Digital Journalism and Education: How Public Authorities Lower the Voice of Citizens.

Sergio Ricardo Quiroga.

Cita:
Sergio Ricardo Quiroga (2016). *Digital Journalism and Education: How Public Authorities Lower the Voice of Citizens. ACTA UNIVERSITATIS SAPIENTIAE, COMMUNICATIO, 3, 21-32.*

Dirección estable: https://www.aacademica.org/sergio.ricardo.quiroga/102

ARK: https://n2t.net/ark:/13683/pgPS/kMr

Digital Journalism and Education: How Public Authorities Lower the Voice of Citizens

Sergio Ricardo Quiroga

Instituto Cultural Argentino de Educación Superior (ICAES)
sergioricardoquiroga@gmail.com

Abstract. In this paper, we examine the educational information produced during 2014 by media organization Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL), a news agency with a digital platform created in 2012 and managed by the state. This work may be instrumental for studying the macro-themed messages in what we call "educational frames", in a province where the dominance of state media is relevant. The methodologies used are frequency analysis and the examination of texts and their meaning. In the province of San Luis from Argentina, since the advent of democracy in 1983, the ruling Justicialist (Peronist) Party had the tendency to meddle with public service media, especially during election periods, thus creating partisan content. The relevant educational topics and the main difficulties faced by education in San Luis, and key actors of the educational process were absent from ANSL agenda. The narrative of ANSL about the educational issues was dominated by issues such as computer use, Wi-Fi access, and government initiatives for all students.

Keywords: news, education, public policies

Introduction

In this paper, we examine the educational information produced during the year 2014 by the media organization Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL), a press agency with a digital platform managed by the state, created in 2012 in order to convey governmental information in the province of San Luis, Central Argentina.

San Luis is located in the region of Cuyo, and since December 1983 it has been governed by the incumbent Peronist Party, in the context of a widespread crisis marked by the poor performance of local political parties and the decline of the multivocal press among other factors. This inquiry is aimed at contributing to the study of macro-thematic messages conveyed by state media, in a province where its dominance is strong. The main media channels in San Luis are "El Diario de la República", which belongs to the family Rodriguez Saá, and "San Luis Canal

13", a state television channel. From 1983 to 2011, the province of San Luis was ruled by the brothers Adolfo and Alberto Rodriguez Saá. From 2011 to 2015, the dauphin of the political group Claudio Poggi took over the power.

Journalism and Public Information

This research comes at a time of redefining the role of journalism. Many stakeholders are beginning to ask questions posed by key journalistic issues. We might ask who is now a journalist, what journalism is, what its future is, how many consumers get breaking news, or why journalism is still relevant in the new digital environment. Barros and Duarte (2004) use the term "journalism" as defined by Beltrao, a great Brazilian scholar of communication studies. To Beltrao, journalism is not limited only to traditional media, such as magazines, radio, television, and film, but also includes manifestations of modern journalism, public relations and propaganda, popular songs, tourism, folklore, and contemporary books (Beltrao, 1969).

These are topics of interest within the academia: how digital technologies are changing journalism and how such transformations are influenced by technological advances. It is precisely technological development and new patterns of cultural consumption which are changing the role of journalism and the models of production, distribution, and consumption of media industry.

Journalistic content is built now by using a wide range of digital technologies, distributed instantly through the Internet, mobile devices, and other platforms, made for comfort and the satisfaction of consumers. These are relevant and no less traumatic changes; we could argue whether journalism remains as important as ever. The media looks and multiple voices, which should be tender, have generated significant changes in the entertainment and education of society. We provide access to remote, different imaginary regions, modify our perception of time and space, and develop a sensitive role in social life, as their permanent presence influences the construction of individual and collective identities.

The new information and communications technology (ICT) significantly influences the process of creation and change of current public opinion, where, in addition, traditional media, text messages, e-mails, blogs, and other online spaces affect the daily lives of people in relation to their age, social status, level of education, and studies. Networks are increasingly part of the technological growth and social participation, reducing the space of privacy and becoming a public and globalized environment where people exchange ideas, build knowledge, establish relationships at various levels, and create ideas about reality. The dynamic of government communication and state media should be interpreted in this context. In Latin American democracies, it is sometimes useful to distinguish between

state and governmental media. The latter is characterized by the dominance of official discourses, whereas opposition voices and dissent are invisible.

The democratic state requires the management of government activities, promoting quality public information to its citizens. This implies that all citizens can have access to information through all the procedures that serve transparent governance, through dissemination of information, communicative exchange, ensuring the protection of personal data, favouring the accountability to citizens, improving the organization, classification, and handling of documents, and contributing to the democratization of society by the rule of law.

All these possibilities are required when the media in general build and develop their visions of reality, perceiving differences and similarities in data processing and in the agenda presented daily. Given the characteristics of journalistic work, the construction of the news is made daily under time pressure and urgency and episodic presentation, between the play of the gatekeepers (goalkeepers) who – according to their positions within the news organization – control sources and the information to be published.

The media have their own system of values, production routines, their decision-makers, quality criteria, opportunity and relevance criteria, shaping a media reality (La Rosa, 2013). Habermas (1994) recognized that when market laws were introduced in the "advertising", the replacement persuasion exchange of arguments, and thus political communication, ceased to be based on reason, and criticism became manipulative advertising.

Considering the complexity of reality, the presence of multiple perspectives influenced by individual perception and historical subjects, the underreporting thesis of Sartori (insufficient information) and misinformation (distortion of information) are very useful (Sartori, 1998). State media is increasingly a dominant news source, a communication space in which local, regional, or national governments present their views and vision of reality. Often the political, economic, and social elites impose topics and agendas rooted in dominant community values.

Communicating Public Policies

Adriana Amado (2011) pointed out that in a scheme of communicative citizenship corporate communication functions as a counterpart to the media, while media organizations produce (or should produce) supposedly more general and pluralistic information.

State modernization leading to democratic development confronts governments with multiple challenges. Governments must respond to new management standards, where the core values are efficiency, transparency, and citizen

participation. It is necessary to know how the government does manage communication. The state can become an active communicator, taking the initiative to build bridges between its institutions and citizens, and thus achieving a strengthening and deepening of democracy by ensuring access to public information and, secondly, knowledge about what their representatives do.

Public policy actions and programmes are running a government and provide the answers that the state can meet the demands of society, in the form of rules, institutions, services, or public goods. Government communication brings together a set of processes with a strategic action seeking to communicate and assert the interpretation or the frame of government on a given topic. The function of the frame is to define an issue or problem, and put it in correspondence with a solution, competing parallel with frames of other actors in the public space. Delle Donne (2011) notes that every government faces recurring situations of public exposure that causes an increase in the visibility of their decisions. Bread and Kosicki (2001) said that there was a permanent competition in the political arena to impose the perspective and interpretation on the issues itself.

There is a perspective that considers government communication as actions that formalize governments to communicate and build consensus on what they do, that is, trying to raise awareness and gain acceptance of their projects, policies, achievements, and their difficulties. Professional interventions are aimed at reducing tensions between citizen demands and priorities of governmental actions (Elizalde, 2006; Echevarria–Maurice, 2013). Undoubtedly, "governmental communication is one of the means to reach consensus" (Elizalde, 2006: 158).

The concept of "governmental communication" varies from attraction and persuasion strategies of governments to the citizens' right for information, producing "a process of articulation and selection decisions, often contradictory, between democratizing communications, electioneering communications and management communications" (Elizalde, 2006: 146; Echavarria–Maurice, 2013). We propose to examine this phenomenon, an emerging and complex matrix of government communication that seeks to express different relationships, synergies, and complexities.

Actors of Governmental Communication

Governmental communication actors are media, state actors, such as public policy makers, and citizens. Every democratic government needs the commitment and support of society. The legitimacy and representation of a government are given by the results of the electoral process, but in the management of government actions and plans there are often changes, which require state actors to communicate and constantly justify their decisions and reinforce their vision of reality.

It is through the use of governmental communication, and in this special case study, the government agency itself, which is aimed at setting the governmental agenda on a given topic. It tries to propose a vision of reality, to build consensus, and to legitimize government decisions. What happens is that the rules imposed by the government administration in general aim to seek consensus on issues of concern to the government, while silencing others affecting their interests (Brosius–Eps, 1995): some topics are more likely to be selected than others. When a fact implies greater coverage, and thus acquires greater relevance, it becomes a key event, reorganizing the coverage of the following events with the same qualities.

Tuchman (1999) believes that the information process includes organizational and personal elements like ideology, with a legitimizing power deeply rooted in society. It is also understood as a system of rational discourse that gives an explanation of reality, engaging with preconceptions (Sadaba, 1995).

Press Agencies

Reporting agencies are organizations that produce news through correspondents in different places, who immediately transmit to the central unit, and spread information as quickly as possible to their customers. Agencies are usually private companies that sell information to their subscribers, who pay according to the services received: national reporting, international news, and graphic service.

The technological development – Internet, fax, satellites, telephony, fibre optics, and computers – contributed to an increasing volume of information circulating daily. International news agencies are companies that work around the clock producing information transmitted to the centre, and then to the publishers, who are in charge of checking whether the information is correct in terms of content and sources, and then writing and sending them to their subscribers. New technologies of information and communication (NTCI) have allowed the development of multiple online platforms. According to La Rosa (2013), the Internet brings into play six codes: visual language, visual paralinguistic, iconic visual, linguistic sound, sound paralinguistic, and non-linguistic sound. Each medium of communication makes a limited reproduction of reality that allows us to manage it with our own codes (Casafús, 1972; La Rosa, 2013).

The Value of the News Industry

New media is covering larger areas in the value chain of the news industry by diversifying its content in different formats, for different audiences. Today, digital media have to create, produce, and distribute large amounts of information. Smith

highlights the links in the value chain of information industry that publishers should capitalize on in the future, based on packaging: presentation of information in different ways to new audiences, databases, and interactivity; building tools (mailing lists, discussion forums, chats, e-mails, etc.) to speed up the flow of content, the distribution of new products and the multiplatform content and the partnerships. The press will also create alliances with other content providers to distribute network or editorial costs and develop new platforms reusing the same content (Smith, 2000: 46; Rojo–Villada, 2006: 419–420).

In recent years, the development of communication technologies (ICT) has increased the interest of national and provincial governments to establish news organizations and news agencies with the purpose of spreading their activities and actions more directly and more conveniently, according to their interests. Persuasion and interests are key elements of the governmental media.

Mass Media in San Luis

The main media outlets of the province of San Luis are "El Diario de la República" and "Canal 13 San Luis", a state channel, which together with San Luis News Agency (ANSL) are media that disseminate government news.

The media context of the province of San Luis, Argentina, is characterized by the existence of an incipient opposition to the dominant media group, projecting an idealized, modern San Luis, with proper administration, investment, development, and a peaceful life.

From the journalistic field, the Report of the Argentine Journalism Forum (FOPEA) of 2011 mentions some indirect restrictions produced by the provincial government from the discretionary distribution of government advertising and the concentration of state media. The document also reveals data on the lack of access to public information, the arbitrary allocation of government advertising, and the job insecurity of those who practise journalism across the province.

Agencia San Luis Noticias

On 23 March 2012, San Luis News Agency was created (Agencia San Luis Noticias –ANSL) in the province of San Luis, a governmental media organization aimed at providing information via a platform, with scarce resources and few journalists.

Working with about twenty journalists, ANSL produced in its first year 11,766 news articles. ANSL was organized as a website providing news content using different platforms (text, audio, image, and audio-visual production) and ensuring

access to information produced by the State and media workers, free of charge. It also provides information to media outlets in a context of limited technological development of journalistic initiatives in the province of San Luis.

ANSL as a public mass media platform was marked only by the idea of spreading and better publicizing the acts of government and the provincial administration, and of creating a means to develop content for other media outlets. Thus, San Luis News Agency has become a mass media that provided information, images, audio and video material to others, but also an instrument of political promotion of government information consulted not only by journalists and media but also by the citizens.

On the homepage (http://www.agenciasanluis.com/), the main menus are society, police, entertainment, sports, media, provincial policies, and contact in order to organize content and highlight the provincial policies of the state. ANSL also has a newsletter, which is distributed by e-mail on a daily basis for those who subscribe to it through the website.

Web-Based ANSL

In 2014, the home screen organizer links were "today-society-show-2014-sports-world intercollegiate-audios-videos-Canal13 and more". The first image displayed on a web portal is the first thing readers see. It is an important space because it allows the audience to decide whether to continue reading or not.

Methodology Used

For this investigation, we used the thematic analysis, looking at frequency and content. We used content analysis seeking the review of the texts, with the possibility of not only learning its meaning but also acquiring information about the mode of production.

Educational News in ANSL

The educational information portal of Agencia de Noticias San Luis acknowledges two main sources, the Ministry of Education of San Luis and the University of La Punta, and some alternative sources such as the Higher Education Programme of the province and other organizations linked to educational work.

The Educational News of ANSL

The most important news flow involves various government programmes, such as Puntana Merit Scholarship, the School Stamps, Digital Public Schools, and the 20/30 Plan, which the government wants to promote, avoiding complex or controversial issues. The news stories are short in general. Some exhibition-related topics appear as educational improvement, school clubs, managerial skills, and teacher training.

Image 1. Webpage of ANSL 01/09/2014 (www.agenciadenoticias.com)

For example, on April 29, it was published that the governor of San Luis, Claudio Poggi, said that "digital public schools were fully integrated into the education of San Luis". It was during the delivery of computers to students in primary schools "Isaac Newton" and "Albert Einstein" in the city of San Luis as well as "Nelson Mandela", "Maestra Rosenda Quiroga", and "Nuevos Desafíos" in the city of La Punta, San Luis Province, where teachers were also given tools to work in classrooms, books, games, and a manual to work on problems of violence.

On March 17, ANSL highlighted: "Improving Education. Education in the centre of the San Luis agenda", a headline referring to the Plan for Measuring and Monitoring Permanent Education in the Knowledge Society, as part of the

education policies of the provincial government, aiming at improving school results in San Luis. The initiative was carried out by the University of La Punta (ULP) through a series of actions, which included assessments of language, mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences for primary-school and high-school students.

On July 30, ANSL covered a governmental act where technological materials were delivered to a group of teachers. The article referred to "Equipment for Managers of Educational System. Poggi. The education of the highest quality and full access to knowledge are the way to progress".

Aspects of reality aimed to be covered by the agenda set previously by the executives, called journalistic frames by Entman (1993), are promoting visions or particular definitions of the issues at stake.

Presence and Absence of Educational Topics

The coverage of environmental education news runs ads made by various executive branch officials, based on government policies. School Stamps, Merit Scholarship, and the 20/30 Plan (a plan that allows people of up to thirty years to finish high school) are accompanied by images, audios, or videos of the officials or public events. While many governmental actions are guided by strategic plans, the education of San Luis has not yet developed a strategic plan that would address their present-day difficulties and challenges and that would be formulated with the participation of the various players involved.

We reaffirm the idea that all practices of journalism are intentional, and in the case of government communication seeks to acquire public light through the media, disseminating the plans and initiatives of management. The media serves (or should serve) to inform and enlighten the public about the development of public policy – in this case education – as an element of government transparency.

Educational news on ANSL in 2014 were sporadic, usually with governmental guidelines, especially those advertising official events, accompanied by photographs of governmental actors with students and teachers, or just images of officials. The staging, the promoting had a magnificent setting for proper ANSL coverage. The news agency providing public information on the plans released by the provincial executives rarely mention everyday teachers, their daily work, their difficulties in school, their low wages, and the problems they are confronted with in San Luis. ANSL refers to the delivery of netbooks and stamps, the Knowledge Olympics programmes, Program All about Robotics, Chess School and Language – topics reflecting a meritocratic culture, while the complex educational issues remain invisible.

Conclusions

News coverage of educational topics reflect governmental discourses and priorities, highlighting state agencies' achievements. A permanent strategy of persuasion and marketing is at work to present governmental initiatives while hiding problems and tensions that exist in San Luis such as the construction industry crisis or school teachers' low wages.

But pursuing its own agenda, ANSL seeks to reaffirm the idea of public transparency based only on governmental sources such as the Ministry of Education and the University of La Punta (ULP). While these sources reduce the scope of topics, they also ease journalistic content production cycles. This vision of a state-controlled agenda, which admits no other existing educational problems in the San Luis society, hinders citizen participation. However, education news coverage has all ingredients used by a multimedia platform, allowing text, audio materials, and images.

An impregnation of the social order is taking place with these messages, with storylines that create myths of good public administration, successful investments, educational improvements, access to Wi-Fi, unlimited progress, and a positive image of the future.

Certainly, material achievements are fully visible, almost palpable, and there are also contributions to education, but executives should take advantage of state agencies themselves to provide more information on increasing and implementing their budgets, on the situation of schools and colleges, information about where we should or should not invest, the status of teachers, and take into account the growing problem areas of education, creation and development of reliable statistics, and presenting a clear educational policy.

In consonance with Giovanni Sartori's misinformation theory, officials are overrepresented in the state provincial political news, their views and their vision of reality dominate the mediascape, while other actors may not be visible (Sartori, 1998).

Communicating governmental strategies in a transparent way would both increase the quality of education and increase citizen participation in public affairs, with all the challenges and difficulties that such complex matter raises due to the politicians and journalists.

References

Amado, A. (2011). Prensa y gobierno en situaciones complejas. In: Elizalde, L.– Fernández Pedemonte D.–Riorda, M. (eds), *La gestión del disenso. La comunicación gubernamental en problemas*. Buenos Aires: Editorial La Crujía, 287–322.

Aranes Usandizaga, J. I. (1996). La comunicación institucional de la administración pública: entre la lógica autista-instrumental y la democrática. *ZER. Revista de Estudios de Comunicación-Komunikazio Ikasketen Aldizkaria Abendua.*

Barros A.–Duarte, J. (2004). Luiz Beltrao: perfil intelectual. In: Hohlfeldt A.–Gobbi, M. C. (eds), *Teoria da Comunicacao. Antologia de Pesquisadores Brasileiros.* Porto Alegre: Editora Meriodinal Ltda, 56–70.

Beltrao, L. (1969). Nuevas fronteras del Periodismo. *Periodistas Católicos* 2(7). Montevideo: Culap. Janeiro.

Brosius, H. B.–Eps, P. (1995). Prototyping through Key Eevents. *European Journal of Communication* 10(3): 391–412.

Casafus, J. (1972). *Ideología y medios de comunicación.* Barcelona: DOPESA.

Delle Donne, F. (2011). La comunicación gubernamental y el apoyo social hacia las medidas del gobierno. In: Elizalde, L.–Fernandez Pedemonte, D.–Riorda, M. (eds), *La Gestión del Disenso. La comunicación gubernamental en problemas.* Buenos Aires: Ediciones La Crujía, 229–256.

Echavarría, C.–Maurizi, V. (2013). La comunicación gubernamental: ¿herramienta para la legitimación de políticas o condición de posibilidad de la participación ciudadana? *VI Encuentro Panamericano de la Comunicación.* Companam 2013, Córdoba, Argentina.

Edelman, M. (1988). *Constructing the Political Spectacle.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Elizalde, L.–Fernández Pedemonte, D.–Riorda, M. (2006). *La construcción del consenso.* Buenos Aires: La Crujía.
(2011). *La gestión del disenso. La comunicación gubernamental en problemas.* Buenos Aires. Editorial: La Crujía.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication* 43(4). DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.

Feldfeber, M. (2003). La redefinición del espacio público: el caso de las escuelas autogestionadas en Argentina. *Educação & Sociedade Campinas* 24(84): 923–943.

Floß, D. (2010). *The Impact of Mass Media on Political Support. A Preferences-Perceptions Model of Media Effects.* Baden-Baden: Reinhard Fischer.

Gómez Mompart J. L. (2013). Complejidad social y calidad informativa: hacia un periodismo "glocal". *Revista Austral Comunicación* 2(2): 219–238.

Habermas, J. (1994). *Historia y Crítica de la Opinión Pública. La transformación estructural de la vida pública.* Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.

Jay, A. (1996). *The Oxford Dictionary of Political Quotations.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

La Rosa, A. (2013). *Construcción de la agenda Mediática. Una mirada al interior de la organización.* Lima, Perú: Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación, Turismo y Psicología. USMP. San Martín de Porres.

McCombs, M. (2006). *Estableciendo agenda.* Barcelona: Paidós.

Meny Y. (1987). A la jonction du politique et de l´administratif: les hauts fonctionnaires. *Pouvoirs* 40: 5–23.

Pan, Z.–Kosicki, G. (2001). Framing as a Strategic Action in Public Deliberation. In: Reese, S. D.–Gandy, O. H. Jr–Grant A. E. (eds), *Framing Public Life. Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Prat, G. (2001). Consultoría Política. Como piensan los que piensan para los políticos. In: *CD de Marketing Político de la Fundación Konrad Adenauer.*

Quiroga, S. (2002). La agenda radial y el efecto rebote. *Communicare* 2(2): 103–115.
(2012). *Emisor, investigación cualitativa y producción de noticias. Cultura medial y fuentes.* Alemania: Editorial Académica Española.
(2014). Um estúdio de uma agencia de prensa estatal: agendas y competência. *Vozes e Dialogo* 1(13): 132–141.

Reese, S. (2001). Prologue. Framing Public Life. A Bridging Model for Media Research. In: Reese, S.–Gandy, O.–Grant, A. (eds), *Framing Public Life: Perspective on Media and Our Understanding of the Social Word*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawerence Erlbaum, 7–31.

Rojo Villada, P. (2006). Prensa y convergencia tecnológica: Claves para la definición de un nuevo modelo de negocio periodístico en la Era Digital. *ZER* 20: 411–424.

Sadaba, T. (2007). *Framing: el encuadre de las noticias. El binomio terrorismo medios.* Buenos Aires: La Crujía.

Sartori, G. (1998). *Homo videns. La sociedad teledirigida.* Madrid: Taurus.

Smith, M. P. (2000). Values, Culture, Content. Three Keys to Journalism in a Strategic Newspaper. Chicago: Media Management Center. Northwestern University.

Sontag, S. (2004). *Ante el dolor de los demás.* Buenos Aires. Alfaguara.

Tuchman, G. (1999). La objetividad como ritual estratégico: un análisis de las nociones de objetividad de los periodistas. *CIC* 4: 199–217.

Wolf, M. (1996). *La investigación de la Comunicación de Masas.* Third impression. Barcelona: Paidós.

Wolton, D. (1995). La comunicación política: construcción de un modelo. In: Ferry, J-M.– Wolton, D. et al. (eds), *El nuevo espacio público*. Barcelona: Gedisa.