

The experience of the collaborative work in the study of media and in the public agenda

CAMPOS-GUIDO, Laura Lizeth*†, GARZA-SÁNCHEZ, Juan Antonio and CANDIA-CORTES, Xitlalic

Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León. Pedro de Alba S/N, Ciudad Universitaria, San Nicolás de los Garza, N.L

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Abstract

In the field of scientific research, collaborative work has become an indispensable dynamic for the creation, discussion, analysis and diffusion of new knowledge. However, networking involves a complicated work, which requires intellectual and personal skills that allow the pooling of complex codes, interests and, of course, coincidence in the search for solutions to problems that afflict society. This paper presents part of the research results of the network called Studies of media the Public Agenda, made up of two Mexican Academic Bodies, one from the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León and another from the Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila; As well as the research group Semiotics, Communication and Culture of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. In addition to the results are also exposed the experiences of the conformed by the international group.

Public Sphere, Mass Media, Public Agenda, Research Networks

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* Correspondence to Author (email: camposguido@hotmail.com,)

† Researcher contributing first author.

1. The research communities

As in all sectors of the globalized world, education has redefined its practices and objectives against the shrinking of the State and the primacy of information coupled with the reduction in the perception of space and time. This vertiginous change includes the detachment and decentralization of the state obligation to educational systems in the face of the new vision of education-merchandise.

The clearest evidence is found in the educational reforms that have been succumbing since the end of the last century, which include, in particular, the new role of the States in the distribution of public resources. The current formula includes educational institutions forced to fulfill objectives and goals in exchange for being able to receive public resources user. These objectives are led by quality and competitiveness, neglecting the civic-citizen values traditionally found linked to university education and preferring "the preparation of competent workers for a restricted occupational market" (Mollis, 2014: 33).

In Mexico, the measurement of educational quality was formalized in 1994 with the document "Points of Agreement for the Establishment of the National System of Measurement and Accreditation of Middle and Higher Education", signed by the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES) and the Council of Public Universities and Related Institutions (CUPIA). From then on, it was taken for granted, between the State and the Higher Education Institutions, that measurements, accreditations and evaluation programs would be an indispensable part for the fulfillment of the Institutional Development of the Universities that, in turn, contribute to the fulfillment of the State Development Plan.

Thus, measurements became the parameters of compliance with the function of higher education in our country following global trends. In this sense, in a world in which education is another commodity, rankings, evaluations and competitions represent an essential element in the differentiation of the brand. Excellence and quality become concepts that must be measured and quantified if we want to obtain the economic benefits that the State provides and it is precisely through this quantification of such diverse variables that educational institutions pour all their efforts.

However, numerous investigations have shown the risks that exist in this universal practice (Mollis, 2009 and 2010, Casas y Luna, 1994, Ferrari, 2005, Zorzona, Edo and Puig, 1999, and Delgado, 2012) since it drowns to educational institutions requirements that include certifications, infrastructure, self-evaluations, innovation, scientific production, quality in the service, wide academic offer, efficiency, sustainability, competitiveness, and so on; all aimed at the construction of the social knowledge society in which, inevitably, universities are an indispensable part.

In order to find a solution to this problem, Higher Education Institutions (IES) have found in collaborative work a fundamental tool that contributes in a very significant way in obtaining positive evaluations. Research in networks of professors and researchers from public universities are part of the Secretary of Public Education (SEP) of the Federal Government. For the Director of Academic Improvement, the work of communities of researchers would enhance the transformation of society and for this it has used the creation of Academic Bodies (CA), defined as "a group of professors - researchers, who share one or more lines of study, whose objectives and goals are aimed at the generation and / or application of new knowledge "(SEP, 2017).

However, networking involves a complicated task, which requires intellectual and personal skills that allow the sharing of complex codes, interests and, of course, coincidence by the search for solutions to problems that afflict society.

2. The experience of the Network of Media Studies of the Public Agenda.

The task of research is already a complex exercise, including skills and abilities that are developed with continuous practice and the desire always alive to understand the world around us. It is also about individual and personal exercises that come to constitute a style in the search for knowledge and become an experience that, as such, can only be personal.

More complex, therefore, will be the development of research groups. Castellanos (2011: 4) talked about it: The research is built with a certain order, a lot of creativity and endless personal hobbies to such a degree that it is important to ask how such a personal process can give precise results and generate consensus in communities of scholars.

Following Castellanos, the biggest challenge is therefore, in the commitment and coordination that each, user of its participants acquire. Also, of course, you have to consider the study discipline, the weight you have in the institutions, the budget allocated; in addition to personal considerations such as the age and gender of the members, experience, etc. (Pérez-Castro, 2013: 46). Despite all the difficulties, the research communities acquire even more meaning in the globalized world in which we live, in which our perception of time and space has changed drastically, and in the social knowledge society in which we are already immersed.

Today it is impossible to think about research and innovation without the exchange of experiences beyond our closest environment or without linking to other people's experiences that broaden our knowledge and serve researchers as a parameter of quality measurement.

It is not, however, a new concept, Habermas (1989) already spoke of collective learning thanks to the consensus achieved through our communication skills. For this author, the main characteristic of learning communities is based on egalitarian dialogue using arguments of value and not power. This requires, without doubt, respect for the diversity of positions and recognition of differentiated knowledge that is built through the personal and cultural experience of each member of a community.

Under these principles, the Network of Media Studies of the Public Agenda was created, whose main objective goes far beyond the updating and professionalization of its members; The real motive is focused on social change, seeking to generate tools for citizen participation in the construction of public affairs.

Inserted in the National Development Plan (PND) 2013-2018, drawn up by the Presidency of the Republic in relation to a Mexico in Peace and an inclusive Mexico, the network aims to influence the formation of practices and policies necessary to build inclusive societies, innovative and reflective, as suggested by the PND. The network has set itself the main goal of contributing to the reflection on the role of information in democratic societies and in particular on its capacity to promote the development of a public sphere open to diversity and controversies in the current context of transformation of the technologies and forms of communication.

Our main objective is to attend to innovation in the public sphere (EP), studying how social and political actors get to introduce new issues and perspectives in the space of public visibility; how these questions are converted by the media into informative stories that shape their meaning and value and involve the emotions of the recipients.

Faced with this field of problems, rather than investigating the media or the technological and communicative convergence, we start with the issues that interest a sector of the citizenry. We selected some of those who access the first plane of the EP to see how the actors interested in them use the means and resources at their disposal, among which the citizen platforms and social media networks are surely fundamental today, to ensure that the issue or its perspective and initiatives on it access to the official EP, which increase their chances of influencing controversies and ultimately political decisions. We consider that investigating the mediation of social diversity requires observing the construction of issues of common interest and public debate (or lack of it) in the different media that make up the public sphere today, which we can no longer deprive of its value dimension and affective, so we include these aspects in our perspective of inquiry.

2.1. The experience of its members

The Network of Media Studies of the Public Sphere is made up of a group of researchers from different disciplines, ages, nationalities, geographical regions and even academic degrees. Teachers - researchers are included; Doctorate, Master's and even Bachelor's degree students; members of the National System of Researchers and teachers with different degrees of administrative responsibility.

It is conformed by the CA Studies of Mediatic, Educational and Organizational Communication, of the Autonomous University of New Leon; the CA Communication for the social development, of the Autonomous University of Coahuila and; the Semiotics, Communication and Culture research group of the Journalism Department III of the Faculty of Information Sciences of the Complutense University of Madrid.

Thanks to the experience in the subject of research of this last group, as well as the previous work of the Mexican CAs on similar topics, that the initiative arises to unite three groups from three different places in order to enrich the investigative process.

The conformation of the community has not been simple matter. Undoubtedly the space factor has largely determined the evolution of the work being done; However, as members of the network have begun to become familiar with communication technologies, this has been a problem that diminishes¹.

Nor was it easy to reach an agreement on the analytical perspectives that would guide the investigation. The objective of the discussion of theoretical and methodological proposals was to agree on the common theoretical references among the researchers who participate, both national and international. The capacity of the team was supported in the first instance by the most veteran researchers, who have directed a considerable amount of doctoral theses. Also the diversity of research experience makes the group to be built as an environment conducive to sharing references, methods and objects of study that will result in the generation of knowledge.

¹ It is very important to consider that almost 40% of the members of the network are over 60 years of age and, in many cases, are in the process of retirement.

None of this would have been possible without the existence of an adequate work environment that has resulted in the creation of an organizational culture aimed at the production of knowledge as a whole, "so that a person learns a fact and another builds on this fact, to discover another, and so on" (Tierney, 2001: 165).

3. Project: Analysis of the media agenda, a semioetnographic vision of the information

The first project on which the network has worked is centered around the new public sphere through the informative construction of controversial issues. We set out to contribute to the reflection on the role of information in democratic societies and in particular on its capacity to promote the development of a public sphere open to diversity and controversies in the current context of transformation of technologies and forms of communication.

Our main objective is to attend to innovation in the public sphere (EP), studying how social and political actors get to introduce new issues and perspectives in the space of public visibility; how these issues are converted by the media into informative stories that shape their meaning and value and involve the emotions of the recipients and, finally, if the controversies between the different views of the subjects investigated evolve towards the meeting of common values and interests that make possible agreements. More than investigating the media or the technological and communicative convergence, we start with the issues that interest a sector of the citizenry.

We selected some of those who access the first plane of the EP to see how the actors interested in them use the means and resources at their disposal, among which the citizen platforms and social media networks are surely fundamental today.

To ensure that the issue or its perspective and initiatives on it access to the official EP, which increase their chances of influencing controversies and ultimately political decisions. The research focuses on two different areas: the producers of information and the stories of the media. Consequently, there are two basic methodological procedures to deal with these areas: one of ethnographic nature that allows us to investigate how companies and information producers select the relevant voices, perspectives and issues, make them relevant and disseminate them; and another one of socio-semiotic character, that analyzes the stories and controversies mediatic on the selected issues. The corpus of the investigation will be formed by those matters included in:

- Online and traditional edition of one or two local media that are the most relevant and widespread. The teams will analyze the means of reference to prepare the samples during the final election of the issue.
- Publications and thematic or sectoral sites in network or on paper; citizen platforms built around each selected issue

It is therefore a project of great impact in the search for the democratic society that we all yearn for and which, given the nature of the network, allows us to replicate in different parts of the planet to verify and contribute to the construction of a better society.

In order to fulfill the objectives, the members of the network selected different controversies, not only for the different CAs, but also, within the institutionalized research groups, work teams were formed that analyzed diverse issues with the intention of expanding the panorama and get more results. In this way, almost a dozen studies focused on particular controversies that examined, under a common approach, the construction of the public sphere.

4. The construction of a matter in the public sphere: the case of "el gasolinazo"

One of the research teams of the CA Media, Educational and Organizational Communication Studies, of the Autonomous University of Nuevo León, undertook the task of analyzing the controversy known as "el gasolinazo". Using analytical perspectives and shared tools we show some of the results obtained under said the the stated scheme.

4.1 The controversy

In Mexico, the biggest increase in the price of gasoline in 20 years sparked public outrage. Thousands, in almost all the states of the country, began peaceful protests that continued for several days until they became looting and riots that led to the arrest of thousands of people, hundreds of stolen businesses, fuel theft, road closures and loss of lives. The uncertainty that sparked the release of gasoline prices led to a debate among actors of various kinds who used strategies to achieve maximum visibility and expose their perspectives on a matter that had a direct and immediate impact on the economic and social life of Mexicans.

Using social networks, thousands of citizens shared their discourses and positions in a virtual world that ended up materializing in forceful actions, some violent, in front of the main urban spaces that represent the institutionalized political power of the country and, then, the controversy surrounding the gasolinazo took other dimensions. To identify the role of the media in the construction and dissemination of issues arising from the controversy surrounding the "gasolinazo", we first undertook the task of analyzing the informative stories of two local television stations (one of a public nature and the other of a private), two local newspapers (both free and two) and two national digital information portals (those with the highest consumption).

Regarding the period of analysis, new texts were collected from December 15, 2016 to February 15, 2017. This corresponds temporality to the beginning of the controversy, or what Dewey (2004) describes as the problematic situation, with the shortage of fuel at some gas stations in Monterrey and the metropolitan area, as well as the end of it when it was decreed that the first programmed increase in the price of gasoline would not be effective.

The information that was collected includes: the identification data (date and publication), the title of the informative piece, its extension (in time or words as the case may be), the journalistic genre to which it corresponds, a brief description of the fact that narrates, the actors of the narrated fact (classified into 12 different categories), the type of attribution (direct, with reservation, compulsory reservation or total reserve), the position before the event (positive, negative or neutral), if the narrative includes past events, if it suggests future events and the inclusion of actors outside the controversy (specialists).

To analyze the processes of dissemination of the issue in social networks and establish the dominant perspectives, based on the data collected, the main actors were identified and their participation in Facebook and Twitter was examined.

The analysis period was distributed during the 3 weeks of greatest media activity for each observed month (from December 27 to 30, January 5 to 12 and February 2 to 7). The information that was gathered includes the fact that it relates, type of opinion (personal, shared or of third parties), number and type of reactions, number of times the publication was shared, as well as number and position of the commenters.

4.2. Results of the analysis of the controversy

The controversy analyzed turned into a public issue that truly represented the interests of Mexican citizens. However, the interactions needed for the construction of citizenship and the spaces for discussion are shown, in this first analysis, full of elements and tools that mediated the degrees of political participation from various actors.

Once the controversy in the media agenda was included, the story of "el gasolinazo" was not simply conveyed by the media; On the contrary, we could corroborate that, according to the interests of the company, the speeches can be manipulated as demonstrated in an informative piece of more than 5 minutes transmitted by the public television channel that praises the Governor for the reduction of his salary. In the same sense we can observe the visibility that certain actors can reach depending on the relations they maintain with the mass media.

Thus, for example, the same governor is practically omitted in the news of the private television station or the newspaper of greater importance as a consequence of the threat of Jaime Rodríguez to investigate those media that favored him in past administrations.

As an example of the above, on the interaction of the hegemonic powers in the digital media that citizens use to encourage mobilization, is the participation of EPN in social networks and, above all, the reaction to his publications.

In relation to the Internet, it is also necessary to continue analyzing if, truly, this space has become a public arena that gives visibility to diverse and heterogeneous social actors; especially when in a society such as the Mexican one, access to information becomes "a more decisive form of social exclusion since that access is played at the same time on the economic order - economic possibilities of connecting to the network - and cultural : knowledge, languages, habits and mental skills "(Martín Barbero, 2001: 100).

5. Conclusions

Work in learning communities has become a necessity in the Mexican educational system. For decades, in the federal government has implemented a model that forces High Educational Institutions (HEIs) to strengthen their teaching staff by incorporating them into Academic Bodies in order to give priority to research work within the framework of the Knowledge Society. The HEIs, on the other hand, structurally organize these CAs in their plans and programs in order to meet the institutional objectives and contribute to the development of the region and the country.

However, collaborative work is not an easy task, it implies the conjunction of common agreements and codes of a diversity of actors with particular research styles, with their own cultural and cognitive background and, above all, with individual interests and motivations to develop the activity of the investigation.

However, if part of the recognition of the possibility of generating a social change through collaborative dialogue, and if it is recognized, as a main position, the value of each one of the members that make up the learning community; the road can be less winding and, in addition, contribute to the formation of a more just and egalitarian society.

The experience of the Network of Public Studies of the Public Sphere has shown us that it is possible to establish communities of knowledge beyond those offered by the IES itself and that, in addition, it is based on the communication which is based on the value of the arguments and not power, substantial differences such as age, nationality, academic degrees, etc. can be avoided.

We do not pretend to ignore the problems that derive from the change of educational paradigm almost imposed to force, or from the injustices that prevail among teachers and researchers, their level of preparation, their professional activities and their salary recognition. What we do want to do is to recognize the work of many researchers, inside and outside the country, who are convinced that by questioning the world we live in, they can contribute to the building of a better world.

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