Automated news production within the *uses* and professional practices

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Formation of the uses

Complex mechanism relying on both collective and individual representations + sociocultural and professional background of the journalist

Endogenous factors:
organizational context and journalistic routines

Exogenous factors:
technical imaginary / man-machine relationship
Hypothesis

Uses and practices are the results of interactions between the technical and the social, in which journalistic values are embed.

= compatibility

Uses are conditioned by the needs and requirements of the users (can be expressed explicitly or not)

= quality management (ISO 9000)

Uses will depend on the representations of the technical object.

= imaginary
Method: SCOT model/software lifecycle

- 2 case studies (2 Belgian newsrooms)
- Participant observation
- Involved within the design process: privileged access to information
- Interviews + anonymous surveys (qualitative)
- Assessments methods (quantitative)
Case study: “Air quality”

- Small newsroom
- 6 journalists involved
- Niche media, about social innovation (monthly magazine)
- Support investigative (1 year project)
- Air quality in Brussels (real time open data)
- Data aggregation, analysis (graphs, maps), natural language generation => online access
Case study: “Stock markets”

- Bigger newsroom (50 journalists)
- 6 journalists involved
- Daily newspaper + Online “market live”
- Support daily routines (1 year development)
- Coverage: stock market (paid real time data)
- Natural language generation, graphs => offline access (only for journalist)
Journalists, actors of the innovation

- Considered as a first form of use (Akrich)
- Meet ISO 9000 principles (quality management)
- Journalists define their requirements and needs (translation process)
- Interactions with the information system through human mediator(s)
- Gives the innovation more chance to be used BUT does not guarantee it!
Translation circles

- Intentions: To interpret, To make rational
- Mediations: Activities of translation
- Representations: To imagine, To project
Importance of mediation practices

Software at the **boundary** between two social worlds (Flichy)

**Mediator**

= process manager, boundary agent
= translator or facilitator

**Tasks: mobilize staffs**

Respect of the deadlines, check-point to ensure that technology answers to journalism
Technological imaginary (collective/individual)

Resistance = negative representations
Technology = time-consuming / not journalism
Data = resistance to numbers ("I am afraid")
Automation = “the robot will take my job” (competitor)

Engagement = positive representations
Automated news to support repetitive and time-consuming tasks
Main observations

Technology not purely mechanical
= social construct

Limits have to be fixed by journalists
= choices embed journalistic values, permits to open the “black box” of technology

Appropriation
= meet journalistic requirements
= give meaning to automation (journalists)

Imaginary
= can evolve with time (perceived benefits)
Conclusion

• Journalists = actors of the innovation but will not guarantee the uses

• Imaginary not frozen once and for all = can lead to reconsider uses & practices = correlates to innovation theory (Rogers) (relative advantages: time-consuming & repetitive tasks; compatibility: with journalistic values induced by the association within the design process; benefits: gain of time + easy to use)
Conclusion

• Non-use also because no interest in the field or because resistances (to news automation, to technologies, to numbers)

• Can lead to reconsider practices, especially to more data driven approach (source): new interest for numbers and spreadsheets (independent of automation)

• Automation comes to live when it is appropriated by journalists in their work