Content curation in journalism (and journalistic documentation)

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The last years we have seen the appearance of concepts such as content curation and content curator as, respectively, the activity or system and the professional or specialist. Although the term is originally linked to the world of marketing, -considering marketer's Rohit Bhargava ''Manifesto for the content curator'' (2009) as its founding article-, and its features mostly identify with those of the Information Science professional, content curation goes beyond a specific discipline or professional role. Both profiles of marketers and librarians-information scientists can of course become content curators, but also others, as for example educators. And, as is the case we are dealing with here, journalists (and press documentalists), because in this short article we are focusing on presenting the role of content curation in the area of journalism.

In the current context of crisis in large media organisations and irruption of micromedia, blogs and other social media with journalistic content, there are lots of voices considering content curation as one of the best strategies for the future of journalism: from pioneer texts by McAdams (2008) to those by Saad (2010), Sternberg (2011) or Bradshaw (2013), going through the evangelization texts on news curation by enthusiasts like Robin Good (2010).

Generic and specific identification

Let us take a definition of content curation to start with, for instance:
*"*Content curation is the system used by a specialist (the content curator) based on continuously searching, selecting, characterising and disseminating the most relevant content from several web information sources about a specific topic (or set of topics) and a specific area (or set of areas), aimed at a specific audience (an organisation or individual) who could be on the web (which is the general tendency) or in other contexts (e.g: in an organisation), offering added value and therefore establishing a link with its audience/users" (Guallar and Leiva-Aguilera, 2013, p. 27).

Following this definition, in the area of journalism we consider the existence of a generic identification and a specific identification with content curation.

The journalist looks for current information for a specific audience. To that end, sources have been researched and content has been obtained and checked, so that the journalist is a professional with content creation but also information management abilities (search of sources and verification of news). What we say is equally applicable to other professional specialities working in the newsroom of a medium, and particularly to the press documentalist, whose speciality is essentially managing journalistic information (search and verification of news, as well as archiving and documentary analysis or tagging) and also includes creating content. None of the previously described tasks is alien to the basic concept of curation, meaning that there is already a generic identification of journalists and press documentalists as content curators.

Besides, we can establish more specific identifications. The concept of content curation makes it way in journalism to refer to those journalistic pieces, sections or even media which, besides their own content, include (publish or use) selected content from various sources. In a way, content curation can be considered an evolution of what in its day received the name "link journalism", the tendency which encouraged including not only the links to official sources and other in the news published, but also –which is not very usual in journalism- to sources from other media.

Journalistic curation products

Let us see some examples of journalistic curation:

- Sections in media (or specialized media) based on content aggregation, where there is a manual or intellectual intervention in the selection. There are several articles calling this kind of elements like Newser "manual news aggregators", (Guallar, Abadal and Codina 2013), but in light of the new concept they could preferably be renamed as a type of content curation products.

- Topics sections from some of the largest press mastheads, which present a significant amount of content selected from various sources and grouped around specific themes, such as the emblematic case of Times Topics from *The New York Times*.

- Media based on publishing blogs and content aggregation, like The Huffington Post, which is a usual example when talking about journalistic curation.

- Journalistic pieces, from posts in blogs to articles at important newspapers, based on curation processes like the blog [Brain pickings](#) from popular curator Maria Popova.

- Journalistic products created with tools specialized in content curation which allow for a strong narrative use, such as platforms like [Storify](#) o [Storyful](#). These products are becoming increasingly habitual, particularly those related to following all kinds of events in real-time.

- Documentary products in the digital press, such as chronologies, anniversaries of evens and biographic profiles, like those that can be found in the hemerotec of online newspapers such as [The Guardian](#) or [La Vanguardia](#) (Guallar, 2011).

These are only a few examples of content curation by journalists and press documentalists (the last case). Bradshaw (2013) offers some more examples.

Creation + curation and the 4S's

In content marketing it is common to use the expression creation + curation to indicate an ideal formula to use content curation. From a strictly journalistic point of view like the one we are considering here, the term can be equally used. What do all the examples shown in the previous section have in common? They put together curation and content creation, in one way or another. Thus, Saad (2010) indicates that journalists must go from being creators to being content curators, which is what the combination of creation + curation precisely means.

To try and explain what Saad suggests, we can analyse curation and creation within the process of content curation itself. Let us take as an example the model of the 4Ss, according to which content curation is a process in four successive phases: search, select, sense making, share (Guallar and Leiva-Aguilera, 2013).

- The two first phases (search, select) refer to an information management task based on locating and selecting relevant content, which is closely related to what traditionally has been considered the role of documentation in journalism.

- The third S is the most creative phase, (of "creation within curation"): it is the sense making phase, the characterisation of content, which means the curator provides added value to previously selected content. In journalism, this phase consists in creating a product (for instance, an article or post with curated content) providing context and the style or personal touch of the curator.

- Lastly, to share is an essential activity in the current context, to which all the professionals communicating on the Internet are headed. This practice has increased greatly in the last times under social media. It involves dialogue and engagement with increasingly active audiences.

Journalists and documentalists as curators

Thus, content curation and creation emerge as the new duality of competences and abilities journalism professionals (and journalism documentalists) must be proficient at.

In an increasingly clear process, and since Internet irrupted, journalists have been developing search and information selection abilities (the two first S's). Whereas press documentalists, who are already veteran experts in these phases, have had to develop (or should develop) competences related to creating or co-creating content (Guallar, 2011), which are journalistic abilities we must identify with the third S of content curation. Lastly, the current context of web 2.0. and social media compels all content professionals to put a lot of effort into the fourth S: that of disseminating and interrelating with audiences.

This is the new conceptual framework wherein we can locate the relation of content curation with journalism and journalistic documentation. Journalists and press documentalists as content curators: this is already a reality.

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