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Mueller | Eichsteller | Rajaram [eds.]

#Innovation telling

Nomos
Edition Reinhard Fischer

Now Media

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Volmue 1

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A looking glass into a digital wonderland[1]

Not long ago, in mid-2016, I pleasantly coined the term "#Innovationtelling in journalism" in a systematic approach to analyse and describe the positive potential of using contemporary digital tools in journalistic storytelling. During one of my talks at a German media university on my newly developed concept, the immediate response by a younger male academic baffled me. "I felt very old during your talk", he said, somehow at the same time comfortably and ironically smiling at me.

Remember, how the legendary German youth magazine "Bravo" visualised the rift in the mind-set of generations, "if it's too loud, you're too old." Can we translate this successful claim into a contemporary version, like, "if it's too digital, you're too conventional"? Sounds witty, doesn't it. However, today the story no longer - if ever, it was - is about age, it's about opposite mind-sets.

In the above-mentioned situation following my talk, I reacted politely and didn't explicitly draw the audience's attention to the many patriarchal implications in this casually uttered statement. Obviously, there can be observed the lack of acceptance in the (German) academic and media industry for a female professional of my age embracing the digital and virtually immersive technology for storytelling and experimenting with it. But instead of elaborating on this aspect of gender and innovation priming, I'd rather prefer to go ahead to the mind-set of practicing #Innovationtelling, which really matter most to me and should to everybody interested in journalism, media and communication.

To fully understand the rift between "old" and "new" in the mind-sets of media professionals, you have to take a close look at my generation of media and journalism professionals. I believe, professionals today looking at themselves as the "old" guards and experts, see media evolution still as a constant lane of incidents and innovation, and they themselves navigate in the driver's seat. Professionals looking at themselves as "new" learners and experimentalists, see that media evolution in the age of virtual reality

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1 Based on the expression "A looking glass into a mathematical wonderland" by Ivan Sutherland (1965), in: Frank Biocca, (1995), Communication in the age of virtual reality, p.7.

has been lifted up on a revolutionary new level with real-time speed, which is a game-changer for every aspect of communication and life organisation.

My generation is born in the 60 s and 70 s and we are the last generation with in-depth practical and conceptual knowledge of both analog AND digital communication and media production. We are "timelines of the media evolution" as my co-editor Devadas Rajaram puts it. Our generation of 'lively timelines' will fade away since the innovation speed reaches now almost real-time. Hence, as 'talking timelines' we have the potential to act as the ideal mentors for the youth and much younger generations of "makers and mind crafters"[2] - I don't fancy the term "Generation Z" as the letter Z is the last letter of the chronological Latin alphabet - as well as we become #Innovationtellers in our own right.

Adam Grant tells us in "Originals", his wonderfully new take on non-conformists, how research shows that creators and innovators are best in their twenties or in an older, experienced age of fifty and beyond[3]. That way he destroys the myth of experimentalists described as sprinters and short-term goal-getters. In the contrary, Grant highlights the proven connection between experimentalists and marathon, in the sense of a long-term production and prototyping line born from experience nd patience.

The disrupted media industry and digital communication in real-time are anything but buzz words. In fact both notions - disruption and real-time - describe exactly the contemporary state of the media evolution lasting over 2.000 years.

If we'd like to acknowledge it or not, we are living now in the digital network society with means for non-linear mass-self-communication, for sharing relevant information of mutual benefit for both the user and the producer, for self-empowered communities as well as for transformative low-key and affordable devices which immerse users into the interactive communication environment. Diversity and inclusion are driving this disruption towards a very positive and new social good environment. At the same time digital environments are being tested by the negative counter-impact of commercialised and intransparent data flows as well as by the fake-news-industry.

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2 See: Robert Scoble and Shel Israel (2017), The Fourth Transformation, p.14ff.

3 Adam Grant, (2016), Originals, How non-conformists move the world, p. 108-113.

The increased speed towards virtual and immersive storytelling and communication environments was long foreseen by visionary media professionals, only to name here three: Marshall McLuhan, Frank Biocca and Jaron Lanier. For the latter virtual reality gears are the first communication tools which do not narrow the mind. We can even say, that media always have been environments and have created their own environments, be it from scripted walls in ancient caves over typewriter offices and film sets and film theatres all the way through to VR-surgery-labs and VR-themeparks. By now VR environments surround us and the goal of representation is not longer meaning but appearance.[4]

All said, to cut it short, leads to the insight that the digital and mobile ecosystem as well as the virtual reality and wearable ecosystem, where we are heading to, are forces of a revolutionary change. Human media history speaks of the unquenchable thirst for the "ultimate display" and "the essential copy"[5] (representation), a looking glass which enables us to experience the digital wonderland which immerses us into a virtual environment not limited by a screen or headset.

Within this agile unfolding media evolution journalistic storytelling and relevant news stories were always developed at the interface of our human brain within a sensorimotor human body and with technological extensions. Against this background, I figured out the strategy of #Innovationtelling, which I owe to the experience that now everybody who owns a smartphone (or tablet) can use cutting-edge immersive technology to tell a story and empower her or his voice or voices of others. Just think for a moment about the sheer numbers: In 2017 more than 50% of the world population - 3,77 billion - use the internet, while more than 37% - 2,8 billion - use social media, of which 34% use social media with mobile devices.[6]

Naturally this development has its own downsides and especially with the global reach and intransparent data industry political fascists and destabilising propaganda using the internet can pose a real threat for every society. However, I belong to the group of professionals who strongly believe that we who oppose fake news and misguiding propaganda are urged to investigate and share the positive trends in the digital and immersive

4 See: Frank Biocca, (1995), p.8.
5 See: Frank Biocca, (1995), p.7.
6 See Global digital report 2017, we are social: https://wearesocial.com/de/

media communication to be able to respond to these attacks and downsides.

The more we understand and enable ourselves and empower others to use these tools, the more likely it is that we will experience a more informed and active global citizenry than ever before. Nonny de la Peña, so-called "godmother" of virtual reality storytelling in journalism, shares this believe:

"I think that hopefully VR will get us closer to that sort of transparency question we're always pushing on in journalism. We've thrown objectivity out. We know that's not there, so transparency is where did you get your information and facts?
I do believe that by offering these kind of experiences we begin to leapfrog boundaries, walls, cultural differences, and take people into stories that they didn't have access to before. The hope is that we're going to have a more informed global citizenry, and I think that is the underpinning of democracy. That's how we work together to make decisions in the world."[7]

The notion Innovation/Telling is a compound word consisting of newly composed parts cut off "open innovation" and "storytelling". I refer with this to the fact that we as storytellers have to get to know all over again the technological forces, platforms and tools which will help us to present our story content in the best possible way. In the age of digital and immersive story experience, while we encounter billions of storytellers sharing their information and stories in social media any time, we have to find new answers to the old questions: How do we tell relevant and important stories, and how can our stories stick out and be seen by the audience we would like to connect with?

Understanding stories and transferring knowledge are key skills for everybody and especially for quality content producers. Today with virtual and immersive storytelling we experience stories and information in the same way as we do experience the real world with things happening all around us. At the same time we access facts in a way that is more engaging and investigative. The strategy of #Innovationtelling can guide storytellers who look for a way to understand better how to approach the con-

7 Interview with Nonny de la Peña, 2017, in "the future of news": http://futureof.news/episodes/nonny-delapena/