

Content analysis: Absence of journalistic standards in citizen media¹

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ABSTRACT:

The contribution of citizens to media contents is here to stay. Phenomena like Facebook, blogs and Twitter have opened space for the public and have enriched the debates on socially significant issues. The advent of digital media with content partially or fully produced by those who previously were public or, eventually, sources, has sometimes suggested the possibility of a replacement of journalism. This article confirms, through a content analysis of media belonging to the Network of Citizen Newspapers of Chile, that units developed by citizens do not meet the criteria of Journalistic Added Value (JAV). It therefore concludes that the contribution of citizens can benefit and be a complement to the news agenda, but it is far from complying with the professional journalism's basic standards: selection, prioritization and contextualization of socially relevant contents.

Key words: citizen journalism, quality, information, complement, media, relevance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The possibility that anyone can publish content that can reach audiences around the world, thanks to the Internet, exalts the ideal of a universal communication with each individual or organization delivering their available knowledge, the facts which they witness, the opinions and fantasies that they have, all that may be necessary and/or interesting to others. In this scenario of knowledge free from physical restraints, of instant and ubiquitous information, the meaning would be migrating from certain centers -such as traditional media and their discriminated, hierarchical and contextualized offer- to articulate as the questions written in a Google argument (Baricco, 2008), in an ever increasing amount of data that acquire the character of miscellaneous (Weinberger, 2007) or in individual or collective initiatives that seek participation in the public arena, partly replicating the work of journalists -even with optimistic desire to replace it- and partly influencing the content of established media. Is the emergence of citizens who are no longer just passive audience or part of a statistical or testimonial sporadic media source; now they can process and produce content, and disseminate them without mediation to their local community or worldwide.

In the late 90's the denomination "citizen journalism" was used to describe a phenomenon that appeared to be able to replace or at least to exhibit traits similar to those

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in the profession. But is it journalism? The question is not a union demand, but points to the center of the social role of information and the professional action that belongs to it.

Ours is a professional society, states Juan José García-Noblejas (2010), when addressing this topic. He maintains that it is the professionals, "almost every citizen, who move forward the society insofar as we are creditors of the trust of others in the performance and the fair and dignified administration of specific knowledge involved in every profession."

The confidence generated by the way an important social activity is performed is a key attribute when evaluating the professional work and, especially, the social communications. Therefore, although to massively process and disseminate information is no longer the exclusive preserve of those responsible for the media, of journalists, but of all people, it is still possible (and necessary) to discriminate between the role played by citizens and journalism professionals in the supply of information.

In search of an answer to such questions, a team from this Faculty decided to investigate this phenomenon and try to determine whether there was really something that could be called citizen journalism. If so, it would be a phenomenon starring non professional actors who were able to generate products with certain minimum standards of journalism. Then, if any, citizen journalism should be that information practice held by non-professional journalism citizens, but that maintains the following professional conditions: a) factual element: that relates to facts and not opinions; b) element of balance: recourse to various sources; c) element of verification: to apply filters to ensure accuracy; and d) direct style and intention to inform (Pellegrini, 2010, pp. 276).

To address this question, for three years a work of qualitative and quantitative research was conducted, that sought to determine whether those people, media and content that call themselves representatives of citizen journalism achieve or not the basic conditions of the profession. This analysis was initiated through a comprehensive theoretical review, a research conducted on a sample of media that used hybrid forms -amateur + professional-, and a perception study done to employees and responsible of the so-called citizen media. From this work it became clear that, in this type of media, the role of citizens should not be considered journalism, for his actors themselves do not consider the standards of the profession as key elements of their activity and also because it is not performed steadily, but occasionally.

To validate the results, we decided to perform a new content analysis, which findings are presented in this article, this time to a sample no longer using hybrid formulas, but with media that are based entirely on the so-called citizen journalism. We worked with the main articles published in the *Red de diarios ciudadanos de Chile* (Citizen Newspaper Network of Chile), a referent to the phenomenon in the country. The objective of this measurement was to establish quantitatively the presence or absence of journalism standards, to see how much they approach or not to the definition of citizen journalism established above. We used VAP (Spanish acronym for Journalistic Added Value), an instrument for measuring Journalism quality, was used as a content analysis methodology. It allows upon the evaluation of published stories, to determine whether and to what extend professional criteria have been fulfilled in a given piece or media. (VAP-UC Team, 2004; Pellegrini et al., 2011).

The results here presented confirm that the citizen journalism concept does not describe correctly the scope of this manifestation, and that the multiplication of content generators and distributors at local and global level that does not meet the minimum criteria for VAP and therefore could hardly be described as a journalistic product.

Therefore, this team suggests naming the activity as *citizens complement* to the news agenda.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INCLUSION OF CITIZENS IN THE MEDIA AND IN CHILE

The starting point for the active inclusion of people in the journalistic agenda was the concern of the media to ask citizens in their role as voters, on their issues of interest in order to include those in their agenda. This phenomenon, known as civic journalism (Meyer, 1995; Rosen, 1999) was followed by the emergence of technology that shattered the traditional paradigm that a *few speak and many only listen* (Moglen, 1997; Bowman and Willis, 2003; Ballas, 2006) that gave sense -for centuries- to traditional media. And although there are very early examples of occasional citizen participation in the established media, it is with the spreading of Web 2.0 that opportunities have been created for people to directly contribute with content ranging from verbal comments to stories and original records, as photographs, audio and video on highlighted facts.

Contemporaneously, there have been also efforts to disseminate content directly, without mediation or explicit filter, thanks to the collaborative technology and low cost of the Internet. Starting with the simpler alternatives such as email, then blogs and then with wikis (Rosen, 1999; Bowman and Willis, 2003; Nip, 2006), there was an unforeseen situation in journalism: the common people ceased to be only sources, to which media resorted to complement the information with their testimony or opinion, and became generators of contents that could be mass released through the web. The phenomenon of citizens transformed into communicators thanks to the technological offer has been called in several ways: grassroots journalism (Gillmor, 2006, 2008), citizen journalism (Outings, 2005), Journalism 3.0 (Varela, 2005), *produsage* (Bruns, 2006) and democratic journalism (Kim and Hamilton, 2006), among others.

The last two concepts are the ones that best explain the evolution and, in part, account for some of the reasons that encouraged citizen participation. The concept *produser* -which fuses the terms producer and consumer-(Bruns, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008) synthesizes in a word the compound role that the citizen has increasingly acquire as a shaper of content.

The so-called democratic journalism justifies citizen incorporation emphasizing on expanding the areas of freedom of expression and preventing the decision of what to report to be of a few "powerful" people. Driven by this last argument, Oh Yeon, PhD. in Communications, founded in South Korea *OhmyNews*, the world's pioneering experience in the incorporation of ordinary people to the information function (Kim and Hamilton, 2006). In *Wired* magazine, Ho summed up his proposal, which set the trend for over ten years (Kahney, 2003): "With *OhmyNews* we wanted to say goodbye to 20th-century journalism where people only saw things through the eyes of the mainstream, conservative media". He emphasized that the fundamental premise was that every citizen can be a reporter. "We put everything out there and people judge the truth for themselves.

In the case of Chile, the evolution of citizen participation, particularly the one in question, the Citizen Newspaper Network of Chile, has been conditioned, first by two geographical characteristics: the four thousand kilometers separating north from south, and its location at the south boundary of the American continent, flanked by the Andes and the sea. The great distances between one city to another, and their isolation from the rest of the world, has made major civic initiatives emerge from the need to place the most remote locations in the country's news agenda.

If to this we add the strong centralization of the media, mostly located in the capital, which dedicate less than 15% of its content to regions (Puente and Mujica, 2006; Pellegrini et al., 2009), it is symptomatic that the first experiences of citizen media are given in locations far from centers of power. *Lanalhuenoticias*, the website of Cañete, a town located in the Bío Bío Region, over 600 kilometers south from Santiago, emerged in 2001 as a pioneer space of citizen incorporation in Latin America², in which the inhabitants of Cañete could inform their peers about what happened in town.

In 2005 appeared in Arica, on the northern border, the Web *El Morrocotudo*³, a local media that would become the first of 15⁴ that form the Citizen Newspaper Network of Chile. The chain, now renamed *Mivoz.cl*, has about ten thousand correspondents registered and is the only company in the country devoted entirely to promoting the inclusion of citizens in the information universe of Chile.

While the idea that anyone can publish to audiences around the world, and especially for their communities, has sounded optimistic and inviting from the beginning, the practice has shown the error of believing that the mere fact of publishing makes a person a journalist. In words of Douglas Rushkoff (2010):

A professional newsperson is someone who is not only trained to pursue a story and deconstruct propaganda, but someone who has been paid to spend the time and energy required to do so effectively (...) Just because a kid now enjoys the pw once exclusive to a professional journalist doesn't mean he knows how to research, report or write.

More incisive, Arcadi Espada (2009) says that those who claim for citizen journalism ("a pure pleonasm, if we stick to the traditional concept of journalism") argue that

information has to leave the hands of reporters and move to the citizens. Imagine a world, a network, without centers, where communication between citizens does not have mediation and every one serves others from their social function or their intellectual expertise (P. 12).

The main problem that have face those defending this utopia without mediation, in which networks belong "exclusively to citizens and, even better, to good citizens" (Espada, 2009), is the verification of the content: in practice, those media which use part or all of the contribution of citizens have found the enormous difficulty for checking the data, often confused with the views, intentions and aspirations of those who contribute.

It was precisely this obstacle which caused the end of *OhmyNews International (OMNI)* as it was known until 2010. From a large website delivering news reported and written by people around the world, it then became a forum for discussion on the scope of

² Cf.: http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lanalhue_Noticias; <http://periodismociudadanochile.wordpress.com/2008/11/27/lanalhue-noticias-el-primer-medio-de-periodismo-ciudadano-en-chile/>
<http://www.atinachile.cl/content/view/117356/7-ANOS-CUMPLE-DIARIO-CIUDADANO-LANALHUE-NOTICIAS.html>

³ <http://www.periodismociudadano.com/2007/05/28/el-morrocotodo-primer-diario-ciudadano-del-mundo-hispano-parlante/>; <http://periodismociudadanochile.wordpress.com/2008/12/02/el-morrocotodo-el-primero-de-la-red-de-diarios-ciudadanos/>; http://www.elpais.com/articulo/semana/Periodismo/ciudadano/participacion/Chile/elpepatecib/20070201elpciblse_1/Tes

⁴ In addition to *El Morrocotudo*, Citizen Newspaper Network consists of: *El Rancahuaso*, *el aMaule*, *El Observatodo*, *La oPiñón*, *El Naveghable*, *El Vacanudo*, *El Repuertero*, *El Nortero*, *El Paradiario 14*, *El Martutino*, *El ConceCuente*, *El Boyaldía*, *El Quehaydecierto* y *El Magallanews*.

the phenomenon of citizen inclusion in the media. The original idea that "every citizen can be a reporter" stated by Oh Yeon Ho in *Wired* in 2003, changed to the current site's official statement:

The broad array and frequency of topics was also intimately tied to our second problem: editing difficulties. With stories coming from places like Afghanistan, Brazil, Zimbabwe and everywhere in-between, it was impossible for our editors to accurately check each story. Fact-checking is one of our core principles.

In Chile, the Citizen Newspaper Network began as an initiative to establish "citizen media governed by the editorial and formal canons of publishers of the well-known national and regional media in the country⁵", taking what was then *OhmyNews* as an example. Today *Mivoz.cl* is presented as a platform to "create media spaces that enable society to actively engage in the dialogue, creation and taking action on aspects that are meaningful to the local community⁶".

The change of name-including, as the Korean example, the possessive of the first person- with which the network seeks to be known popularly shows that the evolution of the phenomenon in Chile has followed a line similar to the international (Neuberger and Nuernbergk , 2010). The goal is no longer that people generate and publish news as if they were journalists, but they can make their voices heard in spaces dedicated to generate public discussion, especially in the local area.

According to Pellegrini, two are the main social functions performed by journalism that cannot be replaced by other means of information: first, "the certifying factor", i.e. the ability acquired by the media to certify, through appropriate professional practices, the true existence of the facts that are being published as well as the reliability of its sources; and second, the "meaning assignment" which implies that media and journalists are capable of "organize and relate the elements of a story as to make them not only understandable to a general audience, but also meaningful with regard to the social environment and culture" (Pellegrini, et al., 2011, p. 28).

Current trends suggest that citizen participation in the media will take place with increasing intensity, but not necessarily in similar levels to the media (and Nuernbergk Neuberger, 2010). Social networks, especially blogs (Duffy et al., 2010), Twitter (ComScore, 2010) and Facebook (García, 2010; Noguera Vivo, 2010), have become the most striking platforms, and probably more relevant to fulfill the role of democratic collaborator thanks to the horizontality they offer people, regardless of their rank of authority (Gil de Zúñiga y Rojas, 2009; Kenix, 2011). Also, the technology at low cost, easily accessible and simple to use, allows *producers* to have an effective active role in content delivery. The ability to report breaking news and useful data to the community, make social networks and their users in a very rich source of news and views, which according to their relevance may or may not be collected by traditional communication media (Carpenter, 2010).

A democratic society in which citizens actively participate depends on them being properly informed, and for that it will still be necessary to have a steady stream of relevant that keeps its skeptical views at the powers in order to deliver original and reliable information (Ghiglione, 2010). Jill Abramson (2010) considers that the availability of quality journalism, rather than a desire, is a human need. According to him, the profession

⁵ <http://www.diariosciudadanos.cl/nuestraempresa>

⁶ www.mivoz.cl/que_hacemos

becomes even more important in this times, when there is an abundance of information available, in which it is very difficult for individual actors to supply the civic role of the profession and have the energy, strength and intelligence necessary to dive into more complex stories and cover them with the depth journalism has been showing in the last century.

Because a rigorous reporting plays a fundamental role in society, some even speak of the need to monitor citizen contributions in the traditional media as a way to prevent that they may diminish their quality (Singer, 2009). To define and describe what quality journalism is, is a task of enormous complexity and therefore has to be separated in certain essential characteristics that determine the value of a product as social information; that is what the VAP method, developed by a team from the Faculty of Communications at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, seeks to do, and which has proved efficient in the measurement and analysis of information products (Pellegrini, et al., 2011). This research method is the one chosen in this work.

3. PROPOSAL AND HYPOTHESIS

As mentioned in the introduction, theoretical analysis and qualitative research work done by this research team allowed to observe that citizen incorporation to media that occurs in Chile does not fulfill the characteristics needed to call it citizen journalism.

We therefore propose to evaluate, through a content analysis of the information published in the media of the main exponent of citizen participation in Chile, if their formal characteristics are consistent or not with the characteristics mentioned by its actors, which can be summarized as follows:

- a) Opinions rule over the facts, since the factual element is usually absent or combined with explicit expressions of subjectivity. It does not intend to be a hard data offer, but a platform where the voices of citizens can make themselves known.
- b) The element of balance is not a priority, because what counts is the author's voice, his own experience and opinion rather than a plurality of points of views in front of an event.
- c) In most cases the use of procedures to ensure accurate information is delegated to professional journalists who act as editors and reviewers of content.

4.- METHODOLOGY

As a work method the VAP coding sheet⁷ was applied. This tool allows comparing through a quantitative content analysis, the degree of compliance with certain journalistic standards among different media from the analysis of the published products (VAP-UC Team, 2004; Pellegrini et al., 2011).

VAP aims to measure what the media and the journalist add to the data that the audience could obtain directly; it is a quantification of the ability of the media and the content generator to process information, selecting and prioritizing both what is news as the sources involved in the facts, looking for their variety and giving each one a hierarchical space. It also makes sure that the message is prepared in a way that is both understandable and attractive to the audience, giving them context and a proper focus for informational purposes. It is, thus, the measurement of the basic requirements that any journalistic product, regardless of the media in which it is transmitted and even its editorial, must take into consideration to fulfill its social role of delivering to the population the necessary data for making decision freely.

We reviewed a sample of 139 articles published in the ten media that belonged, during the second semester of 2009⁸, to the Citizen Newspaper Network. That sample was elaborated as a built week, i.e., it included articles of different days of the week of seven successive weeks, obtained from Monday September 28th until Sunday November 15, 2009. We chose this method of selection of cases as it avoids the distortions of the sample caused by informational cycles of different days of the week and by the concentration of a single subject that has set the agenda for a specific week (Stempel, 1989; Riffe, et al., 1993).

Specifically, we analyzed the main cover article and the main article of the Local page, in the understanding that these sections showed what each of the online newspapers considered more relevant from the day the offer.

The media studied are:

- *El Morrocotudo*
- *El Nortero*
- *El Observatodo*
- *El Paradiario 14*
- *El Rancahuaso*
- *El aMaule*
- *La oPiñón*
- *El Naveghable*
- *El Vacanudo*
- *El Repuertero*

⁷ Instrument developed at the Faculty of Communications of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile to describe the journalistic quality of information products offered by the media

⁸ Currently, the Citizen Newspaper Network, renamed *Mivoz.cl*, has 15 media, five of which were founded between 2010 and 2011, after this measurement.

Fourteen articles were analyzed per media, except for *La oPiñón*, in which 13 were collected, because on Monday, September 28, the cover story and the Local section one was the same. The units were always collected at the same hour⁹.

In addition to VAP indicators in the measurement was applied one of the results obtained in the qualitative research work conducted in previous years: the categorization of roles that citizens can adopt when they content to the media. Thus, the authors of the articles were classified into the following types:

- a) Opinionated/Critic: is the one who gives opinions or judgments about a subject, delivering an unequivocal and personal vision of it.
- b) Proponent/Complainant: is the one who knows or participates in a fact which he/she considers newsworthy and gives it to the media, for further processing or to make it known to their peers.
- c) Witness: is the one who shares a personal experience, either telling it or providing its record through other media, usually audiovisual. Is the one that shows what he/she saw, firsthand.
- d) Information Contributor: is the one that produces a product from an issue that he/she has not necessarily experienced, meeting the basic ethical standards of professional journalism and applying some of its characteristics (e.g., inclusion of verifiable data, various sources, and delivery of a text with factual narrative base).

5.- RESULTS

While the VAP coding sheet measures more than 50 indicators of quality journalism, for this analysis were selected only those results that allow, in one hand, to clarify who are the authors and sources highlighted in the media of the Citizen Newspaper Network and, secondly, to evaluate how its contents meet or deviate from the required standards of relevance demanded to professional journalism.

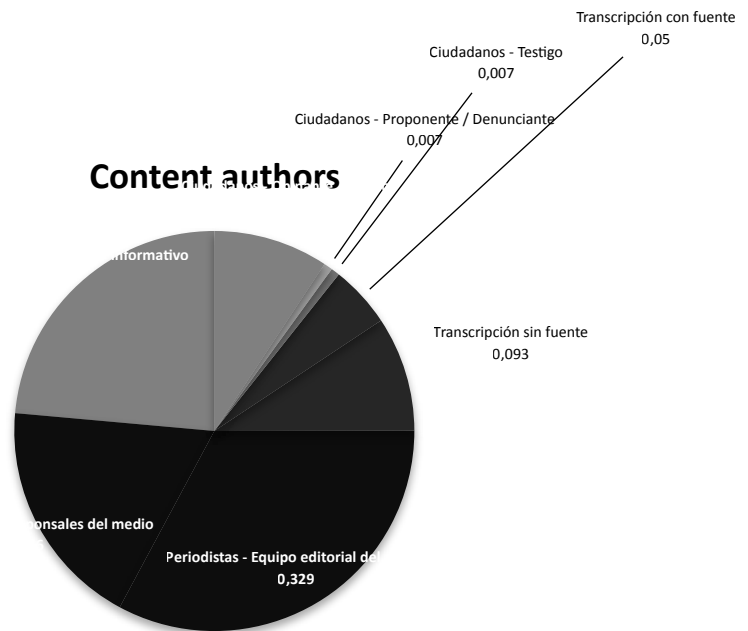
5.1. CITIZEN ROLE

From the citizen's role described in the methodology, we analyzed the content of the articles, which showed, in more than 80%, the use of a factual narrative base, i.e., the focus has more facts than opinions or speculation. This apparently is consistent with a first analysis of the roles adopted by authors of content: 89.3% would be informative collaborators, 9.3% opinionated/critic, 0.7% proponents/complainants and 0.7% witnesses.

However, by making a more detailed examination of who actually constitute the 89.3% of collaborators citizens, we perceived a widespread phenomenon in the media of the Network: information content were mostly (51.5%) produced by journalists belonging to the stable team of each media, while about 14% of the rest of the articles corresponded to transcripts of press releases, billboards or reports appeared in other media. This means that citizens contributing to these media adopting the role of opinionated/critic at 9.3% of cases, and less than one quarter of all articles will be actually elaborated by citizens acting as informative collaborators (Figure 1). This confirms that, in most cases of so-called citizen media, the use of filters to ensure accuracy of the information is delegated to journalists acting as editors and content reviewers, and in many cases they themselves generate contents directly.

⁹ The analysis and data processing was performed during a Research seminar in which participated the following students: María de los Ángeles García, Verónica Luco, Florencia Yáñez and Diego Zúñiga.

Figure 1: Content authors



Source: Fondecyt Project n°1080049

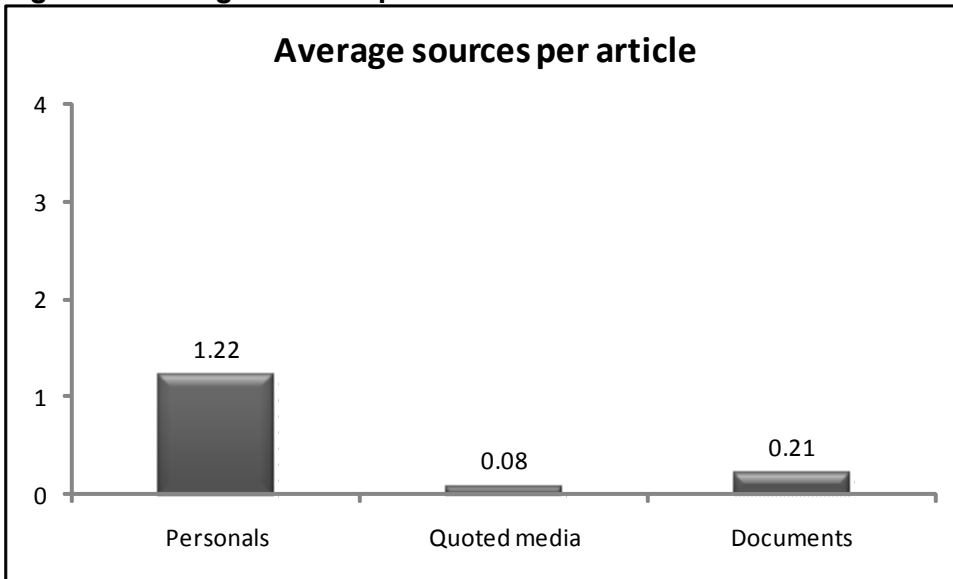
5.2.- SOURCE USE AND POINT OF VIEW

The customary rule of professional journalism requires including -in each information- the different points of view involved in a topic. For this, the VAP method measures the average sources per note, the variety of points of view and the types of sources consulted. For the first of these indicators, it is considered as a professional

acceptable minimum the use two sources per article, which while is not necessarily guarantee of a multiplicity of views, creates a minimum standard of evaluation, because the use of less than two sources does reflect a biased vision of a fact.

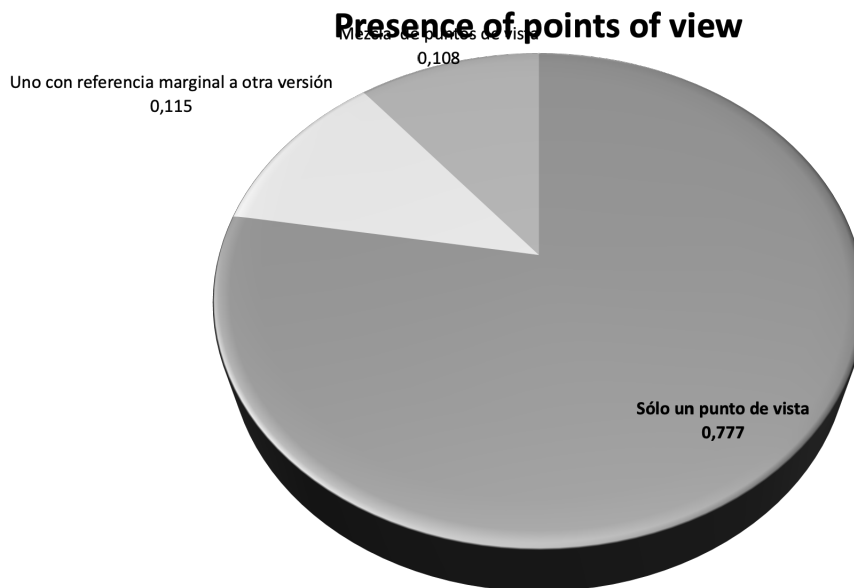
The results show that most of the analyzed articles have only one personal source on average (Figure 2) and also reflect a single view of events (Figure 3). This confirms that the element of balance is not a priority in citizen media, because, as they themselves declare, the author's voice is above the plurality of views.

Figure 2: Average sources per article



Source: Fondecyt Project n°1080049

Figure 3: Presence of points of view



Source: Fondecyt Project n°1080049

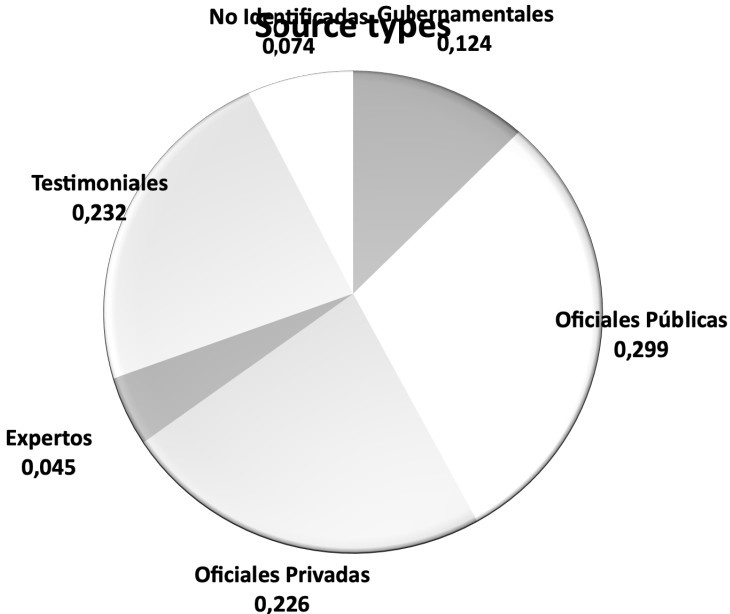
By analyzing the different types of source ¹⁰ (Figure 4) that citizen media use to make their articles, we observe a high use of testimonials (23.2%), which would be consistent with its position of allowing that citizens speak. Moreover, we see that, adding

¹⁰ Types of possible sources according to VAP. 1. Official sources, corresponding to the spokesperson of an institution that delivers the official version of a fact. They are classified into three types: a) Government (representatives of the Executive branch of a country), b) Official publics (people who report of their public position and who are not members of the Executive branch) and c) Official privates (people who report of the position they have in the private sector or civil society). 2. - Editorial sources, those that media seeks to complement or give context to an information. They are classified into three types: a) Experts (people who speak of their knowledge on a subject), b) Testimonials (people who speak of their direct link to the fact, talking on behalf of themselves) and c) unidentified (people whose name is not disclosed).

government sources (12.4%) and public officials ones (29.9%), more than 40% of respondents represent the official voice of the representatives of the powers of State in different locations. If we add to that a 22.6% that corresponds to the official representatives of various private institutions, it is clear that the voices of citizens share a space for discussion with leading authorities of each community, space in which the latter appear as dominant actors.

Considering the Figures above, the fact that 64.9% of the sources included in the articles of these media are not citizens, but public and private authorities, contradicts their proposal to be platforms where the voices of citizens can be known. In practice, citizens' media act as a showcase for local authorities to submit their proposals and their views on issues related to each community.

Figure 4: Source types



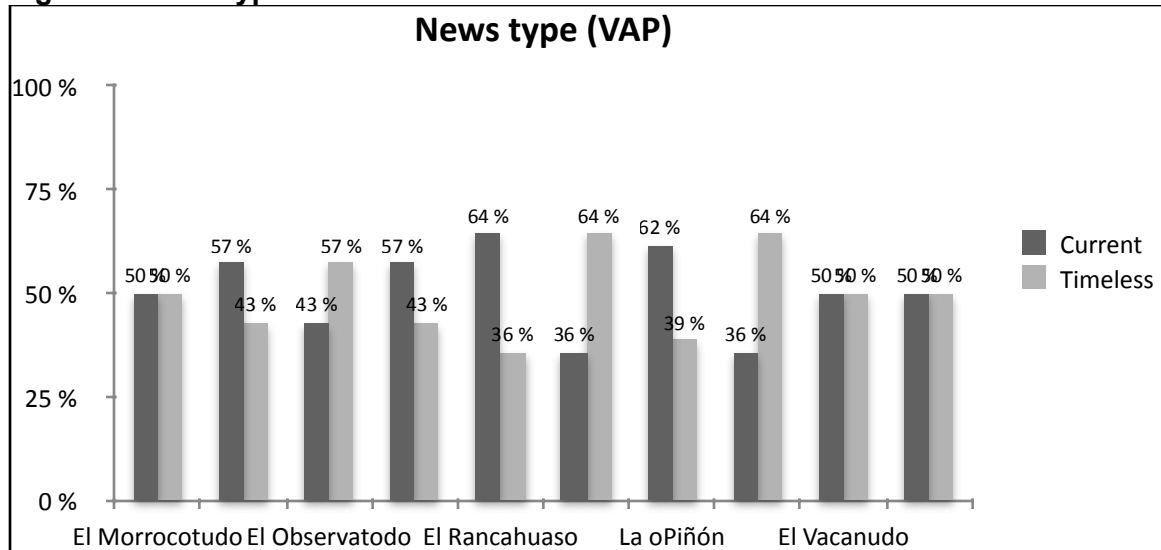
Source: Fondecyt Project n°1080049

5.3.- INFORMATION WEIGHT

The information weight or relevance is the reason that determines the timing and even the need for dissemination of information and can be measured in the content published in the media, through the presence of a number of factors.

The first indicator of the relevance or information weight is how current it is. VAP divide the news into two types: current and timeless. Figure 5 shows how the proportions of both types of news are very similar in Citizen Newspaper Network media, which marks a clear difference with traditional news media, which proportion of current articles, according to previous studies by VAP-UC team, approaches 80%. Moreover, this is consistent with the proposal of citizen media to discuss issues not necessarily referred to the immediate time.

Figure 5: News type

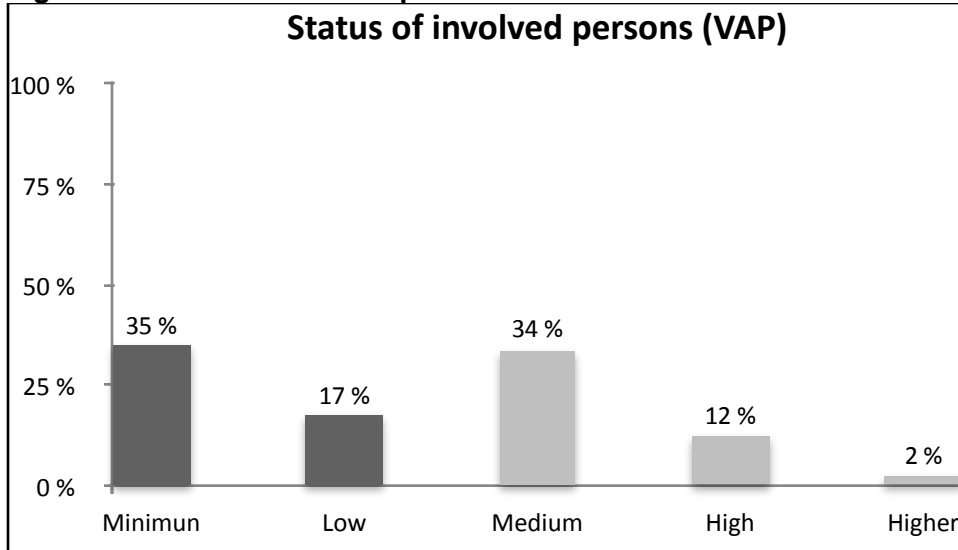


Source: Fondecyt Project n°1080049

Other factors that allow establishing that an event has sufficient information weight to justify its diffusion is the status of those involved in the incident, the scope and duration of its consequences.

The status refers to the social hierarchy of any of the actors in the new, which is measured through the positions they hold. Therefore, one way to assess whether a fact is more relevant than another is through the presence/absence of actors in positions of social responsibility which are presented as a reference for decisions to be taken by citizens. Figure 6 shows that in 51.8% of the principal articles of the analyzed media the actors were people without any degree of formal authority (minimum status), people with little authority over small groups or with minor charge that allows them to speak with some expertise on a topic (low status). Holders of intermediate organizations at local and regional scope –which in VAP are considered medium status persons, although in this case they may correspond to those in positions of higher regional authority status- in this analysis are involved in about a third of the articles (33.8%).

Figure 6: Status of involved persons

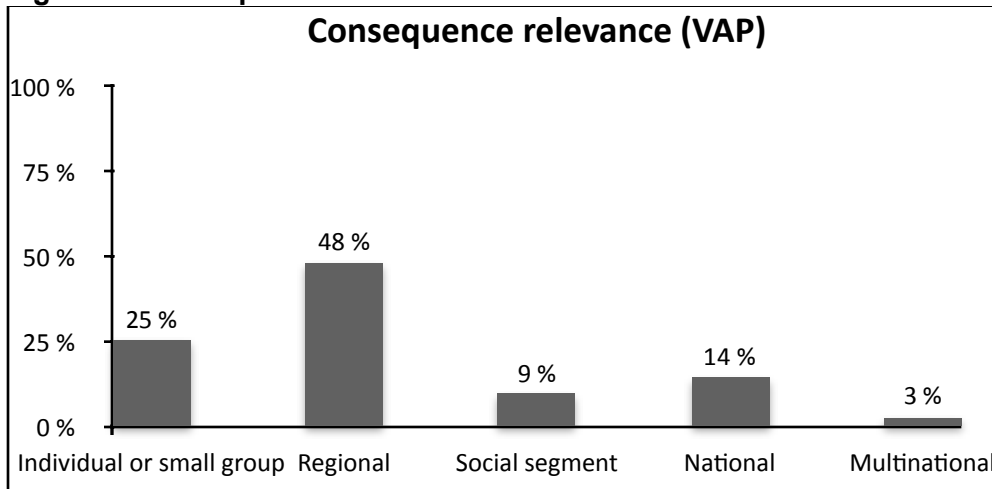


Source: Fondecyt Project n°1080049

The relevance of a reported fact is measured also in the duration of its impact and scope in terms of affected people. It is understood that the more these are, regardless of their status, the greater the information weight of a story. Similarly, beyond the number of people affected, a fact has greater information weight than another if its effects are larger.

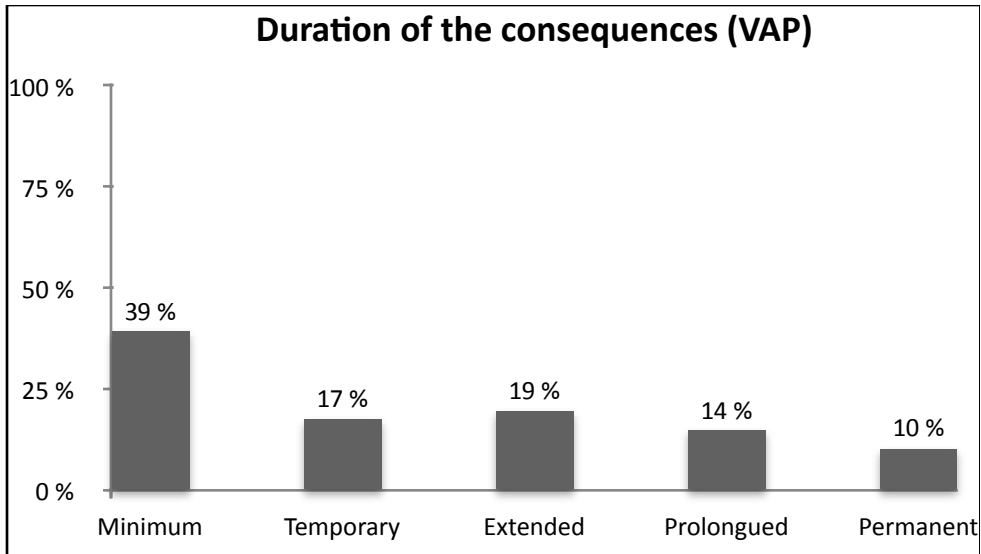
Citizen media are consistent with its local proposal by providing as the main themes facts affecting their respective regions. However, the presence of a quarter of cover information whose consequences affect only one person or small group is noticeable (Figure 7). The fact that 56.1% of those same articles have consequences of a minimum duration or temporary (not exceeding two weeks) shows that it there are mostly light weighted news stories that would hardly reach traditional media (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Consequence relevance



Source: Fondecyt Project n°1080049.

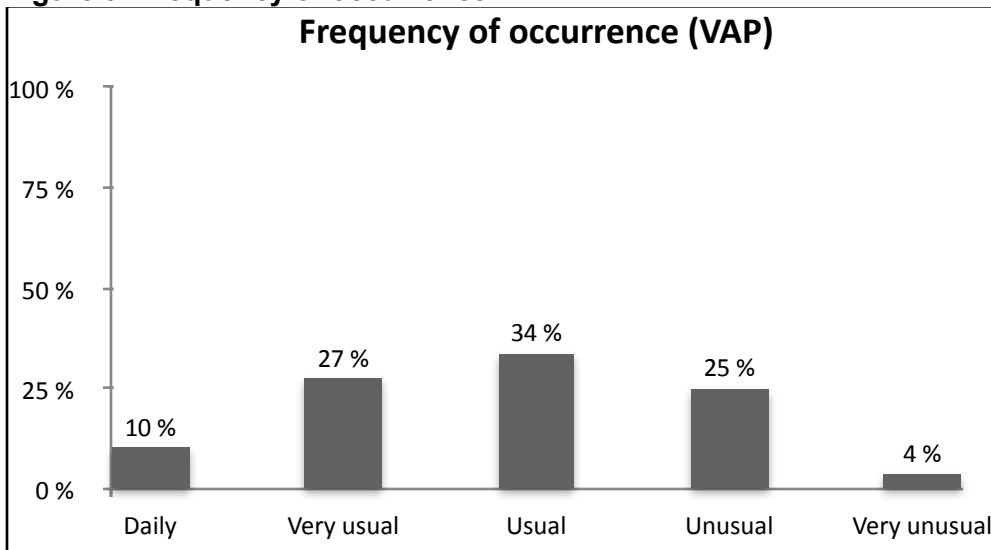
Figure 8: Duration of the consequences



Source: Fondecyt Project n°1080049

Finally, the information weight can be evaluated according to the rareness of the new events. In operational terms, VAP approaches this concept as the frequency of occurrence of events, that is, how statistically unusual or usual the fact is. Adding the first three categories in Figure 9 we see that 71.2% of the content that these media publish as main news corresponds to common events.

Figure 9: Frequency of occurrence



Source: Fondecyt Project n°1080049

6.- CONCLUSIONS

The citizen content specialized media, in this particular case the Citizen Newspaper Network of Chile, do not provide the audience with contents that deliver information verifiable, hierarchical and with context, as well as socially relevant, as the media do. This confirms the results of previous research on hybrid media and regarding self-perception that citizens and media responsible of so-called citizen media have about the activity they perform, and reinforces the view that the citizen journalism concept is not correct to describe a phenomenon that is not journalism.

The contribution of citizen media is in the exhibition of local interest issues, and the delivery of individual opinions and testimonials on the news agenda. However, the news content they offer are mostly produced by hired journalists or come from transcripts of speeches and official statements. Thus, spontaneous or organized participation of citizens in the production of content in these media is lower.

In terms of information weight it is evident that the main indicators of the relevance of information are virtually absent: their contents refer to common events with few involved and of minimal status and whose consequences last less than two weeks.

Perhaps one of the main points of the contents of the Citizen Newspaper Network is the scope of its consequences, which point to local significance events. This could be a reason for its success, because it is an experience that has combined the constant need of Chilean regions for being portrayed in the media with the requirement of having a professional team of journalists which filters and complement citizen contributions. This also allows us to understand the survival of this network, currently *Mivoz.cl*, in a global environment in which the action of citizens as producers of news is going backwards.

The evolution of a phenomenon, which initially was thought as a replacement for the journalists and professionally-run media has taken a different path. This is no longer characterized by the active pursuit of specific data as done in the traditional reporting, but by providing room for public discussion of issues highlighted through social networks, especially Twitter and blogs, which are experiencing a revival. Spaces as the *Huffington Post* do not replace traditional media, but even help its spread through direct links that attract readers to the original sources of news.

One of the theorists of the concept of citizen journalism, Jay Rosen, said in an interview in 2010 that the idea that citizens could replace journalists and thus cheapen newsroom costs was already in the past, because what at first seemed simple has been unveiling a series of complications on how to process and model a multitude of data. According to him, media has the challenge of channeling citizen contributions and use them as an opportunity to regain citizen confidence, which is reflected in the data they, or others like them, delivered.

It must be assumed that the arrival of Web 2.0 allows access to massive publication, in a transversal way, and it makes possible for anyone to disseminate what they want, including some data that may be very important in journalism. But in Pellegrini's words, "the mere existence of citizens' direct information action modifies the professional actions of journalists: other forms of reporting, new forms of verification and, above all, a selection process much more accurate to prevent the information tide to ultimately drown the ability to understand the events and irrevocably break up the audiences" (Pellegrini, 2010, p. 276).

Citizens have found ways to be present on the public discussion agenda, and to make their opinions heard and achieve symmetry, at least in a communication way, with

others as authorities, institutions or artists, who were once far away and now have entered the game of sharing a space. But this valuable citizen dialogue, by itself, does not produce socially relevant information, professionally collected, processed and disseminated. So this team confirms, after the investigation, that the concept of *citizen complement* seems to be the most relevant to account for a phenomenon that transforms analogously to the technology behind it, and that, until now, has not replaced journalism but has become an opportunity to enrich the news agenda and to require professionals a greater proximity while doing their work.

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