

# News Life Cycle and the Hybrid Media System\*

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Submission date: February 2022

Accepted date: January 2023

Published in: June 2023

**Recommended citation:** SERRANO TELLERÍA, A. (2023). “News Life Cycle and the Hybrid Media System”. *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 68, 197-212. DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3525>>

## Abstract

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Following a brief examination of recent theories, this proposal describes the transmedia ideals, logic and values for journalism and explores how transmedia storytelling addresses the need to ensure the continued relevance of journalism. We test the ideals, logic and values and refine the evolving features and strategies employed by Spanish legacy media through case study analysis. Thus, this research analyses and describes the use of languages, genres and formats; strategies, resources and platforms for the creation, collaboration and distribution (*News Lifecycle*, Serrano-Tellería, Jin and Arroyo, 2019) of journalistic products about Covid-19, and determines whether a transmedia logic is being followed. Likewise, this study proposes a set of good practices that can be applied to other stories-products and media in everyday and planned routines. For this, the field work focuses on the analysis of two aspects: the interface design and the creation and dissemination of content. The pandemic represented a unique frame of analysis due to the intrinsic work conditions, routines and dynamics as well as its limitations and increased demands for information. Thus, we concluded that transmedia core values, ideals and logic offer a suitable framework to embrace in everyday media work and specifically, in journalism, to adapt, innovate and overcome its crisis and challenges, opportunities and potentials. Transmedia means an ideal, a logic, a group of values to bear in mind when constructing a story. To adapt storytelling to media production, bearing in mind all possible genres, languages, formats, semiotics and strategies is a fundamental step because audiences are

\* This proposal is part of a research project entitled “Newsnet”. Principal researchers: Associate Tenure Professor Ana Serrano Tellería and Full Professor Javier Díaz Noci of the Spanish R+D+I calling “Challenges of Society”, subproject title: “News, Networks and Users in the Hybrid Media System (Newsnet). Transformation of the News and Media Industry in the Post-Industrial Era”. Reference: RTI2018-095775-B-C43. Three years: 2019-2022. Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. It is also a result of the author’s stay as a visiting scholar in the Media Studies Department at the University of Amsterdam, hosted by Prof. Mark Deuze (2019).

used to consuming media on different devices and want the best of all of them to have a full experience.

**Keywords:** news life cycle; journalism; transmedia journalism; hybrid media system

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**Resum.** *El cicle de vida de la notícia i el sistema híbrid de mitjans*

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Després d'un breu examen de les teories recents, aquesta proposta descriu els ideals, la lògica i els valors transmèdia per al periodisme i explora com la narració transmèdia aborda la necessitat de garantir la pertinència contínua del periodisme. Posem a prova els ideals, la lògica i els valors i refinem les característiques i estratègies en evolució emprades per rellevants mitjans de comunicació en espanyol mitjançant l'anàlisi d'estudis de casos. D'aquesta manera, la recerca analitza i descriu l'ús de llenguatges, gèneres i formats; estratègies, recursos i plataformes per a la creació, col·laboració i distribució (*News Lifecycle*, Serrano-Tellería et al., 2019) de productes periodístics sobre la COVID-19 i determina si se segueix una lògica transmèdia. Així mateix, aquesta recerca proposa un conjunt de bones pràctiques que poden aplicar-se a altres històries-productes i mitjans en les rutines quotidianes i planificades. Per fer-ho, el treball de camp se centra en l'anàlisi de dos aspectes: el disseny de la interfície i la creació i difusió de continguts. La pandèmia va representar un marc d'anàlisi únic per les condicions, rutines i dinàmiques intrínseques de les condicions i rutines laborals, així com per les seves limitacions i majors demandes d'informació. Per tant, concloem que els valors, ideals i lògiques centrals transmèdia són un marc adequat per adoptar en el treball diari dels mitjans de comunicació i, específicament, en el periodisme, per adaptar-se, innovar i superar les seves crisis i desafiaments, oportunitats i potencialitats. Transmèdia significa un ideal, una lògica, un conjunt de valors que cal tenir en compte a l'hora de construir una història. Adaptar el relat de marca (*storytelling*) a la producció mediàtica tenint en compte tots els gèneres, llenguatges, formats, semiòtiques i estratègies possibles és un pas fonamental, perquè les audiències estan acostumades a consumir diferents mitjans en dispositius i volen el millor de tots ells per viure una experiència completa.

**Paraules clau:** cicle de vida de la notícia; periodisme; periodisme transmèdia; sistema híbrid de mitjans

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**Resumen.** *El ciclo de vida de la noticia y el sistema híbrido de medios*

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Tras un breve examen de las teorías recientes, esta propuesta describe los ideales, la lógica y los valores transmedia para el periodismo y explora cómo la narración transmedia aborda la necesidad de garantizar la pertinencia continua del periodismo. Ponemos a prueba los ideales, la lógica y los valores y refinamos las características y estrategias en evolución empleadas por relevantes medios de comunicación españoles mediante el análisis de estudios de caso. De este modo, esta investigación analiza y describe el uso de lenguajes, géneros y formatos; estrategias, recursos y plataformas para la creación, colaboración y distribución (*News Lifecycle*, Serrano-Tellería et al., 2019) de productos periodísticos sobre el COVID-19 y determina si se sigue una lógica transmedia. Asimismo, esta investigación propone un conjunto de buenas prácticas que pueden aplicarse a otras historias-productos y medios en las rutinas cotidianas y planificadas. Para ello, el trabajo de campo se centra en el análisis de dos aspectos: el diseño de la interfaz y la creación y difusión de contenidos. La pandemia representó un marco de análisis único por las condiciones, rutinas y dinámicas intrínsecas de las condiciones y rutinas laborales, así como por sus limitaciones y mayores demandas de información. Por lo tanto, concluimos que los valores, ideales y lógicas centrales transmedia son un marco adecuado para adoptar en el trabajo diario de

los medios de comunicación y, específicamente, en el periodismo, para adaptarse, innovar y superar sus crisis y retos, oportunidades y potencialidades. Transmedia significa un ideal, una lógica, un conjunto de valores a tener en cuenta a la hora de construir una historia. Adaptar el relato de marca (*storytelling*) a la producción mediática teniendo en cuenta todos los géneros, lenguajes, formatos, semióticas y estrategias posibles es un paso fundamental, porque las audiencias están acostumbradas a consumir medios en diferentes dispositivos y quieren lo mejor de todos ellos para vivir una experiencia completa.

**Palabras clave:** ciclo de vida de la noticia; periodismo; periodismo transmedia; sistema híbrido de medios

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## 1. Introduction

As the media industry (including journalism, with news and news reporting as its core product and activity) continues to undergo a broad range of – at times, dramatic – changes, it finds itself forced to collaborate and compete with many other actors in an emerging ‘hybrid’ media system (Chadwick, 2013). At the heart of the framework under which the media industry is being restructured is the interdependence of all media – at the expense of characteristics that have historically defined the discipline of journalism. Traditional news organizations, long considered the fourth estate in democratic societies (after the clergy, the ruling elite and the public), now constitute only a part – and not even a necessarily central part – of a broader media system characterized chiefly by constant change, interconnection and unpredictability. Consequently, journalism is often fighting a seemingly rear-guard battle to preserve its historical role as a shaper of public opinion and gatekeeper of the news.

The emergence of the world-wide web, digitalization, media convergence and the implementation of multimedia storytelling strategies alter the way in which news is gathered, produced, disseminated and consumed. In this paper, we aim to identify and analyse some of the key issues involved in the transition to hybrid or transmedia storytelling in journalism – an approach that takes advantage of the hybrid media environment in which producers and consumers of news operate.

## 2. Transmedia ideals, logic and values for journalism

As Scolari and Ibrus (2014) and Scolari (2019) note, the concept of transmedia has evolved differently in the academic and professional fields. In these and other early analyses, guidelines and protocols emerge about how to create and evolve the transmedia storyworld and its storyboard, including resources and strategies to spread and finance them. In this paper, we will analyse the transmedia ideals, logic and values for journalism.

Therefore, although there is a lack of a wide variety of fully developed transmedia journalistic projects worldwide (Rampazzo and Carvalho, 2018; Freeman and Rampazzo, 2020; Rampazzo-Gambarato, Carvalho-Alzamora and Tarcia, 2020), the dynamism of transmedia and the logic of its produc-

tion processes have been incorporated and followed at different levels and degrees, as artists, journalists and other media content creators and professionals have started to experiment and incorporate diverse media (cross/multi/transmedia) into the context of converging media industries and digitization (Serrano-Tellería, 2016; Serrano-Tellería and Prenger, 2019).

The transmedia (interactive) documentary may be the most widely explored genre, as Vázquez and Gifreu (2019) describe. We agree with them that the explosion of video and visual content on the internet has created the ideal conditions for the emergence and evolution of interactive documentary as a non-fiction format. This form is presented as a contemporary one, marked by complexity and hybridization, with challenges to and opportunities towards its institutionalization and in the encounter with new technologies. In this sense, because of its complexity and hybridization, the transmedia logic has been employed as a strategy to best adapt and take advantage of its potential and challenges through the creation of the storyworld and its various stories.

Therefore, it is possible to find other approaches, initiatives and strategies to create both fiction and non-fiction transmedia projects, or in other words, guidelines from different perspectives in terms of how to construct a fully developed project (Phillips, 2012; Freeman, 2017; Rampazzo and Carvalho, 2018; Freeman and Rampazzo, 2020; Rampazzo-Gambarato et al., 2020). However, as stated above, the aim and focus here is to describe how transmedia ideals, logic and values (Serrano-Tellería, 2019, 2020) for journalism may be applied to everyday media work or journalistic routines.

In this sense, Jenkins (2016), for example, reminds us how transmedia storytelling is used to tell the Christian story of the Middle Ages across books, architecture, sculpture and ritual, while Weedon (2021) shows how it appears in British storytelling in the 1920s and 1930s. Likewise, we can find more examples of these characteristics in the transmedia retrospective carried out by Freeman (2017). Similarly, in its core ideals, values and logic, transmedia journalism embraces some of the pre-existing core values of journalism and its ethical code, such as credibility and transparency. In addition to these legacy ethics and practices, transmedia ideals, values and logic include others that have arisen in journalism's adaptation to the contemporary media ecology and its technological environment.

Transmedia production is different to hypermedia (comprehensive description), crossmedia (a story that runs across different media) or multimedia (a story that uses different media). Unlike these, transmedia involves the creation of a storyworld or universe through the use of a variety of media for different parts of the story, each with its own objectives. This means that each part of the story is developed mainly by employing the specific medium that is most suitable for that part of the narrative or storyboard. All parts of the story might share some common patterns that unify the creation of the narrative universe and, in some cases, certain pieces of content may even be repeated throughout the story (Serrano-Tellería, 2016; Serrano-Tellería and Prenger, 2019).

Examples carried out by international legacy media that may show this ongoing process of evolution and experimentation include “The 1619 Project” (*The New York Times*, 2019), “A New Age of Walls”, “The Way Point” (*The Washington Post*, 2017a, 2017b) and “Cento Giorni in Europa” (*Corriere della Sera*, 2019). “The 1619 Project” has been described as long-form storytelling, and won the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary in 2020. “Cento Giorni in Europa” has also been labelled long-form storytelling, while “A New Age of Walls” and “The Way Point” won first and second prize respectively in the innovative storytelling category of World Press Photo’s 2017 Digital Storytelling Contest.

Media production – transmedia production in particular – requires in-depth reflection on the ecologies and semiotics of each medium, as well as their inter-connections. In the attention economy, choosing the best medium for a story or for an independent part of the overall storyworld or transmedia universe, demands all three. The audience/user plays a fundamental role in this construction, having to navigate the storyworld themselves; and in doing so, they participate in its creation and evolution (Serrano-Tellería and Prenger, 2019). Furthermore, we propose that transmedia ideals, logic and values for journalism – which we will discuss later – may be applied to everyday media work and journalistic routines.

Several key considerations for transmedia logic and productions have been proposed by some of the leading experts in the genre from both academia and industry worldwide (Serrano-Tellería and Prenger, 2019), including the following:

1. Analyse, study and understand the audience (both for the story and in a segmented way across different media);
2. Assemble a team with truly diverse talents and skills with a passion for transmedia storytelling;
3. Invest in understanding the unique affordances of each medium used in the transmedia experience;
4. Always test the elements of the story within the overall idea (or ideal) of the storyworld; and
5. Be ambitious regarding the general concept, or the ‘heart’ of the story, but start small and expand the storyworld gradually, organically and systematically, and continue testing to see if parts of the story still resonate with the audience.

Regarding the challenges facing the media, which range from business models to inner structure and skills required, among others, the following transmedia core ideals, logic and values are increasingly prevalent:

- authenticity, credibility and transparency;
- creativity, innovation and originality;
- credibility, quality and trust;

- the importance of belonging to a community or society and feeling like part of the solution (journalism);
- cultivating collaboration among professionals, projects and users; moving from hyperlocal and local issues, scopes and perspectives to those that are global;
- enhanced user experience;
- 360°, augmented-extended-virtual-mixed reality, internet of things, artificial intelligence and big data;
- interface design and information architecture-SEO; and
- media integration or combination (critical selection) and media literacy.

To start with authenticity, credibility and transparency, the transmedia community sees these as intrinsic in order to believe and support the storyworld or transmedia universe. Applied to journalism, they are linked to the ethical code and core values such as the Five Ws, credibility, source contrast, reliability, transparency, trust, etc. In all cases, they are linked with quality content that, for hybrid and/or transmedia journalism, means and implies experimentation as well as delving into creativity, innovation and originality, because both media makers and users, proactive and collaborative, want the best of all media and devices affordable in order to have a full and meaningful experience, as well as consistent and coherent interaction and navigation within the storyworld or transmedia universe.

By “the transmedia community”, we refer to both media makers and (pro-/co-) users, as well as the desirable and close relationship between them as a result of the construction and maintenance of the core values mentioned: authenticity, credibility and transparency.

Once all these values have been achieved or are in the process of being created, built, enhanced and promoted, the importance of belonging to a community or society and feeling like part of the solution (journalism) represents another fundamental step in the expansion and consolidation of the storyworld or transmedia universe. Costera-Meijer (2020) and Wahl-Jorgensen (2020) noted that a relevant interconnection to bear in mind is the link between the level of engagement with and immersion in a story through emotion and the perception of the quality of news and of consuming news, all of which are related to the storytelling experience and to the storyboard provided. This necessitates a selected media integration or combination and media literacy, as well as quality and trust.

That is to say – and moving on to enhanced user experience and 360°, augmented-virtual-mixed-extended reality –, if we follow a transmedia logic, we may be open to incorporating these experimental fields in the creation of the storyworld or universe. Regarding media literacy, the transmedia storyboard and the interface design of the storyworld or universe should apply usability patterns and provide consistent navigation. Also, the interface design should follow the information architecture guidelines and incorporate SEO strategies. The last step in this configuration of the deep and semantic

web are artificial intelligence and big data. To this should be added the internet of things as well as potential devices.

With information architecture guidelines and SEO strategies, we refer to how the interface design of the storyworld or transmedia universe is organized and structured by the deployment and visualization of its menus (main and secondary); internal (between different components or stories of the storyworld) and external links; hashtags, mentions and tags. In relation to usability patterns, this means that a suitable font size and colour palette must be carefully studied and selected according to the emotions we want to convey. In addition, since we must consider different levels of media literacy to promote an enriching and satisfying experience, the coherence and consistency between all these guidelines is essential. The interface design means the design of every part.

Finally, cultivating collaboration among professionals, projects and users; moving from hyperlocal and local issues, scopes and perspectives to those that are global. Concretely, this is a specific behaviour and provision regarding transmedia journalism and, in previous stages, a tendency observed in the transition to hybrid and/or transmedia journalism. When creating the storyworld or transmedia universe, every part has its own identity while it may share some common pieces of the story with other parts. This means that, in terms of the selected topic and/or areas to cover, both media makers and (pro-/co-) users through that selection and interrelation may cover and delve into (hyper-)local perspectives that may also have a similar counterpart worldwide and/or in another (hyper-)local place.

Meaningful audience participation, which implies being truly committed and trusting in a community, involves a return to the core values of journalism. Thus, from the global to the local and hyperlocal, or the other way round, relevance and proximity are the keys. Both *Fast News* and *Slow Journalism* have to be combined and balanced by selecting among all media ecologies and technological environments that are affordable (convergence with cross, multi and transmedia), bearing in mind the increased demand as well as improved quality of audio-visual content (audio, podcast, video, pictures, voice; data visualization; 360°, augmented, mixed and virtual reality). Therefore, media literacy embraces all agents and participants in this process to provide a meaningful experience.

Thus, in the hybrid and/or transmedia ecology and technological environment described by the interdependence of all media, where there is a constant change, an interconnection and an unpredictability, transmedia core ideals, logic and values may offer a mindset, a way of thinking to best adapt to these circumstances because of its flexibility and open-mindedness. On the one hand, focusing on the story (the storyboard and storyworld or transmedia universe) may make it possible to reflect critically on the interdependence of all media and their interconnections. On the other hand, thinking first about/prioritizing the story over a specific medium (and subsequently, a concrete genre with its guidelines) may make it possible to best

adapt to the constant change and unpredictability in production processes or product cycles.

### 3. Methodology

With the aim of testing all these transmedia ideals, logic and values for journalism, we have selected legacy media from the Newsnet project (2019-2022) to analyse its interface design and content centered on handling of the pandemic. We have chosen those sections that archive, group and organize all items, news and products related to the topic because, apart from a planned transmedia approach that could be an interactive documentary, for example, we have observed, as described before, that transmedia core values, ideals and logic for journalism may be applied in everyday media work and its routines. Therefore, these sections may be created by a planned strategy (named accordingly) or may be created spontaneously by the requirement of the everyday media work – journalistic routines – and its necessities, and both may create storyworlds.

We have been observing selected legacy media since the 1st December 2019 and, so decided – as explained before – to centre the focus of our analysis on those sections that archive, group and organize all items, news and products related to the topic. Since then, we have dedicated at least every weekend to analysing and taking relevant notes on the interface design as well as the creation and evolution of related content. This long and meticulous process has allowed us to analyse and observe the evolution in the interface design of both the general sections and subsections as well as the specific sections of each content. Thus, we have focused on analysing and observing processes as well as product cycles. Sections dating from 1st December 2019 to 30 September 2022 include:

- “La crisis del Coronavirus” (*El País, Elpais.es*, 2022a), “Coronavirus-Covid-19” (*El País, Elpais.es*, 2022b).
- “Especial coronavirus” (*El Mundo, Elmundo.es*, 2022a); “Lo último del coronavirus: Directo, etc.” (*El Mundo, Elmundo.es*, 2021); “Coronavirus” (*El Mundo, Elmundo.es*, 2022b); “Covid-19” (*El Mundo, Elmundo.es*, 2022c); “Ciencia y Salud” (*El Mundo, Elmundo.es*, 2022d).
- “Coronavirus” (*Eldiario.es*, 2022); “El virus que cambió nuestras vidas” (*Eldiario.es*, 2021).
- “Coronavirus hoy – última hora – en directo” (*La Vanguardia, Lavanguardia.es*, 2021a); “Europa ante la Covid” (*La Vanguardia, Lavanguardia.es*, 2021b); “Junior Report Coronavirus” (*La Vanguardia, Lavanguardia.es*, 2022).
- “Coronavirus” (*Elconfidencial.com*, 2022).
- “Coronavirus” (*ABC, Abc.es*, 2022).



Starting from these premises, more specific objectives of this research are to analyse and describe the use of languages, genres and formats, and strategies, resources and platforms for the creation, collaboration and distribution (*News Life Cycle*, Serrano-Tellería, Jin and Arroyo, 2019) of journalistic products on the subject of the pandemic; and to determine if a transmedia logic is followed. Likewise, we aim to propose a set of good practices that can be applied to other stories/products and media. For this, the field work mainly focuses on the analysis of two aspects: interface design and the creation and dissemination of content.

First, we applied two different analysis sheets, one for the analysis of the sections and another one for the analysis of products (every product or news item, independently). Both analysis sheets were based on a review of the literature and on 15 in-depth interviews carried out throughout 2019 with managers and professionals linked to innovation at 13 Spanish media companies (*Marca, El Confidencial, El Español, Agencia EFE, Lab RTVE, Vocento, Neutral, Eldiario.es, Castilla-La Mancha Media, El Desmarque, SER, COPE and Henneo*) (Serrano-Tellería and Calvo-Rubio, 2021).

Next, both sheets were tested with 13 stories published by the media organisations where the professionals who had participated in the interviews work. This study phase allowed us to adjust and optimize the coding of variables grouped into four dimensions: the channel, the autonomy of the content itself and the content contributed to the story, the adaptation to the medium and the promotion of participation (Serrano-Tellería and Calvo-Rubio, 2021).

Initially, these methodological tools were also tested with content sections and a sample consisting of nine stories relating to COVID-19 and inequality, published between 31 January and 1 July 2020 by five Spanish legacy media companies: *El Mundo, El País, Eldiario.es, La Vanguardia, El Confidencial* and *ABC* (Serrano-Tellería and Calvo-Rubio, 2021; Newsnet, 2019-2022).

We selected the stories using the search criteria “Covid19, Coronavirus” and divided them into three periods: 9 December 2020 to 14 March 2021; 15 March to 21 June 2021; and 22 June to 25 August 2021. This search provided 396,270 results. We then applied a probabilistic selection of a composite week, obtaining 3,339 results; and a second search term, “income inequality”, which gave 112 results. These periods correspond to the different phases defined as the lockdown, the first wave and the second wave. This initial research carried out as part of the Newsnet project allowed us to test the two analysis sheets; to obtain results, discussion issues and related conclusions; to share them with the interviewees; and to obtain further research complementary to this study.

As part of the overall Newsnet research project, we also employed the following methodologies: content analysis, social network analysis, consensus methods, nominal group technique, expert panels, discourse analysis, interviews and in-depth interviews. These allowed us to complement previous, current and ongoing research in this field. In this paper, we have obviously focused on the first methodology, as explained at the beginning.

#### 4. Results

In terms of the methodology employed, our approach was to start with a brief review of current theories and then to test the transmedia ideals, logic and values for journalism using selected case studies. We focused on processes (product cycles) and looking at the full story, storyworld or transmedia universe, which allowed us to adapt to the hybrid and/or transmedia journalism ecology and technological environment (characterised by the interdependence of all media: constant change, interconnection and unpredictability).

Choosing the sections that embraced all components or stories of the storyworld allowed us to analyse every product cycle as well as the overall universe.

By studying every product cycle (additions, comments, sharings, updates, etc.), as well as the creation and evolution of the storyworld or transmedia universe through the cited sections, allowed us to adapt and embrace the hybrid or transmedia ecology and technological environment; the constant change at different levels, from the product cycle to the work routines; the interconnection of all media and its relationships with the narratives and storytelling involved (languages, genres, formats); as well as the unpredictability of, again, the product cycle and the work routines. The constant change and unpredictability are also influencing work conditions and business models.

Initial, concluded and ongoing results all show that the media employ transmedia narratives or storyboards (languages, genres and formats), and that they use different resources, strategies and platforms to distribute content at different levels and at various interaction rhythms (from simple interactions such as hashtags, mentions or tags to more developed ones such as planning content integration) to create a proper storyworld or universe. This means that, despite starting with a single story with a specific narrative (language, genre and format), through the evolving, ongoing evolution of its product cycle, the legacy media studied have increasingly added and incorporated transmedia ideals, logic and values.

In this sense, we have mainly identified two type of stories and storyworlds or universes: either planned or evolving and spontaneous. The more elaborate ones employ a planned and strategic transmedia narrative or storyboard. Usually, they refer to semi-closed stories – the plot and outcome of the story are known – that have had prior planning in their preparation. In contrast to this type of production, spontaneous, evolving stories appear that acquire a transmedia character with the passing of events. This supports the hypothesis that we have proposed in this and in previous research as part of the Newsnet project: in addition to a planned and strategic production model, it is also appropriate to refer to a transmedia logic, as well as its ideals and values, that may be applied in everyday media work or journalistic routines.

Regarding the interface design, the media also group items, stories and products following a similar pattern, in planned and strategic specific sections as well as through evolving, ongoing, spontaneous strategies and resources (hashtags, mentions, tags, headlines, etc.). For instance, we may find specific

content sections named accordingly, and previously planned storyworlds and universes that are usually clearly highlighted on the homepage, initial page or front webpage. Previously planned storyworlds or universes are usually mainly interactive documentaries, as well as, to a lesser extent, the so-called “specials” about a topic and/or area that the media wanted to focus on more closely, mainly through the intersection of data journalism and infographics.

As the case studies proposed suggest, all legacy media have at least one specific section that has been created with the purpose of grouping together all stories related to the COVID-19 Pandemic. This content ranged from daily and fast news (all legacy media) to special content such as (from most to least frequently used): data journalism and infographics, audio-podcasts, short videos and brief documentaries. The most common method employed to organize content in this specific section was through headlines, coloured banners, informative highlights and sub-sections within the main section. The hierarchy was determined by font size and its position on the page of the website.

In the case of evolving, spontaneous stories, the transmedia actions employed and developed to go deeper into stories and start creating and evolving a storyworld (combining various narratives and storyboards) included external and internal links; hashtags, mentions, tags and comments; pictures and galleries; audio-visual content and its diverse formats (trailers, long/short videos), audio segments and podcasts. Also, data journalism and infographics were employed, as well as newsletters. To a lesser extent, we found audios were used to complement content and stories, including witness statements, declarations, etc. In this spontaneous growth process of content and stories, both headlines and menus were employed to organize the storyworlds and universes, while hashtags, mentions and tags were first used to group them.

In this regard, key aspects or features include the importance of interface design, information architecture and usability in relation to the emotion and experience of both journalists and collaborative and proactive users, and how to simplify ongoing interaction and the growth and evolution of the information, data, content and audience engagement. We have to bear in mind that when a storyworld or universe is planned in advance and created by an initial and tested storyboard, its interface design may be changed depending on the results obtained (tests, etc.). However, embracing transmedia ideals, logic and values and incorporating them into daily media tasks and journalistic routines requires spontaneity and being open to the unexpected.

This spontaneity may, on the one hand, be very creative and innovative, which requires a lot of intuition in the process of creation. As a counterpart, on the other hand, it will require specialized knowledge of the information architecture and usability. In this process, we may lose our audience if we fail to provide them with clear and reliable navigation that offers them a positive and meaningful experience. In the economy of attention, given the abundance of information, we may lose our audience with just one wrong click or with a brief interruption in their experience of the story; and even more so if this failure interferes with their interaction with, and immersion in, the sto-

ryworld, which requires a clear interconnection between all components or stories that make it up.

Another essential requirement is to take time to reflect deeply on the best medium and overall media to use in creating, interacting and disseminating the content. Simplifying means looking closely at the design of the interface that facilitates a useful experience between media, journalists and co-/pro-users, in order to build and maintain a meaningful relationship with the community based on authenticity, credibility and transparency, in a unique storyworld or universe. In other words, it is better to take time to reflect on the selected medium and/or media rather than to act impulsively. The story should be at the centre and the media should serve the story's goal or purpose.

In order to give a few prior examples to this study, transmedia core values, ideals and logic may be implemented in the following situations: when a story needs to be explained (as in the case of disclosing the entire process involved in the “Panama Papers” by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism, 2016; and “The Marshall Project”, 2013); when a story is disseminated using different aesthetics (creating trailers of complex infographics and announcing them on Twitter, an example of which is the non-fiction series *Datadista*, 2021); when collecting audience information, contributions etc. through a hashtag (*#Jetaparking*, Sánchez Hidalgo, 2018; *#MeToo*, global); or when raising awareness of the difficulties being experienced by a medium and asking for support by crowdsourcing to develop a project etc. (*Lamarea.com*, *Publico.es*, *elDiario.es*).

Concerning case studies proposed about COVID-19 and the coronavirus, we perceived a rather chaotic process of creation, distribution and organization of content, due to the desire to be the fastest – which is understandable given the uncertainty and concern among the media in the early stages of the pandemic. Despite this, legacy media emerged as sources of reliable information and fact checking to counter both mis- and dis-information. Once the early months of the pandemic had passed, legacy media soon started to employ transmedia strategies to group and organize information and content, using hashtags, mentions, tags, newsletters and sections to look more closely at a topic or area, with external and internal links to contextualize and look more deeply at the content or story, as well through different media and resources such as videos, infographics, data journalism and podcasts. At the beginning of the pandemic period, the accelerated pace of production was characterized by constant updates through extensions and links. Later, they employed and developed “specials” to look more deeply into content and stories.

In this sense, considering transmedia core values, ideals and logic implies taking into account all available media, genres and formats – that is to say, narratives and storytelling that may require appropriate storyboard and interface design to deploy them properly. It means testing audience engagement every step of the way when we decide to create and build storyworlds or transmedia universes – both planned and spontaneous and evolving – in order to offer a full and meaningful interactive experience. Some key strate-

gies include simplifying this experience and reaching the highest level of high quality usability through an appropriate interface design. It can be easily achieved through the accurate use of colours, clear and specific menus, and solid navigation throughout the storytelling experience. As in videogames, audiences want to interact, immerse themselves, contribute, learn and play, so they need consistency in usability patterns that allow them also to be part of the community. In this sense, we should consider the different levels of media literacy among users.

Moreover, developing a strong script – in which the journalist’s story is grounded in the core values of journalism (the Five Ws, etc.) and is based on its deontological ethical code – requires knowledge of how the information architecture works, mainly in terms of the foundation on which the semantic web is built (hashtags, tags, comments, labels, etc.). It should offer resources and strategies (the semantic web mentioned, and SEO indexing) to allow the story to grow and be disseminated, as well as to provide the deserved hierarchy both for the transmedia universe and the inner semantic web as well (indexing). However, most of all and as a foregone truth, high quality content should be the overriding priority. After all, audience, democracy and society itself is urging journalism to provide such content.

## 5. Discussion

Apart from a planned strategic production model with detailed resources and strategies, transmedia production also means a logic, a group of ideals and values to bear in mind – a way of thinking – that may be applied to everyday media work – routines – at different levels and at various interaction rhythms, employing all available media: genres, languages and formats, narratives and storytelling, storyboard and all affordable devices. Thus, we may describe three models: planned, spontaneous and hybrid. Our proposed discussion is based on the adequacy of these transmedia ideals, logic and values to journalism, with the aim of adapting to the current media ecology and enhancing the profession, addressing the need to ensure the continued relevance of journalism, and its ethical code and core values.

As we previously explained in the brief review of the current situation, some of these ideals, logic and values were already present as fundamental to journalism and its ethical and deontological codes. In this sense, we would argue that this is the process of natural adaptation, of technological appropriation, between old and new media. Furthermore, as we suggested at the beginning, we consider that in the transmedia logic, transmedia storytelling addresses the need to ensure the continued relevance of journalism.

## 6. Conclusions

Thus, based on a literature review, case studies and interviews (Newsnet), we propose that transmedia core values, ideals and logic represent a suitable

framework to embrace in everyday media work, and specifically in journalism, to adapt, innovate and try to overcome its crises and challenges, as well as to take advantage of its opportunities and possibilities. This means that the current media ecology and technological environment demand media literacy both from the perspective of content creators as well as from the perspective of pro-/co-users. All require a critical use of technology. All demand to take the best of every medium to create, consume and interact with a story or a universe, by selecting the most appropriate genre, language, narrative, format, application and platform to provide a full experience.

Embracing the transmedia approach allows us, on the one hand, to adapt to the hybrid or transmedia ecology and technological environment (the interdependence of all media: constant change, interconnection and unpredictability), because we prioritise the whole story (the storyworld or transmedia universe) over a specific medium or genre. Therefore, we may have an open way of thinking, a mind-set, to choose the best alternative. And on the other hand, transmedia production – whether planned, ongoing and spontaneous, or hybrid – also means an ideal, a logic, a group of values to bear in mind when constructing a story. To adapt storytelling to media production, bearing in mind all possible aesthetics, genres, languages, formats, resources, semiotics and strategies is a fundamental step, because audiences are used to consuming media at different levels, at various interaction rhythms, and using different devices, and want the best of all of them to enjoy a full, interactive and meaningful experience. Thus the transmedia approach allows us to free ourselves from technological determinism, and at the same time to make the best use of it when we put the story and the core values of journalism first, at the heart of our aims.

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