the most involved in daily production. *Diari de Tarragona* was the other way around: the programmer worked side by side with the online editor and graphic design was outsourced to an external studio.

To this structure, in the case of *El Periódico* and *CCRTV* we have to add the linguistic teams. At the newspaper they had the responsibility of polishing the automatic translation to Catalan of the stories published in Spanish by the online journalists. The bilingual website (mirroring the print edition) had the Spanish version as its first product, and the Catalan one was only kept up after the linguists had finished their task. This was quite agile, as an alert pops up in the linguists computer screen when a new story was published by the journalists. In the case of the broadcaster website, the figure of linguists paralleled the structure of the traditional newsrooms, too. Linguists were in charge of guaranteeing the quality of news texts in terms of grammar, lexicon and syntax, as well as homogeneous criteria in foreign names and journalistic conventions. In normal circumstances, every news story was reviewed by them before it was published. If the piece was regarded as important and urgent to be promoted to the homepage, the reporter told so to the linguist and he/she prioritized that piece and let them know when it had been corrected. This accelerated the publishing cycle. Linguists also re-reviewed published news when a reporter edited or updated them. Usually the reporter told the linguist where the changes were located. Only in very rare occasions reporters published the story without having a linguist correcting it beforehand.

We found editors with different profiles leading the online projects: a more marketing and technology oriented in *Diari de Tarragona*; journalists with solid technological knowledge in *El Periódico* and *laMalla.net*; and journalists with little technical skills in *CCRTV*. As highlighted in the history of the project, in 2003 the priority of Tost at the *Diari* was the development of a new CMS and subscription system. He stayed in the upstairs floor alongside the programmer, while journalists worked at a desk placed in the middle of the print newsroom. This structure was quite similar to that of *El Periódico*, where the online editor and the online production team were in a basement room of the building while breaking news journalists shared a table at the print newsroom beside the coordinating staff of the newspaper. *CCRTV* had its two editors at the online newsroom, separated from the television newsroom. In the case of *laMalla.net*, online journalists, including the editor, shared space with the local television network newsroom.

The location of the members of the online teams, namely their distance among them and with the traditional newsroom, may be important to understand the working routines and internal communication logic. Even in a digital environment, sharing the same office space or not may affect the intensity and quality of relationships.⁵² Scholarly literature has particularly surveyed whether online and offline newsrooms shared space, but no consistent patterns have been identified. In 1999, 80% of newspapers surveyed said that their online staff was completely separate from newspaper staff, but in smaller newspapers only 23% were separate (Singer *et al.*, 1999). Kopper *et al.* pointed out the tendency to reintegrate initially independent

⁵² The implications of location of online team members in the four cases will be discussed in chapter 7.

newsrooms, while European newspapers “seem[ed] to prefer the alternative”, having separate staffs for online and offline products (2000:508). “[In the Netherlands] The online departments of broadcasters operate as a separate branch of the main organization, whereas newspapers tend to integrate the Internet desks with the regular newsroom” (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:24). This last case echoes the ones analyzed in the present study if we focus on journalists working on online news production.

“Like many of my generation, I was pretty much self-taught. I learnt what I know about the Internet by myself, sharing findings with friends. Mine is a transition generation”, states Joan Escofet, political reporter at *laMalla.net*. That's the profile of most of the online journalists in the four newsrooms. Communication graduate education has just recently started to integrate Internet news production as a comprehensive part of the curricula. Most of the reporters had entered the project being very young, with little experience both in journalism and in the Internet. Many did their first steps in traditional media, but soon found their opportunity to consolidate in the online version or in an online-only venture. They learnt by doing and, while technical skills were assumed to a basic level quite easily, some still feel insecure about professional criteria: “Everyone has to fill up all the sections of the website with news. It doesn't matter what issues you like or you really know about. Sometimes you feel very lost writing about issues you don't know nothing about. You try to have a coherent story, but you may have no idea and just can hope that the guy who wrote the agency wire does know what he is talking about. We lack background...”. “I feel we tend to produce too many news because we have many doubts about what it is important. You are afraid to take wrong decisions and opt for choosing everything”,

reflected another reporter. Brannon quoted the online editor of USA Today Online to show a similar situation in United States online newsrooms: "We give people a lot of responsibility, and sometimes that is good and bad. We'll have a 22-year-old kid here, all by his lonesome on Saturday or Sunday and [we just hope that if] something huge happens, they can recognize a big story when it happens" (Brannon, 1999).

A second smaller group of online journalists present in some of the cases were veteran traditional reporters that had moved to the online project in search of a quieter pace or forced by the managers. They had much more trouble dealing with technical tasks, but they assumed as quickly as the younger journalists that "the Internet is a different medium from the rest", as one of them put it. McCombs (2003:76) found that the mixture of young and experienced journalists is one of the common factors of successful US online projects, while online editors in the US and Ireland valued journalistic skills more than technical (Brill, 2001; O'Sullivan, 2005). However, in the Catalan cases veteran journalists were not regarded as positive for the development of the online edition.

According to the data available on European research, it is usual to find a younger average age in online newsrooms than in traditional ones. In the Netherlands, 100% were between 26 and 35 years old; 62% in Flanders were under 35 years old, and 60% were between 25-34 years old in Germany (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:22-24). Quandt *et al.* (2003) pointed out that the average online journalist in Germany was 35 years old, closer to other media, but the salary was significantly lower. Sandoval and Yuste (2005:589), referencing some of the non-academic surveys, which are the only actual

data about Spanish online journalists report a similar situation, with the typical age around 26-30 years old. Low salaries and precarious contracts are common in online media in Catalonia and Spain, resulting in a high job mobility, which was also detected in the Netherlands (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:24). Given this situation, Alonso (2005:532) argued that “the labour conditions of online journalists are not the best culture broth for information technologies development”. In the four online newsrooms, differences in salaries and job satisfaction in comparison to traditional journalists were a recurrent coffee-break issue. At CCRTVi union representatives had a hard negotiation with the management to set up a labour general agreement that would get them closer to the conditions of their radio and television newsrooms mates.

Online newsrooms of traditional media distributed their human resources over time to maximize the range of hours when the website would be updated, trying to get close to the permanent-update utopia. The drawback was that this strategy reduced dramatically the number of journalists who were actually working on news production at any given moment (Figure 14). In the middle of the day there were three reporters and a trainee at the *CCRTV* online newsroom, but the night shift just had one. The logic was that of adapting to the rhythms of newsworthy activities. At the time of the observation, in the broadcaster online newsroom there were three overlapping shifts, expanded to four with a night shift to complete 24-hour update during the Iraq war. Mornings were quiet and with several free computers, afternoons were more intense. At 7:00 two journalists started the daily routines and they ended their shift at 15:00. The second shift started at 12:00 and worked until 20:00, adding one more journalist. A third shift covered from 15:00 to 23:00 with two reporters. The night shift worked

from 23:00 to 7:00, and usually stayed until the morning reporters came in.⁵³ The overlapping made shifts change very smooth and progressive. They enjoyed coffee breaks, resting for a while of the daily routines, but editors did not like them to leave the wires without someone revising them, because they could be late at publishing new breaking news. This is why they usually brought in the coffee to the newsroom. For lunch, around 15:00, a second shift reporter usually stayed at the newsroom. For dinner they usually did not remain at the newsroom and went together to the company cafeteria, but if it was a busy evening they skipped dinner and waited until going back home to have it. For weekends, there was a special shift of three stable journalists. Rhythm was much more relaxed compared to the weekdays pace, but they worked 10-12 hours instead.

Figure 14. Working shifts in the analyzed online newsrooms (2003)

<i>El Periódico</i>	8:00-15:00 (2)	12:00-19:00 (2)	18:00-2:00 (1)	
Production team				
Breaking news team	9:00-16:00 (2)		16:00-23:00 (1)	
<i>CCRTV</i>	7:00-15:00 (2)	12:00-20:00 (1)	15:00-23:00 (2)	23:00-7:00 (1)
<i>Diari de Tarragona</i>	9:00-16:00 (1)	15:00-22:00 (1)		
<i>laMalla.net</i>	8:00-17:00 (2)	10:00-20:00 (4)		

Note that shifts in most cases are overlapping and therefore there are moments with journalists of more than one shift working at the same time. Numbers in brackets indicate reporters in each shift.

⁵³ This night shift was preserved as the new 24-hour news television channel started in September 2003, but it was finally eliminated in 2004. However, the other shifts were reset to cover 19 hours a day, from 6:00 to 1:00.

At *laMalla.net* they sacrificed some hours of updating to have a more cohesive newsroom, with several hours when almost all the reporters shared space. The first shift started at 8:00 and lasted until 17:00 and the second shift started at 10:00 and ended up at 20:00, with some little coffee breaks and a short lunch break in between, when usually everyone stopped working and gathered at a little kitchen besides the newsroom to chat. One person was in charge of the weekends, but she worked on Fridays and Mondays as well in order to be integrated in the team. She produced not only breaking news and sports stories, but also atemporal pieces for some thematic sections that were to be published through the week. This weekend shift was not set up in the first stage of the project, but eventually, for they thought they needed this permanent updating as the news focus of the portal matured. If very important news broke outside of the daily schedule, a reporter or the online editor herself updated the website from home. *LaMalla.net* was the only newsroom having regular team meetings: every Monday at noon all the reporters met to plan the week ahead. Each one explained their story ideas, they discussed the controversial one and agreed for coverage criteria and assignments, and they also talked about the development of special issues and the weekly poll. The online editor suggested issues she had collected which had not been put forward by the reporters.

At *El Periódico*, they had two breaking news shifts: 9:00 to 16:00 with two journalists, and 16:00 to 23:00 with one. The online production team had three overlapping shifts of two reporters from 8:00 to 23:00 and after that the person managing the paper content upload to the website stayed until 2:00 or 3:00. Weekends had minimum resources, and reporters rotated this responsibility: one person at breaking news and

one at online production. At *Diari de Tarragona*, they had single-reporter shifts from 9:00 to 16:00 and from 15:00 to 22:00, rotating in the weekend shift.

Small online newsrooms do not allow a developed role hierarchy. A single journalist usually assumed further more responsibilities than a traditional reporter: wires selection, news writing, photo and audiovisual material editing, online publication and homepage updating are common tasks. Instead, they did not perform many of the traditional newsgathering tasks.⁵⁴ . Editors did not have a continuous involvement in news selection and hierarchy at any of the online newsrooms, even though they had the last word if doubts arose. The work of online editors was a mixture of mid-term project evolution management, external and internal public relations and editorial supervision. When they were at the newsroom, journalists asked them for advice in handling a news story in terms of focus or newsworthiness, and proposed them homepage updates when they implied a changing in the position of the main stories of the day, but autonomy was the rule for journalists when taking decisions. At *CCRTV*, Joan Besson was also manager of the Catalan news agency ACN and did not usually intervene in newsflow supervision. He answered or redistributed users' e-mail messages. Josep M. Fàbregas was more engaged in daily news production and specials coordination, but most of the editorial decisions were taken by so-called *subeditors*, reporters who were in charge of managing the homepage. As Franquet (in press) already pointed out, *CCRTV* is, among Catalan traditional media companies, the one

⁵⁴ Actually, the Catalan word used in the four online newsrooms to name the journalists was "redactor", the person who writes. Obviously, they performed more tasks than news writing, but the label is significant taken into account that in Catalan the word "reporter" also exists and is mainly used for journalists that go out to the streets to cover events and explore issues. In this dissertation we have used the English word *reporter* to refer to journalists that do not have the managing role of online editors. The concept *journalist* refers to both online editors and reporters.

that “has defined the most complete and organized structure for its online newsroom, with an adequate dimension in regards to its objectives”. There were two clearly separated roles among online reporters, with just a few of them (usually one per shift) being able to update the homepage. The delicate ordering system on the homepage, based on numbering the headlines, may have reinforced the verbalized reason for this role: “It is the guarantee that the homepage will be consistent during every shift and across shifts, as one person supervises all the produced news and can better decide what needs to be promoted”, explained a subeditor. However, as subeditors were actually reporters and had also the duty of writing stories, they were often overwhelmed and admitted that this made them make some mistakes, like overlooking a breaking story or taking a wrong focus on an event. When the editor in charge of the website content was at the newsroom he could participate actively in the editorial decisions, but without usually doing the technical work of updating the homepage.

In the small online teams of newspapers breaking news journalists were *de facto* editors, as they had to be constantly taking editorial decisions on their own, with slight supervision from the print coordinators, who had actual responsibility on content published online. Singer *et al.* (1999) found that US online managers valued editing higher than reporting skills, which would be consistent with the nature of the most usual tasks in the analyzed newsrooms. Except for *laMalla.net*, online journalists do not usually do traditional reporting (interviewing, covering events, searching for original sources), but they mainly select and edit copy from agency wires. Selecting texts (90%) and editing them (60%) were also the main activities carried out by Dutch online journalists (Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002). Reporting and generating story ideas

were not deemed as important by US online managers, as 75% of the online newspaper sample had no original content for the websites (Brill, 2001). 80% of German online journalists reported that their main tasks were writing, conducting online investigations (much more than offline newsgathering), and selecting and editing news of news material from wires and press releases (Quandt *et al.*, 2003). Researchers pointed out that “most online journalists had the pressure of permanently updating the content” (Quandt *et al.*, 2003): 30% said they updated their website several times an hour and 31% several times a day.

In our cases, news update policies, with a culture of immediacy particularly rooted in the three online newsrooms linked to traditional media, together with the scarce human resources, are also the main reasons for this limitation in journalistic tasks (see section 6.2). “Even in a boring day I do not have a minute of rest”, stated a journalist working alone on news updates in his shift. At *El Periódico*, the online team as a whole produced between 40 and 60 online stories a day; *laMalla.net* and *Diari de Tarragona* published around 40 (with very different sizes of the online newsroom) and *CCRTV* over 120 with 50 audio and video clips. Singer warned about the risks of productivity promoted by digitalization and the culture of immediacy. The web, in fact, allows to broaden the number of stories to be published, but this may lessen the gatekeeper selection rigor and may threaten the quality of news stories: “The quantity of the news product increases but its quality is likely to be diluted” (2003:153). Verifying information is difficult “amid intense pressure to get it out” and therefore she claims that “the potential for speed makes professional judgement regarding the news more vital than ever” (2003:153). Online managers in the four cases admitted that news

production thoroughness was not easy to achieve with human resources shortage and some reporters confessed that they did not have time to verify most of the wires.

Diari de Tarragona online reporters, alone in their shifts during my stage, actually left breaking news update aside when they had assignments from the print newsroom. "You cannot be doing everything at the same time", a reporter justified. One morning the reporter could not update the website from 10:22 to 12:10, then he posted four news to the web, and eventually he could not post any other story until 14:30. He was preparing an interview and other stuff for the print edition throughout the morning. Over time, these assignments were not an exception, but a routine, part of the dismantlement process of the online edition.

At *laMalla.net* there was a sharply different work distribution in comparison to online newsrooms in traditional media: each journalist specialized in a limited number of thematic areas (usually three) and worked mainly with original sources, as agency wires were not specialized enough for most of the channels in the news website. "We are very autonomous, everyone with their own topics, and this gives you a freedom that I appreciate very much; but at the same time we communicate a lot with each other, passing stories we find that are related to another one's section", told me one reporter. Each reporter had the responsibility of keeping his/her thematic channels updated and of putting the headlines on the homepage, at his/her own criterion. In a way, this autonomy was the same that online journalists in the newspapers had, but with the crucial difference of specialization, which let the journalists work longer on each story, with less pressure for immediacy. This different status of *laMalla.net*

reporters was visible for users of the website: it was the only case where each story was signed with the name of the author. Online journalists in the other online news sites were anonymous for users.

CCRTV had only some online journalists with a priority on particular issues, such as local news or sports. The local news specialist was supposed to write, on a daily basis, one story about as many of the 41 Catalan “comarques” [*counties*] as possible. These specializations were eliminated in 2005 and substituted by semi-automatic feeds: from ACN for local news and from the CCRTVi sports portal (born in 2003). In every shift there was an informal and very broad assignment of issues to each journalist, but a single reporter would seldom follow systematically a single developing event. Big issues such as the Iraq war or an electoral campaign usually had a clearer assignment of journalists in every shift. Beyond these broad criteria, each reporter had access to the same database of news sources and a great deal of autonomy to select the issues to be turned into a story. Only trainees did not have this prerogative. Here, and also at *laMalla.net*, specialization was a flexible organizing criterion that would disappear if the urgency of breaking news demanded more hands or the specialist was not at the newsroom at that moment.

In newspapers online newsrooms there was no chance for specialization, as it is the case in 73% of online journalists in Germany (Quandt *et al.*, 2003). Brannon pointed out the consequences of the lack of specialization in US online newsrooms in the words of a manager: “Everybody has the ability to do everything. There is no specialization (...) I think it's good in terms of that it makes people interchangeable when you're

looking at scheduling or you're looking at what needs to be covered when by breaking news. I think it's bad because you don't have the expertise that you'd like to have sometimes" (1999). Quality and coordination issues also arose in the online newsrooms of traditional media. "We produce lots of news and usually we are overwhelmed. We cannot take care of all the issues. Everybody does a little bit of everything and there can't be 100% coverage of a developing event. Some news pass by with just 10 lines when they could have been worked more thoroughly", explained a reporter. In a shift with two journalists, they sometimes did not communicate too much, resulting in the production of parallel pieces on the same issue. A reporter usually started his shift by reviewing the work of his peers in the previous shift, and comments: "They are working to the minute, so it is normal that they would miss something. Internet is instantaneous, therefore it is good that the peers review each other". After finding a news story that did not have the right focus ("That is not today's headline"), he complained that he could not be editing every single news story of the previous shift. In some cases, journalists were too busy to notice that the same issue had been covered several times during the day by different reporters and the website had three pieces on an event, one of them on the homepage and the rest buried in secondary pages. They usually avoided this problem by talking often among them, announcing what they have found and asking if anybody else had worked on it already, but shift changes sometimes broke this internal dynamic.

At *El Periódico* the online production team not devoted to news updating had another set of working routines. In the morning, they enhanced the paper online version linking together related news, forums and specials. They also managed the production and

content updating of specials. In the afternoon, they focused on paper supplements web versions and forum management. One person stayed at the newsroom each night to manage the paper content upload to the CMS. It did not seem to be a very stimulating task: "If I had to do the paper upload for three months in a row I would go nuts", stated one of the journalists. I asked them if they would like to produce original content. David Sancha admitted that they mainly worked on "repurposing content", but automating this process, as in the early stages of the project, did not guarantee a good online edition of the newspaper. They devoted a strategic importance to the print content on the website as they regarded it as the most visited part of the site.

In other studies, non-traditional journalistic tasks also take most of the worktime of online reporters in newspapers. "New journalistic tasks that already have large significance are processing and answering e-mails (82%) as well as moderating interactivity through message boards, discussion forums and chatrooms (28%)" (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:23). Technical processing of content also demanded a lot of the journalists' time, as already noted by Brannon (1999) and further explained in section 7.1. Pauluseen (2004) calculated that technical work took more than one hour of daily work of 55% of Flanders online journalists. The online editor was not satisfied with the dual model and, in fact, *El Periódico Online* made its internal organization more flexible in 2005 when all the team was back together upstairs, among the newspaper staff. Members of the team acknowledged that the previous arrangement, with the production team in a basement room, did not favour internal communication among the two teams, and they had their own autonomous routines and rhythms. Before the change, their aspiration was to create a more compact online newsroom, without two

separated groups, more autonomy in regard to the traditional newsroom, capable of producing more original content. "The basic pillar of the website is the print edition content. This shall continue with the same quality, but we could add more to it: not just wires, but also advancing paper content of the next day, if it is not a scoop. We may need to restructure to do that. We certainly now devote too many resources to web management and very few to news production", summarized David Sancha. However, even though the new situation allowed to rotate reporters in production and breaking news tasks, the routines remained mostly unchanged in the first year after the change.

Most of the conclusions in Brannon's ethnographic study parallel the picture described above: "Staff members were adjusting to a new medium. They used different tools, requiring a broader way of thinking. They were time-crunched and often failed to take a further step to develop content suitable for the medium. They appeared to be mired in a cut-and-paste, chase-in-haste comfort zone. They were from various media backgrounds. Many were unexperienced at any medium, much less this fledging one" (Brannon, 1999). Scarcity of human resources, lack of specialization and time pressure are common places. In this context, material conditions make it not easy to explore online journalism utopias and immediacy seems the "comfort zone", the reachable meeting point between traditional journalism values and the Internet. "We would like to have original audio and video on the website, more multimedia content. Users like that, but we need more journalists to do that. This is the first thing we need: we have a lot of channels we update every day and reporters cannot assume much more than this. We can't do more with the present team", explained Anna Garcia, *laMalla.net*

adjunct editor,⁵⁵ an argument that other interviewees in the four cases also pointed out. She was the person in charge of reading and redistributing e-mails reaching the generic newsroom address and publishing video material, besides writing content for two sections and overseeing the integrity of the homepage. In 2005 they hired a journalist to work only in users' interactivity management.

At *CCRTV*, like in *El Periódico*, online editors thought that restructuring the newsroom would allow them to be more efficient. In the case of *CCRTV*, the intended move was towards having reporters specially devoted to interactivity issues and multimedia content: "They are so busy producing news, news, news, that this added value features are now very difficult to maintain. We are thinking of having the reporters producing less news and having other concrete responsibilities", suggested Fàbregas. Online newsrooms managers, therefore, were not satisfied with the structure and size of their teams, but making changes took a long time. Obviously hiring more people needed the approval from the company, which was hard to get, but internal organization may seem easier to change. Nevertheless, *laMalla.net* had news content as a priority to gain the status of a "regular news medium" and the small team did not allow much more. "From the beginning we tried not to depend always on breaking news. You can't avoid covering a terrorist attack in Madrid, there are hard news that have to be there. But the fact is that there is a strong dynamics that tends towards breaking news production. I would have liked journalists to dynamize users as their main role, but they understand much better a classic role of content producer, this is

⁵⁵ "Redactor en cap" [*leading reporter*] in Catalan. We have translated it into English as *adjunct editor* because it describes their task better than the literal translation and is more coherent with the use of *online editor* as manager of the online news site.

not easy to change”, reflects the founder of the project Toni Esteve. The focus on breaking news was too strong in *CCRTV* to allow explorations of other production rhythms. The first change needed was in the philosophy of the news portals. At *El Periódico* and *Diari de Tarragona* the online managers did not have enough autonomy to make structural decisions. In the former, changes needed the newspaper editor’s approval. In the latter, the evolution was towards the opposite direction –the dismantlement of the online newsroom– also by the decision of the newspaper editor.

“When the 400 MSNBC journalists re-package what 1200 NBC journalist produce, does that render online journalists as multi-media technicians, simply processing the input from the *real* journalists? Or will there a need for genuine journalistic skills and occupations among the producers of online content?”, asked incisively Kopper *et al.* (2000:508). Research shows that online journalists are very convinced that they are doing something new, something different from traditional news media. 74% of the Flemish online journalists surveyed by Pauluseen agreed that online journalism is a distinct form of journalism and almost all of them thought it was complementary to traditional media (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:22) while “78% [Dutch online reporters] feel strongly that online journalism is developing next to print and broadcast as a new, distinct professional type of journalism” (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:24). So do journalists in the analyzed cases.

90% of German online journalists declared being satisfied with their jobs (Quandt *et al.*, 2003), as most of the US reporters surveyed by Brill (2001). Many of the journalists in the four cases analyzed in this study also reported being satisfied, overall, when

asked. *LaMalla.net* editor, Sílvia Llombart perceived self-confidence in her team: "They are very professional and they know they are doing a good news medium". McCombs points out that one of the factors of job satisfaction in online media might be a positive personal attitude towards change: "You know [traditional] reporters that do a story or two a day, and one of the things I like about my job is the way I'm constantly doing something different", said one of her respondents (McCombs, 2003:79) satisfied with the demanding and multi-skilling challenge of a project rich in multimedia features: "All felt they are developing something new, many had a strong sense that they were pioneers of a new media form" (McCombs, 2003:62).

However, many times I could hear bitter accounts about lack of motivation. "This is a very unrewarding job. It's good because you know you'll work no more than seven hours, but they are really intense and repetitive", said a reporter while she was mechanically processing content of the traditional medium to be published on the website. As in McCombs respondent, the reference to judge online jobs are the perceptions on traditional journalism: there, your shift can be endless if a last-minute news story brakes in; at online media many journalists expressed that the fact of having very stable work shifts was an advantage: when you finish, someone else will take the responsibility of continuing the coverage of an event. At the online newsrooms of traditional media, many reporters felt their job felt into routine and was intensive, and it did not allow to do more creative work besides reading, selecting and editing wires, and the technical routines. I witnessed very busy days, with almost no room for rest. At *CCRTV*, during my stage, online reporters not only had to write news, but also to record fragments of television newscasts live and put them online. One evening, a

reporter was recording the newscast end summary and at the same time writing the chronicle of the just-finished first half of a soccer match. He moved from his computer to the video computer to stop recording and continuing writing the story... and he almost forgot to start recording again to capture the weather forecast. But after some hours of intense updating there was usually some moment when the wires seemed to rest for a while, and there were very "boring" days as well, when reporters said that news had "no substance". Some journalists complained that it was very tiring to be the entire shift focused on the computer mainly processing wires. The computer screen is the main tool of their work: several overlapping windows crowded the desktops, with the CMS, the wire feeds, their website homepage, other media websites, the e-mail client, and they shifted from one to the other with quick finger movements. "My hands hurt today", one reporter told me in the end of her shift. Some online editors admitted that working in front of the computer all day long was physically hard, and had effects on back and vision health.

6.2. News updating policy: the life-cycle of news stories

"It was revealing that when [online journalists were] asked how the Internet differed from broadcast and print, most referred to the shape and timing of content (...) rather than to interactivity or any fundamental shift from the one-to-many model of established media", highlighted O'Sullivan (2005:59) in a recent report on Irish online media. In a German survey (Quandt *et al.*, 2003), 97% of online reporters stated that quick updates were the most important feature of successful news websites. 80% mentioned original content, 79% interactivity and multimedia was the least valued feature with 60% of the answers. "Some of the most prominent ideas about online journalism from its beginning in the mid 90s have a lower ranking than expected", concluded the researchers (Quandt *et al.*, 2003). Paulussen (2004) found similar statements about the crucial elements of online media among Flemish online journalists: disseminating information quickly (90%), interacting with readers (80%), providing depth through hypertext (77%), providing discussion forums (69%) and make use of multimedia (67%). Why is immediacy so popular among online journalists? What are the consequences of this endorsement? The daily routines in the four Catalan newsrooms analyzed in this study give some crucial clues.

As it has already been stated in previous sections, immediacy is the online journalism utopia that has been more clearly put into practice, specially in the case of online newsrooms of traditional media. This has been the case even if this choice implied

discarding most of the other utopias and even threatening some of the principles of quality journalism. Quick updates do not allow thorough multimedia production or comprehensive event coverage. They neither help in fact checking or source pluralism, and therefore the risk of lack of accuracy increases (Sandoval and Yuste, 2005:591; Pavlik and McIntosh, 2004:46). Short and up-to-the-minute are the rule in online breaking news. Gasher and Gabriele intuitively point out from a content analysis of a Canadian news site:

“The site provided only the barest of facts, offering minimal context, making it difficult to discern at times why an item might be of interest to its readers. Such was the case with the two dozen stories appeared in the hours following Dale Earnhardt Sr.'s crash at the Daytona 500 [motor race]. With each new posting from the wire, featuring the addition of the smallest –and seemingly inconsequential– latest detail, it became clear that the stories were not edited before being posted on the website. The imperative to publish the ‘newest’ of news took precedence over the news value of consonance, turning the *Gazette* site into a generic, inoffensive, though barely relevant, news product for anyone interested in news from Canada or the United States.” (Gasher and Gabriele, 2004:320)

“Featuring constant updates ran against the notion of *news analysis* that print held as its advantage over broadcast for the second half of the twentieth century”, sharply concludes Boczkowski (2004b:69). But the fact is that immediacy has become a prominent journalistic value, particularly since the rise of 24/7 television and radio news networks, some years before the Internet entered the media scene.

“Disseminating information quickly” is not only the most agreed value among online journalists where we have available data, but also the most important around the world in traditional media journalists (Weaver, 1998). Kovach and Rosenstiel (1999) denounced that news production is turning into “warp speed” journalism based on never-ending news cycles that result in stories that offer pieces of evidence, accusations and speculations throughout the day without providing an interpretative context. Therefore, the immediacy utopia of online journalism, the always-updated news paradigm (see section 2.3.1), resonated with the current general trends in journalism and was easy to incorporate even to newspaper online editions, the ones initially more distant from it. For newspapers, their website was the chance to, for the first time, compete with radio and television in their own terrain. “More and more, in the last few years, when there are breathtaking or transcendental events people tends to go online to see what has happened. Online newspapers can compete with news radio: newspapers have the advantage that we have a more interpretative point of view and the web audience appreciates this”, argued *El Periódico* print editor Antonio Franco, even though their breaking news online section did not provide as strong interpretative content as the print edition. Other utopias were far more challenging for the established journalistic culture and had been adapted to it or avoided in the processes of definition of each online news project, with different solutions, as we shall see in other sections of this chapter.

“Internet is really rash, but if you are mindful of this, you can be prudent enough to avoid getting things wrong too often. It is rash because you get the news and you publish it. It's not easy to fact check, because you have to put it online as quickly as

possible. This is why online news has so many errors in data and interpretation. But you have an advantage: as soon as you publish something you can edit it, correct any mistake. This is why you have to be permanently looking for new developments, checking if there is any imprecision, if you can broaden or deepen in the story. Online stories are open. They have to be in a permanent quarantine". An online reporter elaborated this bizarre reasoning when asked about immediacy, the widespread criterion of permanent updates in online news websites. Throughout my observation stages there was a permanent silent tension between good journalistic practices and the expectations raised by the online journalism utopia of immediacy.

The basic principle for news production was publishing a story as soon as possible once they knew about a newsworthy event, fact or comment. In all the four newsrooms reporters openly admired *El Mundo* website and were particularly impressed by their quickness to post breaking news. There was a legend in the online newsrooms that suggested that *El Mundo* had an special agreement with news agencies to receive wires prior to any other online newsroom, and some reporters claimed having seen in the website of the Madrid newspaper a wire story before it actually got to their wire feed computer application. Online journalists in *CCRTV* had a close referent to define their news production pace: the 24-hour news radio network *Catalunya Informació*, owned by the very same public broadcasting corporation as their website. The editor argued that radio is even more instantaneous than the web, because radio reporters could read wires on the fly, meanwhile at the web they had to edit them before publication, with some newspaper routines, but definitely with the radio immediacy. Actually, they used to listen to *Catalunya Informació* all day long, but

reporters revolted because they deemed it as unbearable and finally they usually listened to a music radio station. Only in very specific moments, when there are relevant live news broadcasts they did listen to the radio. The culture of immediacy made online journalists anxious if they quitted for a break or when they had been focusing on a single piece for a while. "Anything new yet?" was a common question in bigger newsrooms. Single shift journalists browsed the wire feed and other media websites to check if something new had happened while they were away. Joan Escofet, the reporter working on political news at *laMalla.net* argued: "Internet is very agile: something happens and you can break it on the website immediately. This is a pressure, but as a newspaper journalist I used to have the pressure of the blank page, a page you had to fill up for tomorrow. Pressure is a synonym for journalism, it is having new things happening every day".

Limitations in human resources in *Diari de Tarragona* online newsroom produced kafkian situations and justifications that show to what extent a rhetorical closure has been reached in the Catalan online newsrooms about the supremacy of immediacy as the main online journalism value. During my stage in 2003, as the two reporters were partly absorbed by print newsroom tasks, they took advantage of the fact that the update time on the homepage had to be manually changed and set it to convenient times that gave the users the illusion that there was an even flow of news updates. After the online newsroom was dismantled, Abelló, the print journalist in charge of the web content, argued: "We do not want to be continuously updating the website, because we do not have enough staff to do that. We select some paper news in the morning, and then updates (based on wires or the work of our reporters) at 13:00,

15:00 and 18:00. These updates let the user of our website have a clear idea of what is happening around the world. If there is a very special event, we do update as often as needed”.

The paroxysm of immediacy was to be found in the coverage of some of the most important issues of 2003 in journalistic terms: the Iraq war and elections in Catalonia. Respectively, for these two events, both *CCRTV* and *laMalla.net* decided to develop a new feature in their CMS: a pop-up window with up-to-the-minute headlines (see Figure 15). At *laMalla.net* the initiative was planned in advance and they redesigned the homepage to provide headlines of the results as they were released in the right column during the municipal election night. Time was stamped automatically besides the headlines as the reporter in charge posted them. New headlines squeezed out the oldest news from the homepage automatically, but if you clicked on them a pop-up with all the headlines showed. Headlines were actually conceived as news pills, not to be developed into a story, a parallel data input for the user that let most of the reporters in the newsroom concentrate on writing stories without the pressure of the last-minute wire. After this first experience, they have used this feature again in other electoral evenings.

At the broadcaster online newsroom, they started the headlines pop-up the day the Iraq war broke out, as the editor wanted the portals to be completely focused on what he expected to be a rapid US invasion. “Our intention is putting there the headlines as soon as we get the wire, without having to wait for the news story to be written”, explained Fàbregas. In some cases the first wire on an event was very limited in

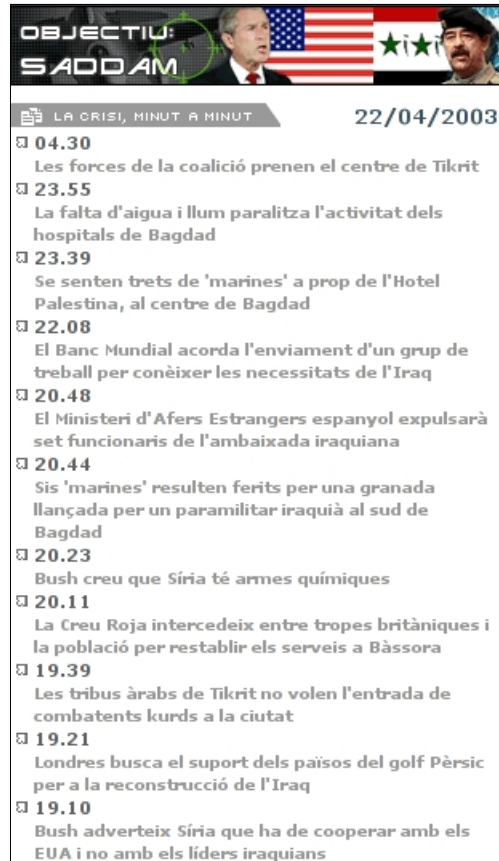
Figure 15. Special up-to-the-minute headlines on *laMalla.net* and *CCRTV* (next page)



Captured by the researcher in both cases

information and they just published the pop-up and waited for later wires to start writing a piece of news. Once the story was published, they made a link from the pop-up headline to the piece, but many headlines were not finally developed into stories. The initiative was so unplanned that reporters initially had to edit an html file to update the pop-up. The window popped up automatically every time a user entered the news portals. The television newsroom liked the feature in the website so much that they asked to have it as a 24/7 rollover in the TV transmission. Online editors were very

proud about the recognition to their work that this meant. They negotiated with the television newsroom the hiring of two of the online newsroom trainees to work full shifts and exclusively devoted to manage the new headline feeder. Reporters handed on the headlines they had found to the trainees, then they wrote them in the CMS and once the linguist had checked them, headlines were automatically published, without the previous supervision of subeditors, as it was usual in news. They published a headline every five minutes most of the time. This urgency in publishing the headlines led to some inconsistencies, because the headlines were usually based on the ones from the wires and the reporters working on the news



OBJECTIU: SADDAM

LA CRISI, MINUT A MINUT 22/04/2003

- 04.30 Les forces de la coalició prenen el centre de Tikrit
- 23.55 La falta d'aigua i llum paralitza l'activitat dels hospitals de Bagdad
- 23.39 Se senten trets de 'marines' a prop de l'Hotel Palestina, al centre de Bagdad
- 22.08 El Banc Mundial acorda l'enviament d'un grup de treball per conèixer les necessitats de l'Iraq
- 20.48 El Ministeri d'Afers Estrangers espanyol expulsarà set funcionaris de l'ambaixada iraquiana
- 20.44 Sis 'marines' resulten ferits per una granada llançada per un paramilitar iraquí al sud de Bagdad
- 20.23 Bush creu que Síria té armes químiques
- 20.11 La Creu Roja intercedeix entre tropes britàniques i la població per restablir els serveis a Bàssora
- 19.39 Les tribus àrabs de Tikrit no volen l'entrada de combatents kurds a la ciutat
- 19.21 Londres busca el suport dels països del golf Pèrsic per a la reconstrucció de l'Iraq
- 19.10 Bush adverteix Síria que ha de cooperar amb els EUA i no amb els líders iraquians

stories used to reshape or reinterpret them. In these cases the pop-up headline and the headline of the piece of news were different and some reporters felt uncomfortable about that. A subeditor argued that they could not wait for a reporter to think the proper headline: the pop-up had to be updated immediately.

Scooping other media with an original story was not supposed to be the aim of online newsrooms. The usual challenge was to be the first to publish important stories available at the wires, specially if the most adequate focus on the story was not easy to grasp at first sight and the reporter had done a good job at finding it. At *El Periódico*

Online, reporters were really proud because they beat other media when they published that the PSOE (socialists) had won the PP (conservatives) at a State level if the results of all the local elections were summed up: they dared to get this conclusion with a scrutiny of just 40% at 23:00.

In very exceptional cases, websites turned into the main news channel of traditional media companies, for very specific reasons. When the sentence of a major trial in Catalonia (the Feliu case) was ruled, *CCRTV* online editors had privileged access to it one hour prior to the public reading of the sentence and rushed to have the news story written and ready to be published at the very moment that the judge read it, therefore being the first in breaking the news and provide the whole text of the sentence. Only the live radio broadcast at *Catalunya Informació* could compete with their speed, but the website already had an edited piece. *El Periódico Online* published original data gathered by the print journalists on the ground of the Madrid bombings of March 11th 2004. This was the first time that original materials of the newspaper were first scooped online, and the print editor justified the decision because of their social responsibility in such a critical moment, not to mention that there was the suspicion that the Spanish conservative government was concealing information.

Reporters in online newsrooms of traditional media usually started working on news stories as soon as they noticed a worthy wire. Following again the hypertext utopia of the end of time limitations, news stories were usually considered open-ended pieces that could be edited several times a day or even through different days. Whenever they found new data they opened the existing piece of news in the CMS and added the

update. A *CCRTV* online editor published a plain list of winners of the 2003 Cannes Film Festival, to break the news, while a reporter was writing the story. The full text substituted the list when it was ready for posting. But the autonomy of reporters made the rule a very flexible premise that was constantly re-evaluated in every story. The online editor in *CCRTV* asked a reporter to publish, as soon as possible, a first piece of news with Blair's statements after his meeting with Bush, and eventually added the US leader declarations. She felt that the British premier did not state anything new to his positions previous to the meeting, already published in the leading story of the homepage. After writing the text from a Reuters wire in English, she decided to wait for the end of the press conference and add Bush's statements before publishing the news piece. When she got a wire in Catalan with the whole story and saw that Bush's words were more important than Blair's, she erased the text she had produced and published the new wire in the place of the leading story, without editing much of it.

Data from a wire or from other sources could be transformed into a news story or added to an existing one. In most of the newsrooms, this was the chosen option not only if it updated former data, but also if the reporter considered it to be not important enough to stand alone. In this latter case it would only be published if it complemented or was related to an already published piece of news. Reactions to a story were typical update material that would usually not stand alone. Again, applying these general principles to each single case allowed space for subjectivity and there might be discussions over this kind of decisions in the newsrooms. A journalist recommended another to split a statement of the president of France taken from a general piece on reactions of countries against the Bush's declaration of war against Iraq. The writer of the story had just added the French statement to the general piece from a wire. Story

updates were usually added at the end of the piece as a new paragraph, and other paragraphs were edited or deleted if they were not coherent with the update. If the new data was regarded as important enough, a sentence was also added at the end of the lead. The headline was not changed in most of the cases. This was particularly valid when the update was up-to-the-minute in a developing event. However, there were also cases in which the headline and lead changed with the new information, for instance when new data was a major development, such as the US tanks reaching the center of Baghdad in the story about the evolution of the battle in the Iraq capital city. In updates based on wires expanding on events that happened the day before (or several hours before), and given that there was no time pressure anymore, the reporter could take more time to re-edit the story and may change the headline, the lead and the body. In other cases, when the text of the new source was regarded as more accurate or complete than the previously published, reporters could even substitute the old one with the new piece. This also happened usually when the update was related to a story of the previous day. Actually, *El Periódico* and *Diari de Tarragona* did not keep breaking news published in the previous days. At *laMalla.net* and *CCRTV* these news seemed to be closed for the reporters, even though they could have edited them as easily as the ones produced in the present day. One of the cases was the false alarm of two cases of SARS in Spain. The next day they were denied, and an online reporter at *CCRTV* wrote a new story and linked it to the one published the day before, instead of rewriting it.

Diari de Tarragona, with just one online journalist per shift, was the only case in which data from a new wire on an already published issue was almost never considered to be added to the existing piece, even if it just updated some data or developed the story.

The reporters argued they had no time for such fine-grain edition work. Wires were to them the minimum news unit. They performed two possible options: publishing a new piece or deleting the existing piece and substituting it with the new wire. I witnessed how a story about an anti-war demonstration posted at 13:00, using verbs in the present tense (as it was developing right then), was only updated and turned into the past tense when the afternoon reporter found a new wire some hours after the demonstration had finished; she simply substituted the old text with the new one. The criteria to choose one or another option was not clear either in this newsroom. It seemed to be related to the perceived viability of the already published text. The afternoon reporter once looked for an update of the story about a plane hijacked in Cuba. The morning reporter had initially posted the piece at 10:22. Then, over 16:00, she found that the most recent wire was from 13:25 and it explained the same situation of uncertainty about the plane, with fresher data. She substituted the whole old text with the new one in the CMS form of the original post. She also changed the headline and lead on the homepage with the ones of the new piece. In contrast, when she got a short wire that explained the end of the story she posted it as a new piece, respecting the existing one. What she did substitute was the headline and lead on the homepage, using the ones of the concluding piece. Later, when a developed wire arrived, she substituted the short story, but kept the same headline. Another hour later, she substituted the whole text even once again with a final synthesis wire. When I asked her about the criteria for substituting or making a new piece she told me that when there was an important leap in the development of the story she left the old piece and created a new one. When the wire just provided more details she substituted the old piece.

The life-cycle of a piece of news could last several hours –and even some days– long before its final version consolidated. This meant that journalists from different shifts may work on the same text, adding new data to a colleague's previous work. It was usual that in the shift change, reporters leaving summarized to the incoming ones which were the ongoing issues, pending stories they had no time to cover or important expected events. One of the subeditors at *CCRTV* wrote down some guidelines for the next shift subeditor and commented them with her before leaving. Tips also included which stories should be out of the homepage in the afternoon and which news needed updates and when. Updating a piece of news along the development of an event sometimes led to a misjudgement of the most relevant aspects of the event. In a Spanish parliament session in which the Iraq war was discussed, president José Maria Aznar announced, almost in the end, that Spain would send 900 troops. This was the main headline in all newspapers the next day. An online reporter added this announcement at the end of the piece soon after hearing it, but didn't change the headline nor the lead. The next day the headline had been edited to show this idea, but the lead still began with an anachronistic "Aznar is presenting his plans to the parliament (...)". Despite a developing was finished, the story would still evolve if more details came in through wires (news agencies used to provide stories which were further developed after the first short highlights). When new issues broke in, they took the leading priority, but reporters might save the wires about an "older" story to expand it later, when they had a quieter moment without last-minute news.

The dynamism of the websites was made visible to the users with several strategies that intended not only to inform them of the publication time of updates, but also to

highlight that immediacy was a fulfilled promise. *LaMalla.net* stated the date and the time of the first version of the story and the date and hour of the last update, if any. *CCRTV* online news portals stated just the date and the time of the last update. The online newsrooms of traditional media indicated the time of the last update at the top of their homepages. This was the only time reference in *El Periódico Online* and *Diari de Tarragona*, whose stories had no timestamps. The reason may be that these websites did not preserve online news from day to day: the upload of the paper online version late at night took the place of breaking news on the homepage. At the Barcelona newsroom the CMS kept online-only stories from the day before, but they were no longer accessible for the public. The online editor at *El Periódico* justified this decision: "The paper collects all the important news that have been published as breaking news throughout the day, but in a more detailed fashion and with our own perspective, not the one of the wires. Therefore, the paper is the official final version of the news production of our media company". In Tarragona, the morning online journalist deleted the stories before starting to upload the ones of the day. This was also the case in the first online news experience in the Catalan public broadcaster, in the news section of TVC Online, until 2002. For me this was hard to understand: it seemed the crudest proof that the work of the online journalists was not regarded as being as important as the one of the traditional newsroom. Technology allowed to keep an archive of these news stories, but they were not considered worthy enough for this second life. At *CCRTV*, it was the set up of the autonomous news portals what let things change, and a searchable archive was set up. For reporters, however, news "died" when they were taken out of the homepage as new stories came in. They were still available, but for the reporters they were no longer important and they did not

care about possible updates or for changing their tense. Only new data coming in could make them reconsider to get a story back to the homepage and update it. Obviously, an online-only project as *laMalla.net* did have a news archive from the beginning but the work on an issue also ended (provisionally) when the story disappeared from the homepage.

On the opposite end of the news life-cycle, when did an issue become a story? This is not a trivial question, as news agencies regularly send forecast wires about events, meetings or announcements expected and scheduled to happen in the following hours or days. If the logic of online newsrooms was posting a story as soon as a wire broke in, forecasts might be an important ingredient of news websites. The common standpoint in online newsrooms of traditional media was straightforward: reporters were reluctant to post *forecast stories*. "It would mean doing twice the work", argued a reporter, as they would need to edit the forecast wire and then rewrite it or substitute it with data from new wires when the event actually happened. Whereas these arguments seemed solid in newsrooms with shortage of personnel, there was a complementary statement that, again, left the final decision to a subjective evaluation of each case: "Only if the forecast news is news in itself we post it". The ambiguity of this point or the pressure of wires coming in could explain why many forecast stories were published in the websites. Relevant political meetings expected for the afternoon had an important place in homepages with a forecast story. Reporters, then, would usually do "twice the work": the story was usually completely replaced by actual results data after the meeting, sometimes keeping some paragraphs of the older text for contextual purposes. If the forecast piece was complete enough and the actual event

had no unpredicted outcomes, some journalists just preferred to add some of the fresh data and change verb tenses from future to recent past. In one case they left the forecast piece and produce a brand new story after the meeting, but this was an exception. They used to argue that there was no point in keeping a forecast piece once the event had happened, and therefore they tended to reshape the piece to turn it into “a proper news story”, as one reporter put it.

Only *laMalla.net* reporters and the local news journalist in *CCRTV* online newsroom usually planned their news production with less rush, avoiding the pressure of immediacy in many cases. Each week, Emili Vinagre produced, with the help of trainees, some 300 stories on local issues (events happening in Catalonia only relevant to inhabitants of a municipality or a *comarca*). Most of them were not a priority and the rush of immediacy would not apply to them. In a way, it was a matter of productivity limitations: to get news from every *comarca* was not easy, as the wires fed in more local stories from some of the regions than others. Therefore, Vinagre had to rely more on television texts, produced by the midday regional newscasts. Every morning, he checked issues forecast for the the newscast as well as the wires to make a list of the pieces to be written. He searched for more data to write the stories and produce them during the shift with the help of the trainees. One of his aims was guaranteeing that the least populated *comarques* had at least a new story every week. As the updating rhythm in this sections was slower than in the thematic ones, renovation was not daily in most of the cases and “expired” news (those that forecast an event that has already taken place, for example) needed to be deleted from section homepages. Vinagre was quite overwhelmed with all the work this represented. “I

think we should rather have a single homepage on local news, instead of one for every *comarca*, and commit to produce twelve daily news. But users are now used to look in the map for their *comarca*, and it is difficult to justify that we may leave them without the local homepages”.

At *laMalla.net*, the online-only case, they produced daily editions during their first months in 1999. During the day, reporters wrote the news stories and uploaded them to the CMS, without publishing them. At 19:00 the homepage was defined, the stories hierarchized and published. After the first online editor left, they started to produce more editions during the day: at lunch time, in the afternoon... and soon the publication of every story was autonomous: if it was breaking news it was posted immediately after being written; if it was a more atemporal piece it could even be planned to be posted the next day. The CMS was ready for permanent updates from the beginning, but the criteria of the first online editor, rooted to the traditional journalistic culture, and the lack of experience of the reporters prevented this use until they became more familiar with Internet publishing. “Everyone in the newsroom thought that it was very difficult to self-publish their news at the moment they had written them”, recalls Quim Cardona, the designer of the web technological platform. The news production model that finally consolidated with Silvia Llombart combined breaking news on the major Catalan, Spanish and international issues and more atemporal service-oriented stories. Their approach to breaking news diminished the importance of the need for up-to-the-minute stories: “Internet has this culture of immediacy, and you have to follow it with some breaking news, so you publish it as soon as possible and after a while you update it with things that the Internet also let

you do, such as links, and more data. But if it is a developing event that is not crucial, we may wait until it is over before writing the story”, argued the adjunct editor Anna Garcia. Even a news story that was already known the night before but they had not published would only have priority for the first morning shift if they considered it to be very important. If it was not, they waited for the reporter specialized on that issue to write it. One day, the big political news was the split of CiU (the Catalan nationalist party ruling in Catalonia) and PP (the conservative party ruling in Spain), but their priority those days were anti-war mobilizations, and therefore the story was not published until the political reporter came in, after 10:00.

LaMalla.net produced lots of stories which were not strictly linked to the last-minute pace. Most of them were service-oriented and many were forecasts, though they could be worked at well in advance to the time (or even the day) of publication. Unlike breaking news, these stories did not need to be written in the very moment they were found by the journalist. Usually the reporters added them to a to-do list that they worked through during the day or week. They could spend some hours gathering information and writing the text for these news stories, much more thoroughly developed than breaking news. They also might have them on standby for several hours or days, because they prioritized breaking news production when last-minute issues broke in. They usually saved the draft text in a Word document to keep it ready to work with it. A common strategy at *laMalla.net* was “saving” stories for the following days if the reporter had already published more than one story on an specialized channel that day. The obvious requisite was that the story would not lose viability, but many service news were not linked to a particular date and offered a big deal of

flexibility for their publication. The most extreme case was the one of the weekends reporter, who got ready almost a piece to be published each day of the following week for the Elderly and the Children channels. This way, the channels were daily updated at the eyes of the user. Another reason for this strategy was to avoid overcrowding the homepage: as their philosophy was posting every new story on the homepage and they attempted to leave it there at least one day (on condition that it did not get outdated), they preferred to dose the daily production of specialized news. This way, reporters at *laMalla.net* had a very stable and predictable production rhythm that let them work without pressure most of the time, and they also had room for specialized breaking news without having to sacrifice visibility of service-oriented stories. One day, the local news reporter, prepared in just two hours the drafts of two news for the next day, one for the following day and another one for two days later. The online editor justified this strategy of delayed publication of news not only because they would not be able to put all the news produced daily on the homepage, which would lessen their visibility, but also because this way reporters had more time to work on the pieces and check for more information.

In this context, forecast stories were not seen with reluctance at *laMalla.net*. They fitted perfectly in the delayed publication strategy. A press release on the events surrounding the All Stars match of the Spanish basketball league arrived on Wednesday morning to the sports reporter and, as the event did not start until Thursday night, he left the piece ready to be published on Thursday morning, even though he had finished the writing early on Wednesday afternoon. The main difference of many forecast pieces at the online-only news website in comparison with traditional

media websites was the fact that in many cases the stories were not updated with a piece reporting the event. The date of the event was just the reference to take the piece of news out of the homepage. My hypothesis to explain this sharply different strategy from the other online newsrooms was that the local and service orientation of *laMalla.net* made them cover issues on which news agencies usually would not focus at, and therefore did not have a regular feed of news reporting the outcome of the events they forecast. Online journalists mostly relied on press releases and organizer's websites to find newsworthy events of local or specialized scope, and as this kind of sources tend to provide announcements of a future event rather than reports on it, reporters hardly had the chance to go further than the forecast in most of the cases.

They actually went out of the newsroom to cover some events, but they had big limitations: going beyond Barcelona would mean to waste too much time and it was not worthy for just a story, and leaving the newsroom more than once a week was also seen as too time consuming. As many forecasts were about events from around Catalonia, their ability to get inputs to produce an after-event report was very low. In some occasions, this was solved by asking the organizers of the event to write a piece explaining and commenting the outcomes. Reporters had a well reasoned explanation for this habit of producing forecasts that did not turn into what other newsrooms considered "proper news stories". Their service vocation was their main point: for their users, to know where and what will be going on was an opportunity to participate themselves instead of reading afterwards what happened. Furthermore, they stated that traditional media also produced many forecast stories as well, even when they had much more resources than them. "A forecast story represents the same work for the

journalist as an event report – argued editor Llombart –, but it gives the chance to our users to get involved in it”.

In long-run issues, the challenge for the journalists was finding “today's headline” in the wires. “All the wires look equally important at first sight”, explained a reporter and one of their main abilities was to judge them and find the key one. With issues such as the Iraq war, which had an up-to-the-minute coverage during the first days, some of the newsrooms changed the strategy soon in order to provide a daily story that summarized the main developments, to be able to cope with the overwhelming volume of wires. At *laMalla.net*, after the first week of war, the central issue in the Monday meeting was planning further coverage to turn the unpredictable into news packages that were as standard as possible, following the logic of journalism already described by Tuchman (1978) and other early researchers of newsmaking. They decided to publish every morning a piece of news that summarized all the anti-war events scheduled for that day. The online editor suggested it to be the main headline every morning and the editor in chief proposed that all the reporters wrote whatever they found related to a single entry in order to make it easier to produce the piece at the end of the day before its publication. After that, they updated it with data about the development of the events throughout the day, converting it from a previous-to-the-events story into a news story. When adding the new data (events not already listed or latest developments), the reporter responsible for the news story usually added a brief sentence at the end of the lead and then a more detailed explanation at the end of the text. They put the new data at the beginning of the lead and even change the headline only if the new data overcame the importance of the existing information in the text.

With the war coverage they did the same strategy: a main update early in the morning by one of the first shift journalists. After that, the reporter responsible for international news kept an eye on the daily developments, usually not publishing anything else until the afternoon, summing up the events of the day. Only in very extraordinary cases he wrote a brand new piece about breaking news as soon as he read the wire.

Once I could witness a coordination problem caused by the single-story policy for anti-war coverage at *laMalla.net*. Early in the morning, one of the reporters decided to substitute the events chronicle published the day before on the homepage for the morning war chronicle, as there were already many news about Iraq. When later in the morning the reporter in charge of updating the anti-war chronicles tried to add the late evening successful “cassolada” (a demonstration banging pans and pots), he found the forecast piece about the events of that day as the leading headline on the homepage and put the data on the “cassolada” there instead of updating the story of the day before, which therefore still talked about the “cassolada” in the future tense, out of the homepage. Later on he added information about the central square demonstration (the main headline of the chronicle of the day before) to that old news piece, but he did not put it back to the homepage. The online editor was surprised when she did not find a headline about the most important event of the day before on the homepage and then the reporter decided to recover that chronicle for the homepage and move the information about the “cassolada” from the piece of that day to the one about the day before, and changed the headline to highlight that event.

One of the radical consequences of the culture of immediacy, particularly in online

newsrooms of traditional media, was the heavy (and in some cases almost unique) reporters' reliance on agency wires as their input for news stories. This will be further discussed in section 6.5, but we need to point out here that this means that, with the exception of *laMalla.net*, online journalists do not beat news going out of the newsroom. They argue that if they were out, in the streets, they would not be able to provide up-to-the-minute news. Being in the newsroom, they could just wait for news to come in and had few tools to check facts. As a reporter's quote at the beginning of the section pointed out, there were errors in the first version of a news story quite often. Some could be corrected as fresher and more precise wires came in or after a mate noticed the mistake. Others remained inaccurate and unnoticed.

Some stories were simply false. I witnessed some of these being produced after a wire and how the journalists dealt with them when they knew that they were wrong. After being told by one journalist from the traditional newsroom that the news story on the Iraq war he had published as the main homepage headline was a fake, an online reporter decided to substitute it with one of the three new wires on other issues related to the war he was already working on. He then deleted the fake news piece from the database. He argued that he could have added the US statement denying the story to the fake text, but that would be "strange for the reader". "As the Internet allows you to delete news this is the easier option". It would be as if he never published it. In another case and in a different newsroom, the reaction was different: half an hour after publishing a news story as the first headline on the homepage they got a wire denying it. Firstly, the reporter added two paragraphs at the end of the piece, without changing the headline, and then worked on a brand new text explaining

the issue from the new point of view. As soon as she had the lead ready, they substituted the previous piece with it. She then ended writing the new text, and stated that the news will be out of the homepage as soon as they get a new piece. It was not newsworthy anymore. Another reporter, after being told that there was a wire denying the story of a proposal in the Catalan town of Girona to put a toll for vehicles entering the city, the reporter took the piece off the homepage and add the denial at the end of the lead and a new paragraph at the end of the story, leaving the headline untouched. In a more radical case, when a reporter saw a wire denying a chemical attack in Kuwait, the reporters rushed to delete the news story from the homepage (it was in 2nd position). After that, they forgot to update the piece with the denial, and it remained with the false statement in the section archive. A reporter would argue: "At the newspaper they cannot afford committing the error of publishing errors. The paper is done just once. On the Internet we can correct the errors and this is why we can try and publish a story as soon as possible, as you can always edit it afterwards".

Under these circumstances, online news quality has been questioned by many scholars and professionals: "The speed of [24-hour news] all leads to mistakes that could be avoided in a more traditional newspaper cycle. Moreover, the dynamic pace can sometimes lead to a loss of context. To the traditionalist, the 24-hour cycle has become a nightmare of drivel and error" (Kansas and Gitlin, 1999:72). Most of the online managers and reporters in the studied newsrooms were very aware of the risks of immediacy and they actually stated their intention of changing to another news production model in which the pressure of immediacy would be lessened and original content could have a place in the daily online news production. "We may be

overvaluing immediacy –reflected a reporter–. No one has that urgent need of information. Sometimes you post an irrelevant story just because you got the wire, and you stress ‘It has just happened’, but who needs to know every little thing happening now around the world? We actually visit other online media websites constantly, to check for updates, but this is pure professional deformation. Immediacy has advantages in very big events, but in a normal day I would bet for social interest issues and for more elaborated news, more explanatory and didactic approaches. If we would slow the rhythm we could do this”. This is a reasoning that Brannon (1999) already found on early US news websites:

“Bruno (ABC News) wanted ‘to see less of this rush to vomit copy out and vomit out the news (...) and have ‘people give more thought to their stories’ by adding interactive devices such as maps, polls or chats. (...) At USA Today, Fruitrich had held many in-hours training sessions intended to encourage creative thinking as an effort to urge people to relinquish some speed and instead expend energy on stronger conceptualizing. (...) She said her goal was to try to help people focus on two or three stories a week, rather than a day. She said the key was ‘not so much scaling back their ambition, it’s scaling back the volume of what we’re producing’. “Monitoring news around the clock required a significant commitment of resources and precluded people from developing more interactive medium-specific content.” (Brannon, 1999)

At *Diari de Tarragona*, the online editor stated he preferred “quality over quantity”. “I never told them that the aim was posting as many wires as possible, but doing attractive short news stories by processing data from several wire sources”. But

reporters argued that it was more convenient to post many unedited wires than working further on fewer. Immediacy had become their better alibi. The editor foresaw a new website where unedited wire publication will be automatic, which would let the reporters concentrate on some six cover stories that would be more elaborated and local-focused if possible. He was sure that a better product could be made with the resources they had, but control over the newsroom was no more in his sole hands. *LaMalla.net* already had a significant part of news production not linked to immediacy and sometimes reporters went out for interviews and press conferences, but online editor Silvia Llombart hypothesized, paralleling Tost's orientation, that if they reduced the quantity of pieces they would be able to "devote more time to the most crucial content and draw news with a different perspective" from the plain breaking online story. "Having more reporters would obviously help", she added.

The ideal situation for Pep Puig, the online editor of *El Periódico*, was that in which the newspaper journalists posted to the website a first summary of the news story they were producing for the print edition as soon as they started the writing process. "I know this is a utopia", he bitterly admitted. An online reporter suggested that it would be enough if the paper journalists would stop for a while at the breaking news online desk and tell the online staff the main ideas about the story they have been covering during the day. This would help the breaking news reporters to have a more precise insight on the story even if they still work it out mainly from the wires. Another reporter envisioned a team of five online journalists going out to the street with a video camera to cover events and unexpected accidents in the city, taking notes, photos and videos. They would not need to write the stories themselves, just phone

the breaking news desk and tell them the main data about the story. "This would be more realistic than having the paper reporters producing news for the website; we could then have online original content on local issues".

The online editors of *CCRTV* did not feel that they had personnel shortage; they stressed the fact that every user just read three or four pieces, and therefore it may not be reasonable to produce so much news every day. "The ideal situation would be that a single journalist would work on just one of the main issues of the day per shift, with a deeper coverage", explained Fàbregas. The rest of the news of the day could be covered with texts edited from the television and radio newscasts once they have been produced by the traditional newsrooms. "We should focus on doing three or four original in depth stories each day, working on data from wires, TV and radio". This would allow reporters to search for related documents and websites, select the most relevant ones and providing much richer stories, things that are sacrificed for the sake of immediacy. "I think all the reporters in the newsroom have this feeling", stated Fàbregas, and they surely did. But, at the same time, the editor would like to be able to publish a headline and lead on the homepage before creating the complete news story. Now they have to get at least the headline and lead in the database and then promote the story to the homepage, which takes some minutes of procedures through the CMS. He would like to use a more straight forward publishing method for last-minute news. A reporter would analyze the contradictory situation of online news: "People can understand TV or radio if they still do not have a story when it has just broken, but they ask a website to have at least a headline immediately. However, they also go online to search for things similar to a newspaper: a good special, documents,

analysis, graphics. It is compatible to offer a lot of news, good news and immediate news at the same time. What it is not compatible is providing comprehensive news in every single story. Online journalism can be fast, faster than any other medium, and we are doing it. But being fast and at the same time being comprehensive... this is not possible if you have to fill every section with 10 news. The sections structure should be more flexible, so that time could be devoted to write a good and comprehensive story about a relevant event of the day instead of three short pieces on things that users may not be interested at all".

Human resources shortage was the main reason stated by online editors for not developing these other news production models, but the fact was that many of the changes, such as reducing the volume of stories produced by every journalist, were easy to achieve without any reorganization of the online team. However, the rhetorical closure that imposed that immediacy was the main value of online news seemed too strong to be broken and reporters instinctively tended to produce short and fast stories rather than elaborating them further and producing less. Brannon found in the US newsrooms some justifications for the prevalence of immediacy beyond the fragile one of shortage of human resources. "The first step required getting the raw news out. (...) 'If a story is breaking – if you don't have it up, then you can't use multimedia or interactivity'. Evidently the problem with the strategy of returning later to get material 'massaged', 'gussied up' or to reflect 'window dressing' as respondents said, was that too few people actually returned to enhance or refine it" (Brannon, 1999). Or the much more straightforward position of USA Today editor: "When we put things out, don't worry about it being incredible stuff for the ages. Because it's not going to be there in

a couple of hours. If you need to, you can change it and in five minutes most people probably will never notice that you misspelled a word. For better or worse, online is like broadcasting. It's at the moment, whoever can get it out first. That's how the bar is set. You gotta jump over it" (Brannon, 1999). This online manager firmly believed that immediacy was what the users of his website demanded most and perceived beating competitor's website in speed (and accuracy) as vital to keep users' trust. Brannon hypothesized that the prevalence of immediacy could be reinforced by its very consequences: "If USA Today rarely incorporated multimedia or interactivity into its content, it seemed logical that its news team directed its efforts to the medium's other inherent trait: immediacy" (Brannon, 1999), and thus the newsroom entered in a circle that was difficult to escape from. For Brannon, this situation affected negatively the quality and job satisfaction of online journalists, as it led to repetitive and routinized tasks.

Alonso argued that the disappearance of closing times in online newsrooms, the fact that there are no deadlines, no editions, affected negatively traditional journalism routines like fact-checking, source diversification or interpretation. The schedule of a newspaper or a broadcasting newscast set the time for the reporter to work through these routines (Alonso, 2005:528-529). With no temporal limitations, time collapses into *now*. Thus, the temporal revolution of hypertext utopias kills the spatial promise of hypertext, in-depth reporting.

6.3. Homepage management

When immediacy is the rule, homepages of news websites shall reflect this continuous production of stories. And they actually do: each new piece will usually find its place on the homepage as soon as the first version is ready. Homepages are in constant evolution, they are dynamic spaces in contrast to the static front page of a newspaper. However, newsroom observation reveals that the dynamism of homepages follows certain rhythms and online journalists actually create (supposedly unnecessary in an online environment) deadlines that resemble those of the newspaper editions. Work shifts and the logic of optimizing newsroom productivity define routines that in a way contradict Alonso's intuitions and give some organizational antidotes to the push of immediacy.

The fact is that an Internet user that would visit the homepages of the four analyzed cases every five minutes would be disappointed about the promise of immediacy. Sometimes an hour or more could pass without any headline change. These were the times of homepage updates in *CCRTV* one afternoon: 16:40, 17:00, 17:13, 17:33, 18:33, 19:00, 19:35, 19:43, 20:47. *Just* nine changes in six hours. But this was not the perception from inside the newsroom: there, wires were constantly reaching the computer desktops and reporters could not stop for a minute, sorting out newsworthy material, writing up new stories, updating old ones, deciding which is the right position on the homepage for it. Online journalists felt immediacy, continuity, in first person. For them immediacy actually meant being producing stories all the shift long. And they

feared that if they stopped, a user that was expecting a story about the political meeting he knew that ended at 17:00 would think that they are not good enough when at 17:05 there is no word about that on the homepage. No user (even a competitor online journalist) looks every five minutes on the homepage of a news website. But journalists were convinced that users will be there waiting for their story when news would brake.

News in the content management systems (CMS) of the websites were automatically uploaded to section archives, but they were not available on the homepage until a journalist edited it through a special application in the CMS or by manually editing the html page in the case of *Diari de Tarragona*. This was a strategic decision: weblog homepages automatically show the most recent post at the top of the list, and CMS also allow to automate such updating processes. But the online teams wanted to have journalistic control over the homepages to reproduce the conventions of print journalism, for which the most important story (on the basis of newsworthiness criteria) is the one at the top of the page and with larger font size. In most of the newsrooms changes on the homepages were mostly managed by only one person per shift and, as the technical procedure was never very straightforward they tended to accumulate some news before publishing them on the homepage. Only very last-minute big breaking stories were promoted to the homepage as soon as they had a headline and a lead. In big online newsrooms like *CCRTV* the concentration of homepage control in one person guaranteed the coherence of the homepage evolution and hierarchy. At the online newsrooms of the newspapers there was no other option than this, as there were mostly single reporter shifts. *LaMalla.net* had a very different

approach, with all the reporters being able to edit the homepage to post their stories. A journalist just needed to warn the rest of the team that he or she was going to update the homepage, to avoid saving different changes at the same time. In most of the newsrooms reporters frequently asked other mates to check the changes they had just made on the homepage, to see if they considered them appropriate. At *El Periódico* they also showed the changes to the print coordination desk manager when the reporter had introduced significant changes, such as promoting a new story to the first positions. *CCRTV* subeditors (reporters with homepage edition responsibilities) could ask the editor for his opinion about a change before performing it or the editor could propose a change by himself after checking the homepage or finding a very relevant wire. The editor of *laMalla.net* played this role, too.

The specific dynamics, procedures and criteria in homepage management varied among the four projects: each one had its own solutions based on the combination of CMS software developments and newsroom journalistic culture. *El Periódico Online* had the most complex homepage system of the four cases. "It is like a house, and the headlines are the furniture –described a reporter–. If you want to move a piece of furniture you need to move the rest. Half of our work time is devoted to homepage management. It would be good to have a space to publish breaking news without having to reshape the whole homepage". They had different templates in order to accommodate various numbers of breaking news with different degrees of importance (see Figure 16). Reporters paid a lot of attention to avoid white spaces between headlines, like if they were making the layout of a print newspaper page. They devoted a considerable amount of time to edit them in order to shorten or enlarge

them to fit better. "At the Internet the first impression is very important", added the reporter. Developers had actually offered them a visual tool that enabled to edit homepage specific headlines different from the inner pages ones, but breaking news reporters refused it and preferred to edit the headlines in the story form of the CMS and check afterwards if it fitted the space. They had the chance to check the changes in a preview screen, so that users only saw the changes when the journalist was satisfied with the result. They said they "made the changes visible in the street" to refer to the publication of an updated homepage. When a very important news story broke, they used a three-column wide headline with a photo and sub-headlines. These were the biggest challenges: it could take as long as thirty minutes for them to be satisfied with the layout. Promoting a headline from a position to another higher in hierarchy implied several operations: promoting the 4th headline to the 1st position implied also cropping the photo of the 1st story to be put in 2nd position, rewriting the headlines and reconsidering the positions of the other three main headlines. This is why they tried to avoid changing the main story throughout the day as much as possible, as well as the template: if changes within a template were so cumbersome, adapting all the news to a new template was a huge effort. If they decided that a new story was to be promoted to the first position in a template that required a picture associated to it, they rather preferred to wait for a picture to come in the photo feeds instead of changing the template to one whose main story did not require a picture. Even though they had over twenty templates, reporters tended to always use the same three or four.

Figure 16. Different homepage templates of *El Periódico Online* (2003)



Source: www.archive.org

CCRTV online news portals homepage was not as complex in 2003, even though the new version starting in Spring 2006 had a completely flexible homepage that would make updates much more time-consuming. The 2003 template could automatically fit three news as the most important in a first wider column, with headline and lead, and nine more in a second column with just the headlines in most of the cases. The layout required the first news in each column to have a photo. In very special occasions another story could be put in a three-column wide position over the top of these

twelve stories. The system to decide homepage hierarchy consisted of a form with the list of the headlines of news already produced that specific day that could be numbered and renumbered to establish their order. Again, this system was not visual at all and subeditors just saw the results after submitting the changes. In this case, they seldom cared about headline length. As the system was much more automated, subeditors concentrated on news hierarchy and flow. They knew really well which stories were on the homepage at any given moment and they were quick in taking decisions on which were the most outdated ones and therefore suitable to be substituted by a new story, not necessarily of the same section. They tried to relocate the piece deleted from the homepage as a related link of an existing news story in order to have it still available. The three main stories could show related pieces right on the homepage and this was very useful for the subeditors to group several stories about the same big issue without taking more than one of the twelve precious homepage headlines. Subeditors also decided which position in the section homepages took every new story and they also managed the headlines that appeared in the *TVC Online* homepage. The publishing structure was very stable and easy to grasp, but the technical procedures to handle it were quite time consuming, as headlines position in every homepage depended on a numbered list (1 meaning first position) on a form where subeditors had to change the number associated to the headlines in order to change their position. Subeditors responsibilities were considerable and sometimes supervising all the website hierarchy was overwhelming for the journalist.

Telenotícies.com and *CatalunyaInformacio.com* usually had the same news hierarchy, unless they published a self-promotion news story about *TVC* or *Catalunya Ràdio* that

they would only show on the respective portal. Sometimes the subeditors forgot to change both portals and after a while they had to get into the listing forms and homogenize them again. Local and sport news were the only stories which were not usually promoted to the homepage by the subeditor: the specialized reporters had the three last positions on the homepage reserved for them to post these news at their own pace. Despite subeditors' duties and intention to keep the control on homepage management, reporters updated the homepage by themselves quite often in order to post the last story they had written provided that the subeditor was really busy and they had her permission. They knew the technical procedure to do the update, but it took longer for them to decide in which position to publish the new piece. They usually asked the subeditor which piece could they delete to put theirs and they even inquired the subeditor about which section to publish the story in, in case they doubted: "The end of the Concorde goes in Society or Economy?".

Subeditors usually waited for the linguist to review the pieces of news before putting them on the homepage. In normal circumstances, when there was no urgency, subeditors checked the list of corrected news every hour or so and decided if they promoted some of them to the homepage. But in some cases the linguistic correction process delayed homepage updating. Once the linguist was working on the Iraq special background texts and did not correct news for an hour. After that, reporters agreed that she could concentrate on pending local news (not urging, but there were a lot and the local news reporter was stuck waiting to manage the local homepages) if she proceeded first with one of the breaking news of another reporter, a lethal accident in an US discotheque. In other cases, the journalists had decided beforehand that a news

story could be promoted to the homepage as soon as they had it corrected and told the linguist to prioritize it over the rest.

LaMalla.net homepage had a two column structure as the one in *CCRTV*. In this case the homepage management interface was very flexible and visual. Reporters could insert a new story wherever they wanted in the list of headlines of any of the columns, decide if they wanted the news picture (if any) to be shown or not and whether the section title or the lead should be visible. This was a conscious CMS design effort: “We tried to have a homepage that would allow every option, as flexible as possible for the reporters”, recalls the web developer and project manager Quim Cardona. In fact, reporters had the option of customizing the homepage layout structure completely, using a CMS form, but they seldom used this option and preferred to work on a stable layout. The homepage could grow indefinitely as headlines were added, but obviously they tried to limit the size to two to three screen scrolls. Each reporter at *laMalla.net* promoted the news story he had written to the homepage, usually as soon as he had finished and published it. They also took their pieces of news off the homepage when they had been superseded by events. Usually they replaced an old piece of a section with a new piece of the same section. The local news reporter posted a news story just because he had not posted any of that section during the morning and wanted to substitute a headline from the day before on the homepage. It was a curious story and he took it off the homepage when he wrote a more serious and important one. But this was not usually the case: outdated pieces (specially forecasts) were taken out even if there was nothing to substitute them. When a news story was quite atemporal and the reporter in charge of its section was away, it could remain on the homepage for a

couple of days before someone decided it was too old to be there. Anyway, the online editor and her adjunct could review the homepage at any time and delete or change the position of any headline, usually commenting her decision with the rest of the reporters. Journalists were also responsible for the managing of the main sections homepages, which had some manual settings, such as which was the main headline. Subsections were set to automatically line up the headlines with the most recent at the top. Usually reporters did not check the section homepages every time they published a new story, but once or twice a day. Some of them used to do that as their first routine of the shift, others at the end. They checked on a daily basis that two-day old pieces of news were not first stories of section homepages.

The homepage at *Diari de Tarragona* highlighted, in a single column, four or five breaking news stories and one piece related to sports (many times this one was taken from the print edition), all with headline and lead, and some of them also with a picture. Main news often had secondary news grouped under their headline, in order to cover the most important issue of the day more comprehensively. Sometimes there were up to six or seven headlines, but reporters tried to avoid that because then the homepage was too long. Thus, the least important stories were deleted when new stories suitable for the homepage were edited. The reporters copied and pasted the headlines and leads from the content management system to the html template of the homepage. After that, they transformed the headlines into links to the particular path of every piece of news. The html document was uploaded using an FTP client.

The process of uploading a new headline for the homepage followed different

strategies, and the technological design of the CMS system influenced how journalistic decisions were to be made. A new story promoted to the *El Periódico* homepage would appear in the last position, substituting the story in that position. The reporter should then decide what changes should be made to put it in a higher position. At *CCRTV* the subeditor should decide first which story to substitute in the headline and assign the new story the position number of the candidate to be out of the homepage. This led to inconsistencies sometimes: a subeditor promoted a piece from the 6th to the 5th position and after a while, when the editor asked to publish a new piece at the 5th, she deleted the one she had previously promoted. Whereas, the flexibility of *laMalla.net* homepage form let them define very standardized journalistic criteria to handle the collective update without turning into chaos. The newsroom defined a stable distribution of news on the homepage, with four different areas: the first "block" was the main story, the first position at the left column, with headline, photo and lead. On the top of the right column (the "second block") there was the space for politics (Catalan, Spanish and international), local and technology news (usually in this order). The rest of sections were usually put on the second half of the left column ("third block"), under the main story. Sports were promoted to the second block on weekends and Mondays. There was not a predefined hierarchy for the 3rd block news. Stories of the same section were usually close together, but the hierarchy was neither based on sections nor on relevance. Actually, reporters tended to put their new pieces in the position where the previous news of the same section was, and tended to be humble and put the story at the last position in the block if there was no other story of their section. The online editor was usually the person who changed hierarchies from a global point of view during the day. For special cases they could choose a couple of

other layouts different from the standard one. In fact, one of them was designed for days with a special issue with many related news and framed all these news inside a green box under the main story. They designed another template for the Iraq war to have secondary headlines on the main issue at the second column. At *CCRTV* or *El Periódico* they only had a predefined homepage news layout in very special circumstances, such as election days, when stories could be planned in advance and be ready to publish in the right place when data came in.

Layout design decisions also affected in a clear way the decisions that journalists made when managing the homepage, even though they had not participated in the design process and therefore were adapting their routines to an imposed framework. The fact that only the three main stories in *CCRTV* homepage could show video and audio icons when there were files associated to a story made the reporters prioritize stories with audiovisual material in those positions when choosing from stories of similar importance. The fact that the first headline of the right column (4th story in the hierarchy) required a picture was also very influential in homepage decisions. Subeditors found useful applications for this position, but also felt uncomfortable sometimes. When a story was considered as important as the one at the 1st position, and therefore having two somehow different important stories at first sight for the users, they used the 4th position instead of the 2nd (below the first headline and usually out of the first screen scroll). The day the Iraq war started, this layout allowed them to put the most recent news (Aznar's afternoon statements) in the 4th position and keep the most important but several hours old story of the day in the 1st (the beginning of the war). "If we couldn't do this, the most recent of both would be surely the first",

argued a subeditor. Another case was the Feliu case sentence, which was planned to be 1st during an hour, during which the main Iraq war headline was 4th "to make clear that the war is still there". After that time they swapped positions. Subeditors also acknowledged that 4th position attracted users' attention very much and they preferred to use the three-column wide model (with no picture in the first position of the right column) if they had a very important story at 1st position and no interesting photo and story for the 4th position. During one day they kept the story of the fall of Bagdad with a three-column wide headline. The next morning the editor decided to go back to the normal template with the follow-up story at 1st position and the Barcelona football match of the evening before at the 4th. The online editor of *CCRTV*, when envisioning the new portal design, wanted to keep the two main headlines on the top of the homepage, because he found it very useful. He thought that secondary news could be just headlines and defended a more visible access to live video coverage and audiovisual files associated with each story.

The dynamic of homepages was based on pretty much classical journalistic criteria. The hierarchy of news on the homepage evolved as new stories were produced, but a new story could take low positions in the layout if there were no other newsworthiness factors than newness backing it. When a *Diari de Tarragona* online reporter had doubts on choosing which Iraq war news story to promote as the main one, she asked the international section head in the paper newsroom for advice. As he told her that they still had not decided which was the main issue of the day, she then chose "the most spectacular one": the rescue of a female soldier from an Iraqi hospital, a story that eventually resulted to be a hoax (created by the US Army propaganda, as it was

revealed months later). Immediacy, the tension of last-minute breaking news, had an important effect in homepage hierarchy decisions. When reporters found wires about news that had broken some minutes before, specially if they were still developing, they might promote them higher on the homepage than if they were finished events reported by the news agency some hours later. A reporter critically compared television and online criteria: "Lunch-time newscasts do not hesitate to start with the big issue of yesterday. On the Internet, instead, we are too obsessed in what has just happened. As audience, I would value more the television criteria than immediacy. [At the TV newsroom] they value the social relevance of the events better [than us]. At online news we value immediacy more because it is what justifies your existence, but it may not be what people really care about".

Balance and diversity of topics was also an important criterion in homepage management. Unless it was the event of the day, reporters tried to leave only one headline on a multifaceted issue on the homepage and put the rest of the stories as related links. At *CCRTV*, they used the 4th position on the homepage as a balancing spot. The editor who was most concentrated on newsflow was formerly the International section head of *Catalunya Ràdio* and this might be the reason for his criteria to privilege "hard" news on the homepage, with a special stress on international politics. Nonetheless, the moment of my observation stage coincided with very intense months of media attention towards the Iraq war. The three main stories on the left broad column were almost always under these topics and Catalan or Spanish politics. Subeditors tried to compensate the preeminence of hard news in the three main headlines by promoting curious or service news on the 4th position, the first

on the right column, which required a picture in the layout that they used as balance, looking for fresh and expressive images. 4th position archetypal news stories were: a Russian guy has changed his name to Harry Potter; a woman to be compensated after winning a mobbing trial against her former company; death of a Basque sculptor. Barça football matches were also a typical 4th position story during and right after the match. At *Diari de Tarragona*, the afternoon reporter changed an airplane crash in Bolivia for the report of a possible case of Asian pneumonia in Bilbao because there were "too many news about planes" after posting a story about a hijacked plane. Later on she promoted this piece of news to a higher position in order to separate it from a new story related to planes (new Reus-Köln service by a low cost airline). In a day when they had two different terrorist attacks, plus a fire in a building at Tarragona and the war in Iraq she looked for a positive news story to compensate the homepage: a medical research finding. Another day they had seven headlines related to terrorism and she compiled them in one story with secondary headlines, arguing that the homepage seemed a crime newspaper.

Another important factor for homepage decisions was the external variable, that is, competitors' homepages. The routine of visiting other online media reinforced and homogenized newsworthiness criteria. A journalist about to do a routine homepage update would usually check *El Mundo*, *El País*, *Vilaweb*, *La Vanguardia*... to see which were their main headlines. "This way I know I'm in the right path", told me a reporter. The decisions of other media were an important reference to justify their decisions, either when they changed their mind and when they reassured their take. After noticing that *El País* had a story on the homepage that they did not have at the

moment, an afternoon reporter checked that the morning reporters had already written it and had sometime taken it off the homepage. He would relocate it at the 6th position on the homepage. The same reporter said that he liked the journalistic criteria of *Cadena SER* and promoted a news story higher on the homepage after seeing that it was one of their main stories. Some time before he had criticized El Mundo for highlighting that story too much.

"Yesterday" is not an attractive concept for online news homepages. The morning after municipal elections, the editor said that they needed to change the three main news, because they were the 3:00 wrap-up. A reporter was preparing a piece for each political party reaction and they decided to put those as the three main news, leaving a summary of the main results in 4th position. Some days, reporters complained because they did not have "good materials" to update the homepage and felt the homepage was "old". They commented on the hierarchy of the most *dispensable* news and waited for new stories to come in. But sometimes the "life" of a story on the homepage could last longer than a day not because new stories were lacking, but because of its relevance at the eyes of the journalists. As always, the online editor had the last word. A subeditor at *CCRTV* took off the homepage a news piece because it had very explicit references to "today" and was from the day before. The editor did not agree, because he found the story to be important and was the holding point for several related news, and he argued that they should not be that strict with the temporal references as a criterion for homepage management. "The reader can check the date of the piece", he added, but conceded that temporal references should be edited or avoided in order to make the story more adaptable to the reader's time.

Throughout the day, homepages did not evolve smoothly and progressively. There were different routines and priorities depending on the moment. In most of the newsrooms there was a clear concept of an “opening edition”, a homepage that was conceived as brand new in regards to the homepage of the evening before. At newspaper websites the change was radical: online news production of the day before was substituted on the homepage by an adaptation of the print front page headlines of that day. This was the homepage of the websites until online reporters had produced some breaking news. *El Periódico Online* had a transition period when print edition headlines were still shown below the two to four first online-only stories. When the number of new stories grew over eight, the print edition was automatically taken out of the homepage and it could be accessible only from the web main menu. At *Diari de Tarragona* the technological platform did not allow to combine both editions and reporters usually shifted from one to another before 11:00, when they had already around five breaking news stories. *CCRTV* performed a smoother transition from day to day, particularly after incorporating the night shift. At 9:00 the three main stories on the homepage were usually fresh ones, from the night or the morning, or forecasts of big news of the day. Most of the secondary news on the right column were from the edition of the previous day until mid-morning. With the 24 hours coverage the editor assured they had saved two hours of work in the morning, as the night news were already produced by the time the morning reporters came in. They just needed to review them (the night shift reporter was not as experienced as the morning ones), changing their priority if necessary and rewriting stories that did not have the appropriate focus.

LaMalla.net "opening edition" in the morning was mainly based on news that were already produced the day before (or earlier) and were scheduled to be published by 8:00 that day, as well as on breaking news from the last 12 hours and updates of the main issues of the previous day. Usually, morning shift reporters wrote first the breaking news stories as soon as possible even if the person specialized on that issue had not arrived to the newsroom yet. Once the main story was ready, reporters worked on the last evening homepage to have a base for the new homepage. They substituted old news with the new ones, leaving less than half of the stories from the last evening homepage. The main story of the previous day was usually preserved for a while in the 2nd block unless it had been completely outdated by the events, and the second story of the last homepage edition could be promoted to the first position in the opening edition if no big news had occurred during the night. Thus, the opening edition was half the way between the smooth transition of *CCRTV* and the radical break of newspapers' homepages. The reporters argued that the main factor explaining the fact that they conceived the first morning homepage as a "new" edition was that they did not have a night shift and therefore they had to update twelve hours of news as soon as they started in the morning. Another reason was the scheduled publishing strategy they used to handle stories which were not linked to the up-to-the-minute rhythm. In fact, the lack of night shift was an organizational decision that was possible because of the delayed publishing strategy. This saved a rather unproductive shift and made it possible to have a "new" homepage at 8:30 or 9:00 with no need to start the morning shift at 6:00, as half of it was already ready to be published beforehand. In fact, they usually had around eight news stories ready from the previous day.

Shift changes were, in a sense, another stop in the update rhythm of the homepages. When the second shift started, the afternoon reporter or subeditor checked if the homepage included all the important news of the day and whether the focus was the adequate in each case. They could reorder the homepage headlines to fit their own newsworthiness criteria and they also checked if there was any news story that deserved to be on the homepage and was not, and viceversa. Sometimes they wrapped-up different pieces of news on a main issue in a single story to free space on the homepage for new stories. It was a thorough review of the product away for a while from the pressure of immediacy.

Main stories were usually placed in 1st position for hours (half of the day in many cases) in all the websites because they were regarded to be the online newsroom most important bet. However, there was the consensus that the evening homepage should be quite different from the morning opening edition, and the main story could be taken down on the homepage hierarchy sooner or later, substituted for an expected story or big breaking news. Newsrooms tried to make the dynamism of their homepages visible, that the website was evolving throughout the day. As the day ended, reporters at newspaper online newsrooms tried to “bring the web homepage closer to the front page of tomorrow’s newspaper”, in the words of Ferran Cosculluela, by reconsidering again the headlines hierarchy at the light of the first draft of the paper front page, which was decided at 19:00 every day. At *laMalla.net* they prepared the “closing edition” around 20:00. They deleted the oldest news –sometimes they were still on the homepage from the day before– and the ones that would be outdated the next day. Therefore, they left a minor amount of headlines, in order to make room for the ones

planned to be published the next day. They could also review those news that were scheduled for the next opening edition, in order to let the morning reporters be faster when putting them online.

6.4. Newsworthiness criteria

Online reporters in the four analyzed newsrooms did not invent a newsworthiness scale anew for their products. The criteria of traditional journalism to judge, select and hierarchize news had been very stable for decades during the 20th century and had been acquired by the current online journalists in university schools and print or broadcasting newsrooms. The weight of inertia in a matter that guarantees efficient and agile decisions was very strong. The proven formula of newsworthiness resisted the change to a new medium and walked in the same direction than in traditional media: immediacy and spectacularity gained weight in contrast to the rest of criteria, and service to the community was a common attitude among online journalists. For *El Periódico* online editor, online news media had not worked on developing their own set of newsworthiness criteria: "We are still defining the personality of news websites. One of the main problems in Spain is that all the websites look alike. The website of conservative *ABC* and socialist *El País* are closer in their news selection than the respective newspapers. On websites we have looked for efficiency and usability, but we have not thought too much about personality".

The usual criterion of proximity did not have an homogeneous weight in the newsrooms. Catalan news tended to overrule over Spanish and international news when two stories with similar relevance were evaluated, but the presence of the latter was very relevant in all the homepages. The volume of political news in the wire feed and the fact that they had the main Spanish online newspapers as referents made

Catalan news be underrepresented on the homepages many times. In the case of *Diari de Tarragona*, proximity was a very difficult criterion to apply in daily routines given the fact that local wire stories were scarce. Local news is the particular nightmare for *CCRTV* online editors. "Having news of every *comarca* was a political decision,⁵⁶ not a journalistic decision. It might be absurd to try to be exhaustive when there are local media that provide this news. But it makes sense that making a Catalan product we should show what is happening here and not only around the world. As we did not have the limitations of television, we thought we should try".

The autonomy of online journalists in their editorial decisions depended on their relationship with the traditional newsroom. Even though they acknowledged their loyalty to the broad criteria of the broadcaster newsrooms, *CCRTV* online editors and reporters defended their independence, and their physical location away from the television and radio reporters helped in having a great deal of freedom. "We shall be another product of *CCRTV*, with its own personality", defended a reporter. During the Iraq war, the editorial line in the television and that on the website were radically different: website editors asked reporters to concentrate on the military side of news, the evolution of the conflict, while TV newscasts highlighted the social mobilization in Catalonia and the world against the war. Nonetheless, beyond these differences in specific issues, television and radio news agenda are the main reference for *CCRTV* online reporters. "I think our news portals could be more independent from broadcasting criteria: a forum post or a photo gallery may be the main highlight on the homepage, not only news stories", suggested Marc Mateu, content director at *CCRTV*

⁵⁶ As a public news service, they were committed to offer local news from all around Catalonia, for other Catalan-wide private media may not invest in covering them.

in 2003. This attitude changed with the new online editor Joan Puighermanal, who strove towards editorial coordination between the website and the traditional newsrooms.

In the case of *Diari de Tarragona*, online journalists felt abandoned in terms of having newsworthiness directions from the newspaper staff: "Almost no one in the paper newsroom looks at the website and therefore I publish whatever I find interesting with my own criteria. If they do not like it they tell me when they visit the website". This let them work with much less pressure and they usually had far more leftist selection criteria than the conservative paper managers. In a single day, a reporter selected Zapatero's words (the Socialist Party leader, in the opposition in 2003) in the parliament instead of Aznar's, the trial to two policeman for manipulating the detention report of two anti-globalization demonstrators, and the archival of the trial against the Basque separatist party leader Otegi for his words criticizing the Spanish king. But in most of the cases it was difficult to find big differences. One day, the newspaper started its front page with the story that appeared second on the homepage of the previous evening (an original local piece) and chose the same photo as the online reporter for the Iraq war headline. The morning reporter took some time in the first hour of work reading through the headlines of the newspaper, to have a clear idea of the issues already covered and avoid this way repeating them in the breaking news section. This was also a common routine of *El Periódico Online* team. While at *CCRTV* online newsroom they felt the need of making an online version for almost every piece the television covered, and browsed the newscast archives looking for those they had not covered, the newspapers had the automatic upload of the print content, and the

challenge for the reporters was looking for new stories or the developments of those that appeared the previous day. They complained that news agencies many times released issues very late, sometimes based on the newspaper stories: they could publish a piece thinking it was fresh news, and then they should have to delete it when the paper staff or the linguists noticed that it already was at the newspaper.

At *El Periódico* there was an explicit conception of the website as an extension of the newspaper that should follow the same criteria. "I do not need to put more news on the website than the ones that will be in the newspaper tomorrow", graphically stated a reporter. However, the concrete realization of this ideal consisted of focusing on "real, tangible events of the day" and there where issues that the newspaper would cover that were too abstract to be addressed by the online newsroom. They stated that they tried to avoid atemporal news which were not linked to an event, open long-term processes, politicians' statements *wars* on an issue, anything that was beyond the bare facts, even though this was not always the case. *Diari de Tarragona* and *CCRTV* online reporters had similar criteria. At the broadcaster's online newsroom they argued that some television stories were impossible to be transformed into a web piece: "At the newscast they can focus on the experience of a girl as the example of how students prepare their final exams, but we cannot do that, we can do a piece explaining that it is the last day of exams and that marks will be available online for the first time. We must concentrate on facts". Deep, analytical reporting was the terrain of the traditional newsrooms in their companies. At the same time, the pressure for immediacy led reporters to cover events that could not be important in the end, and therefore they would not find a place in the newspaper or the newscasts. A

reporter in *El Periódico* asked a paper reporter for more information about a sniper in an Italian city and his mate told him that it was not an important story. Despite of this, the online reporter posted the story and followed it. "Newspapers are static, but websites are dynamic. I can give the users the feeling that they are where the news is happening at the moment it is happening and later on, if the story is not important anymore, it will be out of the homepage". He promoted the story of the sniper high on the homepage for a while, because "it's new and it's open".

LaMalla.net, as an online medium that could not compete in human resources with traditional newsrooms and needed some personality to differentiate itself from other online news ventures, opted to pursue the contrary approach. Instead of the immediate bare facts they tried to explain news, get them close to the user. An extreme example would be the coverage of Roland Garros: they wanted to explain that the tournament was going on, but neither had the resources nor the willing to report the results of each day. They rather highlighted little curious things such as the fact that one day there was the longest tennis match ever. With local news, the anecdote was also a good way to make them attractive to a wider Catalan audience: "Instead of explaining plain local politics, that would only interest to those living in a municipality, I try to look for the side of the story that can transcend the local and be interesting or useful for all my users. The anecdote is a good strategy for this", explained the local news reporter. Online editor Silvia Llombart argued that they had matured their own journalistic philosophy: "We think that what is newsworthy is what affects people. In every story we try to turn around the issue and explain the user how it will affect him or her. When I entered the newsroom, they told me that our priority was local and

Catalan news and, besides this, just the most important news in Spain and the world. But I could not do that. There happen lots of things around the world and we could not neglect them. We cannot compete with bigger media in immediacy, but we can have our own approach. Our take was trying to explain things with a style that is closer to the user. Traditional media inform you, but they are not close to you. We want to explain things to the people in their own language, saying “you” and with a very direct style. Political news are important to your daily life if you are didactic and make people aware about how it is going to change their lives”. This strategy was completed with the conscious decision of providing news that were not in the mainstream media agenda, particularly service and forecast news on events in Catalonia. “Our ambition is being both a complete medium, that covers all the main issues, and an alternative option for the people who do not find what they need in traditional media. We cannot compete with *La Vanguardia* [one of the Catalan leading newspapers], therefore we have to offer something different from what they have”, argued Anna Garcia, the adjunct editor. But the fact was that when big breaking news were going on and *laMalla.net* followed them, they had almost the same resources as the other online newsrooms and could beat them in being the fastest in updating last-minute facts.

A widespread concept for newsworthy news in all the newsrooms was human interest, usually a way to label spectacular stories in traditional media online ventures. “There are two kinds of news we have to publish on the web: the important and the interesting”, summarized a reporter. They selected some stories just because they thought that users would find them curious, amusing or useful. However, journalists' professional instinct deemed these as secondary complements: their priority, the “real”

news where breaking news. At *El Periódico* reporters processed the murder of the Serbian prime minister as fast as they could and looked for a photo to be placed at 1st position on the homepage. "It is sad to say, but the best days are the ones with a terrorist attack or a battle going on. Other days are really boring, even if you do not stop working", argued a journalist. "The Internet has this advantage: there is no space limitation and when reporters have some spare minutes without the pressure of breaking news they know they can produce a curious story that will be useful to increase web traffic", added an online editor.

6.5. Newsgathering practices

The killing of a Spanish journalist by a US tank shot aimed at the Palestina Hotel in Baghdad was the most dramatic moment during my observation stage at the *CCRTV* online newsroom. The Palestina Hotel was well known during the Iraq war, because it was the place where international journalists stayed and the place where live stand-ups were recorded when the US soldiers started laying siege to Baghdad. That morning, April 8th 2003, around 11:00, amidst the uninterrupted wave of wires about the situation in Iraq, Reuters was the first to inform that the Palestina Hotel had been attacked. The first wire was just a headline. After some minutes, EFE⁵⁷ sent a paragraph about the tragedy: two reporters were wounded after a missile hit the hotel. The subeditor considered that it was enough information to produce an initial piece of news. When she was editing the lead, before publishing it, a new wire came in announcing that one of the journalists was Spanish. She changed the headline to reflect this information and added it to the lead. Once the story was ready to be corrected by the linguist, the subeditor printed the new wires (there was new data coming in almost every minute) and prepared a longer text. The reporter in charge of updating the Iraq war headlines pop-up said that *El Mundo* was reporting five journalists had been wounded. The subeditor talked to the editor to decide where to publish the story on the homepage. He suggested to substitute the story at the 2nd position (Al-Jazeera journalist killed some hours before) and include that in the text of the new piece. The subeditor worked on merging the pieces and updated the number

⁵⁷ Leading Spanish news agency.

of wounded journalists. The reporter found a new wire reporting that the Spanish journalist had lost a leg while the first photos from EFE were getting in. They decided to reposition the piece in the 4th position, with a moving picture of the wounded man. After reorganizing the homepage, the subeditor took an Europa Press⁵⁸ wire in Catalan to add more details to the story.

After a while, they realized that radio texts (of sister station *Catalunya Informació*, which they could access anytime) reported that one Reuters journalist had died. They looked for wires saying so, but they did not find any. They decided to wait before editing the piece, arguing that they knew *Catalunya Ràdio* (the main radio station of CCRTV) did not have any correspondent in Baghdad. After a while *El Mundo* stated the same, quoting Al-Jazeera, and EFE confirmed it as well. The editor argued they should wait for Reuters to confirm the fact, as the journalist worked for them. The subeditor decided to walk downstairs to the television newsroom and ask them. They told her that TVC correspondents had seen the dead journalist with their own eyes and when she went back to the online newsroom she quoted them as the source in her piece. Everyone was so focused on that story that they forgot that they wanted to update the first one (on the Baghdad battle) and also to edit a story on the use of chemical weapons by the Iraqi army that had been denied. The subeditor was already back in the newsroom when a wire suggested that a US tank fired the rocket into the hotel, but it took an hour before she realized that that data was missing from her story. She decided to start anew, and took the piece of *El Mundo* and the last radio text as the base to rewrite her story. Soon after she finished, the reporter highlighted a wire

⁵⁸ Second biggest Spanish news agency.

stating that the Spanish journalist was out of life-threat. One minute after, she saw a new wire reporting he was dead. The online team was under shock, after this contradictory information. They kept on asking one another "Does any other wire say something else?". The subeditor edited the news story again with this last data, but she decided not to publish it until having another source confirming it. The editor phoned the TV newsroom and they said they could not confirm the death of the Spanish journalist yet. Thus, the editor suggested watching Telecinco, the Spanish channel for which the journalist worked. "If they do not say it, we can't", he argued. There were five minutes of tense waiting. Then, they received a call from the TV newsroom confirming the death and Telecinco soon interrupted their programming to state the fatal ending. Before publishing the last version of the story, the subeditor edited the first paragraph four times, not satisfied with the wording. Everyone in the newsroom was very touched, sad, silent.

This was not a common story. It was the story of the murder of a journalist, and the reporters at the online newsroom witnessed it live through the wires. They saw him getting into the hospital, they heard the doctors fighting for his life, they felt the hope and they wrote about his death. It could have been them if their destiny had been becoming a war reporter. This may be the reason why they did not want to believe the wires. They did not want to hear two journalists had died and that the American army was the killer. This was one of the few occasions when the news in the wires had to wait before being published. There was no rush, time had stopped and online journalists could not believe the wires. An infinite sadness broke the routine.

Nonetheless, the rest of the story describes perfectly the newsgathering work in online newsrooms of traditional media: constant incoming wires, rewriting work with the news stories, competitors as an essential reference, traditional newsroom as an exceptional source. The daily routines of online journalists are more concerned with filtering and selecting a constant flux of information rather than an active search for stories. Whereas in the 1990s “the vast majority of online content [was] merely *shovelware*, reproductions of content that appeared in a news organization's primary distribution channels” (Scott, 2005:110), online news in the early 2000s tended to be shovelware of agency wires: “A newspaper's website is unlikely to be very distinct from its hard-copy cousin if, like the *Gazette*, the online operation does not have its own journalists producing [original] stories and illustrations, and must operate with only a handful of copy editors and page designers repurposing the newspaper's content and filling the rest of the site with wire copy” (Gasher and Gabriele, 2004:321). In Spain, the analysis of López *et al.* (2005) showed that in a secondary news item, only three websites added some original details to their reporting compared to more than 80 news stories strictly based on a wire text. Original coverage was provided by subscription online newspapers (*La Vanguardia*, *El País*) and the biggest radio network website (*Cadena SER*). For a front page developing story wire texts were the basis for half of the news coverage. Spanish nationwide online media were the ones with more original reporting, compared to regional media.

Wire dependence was the primary situation in the newspaper online newsrooms, in which, during my stages, there were one or two journalists per shift devoted to breaking news. “We cannot wait for the print journalists to have their news ready –

argued Carles Abelló, print editor at *Diari de Tarragona*—. From 9:00 to 18:00 we have to update the website and wires are the only source. Local information is very much original production of the print newsroom, and few of this gets to the website during the day. In fact, we would not scoop a story at the website, because that would be competing with our print edition of tomorrow and allowing our competitors to catch up". Whereas, *CCRTV* online news portals did not have these limitations, as the broadcasting newsroom was producing news throughout the day. For online journalists, television and radio news texts from sister newsrooms constituted a closer reference besides wires for many of the stories. *LaMalla.net* was again the clearest example to show that there can be different online journalism models: its reporters had a wider range of news sources and newsgathering routines, and wires were just another element, essential in issues such as politics but secondary in most of the specialized sections.

Agency wires, as a source for online news, had different degrees in their subsequent elaboration by online journalists: from an almost unedited copy and paste procedure at *Diari de Tarragona* to a usual rewriting and enrichment process at *CCRTV* and *laMalla.net*. All the newsrooms had access to a handful of wire services through a dedicated intranet or a single-purpose application at their computer, in which wires from different agencies were put together into a continuous feed. Fax was not used anymore, but *CCRTV* and *laMalla.net* online reporters used to print some of the wires to work on them with a more global perspective. Selection of wires for the website was mainly an individual decision. It could be discussed with other online journalists in the newsroom in case of hesitation or the online editor could suggest the coverage of an

issue found in a wire, but generally every reporter browsed through the wire index and picked up the stories considered to be newsworthy enough. Most of the indexes gathered stories from different news agencies into a single feed, and they were arranged in inverse chronological order and constantly updated. Every time reporters finished writing a story or group of stories, they checked if there were new relevant wires, browsing back the index until they reached the point in which they had stopped browsing previously. Usually, journalists in *Diari de Tarragona* opened two wire index windows: one with the general list and another with wires filtered by a keyword (Tarragona, Iraq). They short-listed some twenty stories and browsed through them to make a final decision and paste them into the CMS to be edited. The wire software let short-listed pieces to be opened in independent windows, and this allowed sorting them through quite conveniently. Other newsrooms did not have this option and were more straight-forward when selecting particular stories to be inserted into the CMS. The fact is that *Diari de Tarragona* journalists sometimes missed important stories: in the second selection process they might have skipped them because they misjudged them. They tended to select the wires without reading much more than the headline. Every time they checked the wire application they would sort through a list of 50 to 100 new headlines, and thus it was not difficult that reporters could neglect an update of a news story that they had already covered.

LaMalla.net and *Diari de Tarragona* had the most limited scope of agencies. EFE, the most veteran Spanish news agency and common denominator in all four newsrooms, was the only wire feed at the purely-online news site. Wires were classified in broad sections defined by the agency, not strictly related to the ones of the portal. Journalists

had their own priority in checking some of the sections, but "Catalonia" was the main reference. The reporter in charge of the environmental information at *laMalla.net* told me that he seldom used wires as the source for news in that section: he had many other sources and would only use a plain wire if he was too busy to do a proper search. Access to wires was quite a recent achievement of online editor Sílvia Llobart in the process of turning the site into a "regular news medium". Before, they browsed for wires in free-access portals. Online newsrooms of traditional media had access to the wire systems of their mother institution. EFE and Colpisa (an enterprise of regional dailies), were the sources for *Diari de Tarragona*. The afternoon reporter regarded Colpisa's wires as more complete and better written than EFE's, ones and substituted the full text of a piece because of this. At *El Periódico*, reporters had access to Reuters and France Presse, but they preferred to wait for the Spanish wires by EFE or Europa Press, because translating the wires would take as long as the time it took to get the Spanish one, a reporter argued. They would translate a French or English wire only if they did not expect the Spanish agencies to cover the issue. EFE was the preferred source, because Europa Press tended to produce messy long texts that needed a lot of editing work to simplify and clarify them. "This is always a risk, because you have not been a direct witness of the event and therefore you can misinterpret the text and get facts wrongly when you are trying to make them clear", pointed out a reporter. The *CCRTV* online newsroom had access to the same four agencies as *El Periódico*, adding ACN, a young Catalan agency that focused on local news, managed by CCRTV from 2002 on. Reporters normally used the general combined feed even though the wire application allowed very complex thematic, keyword and temporal selection filters.

Most of the wires were not in Catalan. This might seem trivial, but was a practical factor to add in the different routines among newsrooms when handling wire editing. *LaMalla.net* and *CCRTV* produced news only in Catalan, and therefore they could not just copy and paste the wires. They had to translate them at least. As these were at the same time the biggest online newsrooms in the sample, reporters also had more chances to work in further elaborating the story beyond the wire, reinterpreting and refocusing the text in the process of the translation, and adding data from other sources if available. Reporters usually read the full text of the printed wires before starting to write, underlining the main ideas and taking their time to decide. The local news reporter at *laMalla.net*, the one which relied more on wires, often phoned the original source and searched for information on the Internet.

At *CCRTV*, it was not unusual that online reporters would take the straight-forward option of pasting wires in Spanish to a Word file and rewrite it quite literally, relying just on one piece, particularly if it was not very important or if publication was very urgent. However, in many cases reporters gathered information from TV or radio texts and different wires around an issue to edit their own piece. "There's a risk in mixing different sources, because there can be some incoherence that you may import to your text, and you will be the one who will be criticized", expressed a journalist. They used AFP and Reuters extensively for international news and did not wait for Spanish wires if the story was newsworthy. Quite often *El Periódico Online* reporters also pasted the content of different wires in a Microsoft Word file and worked their text out of this basis. But most of the times they relied on the wire they found the most adequate. In many cases, with the first three paragraphs there was enough content to produce an

online story, for wires tended to provide many background data that reporters considered unnecessary to repeat: there was always the option to link the story to previous stories that acted as background, though this was only a usual practice at *CCRTV* and *laMalla.net* (see section 6.6). Journalists admitted that many times they had the feeling that there was relevant data missing in a wire, but they argued that they could not spend time trying to find it elsewhere. At *Diari de Tarragona*, production routines were reduced to the minimum. In most of the cases they posted them without previous editing of text at all. "We have no time for more", justified a reporter. They usually edited the headline, arguing that agencies wrote "terrible" headlines, many times with the wrong focus on what was newsworthy about the story. When they worked more thoroughly they deleted references to the news agency in the text and cut some background information, but in many cases they did not notice these references.

"Online newsrooms are full of editors –but as discussed earlier, their jobs consist mainly of adapting stories to the web and turning them around quickly, not fact-checking" (Singer, 2003:152). This was also the case in most of the news produced in the analyzed online newsrooms of traditional media. Fact-checking was a scarce routine and was usually limited to confront two wires from different agencies, looking for the version of other online media (which have the same wires as their main source) or, in very few cases, consulting the specialists on that issue in the traditional newsroom. Only journalists at *laMalla.net* phoned directly, and quite often, the protagonists of their stories and sometimes they interviewed them in person or participated in press conferences. "An old journalistic pitfall such as a 'telephone

addiction' can be made even deeper via digitalization. The journalist who seldom leaves his or her desk (...) may become too encapsulated in a convenient cyber reality, losing touch with other dimensions of the social world", predicted Dahlgren (1996: 68) in the early days of online journalism. Paradoxically, even though many online journalists had a strong dependence on agency wires, they were very critical about these institutions. There was a strange love and hate relationship, an acknowledgement of the necessity and a conscience of its risks. Reporters said that they did not trust news agencies and explained anecdotes about agencies' trainees covering most of the press conferences. "Wires are usually very imprecise and lack the right news focus", they would argue. "I worked for a news agency some time ago, and I know how they work. But we cannot help it. With the rhythm of online news you cannot apply the ideal of fact-checking", concluded a journalist.

This is why most of the time reporters would just put these criticisms in quarantine. Once, a reporter found a wire contradicting a story she had written the day before and she decided to neglect it, angrily: "It is not a TV or radio journalist that has fooled himself, but a wire!". A paper reporter covering the murder of a young woman in Tarragona told an online reporter that the leading story at the website was a rumor yet to be confirmed. The online journalist argued that it was taken from a wire that quoted police sources. After two hours, when the wire was definitely denied the reporter complained he could not check if every wire was truthful: "I have to trust that the news agencies do they work well or else I would not be able to do mine: it would take a long time to confirm every data, call sources... and wires keep coming in too quickly to follow their rhythm if you tried to confirm everything". An online newsroom panicked

when a mate from the traditional newsroom said that he had heard that the Iraq war had just begun. They just rushed to the wires looking for the story and decided quickly that it was a false alarm: there was nothing about it on the wires.

"It is an organizational problem. With the resources we have, we cannot go out the streets", insisted David Sancha, adjunct editor at *El Periódico Online*. "Some readers have written e-mails complaining that they had seen the very same story at our website and at *ABC* [a Spanish conservative online newspaper]. I guess they are aware that we work with wires!". Ferran Cosculluela argued that "wires definitely set the rhythm", but he defended that at *El Periódico* they edited them thoroughly to keep imprecise information out of the final text: "If my intuition tells me something is wrong, I will check it with the mates in the print newsroom". For him, there is an economical reason for the reliance on agency wires: "Last minute news in websites is a service rather than a product with identity. If people paid for it, there would be original information, but with no clear business model we cannot do more than this". Some online journalists argued that they had the feeling that in their respective traditional newsrooms there was also a tendency to do desk journalism, and therefore the online newsroom could not be blamed: "How can we compete with a newsroom of some hundreds of reporters?".

Content produced by the traditional newsrooms was a source or a reference, depending on the case and the moment. For *El Periódico Online* breaking news reporters, the newspaper started to be a clear reference in the evening, in the last two or three hours of the second shift. The draft of the front page for the newspaper of the

next day was a reference to reconsider the hierarchy of the website homepage and also to find stories they had not covered. They could take some news stories from the newspaper digital content system once the journalist had written them. "I prefer our stories to wires, but I take care not to post online exclusive news of our newspaper", explained a reporter. He did not take the main front page story from the paper prepared for the next day because he did not remember seeing it at the wires and therefore deduced that it was an in-house developed story. He argued that in the print newsroom there was the firm certainty that if they scooped a story on the web this would help the newspaper competitors to catch up. Even a story that was already in the wires was stopped if the newspaper had privileged information: they avoided start talking about the issue, even with just the wire data, to be discreet. "If the wire comes up at 21:00 and the newspaper has better data at 17:00, I will wait until another website posts it, because this means that other newspapers will have less time to work on that issue. This is a compromise we have to do with the print newsroom".

Reporters at *Diari de Tarragona* had similar criteria and routines. In their case, the afternoon reporter explicitly asked the section heads in the print newsroom for paper stories they allowed her to post online. As soon as the print journalist finished a selected story, he or she was supposed to tell the online reporter. In the evening, she reminded them the pact if she did not have the story yet. She looked for the piece at the newspaper content system, then she copied it and pasted it onto a new entry at the web CMS. She could find that the paper story was not suitable for the web, because it had a more literary tone or a very atemporal focus. Many times she ended up with just a couple of pieces from the first selection of more than five. If the story

had already been covered with online breaking news, she substituted the wire-based text with the print piece.

CCRTV online news portals had a 24-hour updated complement to wires: the texts produced by sister radio and television newsrooms of the public broadcasting company. Reporters had full access to the content management system of the traditional newsrooms and could use any of the texts for their stories. They were a crucial reference to detect breaking news (specially the radio) and to hierachize the stories in the website (specially the television newscasts). However, most of the journalists argued that broadcaster pieces were not a good source for the web texts: many television stories were too interpretative, atemporal and sometimes very didactic. They preferred wires in this regard, as they were more neutral. From a more practical perspective, broadcaster texts were written for speech, not to be read by the users of the website. Television pieces had references to images and radio stories had *in voce* quotations that were an essential part of the story but were never transcribed into the text available to the online newsroom. International and on-site chronicles were neither available as texts. Only in very specific cases, the reporters took the time to recover the audio or video file and listen to the story to get a quotation or the full text of a chronicle. The structure of audiovisual stories was also hard to adapt to the inverted pyramid model of a web story, as many times an anecdote or context information established the starting point of the broadcaster pieces. All these issues forced the online reporters to rewrite stories from television and radio much more than wires, and therefore many times they opted for the wire instead of the in-house text as the main basis for the web piece. At the same time they felt that they should not edit

too much television stories, because they had an author that could get angry if the piece was too reelaborated, and this discouraged them from taking many pieces. "I would say that only 30% of what we produce comes directly from the radio and the television. As they do better broadcasting journalism, with texts that are more adapted to the medium and live coverage, we have to produce more and more our own texts, find an Internet language", explained the editor Josep M. Fàbregas.

The decision of taking a broadcaster story or a wire as the basis for a story was in the end a very personal and circumstantial decision of every reporter. Any possible solution was used during my stage. The radio news repository was worthy because it was very up-to-date and had an already filtered list of relevant news, much easier to sort through than wire feeds. Radio texts were used as the first version of a story if no wire had been found on an issue yet. Wire data would be used afterwards to develop the piece. In some cases it would be the other way around, with a broadcaster story substituting a wire story, because the issue was "more clearly explained" or "more updated". Television news were good summaries of the big issues of the day and could also cover stories that the news agencies had not paid attention to or online reporters had neglected.

Television newscasts had actually a very strong influence in the daily routines of the *CCRTV* online newsroom. "We are not supposed to resemble the newscasts, no one has said that, but it happens: when the time of the newscast approaches, we start to look at the stories they have and fill in the ones we have not covered yet and rethink the homepage taking into account the order of the news in the newscast". This usually

happened those days with few big issues, when the online reporters were not overwhelmed by an important developing story. When there was no night shift, the night and morning newscasts items were the main reference for the first update of the web content. After that, wires took the lead as the main source, as well as the competitors' websites. It is relevant noting that online journalists at *CCRTV* did not only look at newscast items at the computer application, but they also often watched part of the actual newscast live on the main television set in the online newsroom (there were four other smaller ones always on, usually tuned to CNN and Al-Jazeera during the war, with the volume turned off). They paid close attention to the broadcaster take on the news in the newscast summary and if there was data that updated or contradicted the one they had published they usually took the TV version as the most reliable and edited their news stories. The first news about the end of the Baghdad battle was the interpretative chronicle of the TVC correspondent, live at the beginning of the midday newscast. The editor of the website did not wait for wires to certify it and he immediately changed the headline of the main story. Live TV and radio broadcasts were a common immediate source for big events in *CCRTV* and *laMalla.net*, where there were also four television sets on one of the walls, with silent images of several channels, and a radio set that was usually tuned to *Catalunya Informació* in days of last-minute news. Reporters did not wait for the wires to come in with the summary of an important parliamentary session or political speech. They listened to the live coverage in radio or television and took notes in a Word document, as to write a first piece as soon as possible, which was updated on the fly. Football matches were also a usual case of this routine in *CCRTV*.

LaMalla.net, despite being an online-only venture, had direct inputs from traditional media content. Online news adapted from local TV news and published in text format at sister XTVL portal were in several occasions the source for news stories. The adjunct editor usually checked daily the available stories and selected the ones she found to be relevant for their website only if they had not already produced the same story. One of the criteria for selecting a story was if it had a related video, a value-added content that routinely would be incorporated to the news site. As these stories were already in the contributors content database (PIC), if she liked the text, she just needed to relate it to one of the *laMalla.net* sections. In other cases, she asked the reporter specialized in that section to rewrite the piece. In some cases they knew beforehand that XTVL was covering a particular story and they waited for them to produce it if it was not urgent. Video pieces of XTVL were attached to stories existing in the news website, if possible, or a new one was created for them to be published.

Besides wires, the Internet has consolidated as a news source in traditional newsrooms. The work of Virginia Luzón (2001) at the CCRTV television newsroom and Pere Masip (2005) in both television and radio newsrooms, as well as in the *El Periódico* main newspaper competitor, *La Vanguardia*, have pictured uses in which e-mail has substituted the fax machine to receive press releases and Internet searches play an important role in secondary data gathering. Opening the e-mail software is the first daily routine of almost every journalist in traditional newsrooms, but this technological change has not affected the routines and source criteria. New alternative sources reach more easily the reporters' e-mail inbox and can also provide information on their websites, but journalists tend to discard them and rely on the trusted sources:

institutions, political parties, well known NGOs. Websites are mainly used to search for precise data, and in very few cases they are the origin of a story. Competitors' websites were some of the most regularly visited ones by traditional journalists. These are similar solutions to those adopted by Finnish journalists (Heinonen, 1999:62-63). Soriano and Cantón (2005:605-606) found mixed feelings in thirty Catalan journalists: the Internet had positive connotations as a tool that made their work more efficient and fast, but it had also a negative side: less credibility as a source, information availability could be overwhelming. The perception was that the Internet promoted desk journalism and lessened street work. Researchers pointed out that this interpretation of professionals might be misled: the increasing pressure of public relations cabinets and the smaller sizes of newsrooms may explain better the reduction of street work in traditional newsrooms. The increasing use of the Internet would be then a consequence, not a cause, even though its risks as a source still exist. Heinonen described a newsgathering routine in Finnish traditional newsrooms that can be easily translatable to the situation in Catalonia: "The routine consists of piling up separate news items for which the basic material is received at least half-way ready-made in press releases or at press conferences. The journalist's information gathering task is limited to checking occasional facts" (1999:63). In online newsrooms, this was also generally the case, with wires being the main input and the Internet serving even less as a data gathering tool than in traditional newsrooms.

The exception was *laMalla.net*, for which the Internet was actually the main access to news sources. E-mail was a crucial tool, and journalists accessed their inboxes quite often during their shifts. Each reporter had subscribed to specialized e-mail lists and

newsletters and they received lots of press releases daily. Much more releases reached the generic e-mail *redaccio@lamalla.net*, and the adjunct editor resent the relevant announcements to the journalist covering each topic. After this first filter, each reporter decided if the message contained newsworthy data. Press releases were just starting points for the work of the journalists, who would usually visit the website of the organization to search for more details and would refocus them to fit the criteria of *laMalla.net*. E-mail was also used for internal communication beyond face-to-face contact. This was almost the only use at the online newsrooms of traditional media.

The irony in online newsrooms of traditional media was that they used the Internet even less than their traditional counterparts. They almost limited their Internet browsing to competitors' websites. Few original sources websites, very occasional searches. Reporters were conscious about the online journalism utopia of the network of knowledge: "With the Internet I can reach the BBC and explain almost first-hand to my readers what is going on in the UK. And I can also tell them, 'This is my synthesis, if you want more, follow this links' ". This was the ideal situation for an online reporter at *CCRTV*, but she quickly acknowledged this was theory, not daily practice in their newsroom. Neither at the newspapers online newsrooms. At *laMalla.net*, instead, reporters visited regularly specialized portals and websites related to the sections they covered. Indymedia Barcelona was a must for the reporter in charge of anti-war events during the Iraq invasion. Beyond this specific issue, the Catalan NGOs press release service *Liberinfo.net* was also a major reference for daily visits. The press website of the Generalitat, the Catalan government, was also usually visited for press releases and dossiers. The local reporter visited daily the websites of municipalities that

provided fresh news in order to be less dependent of news agencies. The tourism reporter visited the ski resorts websites weekly during the winter season to find special activities and events they organized.

LaMalla.net reporters used to follow the online trail of sources. A press release, a wire or an article found on a website could be the starting point for a story, but just the starting point. They followed links, searched on Google and their favorite specialized portals. They checked for the version of the original source in its own website and looked for detailed reports. This could take them a long time and they did not mind to take as much as needed to find and digest all the information they thought they needed to write a proper story. In some cases, they sent an e-mail to the original source if the information on the website was not considered to be complete enough, and therefore they waited for an answer before publishing the news story. Only breaking news altered this routine and made them post a first short story before looking for more thorough data. The fact that the routines of online data gathering were fruitful could be verified when a reporter had to cover an issue that was not of his own section, as the specialist was sick at home. He found it difficult to get the right focus on the story and finding the first hand source. He looked for the previous news on the issue published at *laMalla.net* to have a contextual perspective.

In traditional newsrooms, reporters still prefer the phone or face-to-face conversations with sources, rather than e-mailing them. They argue that it is quicker and they have to keep a good relationship with the institutions' public relations (Masip, 2005:566). Online journalists in traditional media had deeply assumed that walking out the streets

was a duty for their colleagues, not for them. They acknowledged that they missed direct contact with sources, but assumed it was not their task. They did not have time for it and in the very scarce occasions when they had tried to do original reporting, the experience was deceptive: A *Diari de Tarragona* online journalist was told by sources that they only would talk to print journalists; they were not interested in a story that would only be online. "If one day it would be profitable to send an online reporter to the parliament to produce a chronicle for the Internet, we will do it. But even if it would be profitable, if the online reporter would get exclusive declarations from a politician, we would not post them on the website. We would say that we have exclusive declarations and tell the users to buy our newspaper tomorrow to know more", argued Pep Puig from the point of view of a realistic online newspaper editor.

Sílvia Llombart instituted at *laMalla.net* the routine of attending press conferences and doing face-to-face interviews. Before she arrived to the online news site, going out of the newsroom was very strange for reporters, even though online editor Quim Cardona tried to convince them to do so. "Guess they were too busy", he argues. Llombart was conscious of the limited resources of the newsroom and therefore "going out" occasions were carefully selected and planned in advance. The weekly Monday meetings were the occasion when they were usually decided. The reporter responsible of the section related to the issue was usually the one conducting interviews, while press conferences were often entrusted to trainees. Reporters went out of the newsroom less than once a week for interviews or events coverage. Going out meant devoting almost a day to a single story and they could not afford that too often, because sections would not be updated regularly enough. They admitted that they

would like to go out more, but some reporters stated that they were not sure if that would directly improve the quality of the portal. Moreover, direct contact with sources was also possible without leaving the newsroom. Besides the e-mail, reporters could also use the phone as a fast and easy way to check facts with the protagonists of a story. Sometimes finding the proper spokesperson was not that quick and they had to negotiate access with public relations. They usually told each other about the evolution of their efforts, and the online editor warmly congratulated reporters doing such a fine grain work. "You do not necessarily have to go out to the street to get first hand information. We have the e-mail and the phone and they work very well", emphasized Llombart.

The second main news source for online media after wires were competitors' websites. As for journalists in traditional newsrooms (Masip, 2005:568), for online reporters other news websites were a very convenient referent to have several hierarchically organized sets of proposals of the current newsworthy events and check if they had missed any story. While wire feeds were a chaotic even flow of news, without any hierarchy, competitors were doing the same exercise of selection and evaluation as them, and they could have had sharper criteria. This allowed reporters to recover neglected stories, find missed updates or compare their focus on a story with other takes. "In a way, we help each other, there are now more eyes working at the same time [at the online newsrooms] and we see more, together we better define the news agenda", stated a journalist. One day a reporter was very anxious because there were no interesting stories in the wires that she looked in a row at *El Mundo*, *El País*, *La Vanguardia*, *CNN*, *BBC* and *Google News*. However, reporters never copied the story of

the competitor even if they knew it was originated in a wire: they got the original wire and worked their own story from scratch. The result might be the same, but there was a sense of authoring in wire editing that let journalists feel they were doing some sort of original reporting.

Such a close follow-up of competitors is not new. Schudson (2003:109) notes that this is a general trend in news media in the last decades, not only a phenomenon of online journalism: "Now news institutions monitor one another all the time. (...) The result is interinstitutional news coherence". Adding the fact that the sources of online media are still more homogeneous than in traditional media, one can imagine that news websites would look very much alike in their stories selection and hierarchy. "Differences may be at the interpretation of the bigger news, but the secondary ones are treated very similarly in all the websites", argued a reporter. The few empirical studies comparing the content of several online news sites in Spain offer grounding for this hypothesis. Comparing the coverage of the same issue (a secondary story), López *et al.* (2005) found that 98% of the cases reproduced the same wire. In a content analysis of three online newspapers (*El Periódico* included), only 13% of the news texts had significant differences in an issue covered by the website, as 73% of them were mere transcriptions of wire texts without re-elaboration. Instead, 65% of the headlines were different, as journalists concentrated on this element to offer their editorial position on the issue (Sancha, 2005). López *et al.* openly talk about a "mcdonalization" of online journalism (2005).

6.6. Newswriting and hypertext policies

The ideal online news story, in the online journalism utopia, would be that of a web of related data pieces that users would read, hear and watch choosing their own path in an open hypertext. Manuals (Ward, 2002; Salaverría, 2005b) insist in the need for short and direct texts and links to related information on the websites of sources and other observers of the event. All these recommendations, when faced with the reality of the online newsrooms and their actual working conditions, quickly fade into good will that hardly finds its place among daily routines. Again, there are different solutions and cases with similar resources have not developed the same policies. The context of traditional media was an important factor in the shaping of hypertext news. Even if online journalists in the four newsrooms shared the utopia, those at *laMalla.net* were the most eager ones to explore new languages and structures for stories. The peculiarities of their work organization, with reporters having more time to work on every story, have been a facilitator for this attitude. However, even in this case, real developments do not strictly follow the ideal model. "News stories on the Internet must be thought differently from traditional media –argued one of the online editors–, but it seems that journalists do not dare to go beyond the traditional routines".

Breaking news texts had not developed into complex hypertext structures. Newspaper texts and wires were the most immediate referent for online journalists and the single-piece story structure dominated. This was the case in all the newsrooms. "I think that print news is still a valid model for online news: a headline, a lead, and then further

data”, argues David Sancha from *El Periódico Online*. Nonetheless, in that newsroom other options had been studied: at the Zeta Digital stage they designed a “horizontal” model in which every story had a parallel structure to the main text with photos, audio and multimedia content, audience feedback and statistics (similar to that of *El País* website latest version in 2004). The text still was the core element, but every story was a constellation of choices. “I don’t remember why it was not developed. No one had asked us to make the proposal, it was our own initiative”, he admits. A more modest solution was finally developed: the CMS added a side-box that could include external links, related stories and multimedia content. In daily routines, the most usual application of the side-box was linking together stories on a specific topic of the same edition in the online version of the newspaper. Breaking news reporters sometimes used this feature creatively, to create a secondary piece related to a story. The secondary piece was created in the CMS with the same procedure as any news story, but it was not published on the homepage, it was only accessible through the story to which it was linked. Secondary pieces could be used to provide background, complementary information or reactions to an event, material that would not stand on its own, for it would have made the main text too long. This was not used very often and there was no more than one secondary piece. At *laMalla.net* they had consciously developed a simple hypertext structure for complex, multifaceted stories (Figure 17). Again, the main reason for doing so was that some stories got “too long” with the single-piece model, but reporters also had the argument of “letting the users choose what do they want to read of the story”, echoing the utopia. The hypertext piece had a headline and a lead, as any other had, and then sub-headlines with the different aspects of the story. Clicking on them, the user could access different elements on an

issue, sometimes short interviews. The core of the hypertext and the sub-headlines were placed on top of the page all the time and sub-pieces were loaded beneath without reloading the page, so that browsing through them was very fast and easy. Furthermore, there was the option of reading the text as a single-piece. Reporters did not use this model daily, but for special occasions. The most regular use was the Friday chronicle on film premiers, with a sub-piece for each movie.

Figure 17. Hypertextual news story on *laMalla.net*



Captured by the researcher

"Short", "clear" and "attractive" were the most common adjectives to define online texts according to the journalists in the analyzed newsrooms. "Who wants deeper details buys the newspaper", argued a reporter. Another usual reason was that reading texts on the screen was not as comfortable as reading them on paper. However, in the early days of online journalism, Dahlgren already pointed out that short texts might not be exclusive of Internet news: "The day to day practices of cyberspace suggest that the computer screen is not hospitable to texts whose length fills more than one or at most two screens. (...) Cyberspace, then, continues to foster the trend to shorter texts that we see in the press, and the faster cuts and sound bites associated with television news in recent years" (1996: 65). It would, then, be the natural continuation of a well established trend in news media. With all these factors, adding immediacy as one of the most crucial one, it is understandable that in daily online news the utopia of comprehensive reporting is hard to be fulfilled. With single-piece news as the common structure in breaking news and immediacy as the main objective of news production, the irony was that sometimes reporters did not have time to edit much of a wire and the resulting text ended up being really long in Internet terms, with more than five paragraphs in many cases, the "maximum" length stated by journalists when asked in abstract terms. Condensing the loads of information of wires into a short and clear text was actually a challenge, in fact, the main challenge for online reporters.

Wires and other news texts were edited to different extents, mainly depending on the human resources of the newsroom and the urge of immediacy. *Diari de Tarragona* reporters were the ones who did less re-elaboration: wire texts were published almost untouched. In other newsrooms, the minimum editing that was always performed

consisted of changing the simple past tense (usual in wires, mirroring newspapers' style) into present perfect or present tense, more appropriate for the continuous update pace of online news. Reporters working for websites with breaking news archive did not feel completely comfortable with this solution, as the stories could be read by users many days after they had happened. At *laMalla.net* they argued that the date of the story makes it quite clear when the event did happen. Sometimes, at *CCRTV* they changed to past tense some stories of the previous day that were still on the homepage in the morning. Temporal cues were a similar concern. Reporters tried to avoid relative references like "today" and "tomorrow", preferring forms such as "this Tuesday morning", that would not be outdated in a week. A reporter corrected the headline written by a trainee that read "Barça plays tomorrow against Torino" for "Barça is already at Torino", closer to the present time. Further editing of wires included changing direct quotations to reported speech when there were too many quotes, putting a subject to impersonal sentences, deleting context information and rewriting unclear paragraphs. "Wires are usually very badly written", said a reporter after editing a text thoroughly. Many agreed that they often were too long and confuse.

The headline was regarded as the key element of any news story: a very good piece of news wouldn't be visited if it had not an attractive headline. Online reporters rewrote wire headlines systematically and at *CCRTV* they had to write from scratch those stories taken from a broadcaster text, which did not have headline at all. A headline could be edited several times after being published, not only because of updates but just to make it clearer and more attractive. At *laMalla.net* headlines were usually

shorter than in other websites (as short as two words in some cases) and very playful if the story let the reporter be creative. The use of complementary sub-headlines compensated the risk of losing clarity. Inside the texts, bold short titles were used with different strategies: in *CCRTV* and *laMalla.net* stories, these titles were supposed to separate a second part of the piece if it introduced tangential issues, but they were not used very much. At *El Periódico* it was more an aesthetic solution, and were used every three paragraphs to break the homogeneity of the text. A reporter complained that other reporters did not put titles systematically. "They are very important to be sure that the user reads the piece until the end. If there are no titles in the text, users would just see a grey blanket of text. Reading on the screen is tiring and the titles offer a reason to continue reading if they are done properly: intelligent, attractive and introductory, making clear what's next".

In traditional media, text quality is routinely assessed before publication or broadcasting. The hierarchy of the newsrooms guarantees that most of the production is reviewed and edited by several hands after the reporter finishes a story. On the Internet, things changed, as Brannon's picture of US online newsrooms already showed: "Perhaps the biggest difference in organizational culture was that just about any producer could publish something without help from anyone –or oversight. (...) Most respondents recognized this as both boon and bane. Errors or mistakes could be fixed quickly, but the ease of publishing also created carelessness, several respondents noted" (Brannon, 1999). The structure of online newsrooms and the push for immediacy had also limited quality control to a minimum in most of the cases in the studied Catalan newsrooms. Many stories were published without the author even

rereading the text. The usual alibi here was again that online texts could be edited at any time if any mistake was detected, but the usual scenario was that only a story was reread to consider updates when new wires came in. *Diari de Tarragona*, with just one journalist per shift, was the most extreme case, with no pre-publishing supervision and almost null oversight of the product by the editors of the online and print editions. At *El Periódico*, an informal post-publishing supervision was performed by some of the reporters on the texts of their mates when they were not very busy. They usually corrected grammatical mistakes without reporting the author, and, in stories of previous shifts, changes in structure and style could be substantial sometimes. The linguists responsible of reviewing the Catalan version translated news texts from Spanish automatically, and we can consider that the in-house developed software also played a partial quality-check role: linguists phoned the online reporters to warn them any time that through the translated text they detected a mistake they deduced that was originated in the Spanish text. Reporters at *laMalla.net* often read twice their own texts and edited them before publication if it was not last-minute breaking news. For some reporters it took a long time before they published a story, as they rewrote paragraphs until they were satisfied. They also could read their stories again once they are online. The editor would read some of the stories, those that she found controversial or most relevant, and in scattered occasions she suggested some changes to the reporters.

In the *CCRTV* online newsroom there was the most complex quality control structure. At any moment of the day, a linguist reviewed almost all the texts before publication. Most of the time, the linguist worked at a desk within the online newsroom and was

entirely devoted to quality control of news production. In the night shift, television newsroom linguists performed this supervision work. Linguists were conscious of the fact that their presence in an online newsroom was quite exceptional: "We are here because there's this strong policy in CCRTV to promote the quality of Catalan language, this social responsibility of the public broadcaster in a minorized culture. This is why it was very automatic to extend the model of the broadcaster newsroom to online production". The tasks of the linguists had been totally integrated into the news workflow and the CMS system, which generated a list of headlines of unpublished news for the linguists, stating if they were pending revision. Supervision was systematic. The afternoon linguist even carried out a second check to the morning news when he did not have new pieces to correct. Sometimes they had to hurry considerably because there were many stories ready at the same time and the reporters put pressure on them to validate the most urgent breaking news. Thus, when they had a quieter moment they double-checked the ones from those rushing hours. Reporters could technically publish a story that had not been corrected by the linguists (a red dot will mark it on the CMS as a warning), but they would seldom do it. If a story was very urgent to be published, reporters used to accelerate the publication process by putting the headline and lead in the CMS, for the linguist to correct them quicker, and afterwards they wrote the rest of the piece, with the first news flash already published.

Besides this, after the linguists' correction was done, subeditors read the whole texts of most of the stories that were in the process of promotion to the homepage. In some cases they commented on the text with the author and proposed some changes in the focus or the journalistic style to improve the accuracy of the text. Linguists, instead,

would limit their role to the grammatical quality of the text. One day, a reporter argued with a linguist, telling her that she should also check the journalistic quality of the texts, but she did not agree. In the newsroom collective debates they usually discussed about controversial headlines or dubious concepts, with contributions of all the reporters and the linguist. This contributed to consolidate common criteria. However, editors still felt that reporters did not have enough time to review their own texts, to double check them. They had considered writing up their own "llibre d'estil" [*style guidelines*], as big Catalan newspapers and the broadcaster traditional newsrooms in their company already had. In 2003 they just had a Word document with some notes that the linguists updated from time to time, but most of the criteria were shared orally. In 2005 CCRTVi finally created a global style guidelines document for all the websites of the company, and a joint initiative of the CCRTV set up a common website for linguistic advice⁵⁹, which helped in systematizing solutions. At *laMalla.net* they also had collected style guidelines in a Word document shared by the reporters and updated by the adjunct editor, but they did not check it too much, because journalists had the stylistic criteria really well embodied.

One of the standardized criteria was related to the linking policy: what could be linked to a news story, how shall it be labelled. This was obviously not only a matter of style, but the grounding for a full subset of routines to manage hypertext in the news production process. The range of solutions was very broad. *Diari de Tarragona* CMS did not foresee links associated to stories at all. The only space where there was a rudimentary shadow of semantic linking was on the homepage, where reporters could

⁵⁹ www.esadir.com

edit the html to add the headlines of related stories below the main headline on an issue. At *El Periódico*, linking related stories was common in the print online version, but with regard to breaking news reporters argued that they did not have time for that. The procedure in the CMS to link two stories together was cumbersome and therefore journalists would seldom have the will to go through it. Links to other websites were even less a priority. Reporters stated that they could not distract themselves from news production “getting out” to the Internet looking for links. In one of the few occasions in which I was able to participate in news production, a reporter asked me to add links to the British newspapers mentioned in a story. “If you were not here helping us, we wouldn't do it”. In his critical review of online media history, Scott argues: “Though it is true that the bottomless news hole can support all manner of primary documentation and related content to enrich each and every story, it typically does not (...). It would mean pointing readers toward other media outlets, the last thing a capitalist news organization wants to do” (Scott, 2005:110). There might be a part of truth in this reasoning, but the actual motivations of the journalists for not providing links in stories are much simpler according to my observations: the pace of online news production did not let them search for links. Cosculluela had another argument: “Today Google is *the* tool when people want to search for what they want, this is not our duty. Only if you have a link to a very specific document that would be difficult to find it would make sense to put it on the story”. He admitted that he would not look for this kind of links: he would consider using them if he had the URL in the source document for the piece of news.

The definition of the user and the journalist also played an important role in the linking

policies of websites. Punie and Terzis (2003:61) described the model of *Vilaweb*, the Catalan veteran online-only news site that popularized the extensive use of links in stories. It was a model explicitly admired by *El Periódico* journalists, even though they argued they could not afford to follow it. At *Vilaweb* they framed their users as Internet savvy ones and defined the role of the journalist as a guide to the sources who was not supposed to explain the details of the news, but offering the best links to first-hand information that would let users interpret the story by themselves. "If you provide good, interesting and updated links, users come back to your site" (Punie and Terzis, 2003:61), was their counter-argument to the philosophy criticized by Scott.

At *laMalla.net* reporters were sympathetic to *Vilaweb* philosophy, which in fact was one of the online journalism utopias. Actually, they would not explicitly relate their policy to that of *Vilaweb*. A journalist would systematically search for articles related to a new story, published in the past at *laMalla.net*. They had a convenient pop-up form to do this from the CMS form for article editing. They also added links to the homepage of the website of any institution that was mentioned in the story and to particular documents on the specific issue, provided that they were available online. Reporters stated that they tried to offer such *deep links* to documents as long as it was possible, but there were reporters that did this more systematically than others. They usually added external links both in the text (typing or pasting the html code in the text at the CMS form) and in the right column (automatically situated on the page when entering them through the links form in the CMS). If they got an interesting document that was not available online they posted it on their server and linked the related news story to it. Anna Garcia, the adjunct editor, argued that doing the effort of adding links to

provide further information allowed them “not to explain everything in the story”, keeping it simple and short.

CCRTV was a case in between the newspapers and *laMalla.net*. They had more systematic routines than newspapers in linking to past related stories of their own news portals, but external links were seldom used. As in *laMalla.net* CMS, reporters could search for related stories from a pop-up in the story editing form. This facilitated the routine of looking for some headlines to add as complementary and background information (from two to six in most cases). While online reporters managing the print edition of *El Periódico* on the website just linked stories of the same day (“linking previous days stories would puzzle our readers as they had to register to access those news”), for *CCRTV* online journalists it was natural to go back as far as needed. Technological constraints played an important role, too: *El Periódico* journalists did not have such a keyword search feature to select news for linking. But it seems that the online newspaper newsroom defined their users as less web savvy than other online projects. At the broadcaster portals, they had two different options to show related news: on the homepage, under the lead of the three main stories, or below the full text of the story within the inner pages. They usually selected different stories for the two options: homepage links tended to be from news published on the day, related to the same issue but not cause-effect related; inner links tended to be related to background and previous developments of the story from earlier days. The CMS also allowed the reporters to add links inside the text, but they seldom used this method because the procedure was complicated and there was no clear criterion in this regard. A reporter once added a link in the text (she was reporting on the reactions to a train

accident, and the link was to the piece of the same day that explained the facts) and she also added links below the text to related news of previous days. "If there wouldn't have been previous news I would have added today's story link below, but this way I do not mix both kinds of links". Another reporter added a link on a quotation in the text to the actual audio file in which the quotation could be heard in context. Online editors argued that journalists were too busy producing content and this prevented developing a more ambitious and clearly defined link policy. "Providing external links would mean browse the WWW, find information and evaluate its credibility. This means producing less news... and maybe we should do that", hesitated one of the editors.

6.7. Multimedia content production

"A multimedia news organization is one that regularly produces content that contains material that is not native to the parent organization -whether it is audio, still photos, text, video or interactive graphics- and presents it in ways that create storytelling forms unique to the web" (McCombs, 2003:3). This definition was based on the successful multimedia experiences that McCombs analyzed in US online newspapers. She found that the original and multiple format online content production was fostered by fully support from the company managers and by a staff open to change that combined a variety of professional backgrounds (McCombs, 2003:75). The situation in the four Catalan newsrooms was closer to the picture of Brannon's observations: "Managers lamented the content for not being more medium-appropriate because news workers got too bogged down in the production process to think broadly or creatively; producers, meanwhile, felt their tools were so inadequate and time consuming that their workloads precluded them from developing content better suited for the web" (Brannon, 1999). For the journalists of the observed newsrooms, multimedia tended to be either wishful thinking or a technological nightmare.

Original multimedia content in breaking news was an unthinkable luxury for these online newsrooms. The most important initiative was that of *Diari de Tarragona* during its first phase, with animated infographics. When I did the observation stage at the newsroom, this was just a memory: the development of the new website had focused the priorities of the graphic design team. The other newsrooms limited their daily

multimedia efforts to the repurposing of audio, video and photographic materials produced by traditional newsrooms or news agencies. It was a similar situation to the two Argentinean online newsrooms analyzed by García (2004): "Editors are taking whatever is available and they elaborate the multimedia presentation with that. And it is obvious that, even when images and sounds come from other media of the same group, the logics and agendas do not necessarily coincide". The researcher underscores "the scarce autonomy of the online newsroom" to produce multimedia content. "They work with what they find, when they can do it, and if it is not too expensive" (García, 2004:208). Therefore, the utopia of the journalist choosing the best format to explain news (see section 2.3.2) is constrained to the available material and is not at all planned by the online journalist. Only *laMalla.net* had one camera for the online journalists to record video or take pictures, but as they did not usually get out of the newsroom, the presence of original audiovisual material on the website was anecdotal.

Pictures were the most available material besides text for the online news websites. In traditional media companies, online journalists had access to an agency service and the production of their mates (e.g. photojournalists' pictures in the newspapers or still captures of video footage in the broadcaster). This was easy in newspapers, but *CCRTV* only hired this service in 2003, as the broadcaster newsrooms did not have the need for it. "It is quite slow in providing photos of breaking news if compared to the immediacy that the Internet requires; I guess that newspapers are their main clients and they have no rush", commented an editor. Sometimes they took the photo of an international news website until EFE delivered it. *LaMalla.net* reporters did not have

such services, and took most of the photos from the websites of the news sources and Internet searches, as well as still captures of the local broadcasters television network (XTVL) stories. Homepage layout was an important factor for decisions regarding picture selection. *El Periódico* and *CCRTV* had some layout options that required pictures in the main stories, and therefore they searched for photos to illustrate them. At the same time, a very striking picture could be enough reason to promote a story to the top positions on the homepage. At *Diari de Tarragona* pictures were only shown on the homepage, and they tried to have half of the headlines with photo. *LaMalla.net* editor would insist to the reporters to try and put at least one picture in every story. This let them have more flexibility when defining the homepage layout, as they could show or hide the photos besides every headline. They showed a photo in at least one of the three headlines approximately, guided rather by the aim of having a balanced homepage than in journalistic criteria. A journalist updating the homepage could show or hide photos to fit the new structure after the update was performed.

Pictures did not play a very important role as a newsworthy element on their own most of the time in any website in 2003. Both *laMalla.net* and *CCRTV* had a website photo archive mainly consisting of previously published pictures that they could use again if they did not find any recent and more appropriate alternative. *LaMalla.net* was the only news site having an automated photo gallery that could be attached to every story. In that were particularly prone to have newsworthy pictures, such as anti-war demonstrations, the photo gallery allowed the reporter to give the images a more preeminent role. In this particular case, reporters posted their own pictures and invited the audience to submit theirs. "Users appreciate very much these photo galleries, they

visit them a lot!", explained enthusiastically a reporter. Another exception to the lack of journalistic value of the pictures could be found in *CCRTV* when the photo of the main story on the homepage was used to highlight an issue that the headline could not reflect. The photo caption was used then as a kind of secondary title. After the 2003 stages, *El Periódico* and *CCRTV* developed automatic photo gallery tools and gave photos a special section highlighted on the homepage where images were the main content. This somehow superseded the previous situation where photos had a less relevant role as news content.

Video and audio were not available on newspaper websites. "If you want audiovisual clips on your website you must have the files. You buy them or you do them. And we don't do either", was the conclusive reply of an online reporter when asked. *El Periódico Online* editor argued that there was no point in putting video in a website nowadays: image quality was poor and this made it not competitive with television. "This may change with broadband", he wondered, but the fact was that they had no technical means or human resources to produce video or audio. "We have opted for an attitude of 'wait and see' with multimedia content", admitted the newspaper editor Antonio Franco. The CMS supports video and audio since 2001, and they experimentally tested it during the Zeta Digital stage. "The online team is convinced that we can provide multimedia content on the website, but the decision is not ours. The newspaper is very graphical compared to competitors and the website should also have this, it is too text-driven right now", argued David Sancha, adjunct editor at the online newsroom. At *laMalla.net* the source for video footage was XTVL. They had multimedia as a founding principle, following the utopias of online journalism.

Television news stories were codified for online webcasting without editing, and were conceptualized as complements to news texts. XTVL sent news videos to the satellite feed for local stations at noon and 19:00. The adjunct editor selected those newsworthy ones for *laMalla.net*, uploaded them onto the server and added a link in the appropriate story if they had already covered the event, or created a new story for the video, usually with the XTVL web text. The video feed included non-edited images without off voice, but these were only used by the news site if they were very spectacular or self-explaining. "We would like to do more, but I think that what we have is enough for our users right now. Many still do not have broadband access and they watch TV when they want video. If the web just offers TV at low quality, I think it is not worthy. We need to keep on exploring this and try to find how video can be useful as an online storytelling tool, go beyond using it just for the sake of having video on the web", argued online editor Llombart. "Some videos have very few viewers, some many. Sometimes the video is a necessary complement for the text. I guess we should think in providing less videos, with more image quality and more relevant content", suggested Anna Garcia.

For the *CCRTV* online newsroom, video and audio were naturally to be an inherent part of the news portals from the beginning: the website of a broadcaster had to be audiovisual. They encoded newscast summaries, weather forecasts and selected television and radio stories for the web. But users looked just 10% of the uploaded materials, and only one in ten users opened the main story video, that is, most watched one besides newscast summaries. Editors blamed low bandwidth at users' homes as the main reason for this lack of interest, but they also acknowledged that

offering contents without editing on the website broadcaster may not be appealing. During my stage, they were planning to improve image quality of the videos and change the encoding technology, which would allow them to be more selective and provide “less clips, but more attractive”. Before newscasts started, journalists talked about which videos were relevant for the website. Sometimes, they realized that a story was not suitable for the portal after recording it, because it was too close to reportage style, atemporal or focused on background information, and then they discarded it because it was difficult to link to a specific news story. Besides newscasts stories, they recorded live the most important political declarations to be put as related content to the story, summarizing the statement. They captured a frame to be put as a photo in the story, as well. During 2004 they also started to provide live video on the website in very special occasions, taken from the 24-hour news TV channel. This became a more common routine in 2005 and live coverage was announced on the homepage. Most of the technological constraints and difficulties of online video production were overcome since 2003 (see section 7.1), but editors still feel that video will only have the right weight on the website after the portal redesign. Audio files were almost exclusively offered by *CCRTV*. They could access the daily digital audio archive of *Catalunya Informació*, where they could recover quotations and on-site chronicles, not the stories read by the radio newsroom journalists, as they were read live. The hourly news bulletin was automatically uploaded to the website. Quotations and chronicles served as a complement of the text and they could be updated as new versions were produced by the radio journalists.

Infographics were regarded as an attractive element by *El Periódico* and *laMalla.net*

online editors, but they acknowledged that they needed more resources to apply them to daily news production. "We have learned that Flash can be an important news tool, it allows you to explain things in new ways. But the breaking news rhythm does not allow us to work on this daily, we can only use it for special occasions right now", admitted Llombart. "Any plan must include a journalistic reason behind the multimedia (...). Don't put video just for video's sake", recommended McCombs (2003:89) as a conclusion from the experience of successful multimedia websites. Catalan online newsrooms seemed to be entering this phase with video and infographics: Flash was moving from being mere decorative animation towards creating news content; video was turning from a mere complement to a newsworthy element. However, there were other factors besides the journalistic value to foster multimedia content production. *El Periódico* and *Diari de Tarragona* once had graphic designers producing infographics, but job cuts at Zeta Digital in the former case and the priority of web redesign in the latter made the newsrooms forget about infographics. If an online newsroom lacks the experience, the human resources or even the technical tools or the primary matter, it is difficult for them to explore multimedia content production. Furthermore, the experience of the two online newspapers shows that adopting multimedia is not the necessary evolution trail: they entered the infographics world and then stepped down. The limited and diverse experiences with multimedia content at the analyzed newsrooms are one of the clearest demonstrations that the material and social context of the online newsroom shape the uses and actual features of Internet communicative possibilities (see chapter 7). Online journalism utopias are a far pale ideal in real situations.

6.8. User participation management

If multimedia utopias are hardly taken into account in daily practice in the four online newsrooms, many of the interactivity utopias were also far from actual developments in the news websites. Beyond material and organizational circumstances, the professional culture strongly shaped the conceptualization of users. While interactivity was a keyword in the discussions with online journalists about the differences between the Internet and traditional media, in daily routines there was a tendency towards reproducing mass media models, in which journalists were the sole producers, and users were a rather passive audience, consumers of the stories. *LaMalla.net* seemed to be more sensitive to interactivity utopias in their discourses and of their some developments, but somehow the traditional model also dominated in most of news production. They argued that Internet users were active consumers that would be willing to become co-producers if they were given the chance, but these more radical definitions of collaborative news production were mainly put into practice in special coverages. For editor Silvia Llombart, interactivity features in the website were crucial to foster audience engagement, as they felt part of the online project.

Online newsrooms had access to very detailed statistics about the times when more user visits concentrated and how many times a story had been opened. This was far more than what traditional media journalists could know about their users, but statistics did not tell much about the profile of the online users. Scott argues that live, detailed statistics provoke that “each topic, each story, and each journalist are

subjected to a ruthless market calculus. (...) Features that do not cut the mustard in terms of traffic and advertiser appeal are routinely dropped or altered" (2005:110). Whereas, the routines in the analyzed online newsrooms seemed to privilege professional criteria as their main reference, not users preferences. The Guardian Unlimited online editor gave similar arguments to those of Catalan online journalists: "I very firmly believe that, if you are an editor you are an editor because you've got some experience and this is important" (Punie and Terzis, 2003:22). We would state that selection could not depend on the hits of an article. He found statistics useful for broader considerations over the content of the website: if a section only got 2% of the audience and producing it meant a significant cost, it had to be reconsidered. Nonetheless, journalists at *El Periódico* and *laMalla.net* had the habit of looking at the news stories statistics at least a couple of times during the shift to see which were the most viewed today. When asked if user statistics influenced their decisions on the homepage, editors defended that newsworthiness criteria should prevail, but a reporter acknowledged: "You would not change the main story, but surely a popular piece will keep its place on the homepage rather than other secondary stories with less readers". At *El Periódico* and *CCRTV* their experience showed that curious and crime stories were the most visited ones, and those related to the Internet and sports ranked high as well. Hard news was not the most popular, and some reporters pictured their users as young and not interested in politics. The main news may not be the most visited ones, and actually sometimes it was a secondary story that was on the homepage just for a while. "Our users have already heard about the big stories at the TV newscasts, and they know more and more how to search what they want on the Internet. I guess this is more democratic. You will continue providing them a professional choice of relevant

news, but they now have the chance of looking for what interests them”.

CCRTV online reporters did not check statistics that much, but their abstract image of media users was quite similar and served as an argument to back their content strategy: “People who want detailed news buy newspapers; we have to concentrate on immediate news with basic data. They use the Internet when they have no other option, when radio or television are not available”. At *laMalla.net* they agreed that big news reached the users by other means. User statistics also corroborated their content policy: “They read at *laMalla.net* about things that other media do not cover”. Alternative stories were the most read ones. They assumed that statistics measure if the headline has been effective (and the user has clicked through), not if they have actually fully read the news story. With the tool of user comments to news they claimed to know much more: the profile of the readers and what issues really motivated them to share their thoughts beyond reading the stories. “With the electoral period of 2003-2004, we saw that users commented political news considerably. We thought they wouldn't be that motivated with political news, but maybe because of the intensity of the events, they convinced us that we needed to write more political news”, explained Anna Garcia.

Customization can be another strategy to know more about the users. However, only *laMalla.net* had developed a flexible homepage that users could define. *El Periódico* had a user registration system since the end of 2002, but it was just used to control access to the news archive. No customization or analysis of the gathered data was developed at the online newsroom. The system at *laMalla.net*, already envisioned in

the initial project but devised in the mid-2002 revision, allowed users to decide which sections and local news they wanted to be prioritized on the second block of the homepage (the upper right column). Nonetheless, users could not customize the main story, as the reporters deemed important to keep journalistic criteria visible to every user. Just 15% of registered users took advantage of the customization tool. The newspaper editor of *El Periódico* openly stated that he did not find customization to be an adequate strategy: "It may make sense in specialized media, but big popular online newspapers have to offer broad thematic content and a journalistic selection of issues". Ari Heinonen noted that news production had not changed that much on the Internet: "For practical and economical reasons, journalism consists for the main part of bulk production even in the Age of the Net, and it is only in the receiving process that individuals in the audience can make choices" (1999:81). He conceptualized an ideal production in which individual users' needs would be the basis for journalistic work, providing targeted news, much more than customization of a "bulk" production. The situation in the analyzed Catalan newsrooms was far from this proposal.

"Flemish online journalists seem to be aware of a 'stronger' public, so audience-oriented functions become more important online" (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:22). 80% of Flemish online journalists thought that interaction with readers was important and 69% defended providing discussion forums on news websites. Theoretically, journalists in the Catalan newsrooms had similar attitudes. David Sancha compared the two outlets in his company: "At the newspaper you have few opportunities to interact. On the website you can offer a much broader range of participation options: a forum, polls, e-mail".

The Internet as a communication tool between the audience and journalists is not exclusive to online journalists. Traditional journalists in three Catalan newsrooms observed by Masip received demands of more information on a news story by e-mail, as well as complaints and even suggestions for issues to be covered (Masip, 2005:567). Their attitude towards this feedback channel was not very enthusiastic, as Heinonen also found among Finnish newspaper journalists (1999:63). The main reason was the lack of time because of the pressure of production timing. They feared that they could be overwhelmed by readers' e-mails and doubted that they would be representative of their whole audience. In any case they were expecting to engage into conversation or co-operative production with their audience. Heinonen argued that only if journalists are persuaded that close contact with the audience is beneficial for their work –instead of the long standing certainty that detachment is the best option to legitimize their function– the interactive tools of the Internet may be explored as new needs will arise, and not the other way around. Nevertheless, while research on Germany shows that user contact is a routine for 60% of online journalists, in the Catalan cases it was only a newsroom-wide habit at *laMalla.net*. Most breaking news journalists were completely detached from audience contact. "I used to have e-mail, but I received many press releases and spam, it was just overwhelming, so I forgot about it", said a reporter.

Online newsrooms had practical strategies to manage audience feedback and avoid it to interfere the news production process. At *Diari de Tarragona* and *CCRTV*, online editors read through the e-mails and answered or redirected them to the appropriate recipient, be it an online reporter or someone in the traditional newsroom. As there

was just a generic e-mail address on the website, the audience regarded it as the channel to communicate with all the media company. At the *Diari* most of the messages were press releases, but also comments on articles in the print edition. Sometimes they received pictures of events, but they were seldom used. At *El Periódico*, one person per shift in the online production staff was in charge of checking the generic e-mail inbox. They had many answer templates to make it easier to manage the interaction. Most of the messages asked for copies of articles and photos or they reported technical problems in accessing parts of the website. Some e-mails were forwarded to the online editor or even to journalists in the print newsroom. *LaMalla.net* was the only website in which every story was signed and an the author's e-mail address was available. Reporters received many messages from their audience directly, but even more messages were addressed to the generic e-mail that was managed by the adjunct editor: "We receive lots of queries, suggestions, corrections. It is amazing how much people use e-mail to communicate with us. I try to answer all the messages as soon as possible and users are very grateful for this. E-mail just works".

The fact that *laMalla.net* interactive policies were significantly different from those in online newsrooms of traditional media was not only visible in the transparency act of having individual journalists' e-mail in every story. While the other websites had their forums as a separate service from news, the online-only outlet integrated most of the users' commentaries right beneath each story, as in weblogs. This was a crucial conceptual difference: at *laMalla.net* journalists felt closer to their audience, as users could directly criticize, comment and suggest links on news stories. Reporters visited

their stories regularly several times a day to check the comments and they engaged in small conversations in the comments area, answering the most direct proposals. "It is rewarding to see that your story promotes debate, and it is also challenging. Sometimes, there are quite strong comments on mistakes you make, but this only alerts you to be more concentrated on doing things better, in checking twice that everything in a story is all right before posting it", explained a reporter. Participation at these micro-forums attached to news was completely open, and users could write without the need of revealing their real names. This was a radically different experience from traditional media online forums. *CCRTV* and *Diari de Tarragona* forum spaces obliged users to register before posting a message. They neither needed to reveal their names, but their nickname could be banned if their attitude was not adequate. In all the cases messages were moderated after being published on the website, because journalists argued that pre-publication moderation "killed the debate". The routine of forum moderation was performed by the same roles in each newsroom as e-mail management. Thus, interaction with users tended to concentrate in few hands. This meant that, besides *laMalla.net*, breaking news reporters seldom accessed the forums and user discussions had no effect on news content production.

The moderation policy at *laMalla.net* was more relaxed than in other websites. They tried not to delete any comment, even if it was really offensive. They preferred, in very particular moments, to post a comment reminding that respect must be the rule in the posts. They argued that users themselves would shame on a flaming post. For Llobart, both the openness of these space for comment and the fact that journalists write on them, were the keys for the quantity and quality of user participation. The

style of news content also fostered active involvement: "At the beginning there were very few comments on news and reporters did not pay much attention to them. But when we changed our way of telling stories, closer to the public, as a dialog with them, they started to talk to us. When users saw that journalists actually read the comments and appreciated suggestions, they felt that *laMalla.net* was a multilateral communication space".

Forum moderation could become a nightmare. At *El Periódico*, by far the website with more activity in its forums –which did not require registration–, online production reporters deemed it as one of the most boring routines. Every four or five hours, someone had to check the newly published messages. They had around twenty active forums on long-run issues, but only two or three were hot every week. The reporter systematically deleted offensive messages attacking a concrete person and those containing a website address, because they could not control the content of external webs. Before shift changes, the last reporter reviewing the forums sent an e-mail so that the next reporter knew where to start. They did not provide explanations for deleted messages and kept online messages complaining about deleted messages. A dozen users were always participating, all day long, picking on the other users and making it difficult to moderate. However, online managers valued the forum very positively: "I think users understand the forum as their own community, not a place to communicate with journalists. It is a public platform, to express themselves in front of many other people, and it is very popular!". Specific forums were promoted as related links of the print edition stories.

Diari de Tarragona forums were not very active. As at *El Periódico*, there were some users that were usual participants, and the online editor planned that they could be persuaded to act as moderators of thematic forums, to make the debates more active and interesting, because they would have someone feeding them with content and ideas. But the idea never was taken forward. With some events, the activity of the forum raised exponentially. After the murder of a local young woman by her partner, the volume of messages was so high that even the print newsroom managers were interested in the phenomenon and asked the online staff to write a summary of the forum posts for the print edition. The online editors, in charge of moderating the forum, did not usually have much trouble with inappropriate content, but in this case he deleted the ones asking for death penalty for the murderer. Some users complained when he deleted their messages, but he answered them in the forum itself saying that there are basic etiquette rules that have to be respected.

At *CCRTV*, forums were only promoted on the homepage for very particular occasions, such as electoral campaigns. For local elections they tried an ambitious strategy: they opened 990 forums, one for each municipality. Only 30% had some participation and just some few were actually lively. It is obvious that in this case there was no conceptualization of forums as a community building tool, as it was the case of *laMalla.net*, somehow *El Periódico* or successful online newspapers such as Guardian Unlimited: "The idea was that a newspaper could produce a website which was much more than in print. A service that will have more immediacy, by adding a breaking news service, that will be more interactive by adding talk events, invite journalists/columnists, politicians, arts people, administrators etc, to discuss issues

online, in order to build a community around the Guardian" (Punie and Terzis, 2003:21).

Polls were an easy interactive tool to which website users would massively reply. Only in *laMalla.net* there was a discussion space related to the poll beyond the questionnaire. *LaMalla.net* posted a weekly poll, *El Periódico* a daily one and *CCRTV* and *Diari de Tarragona* only activated it for specific occasions.

Again, the only project that made an effort to offer users the chance of participating in content production was *laMalla.net*. The PIC (see section 5.3) was aimed to sources rather than to users, but it was the first step in the open strategy of the portal, even though it was not very successful in promoting participation. Beyond this, many specials were designed to include users' production, and some were directly created around the idea of user-driven production. A literary space allowed users to send their short fiction stories or poems; a photo album organized around the world globe invited users to send in their holiday pictures. But Llombart was clear: "One thing is what the newsroom produces and another what users can produce. We can have an open dialog, but we cannot mix both things".

7. Material and social context of the online newsrooms

The paths of the four analyzed newsrooms in the shaping of online journalism as a form of news production have not followed the utopias closely. Empirical evidence presented in chapter 6 suggests that utopias are regarded as an ideal desideratum, but context factors such as staffing policies and traditional journalistic culture seem to have a more crucial weight in defining online newsroom routines and values. Pablo Bozckowski (2004c) identified three concrete elements that shaped the adoption of technological developments in three US online newspapers: organizational structures (the relationship between the online and offline newsrooms), work practices (the definition of news production as gatekeeping or not) and representation of users (as technically savvy or not). For him, conscious or unconscious decisions in these areas shaped the online news product and conditioned their degree in hypertextual, interactive and multimedia development. Brannon (1999) found that technological tools were also a factor to take into account in the shaping of online journalists' routines. They regarded them as limiting their ability to produce rich online news. Lack of training and the excessive time demands of technological tasks were reasons given in the newsrooms she analyzed to justify why online journalism utopias were not reached. McCombs (2003:87) showed that these technological limitations were better overcome by highly motivated online teams that had the complicity of the media company managers, an enthusiastic attitude towards change and time in their workday to experiment and learn new technical abilities.

Technical artifacts can be regarded as active actors in the shaping of a technological system (Callon, 1987; see section 3.2.4). They may be conceptualized as the material element in the system, the one that can be reduced to hardware and software instruments that online journalists use in their daily routines. Obviously, the features of these technical tools have been socially defined. Some of them were devised outside the newsroom, by companies that were specialized in producing them, but there was a choice of a particular solution by newsroom managers, based on three aspects: their expectations about what that software and hardware should be used for, the current technological options available and the budget they had allocated to each tool depending on the priority it had to the production process. Besides this, content management systems (CMS) were designed in-house in most of the cases, and therefore we may infer that they were devised to perfectly fit the needs of the online newsrooms, their definitions of the product and their routines, although this was not completely the case.

Technology was not an external input to online newsrooms. The material context of the journalistic work was the result of many technical design decisions that clearly affected the performance of reporters. The technical department in the media companies and its relationship with the online newsroom played an important role in these decisions. Thus, the material context was socially shaped, but once defined, its materiality actually became a crucial factor in the shaping of working routines. Reporters usually did not have the chance to participate in technological decisions and one of the strongest internal social conflicts in the newsrooms raised because of the frustration with technical features of the tools they used.

The first section in this chapter analyzes the role of technological artifacts in the shaping of online news production daily routines. Technical tasks are described and journalists' attitude towards them is analyzed. The second section changes the focus to the social context of the online newsroom and the role that other actors in the media companies play in the online venture. The relationship between the online newsroom and the technical department and with the traditional newsroom are portrayed and interpreted as social factors that constrain Internet news production. A special attention is devoted in section three to explore the dynamics of innovation in the four case studies, analyzing the role of the different actors presented in the previous sections. Ethnographic data and interviews are the main basis for this discussion. We conceptualize the material and social context of online journalism as "constraints", because this was the perception in the studied newsrooms: having the utopias as the ideal referent, their context is regarded as limiting their ability to develop all the Internet news potential (McCombs, 2003:82).

7.1. Technological artifacts as material constraints of online journalism

"You may want to set up empires, but if infrastructures do not respond, you cannot get further", admitted *laMalla.net* editor Silvia Llobart. Journalists in the studied newsrooms had quite strong feelings against the material conditions of their work. They acknowledged that time was the best solution for most of the cumbersome technical processes they had to face. "Since your last visit things have improved a lot with this new video editing software", remarked an online reporter at *CCRTV*. But their patience was challenged too often and journalists thought that they were losing precious time in technical tasks. From the technical support team's point of view, Marc Mateu described this situation at the broadcaster online newsroom: "Reporters lose too much time in unimportant tasks: they edit too much video pieces when 95% have no more than 30 viewers. We should put less video on the website and automate processes as much as possible, but online journalists would always have to be able to perform technical tasks. It's not easy, but they keep on learning". Brannon depicted similar (but far more extreme) conditions in US online newsrooms in very early stages of online journalism development (1998), when material conditions were much more demanding. Reporters stated: "I used to leave the office thinking: 'Man, I didn't spend more than 15 minutes on actual journalism today!' " (Brannon, 1999). "Clearly, online workers perceived technology, especially the production aspects of creating online content, as impeding presentation of Internet-suitable news" (Brannon, 1999). Online journalists saw the production technologies they used as very time consuming, frustrating and demanding. They obliged them to be too "production-centric", spending

too much time doing technical tasks that were not rewarding and not related to content creation. "Many respondents voiced frustration that the tools were not developed enough to support their ambition to present content better. Visions of cinematic special effects or CD-Rom interactivity remained vivid in their minds, but such content cannot be refined with sophistication as quickly as breaking news demands" (Brannon, 1999). The need of simpler to use and at the same time more powerful software applications was one of the main concerns for those US online journalists observed by Brannon.

In Europe, surveyed online journalists believe that Internet news is more "technology-driven" than traditional journalism. "68 per cent of the Flemish respondents agree that online journalists need to develop new technological skills" (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:22), while "more than 90% of respondents [in the Netherlands] agreed wholeheartedly with the statement: The development of additional technological skills is a necessary precondition for the online journalist –but only 63% feel that it is html or other specific technical features that one needs for the job" (Deuze *et al.*, 2004:24). It could be argued that the need for technological skills is an *ad hoc* appreciation that will fade away when the tools of online journalism stabilize and become transparent to reporters, as broadcasting and newspaper production tools are. "Comfort with technology is a factor in many of the impediments to multimedia performance", argued Brannon (1999), and this was also the case in the observed Catalan newsrooms: as artifacts were improved or replaced to offer easier and more automatic procedures, journalists felt more confident with content production routines. If in the early years of online journalism there was a need for many diverse technical skills for web

production, the trend in the 2000s was to automate most of the technical procedures to let journalists with just average office computer skills to be able to publish online content.

Web content management systems are the heart of the technological tools for news production. They materialize the main production routines and workflows in specific tasks on a web-based interface. Quim Cardona, the initial web developer and once editor of *laMalla.net* recalls that most of the Catalan online news sites in 1999 were updated editing html pages. This was cumbersome and they were convinced that they wanted a CMS for news publication. "But we had no references, we had not seen any CMS before and we started from the scratch to decide how it should work. It was quite easy to define which were the elements of a news story: headline, pre-headline, lead and text, publication date, thematic and geographical classification and related content (photos, links, video, audio)".

In all the CMS, stories could be set to different status, accommodating the routines of the newsroom. At *laMalla.net* there were two possible status: "in production" and "published". Furthermore, the date of publication could be set, so that a "published" piece would not be visible to users until the established date. This system was devised in the initial CMS design, as they were planning to publish daily editions, but in the end, when continuous update superseded that model as the production criterion, it enabled the delayed publication strategy (see section 6.2) of non-breaking news stories. The system was flexible enough to allow simultaneous immediate publishing and planned production. An initial feature of the CMS that became obsolete in the final

production rhythm was the *expiry date* of homepages: at first, this let them plan automatic homepage updates, several editions through the day. The actual routine was a progressive substitution of headlines on the homepage as new stories were produced, and therefore human control was continuous and pieces were taken away from the homepage manually.

CCRTV had the most elaborated news status options, with a total to five: "writing", meaning that the story was not finished yet, though this was not much used as most of the stories were published right away after a journalist had selected a wire and edited it, the main use was to paste drafts or source texts for another reporter to work on them; "editing", when the newswriting had been finished (a first or a succeeding version) but not reviewed by the linguist; "corrected", when it had been already processed by the linguist, ready to be published; "published", when it had been selected by the subeditor before promoting it to the homepage; "published without correcting", in the case of an urgent news story the linguist could not correct, which would be done as soon as possible.

There was not a unique way of performing CMS routines in the newsrooms. Every journalist had their own habits. Using a Microsoft Word document was more usual at *laMalla.net*, where many stories were created well in advance of publication. Journalists could have saved the story as "in production" in the CMS, but many of them preferred to input the text into the system only when they had an almost definitive draft written. Other reporters proceeded the other way around: they first entered a provisional headline in the news form, plus photos and links, and then started to write

the story directly on the CMS. Actually, half of the reporters tended to write their pieces directly on the news form and the other half on MS Word documents. At *CCRTV* there were also these variations. Even the same would performed different technical routines in different moments, quite randomly. At *laMalla.net*, one of the reporters told me, after thinking for a while –she admitted she had never thought about it before–, that when she found information on websites she usually opened a Word document to paste it and work over that, while when she had documents as a base (wires, press releases, reports) she preferred to print them and write the story on the CMS. An *El Periódico* reporter used the print newsroom editing software to write the stories, arguing that the built-in spell check was superb; then she pasted the text to the CMS. The afternoon reporter, though, preferred writing the stories directly on the news form, because the print editing software “takes too much memory from the computer”. In the case of *Diari de Tarragona*, the news text input box was so small that discouraged the reporters from editing the wire. Browsing and reading the text in that four-line tiny box was really hard and utterly unworkable. Reporters could have first pasted the wire onto a MS Word document, which was a usual routine for many journalists in the other online newsrooms in order to edit the text, but they tried to lessen the steps in their publishing routines and therefore opted for posting unedited wires. One of the reporters did not paste the headline, and wrote it from the scratch, while the other pasted all the wire into the text form and then moved the headline to its input form before editing it.

Brannon pointed out that in US online newsrooms “lack of rules or standards creates problems of managing the medium (...). I suggest that adoption of routines and

techniques can provide online producers with a framework to follow as their skills mature with the medium, [but] the constant nature of change creates obstacles to routinization" (Brannon, 1999). In Catalan newsrooms, however, the existence of different procedures did not mean that there was a lack of rules and routines: every journalist had embodied their own sequence of mechanical actions and repeated it with precision every time, even if it was not the quickest way to achieve a task. Some journalists were not very skilled at computers use and they did not use keyboard shortcuts to copy and paste texts, for example. They had their own solution. This could affect their ability to publish a story as quickly as possible, something crucial in the online journalistic culture, but did not affect the coherence of the resulting product. While Brannon concluded that "producers have so many ways to do the job that it has created inconsistencies" (1999), in the Catalan cases most of the time the different ways of doing the same technical routine did not have these drawbacks and production was consistent. A small exception highlights the fragile relationship between technological design decisions and consistent journalistic criteria: one of the systematic complaints of the afternoon reporter at *El Periódico* was that morning reporters forgot to fill the source box in the news input form. It was not compulsory to fill it up for the story to be published and they had the convention of putting "Agencies" in normal circumstances. It could have been automated, because the routine was absolutely repetitive and the morning reporters felt it to be unnecessary.

Thus, the case of the *Diari* was not the only one where CMS design did not meet journalists' daily routines needs. A reporter at *El Periódico* complained that the input box for subtitles in the news form had a single line when they quite often had to write

two or three subtitles with a line each. The form had a second subtitles box, but its content was not shown on the homepage and therefore it was not useful for their purposes, as longer subtitles were used in main stories to compensate the blank space created on the homepage at the side of the picture. Homepage updating was clearly cumbersome for the journalists in most of the newsrooms, and they complained that technical routines took too long to proceed when immediacy was needed (see section 6.3). *El Periódico* reporters did not trust the CMS: "Sometimes it does not publish the changes we make in the stories on the public website, so we have a look at the public site after submitting any change, to make sure that it worked". During my stage they did not detect any publication error, but they still kept checking the public website after posting any story, it had become a routine. At *CCRTV* they had a similar distrust relationship with the publishing system, as changes in the CMS were only visible in the website after some minutes. "Technicians told us that we notice this delay because of the firewall of our company, that everybody else sees the changes immediately, but this is really annoying, because when you are in a hurry you work blindly". A primal fear that the CMS may not proceed with their orders surfaced in high tension moments.

Journalists in the different online newsrooms had varying technical skills. This did not seem to be determinant to the quality of the online product. At *Diari de Tarragona* reporters had to assume technical tasks to compensate the lack of CMS features, and therefore their journalistic performance was less efficient. *LaMalla.net* journalists used their advanced skills to produce more complex stories, with internal links and tables. In the case of *CCRTV*, online reporters' technical skills were minimal, but the technical

team had developed a comprehensive set of automated processes that tried to let the journalists focus on the content.

News text input forms did not have user-friendly format buttons. Italics, links and the bold style of section titles had to be marked with html code in the form. At *laMalla.net*, reporters had a cheat page accessible from the form, but many of them typed the code directly. Cardona explains that in the first years, reporters did not insert links in the text: they only used the links form that showed the related content in the right column. "I think this was not because they did not want to type html code; they were very familiar with it. It was more a matter of a journalistic criterion". When Silvia Llombart entered the newsroom, even though the CMS news stories input form had not changed, reporters started adding links within the story text systematically, and they also continued offering them in the right column, as a way of giving the reader two chances to look for related information. Therefore, there had been different linking routines with the same CMS system, depending on journalistic decisions. Reporters were able to edit tables and photo collages with Dreamweaver and insert the html code in the text input form of the CMS to create special stories. They also edited static html pages in special features and CSS style sheets if the designer was busy. *CCRTV* online reporters had very scarce html knowledge in comparison to the online-only site staff. In fact, that was the only case in which links in the text could be entered using a user-friendly pop-up box. They almost never used bold style in the text, and a reporter asked another how had she marked some words in bold face in a story, as she did not remember which was the code to do it. At *El Periódico*, html specialists were in the online production team and they could edit html templates with advanced skills. Just

one of the reporters in the breaking news team was able to insert links using html code in the news form, but he said he was too busy to care about it. The most complex html routine they had was marking section titles with bold style.

Reporters at *Diari de Tarragona* edited the homepage with Dreamweaver, as it was static html. The elder reporter admitted he had difficulties to work with the software at the beginning. "I put myself the challenge of editing the homepage in 15 minutes and now I can do it without much effort. The secret is getting the routine of the tasks". He performed a rather mechanical succession of tasks: pasting the headlines and leads into the template, pasting the link to the article, editing the photo and pasting it into the homepage, and uploading the html document. He accepted using Dreamweaver as a temporal solution, taking for granted that the CMS-driven homepage was under development, but they waited for many months without seeing it finished. The online editor argued that it was good for the reporters to deal with technical routines and html editing, because they get to know better the medium in which they were working, but for the reporters it seemed just a reason to justify a delay in the CMS development. Most of the specials were also html-based. This meant that the reporters would have to edit the pages at Dreamweaver using templates created by the graphic designers. The online editor would set up the basics: checking the templates, creating a shared folder and the web server folder. Reporters gave the necessary CSS style to each element of the stories, they edited manually the anchors code and uploaded the files by FTP when they had inserted the content. "It's quite time consuming and I still haven't memorized all the steps as with the homepage", complained a reporter.

Online editors promised that many of the dysfunctions of the CMS could be fixed in the next version of the software, a similar view to Brannon's interviewees: "This is an industry in its infancy, and our tools reflect that" (1999). But the fact was that in-house developed CMS software evolved slowly (see sections 7.2 and 7.3 for the dynamics of this evolution) in comparison with audiovisual tools, which usually were external solutions. As audiovisual production was a far more complex process than text publishing, online managers were sensitive towards the improvement of these tools. One month before starting my stage in 2003, *laMalla.net* newsroom welcomed the third innovation in video processing. Until then the source of videos for the web were VHS tapes and, later, a satellite broadcast, but in any case a reporter had to record and cut the video news stories with Real Producer, a quite simple and intuitive software. The innovation was that the XTVL website team had created a process that encoded automatically every video piece and extracted six frames from each as pictures. This was developed to let local stations know what they were receiving in the satellite broadcast and it really made *laMalla.net* journalists' life much more easier, because they did not need to do all the technical processing. Usually, though, the automatic system had problems with the audio and therefore the output was not suitable to be published on the web. The local stations did not care about these problems as they used the online video as an internal preview, and *laMalla.net* reporters had to continue with the usual routine of recording live the news when they were sent by the satellite and then cutting out selected news stories. The adjunct editor assumed this daily routine. Once encoded for online publishing, putting a video on the website was quite easy: the reporter chose the news story to which it would be related and uploaded the video file from her computer using a form pop-up in the

news input form which allowed to add a title and source tag. In the early stages of the project the upload had to be done using an FTP program. Publishing three or four videos daily lasted for more than an hour of work at first, while with the new system it took less than half an hour. However, the adjunct editor felt frustrated with technological innovations that worked just half the way they were supposed to work.

CCRTV lived a similar evolution. Video production had the most complex and time consuming set of tasks in the newsroom when I started the stage. Usually one journalist per shift specialized in this processing. Getting video pieces on the website required to record them live when they were broadcasted. They had a computer that was completely devoted to this task. They used Windows Media Encoder to record the videos, stopping after each of the news they were interested in, trying to have the sole piece, without the anchor speaking. If they were precise enough they did not need to edit the file afterwards to get rid of the anchor. They named the file soon after stopping the recording and started recording at the beginning of the next interesting piece, as they had decided in advance which were the ones they wanted for the portal. This was faster than recording the whole newscast and then edit it to cut out the interesting videos. At the same time, the reporter captured frames to be used as photos, a complementary routine that became less necessary when they got access to agency pictures. During the spare time between recordings the journalist edited the photos to adapt them to the appropriate size and weight. After that they found the news to which associate photos and video and then uploaded them using a similar form as the one at *laMalla.net*, indicating the caption and the source of the picture.

Two months after my first stage they were given a new video recording software, much easier to use because it could record a whole bunch of news and cut them out and name them very easily. Nevertheless this new system was much slower than the former in encoding the video, a task that was done after selecting all the pieces to be converted into video files for the portal. It took eight minutes to encode two minutes of video, because it recorded in full quality and only transformed the video to Internet quality in the encoding process. In the evenings, when they had several news programs in a row the computer was overwhelmed. The new encoder did not allow to capture frames, and even though they already had agency pictures, journalists complained that sometimes they missed the ability to get photos from the broadcast, which was quicker when providing live coverage of events. As the encoding process took long and was in the end of the video processing tasks, the journalist often forgot about the videos and they were usually posted online much later than with the previous and more demanding system.

Actually, this system was just a transitional solution, as the CCRTVi was setting up an on-demand video archive for the whole television portal and the TV newsroom was digitalizing the whole video production. This allowed online reporters to access broadcast quality videos from their computers as soon as they were posted on the system, without having to wait for the newscast to see them. A simple click triggered an automatic encoding routine that prepared the video in two different qualities, to satisfy broadband users. The editors were proud of this technological evolution, which also allowed them to do live webcasts of special television news programs. However, as the encoding process was centralized, videos were put to a queue and it could take

long before a news video was ready to be posted online. Journalists complained that this was a problem for immediacy and looked forward to having a dedicated encoding process for news videos, separated from the process of the rest of TV programs.

Audio production routines were much easier and also evolved quickly during my observation time at *CCRTV*. At first, only the editor's computer had access to the audio archive of *Catalunya Informació*, the sister 24-hour news radio station. He selected a file and clicked on a button to convert it to Real Audio and then he copied it to a shared folder in the internal server of the newsroom. Linking the audio files from the news texts themselves was a causal finding: it was not consciously designed by the developers, but a reporter thought that if they could link to other websites they would also be able to link to audio files. It was useful, but the process to produce it through the news form was slower and counter-intuitive compared to putting a related audio file outside the text, and thus it was seldom used. The brand new audio management system in the radio station allowed them to have a more complete choice of audio files and access from several computers, but the online newsroom was only granted with one password and therefore just one journalist could access the new system at a time. Again, as in the case of *laMalla.net*, the website was not the priority in the introduction of company wide innovations.

Photo edition was a much more generalized task in the newsrooms. Publishing a photo online usually implied reducing its size to a fixed width. At *laMalla.net* every reporter edited the pictures manually for their stories using Photoshop, and in some cases they cropped them for a better framing of the scene and balanced the brightness as

pictures tended to be too dark for computer screens. The technical staff of *El Periódico* devised a Photoshop macro to automatically convert the photos to the standard size, as breaking news reporters had trouble learning to use the program. At *CCRTV* a similar innovation was incorporated during my stage, in this case transparently embedded in the CMS: when a journalist uploaded a picture it was automatically resized. Journalists appreciated this feature very much, as this way they did not need to use one of the software tools, the photo editor.

Besides software, the hardware infrastructure of the newsrooms was often the target of journalists' complaints. They felt their computers were too old and slow to do all the tasks smoothly. Reporters usually had four or five applications open at the same time: several web browser windows, e-mail software, text processor, photo editor... When computers slowed down too much, some reporters opted to shut down the machine and restart trying to "clean" it from stuck processes. Computers for video editing were the ones that actually froze more often to the despair of the reporters. Sometimes the CMS server was very slow at processing the requests of the journalists and they complained to the technical department immediately. The slowness of the system was seen as an annoying brake for the rhythm of news production. However, the most extreme hardware problem that an online newsroom could suffer was the loss of the Internet connection. At *CCRTV* they had this problem several times during my stage due to the construction of a nearby new building for the 24-hour news TV channel. Journalists felt helpless, as they could not access wire feeds, the CMS system or any other website.

In an early US survey, nearly two-thirds of online journalists felt they had insufficient technical resources (Jackson and Paul, 1998). For McCombs, the key was the attitude towards these inevitable material constraints: in successful online multimedia ventures in US newspapers, “everyone talked about technical problems, but most shrugged it off as part of the business (...), as personal challenges. (...) Changing processes were mentioned, but they were often framed as a learning experience or an improvement” (McCombs, 2003: 80). In the Catalan newsrooms, technological innovation was mainly directed towards automating or making the procedures more user-friendly. Experimenting new formats or tools was restricted to special coverage of planned events (see section 7.3) and few arguments backed the idea of having less standardized processes. McCombs argued that automation had important drawbacks for project development: in successful multimedia news sites, “while there was some use of automated processes, especially for video rendering and encoding, there was also some resistance to automating processes. Not everyone agrees that automation and standardization would be helpful. (...) So it is an interesting battle between the benefits of standardization and automation versus the ability to innovate, do new things, learn new things and use them to the benefit of the site” (McCombs, 2003:74).

At the studied newsrooms, one of the few conscious decisions against automation was the process at *El Periódico* for uploading the print edition content to the website. A reporter triggered manually the import of the stories of one newspaper page to the web CMS and then reviewed every piece of news in the CMS form to make sure that every element had been imported properly. “This way we can guarantee 100% quality in the online version of the newspaper”, argued the online editor. “A print newspaper

and a web are not the same product, and only a human touch can do the adaptation to the new medium". An adaptation that did not consist of text editing, but of layout reshaping to fit elements in the rigid structure of the web news form. The system had many known bugs in the import process that journalists corrected manually. Some could have easily been recoded in the software procedure to avoid the problem, but other required the collaboration of the print edition layout designers. Too much to ask for, as the next section shows, and the best alibi to back the decision of having human supervision of the process.

7.2. Online newsroom relationships with other departments as social constraints of online journalism

If technology is perceived as a problem and a constraint by online journalists it is not just because of its material limitations, but also because there is a social context that, on the one hand, shapes the particular uses and evolution of technical tools and, on the other hand, frames the definition of online news products and production routines in the bigger context of the media company. This section deals with both facets of the social context of online newsrooms, focusing on the relationship of Internet journalists with the technical staff and with traditional journalists. The structural disposition of these actors within the company and in relation to the online newsroom produces a closeness or distance that daily routines and principles reassure.

The social organization of companies is not static. Punie and Terzis synthesized the evolution of *Vllaweb* in regards to the links between technical and journalistic staffs:

“During its early years, the technology base of the company was considered to be secondary to its journalistic mission. Underestimating the technical dimension of the initiative created problems and complicated the necessary dialog between technologists and journalists. Now, the relationship between them has matured and important technical investments have been made in their own database and servers and in technical staff to develop in-house competencies. The mutual learning process between journalists and technicians is now regarded as one of the special strengths of the company. ‘We are

journalists, not technicians, but now we understand it is the core of our system'" (2003:61).

Any of the analyzed online newsrooms deemed their relationship with technical staff as ideal. In three of the cases, web developers were separated from the newsroom, serving not only the news website, but also other projects. *Diari de Tarragona* was the only case in which the programmer worked side by side with the online editor, but this did not help in fostering the communication between journalists and the technician. Journalists' general feeling was that technical staff was far away, slow or even deaf to solve their problems or respond to their needs.

The newsroom staff at *laMalla.net* often complained that they did not have a programmer with them in the newsroom in 2003: they felt this made more complicated to manage innovation in the website and to solve daily technical problems. The web developer was just devoted part-time to the project and he was physically located at the main Lavinia offices. The graphic designer was working full-time for the online news outlet, though, and she was located in the newsroom. During earlier stages of the project they had a programmer entirely devoted to the project and even the online editor had a technical profile rather than a journalistic one. But as the Internet business grew and projects for web development came in through 2000, the managers considered that *laMalla.net* was mature enough to be considered a project in maintenance and reduced the technical support. A new version of the CMS was slowly produced under those circumstances in 2001, and another one was developing in 2004-2005. During my stage in 2003, when there were no works on project evolution,

the company changed the programmer that worked for the site and online journalists interpreted this as a problem. "We are lucky that the new programmer helped in the development of the new version some time ago", highlighted a reporter looking for the positive side of the change. He was the fourth change in the four years of life of the project. In the daily relationship, the advanced profile of online journalists helped them in stating clearly their technical needs to the programmer and eased the process of getting a quick and satisfactory solution. For them it was very important to get again a programmer in the online newsroom after renegotiating the contract of the project in 2005.

At *El Periódico* the structural evolution of technical and journalistic teams was extremely volatile in the first years of the project (see section 5.2), and actually the online editor felt it had not yet been completely stabilized in 2005, particularly on the journalistic side. During my stage in 2003, *El Periódico* had three web developers working full-time for the Grup Zeta websites at the technical department. This meant less human resources than in previous moments, such as the Zeta Digital phase, but in 2003-2004 *El Periódico* received a preferential attention as it was the only completely in-house project, with a CMS started from the scratch in 2000. The graphic designer was neither located with programmers nor at the online newsroom: he shared room with the newspaper infographics team, even though he was completely devoted to the website. During the Zeta Digital period both programmers and designer shared room with the journalists, and therefore online journalists often compared the present situation of relative distance in the same building to the immediately previous situation in which they worked sharing space. For the online editor, working with the technical

staff was easier when sharing the same room: the programmers learned a lot about the journalistic routines and criteria and developed the CMS with a very precise idea of its consequent uses. When they were back to the *El Periódico* building and, therefore, they separated, Pep Puig stressed that he had to be aware that the technical team devoted to the website was smaller and had other websites to serve: "If something may demand more resources than the ones we have, we forget about it". Realism was his main motto.

In this context, the production team actually provided a "semi-technical" support service to the breaking news reporters. They received their queries (problems, suggestions, demands) and solved them by themselves if possible or *translated* them to the programmers when necessary. Between the two teams of journalists there was a certain degree of distance that was not only physical, but also related to technical skills: breaking news reporters felt closer to the print journalists, with whom they shared space, while the production team felt comfortable talking to the technical staff and saw the breaking news team as technically unskilled. These perceptions made the solving of technical problems detected by breaking news reporters more difficult than in *laMalla.net*, as the production team considered that the problems were due to the reporters' lack of skills, not to the fact that the CMS may not fit perfectly the news production routines. The filter of the production team made that only few daily technical problems reached the web developers. The priority was the development of new features and a little problem that did not affect the outcome of the product was usually neglected. An online production reporter stated that the programmers were very busy and he felt sorry to notify little problems that did not affect the general

functioning of the whole CMS. Breaking news reporters felt that the production team was too reluctant to solve their problems or take their suggestions into consideration. A reporter told the online editor that they would like to have a special template for the homepage during the Iraq war, to group all the related news under a single section bar, since the section bar "Iraq conflict" was repeated from three to five times on the homepage over each headline with the current templates. The editor insinuated that the programmers were too busy for that, and so the reporter insisted when he saw the graphic designer passing by. The designer agreed that it was a good idea, but he argued that it was difficult to prepare the template quickly and recommended them to continue using the usual template. On the contrary, the online production team mobilized quickly when the linguists and the breaking news reporters phone complaining that they could not update the homepage. The online editor hypothesized that the problem could have been produced by the programmers' work while performing a change in the code of the homepage to add a link to the print homepage facsimile. An online production reporter went to the programmers' office and checked the problem with them until it was solved.

The online editor and his adjunct David Sancha, one of the veteran journalists in the project, defined the requirements of the CMS and software tools and the technical staff developed them. Nevertheless, as the programmers were very busy, the online production team had to assume programming tasks, and specially the two leaders who were keen with ASP, the dynamic web language used at *El Periódico* site. During my stage, Sancha was programming a dynamic manager for photo galleries that would let them produce the galleries more automatically. Until then, they had used several

options (a Flash-based software that was too complex, Dreamweaver templates) and galleries were limited to special occasions, as producing them was very time consuming. Victoria Ayllón, the technical project manager, was comfortable with this situation and accepted that the ones defining the requirements were the online journalists. She pictured her team as providing an external service to the online newsroom, where programmers received an order from the “client” and analyzed it to find the best solution. “This works easily, because the online production team has somehow a technical profile and we understand each other very well”. However, she proposed a new relationship with a more horizontal dialog between technical and journalistic staff, strongly driven by Internet utopias: “If we want the product to be more lively and interactive, with a more adaptive interface than just a news framework, there must be a closer relationship between technical and journalistic staff. Technicians know what the tools can do, so they need us to propose ideas that would benefit the product. This would mean more work for us, but I believe it will let us have a more interactive product”.

While *laMalla.net* and *El Periódico* had a clear separation between journalistic and technical staff, in which the former acted like clients that requested a service and the later analyzed their needs and proposed a technical solution, the situation at CCRTVi was slightly different even though it was not easy noticed at first sight. From the online newsroom, the perception was the same as in the other projects: “We tell the technicians what we need, they develop it”. But the fact was that the structure of the “technical” team was far more complex than in other companies: CCRTVi, as an autonomous division of the public broadcaster, did not only have web programmers

and graphic designers, but also journalists that led projects and produced content for a dozen of websites. In 2003, all the projects were produced in the CCRTVi building except for the news portals. The fact of being physically separated from the rest of CCRTVi staff and being closer to the TV newsroom made online reporters and editors feel independent from CCRTVi and perceive it as a mere service provider. The editor introduced one of the project managers in CCRTVi to me by saying: "He is the person we contact to solve technical problems, the only one with whom we understand each other". The project manager told me later on that he was a journalist, not a programmer, and interpreted this discourse as a strategy to defend the sovereignty of the online newsroom.

CCRTVi managers accepted this attitude as something they could not easily change, but argued that most of the developments in special features and website evolution were proposed and designed in the CCRTVi lab, not in the newsroom. The proposals from the online editors were prioritized and assigned to someone at the production team (daily emergencies) or at the development team (specials, new applications), who followed the CCRTVi project manager's the instructions. There was no specific programmer devoted to *CCRTV* online news project, while in the case of graphic design one person usually assumed the work related to the portal. CCRTVi managers had consciously avoided locating the designer in the online newsroom, to have her better coordinated with the technical staff and impede that online journalists delegated technical routines on her. For the online newsroom, this situation left them helpless many times, as the technical staff was always busy with many different projects and they reacted to the needs of the online newsroom very slowly. "There is a certain

distance and lack of understanding between the two sides”, acknowledged Marc Mateu, head of online content in CCRTVi until 2004, “but communication is constant”. Actually, the CCRTVi team also produced html pages such as a photo collage of the effects of an earthquake, something that in *laMalla.net* reporters did by themselves. When the online newsroom moved to the CCRTVi building in 2005, coordination improved for the development of the new version of the website, but reporters felt that the practical distance to solve daily problems was the same. “We have our own dynamics, we are like an isle inside CCRTVi without much relationship to the rest of the teams”, the new online editor Joan Puighermanal stated.

Paradoxically enough, the only project in which the web developer was solely devoted to the news website and worked side by side with the online editor, *Diari de Tarragona*, was the one where technical tools were more provisional and technological problems affected more the work of online reporters. Proximity of technical and journalistic staff was not the only factor in promoting a fruitful relationship. The fact that the online editor Gerard Tost had a technical profile rather than a journalistic one explained the situation from the reporters’ point of view. Since he entered the online newsroom in 2002, his main priority was developing an in-house CMS to substitute the rigid and obsolete initial out-of-the-shelf system. He was more focused on this technical aim than on the current content production. The programmer was too busy with this new advanced CMS that everything else was stuck. Reporters said that their proposals of specials or new content features were always delayed. A reporter argued that priorities should be inverted: “Journalism should be first than technology. I’m tired of waiting for the new version of the website that will be already outdated when it is

done. The profile of the online editor was useful at first to revamp the website, but now it is a problem". The online editor himself admitted that he was too focused on technical projects and that he had forgotten about the journalistic quality of the website. He looked into the future with great enthusiasm. For him, the problems of the present were mostly due to the reporters' lack of motivation. He enjoyed visiting the outsourced graphic design team, composed of two professionals during my stage. The designers stated that the *Diari* was their most important client and they felt like an appendix of the online newsroom, part of the team. While the online editor defended an in-house development of the CMS, he and the designers agreed that the graphic work was better outsourced: this obliged the designers to do their best and constantly innovate if they wanted to continue with the contract. The *Diari* was at the same time an experimentation ground for them, and they could then apply what they had learned to other clients.

Online news sites were constantly evolving in little subtle details. Big changes were always in the minds of the online editors and on the plans of the technical staff, but daily requirements were constant –mainly new features development for special coverages– and there was a tension between the long-term and short-term development of the website that each newsroom managed differently. At *CCRTV* these processes were separated at the side of the technical staff and *CCRTVi* project managers assumed an increasing leading role in the long-term definition of the website. The online editors led the short-term initiatives explaining what they needed to project managers, who defined the specific features and directed the work of the technical staff. At *laMalla.net*, daily requirements were so absorbing for a single

programmer that long-term development was really pushed forward only when the company devoted extra programmers to the project and a veteran reporter was commissioned with the responsibility of directing the new version development. *El Periódico* had leadership of both processes concentrated on the online production team, and breaking news technical needs were usually neglected. As far as *Diari de Tarragona* is concerned, separation between the journalistic staff and the direction of the online newsroom privileged long-term developments over short-term needs.

Technical innovations were not always warmly welcomed by online reporters. Breaking news reporters at *El Periódico* rejected having the same homepage management system that the paper online version, which would have allowed them to control more precisely the layout and to write on the homepage a different headline from the original story text. While the online production team defended that this would let them edit the homepage much more easily and with less effort, breaking news reporters felt this would complicate their routines and preferred editing each headline in the news form (see section 6.3). In other cases, the new technical tool was celebrated, but a communication problem was pointed out: *CCRTV* online reporters complained that they had only learned about the new automatic photo-resizing tool of the CMS through an e-mail that they received the day the new feature was incorporated to the project by the technicians (it was a *CCRTVi* websites wide initiative, which was not led by the online newsroom). Special developments and new features in the CMS or the website did not work fine right away. In many occasions, there were problems that were only detected when the journalists started feeding content into the system in real working conditions. In the case of the elections special of *CCRTV* online news portals, the

journalistic tension of the electoral evening was increased with the multiplication of technical problems. The most important ones were, on the one hand, Flash graphics that showed black columns instead of the colors of each party and, on the other hand, the homepage management system (different from the usual in the portals), for it did not update the homepage changes for several minutes. Technical staff solved these problems as they were reported by the editors.

Technical staff considered that their decisions were too conditioned by journalists' decisions, and the same happened the other way around: reporters felt that their work was too conditioned by the design decisions that they attributed to the technical staff. An online editor of *CCRTV* would like to have bigger pictures on the homepage, but the layout did not allow flexibility in that aspect. He blamed technicians' obsession with light-weight websites. The graphic designer at *El Periódico*, instead, complained that sometimes journalists took decisions on web design without taking his expert opinion into account.

If this was the uneven situation between two necessarily close departments, the relationship between online and offline newsrooms was not easier. The main impression while being in the studied media companies was that online and traditional journalists tended to mutually ignore each other in most of their routines. However, contacts did exist, and we have analyzed the way each of the newsrooms contributed to the other.

Online newsrooms had the perception that the Internet project was not important for

the traditional media staff. "Online journalism is currently a supplement and a complement to the dominant print and broadcast news media", argued Scott (2005:93) in an overview of the global situation. In the four analyzed cases this also seemed to be the case: online reporters thought that their traditional counterparts did not consider the website as a journalistic product, but rather as a complementary service. "This is mostly a cultural, generational problem", argued one journalist. Furthermore, online journalists explained how their traditional counterparts told them that the web job was "a gift", because they have a condensed working schedule, with very clear entry and exit hours. Online reporters responded that traditional media routines were much more slow-paced and relaxed than website updating: "Two of the paper journalists may do together one single story a day, while I am doing a whole newspaper!", exaggerated a reporter, but the fact was that he was alone in the afternoon shift and was supposed to get all the important news done regardless of the issue, while newspaper reporters specialized in a single topic. He appreciated some help from the print staff, for sometimes they told him which were the important stories and gave him some data, but this was seldom the case.

In this context, the online project was not supposed to constrain traditional media routines. *El Periódico* online editor acknowledged that one of the reasons for having a human-supervised print edition upload to the website was due to the lack of standardization in the newspaper layouts. He thought that asking for such a standardization would be a lost battle from the beginning. Gerard Tost unsuccessfully tried to use his position as online editor to promote innovation in the print newsroom of *Diari de Tarragona*. He saw the website not as an autonomous project, but as the

core of the renovation of a traditional media company, and was convinced that the technical renovation of the documentation system of the newspaper could lead to structural changes in working routines. The initiative ended up in an open conflict with the print newsroom and, finally, he was fired (see section 5.5). Subordination also affected the growth of the online projects: "In economic terms, we cannot ask for more resources, because we are not a revenue source for the company", argued Victoria Ayllón, the technical project manager at *El Periódico*. Part of the hostility of the print newsroom towards the online project in *Diari de Tarragona* was due to the argument of the newspaper editor that the website was taking away readers from the print edition, therefore putting the company in risk. There was actually a decreasing trend in sales in 2003-2005 while website use increased, and this was used as an argument to fire Tost and reduce web content.

At *laMalla.net*, where they did not have any dependence on a traditional media company, their perception on traditional media attitudes towards online projects was similar to the other newsrooms. They felt that traditional media underestimated online media in general. In a discussion on current events at the Iraq war, the online editor argued: "Traditional media still do not think of the Internet as a news source for people. Spanish newspapers are saying that US media filter the information about the war, without taking into account that the Internet is not doing that and it is being increasingly used by the American public as the way to bypass traditional media censorship". Reporters were very happy when they received an invitation to a press conference aimed only at online media: it was the first time they were specifically targeted and decided they had to go.

Online journalism literature has usually stated that a stronger collaboration between online and offline newsrooms would be beneficial for both projects. "Complementarity between the offline and online world is more and more regarded to be a fruitful and realistic strategy" (Punie and Terzis, 2003:71). Online journalists interviewed by Brannon (1999) and McCombs (2003) agreed with this statement, arguing that this would make the newspaper management more aware of the value of the online project and help in further developing it. "Physical separation" of online and offline newsrooms was identified as one of the factors affecting the development of a better quality online project (McCombs, 2003:85). "Most [online journalists] admitted that folks outside the online newsroom failed to understand the time and processes involved in producing Internet content" (Brannon, 1999). However, Boczkowski's analysis of the separation of newsrooms as a factor on website development showed that the cases with least regular contact between online and offline newsrooms had stronger developments in multimedia and interactive features (2004b, 175), while the *New York Times* online project mainly replicated traditional news production routines partly due to the tight connection between the newsrooms.

In the Catalan cases, collaboration between online and offline newsrooms was not given the same value everywhere, even though the final result was generally the same: independent routines for online and offline journalists. *El Periódico* online editor was convinced that collaboration between newsrooms would be beneficial, even though he saw it as an almost impossible objective: "I have tried to set up clearer and stronger synergies between the newspaper and the web for so long", he explained, but acknowledged that the lack of collaboration was not fully responsibility of the print

newsroom: "If there would be a page in the newspaper with web poll results, selected comments from the forums and so on, someone would have to produce it and we are already very busy with our current routines. And this would not help in introducing the Internet culture in the print newsroom, which would be the final objective of collaborating. I want the newspaper staff to see the website as a place where they relate with their readers, but this is very difficult to establish".

CCRTV online staff had mixed feelings in regards to coordinating with the broadcasting newsroom. Sometimes online reporters told me that they would like to be downstairs, in the same room as the TV journalists, to have a closer access to current events as they are being worked by their newscast mates. They were not the only ones out of the main TV newsroom, but they thought they would be the last to get in, because they were regarded as a secondary outlet by the traditional newsrooms. Online editors would react to this perceived neglect by stating the autonomy of the online project: they did not like to be seen as mere replicas of the radio and TV newscasts, and therefore they strove to produce a website with its own personality. "As they don't care that much about the website content, we can be fairly autonomous in defining our product", argued a reporter. An online reporter went every morning to the television newscast planning meeting. "To make them aware that we exist", she stated. In practice, this was as symbolic as she stated: normally she never spoke in the meeting, she just listened and took notes about the issues to be covered by the TV reporters. She seldom commented the outcome of the meeting with the rest of the online newsroom, as she regarded the rhythms of TV production to be lagging behind the ones of the website, and therefore little of the TV plans were useful to them. However,

this was one of the few moments during the day in which the two newsrooms had some kind of contact. This contradictory impulses leading towards integration and autonomy at the same time, although autonomy was the strongest force in 2003, paradoxically changed in 2005 with the relocation of the online newsroom to the new CCRTVi building. The bigger physical distance did not consolidate autonomy. The crucial factor was the change of online editor: Joan Puighermanal bet for a stronger content coordination between the website and 24-hour TV and radio news services. He stated again his preference to be at the broadcaster newsroom and set up the routine of phoning the leading news editors at the radio and television to share views on current events. But this top-level coordination did not transcend to the rest of the newsrooms and journalists mostly worked autonomously.

During my stages in the newsrooms and after them there were signs of change in the online-offline relationship. Online reporters at *El Periódico* and *CCRTV* perceived that they had won credit in the traditional newsroom with their coverage on the Iraq war or the 11-M terrorist massacre in Madrid. "We were clearly ahead of the newspaper in our coverage, and this had a value that print journalists acknowledged", a reporter explained. An online reporter at the broadcasting company pointed out that some offline journalists had set up *CCRTV* news portals as their browser homepage and phoned the online newsroom to know about last-minute news, as they knew that they were constantly looking at the wires. *El Periódico* breaking news reporters also acknowledged that some print journalists were more receptive to answer their queries on current events. However, these signs had not changed the daily routines of each newsroom and both products lived parallel lives, without almost any overall

coordination. Even when all *El Periódico* online staff moved to the print newsroom in 2005 , somehow making more visible a closer relationship, the routines continued unchanged.

The few occasions in which traditional journalists contributed to the online newsroom production were much appreciated by the website staff. In very specific cases online journalists asked their traditional counterparts to confirm a news story or, even less usual, traditional journalists could warn the online reporters about a breaking news or an error in the online coverage. An example for the former case happened at *CCRTV* one night in March 2003: At 22:00 there were rumours that the Iraq war had started. The editor phoned from home to check the online journalists' knowledge about that, and reporters told him that they had not found any wire saying so. The subeditor then decided to walk down to the TV newsroom and she talked directly to the night newscast editor, the person who would better know the situation at that moment, one hour before her show. The newscast editor assured that nothing had happened yet and advised the online reporter to tune Reuters in the TV-set, as they had a live camera in Baghdad that would surely make visible when bombings started. At the two analyzed newspapers, breaking news online reporters sometimes took advantage of being among print reporters to ask them about doubts when handling wires, looking for background information or expert judgement from the journalist specializing in that issue. When the wires and other online media did not agree in naming an Iraq scientific (Dr. Germ, Dr. Microbe) a reporter asked the international reporters and they told him that they were all wrong and the name was another one (Ms. Antrax). He trusted them and edited his story. At *Diari de Tarragona*, a young journalist asked the

online reporter if she had published a story on a car accident. The print journalist had just come from the site and told her that there was erroneous data in the wires. He sat beside the online reporter to help her correct the story. "You see, you shouldn't complain that we do not offer you anything!", he said. These little contacts can be regarded as exceptions, as the online production rhythm did not allow constant consultation (see sections 6.2 and 6.5).

El Periódico was the only case in which some sort of oversight of the online content by offline staff had been systematized. The coordination desk of the newspaper was supposed to consult the work of the breaking news online journalists. That was the reason why they were sitting nearby. From 10:00 to 19:00 there were two print journalists supervising the evolution of the news of the day for the newspaper and therefore they could easily advise the online reporters about newsworthiness criteria. Usually online reporters were the ones who asked them when they had a doubt and showed them the homepage layout before publishing a major change. The print coordination editor could comment on the style or accuracy of a website headline, but he seldom took the initiative of checking it by himself, but usually when the online reporter showed it to him. The fact was that online reporters tended to be very autonomous in taking editorial decisions and the coordination desk was too busy to oversee their work closely. The formal idea that this relationship would guarantee editorial coherence between newspaper and website became real in practice because the online reporters asked the print coordination editor in case of doubt and they paid attention to breaking news commented among the coordination desk journalists. Online journalists were those who worked for coherence and admitted that

communication between paper and online should go beyond this formula. They would like to be at the newspaper editorial meetings and have the reporters letting them know the stories they were working on.

At *Diari de Tarragona*, a similar oversight work was supposed to be done by one of the print subeditors, but he seldom commented anything to the online reporters. The most usual contact between newsrooms was the the afternoon reporter's routine of asking the section heads to provide her a couple of stories and photographs about local stories on which they were working for the newspaper of the following day. It was a way to freshen the website with that local content that wires normally lacked, and asking for the stories instead of taking them directly from the editorial system was a cautious strategy to know what stories she could use, to avoid taking an exclusive online. The online reporter stated that print journalists and photographers did not like at all their work to be published on the web before it was on the paper, but they got used to her routine. She had to insist everyday to get news. I asked her if someday the paper journalists would publish their own work on the website by themselves. "The online editor would like that to happen, but I think that day won't come", she did not doubt to answer. After the online newsroom was dismantled this was still the case: some print stories were posted online in the afternoon, but the reporters did not fill the CMS forms. The subeditor in charge of the website sent MS Word documents to the graphic design team and they uploaded the content to the website.

The morning reporter sometimes attended the newspaper coordination meeting to have an idea of the day agenda and priorities. This helped him in defining the

homepage throughout the day. Like in *CCRTV*, he did not participate actively, he just listened. The afternoon reporter also tried to attend the meeting in which the paper front page was decided. She got very angry when at the meeting she asked for the paper pieces of two local news she had covered with wires and they told her that the wires had a wrong take and the *Diari* was the only medium having the right sources. She told me that this demonstrated that the newspaper managers did not look at the website at all and deleted the stories.

The contributions of online journalists to the traditional product were even scarcer than the few cases explained above. The most widespread practice was communicating the traditional newsroom very important breaking news, as online reporters were usually the first ones to notice them. At *Diari de Tarragona*, the afternoon reporter saw this as a way to give something in return for the paper stories she got, to help brake the print reporters' reticence. *El Periódico* online reporters printed out the homepage of the website and the stories statistics to provide them as another input more for the newspaper meetings in the morning and the evening. An online journalist proudly told me how the newspaper editorial article after the 2003 local elections was based on the main headline they offered on the website the previous night, concluding that the Socialist Party had won the Conservative at an State level if the results of all the local elections were summed up. He had agreed that headline with the coordination desk and they proposed it in the meeting with the newspaper editor.

With such poor daily relationships between newsrooms and given the relatively high autonomy of the online projects in traditional media it does not seem plausible that

offline newsrooms played an important role in directly shaping online journalism routines. However, we may argue that the neglect of the online project by the traditional newsroom management was actually a crucial shaping force. McCombs (2003) showed how successful multimedia news projects had in common that the company managers trusted the online project leaders and gave them enough financial and organizational support to develop a mature newsroom. Online editors and reporters in the studied cases often referred to the lack of understanding and support from the company managers, and more specifically to the impossibility of asking them for more human or material resources, as the main constrain in the development of their online news outlet. Online newsrooms were conscious that they were the last priority of the company and could not grow beyond the existing limits. Only *CCRTV* online editors managed to negotiate staff hiring in the special circumstances of the Iraq war, as the television newsroom was interested in the headlines feed they designed, and to incorporate new technical solutions, mostly derived from general *CCRTVi* developments or broadcasting newsroom improvements. Even *laMalla.net*, being an online-only project, could only grow renegotiating the contract between Lavinia (as the company producing the website) and Diputació de Barcelona (as the financial promoter of the project).

Traditional journalistic routines and values were not an imposition of the offline newsrooms, but something deeply rooted in the mindset of online journalists that was put in dialog with online journalism utopias to shape the online production cultures. The choice of immediacy as the main value and the limited resources delineated the actual development of utopias.

7.3. Innovation edges and project development

In the context described in the previous section, project development and the evolution of websites and working routines seem to be a hardship. The fact is that the core philosophy about the product and the production culture changed very little in all the projects in the early 2000s, regardless of the changes in location, design, CMS and technical tools. The four models analyzed seemed to have some sort of stability. The four models analyzed seemed to have achieved some sort of stability. Projects had matured and had been able in most cases to find their own strengths, on which to focus their future developments, but stability was also the effect of inertia, of the difficulties of reshaping a process when a product demands constant updating. "As the project gets bigger, it's more difficult to change", a reporter pointed out. Online editors and journalists had very clear ideas about the shortcomings of the project, as well as the ideal routines they would like to apply and the product concepts towards which they would like to lead. There was a will for change and they were self-conscious of being in a learning process (see McCombs, 2003) that was still open. "We are still guessing what online journalism means", acknowledged an online editor. "You feel a little bit like a pioneer, you keep on learning what works and what does not work. Ten years from now someone will start an online news project and will take as a reference our experience, the experience of these people that have taken wrong decisions thousands of times and finally found a good model". Many journalists acknowledged that early stages of their online news project had been an exploration without a map and they argued that time allowed the projects to mature towards models that were

more coherent and adequate to their aims. This section explores the way that process was managed and identifies innovation edges in which new features and possibilities were explored beyond the standardized daily working routines.

Online newsrooms had assumed the computer concept of “version” to conceptualize the long-term renovation of websites. A new graphic design was the most visible element of a new version, but it usually included changes in website features, CMS functionalities, working routines and audience conceptualization. From the first draft to the first working implementation of a version there could pass some years and many envisioned features were left aside in the process, for a future version. Lack of technical staff to produce the new version quicker, too ambitious or broadly defined features that were difficult to develop into a specific tool, and particularly the requirements of daily routines that deviated the attention of online editors and technical staff, turned the process of introducing big changes in the online project into an almost endless proceeding. New versions of *laMalla.net* and *CCRTV* initiated preliminar discussions in 2004, but they were not online until the Spring of 2006. “In the end, the new version feels like old to me”, an online editor told me few days before the version change. At some point of the process, a deadline was put to the renovation process and the most difficult aspects of the new development were dropped in order to meet the deadline. Smaller, functional changes were made over the new stable version, while a future version started to be envisioned after some months. At *E/ Periódico*, the priority in the new version of the website in late 2002 was setting up a user registration system and pay-per-article tools for archive news, as their competitors had also been preparing that move for months and they just had released

their new websites. Many foreseen changes in web design and CMS features still had not been developed in mid 2003. "The website is always work-in-progress", the online editor argued. In technical and in social terms, changes took always too long to become a reality, and once they were there, there were many details yet to be adjusted. Solving minor technical bugs may not be a priority and reporters got used to integrate the bugs into their working routines. Bugs somehow let them remember that the website was still in an open process of development.

Therefore, online newsrooms had a sense of provisionality. At any given moment, they were aware that innovations were needed, foreseen or under way. The website and technical tools were usually the most visible aspect of evolution for them, rather than working routines or product concept. Sometimes, looking backwards, online journalists verbalized a conceptualization of the website as a project in slow but constant evolution: "Little by little programmers have shaped the CMS to fit our needs and our working routines. We would tell them 'here you may try to let this be done in one step instead of four' ", explained Anna Garcia at *laMalla.net*. In other occasions, when looking into the future, change was perceived as too slow and the current website was pictured as limiting the development of the project: "We try to fit new ideas in the current layout of the homepage, but it's not that easy, as it is already three years old. Building the new version means money and time, it cannot be done in a couple of days", argued Josep M. Fàbregas, *CCRTV* online editor. "It is like when your suit has become small for you. We have found that some things are very useful, but we know we have to change others, in order to adapt the website to what we want to do". This feeling of being limited by the current version was quite common among online

journalists and some despaired while waiting for the new version. Others took it easier: "We are conscious that the technical staff is overwhelmed. There are many things we would like to have, such as a daily photo gallery, but we won't do it until they have developed the right tools to easily produce it", explained a reporter at the broadcaster online newsroom.

From the online journalists' perspective, project evolution was mainly perceived as technology driven: when asked about the changes in the newsroom in the last months, they talked about new software tools, a new website design, and new features on the CMS. "You see, things have improved a lot here since the last time you visited us", a reporter at *CCRTV* told me during the interviews period in 2004, half a year since my observation stages. He showed me the new video capture software, the audio management system and the EFE photo feed. The journalistic or strategic decisions underneath these changes were transparent to him and most reporters felt they were mere spectators of innovation processes in the project. In some moments of the projects (usually in their early stages) all the online newsroom contributed to define new developments. But as projects consolidated, most of them had left long-term evolution in the hands of the negotiations between online editors and technical department, out of the reach of online reporters. Many of them had their own ideas of what the web should be and complained that no one would pay attention to their thoughts, which had the value of experience. *LaMalla.net* somehow managed to be the exception and Monday meetings preserved the essence of collective envisioning of the future of the project. Even if the actual management of new developments was on the hands of the online editor or a particular reporter, the ideas about where should the

website lead were shared and discussed formally. In other newsrooms informal conversations helped to build internal consensus in the online newsroom, but generally reporters did not feel empowered in the decision-making process.

Project innovation had two complementary sides. While the technical work had the most visible outcomes, it was only a matter of time and resources. The most difficult side of innovation was the social one, and the decisive negotiation was not taken within the newsroom, but between the online editors with the company and/or traditional newsroom managers. Even though they did not influence the daily working routines and product, at the level of abstract definition of the online project managers in the higher hierarchy of the company usually wanted to have their say about new versions of the website and their features. *CCRTV* online news project was stopped in the development of its two versions to date (the one that went online in 2002 and the latest in 2006) for a while because the traditional newsrooms would not accept having a new brand for online news of the public broadcasting company. In the first stand-alone version of the news outlet this was solved creating two different portals, while in the second version a common portal with both logos (*Telenotícies* and *Catalunya Informació*) was used. *El Periódico* newspaper editor made sure that the news website content was not organically autonomous from the print newsroom. At *Diari de Tarragona*, the new version of the website was almost completely functional in the summer of 2003, and everyone at the online team had embodied Tost's pervasive discourse: he argued that they were building a state-of-the-art new website, based on open source technologies and standards. Both reporters and designers reproduced this discourse. But the deteriorated relationship of Tost with the newspaper management

terminated the renovation project abruptly: when Tost was fired, the graphic design team decided to start anew.

In some cases, technical developments were implemented, but it was harder to make real the parallel changes in newsroom organization, which were needed to perform the new routine that was possible thanks to the new technical tool. Both *Diari de Tarragona* and *El Periódico* had incorporated the tools to include video in their websites, but it was not used beyond some tests, because continuous video production would require a team effort that they could not assume. “We have the technology ready, but producing content would be expensive, for there should be a production team. Content is always the most expensive thing”, a member of the design team of the *Diari* argued. David Sancha, at *El Periódico Online*, was very proud of their in-house designed CMS, but he thought that they needed more reporters and time to get the most of it: “We designed features that we foresaw as necessities of the future that are still unused”. The same happened with the last version of *CCRTV* online news site in 2006. It had added features from other portals of *CCRTVi*, such as news comments and a complex array of related content to each story, but Puighermanal argued that they first needed to concentrate on news production and learn the new technical routines for the most common procedures: “We won't have time for advanced online journalism until we can do the basics”.

Some other features were conceptualized but they were not developed until they became an urgent need for the newsroom. When *El Periódico* programmers developed the automatic publication generator, that allowed to create as many parallel minisites

as needed (for print weekly supplements online version, special coverages) with the same CMS functionalities as the main news website, they conceived that reporters should be able to transfer a news story from one publication to another. This feature was finally developed because of the Iraq special, when the volume of news in the print edition was so big that a manual export of stories to the special would have been unmanageable.

Innovation was not always planned and developed as a long-term desideratum. Sometimes extraordinary events promoted technical or organizational changes to adapt to the circumstances that later on persisted over time as a new feature or routine, sometimes in daily work. This was the case at *CCRTV* with the night shift that was created to cover the Iraq war: it still worked for some months after the war was over, even though it was finally dismantled. Other developments, such as new homepage templates or the up-to-the-minute headlines feed at *laMalla.net* were there to be used again in similar special coverages.

Special coverage of events was the innovation edge of online news projects. While daily routines tended to be stable and the global evolution of the projects was slow and many utopias tended to be refused as impossible to handle in the stressful constant production pace, specials were the space of creative ambition. Being outside of the daily rhythm and mostly devoted to planned events, specials let online journalists think ahead in features and concepts. The other facilitator of these innovation edges was the fact that they were necessarily short-term projects with a limited scope: while general website development was an open never-ending process

that could be delayed if necessary, specials had to be ready when the event was scheduled. At *laMalla.net*, specials were regarded as a crucial part of the outlet and reporters admitted that their development had priority over general website development. "We usually start planning a new special when we are finishing the previous one, and so the programmer does not have much time to work on the new version of the website", explained the adjunct editor.

Specials usually took the shape of minisites that were autonomous from the main news website. In other cases, they were the foremost content of the whole website and implied changing the usual structure of the homepage and the organization of the newsroom. Election evenings were the clearest example of these initiatives. Everything tried to be planned beforehand, with every journalist focusing on a particular issue that was to be published on a specific position in the revamped homepage when the information was available (exit-polls, provisional results from different areas, political leaders' reactions). All the newsrooms had more journalists than usual staying late on election Sundays to cope with the loads of data coming in. Technical and graphic design staff were also required to stay in order to react to any problem with the special features developed for the occasion.

Utopias were a crucial referent in developing specials.⁶⁰ The minisites were the most elaborated cases of complex hypertext structures, with an open narrative of an issue.

⁶⁰ There is access to most of the specials in the studied cases at these web addresses (*Diari de Tarragona* no longer keeps online specials developed by the online newsroom):
www.catnoticies.cat/especials
www.elperiodico.com/info/suplementos/especiales/default.asp?idioma=cat
www.lamalla.net/especials

In most of the cases, the nodes of this structure were news stories and documents that could stand on their own, but there were specials where smaller pieces were put together on a hypertext. An example of this later option is the reportage at *laMalla.net* on the marches for democracy in Catalonia in 1976.⁶¹ Original audiovisual material was also produced by *laMalla.net* for some specials, creating truly multimedia products. *CCRTV* provided bigger audiovisual pieces, with full political speeches, as part of specials. Interactivity, as it has already been mentioned (see section 6.8), was more openly explored in specials, with dedicated forums and, at *laMalla.net*, invitations to users to send in texts or photos that would constitute the main content of the special. Specials also were the innovation context of the most radical materializations of the constant update utopia: up-to-the-minute headlines (see section 6.2).

Specials had also been a learning process, in which the evolution from the initial minisites to the most recent ones was enormous. The first specials in the analyzed websites were produced with Dreamweaver, without any programming. It was the way to get rid of the rigidities of CMS, which graphic designers always felt to limit the possibilities of the main website. In the specials they could have complete freedom to offer playful and experimental interfaces. There was something of an art craft in these initial specials, which made online journalists have the feeling of being really exploring the possibilities of the Internet. This was an attitude that McCombs (2003) identified as crucial for successful multimedia projects, but that the pressure of daily work usually diminished. Specials were the space in which journalists felt as pioneers. Josep M. Fàbregas, online editor of *CCRTV*, created himself the html pages of some of the first

⁶¹ www.lamalla.net/especials/marxa

specials in 2002. Initially, specials tended to be more focused on background information rather than on following the development of events, and they were mostly static. But this changed, and somehow the immediacy culture also entered the specials, which over time incorporated content management systems and developed following the event they were focusing on, combining daily news and background information.

Specials, in the end, became a routine and, as their technical production became more complex and CMS driven, they tended to be more standardized. The focus in more recent specials was on content and user interaction rather than in interfaces and structure. A big part of specials was devoted to concentrate in a single spot the huge news production related to the most important developing events such as the Iraq war or electoral campaigns. *El Periódico* and *CCRTV* had standardized most of their specials to a stable format after some years of experiments. *El Periódico* online newsroom was mostly autonomous from the technical department to set up a new special. The CMS allowed to create new publications, cloned from the main news website, for specials following an issue on the long run. More static specials also had a template to structure content. The designer produced a specific graphic interface for every special. At *CCRTV* the most common specials had a homepage with the latest news on the issue and an array of links to provide background and audiovisual material (Figure 18). The online editors proposed the issues and the content, and the *CCRTVi* team produced the interface. *LaMalla.net* also used the structure of their CMS to create some of the specials, as if they were another section of the news site. In all the cases, daily stories were published parallelly in the general website and in the special, with different

routines to proceed. At *laMalla.net* specials were in the sections list of the news input form and the reporters selected both the usual section and the special one from the list before publishing it. *CCRTV* technical staff added a specials selection list to the news input form, as section selection was carried out afterwards, by the subeditor.

At *El Periódico* the process of including a story in the special was done after the story had been published on the website. As the stories selected for specials were usually taken from the newspaper, the next morning the production team transferred the story to the special using a specific interface. The online editor argued that they mostly used newspaper content for the specials instead of producing original content because the print newsroom produced such a huge amount of information every day on the special issues that it was nonsense trying to make something new at the online newsroom with the scarce human resources they had. One of the exceptions was a special based on daily chronicles written by an expedition to the Everest, which were directly published on the website. *Diari de Tarragona* was the only case where specials production was not standardized, as the online editor had focused the work of the technical staff on website development.

Standardization does not mean that specials stopped being innovation edges. It could be argued that innovation edges became as institutionalized as many other routines in the newsrooms. Knowledge was accumulated and not everything was reinvented with every new special. The aim was pushing the new special a little bit further from the previous one every time. There was a strategy for innovation and everyone knew how to deal with it and who was in charge of it. In the most ambitious specials, such as

Figure 18. Example of a standard special at *CCRTV*

Especial

NOTICIES

Comença la ronda de contactes per a la formació del nou govern israelià

02.04.06

El president israelià, Moshe Katsaf, ha encetat consultes formals amb representants dels diferents partits que van obtenir representació al parlament en les eleccions de dimarts passat. De moment, Katsaf s'ha trobat amb els representants del Kadima, el nou partit fundat per Ariel Sharon i liderat per Ehud Olmert, i del Partit Laborista. Les converses de Katsaf amb els 12 partits que van obtenir representació a la Knesset -el parlament hebreu- s'allargaran diversos dies. Finalment, el president israelià designarà un candidat per formar govern.

LLEER 3

LES ELECCIONS ELECCIONS GENERALS PALESTINES

Els set candidats a succeir Arafat
Resultats de les primeres eleccions (20/01/1996)
La legislació electoral
Comissió Electoral Central palestina

PLA DE DESEMBREIX DE GAZA

El dia 15 d'agost del 2005 es fa efectiu el pla promogut per Ariel Sharon per evacuar els colons israelians dels assentaments de la franja de Gaza

Més informació

LA MORT D'ARAFAT

Biografia del president palestí
De què ha mort Arafat?
Escenaris de la successió
La fortuna d'Arafat

HISTÒRIA DEL CONFLICTE

CRONOLOGIA:
Dels pogroms a la segona Intifada 1981-2002
Galena de personatges

DOCUMENTS:
Declaració Balfour
El mandat britànic sobre Palestina
Declaració d'Independència d'Israel
Carta Nacional Palestina
Els països àrabs reconeixen l'OAP
1r discurs d'Arafat a l'ONU
Acords de Camp David
Els països àrabs, a favor d'un estat palestí
Declaració d'Independència de Palestina
2n discurs d'Arafat a l'ONU
Conferència de Madrid
Informe Mitchell
Pla Tenet d'alto el foc
Demanda contra Sharon
Documents contra Arafat
Arafat condemna el terrorisme
Bush, per un estat palestí
Projecte de constitució de l'estat palestí
Pla de retirada de Gaza
RESOLUCIONS DE L'ONU

EL PROCÉS DE PAU

Els Acords d'Oslo (13/09/93)
Cartes de reconeixement mutu (09/09/93)
Protocol de relacions econòmiques (29/04/94)
Acord sobre Gaza i Jericó (04/05/94)
Tractat de pau Jordània/Israel (26/10/94)
Acord sobre Ciutat Vella/Oslo II (28/09/95)
Protocol de reglamentament Hebron (15/01/97)
Acord de Wye River (23/10/98)
Acord de Sharm el-Sheikh (04/09/99)
Proposta de Clinton a Camp David (11/07/00)
Posició palestina proposta Clinton (15/07/00)
Cimera de Camp David (25/07/00)
Posició palestina sobre els refugiats (22/01/01)
Posició d'Israel sobre els refugiats (23/01/01)
Cimera de Taba (27/01/01)
Iniciativa de pau savitza (28/03/02)
Declaració EUA-UE-Rússia-ONU (10/04/02)
Full de Ruta (07/05/03)
L'acord de pau de Ginebra (23/10/03)
ANÀLISI DEL PROCÉS DE PAU

ENLLEROS

ISRAEL
Govern d'Israel
Ministeri d'Afers Estrangers israelià
La Knesset
Oficina Central d'Estadística
Israel Defence Forces

PALESTINA
Autoritat Nacional Palestina
Consell Legislatiu Palestí
Eleccions palestines de 1996
Al-Fatah
Front Democràtic per a l'Alliberament de Palestina
Partit del Poble Palestí
Estat dels drets humans a Palestina

ENTITATS PER LA PAU
Peace for Palestine
Associació Israel-Palestine
Peace Now
Bat Shalom
Foundation for Middle East Peace

ORGANISMES INTERNACIONALS
Nacions Unides / La qüestió Palestina
UNDP / Programa d'assistència al poble palestí
UNRWA / Assistència als refugiats palestins
European Commission Technical Assistance Office to the West Bank & Gaza Strip

WEBS DOCUMENTALS
The Country of Palestine
Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information
Al-Aqsa Intifada (Wikipedia)
Palestina History
Atemptats comesos per Hamas

MITJANS DE COMUNICACIÓ
Wafa / Palestine News Agency
Palestine Media Center
Palestine Report
The Palestine Chronicle
Jerusalem Media & Communication Centre
Jerusalem Post
Haaretz
Itranews
Desinfoes
Antisemitisme.info

MAPES

Israel
Partició i amistió
Territoris ocupats per Israel des del juny de 1967
Propostes israelianes a Camp David i Taba
Colònies jueves als territoris ocupats (2002)
Foto satèl·lit d'Israel-Palestina
El mur de seguretat d'Israel a Jerusalem Est
El mur de seguretat a Cisjordània
Població estimada dels territoris ocupats (2002)

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Captured by the researcher

elections coverage, CCRTVi project managers took the lead at *CCRTV* online news project. They had a more comprehensive knowledge about available technologies and direct control of the technical and graphic design teams. At *laMalla.net* every new special had a different reporter responsible of coordinating the production. A brainstorming in the Monday meeting was the starting point for new ideas. Then, the reporter systematized them in a proposal and negotiated with the graphic designer and the programmer the technical developments needed for the proposal to become a reality. The journalist mobilized the rest of the newsroom too, in order to produce the content. *LaMalla.net* had the most diverse specials of the four analyzed cases. Besides current events, they created specials for audience participation: poetry and short fiction, travel photos, personal experiences on historical events have been some of the proposals. And they tried to provide not only new features (games, video reports, immersive hypertext structures) but also innovative content, such as informal interviews with majors before the local elections or children talking about politics before the Catalan elections. Past experiences were reused, but there was a clear spirit of challenging themselves with new features in every new special.

Innovation was possible in specials thanks to planning. Developments were conceived enough in advance in order to be carried out without rush. That was usually the case, but in some occasions the push for innovation was accomplished starting from improvisation. The extraordinary nature of special coverages facilitated that technical and journalistic staff agreed to break the routines of the predictable and enter the uncertain maze of innovation. The last-minute headlines pop-up for the Iraq war special at *CCRTV* was envisioned the day the war started and reporters initially edited

an html file (something completely unusual at that newsroom) to update it meanwhile the web programmers developed an extension of the CMS to feed the pop-up, in a record time of one day.

Online journalism utopias were also used still to trace the roadmap for the future of the projects during my stages. At *laMalla.net*, where interactivity had been seriously developed into concrete routines and products, editor Sílvia Llombart underscored “giving our users more opportunities to participate” as the main challenge they wanted to address. Audiovisual content, in her opinion, should also have more prominence too, since broadband connections were growing quickly.

Llombart felt that media companies in Catalonia and Spain were very conservative in their use of the Internet as a news medium. “The lack of resources and infrastructures we all have makes it difficult to go further, to really innovate in online content in regards to traditional media. Weblogs, for example, have showed that there are other ways of offering information, much richer and creative than traditional newsmaking. But media panic change”. Mario Santinoli was also very critical and interpreted that there was a paralysis in innovation: “Every media company is looking at what the others are doing, waiting for each other to take the next step. But no one really dares to make ambitious changes. There is a big crisis of ideas in Spanish online media”. David Sancha, adjunct editor at *El Periódico Online*, argued that the Internet changed too fast for a media company to follow every new technology or trend: “Trying to move constantly to adapt to every new thing would be dangerous. We cannot take this risk”. Online journalists felt that they had already gained the status of being the “fourth

medium", but they understood this was just the starting point and that much was left to be done if they were to produce a news outlet that would take advantage of the Internet possibilities but, most important, be useful to the audience.

8. Conclusions

Inventing online journalism is an ongoing process. The conclusions of this study shall be interpreted as contingent and local, as they are based on four particular cases analyzed at a very specific moment in their evolution and with a methodology that stresses thick description over statistical representativity. Nevertheless, the historical perspective of the research approach and the diversity of the cases suggest strong and stable trends that resonate with broader online journalism research results, and offer interpretative keys for understanding the development of the Internet as a news medium.

The results of the ethnographic work, complemented with the in-depth interviews and historical reconstruction of the development of the projects, mostly confirm the research hypotheses of this dissertation and define the specific mechanisms that have shaped online journalism in the four cases studied:

- 1. Online journalism utopias are an influential model, but they do not directly shape actual online media. The uses of the Internet as a news medium are shaped by contextual factors that are primarily found inside the media companies. Therefore, there may be different models of online journalism and technology is not the driving force, but socially shaped in each local case.*

Online journalism utopias are a permanent reference in the discourse of professionals. They represent an ideal model that is deemed as impossible to

fully reach in the current conditions. Limited human and technical resources, but mainly the weight of traditional journalistic culture, are the key factors that shape online journalism routines and values. This has pushed immediacy, above all other utopias, to be embraced as the hegemonic defining feature of online news (see section 8.1 for a thorough discussion). The case of *laMalla.net*, in comparison to the rest, confirms that sharply different models of online journalism can develop in the same historical context.

2. The tradition of a media company, which could be simplified to the media logic (broadcast, print, purely online) stated by Altheide and Snow (1991), is the main factor that determines the use of the Internet as a news medium. Therefore, independent online projects are more likely to develop along the lines suggested by online journalism utopias while online projects embedded in print or broadcast companies will tend to reproduce their parent medium routines, definitions and features, thus minimizing the influence of the utopian model.

There is also evidence to support this hypothesis. *LaMalla.net*, the online-only project of the sample, was much more sensitive to a broader range of online journalism utopias than the projects linked to traditional media. The online versions of the newspapers and the broadcaster minimized the interactivity utopias by using the same passive-audience definition as their parent medium, while multimedia utopias were only adopted to some extent by the broadcaster and the online-only project. The reproduction of parent medium routines and concepts in online newsrooms of traditional media did not seem to be a product

of an active policy by the management of the media companies, but the result of the online news outlet being a secondary product that did not get enough resources for it to be developed with an exploratory attitude. In the four cases, the inertia of traditional journalistic culture is very strong in defining the main daily routines.

The following sections summarize and further discuss the research findings. Finally, suggestions are made for actions that could be taken both in media companies and research institutions based on the presented evidence.

8.1. Online journalism utopias revisited

Online journalism utopias are the product of a specific historical context, in the mid 1990s, when the Internet raised high expectations of change in the profession as it started to be explored as a news medium. As social constructions of an ideal model of online news, they can evolve over time, but have proven to be very pervasive and constant in the first decade of online journalism. Professionals in the four cases were very aware of this ideal model and they had developed a very homogeneous discourse in each newsroom to justify that only some of the utopias were developed in their respective projects. Journalists were very critical of their current model, as they knew it was far from the ideal one, and systematically blamed their lack of resources for the distance between utopia and reality. A constant complementary discourse was that the project was work-in-progress and described the features and routines that the online newsrooms wanted to develop in the future to get closer to the ideal model. There was an overwhelming rhetorical closure (Bijker and Pinch, 1987) in each online newsroom about this future, but with the current resources it was clear to everyone that it could not be reached. The fact was that online newsrooms had made choices about utopias, adopting some of them and translating (Latour, 1993) others, and this had shaped a model that would be difficult to change even with more resources, as it assumed basic principles on what online journalism is that had profound implications on working routines, audience definition and product features. Current models had already been embodied as natural and an evolution path had been traced for each of the projects. It was not only material limitations that affected the development of their respective

online journalism model: the inertia of traditional journalistic culture and giving priority to some utopias over others shaped how utopias would be developed in each case.

There is one clear converging definition of the main value of online journalism in comparison to traditional media: immediacy. This is the utopia that has been most directly integrated into newsroom routines, specially in online projects related to traditional media, where it is almost the only *raison d'être* of the online outlets. The reasons for privileging immediacy over other utopias can be traced through the history of the projects and the relationship that online newsrooms have with their traditional counterparts. Firstly, immediacy has become one of the main traditional journalistic values in the last two decades, and therefore the congruence of the utopia with a broad trend in journalism made it easier to adopt than other utopias. This is particularly clear in the case of the broadcaster, where a 24-hour news radio service was set up before the news website, and a 24-hour news television channel started almost one year after the stand-alone news portal began. Secondly, the search for the news website identity in the context of a traditional media company was soon linked to immediacy, as online journalists could easily beat their counterparts in breaking a last-minute news story, for the Internet allowed a flexible production schedule. If immediacy was a buzzword in journalism, online reporters felt they were in the best position to respond to the challenge. This was obvious in the case of newspaper online versions and less realistic in the case of broadcaster online newsrooms. But even though broadcast reporters could provide live reporting, they could not systematically produce immediate news like online journalists. Therefore, immediacy consolidated as the main strategy in the online newsrooms of traditional media because it was their

way of claiming that their product was valuable for their media company, as the traditional newsroom also shared immediacy as an aim of journalism.

Besides these two main reasons, the primacy of immediacy was consolidated by other phenomena. Competition among online news media has focused on being the first to break a story. The usual routine in any traditional medium is to compare their competitors' news choices and headlines hierarchy, but in the case of online newsrooms this turns into a race for immediacy. This has been reinforced with audience statistics during big breaking news stories: online journalists state that developing events such as the Iraq war and the March 11th Madrid bombing brought lots of citizens to their websites, and they argue that this is because people trusted the Internet as a source of immediate reporting. This might be a misleading argument, as traditional media audiences also increased significantly during the same events, but we should not neglect that online journalists have constructed the image that their audience is searching for immediacy. Thus, their audience definition is coherent with their journalistic values and, again, reinforces the immediacy utopia.

While immediacy had many factors that made it easy to adopt as a crucial element in online journalism in online newsrooms of traditional media, other utopias involved greater efforts of adaptation from the ideal to traditional journalistic culture or more resources than those allocated for the online projects. And, overall, the primacy of immediacy had important consequences on working routines (see section 8.2) that made it even more difficult to develop the other utopias. The case of *laMalla.net* demonstrates that if immediacy as a value is balanced with other priorities such as

specialized and service reporting then there is room for the development of some the other utopian proposals. The very flexibility of online publishing that allowed immediacy was used in this case for the delayed publication of stories that were not strictly linked to the pace of current events.

Again according to the hypertext utopia that time limitations have ended, news stories were usually considered open-ended pieces that could be edited several times a day or even on different days. This, however, was constrained by staffing conditions: smaller newsrooms tended to substitute updated stories with a brand new text, instead of making the story evolve. The other hypertext utopias did not become a part of daily routines and were reserved for specials. Deep, analytical reporting was the terrain of offline newsrooms in traditional media companies. Immediacy killed the hypertext utopia of the end of spatial limitations in breaking news production. There was no time to develop stories into complex hypertext structures with multiple paths and a comprehensive coverage of an event. Even if online journalists in the four newsrooms shared the utopia, those at *laMalla.net* were the ones who were most willing to explore new languages and structures for stories. The peculiarities of their work organization, with reporters having more time to work on every story, facilitated this attitude. However, even in this case, real developments did not strictly follow the ideal model. "Short", "clear" and "attractive" were the most common adjectives to define online texts in the words of journalists of the newsrooms analyzed.

External linking policies varied from medium to medium, mainly depending on human resources, the immediacy priority, CMS design and the image of the user. *LaMalla.net*

had the most systematic linking routines. The reasons for this development were to be found in their work organization that allowed specialization and the fact that they did not privilege immediacy as the only value, they had a reasonable CMS solution for linking and their user image was that of an active Internet surfer. In traditional media online news sites, the focus on immediacy prevented online journalists from doing extensive link searches and in some cases the CMS design made the procedure for putting a link in a story something extremely cumbersome. Furthermore, online newsrooms of traditional media defined their audience as mostly passive consumers.

Original multimedia content in breaking news was an unthinkable luxury: in traditional media companies, online reporters only performed desk work and could not go out to record audio or video material; at *laMalla.net* they did not have enough resources to do systematic original audiovisual production, and it was reserved for specials. Animated infographics were explored at some point, but they required too many resources to be provided regularly. Therefore, the utopia of the journalist choosing the best format to explain a news story was constrained to the material available and was not at all planned by the online journalist. Multimedia content was repurposed from traditional media products and in no website did it play a very important role as a newsworthy element in its own right most of the time. It was a complement, a competitive advantage (specially at *CCRTV*) or a mere requisite of the website design (photos played this role in many cases). The image of the audience in the online newsrooms played an important role as well as the precarious technical and human resources for multimedia production: users were depicted as having low bandwidth Internet connections and, even if online journalists acknowledged that connectivity was

improving quickly, this was an argument for not developing further the presence of audiovisual materials on the websites until 2005. Actually, video and audio were not available at all on newspaper websites. Things seemed to change in *CCRTV* with the overall strategy of the interactive division for video on demand. Newsroom convergence was envisioned sometimes as a strategy that would improve web content quality, but it was deemed to be an unreachable utopia, as online reporters considered that traditional reporters would never be willing to collaborate in producing original online content.

LaMalla.net journalists were more sensitive to interactivity utopias in their discourses and some developments, but somehow the traditional mass media journalistic model also dominated in most of their news production. They argued that Internet users were active consumers that would be willing to become co-producers if given the chance, but these more radical definitions of collaborative news production were mainly put into practice in specials. In daily routines, the most commonly used interactivity utopia in all the online newsrooms was that of user debate. However, traditional newsrooms had developed strategies prevent interactivity from interfering in news production, transforming it into a parallel space that neutralized the potential changes of opening up production to users' scrutiny. Forum discussions were clearly separated from the news content, and users' contributions were not managed by breaking news reporters. Instead, the online-only outlet integrated most of the users' commentaries right underneath each story, as in weblogs. This was a crucial conceptual difference: at *laMalla.net* journalists felt closer to their audience, as users could directly criticize and discuss news stories, as well as suggest links. While online newsrooms of traditional

media understood user forums mostly as a problem they had to manage (to avoid inappropriate content), for *laMalla.net* reporters interactivity was an opportunity to enrich news with quality input from users. Placing the user input alongside the news and the fact that online journalists were involved in answering comments fostered the quality of audience contributions. The difference was evident for the audience: in traditional media websites, users were invited to chat with one another, not with the journalists. In the online-only news site, they were invited to add value to a specific story, to collaborate with the journalist in a way.

All the online newsrooms had practical strategies for managing direct audience feedback to journalists work. Again, traditional media online newsrooms tried to prevent this from affecting the production rhythm. At the *Diari de Tarragona* and *CCRTV* online editors read through the e-mails and answered or redirected them to the appropriate recipient, be it an online reporter or someone in the traditional newsroom. This was the duty of a production team reporter each shift at *El Periódico*. Therefore, breaking news reporters did not have direct contact with the audience and they reproduced the traditional journalistic attitude of creating an imagined profile of their users. At *laMalla.net* they instead had the individual journalists' e-mail in every story as well as the comment space, and they claimed that this helped them to understand the interests of their audience. Statistics about user preferences can be much more detailed in news websites than in traditional media and they helped in shaping the users' profile. However, journalists defended their professional news judgement against the users' desire for gossip and spectacular or morbid stories reflected by statistics.

8.2. Online journalism models

Immediacy, as the converging definition of online journalism in the newsrooms analyzed, materialized in a set of news production routines that were broadly homogeneous among the different cases. These routines reproduced the basic gatekeeper model of traditional journalism, without challenging any of the existing journalistic culture and sometimes even neglected usual tenets such as fact-checking. Thus, in these cases, online journalism has not revolutionized the profession, but has developed as a new specific form of journalism. The reason for this continuity is not to be found in an active imposition of offline newsrooms. Traditional journalistic culture was as important in the mindset of the members of online newsrooms as the utopias. Even *laMalla.net* reporters mostly reproduced traditional journalistic roles in an attempt to produce a news website that would be respected among the profession as a “news medium”. In traditional media, there was a general lack of support from the management of the media companies for a more exploratory attitude towards the Internet in the online newsroom: online journalists perceived their project as a secondary product in the company. They argued that there was a general lack of knowledge about the Internet as a news medium in traditional newsrooms, but the main complain in online newsrooms was the lack of economic autonomy to increase resources as needed. As websites were not profitable businesses, online journalists had assumed that the situation could not improve easily. Actually, websites were seen as competition for the traditional outlet, specially in newspapers, and no original reporting

from the newspapers should be scooped online. In this context where innovation was undermined by lack of support and resources and where the online product should not overshadow the traditional one, journalistic routines were simplified as much as possible. Many online journalists in traditional media companies considered their product as a provisional form of journalism that filled the gaps left by the production rhythm of "real" journalism, the analytical first-hand reports of offline journalists in their idealized image. Immediacy was their value, and routines were set to produce as quickly and as much as possible with the existing resources.

LaMalla.net was not constrained by a traditional media product that defined its identity: in fact, the online newsroom defined its identity by contrast with traditional media online products. They had assumed that they could not compete for immediacy and therefore aimed for other values such as community building, providing specialized and useful service information and interpreting current events. This led to a more relaxed production rhythm and a more complex set of routines, closer to the full range of traditional journalistic tasks, with the difference that the Internet substituted offline newsgathering strategies (press conferences, face-to-face interviews) more often than in print and broadcast newsrooms. However, *laMalla.net* reporters were aware of the immediacy utopia and would commit to it when events required. For them, the routine of immediate reporting was an option, not their main production strategy. And when they played the game of immediacy they could actually beat traditional media online versions, as they used the same tools and routines with a bigger staff in each shift in the central hours of the day.

Therefore, two different models of online journalism were shaped in the four analyzed cases:

- ☞ *Immediate news production model:* It was shared by the three traditional media online newsrooms as they had found in immediacy their own space in relationship with their traditional counterparts. The online-only venture was also aware of this model and used it when last-minute events happen.
- ☞ *Specialized news production model:* It was developed by laMalla.net to cover issues that big online media do not, in order to find its own space among competitors. Journalists' thematic specialization was the main rationale and immediacy was relativized.

The immediate news production model can be synthesised in the portrait of a small online newsroom where young reporters select relevant wires and publish a slightly edited version as soon as possible. The main organization criterion is to attain the utopia of permanent updating, extending the hours of the day when the website can be fed with new content as much as possible, and with the lack of human resources this meant doing many shifts with few reporters. In this context, there was no option for thematic specialization and a single journalist usually assumed more responsibilities than a traditional reporter, including updating and hierarchizing stories on the homepage. There were few filters for quality checks before publication. While this general description is particularly accurate in the case of online newspapers, *CCRTV* online newsroom had a more complex production system, with television and radio texts and audiovisual material complementing wires, and linguists and subeditors whose role was to check texts and manage the homepage.

The alternative model for non-last-minute news at *laMalla.net* involved journalists specializing in particular issues, and so they set up a stable group of online sources related to their topics. This made them less dependent on agency wires and let them do traditional reporting routines such as interviewing, covering events on site, attending press conferences and searching for original source websites. *LaMalla.net* reporters also applied these routines to breaking news reporting, while online newsrooms of traditional media mainly limited their routines to selecting and editing copy from agency wires. The fact that immediacy was not so important at the online-only portal allowed them to prioritize newsroom cohesion over permanent updates: they had fewer shifts and most of the reporters were in the newsroom at the same time. They did extra shifts for very specific events, to adapt again to the immediate news model when necessary.

Immediacy and small teams forced a very routinized work, with journalistic routines simplified to a minimum, which put quality at risk: fact-checking was seldom conducted, and the demands of productivity lessened the rigor of gatekeeping. Reporters had neither the material nor the time for thorough multimedia production or comprehensive event coverage. Because wires were almost the only source in traditional media online newsrooms, it was easier to produce a lot of fast short news items than a few more elaborated stories. Wire data was questioned only on very specific occasions and newsworthiness criteria were applied very broadly. The risk of lack of accuracy in this situation heightened and source pluralism efforts and fact-checking were delegated to agencies. The case of *laMalla.net* demonstrates that with similar staff sizes there can be different models of online news production where the

basic quality routines of journalism are not compromised. Reporters planned stories and produced them in no hurry, contacting first-hand sources and checking facts. Working shifts as internal deadlines put some antidotes for immediacy in online newsrooms of traditional media. Homepages were constantly evolving, a flow in response to current events, but this evolution was not smooth and progressive, but rather concentrated at particular times of the day. When shifts changed, the news of the day was usually re-assessed and the hierarchy re-evaluated.

Online newsrooms regarded homepages as the showcase of immediacy, even though users' perceptions were very different from those of reporters. From an external point of view, changes from hour to hour were minimum most of the time as journalistic criteria kept the main stories at the top of the page; reporters, however, felt that the pace of immediacy was greater, as they were producing one story after the other. Layout design decisions, and the rigidity of CMS, constrained journalists' decisions in homepage management, even though newsworthiness criteria were very traditional. Immediacy and spectacularity were some of the most important criteria, as well as balance. Spanish and international news had a more prominent presence on the news website than in the traditional media outlets. The volume of Spanish and international news in the agency wire feeds and the fact that Spanish online newspapers were a constant reference for online reporters may explain this phenomenon.

In most of the newsrooms, journalists were stressed, overwhelmed with constant news production and technical tasks. They had mixed feelings about the Internet as a news medium. Many felt like second-class journalists in comparison to their traditional

Conclusions

counterparts. *LaMalla.net* was the online newsroom where these feelings were less present and reporters felt satisfied with their work, as its production model fostered specialization, direct contact with sources, and authorship recognition. In the other newsrooms, when journalists managed to distance themselves from daily routines, they highlighted the privilege of exploring a new medium.

8.3. Context and evolution of online journalism projects

As has been argued in the section above, online news products were defined by their context. The distant relationship between the online and offline newsrooms in traditional media companies had important implications on the shaping of their online products. The role of technological tools and their developers also proved to be crucial in the evolution of the projects. However, technology was not a driving force for organizational and professional changes: rather it was another constrain on the development of online journalism utopias. The materiality of technology is always more complex to manage than its idealistic representations, because it is socially embedded and socially shaped.

Even though the relative position of online newsrooms within media companies in terms of physical location and organizational links to offline newsrooms varied among projects and over time, it was not a determining factor in shaping online news production routines. Physical closeness did not imply less autonomy of the online newsroom and viceversa. Autonomy depended more on attitudes on both sides and location just reinforced them. In the case of the online projects in Catalan traditional media, traditional newsrooms were not directly involved in the specific development of the website or in daily online production, even though some contact existed and some mechanisms of relationship were theoretically established. Online and traditional journalists tended to ignore each other in most of their routines, and online newsrooms

had a strong feeling that the Internet project was not important for the traditional media staff. Collaboration between both newsrooms was seen as positive but it was difficult to incorporate into their daily practices. Their own news production processes absorbed the energy of each newsroom and few practical collaboration initiatives were explored and subsequently maintained. There were a few, occasional consultations in which traditional journalists advised online journalists, but these rare contacts could be regarded as exceptions, since the rhythm of online production did not allow for constant consultation. Online journalists were the ones who had to take the initiative if consultation and feedback were to take place. In content coordination this was also the case: it was online journalists who tried to make sure that their product was coherent with the editorial line of the traditional medium. Traditional journalists seldom visited the websites.

Online journalists felt that they had won credit among their traditional counterparts after big news events, but this did not change the daily routines of the respective newsrooms and both products lived parallel lives, without hardly any overall coordination. Actually, recognition from offline newsrooms tended to reinforce immediacy as the main value of online news: what they praised was that online journalists were quick at following last-minute developing events. If we add the parallel phenomenon of audience peaks on these occasions, it seems that immediacy will rule over online newsrooms for a long time to come. Some self-critical reflections of online journalists would question the "tyranny of immediacy" and propose producing less, in-depth stories. However, in the current situation the chances of changing the fundamental principle of their models are scarce. With small teams that are not allowed

to grow, in a context in which original reporting is supposed to be the monopoly of traditional newsrooms, the routine of immediate news production is a comfortable position for online newsrooms in traditional media companies.

Technological tools did not predefine working routines. The four newsrooms had similar web content management systems, but they were used differently, and had different journalistic routines. Furthermore, there was no single way of performing CMS routines in each newsroom: every journalist had his/her own solution for dealing with technical tools. Nevertheless, decisions about technical tools design did affect journalistic routines. The design of CMS features did not always fit the needs of the journalists and discouraged them from using the routines they would have used in other material conditions. In other cases, they complained that technical routines were too cumbersome and time-consuming, acting against their desire for immediacy.

Journalists in the different online newsrooms had varying technical skills, but this did not seem to determine the quality of the online product. Technological innovation in production tools was mainly directed towards automating procedures or making them more user-friendly, progressively lessening the need for technical skills among journalists. Projects were constantly evolving, but from the journalists' perspective technical improvements were implemented too slowly. CMS always had non-critical bugs that took months to be solved, because they were just another one in the long list of tasks for the overwhelmed technical staff. Bugs made journalists' daily work more difficult, but they developed routines to deal with these problems. Audiovisual production tools evolved faster as they were innovations for the whole of the media

company, but they never quite fitted online journalists' needs. In this context of constant but slow evolution, online newsrooms had a sense of provisionality. From the perspective of online journalists, project evolution was mainly perceived as technology driven. The journalistic or strategic decisions behind these changes were transparent to them and most reporters felt they were mere spectators of the innovation processes in the project.

Journalists distrusted their technical tools and they felt that the technical staff were not sensitive to their problems and needs. There were too few technicians to take on long-term development, short-term problem solving and specials in the timing that journalists desired. Technically skilled journalists (in the online newsroom or leading the technical staff) were crucial in all the cases to communicate journalistic needs to the programmers. However, these technically skilled journalists were usually not involved in daily production and the needs of breaking news production were not fully taken into account. Even though online reporters did not usually participate in future project designs, they indirectly participated in innovation processes by accepting, rejecting, reinventing or adapting new technical tools or working routines. They applied the logic of existing routines and online news values to try and make sense of new developments. If innovations were coherent with these existing rules they were assumed without trouble, but if not, they were rejected: it was as easy as just neglecting the new technological feature.

Online newsrooms had adopted the software "version" metaphor as the only suitable strategy for managing constant evolution in an intensive daily work-oriented project.

They accumulated possible new features and accelerated structural development for some time fighting against short-term needs. Technical and design changes were usually the easiest ones to make and to see, but even these were difficult to develop as fully as the initial idea. Organizational changes were much more difficult to put into practice. This is the paradox of materiality: it is more difficult to develop, but easier to make concrete, to plan. Organizational changes, particularly if they aim to involve the traditional newsroom, are much difficult to manage. It was harder to shape social attitudes than develop software. Version changes, usually focused on technical web development, were the better chance for social change if organizational innovations had been envisioned as a need for some time. But even in this context change was not easily undertaken. Online journalists tended to see technology as a reverse salient (Hughes, 1987), but it was often the newsroom organization and technical skills that provoked dysfunctions in innovation processes: CMS features that had been designed and developed were in some cases never used because there had been no necessary parallel adaptations at the social side.

Special coverage of events was the innovation edge of online news projects. Being outside the daily rhythm of work and mostly devoted to planned events, specials allowed online journalists to think ahead of features and concepts. The other facilitator of these innovation edges was the fact that they were necessarily short-term projects with a limited scope: while general website development was an open never-ending process that could be delayed if necessary, specials had to be ready when the event was scheduled. They were the space for utopian experimentation: participatory publishing where users could become content producers, multimedia-rich reports,

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complex hypertext structures with in-depth background on an issue. In a way, specials were the institutionalization of utopias: what daily routines could not handle, specials offered a routinized way to develop.

8.4. Strategies for a better online journalism

The law of radical potential suppression (Winston, 1998) can be helpful to interpret the process of the adoption of the Internet as a news medium in the four online newsrooms. Social groups react to innovation by adapting the new technologies to the established rules in order to prevent radical change, which could be dangerous to the structure of the group itself. While utopias and competition acted as the main accelerators of the phenomenon of online journalism, traditional journalistic culture and the lack of human and technical resources (due to the lack of trust in the new medium of the companies' management) acted as brakes on innovation. At *laMalla.net*, where the traditional journalistic culture was not as institutionalized as in the other online newsrooms (which were semi-autonomous annexes to traditional newsrooms), there was evidence of a more original model of online journalism: utopias were more clearly developed and their online news product contrasted more sharply with traditional journalism. However, the desire for recognition among professionals also made them reproduce most of the traditional routines and shortage of resources left them far behind some of the utopias.

Despite changes in design, CMS functionalities, newsroom organization and location within the company, the history of the projects shows how the routines and values of these online journalism models have evolved very little since immediacy was established as their main defining aim. There seems to be some stability (although the *Diari de Tarragona's* radical changes in staff and strategy would not fit this conclusion).

However, in the early stages of *El Periódico* there was no breaking news service and the website was a mere replica of the newspaper, *laMalla.net* was updated once a day, and at *Diari de Tarragona* last-minute headlines had a secondary position on the homepage. There was a time when immediacy was not the rule. The factors described in section 8.1 made it an hegemonic value and tend to reinforce it, but in the future circumstances may change and the self-critical attitude of journalists could be the first step towards new models of online journalism. Online editors and journalists had very clear ideas of the shortcomings of their projects and the ideal routines and product concepts they wanted to work towards. There was a will for change and self-awareness of being in a learning process that was still ongoing. At the same time, inertia is a strong force against change once a model has stabilized, and organizational change has proven more difficult than technical evolution in the cases analyzed. Awareness about the trends, contextual factors and taken-for-granted values in online newsrooms can often empower journalists to take more radical decisions about the future of their projects, be them following the online journalism utopias or not. The results of this dissertation would like to be a useful contribution in this regard, following the spirit of research as a tool to design technological strategies proposed by the social construction of technology tradition (Williams and Edge, 1996: 867) we have used as part of the theoretical framework.

The value of immediacy in online newsrooms should be reassessed. One strategy would be to adopt a more interpretative approach to news, adding context, background and different perspectives to news by using links to put immediacy into a hypertext accumulative production structure. The lack of experience of many young

online journalists at interpreting news could be compensated for if traditional newsroom managers engaged offline journalists in a more intense collaboration with the online newsroom, just as consultants, not necessarily producing online content. An integrated strategy of online and traditional newsrooms workflows would be essential to these changes, something that the cases analyzed have shown to be very difficult to achieve.

Reducing the quantity of news produced by online newsrooms would also help to develop more mature news stories. Reporters would be allowed more time to work on them, which means that they would be able to search for original online and offline sources and to check facts. Immediacy could then be pursued in high-relevant, last-minute news with many more resources, as journalists would not have the pressure of constantly feeding the website with new stories. In a context in which more and more citizens are engaging in online publishing through weblogs, online newsrooms could try to explore the utopia of open news production, engaging their more active users as amateur neighborhood or specialist reporters and therefore extending their production capacity without compromising the quality of the core product. This could foster brand loyalty among active users and provide journalists with first-hand access to stories to be further developed. This user-generated news content on the website could be more or less integrated with journalists' production, depending on the professional standpoint of the online newsroom. Commercial initiatives such as OhmyNews.com in Korea and non-profit experiments led by universities (Mansetori in Tampere, Finland⁶²) or activists (Indymedia, Bayosphere in San Francisco, USA) have started to explore this

⁶² See Sirkkunen and Kotilainen (2004).

possibility and highlighted its benefits (see Bowman and Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2004) and, to a lesser extent, its limitations.

Such strategies, based on the experience of this research and again on some of the online journalism utopias are just an invitation to further explore the possibilities of the Internet as a news medium. The crucial point is not the proposals, but the response to them, the attitude of professionals when facing the development of online journalism. This response should involve a critical reflection on the current material and social constraints that define online journalism and working routines in online newsrooms. In this way, online journalists would understand the role of utopias in their daily lives and be able to revisit them or even reinvent them because they would have the realistic starting point of a deep knowledge of the circumstances of their company and newsroom. There are many ways of doing online journalism and the constraints of any given media company can be reinterpreted as a framework within which there are different options for providing outstanding online news products. Exploring these options successfully will be easier with a deep knowledge of the context and the factors that shaped the current situation. And understanding these factors will also help to channel the attempts to change the very framework of the media company, to shape it so that it can produce better online news. This is never simple to do, but taking informed decisions is a big step towards this ideal scenario.

Research in the field of online journalism can fruitfully contribute to the future evolution of the Internet as a news medium. Three further research initiatives would lead in that direction:

- ☞ Cross-country comparative studies of online journalism models.
- ☞ Active involvement of researchers in online news projects development.
- ☞ Research on the users of online news as consumers and producers of news content.

Online journalism studies reviewed in section 2.4 suggest that the immediacy model might have gained an hegemonic status among online media around the world, but further research should compare case studies from different countries and industries in order to better assess the general trends, detect variations in online journalism models and locate successful experiences. “We believe it is time to go beyond the individual, often isolated case studies, and strive towards projects encompassing multiple methods, across time, intended to elaborate on central theoretical perspectives”, argued Jankowski and Van Selm (2005:206) on Internet research in general. Their plea also applies to online journalism research, and this study has tried to contribute to the construction of a solid theoretical framework for a broader comparative analysis. The case study approach does not allow direct generalization, but the theoretical framework tries to enable case comparison that is aware of the problems of cross-national comparative research (Livingstone, 2003).

Beyond this comparative research, each case may need specific strategies, and researchers may get actively involved in the innovation processes of online projects and contribute useful advice. Jankowski and Van Selm (2005:206) suggested the need for action research approaches in Internet research. Active involvement in media design and development would be beneficial for both sides (Castelló and Domingo,

2004). It would provide the researcher with first-hand experience of the definition phase of a news website, in which taken-for-granted online journalism utopias clash with material constraints and professional culture, and decisions are taken to shape online news production. This would give researchers extremely valuable information about the initial processes in creating or redefining a project, which is usually only available through interviews and hard-to-get documentation. The action research approach would also help media companies to become more aware of the factors that influence the project development during the process, and would empower them to take more informed decisions.

The habits of Internet users as consumers and producers of online news content is a largely unexplored research area that would also provide fruitful data for media companies in this process. We may try to understand with qualitative data the online news diet of citizens, what needs does it satisfy and what other needs are fulfilled with alternative sources such as blogs and traditional sources such as newspapers and broadcasters, and explore why and how some netizens become news producers inside or outside online media.

The "fourth wave" of online journalism research could be based on active collaboration among scholars, professionals and users to develop realistic approaches to the Internet as a news medium.

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Index of names

- Abelló, Carles: online editor 2003-2005 at *Diari de Tarragona*
- Ayllon, Victòria: technical director 1999- at *El Periódico*
- Besson, Joan: online co-editor 2001-2005 at *CCRTV*
- Cardona, Quim: website programmer and editor 1999-2001 at *laMalla.net*
- Catalunya Informació*: 24-hour radio network owned by CCRTV
- Catalunya Ràdio*: the main radio network owned by CCRTV
- Catalunyainformacio.com: one of the names of the online news portal of CCRTV
- Catnoticies.cat: one of the web addresses of the online news portal of CCRTV
- CCRTV* (www.ccrtv.cat, Corporació Catalana de Ràdio i Televisió): Catalan public broadcasting company.
- CCRTVi (CCRTV Interactiva): company of CCRTV managing its online portals.
- Clavell, Ferran: online content division director 2002- at *CCRTV*
- COM Ràdio / COM Emissores* (www.comradio.cat, www.comemissores.cat): Catalan radio network funded by Diputació de Barcelona.
- Cosculluela, Ferran: online reporter 1997- at *El Periódico*
- Cuixart, Núria: linguist 1999- at *CCRTV*
- Diari de Tarragona* (www.diaridetarragona.com): Regional newspaper of Tarragona (the main city at the South of Catalonia)
- Diputació de Barcelona (www.diba.cat): Regional public authority coordinating municipalities in the Barcelona area
- EFE (www.efe.es): leading Spanish news agency
- El Mundo* (www.elmundo.es): Spanish newspaper with the leading news website
- El Periódico de Catalunya*: Catalan newspaper
- El Periódico Online* (www.elperiodico.com): Catalan online newspaper
- Escofet, Joan: online reporter 2002- at *laMalla.net*
- Esteve, Toni: president of Lavinia
- Europa Press: Spanish news agency
- Fabregas, Josep M.: online co-editor 2001-2005 at *CCRTV*
- Franco, Antonio: newspaper editor at *El Periódico*

Garcia, Anna: adjunct editor 2001- at *laMalla.net*

Garcia, Iolanda: online reporter 1999- at *CCRTV*

Generalitat de Catalunya: Catalan autonomous government

Grup Zeta (www.grupozeta.es): Catalan media company owner of *El Periódico*

Jordi, Joan: graphic design team leader 2000- at *Diari de Tarragona*

laMalla.net: online-only news site

Lavinia (www.lavinia.tc): Catalan media company that manages *laMalla.net*

Llombart, Silvia: online editor 2001- at *laMalla.net*

Mateu, Marc: online content division director 2000-2004 at *CCRTV*

Miró, Anna: Knowledge Society commissioner at the Diputació de Barcelona.

Puig, Pep: online editor 1996-2005 at *El Periódico*

Puighermanal, Joan: online editor 2005- at *CCRTV*

Ràfols, Josep M.: online editor 2005- at *El Periódico*

Sancha, David: adjunct editor 1998- at *El Periódico*

Santinoli, Mario: technical director and first online editor 1986-1999 at *El Periódico*

Seco, Edurne: online reporter 2000-2003 at *Diari de Tarragona*

Telenotícies.com: one of the names of the online news portal of CCRTV

TVC (www.tv3.cat, Televisió de Catalunya): television network owned by CCRTV

Tost, Gerard: online editor 2001-2003 at *Diari de Tarragona*

Vinagre, Emili: online reporter 2001- at *CCRTV*

XTVL (www.xtvl.cat, Xarxa de Televisions Locals): Catalan local televisions network funded by Diputació de Barcelona