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To think "citizen journalism".

- Publications / Projets de recherche - Le journalisme dans la convergence. -

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Abstract.

Since 2005, the Internet has given rise to several novel initiatives concerning journalism designated by the generic term "citizen journalism". Underlying a set of heterogeneous systems, a unique principle can be observed: web users, who are not professional journalists, contribute directly to the production of the daily news. These practices raise a series of questions, one of which is the link, in the media and journalism, between professional and amateur practices (pro-am) and which we will examine in this article.

Keywords: journalism, citizen journalist, pro-am.

This text is from a paper presented October 9th 2007 in Natal (Brazil) at the opening of the colloquium Comunicação, História e Política organized by the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte.

This paper is based on work carried out jointly with Florence Le Cam, senior lecturer, and Olivier Trédan, doctoral student at University of Rennes 1, CRAPE, GIS M@rsouin.

Introduction.

Since 2005, the Internet has given rise to several novel initiatives concerning journalism designated by the generic term "citizen journalism". The offer includes a variety of projects and editorial systems:

- certain sites justify their initiative by criticizing traditional media and offering an alternative source of news (AgoraVox) while others have been created by major companies (Wat TV by the French TV channel TF1, YouWitnessNews by Yahoo and Reuters);
- some sites are designed as simple publication spaces, with minimal regulation of content posted by users (NowPublic, Centspapiers, AgoraVox), while others strictly control contributions, mixing them with professional content (Rue89, Ohmynews) or integrating them in a collective project managed by journalists (Assignment Zero);
- most of these systems are entirely dedicated to this means of production, but some appear inside traditional media in specific columns (the section Yo periodista on the El Pais website, reader blogs accessible via the Télégramme's homepage, the election period site Quelcandidat.com of the Dauphiné-Libéré newspaper and increasingly frequent encouragements on traditional media sites inviting users to submit news, photos and videos of an event they have witnessed).

Underlying these heterogeneous systems, we can observe a unique principle: web users, who are not professional journalists, contribute directly to the production of the daily news. They search for data, analyze and post it on line, with or without the help of professionals. These sites claim to involve tens of thousands of contributors. These figures are undoubtedly exaggerated or misleading (we would have to distinguish between regular and occasional contributions), nevertheless, they do indicate a significant movement and certain sites have a considerable number of

visitors.

These practices raise a number of questions: Who are these web users? What motivates them and what is their background? Is their production specialized or are certain themes, or discursive forms, encouraged? What is the economic model of these sites? Who are the users that consume this production? We can observe, in particular, that these initiatives shed new light on the relationship in the media and journalism between professional and amateur practices, giving rise to a new appellation, borrowed from sports: pro-am (or proam) journalism.