



## Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

### Institute of Press and Information Sciences

#### CALL FOR PAPERS

#### International Conference

## Innovation in Journalism in the Digital Age

Tunis, 7-8 April 2021

The international conference “*Innovation in Journalism in the Digital Age*” examines innovation in journalism practices in various media types. Various economic, social, and technical factors are pushing the media to upgrade and innovate in all their domains. Among the changes observed in journalism we note the impact of computer mediated tools such as search engines, social media, and data aggregation tools. Media professionals are innovating, adopting creative choices, and inventing new concepts and models. The conference investigates innovative media editorial practices, business models, and technical choices and considers their professional and social impact.

The theme invites participants to consider and focus, especially but not exclusively, on the following aspects of innovation:

#### **Axis 1: Technical innovation**

Media institutions have been witnessing considerable transformations prompting them to invent and adopt technical innovation. In a context characterized by speedy and noteworthy changes, media are organizing brainstorming panels and creating observatories and laboratories in order to experiment new techniques. Journalists and media staff are often

involved in this process. However, some media companies prefer to engage consultants and specialists from various fields in order to promote creative journalism and new approaches (Dupuy, 2013).

The innovation is impacting the whole information process. Indeed, some media institutions are establishing data aggregation and other online tools to gather testimonies and suggestions from citizens among other things. Other companies are investing in automatic information transmission (Mercier, Pignard-Cheynel, 2014 ;Rieder, Smyrnaio, 2012). Augmented reality, automatic fact-checking algorithms, mobile applications and storytelling software offer an immersive and interactive environment that support editorial content and improve user experience. Internet of things and automated or robot journalism are offering some perspectives in the press sector.

On the one hand some journalists are skeptical about strategies focusing on technology. They fear the “technicization” of their activity, which can lead to the loss of journalism quality and substance. On the other hand, other media professionals and researchers are arguing for the consolidation of journalist’s technical culture (Joannès, 2010). Technical innovation seems decisive to the survival of journalism, which means that journalists have to adapt to a new media ecosystem in which technical devices, such as mobile devices, have an important role.

## **Axis 2: innovation in the Newsroom**

Media companies are benefiting from the multimedia opportunities offered by the digital environment. Journalists are not different. They must create cross-media content and are required to renew their editorial models. Consequently, their journalistic content includes diverse formats, hypermedia content, non-linear diffusion, and new techniques of storytelling.

Our society is characterized by a growing ubiquity. The audience departure from traditional media has driven media professionals to target mobile devices. In this context, new forms of journalism are emerging and acquisition of new skills specific for modern journalism can rely on gamification mechanisms (Lazăr, Morelli, 2019). Many news editorial choices are appearing in Western countries’ newsrooms such as solutions journalism, newsgames (Carlino, 2017), videograph, data journalism, fact-checking, etc. To which editorial transformations lead this choice? These practices are new, rare or nonexistent in the Arab and African countries. Thus, it is important to examine the state of the art of these practices in the context of the Arab and African countries.

Internet has generated many transformations in media domain. In this context we solicit contributions that examine how press web services are structured. It's important to check if there is combination of competences and a growth of multitasking or, on the contrary, there is hyper specialization of new skills in the newsroom?

Practices mentioned previously have influenced the structure of the newsroom (Mercier, Pignard-Cheyne, 2014). Some media have empowered the web service or have merged it with the print or audiovisual services. Other media companies have kept both services separated and have strengthened them with transversal competences in order to broadcast the same content on various platforms. Visual Radio is an example of changes and regeneration that media companies are experiencing.

The press has also benefited from User Generated Content (UGC), one of main characteristics of social media. Editorial models were adjusted in order to take in consideration the audience as an important component of the production process. Some media are delegating tasks to the audiences. In this context crowdsourcing is an open call not only for professionals but also for citizens who can witness or collaborate and participate actively in the production process.

The audience can also evaluate and annotate content created by professionals. Besides, in addition to their main platforms, many media companies create blogs, forums, and virtual discussion spaces. These spaces are accessible to the audiences to contribute and create contents. We ask for contributions that examine if this configuration is able to maintain audiences who are rather diverse and segmented. It's important to inspect how the journalistic content is situated in the huge web data? In which way this content is influenced by exogenous factors related to the digital environment such as algorithms? How journalists are perceiving these experiences?

Furthermore, major unexpected events disrupt the media workflow process. The spread of Covid-19 in the world has remarkably influenced tasks in the newsroom. The pandemic has imposed constraints which have driven the media to adapt their working techniques, to carry new practices and to find other alternative solutions. Thus, innovation and creativity are sometimes imposed by circumstances. Consequently, it's important to highlight innovative journalistic practices during the pandemic.

### **Axis 3: Economic Innovation**

Recently, media companies are confronting economic changes such as audience decrease in traditional media and the fragmentation of audiences and advertisement which are now targeting online platforms. Those mutations have caused new challenges for media owners and have driven them to look for new opportunities on the internet.

In this context, panoply of business models has expanded and conventional types of financing, such as advertising and hard copy sales, are changing. Non-profit media resort to crowdfunding in order to deal with the lack of funds and promote public interest in journalism. To generate new sources of income, media companies are adopting new methods including online subscription, sponsored links, monetization of podcasts, and customized sales.

In many Western countries, press publishers have finalized an agreement with Google company in order to compensate the indexation of their news. How is the situation in the other countries? How are infomediaries (Rebillard, Smyrnaio, 2010) such Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram affecting media, mainly on an economic level. It is interesting to examine how self-promotion activities are converted to a profit. What is the impact on the business models that depend on tech giants? For what reasons do they propose tools and projects for professionals and amateurs such as *Facebook Journalism Project* and *Google News Initiative*? How can media companies secure their economic viability despite remarkable changes in the field?

### **Axis 4: Impact of innovation on professional identities**

In this section we consider the implications of innovation in journalism. In the innovation process, the technical, editorial, and economic aspects intersect and influence each other. For example, in order to maintain their independence on the editorial level, media solicit the audience to contribute to their funds. Innovation is impacting the foundation of journalism, thus, journalists are requested to be versatile and acquire more technical skills and competences in management and marketing. Indeed, media are relying on new jobs in journalistic tasks such as computer scientists and communication and marketing specialists (E-marketing consultant, community manager, SEO specialist, etc.). These practices represent some facets of «Communication journalism» (“journalisme de communication”) (Hubé, 2010 ; Charron, 2007).

This kind of practices is flourishing in the digital era. It's important to examine how promotional activities such as brand journalism impact the major role of journalism in news reporting, explaining, and debating about public affairs. How do journalists perceive this situation? What is the impact on their professional identity? And what are the repercussions on the public?

Various axis highlighted above are related to ethics issues. In this context, it is crucial to examine the position of quality journalism in these various concepts and models. Besides, we have to consider how Arab and African countries, which have their own and different ecosystems are confronting those changes in the digital age. For example, how are the innovation priorities in the countries facing political transitions or conflicts different from the priorities in Western countries.

“Journalism and innovation in the digital age” aims to explore new trends and new phase of innovation in journalism. It also investigates the most adequate approaches and the appropriate method to design and understand these distinct and ambiguous practices. The conference considers how to examine online journalism devices and how to use media web data and exceed the technical framework.

Julie Posetti (2018) highlights the importance of an integrated and strategic approach of sustainable innovation in journalism. This approach investigates fundamental concepts and various facets of the problematic in order to overcome “bright shiny thing” (*Ibid.*, 2018). Besides, the enlargement or the “dilution” of the journalism (Ruellan, 2005) drives researchers in information and communication science to involve others specialists like statistic and management. The conference considers these various axis and still open to other aspects with an innovation perspective.

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### **KEY DATES:**

**20 November 2020:** Diffusion of call for papers

**15 January 2021:** Deadline for proposal submission

**29 January 2021:** Authors Notification (submitted abstracts)

**7-8 April 2021:** Conference

**30 April 2021:** Deadline for participants to send full papers

**28 May 2021:** Authors Notification (submitted full papers)

**15 June 2021:** Authors should send full papers final version

**Autumn 2021:** Publication of conference proceedings

Authors should submit an abstract of 3000 characters (space excluded) including the title; authors' name, status and affiliation; Email address, research question; methodology; expected results and a short list of references.

Proposals will be accepted in one of the following languages Arabic, French and English and will be evaluated in double blind.

Proposals are to send via both Email addresses: [colloqueipsi2021@gmail.com](mailto:colloqueipsi2021@gmail.com) and [fredj.zamit@yahoo.de](mailto:fredj.zamit@yahoo.de)

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