Chapter 56

Mapping the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Managing Audience Participation in Journalism:
Problems and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the contribution of artificial intelligence to the management of audience partici-pation in the news production process. Although participatory journalism has revived expectations for strengthening community ties and restoring public trust in professional journalism, it is nevertheless often considered a field for malicious contributions and legal problems. For this purpose, this chapter initially identifies the problems that arise during the integration of users' contributions in the professional news media content. Then the automated methods and artificial intelligence techniques that allow more effective user-generated content exploitation are studied. The chapter also explores how international news organizations adopt artificial intelligence methods when incorporating participatory journalism in their daily practice. Finally, it attempts to propose future directions in this evolving field where artificial intelligence and audience participation in journalism intersect.

INTRODUCTION

Audience participation in journalism has been initially embraced with enthusiasm, even posing challenges on fundamental notions of journalism, such as gatekeeping and framing. However, the coexistence of amateur and professional content in the news websites often raises important legal and ethical issues (Saridou et al., 2019). Citizen contributions are seen as a source of problems in the journalistic work routine, sometimes questioning the feasibility and desirability of participation. In order to prevent and face such problems, media organizations implement moderation methods that allow them to classify, control and verify user-generated content (UGC) (Boberg et al., 2018; Wolfgang, 2016).

    Manual moderation, however, is a laborious and time-consuming process for the professionals, as they have to manage a large amount of content under time pressure, notwithstanding the significant

human and financial resources needed for this task (Wang, 2020). Thus, several media organizations use automated methods and artificial intelligence (AI) techniques to carry out part of this complex task or implement semi-automated approaches to incorporate machine learning (ML) into non-automatic comment moderation process (Risch & Krestel, 2018). In the recent years, news media has also begun to use ML applications in new ways, ranging from speeding up journalistic research to aggregating and cross-referencing data (Underwood, 2019).

In this vein, the following chapter focuses on the ways in which AI contributes to the effective participatory journalism management. Through content analysis in international news organizations, the chapter aims to study how AI techniques are used to prevent and address problems that arise during audience participation in journalism. Additionally, the need to consider arising risks and challenges should not be neglected. The discussion on issues such as transparency, data privacy and accountability has to be prioritized in the context of journalistic ethics and censorship avoidance.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, journalism has often been studied both academically and professionally under the rubric of audience participation in the news production process. The ever-expanding technological capabilities combined with the changing economic and social environment have made it possible for internet users to produce content in the context of professional news media, without required specialized knowledge. Through tools and applications adopted by media organizations, citizens can participate in journalism and public debate in general (Engelke, 2019; Krumsvik, 2018; Loosen et al., 2022). Participatory journalism, as the process through which citizens contribute to the news production by professional journalists (Abott, 2017), takes place when journalists and users produce news on a mainstream platform (Aitamurto, 2013), as well as when content generated by users outside the media organization's platform is acquired and used by professional media (Saridou & Veglis, 2021).

UGC is integrated into the daily practice of the journalistic websites through a wide range of participatory tools, which have been classified by scholars into typologies based on different criteria, such as interactivity, the stage of news production they are part of, or their functionality (Engelke, 2019; Singer et al., 2011; Suau & Masip, 2014). When studying participation from the user's perspective, research findings show that the most widespread and prevalent tools are: content rating, using the media organization's designated rating system, polls, which are topical questions asked by journalists and answered by users using predefined choices, sharing on social networking sites through relevant options provided, submission of material in the form of text or audio-visual content, collaborative content, such as contributing interview questions, comments, usually submitted via a form at the bottom of the published story, discussion forums, which are journalist-led discussions with topical questions posed by the newsroom and submissions are fully or reactively moderated, and citizen blogs, which are created by users and hosted on the news site (Spyridou, 2018). Based on three dimensions (user's control, creative effort required and the time point of participation), the nine tools can be divided into graded categories of participatory activity (Table 1), ranging from very low to high (Spyridou, 2018).

The optimistic view sees in the emerging conditions the opportunity to renew the role of the media in society and strengthen ties with the audience (Reader, 2018; Sinton, 2018), contributing to the revitalization of democracy and political effectiveness (López-Cepeda et al., 2019; Vanhaeght & Donders, 2015). However, citizen contributions are often seen as a source of problems for journalists and news

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