Editors versus audiences facing news: Is this discrepancy also repeated on social news networks?

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Abstract

This study examines whether the frequent discrepancy between publishers and audiences over the news that interests them – the former preferring hard news, the latter soft news – is repeated on social networks. Based on a sample of 8,000 news stories uploaded to a Spanish-language news aggregator over 10 years (2006–2015), the number of hard, soft and general news stories published on its front page was calculated. In addition, the news stories that received the most votes, comments and visits were analysed, and correlations were sought among these three variables. The results show that users mainly chose hard news when voting (50.2%), followed by soft news (30.9%) and general news (18.9%). This was in sharp contrast to the results found for news consumption, where visitors access soft news much more than hard news. The investigation offers some clues about the extent to which the disparity of interests

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between journalists and readers facing news poses a real problem, and it also provides a new outlook on how editors can deal with audiences.

Keywords
Audiences, editors, hard news, social networks, soft news, users

Introduction

The contrast between the interests of editors and their audiences when selecting news, found in many investigations, is an old concern that continues to be an important issue in media studies. News professionals follow different strategies to satisfy audience demands, especially in the age of new technologies, that make it possible to determine the preferences of the public very quickly. However, to date, there has been no research on the existence of such contradictions within communities of users, where people who edit and people who visit web pages share the same network.

This study analyses this aspect by taking into account data proceeding from the most important Spanish-speaking news aggregator, the *Menéame* social network. This emerged in December 2005, following the earlier pattern of Digg, which was launched in 2004, but nowadays, it has more similarities with Reddit and is accessed by around 9 million unique users each month (Martínez, 2017). The network has a promotion system of linked news, in which users can participate by sending a post with a link and a short description, while the rest of the community votes with the aim of promoting the news story to the front page of the site.[1] Only proposals that reach a certain number of users' votes appear in the main entrance of the web, so these news stories are considered the most relevant by the network's community at any specific moment and are consequently the only news read by most visitors.

Is the discrepancy between editors and audiences of traditional media facing news repeated on this social network? To answer this question, we worked with a random sample of 8,000 news stories taken from 10 years in the history of the site, from 2006 to 2015. The research analyses what kind of news users choose to include on the front page with their votes and which news stories receive more visits. In this way, it asks whether there is disagreement between the decisions they make when generating content and their choices when visiting these entries.

The results of the investigation show clearly that members who generate content prefer hard news, while most of the users who visit the site choose soft news. This finding indicates that the traditional opposition between editors and audiences is fully repeated on this news sharing social network.

With the aim of understanding and explaining the findings, the theoretical frame of the study involves two main aspects. First, it examines the disparity of interests between editors and media audiences, noting the existence of different approaches to the topic among researchers and scholars. Second, in order to apply the results obtained for the news aggregator *Menéame* to the field of journalism, it tries to answer the question of whether we can speak about editors and audiences when dealing with users of social

networks. Besides, in the 'Discussion' section, we argue the convenience of proposing a new concept to characterise another side of audiences: their *dual nature*.

About the disparity of interests between journalists and their audiences facing news

There are at least two different approaches to analysing this question. One line of investigation stresses the involvement of audiences and the importance of their participation, while the other is much more sceptical about this possibility because it considers that while many citizens subscribe to the idea of participatory culture, they shun it in practice (Karlsson et al., 2018). We will call the first line of investigation the *participative approach to audiences*, and the second, the *sceptical approach to audience participation.*

The *participative approach to audiences* is rooted in the traditional critical view which maintained that the audience was simply condemned to listen. Media organisations themselves took the audience to be passive, and the role of the editor included the function of speaking in its name. They understood that journalists represented the interests of the public, at a time when there were few options for contrasting different possible interests, a gap that was called the 'missing link' (Schlesinger, 1987). During the final decades of the 20th century with the development of reception theory, which evolved from cultural studies and the theory of uses and gratifications, scholars abandoned the view that audiences were passive.

The rise of Internet spread a term that was appealing for researchers eager to adapt journalism to the digital era: participation. Scholars asserted their 'enthusiasm about new democratic opportunities' (Borger et al., 2013) and expressed their conviction about the possibility of increasing the collaboration of the public. Karlsson et al. (2018) summarise the situation as follows: 'The main theoretical argument concerning participation in journalism is that the development of digital technologies now enables participation on a scale not previously possible, thus affecting various dimensions of journalism'. In this way 'participatory journalism' was constructed as a scholarly object, and researchers carried out a large amount of investigations around it.

The Internet also brought changes to the attitude of editors by permitting interaction and enabling the preferences of readers and viewers to be gauged better and faster. Media companies have also adopted the idea of participation because they consider that one way to solve problems in a space that traditional audiences have been abandoning is to connect with them more, and media executives deem that audience engagement 'is a way of increasing profits', while consumer loyalty is the general aim (Karlsson et al., 2015). Engagement 'has become a media industry buzzword and journalists increasingly accept that they have to interact with their audiences' (Lawrence et al., 2018). Editors 'seek to reconcile the notions of journalism as a public good and as a commodity' (Belair-Gagnon, 2018).

Many researchers and journalists took for granted that the amount of visits or clicks on the website was an indicator of audience participation and a clear indicator of the public's interests. However, the results did not satisfy the expectations of scholars about

the potential of new technologies for improving democratic values. When using this indicator, a widespread conclusion has been that professionals seek information based on its sociopolitical relevance, while the audience is satisfied with entertainment and trivial news (Boczkowski et al., 2011; Dick, 2011; Domingo, 2008; Lee et al., 2014; MacGregor, 2007; Robinson, 2011; Singer, 2014; Thorson, 2008). 'The most viewed news' label foments a higher publication of topics related to such items, although journalists feel that the use of this type of data clashes with their professional standards (Welbers et al., 2015).

Contrary to expectations the real situation scholars found in their investigations presented negative outcomes regarding participation. Borger et al. (2013) summarised the reaction expressed by researchers: they felt 'disappointment with professional journalism's obduracy', 'disappointment with economic motives to facilitate participatory journalism' and 'disappointment with news users' passivity'. The studies pointed to a gap between participation as an ideal construct and its actual practice.

However, researchers who can be linked to the sceptical approach to audience participation conducted investigations on the perspective held by the citizens themselves regarding participatory journalism (Karlsson et al., 2018). They found that a large proportion of the public does not have any opinion on readers' comments (Bergström and Wadbring, 2015), and members of the audience do not want to interact or get in contact with other users as much as journalists expected (Heise et al., 2014).

Furthermore, editors and executives of journalism organisations who share this approach express the idea that audience demands are not so important and that responding to the desires of the public is 'the least important value for journalism' (Van der Wurff and Schoenbach, 2011). They think that providing entertainment and closely attending to audience demands are not included in the standard conception of the journalists' role.

Karlsson et al. (2018) found that participation is not a prime cause of concern for audiences when asked about what constitutes good journalism, and audience engagement in news media even appears to them to be more of a problem than a benefit. They are quite happy to see journalists continue their traditional work and keep their roles as editors and gatekeepers, and they do not consider the absence of participation to be negative. Useful and verified information is a superior goal for these audiences than participation itself.

Depending on which point of view one takes, the *participatory approach* or the *sceptical* one, very different conclusions are obtained about how to deal with the disparity between editors and audiences in their news preferences. Basically, the participatory approach stresses the uneasiness produced by the disparity, elevating it to the status of a problem, while the sceptical approach tends to nuance the relevance of this issue. We expect that data proceeding from social news aggregators about news publication and consumption can provide a new outlook on the topic. The findings could provide suitable suggestions that should assist journalists in dealing more appropriately with the demands made by news media audiences. However, it is necessary to establish that the data from the two fields, news media and social networks, are comparable. Therefore, the first task is to contrast the characteristics of social networks users with those of the editors and audiences of news companies.

Editors, audiences and users

In the pre-Internet age, the selection, production and distribution of content was exclusively in the hands of traditional editors, but with the emergence of the new technologies, the boundaries of conventional journalism are melting down (Singer, 2014). Does the activity of social network users in promoting content match the role-played by editors in traditional media?

Media editors filter a lot of information to select a certain amount of news each day, a process known as gatekeeping since Shoemaker gave it that name (1991), and like them, users of social networks decide which content is worthy of attention. However, in this case, the decisions may also be in the hands of mechanical editors that decide by means of algorithms the topics and entries that deserve inclusion in the information flow (Braun, 2015), while users do not have full control over the process because sites are governed by technological and social protocols (Galloway, 2004).

Production of content, an essential feature of the traditional editor, is called 'user-generated content' (UGC) in the context of social media. UGC has certain characteristics that blur the traditional lines between producers and consumers (Manosevitch and Tenenboim, 2017), one of which being that it is created 'outside the realm of a profession and professional routines' (Naab and Sehl, 2017). This peculiarity places such content outside the work carried out by media editors, and it often leads to poor quality production (Hermida and Thurman, 2008; Mackiewicz, 2014; Rello and Baeza-Yates, 2012; Singer, 2014; Thurman, 2008).

Another exclusive responsibility of the news editor was distribution, which is now in the hands of any user of the network under the name of sharing. The effect is that audiences can access information that they would not otherwise have reached (Kümpel et al., 2015); sometimes, they prefer to share news with high informational value or relevance (Rudat et al., 2014), but many times, new consumption is 'incidental', that is, they are shared out of the need to socialise (Boczkowski et al., 2018).

However, there is a basic aspect in which the activity of the traditional editor differs from that of the user. He or she is someone who places herself in the position of the audience and estimates whether or not something is important to it (Greenberg, 2010). In that sense, users do not act with the kind of responsibility that includes institutional roles, ways of telling the truth, and ways of responding to ethical problems (Hanitzsch, 2007). The main difference between the editor of a medium and a user who publishes content on a social network is the institutional and professional character attributed to the former. The conclusion is that users perform many of the activities of editors, but they are not linked to any corporation or company that pays them for their work; they do not have to follow strict rules to generate content in order to meet various standards, and they do not need to receive formal training to carry out their activity on the network.

How should we speak about *audience* on social networks? It refers to a way of understanding media consumers that presents them as composed of 'others', from whom information must be gathered to know how they are to be served. It has remained in operation for a long time due to the needs of news companies and researchers (Heikkilä and Ahva, 2015). Media industries, advertisers and audience measurement firms have shaped a socially constructed 'institutionalized audience' (Napoli, 2011).

Adapting this concept to social networks presents difficulties because users, in theory, apart from being part of some kind of *audience* can also become *editors* at any moment. This does not prevent such social networks from actually being corporate entities, but their administrators and owners must commercialise the users' practices in a way that does not compromise their goodwill.

The positions of editor and audience are not exactly applicable in social networks, but neither are completely extraneous to them, so data proceeding from an analysis of the news aggregator *Menéame* could be valuable for obtaining results to apply in the journalism field.

How the news aggregator *Menéame* works

Like many networks, *Menéame* has a protocol which aims to create a comfortable site for users because a 'virtual community abandoned to its fate cannot survive for long' (Grimmelmann, 2015). It has a team of administrators who guarantee that users will fulfil the 'conditions of use'. The list of conditions is composed of several articles that, on one hand, indicate the basic elements for editing news stories with respect to how to write and link them. On the other hand, it sets out prohibitions: not sending in racist and pornographic writings and links, not using the services of the social network for illicit or promotional purposes, not disclosing the private information of third parties and so on. Failure to comply with these conditions results in the user's account being blocked.

Users of *Menéame* can carry out activities directly related to editing. They have to make a written presentation of the news story following a series of recommendations on how to write the text. In the 'Terms of use' section of the website it states,

> The title, entry, geolocation and labels of the text, as well as the category in which it is inserted, must reflect and not distort the content of the link. *Menéame* is not a microblogging site, or a place to generate new information or opinion columns in the space reserved for the description of the subject.

By means of their votes, users promote relevant news stories that deserve to move to the front page. The administrators of the network call for responsibility when voting. They encourage voting positively on information that is of interest to users, but recommend previously reading comments and visiting the linked site. They ask users to ensure that the site complies with the rules: it must describe the linked content correctly (i.e. the title and description should agree with the site indicated) and the author of the submission should not give an opinion or alter the content. When users consider that the news story presents some kind of problem, they can cast a negative vote with nine different options: irrelevant, old, tiring, sensationalist, spam, duplicated, microblogging, erroneous and plagiarism.

Therefore, votes can be positive or negative, but users have an unequal weight since each one has a score (called *karma* by the network itself) that goes up or down based on various criteria, for example, the amount of news stories they have proposed that have made it onto the front page, the number of news stories that users voted positively for and that have also gone to the front, the acceptance or rejection that their comments have

received and so on. This can be interpreted as meaning that each user's score (*karma*) is related to their ability to connect with the sensibility of other users and propose and vote on news that they consider important; that is, in a certain way, the score represents the validity of their editing criteria. As they say on the social network itself, the score 'aims to measure the instinct to know if a story deserves to reach the front page'.

The algorithm is quite complex but basically it determines how many votes are necessary at each moment for a story to appear on the front page, and the number varies depending on the category in which it is included: current news, leisure, culture, and technology. A current news story usually needs more votes than one of the rest of categories. The aim of the algorithm is not to enable a similar proportion of news in each category but to try to obtain a balance between the number of stories sent in and the stories published in each one.[2]

Analysing the type of information included in those categories, we see that 'current news' is the one which includes more hard news. It can be observed that in many instances, the other three categories (technology, leisure and culture) need less votes than the first one and are mostly made up of soft and general news.[3] It seems that the algorithm tends to prioritise those three categories, producing a tendency to underrepresent 'current news' and, consequently, the proportion of hard information would be even higher if the algorithm were to treat all four categories in a similar way.

Research questions and hypotheses

Based on the above review, which considered the two approaches to audience participation and the comparison between news media and social networks, four research questions were examined:

RQ1. How many users proposed news that reached the main page of *Menéame* over the 10 year period (2006–2015)?

RQ2. What kind of news receives the most votes from users for publication on the front page?

RQ3. What kind of news is most visited?

RQ4. What kind of news is most commented on?

In addition to the research questions, four hypotheses were tested.

H1. The amount of users who propose news in the network is very small compared with the number of visitors.

Although new technologies have been seen as a key element for increasing user participation, the point is that only a small portion of users in a network shares information or comments on content, while the vast majority only visits the site (Karlsson et al., 2015). Therefore, it is wrong to think that access to digital technologies automatically converts people into active participants (Van Dijck, 2009). A basic arrangement, called the '1% rule', seems to be at work here: if there are 100 people connected online, one

will be dedicated to creating content, 10 will interact with it through comments or contributions and the other 89 will simply read it (Arthur, 2006). In addition, this active minority may have differentiated characteristics in terms of ideology and gender with respect to the majority of users (Friemel and Dötsch, 2015), which makes them a select group that comes close to having some of the peculiarities attributed to editors.

H2. Soft news will receive the most votes for appearing on the front page.

H3. Soft news will be the most visited.

When researchers talk about the type of news social network users are generally interested in, it is soft news that stands out (Baumgartner and Morris, 2010). The social interaction factor is the main reason for taking part in these networks (Ancu and Cozma, 2009), so soft news will presumably be the most widely published and receive the most visits.

H4. Hard news will be the most commented on.

In recent investigations, authors, instead of only taking the number of clicks into account to measure the interest of the audience, have used other kinds of indicators (Kormelink and Costera Meijer, 2017). It was found that the news stories receiving the most comments in online media do not coincide with the most visited, so that sensational topics and curiosity-arousing elements get many more clicks, but, however, political and social issues are the items that receive many more comments (Tenenboim and Cohen, 2015). People with greater interest in hard news are more likely to comment on both news websites and social media (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2017). In this context, researchers assume that the decision to write on a story and thus share ideas in a public forum, indicates a special concern for the news, so comments can be understood as an expression of a deeper interest (Ksiazek, 2018).

Method

The analysis considered the first 10 full years of *Menéame*'s activity, from 2006 to 2015. The universe under study consists of 156,800 news items that appeared during that period, which are grouped into 7,840 top pages. Due to this peculiarity, cluster sampling was used to select the units: 400 top pages were chosen at random, each of which contains 20 news items, which add up to a total of 8,000 units. This means that the sample works with a 99 per cent confidence level and a 1.5 per cent margin of error.

One of the first tasks was to decide how to classify the news. As said above, the social network itself requires that the editing user include the information in one of four possible categories: current news, leisure, culture and technology. However, this classification is not useful for the study for several reasons: (a) the categories include both hard and soft news to different degrees, while distinguishing between the two is essential in this investigation; (b) the categorisation is left in the hands of the user, so the reliability of the coding cannot be guaranteed.

Therefore, it was necessary to build a list of categories that would later allow their easy assignment to the classic distinction between hard and soft news. Following an

arduous process of establishing a convincing classification, on which the team worked using different thematic series, a final list of 14 categories was produced. Nine of them coincide with those frequently used in the analysis of the media: Politics, Economy, Justice, Health, Education, Society, Culture and shows, Science and technology, and Sports. Four of them were included due to their special importance in the Spanish context during the period analysed: Corruption, LGBT, Immigration, and Violence and discrimination against women. Finally, the category 'Others' includes the news that cannot be entered in the previous categories.

To evaluate the reliability of the coding of these categories, we measured the degree of agreement between the different coders using the Kappa coefficient, which achieved a score of 0.78. Therefore, the degree of agreement approaches the level of 'very good'.

These 14 categories were relocated in a wider classification, related to hard and soft news. For this purpose, a list of three types was used, following the methodology proposed by Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky (2010), who argue the need to create a third intermediate type between the two because the one reserved for soft news has to date included very heterogeneous thematic blocks. Following their criteria, a type called 'general news' was added.

In this way, the 14 thematic categories were assigned as follows: (a) Hard news: Politics, Economy, Justice, Education, Corruption, LG, Immigration, Violence and discrimination against women; (b) Soft news: Society, Culture and shows, Sports, Others; and (c) General news: Science and technology, Health.

Several thematic categories could be included under different types. For example, LGBT could fall under soft news, but we decided to include it under hard information for two reasons: (a) the topic has been given a high sociopolitical relevance in Spain in recent years and (b) most news stories related to it that appear on the front page of *Menéame* do not refer to celebrities and gossip but, essentially, to its political and social treatment. Another example is Health. It can eventually be included under any of the three types, but in the case of this social network news stories related to it are mostly information about diseases, medicines, procedures for healthy living and so on, so in certain way they are close to the Science and technology category.

Three more variables containing information available on the aggregator's own site were taken into account to answer the research questions. The first two were used as indicators of newsworthiness, that is, the interest or importance that users give to the news: (a) the number of votes received to decide whether a news story deserves to be uploaded to the front page and (b) the number of comments made on each news story. The third variable was the number of clicks, which is an indicator of the preferences of users as consumers.

Results

Users who engage in editing tasks on Menéame

From the publication of the first news on this social network on 7 December 2005, until the end of 2015, users sent in 170,364 news stories that received the necessary amount of votes to reach the front page. According to the administrators, a relatively small group of users, 21,138 of them to be exact, uploaded all of them.[4] Most users contributed only one news story, but there was a reduced group of 41 people who contributed 15.6 per cent of

Table 1. Hard, soft and general news.

Type of news	Number of news stories	%
Hard news	4,020	50.2
Soft news	2,471	30.9
General news	1,509	18.9
Total	8,000	100

them and formed the core of this *virtual newsroom*.[5] These data reinforce the above-mentioned existence of big differences in the activity of users and confirms H1. Few networkers have a very high participation in selecting, writing and promoting content, while the immense majority only clicks on the news.

Types of news selected for the front page by users

If we distinguish between three types of news (hard, soft and general) over the 10 years covered by the study, there is a clear primacy of hard news on *Menéame* (Table 1).

More than half, 50.2 per cent, correspond to hard news, about one-third (30.9%) to soft news and the rest (18.9%) to general news. Users mainly promote hard news with their votes, a fact that clashes with the most commonly held view about the followers of social networks, so this finding rules out H2. We will now observe how the categories and news stories are distributed in each one of those three main types (Table 2).

Two categories stand out at the level of hard news: Politics, with almost a quarter of the total news stories (24.2%), followed by Economy (12.9%). The most prominent category of soft news is Society (21.4%), and Science and technology is the most important in general news (16.4%).

What kinds of news stories are the most important for users?

An interesting aspect of how the social network functions is that users can continue voting on news stories even after uploading them if they consider them to be important. If the observation that most of the uploaded news stories are hard news clearly indicates where users' preferences lie in terms of their editing criteria, the total votes obtained by news stories confirm that users definitely prioritise that type of news (Table 3).

Hard news receives the highest average number of votes with 734.2; soft news follows with 529.1 votes; and general news comes last with 356.1 votes. Soft new stories, such as those stories included in Society and Culture and shows, receive an average of 200 fewer votes than hard news stories. Finally, general news stories, such as Science and technology, receive 173 votes less than soft news stories.

What type of news do users comment on?

Together with votes, comments are an indicator of the interest generated by news stories and the importance users attribute to them. Table 4 shows how many comments each

Table 2. Thematic distribution of news by hard, soft and general types.

Thematic category	Number of news stories	%	Type
Science and technology	1,314	16.4	General
Corruption	371	4.6	Hard
Culture and shows	489	6.1	Soft
Sports	199	2.5	Soft
Economy	1,029	12.9	Hard
Education	155	1.9	Hard
Immigration	58	0.7	Hard
Justice	256	3.2	Hard
LGBT	80	1.0	Hard
Others	72	0.9	Soft
Politics	1,937	24.2	Hard
Health	195	2.4	General
Society	1,711	21.4	Soft
Violence and discrimination against women	134	1.7	Hard
Total	8,000	100	

Table 3. Average votes by news type.

	Total	Votes in total	Average votes
Hard news	4,020	2,951,531	734.2
Soft news	2,471	1,307,382	529.1
General news	1,509	537,406	356.1

Table 4. Average comments by news type.

	Total	Comments	Average
Hard news	4,020	266,413	66.3
Soft news	2,471	137,713	55.7
General news	1,509	60,446	40.1
Total	8,000	464,572	58.1

type of news receives. Hard news stories receive the most on average, followed by soft news stories, and general news stories come last. The data from the comments fully corroborate the evidence provided by the votes, making it clear that the most active users are much more interested in hard news.

The R coefficient can help to indicate if the number of votes and comments work with the same logic, that is, if the news stories that receive most votes are also the ones that get more comments. In this sense, the result provided by cross referencing both variables is $R = 0.24$, which means that there is a positive correlation between the two: more votes

Table 5. Type of news and average visits.

	Number of news	Clicks	Average
Hard news	2,100	11,758,694	5,599.4
Soft news	1,081	10,337,308	9,562.7
General news	539	3,977,067	7,378.6
Total	3,720	26,073,069	7,008.9

mean more comments and vice versa. The correlation is not high, but the result is very clear, and it indicates that there is undoubtedly an association between both elements and supports the interpretation that comments are an indicator of the relevance given to a news story, so the finding confirms H4.

The preferences of users when consuming news

The *Menéame* social network shows the number of clicks that each news story receives, which serves to establish the number of visits to that story. Clicks are an indicator of the preferences of the majority of users as consumers, as opposed to the number of votes and comments, which are indicative of the interest of the most active members, who edit, vote and comment.

The click counter began to work on *Menéame* on 24 September 2010. Therefore, in the sample, the number of clicks is used in studying almost half of the news stories (specifically, the last 3,720; Table 5).

Soft news received the most visits from users (9,563 on average), followed by general information (7,379) and hard news had the least (5,600). That is to say, on average, soft news stories received almost 4,000 more visits than hard news stories, once again confirming H4.

The analysis of the correlation between votes and visits reinforces the interpretation made: $R=0.02$, so statistically no relationship can be established between the two. The votes and the clicks work in an absolutely independent way, from which it can be concluded that the *user's interest when editing* has nothing to do with the *user's interest when clicking*. However, there seems to be some kind of weak relationship between clicks and comments because $R=0.10$, so it can be concluded that there is a very slight tendency for the most visited news to have more comments and vice versa.

The results from *Meneáme* completely correspond to the discrepancy existing in the media between editors and audiences. The former give more priority to hard news such as politics and the economy, while the latter consume more soft news related to shows and society.

Discussion

The main question is how to interpret the disparity between news production and news consumption that occurs in both traditional media and social networks. For scholars aligned with the *participatory approach* and media executives who demand audience

'engagement', this poses a problem and they consider it important to reconcile the positions of journalists and readers. However, to what extent is this a real problem?

In the news aggregator *Menéame*, after selecting hard news as the most relevant, users massively prefer to visit soft news. On average, the latter received almost 4,000 more visits than hard news stories. The most active users of the network try by themselves to respect the main journalistic values when deciding which information is worthy of attention, while subsequently the rest of the users click much more on soft news.

Apparently, unlike what happens in news media, a fact that the *participatory approach* considers to be a serious problem receives little attention on this social network. This does not necessarily mean that the administrators and the most active users of *Menéame* are unaware of the contradiction. For instance, a user of *Menéame* refers to it directly when commenting that in the network 'the news items with the most clicks are about sex, ranking among the 10 best and so on, but they are not voted on due to shame or because the content is not so valuable'.[6] However, this user's interpretation is not that there is a need to eliminate or reduce the divergence but instead seems to conclude that this reflects the normal behaviour of people. Why is a matter regarded as problematic by the *participatory approach* not considered relevant on this news aggregator?

News media and social network organisations are constituted in a different way. Although when viewed from the theory of political economy both spaces are managed by corporate entities, the editors of traditional media work professionally and are paid for their work. Editors try to speak on behalf of the audience, and they expect that the interests of both sides should coincide. The need to retain the audience forces editors to take note of the former's interests regarding content.

Meanwhile, on social networks, users participate satisfying their personal interests in an environment moderated by administrators where the business activity resides in the sale of user data. The administrators must impose basic operating rules and guarantee an adequate environment for participation. The traditional editor–audience scheme works differently: Users of *Menéame* do not appear to think of themselves as editors, as if they were speaking in the name of some public. We can deduce from comments made by these users that one of their main motivations for participating is to increase their *karma* score, something that 'is assimilated to a social status' on the network[7] and the main point they have in mind when doing so is to get the votes of other users.

If the divergence between promoting and consuming news is not a problem for this social network, perhaps it should not be one for news media either. In this case, the *sceptical approach to audience participation* could provide a better grasp of some aspects concerning this position. Van der Wurff and Schoenbach (2014) found that, on one hand, the public understands the professional role that journalists perform in society, and on the other, it is also interested in 'individual needs', so audience members do not exclusively subscribe to one of these orientations and interests. Actually, very much like journalists, the audience has a more complex view of the roles of news media in society.

This prospect leads us to propose a new concept that can provide a complementary insight for understanding audiences from this angle: audience's *dual nature*. It seems that the same readers who claim to be more interested in socio-politically relevant news cannot resist the attraction exerted by soft information. Despite clicking massively on entertainment, these consumers may also be demanding that journalists should act responsibly

by separating out and publishing the most relevant information from the political and economic point of view. This character can be detected or read between the lines in several investigations about audiences.

In a study about the effects of emotions in the consumption of news, Vettehen et al. (2008) found that the public yields to the attraction exerted by sensationalism but is more reluctant to express that they like it. Other research indicates that audiences demand quality news when they are asked about what the media should publish, but, on the contrary, they actually consume more entertainment (Lingnau, 2012; Scott, 2009; Tewksbury, 2003). Expressing a *dual nature*, these segments of audience seem to have internalised that showing interest about public issues is socially responsible while they do not stop reading trivial news.

The assumption, supported by all these indications, that the concept of *dual nature* can capture a reality about the audience that was mostly hidden or latent until now, can indicate the path to follow in future investigations. Research focused on the concept should be made in order to determine how far it reflects reality. To do this, it is necessary to design methods that are able to gather explicit opinions, ideas that are difficult to reveal, and the actual behaviour of audiences, studying the connections between them.

Conclusion

The same fissure found between editors of the traditional media and their audiences, the former preferring hard news and the latter choosing soft news, is reproduced by the users of the social media aggregator *Menéame*.

These users mainly select hard news when deciding which information is socially relevant. Hard news stories add up to 50.2 per cent of the total, soft news stories reach 30.9 per cent and general news stories 18.9 per cent. Within each type of news, one thematic category stands out: in the first group, it is Politics, to which 24.2 per cent of the total information belongs; in the second, Society, with 21.4 per cent; and in the third, Science and technology, with 16.4 per cent.

The other variables analysed to study the social importance of news stories, such as the number of votes and comments, further reinforce the primacy of hard news stories: in both cases, they far outnumber the others in the amount of votes and comments that they provoke. However, the relationship between the number of votes to promote news and the number of comments is clearly established. Both variables are indicators of the interest that users show when editing and deciding which news stories are socially important.

Then something paradoxical occurs: users visit soft news to a much greater extent than hard news. On average, they clicked 5,600 times on each hard news and 9,563 times on each soft news. The research makes clear that the old opposition in the news preferences of editors and audiences is not only a feature of traditional media but is clearly repeated on this social network. Further investigations are needed to determine whether this is only a peculiarity of this community of Spanish-speaking users or whether it is also typical of news sharing networks in other countries in general.

The implication that can be drawn from the data found on *Menéame* is that journalists must weigh up the importance of readers' demands. Every kind of indicator, such as clicking on news, comments or requests from audiences calling for one or another type of news, has to be considered carefully.

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Notes

1. The following is the website of *Menéame*: https://www.meneame.net/.
2. Information available at: https://blog.meneame.net/2012/11/04/explicacion-simple-del-algo ritmo-de-promocion-de-noticias-promote/.
3. Each vote is multiplied by the *karma* of the user. The algorithm establishes the amount of *karma* needed to publish a news story in each category at a certain moment. The maximum difference we found in the *karma* between the four categories was produced on 24 October 2018: the coefficient for current news was 0.91 and the one for leisure was 1.5. This means that 60 per cent more *karma* was necessary to publish a hard news story.
4. Information provided by Daniel Seijo, CEO of *Menéame*, on 15 March 2018.
5. Information available at: https://www.meneame.net/story/analizando-noticias-portada.
6. Mentioned by a user on: https://www.meneame.net/m/Artículos/he-comentado-dos-meses -meneame-estas-son-mis-conclusiones.
7. Mentioned by a user on: https://www.meneame.net/story/analizando-noticias-portada.

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