The New Agenda Setting paradigm in the Web: Approach of Cibermedia towards Social Filters

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Abstract

As everybody knows, sharing is the most important element in the so called Web 2.0. Tools like Flickr, Blogger, MySpace or any kind of wikis (for example, Wikipedia) are specially designed- both technically and ideologically- for user to share their contents. And for that reason, it could be said that the Web is more social than ever. Regarding this up-and-coming process, cibermedia do not want to be put aside and they are increasing their use with their news and with links to social media and other websites where the “user generated content” (UGC) is the most important information.

Since The Washington Post signed an agreement with David Sifry to use Technorati on August 2005, many cibermedia have followed this practice: placing buttons which say “blog this” (like ZdNet and Hindustan Times in 2004) and publishing links to the “most blogged articles” (usually with Technorati) or to other social filters like Digg, Facebook, Newsvine, Reddit or MyYahoo.

The importance of this “social selection of news” on the Web must be underlined. In fact, this process implies a very important strategy. Media are trying to “move” their contents to “places” on the Web where people are talking: the social media. At the same time, this fact is creating a shared agenda of news, a really new (and maybe alternative) Agenda Setting paradigm. Now, journalists can not ignore that the most important news on the Web is the one that people are searching for. Cibermedia and the social media are sharing a news agenda for the first time in History. Because of that, both need to know what are publishing on “the other side” constantly.

This paper tries to show what kind of social filters are the most popular among the cibermedia. We will go deeper to know how they are used (knowing
who is blogging about news, sharing the content, tagging news…) and what all these movements around the cibermedia and the Web 2.0 mean. The key question would be: do the media really want to be more social or is just a “tag”? The second part of this question might come out with our case study. To aim the objectives mentioned above, we will analyze fifty news which belong to several international media (The Washington Post, The New York Times, Le Monde, Clarin, El Pais, El Mundo…). This sample was collected from January to June 2007. This research will shed light on the most important reactions of cibermedia in the last years, a step to recognize the relevance of social media and, maybe, the beginning of the end of Agenda Setting as we know it.

Introduction

The User Generated Content (UGC) is growing up in several ways in the Web, not just like a form of ciberjournalism or citizen journalism, more in a general way: people doing things, talking and discussing them, and finally, sharing all contents to improve their works, hobbies and informations. According the last Telefonica´s report about Society of Information 2006 -taking data from Alexa- (2007), the general trend in sites like Digg, Wikipedia, YouTube and MySpace (the most important social network in the world), is a great growth. And more than this, for first time in the Internet´s history, the social networks are the contents more used by the people, more even than porn contents (Rheingold, 2007).

These four sites have multiplied by two their daily page views from the beginning last year until October 2006. And specially important is Digg´s case, a popular tool for tagging and sharing contents. “Sharing content” may be is the most important characteristic of the called Web 2.0. Sites like Flickr or YouTube have been successful projects not for their storage capacity, but for their possibility of sharing easily. In that sense, digital media have started a phase for sharing their news with users and Social Media using tools as MyYahoo, Del.icio.us or Digg.
If we think in the Czitron’s phrase “the most important news are which people is looking for” (Czitron, 1982: 14) and, at the same time, we try to connect this idea with our “growing reality” in the Web (audience as “prosumer” and Media every day more interested in the citizen Agenda), is easy to think we are in a new paradigm, a flow of two directions: Youtube´s videos, Digg´s news and other pieces of citizen journalism are every day more present in the traditional Agenda and, in the other hand, Media look for different ways to place their pieces in this new citizen Agenda built by non professional users trough the Social Media. As result of this process, both flows redesign constantly the configuration of the other area.

This movement of the Media can be considered as a response to the appearance of the Social Media in the Web (forum, blogs, chats, wikis…), channels where there is imposed the social criterion and all the conversation (buzz) expands and develops for other citizen channels. With the use of the social bookmarking, the Media admit that there exists a new area of discussion and hierarchial structuring of the information, a social area that, thanks to filters as Digg, Menéame or Fresqui (both Spanish versions), allows the readers "to have a few informative alternative front pages in which they are they themselves who define the importance of the news depending on their preferences" (Torres, 2006: 47).

In the Media, we can find different examples about ways to sharing and promote their news and contents. In Spain, one of the pionering cases is the newspaper *El Periódico de Aragón*. In November 2005, In its digital version, this newspaper placed a “BlogThis” button in each news, to promote any blogger could publish the content in their blogs easily. In the international context, we can find other media like Zdnet.com, which placed similar buttons to allow bloggers enjoy their contents. We have decided consider this fact like a precedent of the trend towards to spread journalistic contents among the users ´s channels (called Social Media), and clearly one of the most important are the blogs.
In this sense, we can find an important point to view this trend a few months before, in the agreement signed between the Technorati´s founder, David Sifry, and the digital version of The Washington Post. The project started the last day of August 2005. Thanks to this agreement, any reader could enjoy a link to see rapidly who was speaking about the same topic in the community of blogs, and just using a Technorati´s link (“Who’s blogging”). The executive editor of the newspaper, Jim Brady, explained the strategical action in this sense:

“…News is not static. With the help of the web, interesting stories immediately become part of a broader national conversation. This partnership with Technorati lets the users in on that conversation by delivering the most interesting and lively discussions about washingtonpost.com content from some of the best and most popular blogs on the web”.¹

Almost one year later, one of the most important spanish newspapers, La Vanguardia, started a similar action. From June 2006, this newspaper show us many buttons near each of their news, buttons to add the content to Digg, Menéame, Del.icio.us and MyYahoo, and even, the same link that appears in the Post’s case, a link with Technorati to know who’s blogging about the same topic. Four months later, the spanish 20Minutos started to place social bookmarking tools too. These cases are clear examples about how the Media wants to be in the same “new places” which their audiences there are, places where people is talking, sharing, working together and reinventing every day the Web 2.0 concept.

Our case of study

When Media decide to place their contents in platforms which the maximum protagonists are the users (Social Media and Social Filters), al the same time they are causing something much more important: to let the audience decide

what contents they are more interested in. Because of that, in some way the
audience is taking part in the configuration of Agenda Setting.

In fifty newspapers, we studied the most important topic chosen in seven
different days separated for six months, and in order to have a better
representation, there are Media from twenty two countries: USA (19
newspapers), Spain (6), England (3), Argentina (2), France (2), Germany (2),
Italy (1), Portugal (1), Brazil (1), Mexico (1), Colombia (1), Chile (1), Canada (1),
Sweden (1), Finland (1), Belgium (1), Poland (1), Greece (1), Ireland (1),
Denmark (1), Austria (1) and Netherland (1).

We have chosen mostly of Media in this sample with the criteria of a list of
Jay Rosen (2006) and a group of researchers, from the article “The Best
Blogging Newspapers” and the rest of the sample was chosen at random trying
to get the maximum number of different countries but, at the same time,
collecting some of the most important newspapers in the world. We have mixed
the list of Rosen with a criterion at random with a main aim: to combine the
trend of the best American newspapers with the reality in the international field
of the most prestigious Media (The Guardian, El País, El Mundo, Clarín, Le
Monde, O Globo…). We have decided to choose the Rosen ‘s list because of
the blogs are the most valuable part of the user generated content now, and the
newspapers that are doing better with blogging are, at the same time, the Media
that are trying to be more “inside” the social buzz in the Web.

Elements which we have found (social bookmarking tools):

In the studied sample (fifty digital newspapers from several countries), we
have found sixteen social bookmarking tools. In the top of them, we have
popular sites as Del.icio.us, Digg, MyYahoo and Technorati, which have
percentages from 20% to 10% of presence. Also, we have others less usual
elements like Nowpublic, Webnews or buttons “BlogThis”, all them with 2% of
presence in our sample. We list a brief summary of tools we have found (in
order of relevance in our sample):
**Del.icio.us**: social bookmarking web service, part of Yahoo, and created by Joshua Schachter in 2003. In Del.icio.us, each user can tag the online contents with freely chosen keywords. This categorization system is called folksonomy and this site, bought by Yahoo in December 2005, is one of the most popular of its kind.

**Digg**: is another site based in a non-hierarchical information and social contents. In Digg, news are submitted by users, which decide what stories are going to appear in the front page, through a user-based system. Digg.com started as an experiment in October 2004 and now is one of the most popular social filters in the world.

**MyYahoo**: personalized personal page offered by Yahoo and based on the Really Simple Sindication (RSS) system. Yahoo users can design their personal front page with pieces from different sources.

**Technorati**: the most important blog searcher, created by David Sifry in 2002. Nowadays, Technorati tracks more than 75 millions of blogs. The Sifry’s tool contains a lot of plugins to track the Blogosphere.

**Menéame**: spanish version (although with some differences) of Digg community. It was founded by Ricardo Galli in 2005. The main difference with Digg is the fact Meneame is built with free software.

**Facebook**: one of the most popular social networks in USA. In January 2007 was chosen by *Wired* as the most “wished” company 2.0 of the year.

**Newsvine**: social bookmarking tool that adds user generated content and can be considered a kind of social filter. It started in 2005 and in March 2006 was its public launch. Newsvine want to be “updated continuously by citizens like you, Newsvine is an instant reflection of what the world is talking about at any given moment.” (official site).
**Reddit**: social filter based in links voted by users, and them promote the stories to the front page with their votes.

**“BlogThis” (buttons)**: kind of buttons to promote bloggers can publish easily our contents in their websites. ZdNet.com was one of the pioneers in this sense.

**Folkd**: social bookmarking tool and social network, mixes podcast, tagging or possibility to upload videos and photos among others services. Includes a searcher with four elements: pages, audio, news and video.

**Fresqui**: spanish social filter similar to Meneame. In front page of this platform we can find the news more voted by users in different areas as Tech or Entertainment.

**Linkarena**: german social bookmarking tool.

**Nowpublic**: launched in 2005, Nowpublic is a platform based in participatory news network, where users are invited to write stories and cover events. For example “during Huricane Katrina Nowpublic had more reporters on the affected area than most news organizations have on their entire staff” (official site).

**Mister Wong**: social bookmarking tool very popular in Germany and launched recently in a spanish version. Designed to have private and public contents, to share the bookmarks with friends and create groups, among other services.

**Webnews**: social filter very popular in Germany, with sections as Tech, Sport or LifeStyle, is based in news voted by users. The most voted are promoted to the front page or each section.

**Yigg**: German community of news with Groups, Categories and stories voted by users. The most voted are placed to the front page.
Results

I have got the following results after to study the presence of social bookmarking tools in Media: Del.icio.us 20%, Digg and MyYahoo 12%, Technorati 10%, Menéame 8%, Facebook and Newsvine 6%, Reddit 4%, “BlogThis” buttons, Folkd, Fresqui, Linkarena, Mister Wong, Nowpublic, Webnews and Yigg, 2% of presence. Also we can see in a clearly way the results with the following graphic:

![Social Bookmarking in Media](image)

Conclusions

As we can see in the graphic, is possible to say that the results reflect the way of thinking of Media about the use of social bookmarking tools and how they must promote their contents. In the first places we find the three most important categories in this sense: tagging online (Del.icio.us), social filters (Digg) and personalized web pages services (MyYahoo), but unfortunately with very low percentages of presence (20%, 12% and 10%). In the other hand, in
the last places, the platforms based in user generated content and its possibilities to new ways of participatory journalism, as Nowpublic, do not have an important role (2%).

And in the middle, there are several platforms to create groups, connections among friends and many different kinds of social networks. This fact may be is showing us in a very clear way that Media are thinking more in how to place their contents in other communities than how to obtain valuable answers (“feedback”) and contents from them.

The most popular social bookmaking tools in the Media, Del.icio.us and Digg, do not get more than a 20% of presence, and the most used searcher to look for the conversations around the same topics, Technorati, just get the half of this percentage. These are poor numbers which show us, in a clearly way, a fact: Media are discovering more later than their audiences some very important tools for get the “buzz” in the Web. And we can not forget an obviously professional idea in the Communication’s world: rol of future journalists will be (is being now) to get the main buzz in the Web, to arrange it, classify it and offer it to their audiences in the best and most useful way.

Still we have not sufficient perspective to determine if the use of social bookmarking tools by Media is really a way opened towards the socialization of the contents, or simply, a gesture with more symbolism that conviction. According the statistics gathered in this study, may be it is a kind of medal that the Media want to be hung to be in a evolution in which they do not believe. But we can think too that Media started in 2005 a process without gone back, to be “inside” of social conversation in the Web.

This process could be defined by growing use of social bookmarking tools, a fact that implies losing the traditional fear of the Media to place external links in their sites. In one hand, this process redesign the Agenda Setting with new contributors. In the other hand, to place and to promote journalistic contents among social filters can be considered a way to get a valuable feedback from the audience.
Bibliography


ANNEXE

Sample

The sample was gathered from January to June 2007 (in seven different times), and is composed of fifty newspapers, mostly of them from Europe and USA. Together of them, the studied article’s permalink and list of social bookmarking tools in each one (arranged by date):

1. ElPais.com, January 16:
- Delicious
- Digg
- Technorari
- MyYahoo
- Menéame
2. El Mundo, January 16:
http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2007/01/16/internacional/1168968267.html?a=8820e184a520a8c89dc2a95e237ac798&t=1168973699
- None

3. 20 Minutos, January 16:
http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/192033/0/isabelita/peron/captura/
- Menéame
- Digg
- Delicious
- Technorati
- My Yahoo
- Fresqui

4. ABC, January 16:
http://www.abc.es/20070116/nacional-politica/rajoy-para-presidente-gobierno_200701161053.html
- Menéame
- Digg
- Delicious
- Technorati
- My Yahoo

5. La Vanguardia, January 16:
- Menéame
- Digg
- Delicious
- My Yahoo
- Technorati

6. Clarín, January 27:
- [Nada]

7. Le Monde, January 27:
http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-3228,36-860519@51-853716,0.html
- Button “Blog This” (“Citez cet article sur votre blog”)

8. La Stampa, January 27:
http://www.lastampa.it/redazione/cmsSezioni/politica/200701articoli/17201girata.asp
- None

9. Nytimes.com, January 27:
- Digg
- Facebook
- News Vine
10. Washingtonpost.com, January 27:
- Digg
- Delicious
- Reddit
- Google
- Yahoo
- Facebook
- Who’s blogging (Technorati)

11. Guardian Unlimited, February 9:
http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,,2009567,00.html
- None

12. El Nuevo Herald Miami, February 9:
http://www.miami.com/mld/elnuevo/16657792.htm
- None

13. Boston Globe, February 10:
ogizes_for_stunt/
- Facebook
- Delicious

14. O Globo, February 10:
- None

15. Publico, February 10:
http://www.publico.clix.pt/shownews.asp?id=1285342&idCanal=17
- None

16. Houston Chronicle, February 15:
- None

17. USA Today, February 15:
- None

18. The St. Petersburg Times (tampabay.com), February 15:
http://www.sptimes.com/2007/02/14/Tampabay/Plan_for_sex_ban__not.shtml
- None

19. Atlanta Journal Constitution, February 15:
https://www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/fayette/stories/2007/02/14/0215metbust.html
- None

20. San Antonio Express-News, February 15:
- None
21. Los Angeles Times, February 15:
- None

22. The New York Daily News, February 15:
- None

23. Chicago Tribune, February 15:
- None

24. Dallas Morning News, February 15:
- None

25. San Francisco Chronicle, February 15:
- None

26. Newsday, February 19:
- None

27. The Arizona Republic, February 19:
- None

28. Chicago Sun Times, February 19:
- None

29. San Jose Mercury News, February 19:
http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/16732185.htm
- None

30. The Boston Herald, February 19:
http://thetrack.bostonherald.com/moreTrack/view.bg?articleid=183728
- Delicious

31. El Universal, June 11:
- None

32. El Tiempo, June 11:
- None
33. El Mercurio Online, June 11:
- None

34. El Correo Canadiense, June 11:
- None

35. La Nación, June 11:
- None

36. La Razón, June 11:
http://www.larazon.es/noticias/noti_nac5870.htm
- None

37. Bild, June 11:
- None

38. Der Spiegel, June 11:
http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,487849,00.html
- WebNews
- Yigg
- Folkd
- Mister Wong
- Linkarena
- Delicious

39. Goteborgs Posten, June 11:
http://www.gp.se/gp/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=361&a=351819
- None

40. Helsingin Sanomat, June 11:
http://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/artikkeli/Poliisi+kaipaa+vihjeit%C3%A4+kultasep%E4%8C%94nliikkeen+myrrosta/1135227938173
- None

41. De Standaard Online, June 11:
- None

42. The Warsaw Voice, June 11:
http://www.warsawvoice.pl/view/14948
- None

43. Isotimia Online, June 11:
http://www.isotimia.gr/article/greek/40581/1/index.htm
- None

44. Borsen, June 11:
45. Irish Independent, June 11:
- None

46. Die Presse, June 11:
http://www.diepresse.at/home/politik/innenpolitik/309675/index.do?_vl_backlink=/home/index.do
- None

47. The Herald, June 11:
http://www.theherald.co.uk/news/news/display.var.1460944.0.0.php
- Delicious
- Newsvine
- Nowpublic
- Reddit
- Yahoo

48. The Times, June 11:
http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/iraq/article1915008.ece
- Delicious
- Newsvine

49. De Telegraaf Digitaal, June 11:
http://www.telegraaf.nl/digitaal/65415121/Camcording_in_bios_voortaan_illegaal_in_Canada.htm?p=1,1
- None

50. Liberation, June 11:
http://www.liberation.fr/actualite/politiques/legislatives/260496.FR.php
- None