Mapping e-Democracy Research and New Media in Spain: A Perspective from Digital Journalism

JM Noguera

Under a global view of citizenship participation in society through ICT (Information and Communications Technologies), on one hand, the level of media literacy can be seen as the first step or requirement to involve people in a real and useful interactivity. On the other hand, the ways which people get a true e-Democracy could be seen as the final step, as the scene where they can build citizenship. In this way, full audience participation in digital media is a necessary step for building active citizenship in an online environment, due to the traditional role that media have played as filters and mediators of politicians and political contents.

Although the e-Democracy is based on direct contact between citizens and politicians, the public will always use the media as a strategic actor with two main tasks: watching the behaviour of politicians (“watchdogs”) and containing the political buzz at the streets to move it to different forms of political organization. The role of media in this case is using technology to facilitate the participation of citizens in the decision making progress.

Increasingly, new institutions -like new media-, are hybrid structures that encourage participation with new audiences. In this sense, mapping the research on how audiences are integrated with the media is also a research on how the filters for political contents (the media) are putting in contact their publics with the initiatives and political campaigns which are valuable for the community.

During the International Conference “Comparing Journalism: Theory, Methodology, Findings” at Eichsttat (July 2010), the key speaker David Weaver identified three topics
which need more research on the field of Journalism: the impact of political changes, the new audiences and the fear of journalists to new media. These three challenges are discussed on this essay. Spanish online media have faced technological convergence with many initiatives, but the uncertainty and the fear is still the dominant note. This insecurity has caused the dismissal of numerous journalists and even the closure of some media (Soitu.es, Factual.es, ADN.es) and the lack of preparation have been evident in recent attempts to coverage of political campaigns in the digital media. In many cases, the citizen media (and Social Media) got better interactivity with the audience. The new audiences seem to feel more comfortable to build citizenship in the media made by them, the Social Media.

In Spain, the research on e-Democracy (“ciberdemocracia”) has changed from a political science perspective (Sampedro, 2000; Dader, 2001; Dader and Campos 2006) to another point of view, very influenced by science communication and the role of new media (Dader, 2003; Dader, 2006; Zamora and Álvarez Teijeiro, 2006; Sánchez Carballido, 2008). From this point of view, the e-Democracy through the development of new media could be better understood (Llop, 2007; Noguera, 2010a).

The Spanish research on Digital Journalism is defined by keywords such as “interactivity” (Edo, 2000; Molina, 2008) or “participation” (Herrera, 2003; Sánchez and Pastor, 2009) in mostly of cases, and there is a growing interest on social networking and journalism (Campos, 2008; Noguera, 2010b), but not from a perspective that emphasizes the role of new media at political contents.

This essay suggests a research line linking e-democracy with the development of digital journalism, due to in this area (new journalistic media) is where the public can show more interaction and participation (in political content) and watching the results. And the real digital media convergence is not related just with the platforms. It is a convergence with their audiences. In Spain, the most important research on journalistic convergence is the global project “Digital convergence on media 2006-2009” (national reference SEJ2006-14828-C06), made by 24 researchers from 12 universities.

Related to the e-Democracy research, it must be underlined the last project “e-Democracy in 2008 political campaign” (national reference SEJ2007-64487/CPOL), with 12 researchers from 7 universities, and with Professor Víctor Sampedro as main researcher, author of several books on deliberative democracy, public opinion and political identities. Both projects are conducted thanks to the public funding.
Linking research lines (e-Democracy and Digital Journalism) and creating new clusters of researchers could be useful to study the development of digital media at the scene where the interactivity and the participation of publics can be showed clearly: the political scene (communities, messages, contents, relations).

References


