

2005 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

Closing Session

Panelists:

Rosental Calmon Alves, Professor and Knight Chair in Journalism, University of Texas at Austin

Gabriela Warkentin de la Mora, Director of the Department of Communication and UNESCO Chair in Communication, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico

ROSENAL CALMON ALVES: I'm going to start this flash, rapid, instantaneous wrap-up session. It's going to be really, very brief. Everybody's tired after two days of conference, here. But I thought that we would have, just, a farewell and a, sort of, a conclusion, very informal and also, we would ask you some questions about how do you think have we done here, and what do you think we should do next year.

So I invited my colleague from the Universidad Iberoamericana, Gabriela Warkentin, to help me to do that. Sort of. To help me to do that, and I invite her to make some comments of the overall conference, and the conclusions that she had after these two days.

GABRIELA WARKENTIN DE LA MORA: Yes, thank you. Thank you, Rosental. Thank you for still being here, happy few who are sitting here. And maybe someone is watching on the Internet. My students were supposed to be watching, but I'm sure that they are not anymore, at this time. [laughter] It's Saturday. But well, if they are, I'll just say "hi" to everybody who's watching over there.

I think it's when we say it's going to be brief, we really mean it. I think we really need to out there, and see the sun, and maybe even get a beer, and just get over all this stuff that we've been listening to this past day and a half. And the first thing I wanted to do is, really, congratulate Rosental and his team. Because it's I mean, many of us work in academia, and we know what it's like to try to organize a congress, or a symposium, or whatever. And just being able to get into the same room, professional media professionals and researchers, is not really an easy task. There's a lot of thinking to do about that, but really media professionals and academics, they just don't mix together very well. So I think the first thing that we really have to do is congratulate Rosental and all his team, because this has been an extraordinary experience, to listen to professionals, to listen to them discuss with academics. So, really, it's been interesting. And I'm sure that we have a lot of thinking to do about what we've just listened to.

I have, actually, three points that I want to raise. It's sort of a conclusion It's a very personal conclusion. I don't assume that that's the conclusion for the symposium. But that's a very personal conclusion. And because Rosental told me to be in this

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wrap-up session, I was, sort of, like, going through this narrative during the symposium. So that's, in a way, what I'm taking home with me.

First of all, I do feel that everybody's sharing a certainty. That what we're talking about is happening. It's not like some years ago, when we always thought, "Well, this is going to be" it's like, "This is happening." And this is very important for, also, for people like me that we come from other countries, and particularly for example in Mexico. Where, strangely, we live in a state of perpetual denial, in technological stuff. I mean, everybody says, "Now, this is not happening to us. This is happening to people in the United States, or this is happening to people in the northern part of the world, and this is not happening to us." But while they are saying this, they have their laptops and they have their cell phones and they have an email account, and they do a lot of Internet work, or they are in cyber-cafs as we were told this morning, it's really true that there are a lot of cyber-cafs going on. And when you point that out, and you say, "But hey, you're saying this is not happening, but you're doing it," I say, "Well, yes, I'm an exception." But then you say, "OK, but there are millions of exceptions." And, sort of, there is something very strange going on in our countries, that we are not acknowledging that this is happening. So, in a way, it was very important, and I'm sure that all of those who followed us on the webcast they are going to have this same experience of, "OK, this is happening, and we really have to acknowledge that."

It is making the mediascape more complex. It's not killing other medium, and just being the only media. It's making it more complex. And this is very interesting, for those of us who like research and stuff. But I know that this is not so interesting for those who don't like complexity, because complexity just makes things more difficult. So we really have to accept that part, also. And, of course, as has been pointed out a lot, it is undermining established or traditional media structures, and that has a lot of repercussions that we need to reflect a lot more on.

And then, going to the second part, I think that there are still a lot of questions going on. That there is still even though there is a certainty that this is happening, there is this huge uncertainty, still, that nobody knows where it's going to. And it was striking to find out, in your paper this morning, that the percentage of people who knew where it was going to that didn't know where it was going to increased in the last five years. It did not decrease. So this means that this uncertainty is, sort of, still there.

But then, I think, one of the big conclusions that we might share is that there is a need for research. That there is really a need for research. But I would say a need for applied research, and for collaborative research. Again, getting professionals to dialogue with researchers, to formulate questions together, is what we really need. This morning, this glimpse of the colleague from the Times, I guess it was, who just said, "But you're not addressing this question." That's what we need. We need to have those questions, maybe, to just pop up, and then we can just take them, and work together from our different perspectives. But if we don't have these questions,

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that they pop up together, then it's still going to be like two parallel ways, they don't touch. So that's why I insist on applied research and collaborative research.

And, of course, well, it's very obvious what kind of research we need, and in what areas: consumer habits and commercial strategies, how to profit from the economy of tension, as was mentioned a lot, programming challenges that were posed this morning, introduction of technologies, as we just listened to, digital rights, et cetera. But I think it's, more than ever, the need for collaborative research amongst different areas.

And then, this other thing that is quite interesting. Whenever you go to a conference or symposium or whatever, on "digital something" this time, digital journalism, but digital economy or digital something if you look back, over the years, there's always some big promise. The big promise of the digital economy, many years ago, and then the big promise of the interactivity, and then everything was going to interactive. I have the feeling it's a very personal thing but I have the feeling that this time, the big promise is this user-generated content, and that "everybody has a story to tell." This is, sort of, what went through these two days. Everybody has a story to tell, and the net is going towards user-generated content. And, well, let's just see if, in some years, what happened with this promise. In a way, we were making fun, a little bit, about that yesterday, when we were saying, "If everybody has a story to tell, then who is listening?" [laughter] And it's I know it's over-generalizing it, but in a way, we I think we have to look at it a little bit, I mean, not so happily. I think it's something that we really need to focus on what kind of stories are being told, and where these stories are going to be to fit, into the whole mediascape. But, well, I feel that is, sort of, a promise that we're now working on.

And, well, I'm those would be, like, my general conclusions. I think it has been very interesting, and also there are a lot of ideas that are around us right now, and we really have to work on them, and to see that if the promises that we are seeing today, if they're going to be there, and if we have to work for them, or if they're just going to be part of new promises that are going to pop up in the next symposium we hold.

Thank you very much.

ROSENAL CALMON ALVES: All right. Thank you.

[applause]

ROSENAL CALMON ALVES: I think this was a great summary of what happened here. It's very interesting, and I invite you guys to visit our website of the symposium, because we have the transcripts of all the conferences we hosted here, since 1999. And it's very interesting to see the evolution of this. Each symposium is a snapshot of what is going on, in that particular year, in the field of in the field that is under construction, it's still under construction, of online journalism.

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And it was very interesting, because in the beginning we were still discussing if this would stick, here. If this would be a lasting business. Then we would ask if this would be a business. And then I think we had the user-driven, or generated, content is one of the main issues of the symposium this year.

But I think the thing that connects everything that we talked about here, which is my main concern now, is the future of journalism. We did a conference here about online journalism, but we ended up doing a conference about the uncertainties of the future of journalism. Because those things are very well-connected, and I am very concerned about how we're going to have journalism, you know, quality journalism. We are not talking any more about if online journalism is going to happen. Like Gabriela said, online journalism is happening. And it is growing; there's no doubt. Even the question of if it makes money, it's at this point, a more irrelevant question. Because it is making money. I mean, most of the newspapers in this country are making money out of online journalism.

And it is growing, as we saw here, 40% a year. So it is in the right path. The problem is that advertising, who has financed journalism before, is disappearing. And, you know, so we are kind of destroying what we had, and not building, yet, anything new that would replace. So I think one of the main things that we'll that I'll get from this symposium, to kind of start thinking about the next, is this. And it was not by chance that Phil Meyer's book, *The Vanishing Newspaper*, was mentioned here so many times. Because it is about this, and about this question.

So I want to thank my wonderful team Amy, and Dean, and Fiorenza, and everybody who helped, Fernando I want to give them an applause. [applause] This is really a team work, and I would not have been doing that without so dedicated people. I want also to thank my students, who wrote who were doing real-time coverage of this event. So when you get home, if you are not following from your laptops here, they have been writing stories in a real time basis about what was going on here. So you have in a few weeks, you're going to have, hopefully, the transcripts and the web page, and you're going to have videos of what happened here. But also, you already have the online journalism coverage of this.

And I really want to thank the speakers, and also the attendees who came my new friends from the BBC, from South Africa, from Japan, from Argentina, from Mexico, that came just to attend the conference. It's interesting that sometimes we it's hard to convince a grad student from next door to come to a symposium here, but we can attract people from so far away. And I finally want to thank everybody who is still here. I mean, that's amazing that you are still here, after so many hours of conference.

And I wonder if anybody wants to add anything, or have any suggestion, or have any conclusion, comments for the record? Anybody? The BBC, yes! Dean, can you give him the mic?

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I'm very happy that both of you were here. You really helped to give and I thank you for your questions, all the time, and this was it gave a lot of energy to our discussions.

ALFRED HERMIDA: I think, first of all, we have to congratulate you and your team here for organizing the symposium. And I think one of the things that is really attractive about it is the mixture of research and professional experience. And that's, kind of, something that makes it unique. So you have both mixing. It doesn't usually happen; they tend to be very separate worlds. And, you know, we've heard a lot of interesting ideas, and we've got a lot of stuff to take back to London.

One area that I thought we could be looking at more in-detail is actually the craft of online journalism. Looking at: Does writing for the web, as a journalist, make us different journalists? Do we need to think about the way we convey the information differently? Not just in terms of multimedia and interactive, but if we're covering a new story, for today, do we write it in a certain way that is easier to follow online, but given the nature that it's on a screen, how do you use images there? What is the best way of conveying information in text? Maybe two thousand words isn't the right way. Maybe we need to put it in bullet points. I don't know. We've experimented, and had a lot of these challenges and opportunities in the BBC site. And I felt it's one thing that, perhaps, we could be looking at, particularly within the context of a journalism school. You know, the craft of online journalism what are the challenges and opportunities that this medium offers us, as professional journalists?

ROSENAL CALMON ALVES: All right. Thank you very much. Anybody else want to have any final word?

No? So everybody wants to go to see the bats, [laughter] and have a Sixth Street good, live music?

So, thank you very much.

[applause]

All right! We did it!