
MONOGRÀFIC

Presentation

The never-ending challenge: Exploring the renewed impact of digital technologies on journalism

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It's always the same story. While the journalism profession is finally learning how to harness digital and data technology, artificial intelligence (AI) has surged ahead, leaving journalism back at its starting point: needing to rethink, once again, how journalists can leverage disruptive technology like AI to ensure quality journalism without jeopardizing the social value and long-term sustainability of the news media.

Since the advent of online publishing in the 1990s, the recent history of journalism has been one of continuous technological challenges for the media industry, offering as many opportunities as uncertainties. In the fast-paced digital age, technology has become an integral part of news gathering and dissemination, and journalists have embraced innovative tools while steadily normalizing new professional routines. Now, in the 2020s, AI technologies suddenly pose a new, titanic challenge to journalism, heralding a profound impact on journalism and the media industry as a whole.

Over the last few years, the increasing abundance of digital data has paved the way for data-driven journalism. Journalists have learned to analyse vast volumes of information, identify patterns and extract relevant insights. This data-driven approach has enhanced storytelling by providing journalists with a deeper understanding of complex issues, and facilitating the creation of engaging and informative content. Additionally, digital tools have helped

journalists to fact-check information, minimizing the risk of spreading misinformation or fake news.

Digital technologies have also enabled media organizations to personalize content based on user preferences and behaviours. Through machine-learning algorithms, media platforms have learned to recommend tailored news articles, videos and various forms of multimedia content, enhancing the user experience and increasing engagement. This personalized and immersive approach has not only benefited consumers by delivering relevant content but has also allowed media outlets to cultivate loyal audiences and improve their revenue streams through targeted advertising.

AI has brought increased efficiency and automation to the media industry. Journalists can now employ AI-powered tools to gather and analyse vast amounts of data quickly and accurately. Machine-learning algorithms can comb through extensive databases and provide valuable insights, enabling journalists to make more informed decisions in their reporting. This efficiency allows journalists to focus on more critical tasks such as investigative reporting, while AI handles repetitive and time-consuming processes.

Moving forward, the impact of technology, particularly AI, promises to once again have a multifaceted and transformative effect on the media and journalism industry. AI has brought efficiency, data-driven insights and personalised content, enabling journalists to enhance their storytelling capabilities and engage audiences effectively. However, challenges related to biases in algorithms, ethical considerations and job security must be addressed. Striking the right balance between technology and human involvement is key to harnessing the benefits of AI while upholding the fundamental principles of journalism. As the media industry continues to evolve, it is vital for journalists to adapt and navigate the technological landscape to ensure the integrity and relevance of journalism in the digital age.

The technological advances of recent years, including the popularisation of AI through tools and generative platforms like ChatGPT or Midjourney, confirm that the pace of organisational changes in the present and near future will be highly determined by them. The ability to interpret and adapt a company's products or services to technological innovations should now be at the forefront of the hard skills required for anyone in managerial positions, as well as for any employees for whom technology also offers opportunities to do things differently and who risk being replaced by (more reliable) machines or algorithms. Change and innovation are here to stay, especially for media companies, which face profound changes because users and audiences are attracted to novelties and are interested in new ways to consume all kinds of content, or the same content in different ways. Just as digitalisation brought genuine disruption to the media sector, AI has once again come to shake its very foundations.

Despite these facts, there are reasons that could explain why the media sector, while seemingly different on the surface, will endure. The first reason is that its product and value chain, as Negroponte (1995) pointed out in

Being Digital, are fully divisible into bits, making it more prepared than others to embrace and leverage the digital world. However, this aspect has perhaps not been sufficiently emphasised in recent decades, as the sector grappled with the consequences of digitalisation and the implosion of the traditional advertising-based business model. Now is the time to re-evaluate the entire sector from a new perspective of opportunity and alignment with the digital realm. Moreover, and more importantly, the media's function, which fulfils society's right to be informed and helps interpret reality and facts, is more crucial than ever. Political polarisation, commercial interests and ideological movements pose real threats to our societies and way of life.

To succeed, news media companies need to reinvent themselves, embrace the opportunities offered by technology, and redefine their role in contemporary societies. This entails training professional staff, building multi-disciplinary teams to leverage digital possibilities, and re-establishing the ethical perspective that should always guide their daily work. Serving citizens requires upholding high-quality standards and maintaining strong commitment.

That was the ultimate goal of the JOLT project (<<http://joltetn.eu>>), a Marie-Sklodowska-Curie European Training Network funded by the European Commission dedicated to exploring the potential of digital and data technology for journalism. Developed from 2018 to 2022, this ambitious initiative comprised fourteen PhD projects and two research projects aimed at providing valuable theoretical insights, technical advancements and best-practice guidelines for the journalism and news industry. By bringing together researchers from diverse disciplines such as journalism, communication, data science, computer science and electronic engineering, JOLT collaborated with academic and industry partners across the European Union. Through its comprehensive approach, JOLT explored the transformative power of technology in journalism and drove innovation in the field.

This special issue of *Anàlisi* adds to our knowledge of the above topics by presenting a set of eight research papers selected from those presented at the JOLT-CICOM Conference "Harnessing Data and Technology for Journalism", held at the School of Communication of the University of Navarra (Pamplona, Spain) from 22 to 24 September 2021. These articles, mostly empirical and cross-national in perspective, look closely at issues such as perceptions of journalism and trust in different national contexts (Sierra, Serrano-Puche and Rodríguez-Virgili, 2023); collaborative journalism and normative journalism practices in Latin America (Mesquita, 2023); the challenges faced by news publishers as they adapt to the mobile and interpersonal nature of WhatsApp (Carpes and Moreu, 2023); the typology and trends of digital-native news media (Kaufmann-Argueta and Negredo, 2023; Negredo et al., 2023); transparency in news content, specifically analysing methods used in Spanish data journalism (Arias Robles et al., 2023); the political risks associated with agreements between online platforms and advertisers, investigating the potential dependency created by such agreements (Papaevangelou and Smyrnaiois, 2023); and the relationship between immersive media and

social change, exploring how immersive media can foster emotional connections and drive social transformation (Baia Reis, 2023). This selection of research studies helps us better understand the keys to transforming journalism, which, far from being finished, promises new and exciting chapters in the years to come.

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Perceptions of journalism and trust in news among traditionalist and digitalist media users: A comparative analysis of Denmark, Spain and USA

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Abstract

This study analyses trust in news and the relevance granted to journalism by different user profiles in three countries (Denmark, Spain and the United States), each from a different media system as identified by Hallin and Mancini (2004). For this research we used two online surveys (2019, 2020) carried out by the Reuters Institute with more than 2000 people in each country. Our results show that users who consume news through newspapers, radios and television trust news more than those whose main source of information are digital devices. Traditionalist users also have a higher degree of satisfaction with the classic functions of journalism: making the powerful accountable (adversarial function), disseminating current information (disseminating function) and explaining current events to the public (interpretative function). There are differences between countries, especially in the evaluation of the adversarial function. Spaniards, who belong to the polarized pluralist system, are the ones who worst value its fulfilment among their country's media.

Keywords: journalism; trust; media repertoires; digital technology; media systems

Resum. *Percepcions del periodisme i la confiança en les notícies entre usuaris de mitjans tradicionalistes i digitals: una anàlisi comparativa de Dinamarca, Espanya i els EUA*

Aquest estudi analitza la confiança en les notícies i la rellevància atorgada al periodisme per diferents perfils d'usuaris en tres països (Dinamarca, Espanya i els Estats Units), pertanyents a cadascun dels sistemes mediàtics identificats per Hallin i Mancini (2004). Per a aquesta recerca utilitzem dues enquestes en línia (2019 i 2020) realitzades per l'Institut Reuters a més de dues mil persones en cada país. Els nostres resultats mostren que els usuaris que consumeixen notícies a través de diaris, ràdios i televisió confien més en les notícies que aquells que tenen com a principal font d'informació els dispositius digitals. Els usuaris tradicionalistes també tenen un major grau de satisfacció amb les funcions clàssiques del periodisme: vigilar els poderosos (funció de «gos guardià»), difondre informació d'actualitat (funció disseminadora) i explicar l'actualitat al públic (funció interpretativa). Existeixen diferències entre països, especialment en la valoració de la funció de «gos guardià». Els espanyols, que pertanyen al sistema pluralista polaritzat, són els que pitjor valoren el seu compliment entre els mitjans de comunicació del seu país.

Paraules clau: periodisme; confiança; repertoris mediàtics; tecnologia digital; sistemes mediàtics

Resumen. *Percepciones del periodismo y la confianza en las noticias entre usuarios de medios tradicionalistas y digitales: un análisis comparativo de Dinamarca, España y EE. UU.*

Este estudio analiza la confianza en las noticias y la relevancia otorgada al periodismo por diferentes perfiles de usuarios en tres países (Dinamarca, España y Estados Unidos), pertenecientes a cada uno de los sistemas mediáticos identificados por Hallin y Mancini (2004). Para esta investigación utilizamos dos encuestas en línea (2019 y 2020) realizadas por el Instituto Reuters a más de dos mil personas en cada país. Nuestros resultados muestran que los usuarios que consumen noticias a través de periódicos, radios y televisión confían más en las noticias que aquellos cuya principal fuente de información son los dispositivos digitales. Los usuarios tradicionalistas también tienen un mayor grado de satisfacción con las funciones clásicas del periodismo: vigilar a los poderosos (función de «perro guardián»), difundir información de actualidad (función diseminadora) y explicar la actualidad al público (función interpretativa). Existen diferencias entre países, especialmente en la valoración de la función de «perro guardián». Los españoles, que pertenecen al sistema pluralista polarizado, son los que peor valoran su cumplimiento entre los medios de comunicación de su país.

Palabras clave: periodismo; confianza; repertorios mediáticos; tecnología digital; sistemas mediáticos

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the internet has unquestionably risen to prominence as a space for interpersonal and public communication, marking a turning point in communicative practices and social interaction (Jordan, 2013). From a personal point of view, in addition to the traditional face-to-face context citizens have in the digital environment a new space for their personal development and socialization, with its own peculiarities given its

technological conditions (Serrano-Puche, 2013). As far as institutions are concerned, digital technology has made it possible to open new channels for corporate communication and, in the case of journalism, this is just the latest technological innovation that the profession has witnessed throughout its history since the first printed publications appeared (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2009; Sánchez Aranda, 2020).

According to a media ecology perspective (Postman, 1970), different types of media are interrelated, so that the emergence, evolution, hybridization or extinction of communication interfaces and practices can be understood through an *intermedia* dimension (media as species) and an *environmental* dimension (media as environments) when an ecological metaphor is applied to them (Scolari, 2015). On the one hand, media are like “species” that live in the same ecosystem and establish relationships with each other. On the other hand, technologies – from writing to digital media – create environments that affect the subjects who use them by shaping their perception and cognition. As McLuhan’s (1964) well-known aphorism states, “The medium is the message.” In other words, the media influence society not only through the content they convey, but also through the characteristics of the medium itself.

Against a context of continuous technological change in communication, it is still unknown how certain individual elements, such as consumer profile or nationality, influence perceptions of journalism and trust in news. The impact of technological change and the pandemic on journalism has had a notable effect on the trust and perception that citizens have of news and journalism. The growing polarisation of opinions and a distrust in the media has also led to greater fragmentation of the media and a reduction of shared points of reference.

Instead of relying on a set of reliable and shared news sources, citizens often turn to selective news sources that reinforce their own opinions (Rodríguez-Virgili, Sierra and Serrano-Puche, 2022), leading to greater division in society. This situation has been exacerbated by the pandemic, in which the media faced an increase in fake news and the consequences it had on citizens’ trust (Salaverría et al., 2020). Resolving these challenges lies not only in improving transparency, but also in educating people on the importance of trustworthy and quality journalism (Medina, Étayo-Pérez and Serrano-Puche, 2023). Moreover, as a staunch defender of democracy, journalism must continue to play its pivotal role in holding power to account, and in bringing to light issues that are of vital concern to the people. In this paper, we examine how overall satisfaction with the performance of journalistic roles is related to individual trust in news. Three countries are analysed, Denmark, Spain and the United States, each corresponding to one of the three different media systems categorized by Hallin and Mancini (2004): the North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model (Denmark), the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model (Spain), and the North Atlantic or Liberal Model (United States).

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the primary devices used by users to consume news in Denmark, Spain and the United States?
- RQ2: Are there significant differences in the perception of the relevance of journalism among users belonging to different profiles of news consumption?
- RQ3: Is there a difference in levels of trust in news between those who consume news through newspapers, radios and television and those whose main source of information is digital devices?
- RQ4: How does the degree of satisfaction with the performance of journalistic functions affect levels of trust in the news?
- RQ5: Are there differences in these issues, considering that the countries analysed belong to different media systems?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. *News access*

Nowadays, there are several ways to get information about current affairs (Martínez-Costa, Sánchez-Blanco and Serrano-Puche, 2020). A variety of news sources are available to audiences, including print, audio-visual, digital and mobile platforms, creating a “news supermarket” in which perceived value and usefulness are determinant factors of users’ daily decisions (Schröder, 2015). Citizens evaluate what the media can offer them in a given situation, how they complement each other, and the emotional and social impact of their choices (Madianou and Miller, 2012). Thus, audiences routinely combine different technologies, brands and journalistic genres to satisfy their needs for information, opinion formation, sociability and entertainment (Hasebrink and Dömeier, 2012). This combination of different sources is one of the keys to media consumption, and although in some ways it has always been associated with news consumption, in the digital age “the emerging patterns of cross-media use are far more seamless and blurred, hybrid and complex than in the past” (Bjur et al., 2013: 15).

This is what the “media repertoire” perspective explores, which can be defined as “the set of media that a person uses regularly [and] can be viewed as relatively stable patterns of media practices across media” (Hasebrink and Hepp, 2017: 367). Aspects such as the familiarity that the citizen already has with the medium, the relative advantage of its use (greater benefits than costs), the fact that the medium fits into the person’s daily routines and lifestyle, its accessibility, and social pressure are all reasons that may lead users to choose a news medium or use it more frequently (Swart, Peters and Broersma, 2017). This leads to diversity in the internal architecture of repertoires, which may oscillate between traditional and digital media, and may be complementary or exclusive. At the same time, some repertoires are built around

one medium (e.g., TV), while others are constructed according to the type of content (news), depending on whether the user prefers one element or another (Kim, 2016). All of this shows the complexity of motivations and choices in media consumption relating to daily habits and what users find valuable (Schröder and Kobbernagel, 2010; Costera Meijer, 2013).

Thus, individual and structural factors influence the configuration of media repertoire, and contextualise it socially and spatiotemporally (Peters and Schröder, 2018). While it is true that the particular media constellation revolving around one individual may be quite different to that of another (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007), research identifies clusters of shared media often associated with particular characteristics of users, depending on factors such as gender, age, education, income level, political leanings, etc. (Lee and Chyi, 2014). Their configuration is also influenced by the characteristics of the media system of each country, as highlighted by Adoni et al. (2017), who coordinated an analysis of media repertoires from ten European countries. Precisely because of the specificity of the elements that shape media repertoires, research findings cannot be easily transferred to other environments. In any case, several studies on media repertoires confirm the complementarity of the use of traditional media and new platforms, even if the predominance of the former is increasingly losing ground (Molyneux, 2019; Taneja et al., 2012; Yuan, 2011).

2.2. *Functions of Journalism*

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, in the now classic book *The Elements of Journalism* (2001), elaborated the essential principles of journalism. These include a commitment to truth (coupled with the discipline of verification), loyalty to the citizenry, independence from those being reported on, ensuring completeness and proportionality of news, providing a forum for public criticism and compromise, and serving “as an independent check on power” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001: 112).

Among these principles, there are some that are more highly valued by both professionals and citizens. The watchdog role, for example, arises from the classical liberal view of the power relationship between government and society as a mechanism for enhancing accountability (Norris, 2014). This task of scrutinizing institutions and elites to expose irregularities (Schultz, 1998) is related to the characterization of the press as the “fourth estate”. In addition to the task of monitoring the powerful, journalism’s institutional status is linked to the social function of fulfilling citizens’ need to understand current events. This analytical task makes no sense if it is not accompanied by the informative function itself (keeping the citizen informed about what is happening), but it goes beyond the mere transmission of current events and is linked to a ritual vision of communication (Carey, 1989).

Following Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), journalism has three key functions: the adversarial function of controlling the powerful, the dissemination function

of immediacy, and the interpretive function of understanding. However, digitisation has led to a rethinking of the validity of these paradigms (Peters and Broersma, 2013, 2017). Journalists must incorporate new techniques and work dynamics not only in production and distribution, but also in their relationship with the audience (Mellado and Hermida, 2023). Moreover, the digital environment favours new intermediaries that extend beyond traditional media actors and borders (González-Tosat and Sádaba-Chalezquer, 2021; Hallin, Mellado and Mancini, 2023; Karlsson, Ferrer Conill and Örnebring, 2023).

As McLuhan (1964) argued, the characteristics of any medium have social implications that may affect citizens' perceptions of journalism itself and the functions it is called to perform, beyond the content conveyed. With technological and sociocultural changes, the question arises as to whether everyday citizens value journalistic work for a healthy democracy as much as the academic community does (Carlson, Robinson and Lewis, 2021; McNair, 2012; Schudson, 2008), especially as journalism is now delivered through both traditional media (press, radio, television) and digital devices.

2.3. Media Trust

The performance of journalism's duties according to generally accepted professional standards is the basis for the media's trustworthiness. As Lee (2010) noted in examining the predictors of trust in the media, the truthfulness of the information disseminated, impartiality, the media's independence from external actors, and its commitment to the interests of the public are some of the variables associated with the credibility of the media that make it trustworthy.

Trust is one of the factors that influence people's relationship with the news and therefore affect their consumption of information (Tsfati and Ariely, 2014; Fletcher and Park, 2017). Therefore, and in a context in which traditional media have seen their centrality in the public space displaced to coexist with other news actors (Chadwick, 2017), trust in news has been a relevant issue in academic research on journalism in recent decades (Jakobsson and Stiernstedt, 2023; Kohring and Matthes, 2007; Meyer, 1988; Strömbäck et al., 2020). According to some previous research (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019; Vara-Miguel, 2018), those who inform themselves through traditional channels show higher trust in news and media than those who inform themselves primarily through social media or digital-native media.

The media cannot enforce trust but must earn it by being credible. Therefore, quality is a necessary ingredient to ensure credibility of information and thus trust in the media system as a reliable interpreter of social reality (Palau Sampio and Gómez Mompert, 2017). Trust is a question of attitude, the result of a cognitive process in which the person subjectively examines and evaluates the qualities of an information source (be it a media organisation or a journalist) or the content of its messages (Serrano-Puche, 2017).

However, it is worth considering both the political-cultural context in which this relationship develops, and the citizen's expectations of the media,

as these influence their perceptions and attitudes toward journalism. Previous research such as studies by Aalberg, van Aelst and Curran (2010) and Brüggemann et al. (2014) have consistently demonstrated that national traits influence media systems, following the seminal work by Hallin and Mancini (2004). These authors defined three models (the democratic corporatist model, the polarized pluralist model, and the liberal model) by applying four main dimensions of analysis: the circulation of the press and the structure of media markets; the degree of linkage or “political parallelism” between mass media, political parties and other civil society institutions such as trade unions; the level of professionalism of journalists; and the degree of state interventionism in the media. Following these assumptions, we expect to find clear national differences between those surveyed.

In the case of Spain, previous research shows that scepticism towards the media is higher among young people, those disinterested in current affairs, and those who prefer social networks to keep up to date with the news (Pérez-Escoda and Pedrero-Esteban, 2021; Vara-Miguel, 2020). Based on a representative survey of the Spanish population (n=1,000), Masip, Suau and Ruiz-Caballero (2020) point out that ideology plays an important role in media trust, and they observe a clear polarisation in consumption, giving rise to differentiated media ecosystems according to ideology, which is consistent with other studies (López-Rico, González-Esteban and Hernández-Martínez, 2020) and corresponds to a polarised pluralistic media system such as the Spanish one. Based on the Digital News Report, Moreno-Moreno and Sanjurjo-San-Martín (2020) also conclude that users who place themselves politically towards the right trust less in the journalistic brands they consume and, therefore, consumption is moderated, while users who place themselves on the left of the ideological spectrum are more faithful and trusting in their consumption of the media.

Regarding research on media consumption and trust in Denmark, authors such as Schröder, Blach-Ørsten and Kæmsgaard (2020) and Syvertsen et al. (2014) propose to integrate it into a new “Nordic media system” detached from the original democratic corporatist model suggested by Hallin and Mancini (2004). They point out that there are salient news consumption commonalities that are specific to the Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland), such as preferred sources of news, pathways to news, paying for online news, and trust in the news. According to Schröder, Blach-Ørsten and Kæmsgaard (2020), the Nordic countries stand out as a bastion for print newspapers. This conclusion is reinforced when considering their willingness to pay for digital news. Moreover, these countries exhibit a remarkable level of brand loyalty, particularly when compared to the Southern system. Additionally, the Nordic region is renowned for its high and unwavering confidence in political institutions and its societal trust as a whole, which extends to its trust in the media.

Finally, the report “American Views 2020: Trust, Media and Democracy” (Gallup and Knight Foundation, 2020) uses a survey of 20,000 American

adults to provide insights into media trust in the country. Despite the high value that Americans place on the media's traditional roles in society, such as providing accurate news and holding powerful interests accountable, citizens are increasingly critical of the media's performance in fulfilling these objectives. Although 81% of respondents believe that the news media is either "critical" or "very important" to democracy, an increasing number of citizens perceive the media as underperforming in these areas. This declining trust is linked to a growing perception of political bias in the news media, with perceived bias rising substantially from 62% in 2007 to 83% in 2020 (Gallup and Knight Foundation, 2020). This phenomenon is exacerbated by both conjunctural phenomena, such as the proliferation of fake news during the Covid-19 pandemic (Salaverría et al., 2020), and the transformation of the media ecosystem, which affords users a high degree of choice (Van Aelst et al., 2017) and results in a battle between various actors to capture their attention (Wu, 2016). Among these new media actors, partisan and alternative sources of information proliferate (Andersen, Shehata and Andersson, 2021), which precisely rely on attacking traditional media, accusing them of being unreliable, as part of their editorial strategy (Thorbjørnsrud and Figenschou, 2022). Campaigns are also carried out by populist political entities to discredit and delegitimize journalistic work (Carlson, Robinson and Lewis, 2021; Van Dalen, 2021). All of this contributes to increasing scepticism, and even hostility, towards the media (Gunther et al., 2017).

3. Method

3.1. *Design and procedure*

This study is based on the annual survey conducted by YouGov for the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report (DNR), an international study of digital information consumption sponsored by Oxford University since 2012 and published in Spain by the University of Navarra since 2014. The fieldwork was carried out between the end of January and the beginning of February in both 2019 and 2020, and is now available online at Reuters' website.¹ The YouGov organization selected about 2,000 users in each country to assemble national panels to survey digital news consumption. DNR participants are adult internet users who have consumed news in the past month and are representative of the online population by sociodemographic and geographic criteria. The data were weighted by age, gender, region, news consumption and education level using official census and industry-accepted majority data to reflect the population of the countries analysed.

Since the DNR does not always use the same list of questions, this study used the 2019 and 2020 surveys, which required an adjustment to the statistical tests performed. Specifically, the surveys included digital users from

1. <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report>>.

Denmark (2019: n=2011; 2020: n=2061), Spain (2019: n=2005; 2020: n=2006), and the United States (2019: n=2012; 2020: n=2055).

It is worth noting that the survey is limited by the samples used. Since the survey was conducted online, it is not representative of the population as a whole, but rather of the digital population. In addition, as with any survey, respondents' recollection or perception (self-reported data) does not always match actual use of the media and social networks analysed. Conversely, questions are asked about the stated preferences or motivations of the digital users.

A final notable limitation due to the sample would be that the study presented here is an analysis limited to 2019 and 2020. As mentioned earlier, the questions change from year to year, so the scope of the results in this sense is limited. Future studies should conduct longitudinal analyses (preferably with panel data) using other data sources.

3.2. Questionnaire and variables

The online questionnaire contains a wide range of questions about news consumption. Specifically for this study, a statistical analysis was performed on the following questions, which were correlated with variables related to the user's country of origin and profile. This last variable was created depending on the preferred news sources. Those who consume news using traditional sources (newspapers, radio or TV) were assigned to the "*traditionalist*" category, while those who consume mainly digital devices (smartphones, tablets or computers) were assigned to the "*digitalist*" category.

The questions chosen were:

- How important, if at all, do you think independent journalism is for the proper functioning of society? (Users had to show their opinion by choosing from a Likert scale ranging from "extremely important" to "not at all important")
- We are now going to ask you whether you think the news media in your country is doing a good job or not. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: (Users had to show their opinion by choosing from a Likert scale ranging from "extremely important" to "not at all important")
 - The news media monitors and scrutinises powerful people and businesses
 - The news media keeps me up to date with what's going on
 - The news media helps me understand the news of the day
- I think you can trust most news most of the time. (Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree")
- I think I can trust most of the news I consume most of the time. (Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree")
- I think I can trust news in social media most of the time. (Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree")

3.3. Data analysis

First, we identified the DNR questions related to the aspect we wanted to measure: perceptions of the role of journalism, trust in news, and level of satisfaction with the performance of journalistic duties. Since the DNR is a more general study than the one presented here, we selected the variables we were interested in, so as to limit the responses to the specific topic of our research. Because the responses were from a survey, the data were subjected to a reliability test. In all cases, Cronbach's α was above .73.

4. Results

A preliminary descriptive analysis shows significant national differences in the data analysed. In general terms, the profile of "traditionalists" is the least numerous and shows the least variation. This is not the case with the profile of "digitalists", where notable differences can be observed. As Table 1 shows, the majority profile in the three countries is the "half and half", consisting of users who migrate easily backwards and forwards between the two; the variations in this profile are close to ten percentage points. However, this difference does not seem to be in line with internet penetration, as the United States, which has lower penetration than Denmark, obtains higher values. Notwithstanding their volume, we have decided to focus the attention of our research on the first two profiles ("traditionalists" and "digitalists") as we believe that, since they are exclusive values, they will offer a greater contrast that will lead to more solid conclusions.

Table 1. Internet penetration and user type per country

Country	Internet penetration	Digitalist users ^a	Traditionalist users ^b	Half and half users ^c
Denmark	97.9%	30.4%	20.4%	49.2%
Spain	91.9%	24.2%	23.1%	52.7%
United States	94%	33.4%	21.6%	45%

^a Users who mostly access news through electronic devices (smartphones, tablets and computers).

^b Users accessing news via traditional sources (newspapers, radio, TV).

^c Users who migrate easily backwards and forwards between the two.

Source: Internet World Stats and adapted from Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey (2020), conducted by YouGov.

Several different t-tests were conducted to compare responses to the variables on relevance of journalism, fulfilment of journalistic roles, trust in news in general, self-consumed news, and social media news between two groups ("traditionalists" and "digitalists"). Of the five variables analysed, the differences were not statistically significant in two of them: confidence in self-consumed news and fulfilment of journalistic roles. The means of the two groups analysed for the other three variables (journalism relevance, trust in all news, and trust in social media news) showed a significant difference. Regarding journalism relevance for the correct functioning of society, "digitalists" give

greater relevance to journalism ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 0.88$) than “traditionalists” ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.02$); $t(2478) = 11.49$, $p < .001$. Looking at trust in news, “traditionalists” show greater trust for all news ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.11$) and social media news ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.03$) than “digitalists”, ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.13$); $t(2478) = -3.45$, $p < .001$ for most news and ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.05$); $t(2478) = -6.64$, $p < .001$ for social media news. As mentioned, trust in self-consumed news and the fulfilment of journalistic roles were the only variables where no statistically significant differences were found.

Analysis of the differences between profiles regarding the degree of satisfaction with journalistic functions yields interesting results. When comparing satisfaction with the adversarial, interpretative and disseminating functions, the first two show statistically significant differences. “Traditionalists” seem to be on average more satisfied with the degree of fulfilment of the adversarial function ($M = 2.67$, $SD = .97$) than “digitalists” ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1$); $t(2622) = -.62$, $p = .01$. The same is true for the interpretive function, where “traditionalist” users are also more satisfied ($M = 2.55$, $SD = .95$) than “digitalists” ($M = 2.58$, $SD = .99$); $t(2622) = -.89$, $p = .05$.

Table 2. One-way analysis of variance by profile

Variable	df	F	P
Journalism relevance	2 ^a , 2477 ^b	23.57	<.001
Trust most news	2 ^a , 2477 ^b	83.02	<.001
Trust my news	2 ^a , 2477 ^b	33.76	<.001
Trust social media news	2 ^a , 2477 ^b	20.56	<.001
Adversarial	2 ^c , 2620 ^d	3.83	.02
Disseminator	2 ^c , 2620 ^d	25.22	<.001
Interpretative	2 ^c , 2620 ^d	18.54	<.001

^a 2020 Between groups comparison.

^b 2020 Within groups comparison.

^c 2019 Between groups comparison.

^d 2019 Within groups comparison.

Source: Adapted from Reuters Institute Digital News Report surveys (2020, 2019), conducted by YouGov.

With regard to the influence of the country on the variables analysed, and given that this is a variable with more than two groups (Denmark, Spain and the United States), a one-way analysis of variance was chosen to test for differences between groups (Table 2). Our results show that there is a statistically significant difference in all the variables analysed between at least two groups. Tukey’s HSD Test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value of journalism relevance was significantly different between Spain and the other two countries ($p < .001$, 95% C.I. = [.21, .43] with the US; and $p < .001$, 95% C.I. = [.09, .31] with Denmark). Regarding trust in self-consumed news, Spanish results show statistically significant differences ($p < .011$, 95% C.I. = [.12, .35] with the US; and $p < .001$, 95% C.I. = [.29, .52] with Denmark). As for trust in most news and trust in social media news, all inter country differences are statistically significant according to Tukey’s HSD test.

Our results offer greater diversity when looking at journalism role fulfilment variations crossed with the country variable. Regarding the adversarial role, according to Tukey’s HSD test, there is no statistically significant difference in mean scores between the US and Spain ($p = .89$, 95% C.I. = $[-.09, .13]$) or between Denmark and the US ($p = .08$, 95% C.I. = $[-.21, .01]$). In contrast, the difference in mean scores is different between the European countries ($p = .03$, 95% C.I. = $[-.23, -.01]$). As for the other two journalistic roles analysed, it is the mean comparison between European countries that shows not to be statistically significant, both for the disseminator role ($p = .47$, 95% C.I. $[-.052, .16]$) and the interpretative role ($p = .32$, 95% C.I. = $[-.04, .17]$).

Having analysed these descriptive results, we proceeded to conduct a more in-depth analysis to see to what extent nationality or profile explain the position on the relevance of journalism or the fulfilment of its functions. Given the nature of our variables, and since they belong to two independent years, two ordinal regressions were conducted. The predictor variables were tested a priori to verify there was no violation of the assumption of no multicollinearity. The first regression shows a significant improvement in fit of the final model relative to the intercept-only model [$\chi^2(4) = 208.67$, $p < .001$]. Both the Pearson chi-square test [$\chi^2(17) = 23.42$, $p = .136$] and the deviance test [$\chi^2(17) = 23.41$, $p = .136$] were non-significant. We found the two independent variables analysed to contribute to the model. As we can see in the first regression (Table 3), “digitalist” users are more likely to give journalism a greater importance for the proper functioning of society than “traditionalists”. Similarly, user nationality is also relevant, as Spaniards are more likely to think journalism is less relevant than Danish and American respondents.

Table 3. Ordinal regression to predict journalism relevance

Parameter	Parameter estimates					
	Odds (B)	S.E.	95% Wald confidence interval		Hypothesis test	
			Lower	Upper	Wald chi-square	Df p-value
<i>Threshold</i>						
<i>Journalism relevance</i>						
Extremely important	-1.05	.09	-1.21	-.89	170.46	1 <.001
Very important	.19	.08	.03	.35	5.71	1 .02
Somewhat important	2.24	.12	2.02	2.45	433.11	1 <.001
Not very important	3.7	.19	3.33	4.07	382.55	1 <.001
<i>User profile</i>	-.82	.08	-.97	-.67	115.63	1 <.001
<i>Country</i>						
United States	-.61	.09	-.79	-.43	43.58	1 <.001
Denmark	-.31	.09	-.49	-.13	11.24	1 <.001
Spain	0	.	.	.	.	.

Dependent variable: journalism relevance model: (Threshold), journalism relevance, country.
 Source: Adapted from Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey (2020), conducted by YouGov.

The second regression also shows a significant improvement in fit of the final model [$\chi^2(4) = 950.27$, $p < .001$], but significance varies. The Pearson chi-square test resulted significant [$\chi^2(1625) = 3151.54$, $p < .001$] while the deviance test was not [$\chi^2(1625) = 1692.02$, $p = .121$]. Thus, our model's fitness to the data should be handled cautiously. The four independent variables analysed do contribute to the model. In this case, "traditionalist" users are more likely to find news in general trustworthy, while "digitalists" do not,

Table 4. Ordinal regression to predict trust in news

Parameter	Parameter estimates						
	Odds (B)	S.E.	95% Wald confidence interval		Hypothesis test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald chi-square	Df	p-value
Threshold							
<i>General trust in news</i>							
Strongly agree	-7.07	.31	-7.67	-6.4	534.45	1	<.001
Tend to agree	-4.17	.29	-3.4	-2.26	203	1	<.001
Neither agree nor disagree	-2.82	.29	-3.39	-2.26	95.46	1	<.001
Tend to disagree	-1.26	.28	-1.8	-.71	19.93	1	<.001
<i>User profile</i>	.28	.08	.13	.43	13.86	1	<.001
<i>Country</i>							
United States	.23	.09	.05	.41	6.05	1	.014
Denmark	-.72	.09	-.9	-.54	59.94	1	<.001
Spain	0	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Disseminator role</i>							
Strongly agree	-2.38	.28	-2.9	-1.8	74.75	1	<.001
Tend to agree	-1.67	.26	-2.18	-1.15	40.69	1	<.001
Neither agree nor disagree	-1.19	.26	-1.70	-.68	20.63	1	<.001
Tend to disagree	-.61	.28	-1.16	-.07	4.83	1	.028
Strongly disagree	0	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Interpretative role</i>							
Strongly agree	-3.07	.26	-3.58	-2.55	135.75	1	<.001
Tend to agree	-2.23	.23	-2.69	-1.78	93.42	1	<.001
Neither agree nor disagree	-1.65	.23	-2.1	-1.2	52.64	1	<.001
Tend to disagree	-.87	.23	-1.33	-.42	13.99	1	<.001
Strongly disagree	0	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Adversarial role</i>							
Strongly agree	-.44	.21	-.85	-.03	4.4	1	<.001
Tend to agree	-.55	.18	-.9	-.2	9.6	1	.002
Neither agree nor disagree	-.52	.18	-.87	-.17	8.42	1	.004
Tend to disagree	-.3	.2	-.68	.08	2.36	1	.125
Strongly disagree	0	.	.	.	.	.	.

Dependent variable: journalism relevance model: (Threshold), trust most news, profile, country, disseminator, interpretative, adversarial.

Source: Adapted from Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey (2019), conducted by YouGov.

as can be seen in Table 4. In terms of national differences, Spaniards tend to trust the news more than Americans, although less than Danes. Finally, regarding the fulfilment of journalism roles, we found that a higher valuation of the former is related to a higher trust in news in general.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study presents an analysis of the viewpoints and inclinations exhibited by news consumers from Denmark, Spain and the United States concerning the salience of journalism, the level of confidence they have in news sources, and their overall contentment with the performance of journalistic functions. Against the backdrop of an era characterized by an excess of information and the presence of various analogue and digital media outlets, we aimed to ascertain the primary mode of news consumption among those surveyed (RQ1). Building on earlier investigations conducted in the three nations under examination (Edgerly, 2015; Schröder, 2015; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022), our findings evince the prevalence of cross-media utilization among the users surveyed, with electronic media constituting an entrenched fixture of their information consumption patterns, either as the sole medium or in conjunction with conventional outlets such as print media, radio or television. However, national disparities emerge in this regard: Americans and Danes exhibit a marked preference for digital media, while the discrepancy between adherents to digital versus traditional media among Spaniards is minimal, with a difference of only one percentage point observed.

The statistical tests carried out in this research show that there are statistically significant differences between “digitalists” and “traditionalists” in terms of the importance given to journalism for the proper functioning of society (RQ2). As has already been advanced in the results section, on average, those who access news through electronic devices grant journalism a greater importance for the proper functioning of society. The results suggest that “user profile” was a significant predictor of “journalism relevance” ($B = -0.82$, $S.E. = 0.08$, $p < .001$), indicating that as “user profile” changes from “digitalist” to “traditionalist”, the odds of being in a higher category of “journalism relevance” decrease. Thus, “digitalists” tend to grant a greater relevance to journalism. These differences are repeated when comparing respondents’ answers from a national perspective. Of the three countries analysed, the differences are only significant when comparing Spain with the other two countries. Spaniards attach less importance to journalism than their American or Danish counterparts. The greatest distance is between Spaniards and Americans (.32), leaving the Danes as the closest (.19). These data are consistent with the differences distinguished by Hallin and Mancini (2004) between liberal (USA) and pluralistic-polarized (Spain) media systems.

Regarding our third research question (RQ3), users who consume news through newspapers, radio or television on average show greater trust in news than users who access news through digital devices. The ordinal regres-

sion analysis presented in Table 4 shows that user profile is a significant predictor of trust in news. Individuals who consume news through newspapers, radio or television on average show greater trust in news than users who access news through digital devices. This finding suggests that users who are more invested in news may be more discerning in their consumption habits, and therefore more likely to trust high-quality sources that align with their interests and values. As we have shown, these differences are largely explained precisely through the user profile (“traditionalist”/“digitalist”). This may be due to the fact that traditional sources are associated exclusively with news consumption, while digital sources are a gateway to other types of content. Therefore, the reason for their use is more independent of the credibility given to the news sources.

When analysing the evaluation of the performance of journalistic functions, it is possible to see that greater satisfaction with their fulfilment is connected to trust in news in general (RQ4). Users who agree more with the statements “The news media monitors and scrutinises powerful people and businesses” (adversarial function), “The news media keeps me up to date with what’s going on” (disseminating function) and “The news media helps me understand the news of the day” (interpretive function) also have higher trust in news in general. These findings are consistent with a classical understanding of journalism as a fundamental actor for democracy (Schudson, 2008), deserving of trust when it fulfils its mandated social functions (Lee, 2010).

Finally, the opinion on the fulfilment of the interpretative and disseminator functions does not seem to respond to national characteristics, and no significant differences are found between Danes, Spaniards and Americans. Where nationality plays a differentiating role is in the adversarial function, in which the view of Spaniards, belonging to the polarized pluralist system, is significantly different to the other two groups. This finding is in line with what has been pointed out by other authors (Rodríguez-Virgili et al., 2022; Strömbäck and Luengo, 2008). Similarly, the opinion on the relevance of journalism for the proper functioning of society, as well as trust in news in general, are also affected by the nationality of the respondent. Americans and Danes consider journalism more relevant than Spaniards, but only Danes trust the news more than Spaniards. Consequently, national differences among respondents have also proved to be important (RQ5).

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Collaborative Journalism and Normative Journalism: Lessons from Latin American Journalism*

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Abstract

Collaboration in journalism has become increasingly important, in the face of the challenges posed by digitalisation and platformization. The development of information and communication technologies has led to collaborative journalism committed to democratic and public-oriented methods. However, it is unclear how this commitment is reflected in practice, and whether it varies according to political, economic and media system contexts, especially in non-democratic and authoritarian regimes. Latin America is a diverse region with a history of social, economic and political instability, alternating between authoritarian and democratic regimes. This context can help answer the research question of this study, which aims to understand the commitments, norms and values of practitioners of collaborative journalism in various contexts. The thematic analysis of 36 semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in Latin America found that practitioners of collaborative journalism commonly share normative journalism roles, practices, values and norms. The study suggests a need to reinforce, restore and reform normative journalism norms and values, particularly in non-democratic, authoritarian, and developing democracies. This study can be a valuable resource for future researchers exploring journalism, collaborative journalism and investigative journalism beyond the context of Western liberal democracies.

Keywords: journalism; collaborative journalism; normative journalism; democracy; authoritarian regimes; platformization

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Resum. *Periodisme col·laboratiu i periodisme normatiu: lliçons del periodisme llatinoamericà*

La col·laboració en el periodisme ha esdevingut cada vegada més important a causa dels desafiaments que plantegen la digitalització i les plataformes de xarxes socials i altres plataformes tecnològiques. El desenvolupament de les tecnologies de la informació i la comunicació (TIC) ha donat lloc a un periodisme col·laboratiu compromès amb mètodes democràtics i orientats al públic. No obstant això, no queda clar com aquests compromisos es reflecteixen en la pràctica i si varien segons els contextos polític, econòmic i del sistema mediàtic, especialment en règims no democràtics i autoritaris. L'Amèrica Llatina és una regió diversa amb una història d'inestabilitat social, econòmica i política, i alterna entre règims autoritaris i democràtics. Aquest context pot ajudar a respondre la pregunta de recerca d'aquest estudi, l'objectiu del qual és comprendre els compromisos, les normes i els valors dels professionals del periodisme col·laboratiu en diversos contextos. Segons l'anàlisi temàtica de 36 entrevistes en profunditat semiestructurades realitzades a l'Amèrica Llatina, els professionals del periodisme col·laboratiu comunament comparteixen rols, pràctiques, valors i normes del periodisme normatiu. L'estudi suggereix la necessitat de reforçar, restaurar i reformar les normes i els valors del periodisme normatiu, particularment en democràcies no democràtiques, autoritàries i en desenvolupament. Aquest estudi pot ser un recurs valuós per a futurs investigadors que explorin el periodisme, el periodisme col·laboratiu i el periodisme de recerca més enllà del context de les democràcies liberals occidentals.

Paraules clau: periodisme; periodisme col·laboratiu; periodisme normatiu; democràcia; règims autoritaris; plataformes

Resumen. *Periodismo colaborativo y periodismo normativo: lecciones del periodismo latinoamericano*

La colaboración en el periodismo se ha vuelto cada vez más importante debido a los desafíos que plantean la digitalización y las plataformas de redes sociales y otras plataformas tecnológicas. El desarrollo de las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación (TIC) ha dado lugar a un periodismo colaborativo comprometido con métodos democráticos y orientados al público. Sin embargo, no está claro cómo estos compromisos se reflejan en la práctica y si varían según los contextos político, económico y del sistema mediático, especialmente en regímenes no democráticos y autoritarios. América Latina es una región diversa con una historia de inestabilidad social, económica y política, y alterna entre regímenes autoritarios y democráticos. Este contexto puede ayudar a responder la pregunta de investigación de este estudio, cuyo objetivo es comprender los compromisos, las normas y los valores de los profesionales del periodismo colaborativo en diversos contextos. Según el análisis temático de 36 entrevistas en profundidad semiestructuradas realizadas en América Latina, los profesionales del periodismo colaborativo comúnmente comparten roles, prácticas, valores y normas del periodismo normativo. El estudio sugiere la necesidad de reforzar, restaurar y reformar las normas y los valores del periodismo normativo, particularmente en democracias no democráticas, autoritarias y en desarrollo. Este estudio puede ser un recurso valioso para futuros investigadores que exploren el periodismo, el periodismo colaborativo y el periodismo de investigación más allá del contexto de las democracias liberales occidentales.

Palabras clave: periodismo; periodismo colaborativo; periodismo normativo; democracia; regímenes autoritarios; plataformas

1. Introduction

Journalism is increasingly losing its role as the fourth estate and its position as a guardian of democratic values, due to the digitalisation and platformization of society (van Dijck, Poell and Waal, 2018; Evens, Raats and Rimscha, 2017) and the re-emergence of authoritarian regimes worldwide. Scholars argue that the boundaries of journalism have vanished or been stretched due to the insertion of new actors and different types of organisations into news production (Domingo et al., 2008). However, journalism is more important than ever, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Nielsen et al., 2020).

One mode through which the media continue their work and fulfil their role in society is through news organisations and journalists engaging in alternative work arrangements via innovative and creative forms of production and business models, such as collaborative journalism. Described as a solution to the terrifying moment when journalism suffers a lack of funds and staff (Alfter, 2016; Sambrook, 2018), collaborative journalism aims to supplement an organisation's resources and maximise its impact (Graves, 2018). Thus, journalists worldwide rely on collaboration to restore professional normative values and motivations (Graves and Konieczna, 2015).

However, present and past discussions around collaborative journalism have not reflected on the commitments of its practitioners, nor on the various contexts in which the practice emerges, evolves and develops, and the impacts of these elements on collaborative journalism practices, norms and values. Moreover, little is known about how the re-emergence of authoritarian and non-democratic regimes might affect these elements and their practice. Thus, the present study poses the following research question:

RQ: What are the commitments, norms and values of practitioners of collaborative journalism in various contexts?

To identify and understand the commitments of journalists and news organisations that are conducting or are part of collaborative journalism initiatives in Latin America, I conducted 36 interviews with journalists and practitioners of news organisations in ten countries in the region. Using thematic analysis to identify emergent themes in the data (Clarke and Braun, 2014), I was able to identify patterns in these journalists' views and meanings toward their commitment to normative values and how and whether they are related to their work in collaborative investigative initiatives. Additionally, the data also shed light on the aim of journalism in different countries. The analysis was carried out considering inductive reasoning. Following the example provided by Clarke and Braun (2014), I prioritised the participants' constructions and meanings and the data itself, rather than theoretical assumptions. Nevertheless, the theoretical framework was built from normative journalism and collaborative journalism theories and concepts. It was used as

a set of interpretative concepts “to render visible issues that participants did not explicitly articulate” (p. 60).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Normative journalism

Normative journalism can have many interpretations. The norms change according to ideological constructions and cultural contexts. These rules and norms also change over time according to external and internal factors. For instance, some have argued that digital and other types of journalism, such as broadcasting or the print press, might have different ideas of what normatively good journalism is (Steenen and Westlund, 2020; Witschge et al., 2016). However, some patterns exist that are possible to explore – namely, the norms, roles and functions that help a society to identify and legitimise the profession. These form the basis of the professional identities by which journalists distinguish themselves from others in the industry, and how they evaluate, criticise and judge other journalists and forms of journalism.

The normative function of journalism has been continually renegotiated due to many factors; however, most authors agree that the many changes to the practice and the relationship with audiences brought about by the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) challenge the normative journalism paradigm. The functions of journalism are mostly related to external perceptions and its role in society and other institutions (Deuze and Witschge, 2018). These functions are thus tied to social expectations that are mostly circumstantial and utilitarian. This means that to society, journalism has a role to play and a function that is mostly regarded as an ideal of society or a self-perception of this society (Görke and Scholl, 2006). These circumstances, again, change according to the needs and contexts in which journalism operates (Mellado, 2020). Nevertheless, practitioners also carry these ideal functions with them and attempt to incorporate them into their routines, not only through commitments and behaviour but also through practices, such as guaranteeing the diversity of voices and narratives. However, the function that journalism should fulfil in society is a rather ideological one that is shared by both journalists and society.

The ideological component of journalists operates at the level of their civic and moral guidelines, which remain the framework orientating journalists worldwide; in contrast, for society, journalism functions are much more straightforward, such as informing citizens with fact-based, relevant information (Deuze and Witschge, 2018). On the other hand, according to many scholars, journalism also plays a crucial function in democracy, through the support of, for example, its watchdog and monitoring roles, and also through the representation and participation of citizens and political parties, among others (e.g., Christians et al., 2010). Nevertheless, few studies have focused on public and societal expectations of journalism functions, with most stud-

ies focused on the perceptions of journalists and practitioners regarding their functions in society.

According to Christians et al. (2010), the democratic function, for instance, is established by the normative roles and functions of journalism, which range from a “facilitative role” to a “radical role”. Christians et al. (2010) describe the facilitative role as the commitment of these journalists to a civic democratic environment, one in which they promote and act as facilitators of civil society participation, representation and deliberation. The radical role is characterised by radical criticism and strong resistance to dominance and hegemony; delivering this role is based on challenging power and popular approach. They argue that these two elements constitute some of journalism’s many roles and functions in society, which translate into moral obligations and responsibility for democratic ideals and practices.

Even in authoritarian, less democratic contexts or developing democracies, journalism’s civic role and function, its ethical commitments to democracy, plurality and access to information, and its adherence to normative professional roles and norms are widespread. Yet circumstantial and contextual factors contribute to some functions being viewed as more important than others.

Moreover, the concept of normative journalism is open to interpretation and evolves over time due to various external and internal factors. The development of ICT has allowed new social actors, such as audiences and bloggers, to participate in news production. At the same time, new players such as NGOs and advocacy organisations have access to information once monopolised by journalists. These new players also include news outlets such as start-ups and independent organisations which distance themselves from traditional media and which strive to produce normatively good journalism by promoting social change and transformation. This evolution and innovation within the industry challenges the normative journalism paradigm (see Witschge et al., 2016; Steensen and Westlund, 2020; Esser and Neuberger, 2019; Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Mellado, 2020; Powers, 2015; Boczkowski, 2005).

In addition to introducing new actors, the development of technology and the crisis of traditional business models have resulted in the boundaries of journalism becoming blurred (Carlson and Lewis, 2015). Media organisations and journalists must expand their activities beyond traditional limits in order to compete in a competitive environment. Journalism establishes its limits based on its own principles, with the intention of restricting the involvement of external parties to ensure its independence. Studies suggest that commercial and technological challenges have challenged this sense of work boundaries, lowering the walls between newsrooms and commercial departments and consequently affecting the public perception of and trust in the news.

However, while the norms and values of journalism may change due to various conditions, some ground rules define what journalism is and what it is supposed to do. The ability of journalists to deliver what they believe is required is limited by various factors, including time pressure and precarious

working conditions. Therefore, journalistic performance is a collective and relational action in which normative journalism and media ecosystems and systems intersect with political, economic and cultural contexts. According to the circumstances, the change in values and norms of the journalistic narrative might be more critical than others. The ability to perform the journalistic role is influenced and impacted by the new forms of participation in news output and the introduction of new actors (e.g., Mellado and Dalen, 2014; Nee and Santana, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the facilitative role of journalism, while racial and gender tensions have increased the emphasis on diversity and representativeness in journalism. Therefore, the performance of journalism depends on the situation; in Latin America, political and economic constraints and the overall situation of media systems have strengthened the need for stronger ties to normative journalism and greater socially committed practices. This is reflected in the growing number of organisations developing collaborative initiatives. Hence, it is relevant to understand the definition of collaborative journalism in the literature, which is the starting point for this study.

2.2. Collaborative Journalism: a brief literature review

In recent years, scholars and practitioners have become increasingly interested in collaborative journalism. Collaboration has always been part of journalism (Lewis, 2018; Stonbely, 2017), but it reached a new level with the emergence of new information and communication technologies and their many effects on journalistic practices, production, distribution and business models. The development of ICTs is also at the root of the rise of a networked society (Alfter and Cîndea, 2019), which is considered one of the main factors that have contributed to the emergence of collaborative and participatory practices in journalism.

Collaboration is regarded as the capability of organisations or individuals to share resources, practices, information, rules, etc., to benefit all group members (Thomson, Perry and Miller, 2009). The collaboration principle has been understood as a differential of collaborative journalism practice compared to other forms of participation and collaboration. Different theories exist in the literature regarding collaborative journalism as a cooperative practice between various organisations; these organisations are not necessarily journalistic entities and can include civil society organisations, start-ups and academic institutions (Jenkins and Graves, 2019). Collaborative journalism can also include partnerships between journalists and experts in other fields (Sambrook, 2018).

Moreover, more attention has focused on providing a definition and description of collaborative journalism, with the necessary background of collaboration in journalism, its emergence and its impacts on the practice of journalism (Deuze, 2006; Graves and Konieczna, 2015). A considerable number

of published studies describing the role of collaboration in journalism have focused on analysing practices essential to identify the phenomenon's features and characteristics, and the factors that led to the emergence of collaborative journalism.

The literature has consistently provided a general understanding of collaborative journalism as a journalistic practice and a consequence of journalism's transformations due to the development of ICTs, the rise of the networked society, and the digitalisation of the media. However, a relatively small body of literature concerns motivations, commitments and how they might change according to different circumstances. Little is known about the influences and relationships of organisational, economic, political and media system contexts in practice and the commitments of practitioners of collaborative journalism.

Journalists and news organisations have been using collaborative journalism to continue working despite the difficult conditions, conducting quality investigations, and, most of all, trying to re-establish some of the central secular values of journalism to society, especially in countries with less developed economies and democracies and/or under authoritarian regimes, such as many in Latin America (Mesquita and de-Lima-Santos, 2021; Mesquita and Fernandes, 2021). Therefore, to better understand these commitments and the current state of collaborative journalism in Latin America, this research conducted an empirical study of several organisations involved in collaborative journalism in the region, as outlined below.

3. Methodology

This study conducted 36 interviews with members of organisations responsible for collaborative journalism projects. The interviews were conducted virtually, in Spanish and Portuguese, during March and May 2021. Interviewees were selected through an open call to practitioners in the Latin America region. They were invited to respond to a survey, and those who agreed were invited to participate in an in-depth discussion via interview. Of the 120 organisations that responded to the survey, 36 agreed to be interviewed on Zoom, Google, or WhatsApp. The survey results are available in a separate article, published in 2021 (see Mesquita and de-Lima-Santos, 2021). The interviews were based on a semi-structured script that guided the discussion while providing live space for further questions (Ahlin, 2019). All interviews were recorded, with the consent of the interviewees. The interviews each lasted approximately 45 minutes.

The qualitative data analysis follows a thematic analysis approach. Codes, rather than the literal meaning of words and sentences, are the basis of interpreting statements and information from interviewees to the researcher. To this end, the researcher followed the instructions of Clarke and Braun (2014), which involve systematically analysing qualitative data to distinguish different themes and their relationships.

Table 1. Profile of the interviewees

Organisation	Country	Age	Gender	Role
Coletivo Bereia	Brazil	18–25	Male	Editor-in-chief
OCCRP	LATAM	26–35	Male	Editor-in-chief
Bichos de Campo / El Café Diario Puntocom	Argentina	46–55	Non-binary	Journalist/Reporter
Site da Baixada	Brazil	26–35	Male	CEO
O Eco	Brazil	36–45	Male	CEO
Agência Mural	Brazil	26–35	Male	CEO
CDD Acontece	Brazil	36–45	Female	CEO
24Horas / Factchecking.cl	Chile	26–35	Female	Editor-in-chief
Canal Caribe	Cuba	18–25	Female	Journalist/ Reporter
Boletín Ecológico	Nicaragua	36–45	Male	CEO
Diario La Prensa	Panama	56+	Male	Journalist/ Reporter
Núcleo Jornalismo	Brazil	36–45	Male	Editor-in-chief
Cajueira/Redação Virtual	Brazil	26–35	Female	Editor-in-chief
Mídia Ninja	Brazil	36–45	Male	Editor-in-chief
Ipys	Peru	46–45	Female	Editor-in-chief
Maré de Notícias	Brazil	46–55	Female	Editor-in-chief
Periodismo Negro	Mexico	46–55	Male	CEO
Factor4	Guatemala	26–35	Female	Editor-in-chief
BaudóAP	Colombia	26–35	Female	CEO
Generación Paz	Colombia	36–45	Female	Editor-in-chief
Mutante	Colombia	18–25	Female	Journalist/Reporter
Consejo de Redacción	Colombia	26–35	Female	Editor-in-chief
Congresso em Foco	Brazil	56+	Male	CEO
Portal Catarinas	Brazil	36–45	Female	Journalist/Reporter
InfoMercado	Peru	36–45	Male	CEO
Comprova	Brazil	56+	Male	Editor-in-chief
Alma Preta	Brazil	26–35	Female	Editor-in-chief
Freelancer	Brazil	36–45	Female	Freelancer
Notícia Preta	Brazil	36–45	Male	Editor-in-chief
Abaré	Brazil	18–25	Non-binary	Editor-in-chief
Desenrola	Brazil	–	Male	Director
Sem Migué	Brazil	–	Male	Founder
The Intercept Brasil	Brazil	–	Female	Editor
Fakebook	Brazil	–	Male	Editor
Favela em Pauta	Brazil	–	Female	Editor and co-founder
ConfereAI	Brazil	–	Female	Editor and co-founder

Source: Author's own.

The research conducted a thematic analysis, with the support of NVivo, on the state of collaborative journalism in Latin America. Seven main themes and sub-themes were identified through deductive and inductive approaches. These themes covered the concept of collaborative journalism, processes

involved in collaborative journalism, collaborative practices, benefits of collaborative journalism, results and impacts of collaborative journalism, challenges and limits, and the context of collaborative journalism in Latin America. The sub-themes explored how practitioners and organisations achieved and addressed their values and missions, the structures and types of collaboration, and the impacts of collaborative journalism on policy-making, social transformation, and communities.

4. Results and discussion

Collaborative journalism for Latin American practitioners is about restoring and giving back. It is about restoring the social responsibility of journalism in society, as defined by Benson (2008) and other scholars who stress the importance of journalism to democratic societies (Christians et al., 2010; Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch, 2009). They want to return the power of narratives to the people that most need free and committed media. It is widely accepted among practitioners that collaborative journalism is a tool to produce a kind of normative journalism they believe in and think is needed. This journalism, they argued during the interviews, strongly relates to normative theories and the place of journalism in society, especially relating to the importance of journalism to democracy. However, clarifications are needed regarding some of the interviewees' statements, such as the contexts in which Latin American journalism operates. According to Hanitzsch and Mellado (2011), economic and political factors are among the many influences that make journalism different in various parts of the world. For instance, some academics have criticised the established and traditional mainstream media in these countries, which are characterised by over-concentrated ownership in the hands of a few families and are dependent on political and economic powers (Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez, 2014). In addition, Latin America suffers from low levels of press freedom, and this has deteriorated recently (RSF, 2020).

It is not uncommon among interviewees to understand collaborative journalism in activist terms. This activism is related to what journalism is, how it should be performed, and whom it should serve. For one of the interviewees, a freelance journalist working in São Paulo (Brazil's largest city), collaborative journalism reports and acts on issues. It is a kind of journalism that connects with the problems in society in a deeper way. "If you're reporting on the Amazon and behind you, there's a fire, you throw water; it's not just reporting". For her, acting directly on issues is a form of restoring the function of journalism in society, not just reporting from a distance, objective and cold. This journalist wants to be involved, to promote social transformation and to be part of the solution. This confirms some of the recent discussions around the topics of the transformation of journalistic norms and values.

Similarly, for a journalist from *Mídia Ninja*, an organisation founded in Brazil during the protests of June 2013 and which describes itself as a media activist, being inside the communities on which you report is key to doing a

kind of journalism that represents the lives, the voices and the narratives of the people that journalism should serve. To this interviewee, collaboration is an essential *modus operandi* without which it is impossible to understand social issues. “In collaborative action, you get to understand, to know the actors who are on the street, the tensions there, and better understand the relationships. It serves all reporting, so collaboration brings great power to the reporting”.

Another journalist, part of a feminist collective, shares the sentiment of being inside a problem to promote a deeper representation of social issues. According to this interviewee, her collective was established as a collaborative initiative based on the demands of the feminist community to change the dominant narrative around women and their issues. The interviewee from Portal Catarinas, a feminist collective that reports and acts on women’s issues in the south of Brazil, explains that traditional and mainstream media have always misrepresented and underreported women. According to studies, women account for approximately 25% of the sources and subjects of news articles worldwide (Global Media Monitoring Project Report, 2020). However, there has been a valorisation of women in news-making, especially among independent news organisations (Blanco-Herrero, Alonso and Calderón, 2020; Salaverría et al., 2018). Among organisations conducting collaborative journalism, women have been in leadership positions (Mesquita and de-Lima-Santos, 2021). Nevertheless, as the interviewee points out, collaboration among activists and journalists has changed the narrative around women by adding new voices, different points of view and different forms of interpreting the world.

The literature around collaborative journalism has pointed out the important role of collaboration in promoting a diversity of viewpoints (Alfter, 2018). Some organisations and practitioners understand collaborative journalism as a way of achieving this diversity. As explained by the interviewee from Comprova – a movement to spread fact-checking worldwide, which brought together 24 news outlets in its first phase – audiences tend to trust these pieces because they feel represented by at least one of the outlets involved in the initiative:

The big advantage, I think, is its diversity. People from the right [of the political spectrum] started complaining about the checks. Still, they saw that *Gazeta do Povo*, an outlet more focused on the right, or that harbours more opinions from the right, was signing up, so we saw a retraction in the critics [from this group].

For a journalist who works in an organisation in the Complexo do Alemão zone of *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro, collaboration is the *modus operandi* to connect with the community, bring audiences what is important to them, and change the narrative of mainstream media. The journalist comes from the community, and started working on a journalistic project during the Olympic games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. She found collaboration with the community

to be journalism she believes in. Journalism serves its purposes and represents the voices and the reality of the people living in these communities. The interviewee describes how these populations living in the favelas are represented by the mainstream media:

The television narrative about the favela or any space like that, it's always the perspective of the camera entering the favela and never from the perspective of whoever is in the favela and receives the police, so the press itself is protected by the police because it comes after the police, always looking from the outside to the inside.

The statement from the interviewee from *Favela em Pauta* illustrates a news media industry problem that has been identified in other parts of the world but has stronger implications in Latin America: the profile of journalists working with news organisations worldwide. It is not uncommon for journalists and practitioners interviewed for this study to refer to the profile of journalists, especially those in mainstream and legacy media. They criticise their lack of connection to the lives of much of the population. Journalists and news practitioners are normally located in the largest cities and are normally white males. Nevertheless, these critics reflect a commitment that is not opposed to normative journalism but advocates restoring those values that reflect the needs of the society that journalism should prioritise.

The tone of the discourse among journalists and collaborative practitioners on the peripheries of big cities and those reporting from places outside the big centres of power and trying to connect with populations in remote areas tend to converge. Territory and change in the narratives are always present in the interviews of these journalists. Place has an important meaning of belonging and diversity for these practitioners. For instance, for a journalist in Colombia, traditional journalism cannot embrace the narratives, voices and realities of people living in remote areas. For her, collaboration is an essential tool to connect with these populations, but also a way to provide a platform for journalists in these areas. The journalist works with *Baudó Agência Pública*, which has been conducting collaborative investigations in Colombia focusing on topics that affect communities' lives. They promote collaboration on two fronts: a more traditional one with other news organisations, focusing on broader investigations; and a second one focusing on forming a network of journalists and professionals in remote areas of the country to promote journalistic investigation and training local professionals. A journalist from Chile reinforces the importance of collaboration to connect with audiences in even the most remote areas. According to this journalist, there are cities and communities in Chile that even television cannot reach. For her, collaboration with journalists and practitioners in these regions is essential to make information accessible to these populations.

Thus, the territory offers two levels of input for understanding the importance of collaborative journalism. One is connected with the idea of diversity

and the feeling of belonging and representation; the other focuses on audiences and the democratic imperative of access to information. Using the paradigm offered by Christians et al. (2010), the normative journalism norms and values of journalists and news practitioners in collaborative initiatives range from the “facilitative role” to the “radical role”. The facilitative role is described by the authors as the commitment of professionals to a civic democratic environment; they act as facilitators of civil society participation and deliberation. The radical role is characterised by radical criticism against hegemony; its routes are based on standing up to power and on a popular approach. It is possible to state that the concept of collaborative journalism lacks the dimension of normative journalism, since the norms of journalism top the list of reasons journalists and news practitioners decide to collaborate.

The meaning of collaborative journalism is connected to ideals that are not always homogeneous, such as the mission and values of journalists and news organisations. Mellado (2020) explained that journalism is conditioned by context, which may lead practitioners to perform a kind of journalism that might not be seen as professional. For instance, CDD Acontece is a page on Facebook that reports on the daily life of Cidade de Deus, a neighbourhood in the western part of Rio de Janeiro. According to the interviewee, CDD Acontece’s mission is to rebuild a sense of community and pride in the population of Cidade de Deus. It does this through a collaborative approach with the community, reporting from and for the community, paying local reporters, and promoting the local economy. One of the biggest achievements of this journalist is to promote social change through collaboration.

The interviewees agree on a critique of journalism that goes beyond its state of crisis and the emergence of new technologies as the main enabling factor of collaboration. How journalism is carried out in the region, its alliances with power and its elitism are most commonly criticised. For many interviewees, collaboration has created an independent market that defies the commercial logic of traditional journalism and promotes the normative role of journalism and the restoration of its social function.

The interviewee from *Redação Virtual* stated:

I think the maximum word of independent journalism must be collaboration. If we enter this market to dispute spaces, scoops and articles, like in the commercial market of traditional media, it doesn’t make any sense. We are inaugurating a new independent journalism market.

This is seconded by the interviewee from *MídiaNinja*:

We do not start from this conception of academic journalism, which is a person who, based on a trade or a profession of being a journalist manages to abstract from the world and have an objective vision. No, we understand that we are always positioned in the world, your gaze is positioned, and this position is much richer when built collaboratively.

This constant criticism against objectivity is another common thread among practitioners of collaborative journalism, which is seen as a practice that normalises the elite discourse (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017) and has been substituted by more engaged reporting.

Criticism of the hierarchical nature of traditional journalism adds another layer of analysis. To the interviewee from Maré de Notícias, the hierarchical decision-making processes are the stages of the traditional journalism organisation:

The process of discussion of the agenda in traditional journalism is like this: the agenda comes from above, it has a dynamic of a hierarchy very different from ours, a construction and a look very different from ours.

Site da Baixada emphasises collaboration to encompass the different narratives and viewpoints on issues which, according to the interviewee, go beyond the traditional looks at both sides of the story. However, the greatest concern in the interviews is the stereotype perpetuated and normalised by the traditional media. According to the interviewees, traditional, corporatist, mainstream media have lost their ties (if they ever had any) with the actual experiences of the people; they have lost sight of who they are supposed to inform and benefit – the majority of the population, the voiceless, the people in favelas. According to the interviewee from 24horas and Fact-checking.cl, traditional media have a rigid structure which prevents them from engaging in collaboration. The Consejo de Redacción interviewee reinforced the need for economic independence to pursue investigative journalism.

For the interviewee from Congresso em Foco, traditional media are failing in their primary role in the defence of democracy, which is related to the economic dependence of the media on the state and big advertisers. The interviewee cites the recent campaign they launched to impeach the then-president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro. They did not receive support from most traditional news organisations in the country; they even lost advertisers because of their position. However, he sees that as a small price to pay considering the risk to democracy if Bolsonaro had stayed in power: “I believe that the great collaboration needed in Brazil today is the consolidation of ties to defend journalism, democracy”.

This sentiment is that corporatist, mainstream media have given up on journalism's social commitment, mission and values. This goes with disturbing accusations of the media covering up social and political issues and their close relationship with power in many countries – such as the case denounced by the Colombian news organisation Generación Paz, in the case of the False Positives. The interviewee confirms what many entities, activists, civil society and independent and alternative media have been saying: The traditional, corporatist media have engaged in criminal behaviour by omission or consent over the military assassination of thousands of people (Morales, 2019; Wallace, 2011).

In summary, through this analysis and discussion, it was possible to verify that collaborative journalism emerges as a force to restore journalism's function in society. The values of collaborative journalism are closely attached to democratic aspirations and counter to the position of the captured liberal media in Latin America.

5. Conclusion

Collaborative journalism is often described as a model of journalism that brings together professionals from different news organisations and other industries and institutions, such as universities and advocacy organisations, to carry out a journalistic investigation that otherwise would not be possible. The literature points out that investigations may not be possible due to the lack of expertise, technology or just because there is too much information. Investigations need as many people as possible to make sense of this information (Sambrook, 2018). Most concepts in the existing literature related to working together, fulfilling each other's lack of expertise, personnel, technologies, data and information (Stonbely, 2017). However, what collaboration means for practitioners is mostly disregarded. The study investigates whether the concept of collaborative journalism is understood by its practitioners and how they perceive collaboration in their daily routines. Questions remain unanswered: Is collaborative journalism just a change in the *modus operandi*, a new form of collecting data, or is there a more profound ethos of collaboration in journalism?

The present study assumes that people's meanings of collaboration differ in different parts of the world. It contributes to the literature by interpreting the possible similarities and differences in collaborative journalism practices in terms of motivations, purposes, meanings and understandings of collaborative journalism and journalism itself. The present study goes to a region underrepresented in recent research into collaborative journalism. It expands on it, adding the particularities and different contexts in which the practice has evolved in different directions. The study demonstrates that the concept of collaborative journalism for Latin American practitioners is not confined to a set of practices but rather to an ethos embedded in a normative idea of journalism and how it should be carried out.

The research question posed in this study ("What are the commitments, norms and values of practitioners of collaborative journalism in various contexts?") is answered positively, highlighting the strong relationship between collaborative journalism and normative journalism, as well as other theories relating to the social role of journalism in society and its place in democracies. While Latin America is known for its inequalities and the emergence of authoritarian and non-democratic regimes, it is necessary to discuss the connection with normative journalism and its possible impact on the view of collaborative journalism in Latin America and beyond.

Results show that contrary to the negative beliefs regarding the dissolution of boundaries in professional journalism, practitioners of collaborative

journalism in Latin America use this fluidity (blurred barriers and boundaries) in their favour to counterattack restrictions of press freedom and to produce normatively good journalism. However, mainstream and partisan media have also discovered in collaborative journalism a way to sustain themselves and continue to support authoritarian regimes. This leads to the argument that normative journalism should be considered within the concept of collaborative journalism. In summary, collaborative journalism in Latin America shows the complexity of the profession of journalism and the region's political, social, economic and cultural contexts. Moreover, understanding the underlying issues regarding the norms and values of the profession of journalism in Latin America may also contribute to investigating these aspects elsewhere, in less developed economies and democracies, especially those under authoritarian regimes such as Russia, China, Hungary, etc.

Finally, this study identified that collaborative journalism has many meanings to journalists and practitioners. A commitment to normative journalism, its mission and values and its role in society are guiding principles for most interviewees. According to the analysis, collaborative journalism in Latin America is about restoring the role of journalism in society and promoting democracy. It is also about giving voices to the voiceless, empowering communities and establishing a more democratic form of communication with communities. Above all, practitioners do not distinguish between their mission, values or practices. Collaborative journalism is interpreted by many practitioners as a form of producing a kind of journalism that they believe in. For them, collaborative journalism translates into the involvement of other news organisations, professionals from other industries, universities and, most importantly, communities. Mainly, collaborative journalism is an ethos, a form of thinking and acting that goes beyond the boundaries of the profession but is based on the professional principles of diversity and plurality.

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WhatsAppening to the news in Brazil? A mixed-method study on news publishers' struggle to adapt to WhatsApp's inherent characteristics of mobile and interpersonal communication

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Abstract

After Facebook started prioritizing posts from family and friends on its newsfeed at the beginning of 2018, news consumption on social media increasingly migrated to other mobile applications such as WhatsApp. This has put pressure on media organizations to establish channels on the platform in an attempt to compensate for the decline in audience figures. Journalistic practices on WhatsApp remain poorly understood. Building on the "diffusion of innovations" theory, this article examines whether the way newsrooms have adapted to WhatsApp follows similar patterns to their adoption of social media for news distribution, or whether they have been able to develop new practices that fully consider the tool's inherent characteristics of mobile and interpersonal communication. Focusing on Brazil as a case study, this study draws on the analysis of 8,855 messages sent to WhatsApp news channels and interviews with 21 editors and executives from publishers, and shows that newsrooms have hardly adapted to the possibilities of WhatsApp beyond its technological aspects. Audience engagement has often been neglected or has been addressed with a lack of consistency. According to the interviewees, constraints presented by WhatsApp, such as the large amount of manual work it requires of newsrooms, make it difficult for news organizations to adopt the platform to transform their relationship with their readers.

Keywords: journalism; WhatsApp; diffusion of innovations; news distribution; audience engagement; mixed methods

Resum. *WhatsAppejar les notícies al Brasil. Un estudi de mètode mixt sobre la lluita dels editors de notícies per adaptar-se a l'essència de la comunicació mòbil i interpersonal de WhatsApp*

Després que Facebook comencés a privilegiar les publicacions de familiars i amics en el seu subministrament de notícies a principis de 2018, el consum de notícies en les xarxes socials va migrar cada vegada més a altres aplicacions mòbils, com WhatsApp. Aquesta situació ha forçat els mitjans a establir canals en la plataforma en un intent de compensar el descens de les xifres d'audiència. Les pràctiques periodístiques en l'aplicació de missatgeria continuen sent poc conegudes. Sobre la base de la teoria de la difusió de les innovacions, aquest article examina si l'adaptació de les redaccions a WhatsApp segueix patrons similars a l'adopció de les xarxes socials per a la distribució de notícies o si les organitzacions de notícies han pogut desenvolupar noves pràctiques que consideren completament l'essència de l'eina de comunicació mòbil i interpersonal. Centrant-se en el Brasil com a estudi de cas i basant-se en l'anàlisi de 8.855 missatges enviats als canals de notícies de WhatsApp i de 21 entrevistats amb editors i executius d'editorials, aquest estudi mostra que les redaccions a penes s'han adaptat a les possibilitats d'aquesta aplicació més enllà dels seus aspectes tecnològics. La participació de l'audiència sovint s'ha descurat o s'ha abordat amb falta de coherència. Segons les persones entrevistades, les limitacions que presenta WhatsApp, com la gran quantitat de treball manual que exigeix a les redaccions, dificulten l'adopció d'aquesta eina per transformar la relació entre els mitjans i els seus lectors.

Paraules clau: periodisme; WhatsApp; difusió de les innovacions; distribució de notícies; participació de l'audiència; mètode mixt

Resumen. *WhatsAppear las noticias en Brasil. Un estudio de método mixto sobre la lucha de los editores de noticias para adaptarse a la esencia de la comunicación móvil e interpersonal de WhatsApp*

Después de que Facebook comenzara a privilegiar las publicaciones de familiares y amigos en su suministro de noticias a principios de 2018, el consumo de noticias en las redes sociales migró cada vez más a otras aplicaciones móviles, como WhatsApp. Esta situación ha forzado a los medios a establecer canales en la plataforma en un intento de compensar el descenso de las cifras de audiencia. Las prácticas periodísticas en la aplicación de mensajería siguen siendo poco conocidas. Sobre la base de la teoría de la difusión de las innovaciones, este artículo examina si la adaptación de las redacciones a WhatsApp sigue patrones similares a la adopción de las redes sociales para la distribución de noticias o si las organizaciones de noticias han podido desarrollar nuevas prácticas que consideran completamente la esencia de la herramienta de comunicación móvil e interpersonal. Centrándose en Brasil como estudio de caso y basándose en el análisis de 8.855 mensajes enviados a los canales de noticias de WhatsApp y de 21 entrevistas con editores y ejecutivos de editoriales, este estudio muestra que las redacciones apenas se han adaptado a las posibilidades de esta aplicación más allá de sus aspectos tecnológicos. La participación de la audiencia a menudo se ha descuidado o se ha abordado con falta de coherencia. Según las personas entrevistadas, las limitaciones que presenta WhatsApp, como la gran cantidad de trabajo manual que exige a las redacciones, dificultan su adopción para transformar la relación entre los medios y sus lectores.

Palabras clave: periodismo; WhatsApp; difusión de las innovaciones; distribución de noticias; participación de la audiencia; método mixto

1. Introduction

Between the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2018, Facebook significantly reduced the connection between news organizations and their audiences as it started prioritizing posts from friends and family in its newsfeed (Cornia et al., 2018). As a result, news consumption increasingly migrated to other mobile tools such as WhatsApp, which has become the most popular messaging application (“app”) in the world (Newman et al., 2021).

Although it currently offers practically all its functions in web and desktop versions, WhatsApp was originally developed, and is still mostly used, as a mobile application for interpersonal communication (Agur, 2019). At least since 2014, WhatsApp has been employed by news organizations for content distribution, which demonstrates a potential technological change for newsrooms (Fares, 2018). The platform seemed particularly useful for so-called proximity media: initiatives focusing on regional, local and hyperlocal communities (Negreira-Rey, López-García and Lozano-Aguiar, 2017). Some European local publishers started to use it to compensate for their declining audiences on Facebook (Jenkins and Nielsen, 2018).

Interpersonal communication has been an aspect particularly valued by some studies, as WhatsApp has been used by newsrooms to engage with audiences, whether to meet occasional demands, clarify doubts or even collect information relating to news tips and user-generated content such as reports, photos and videos of noteworthy events (Angeluci, Scolari and Donato, 2017). This kind of use could represent an important change in the relationship between journalists and readers.

This study examines how news organizations have adapted to the inherent characteristics of WhatsApp while employing it to communicate with users. The study focuses on understanding if newsrooms have really been able to benefit from WhatsApp’s technological possibilities in order to develop closer relationships with news audiences, and what the constraints have been to its broader use.

1.1. Newsroom adaptation to social media and messaging apps

“Diffusion of innovations” theory is one of the most popular approaches to address the adoption of new technologies. It explains how a new idea, behavior or product is embraced by a social system (Rogers, 2003). Rogers proposed five attributes to explain why some innovations spread quickly while others do not: *Relative advantage*, or “the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes” (p. 257); *compatibility*, or “the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences and needs of potential adopters” (p. 258); *complexity*, or “the degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use” (p. 258); *trialability*, or “the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis” (p. 249); and

observability, or “the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others” (p. 250).

At the organizational level, innovation diffusion goes through two phases: initiation and implementation (Rogers, 2003). Initiation comprises two stages: *agenda-setting*, in which an organization identifies issues that demand innovation; and *matching*, when a company finds an innovation and evaluates whether it has the potential to solve the identified problem. Implementation starts with *redefinition and restructuring*, as the innovation is adapted to the organization’s needs and structures, followed by a *clarifying* stage, in which the innovation becomes more widely understood by the firm, and *routinizing*, when the innovation is completely incorporated.

Critics have called this approach overly simplistic and generalist (Karnowski, von Pape and Wirth, 2011). For Lievrouw and Livingstone (2010), innovation adoption is not a linear and stable process; there may be regressions and changes in direction along the way. For Micó, Masip and Domingo (2013), the theory ignores the process through which individuals can shape and even reject technologies. Despite criticism, it still seems that the diffusion of innovations theory fits this study, as the attributes proposed by Rogers (2003) are useful for assessing the level of adaptation to WhatsApp by newsrooms.

Several studies over the last two decades looking at the adoption by newsrooms of different new technologies have used the diffusion of innovations framework, and have revealed a certain consensus: a professed acceptance of these innovations by journalists, accompanied by concerns about their complexities and their compatibility with established norms and values (Ekdale et al., 2015). This response has led to a conservative adoption of new technologies, aiming only for them to fit in with existing practices but without the introduction of major changes in the relationship between journalists and the audience (Reich, 2013). Studies on the adoption of Twitter, for example, have shown that the platform spread quickly among journalists because it was compatible with practices for disseminating breaking news (Hermida, 2010). According to Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton (2012), journalists normalized Twitter by offering more opinions, but without relinquishing their traditional role as news gatekeepers. In one of the few broader studies on adaptation to WhatsApp by journalists, Boczek and Koppers (2020) presented a similar logic: news organizations assimilated some characteristics of the tool relating to news consumption, but audience engagement remained largely overlooked.

1.2. Aspects of news consumption on mobile devices

For most people, media use has traditionally occurred during leisure time, whether in the evening or at weekends (especially at night), which became known by TV programmers as “prime time”. News consumption on mobile devices, though, occurs in “interstices”: brief free moments during users’

daily routines (Dimmick, Feaster and Hoplamazian, 2011). As people spend more time connected to their mobile phones, news has actually become inter-linked with their activities (Struckmann and Karnowski, 2016). News consumption turned into several frequent “snacks” throughout the day (Van Damme et al., 2015).

Quick checks on smartphones tend to be even shorter than on other connected devices, and news consumption becomes increasingly dependent on social media and messaging applications (Molyneux, 2018). To meet the “news snacking” habit of mobile device users, the media would need to maintain a constant publication of new content that matches people’s “always-on” behavior, and this content should be as succinct as possible. Previous studies considered multimedia content such as images, videos and audios to be elements that enhance the rapid absorption of information (Bucy and Newhagen, 2004) and consequently align well with the concept of news snacking. To them, we can add *emojis* – pictograms capable of conveying feelings and complementing ideas contained in written texts. Emojis have already become an essential part of the language employed by users in messaging applications.

A potentially negative consequence of news snacking is that readers have a superficial knowledge of public affairs (Costera Meijer, 2007). In this sense, there is a concern that the historical difference between the types of subjects journalists favor in their coverage (public affairs such as politics and economics) and topics that readers would like to consume (non-public affairs such as sports, entertainment and crimes) increases, making the work of journalists more difficult and eventually decreasing participation in public debate (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, 2013).

1.3. Towards a definition of audience engagement

Media executives, journalists and researchers have struggled to agree on a definition of audience engagement, a concept that has been subject to several different interpretations, according to the contexts and subjectivities involved (Nelson, 2018). In research, audience engagement has usually been used to characterize public participation or is associated with editorial metrics that give publishers an idea of reader loyalty (Lawrence, Radcliffe and Schmidt, 2018).

Nelson (2021) argued, though, that definitions of audience engagement tend to focus solely on the audience, ignoring the deliberate attempts by news producers to reach them. Nelson suggests a distinction between reception-oriented engagement, which “focus[es] primarily on the audience’s reception of news: How much time did they spend with a story? How many times did they tweet about it or comment on it?” (p. 7); and production-oriented engagement, which “focus[es] on news production: How many citizens participated in the creation of this story? How many diverse voices were included as sources? How much of the audience requested this story in the

first place?” (p. 8). However, incorporating audience participation into the process of news production and distribution has been complicated because it conflicts with traditional values of professional journalism (Lawrence, Radcliffe and Schmidt, 2018). Thus, our literature review leads us to the following research questions:

- RQ1. To what extent are news organizations adapting to the specific characteristics of news consumption on WhatsApp?
- RQ2. To what extent are news organizations using WhatsApp to incentivize their audiences to engage with news production?
- RQ3. In the opinion of editors, what are the reasons for and the constraints to the wider adoption of WhatsApp as a news distribution and audience engagement tool?

2. Methodology

2.1. *Mixed-method research and data collection*

Brazil is the largest country in Latin America and has a media structured mostly around a private oligopoly that owns TV and radio stations, newspapers and online sites (Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez, 2014). Brazilians are recognized as being some of the most enthusiastic users of the internet, spending on average over nine hours per day online (the global average is around six hours per day). Most of that time is spent on social media and on messaging applications such as WhatsApp, by far the most popular app in the country (used by 96.4% of the population). More than 40% of its population use it for finding news (Newman et al., 2021), making it an interesting case for this research.

We joined 18 active groups and *broadcast lists* owned by 14 different Brazilian publishers on the platform to start data collection (Table 1). We focused our research primarily on news organizations that have content distribution channels on WhatsApp, prioritizing newspapers and digital news natives that offer local, regional and national coverage, including some focused primarily on content distribution through WhatsApp, a situation that seems to be very particular to Brazil. This diversity helped to compare different types of publishers and identify possible trends that have become commonplace only among specific types of news organizations.

Table 1. Brazilian media with news distribution channels on WhatsApp included in our analysis

News outlet	Type	Reach	Channels on WhatsApp
O Estado de S. Paulo	Newspaper	National	O Estado de S. Paulo
Gazeta do Povo	Newspaper	National/local	Gazeta do Povo Gazeta do Povo Local
UOL	Digital news native	National	UOL Economia+ UOL Tilt
The Intercept Brasil	Digital news native	National	The Intercept Brasil
Pública	Digital news native	National	Pública
Aos Fatos	Digital news native	National	Aos Fatos
Correio Sabiá	WhatsApp-based	National	Correio Sabiá
Panorama	WhatsApp-based	National	Panorama
GZH	Newspaper	Regional	GZH GZH Coronavirus
Tribuna do Paraná	Newspaper	Regional	Tribuna do Paraná
Jornal do Comércio	Newspaper	Local	Jornal do Comércio
O Município	Newspaper	Local	O Município O Município Joinville
Matinal	Digital news native	Local	Matinal
O Mirante Joinville	Digital news native	Local	O Mirante Joinville

Source: Authors' own.

2.2. Computational and in-depth human-coded content analysis

To answer RQ1, first we performed a quantitative content analysis of 8,855 messages sent by publishers on their WhatsApp channels over four months (exactly 120 days), between 9 November 2020, and 8 March 2021 (dataset COMP). Data were collected by exporting each chat on WhatsApp for iPhone, and analyze the text using Python (Van Rossum, 1995) for the dimensions of news snacking (frequencies, times of day, text formats, message lengths, adoption of multimedia formats, and use of emojis). To complement this, we conducted an in-depth, human-coded content analysis of 965 messages (dataset HUM) sent over two weeks within that period (from 11 January to 24 January, 2021) to examine the type of subjects addressed by the channels. Topics were manually coded based on 14 categories used by Boczek and Koppers (2020), namely politics, international affairs, economy, crime, disaster, weather, arts, sports, entertainment, lifestyle, science, transportation, prize competitions, and events calendars. After a pretest on coding data, we added one topic (health) that seemed important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of WhatsApp as an interpersonal communication tool to engage with audiences (RQ2) was determined by coding each message on dataset HUM for seven types of requests for audience engagement (survey, contact, share, promotion, feedback, questions, crowd-sourcing). Categories were defined after coding pretest data and by refining the categories used by Boczek and Koppers (2020).

2.3. *Expert interviews: reasoning about the adoption of WhatsApp for news*

Additionally, we conducted in-depth interviews with 21 editors and news executives responsible for these channels, to collect information, analyses and opinion about the use of WhatsApp in newsrooms (Table 2). Their input was particularly valuable to answer RQ3 and contextualize publishers’ strategies for news distribution and audience engagement on WhatsApp.

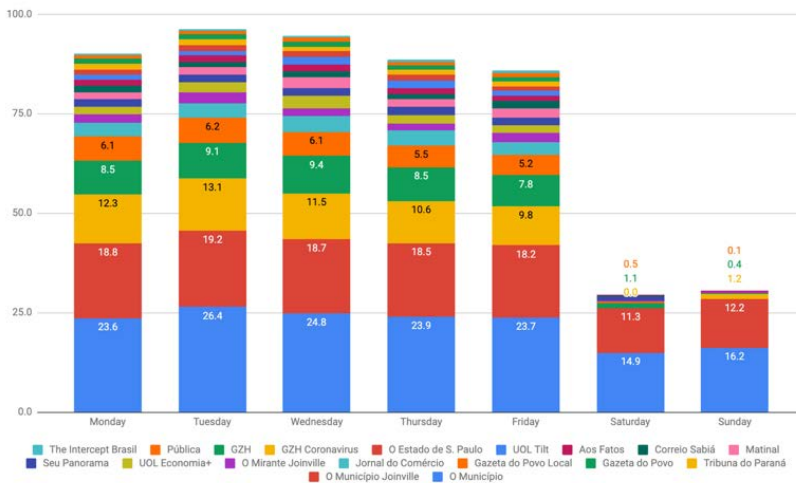
3. Findings

3.1. *Adaptation to WhatsApp for news distribution purposes*

3.1.1. *Frequencies*

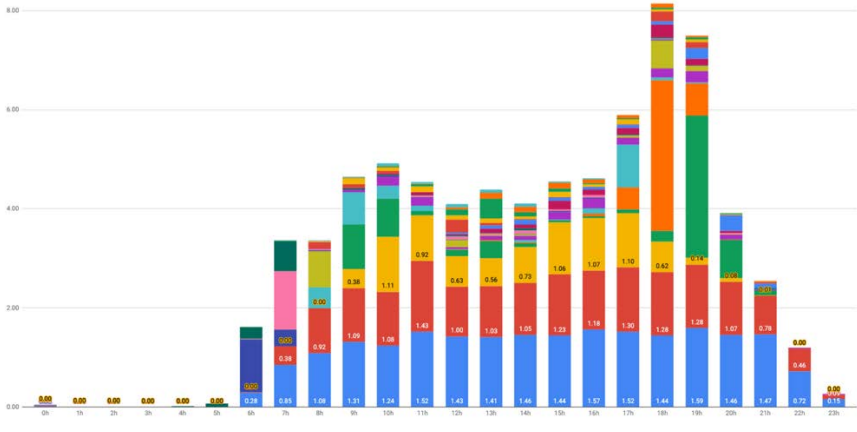
News snacking on WhatsApp supposedly creates a demand for ubiquity. Overall, though, the WhatsApp news channels analyzed did not seek this in terms of frequency: the average daily number of messages sent by each news outlet was 4.09. The smallest mean was 0.3 (*The Intercept Brasil*) and the two highest were 21.9 and 16.7, showing the main exceptions to that trend: both channels from *O Município*. A significantly larger number of messages were sent by news outlets from our sample on working days (an average of 5.06 messages per publisher) than at weekends (1.66) (Figure 1). News distribution channels came closer to ubiquity if we focus on the hour of the day the messages were sent: 97.8% of them were triggered between 6am and 10pm, times when editors assumed their audiences were awake (Figure 2). The prime time for our sample was between 5pm and 8pm, when 29.2% of the total messages were sent.

Figure 1. Average number of messages sent by news outlets per day of the week



Source: Authors' own based on the analysis of dataset COMP.

Figure 2. Average number of messages sent by news outlets per hour of the day



Source: Authors' own based on the analysis of dataset COMP.

3.1.2. Text formats and lengths

News organizations from our sample essentially implemented three distinct news distribution strategies on WhatsApp: 1) several messages a day, each with a link aimed at redirecting the reader to an article on the publisher's website, similar to the use made by news organizations of social media such as Facebook and Twitter; 2) a few messages (sometimes just one, but at most three) a day, with at least three or four links (sometimes more) intended to summarize the news during a specific period of time (morning, afternoon or the whole day), similar to the strategy used by news organizations and independent journalists to distribute email newsletters; and 3) no more than a single message a day, with only one or maximum two links redirecting to the news outlet's website.

Adopters of the first strategy were local news outlets using messaging apps with the goal of building a wider audience, such as *Tribuna do Paraná* and both branches of *O Município*, confirming a similar trend found by Jenkins and Nielsen (2018) in Europe. These publishers arrived late to social media and were not able to catch the boom in news distribution through Facebook, nor could they benefit from the great organic growth that this dominating platform provided to news pages until around the mid-2010s. Their messages were usually plain and simple, limited to not more than 150 characters (the headline and/or a short description of the news piece).

A 'newsletter strategy' seemed to be the most popular one in our sample, not only for established media companies such as *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *UOL* and *GZH* but also for emerging online initiatives such as *Aos Fatos*, *Correio Sabiá* and *Panorama*. The messages from these players had more in-depth descriptions of each of the various news articles compiled (ranging from 600 to 2,700 characters) and their respective links.

A few investigative news initiatives, such as *Agência Pública*, *The Intercept Brasil* and the *GZH* channel focused solely on the subject of COVID-19, adopted the third kind of approach, which can be understood as an attempt to maintain a minimal presence on WhatsApp without committing too much to the logic of news consumption using these tools. Their messages were short, although of relatively differing sizes: 200 characters for *GZH Coronavirus*, and from around 400 to 800 characters for the others.

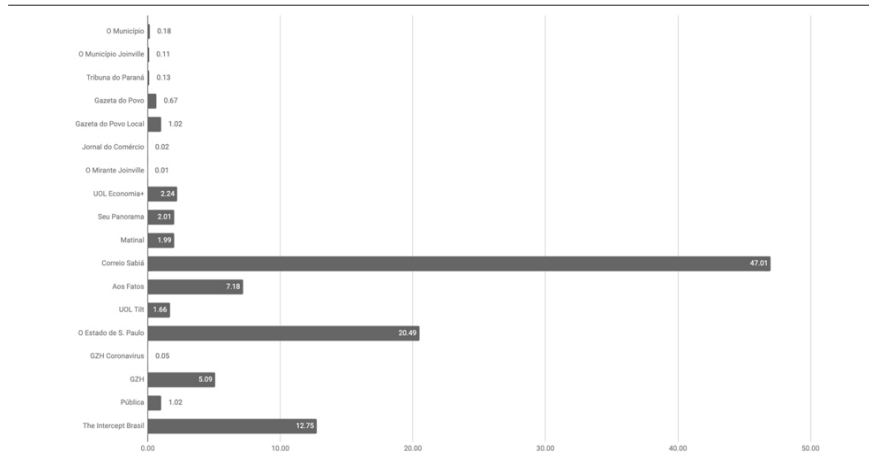
3.1.3. Use of multimedia formats

Only a minority of the channels in our sample systematically used multimedia formats. *UOL Tilt* was the only one that used images with some frequency (more than 30% of all messages). Videos were also rare, with *GZH* being the only one sending this format in more than 5% of its messages. Use of audio was more common, but it only became an integral part of the strategy for *Matinal* and *Panorama*, which aimed to make a product through which communication between the narrator and the user was direct and would give a sense of proximity.

3.1.4. Use of emojis

Experts seemed divided on the institutional use of these icons in messages sent to readers via WhatsApp. Half of the 18 channels, on average, used not more than one emoji per message; four channels sent a moderate number of emojis (between one and two) per message; while another five channels could be considered frequent emoji users, with an average of more than five such icons per message. The average number of emojis sent by Brazilian publishers was 1.65 per message, and the publisher that sent the most was *Correio Sabidá*, with an incredible average of 47 emojis per message (dataset COMP) (Figure 3).

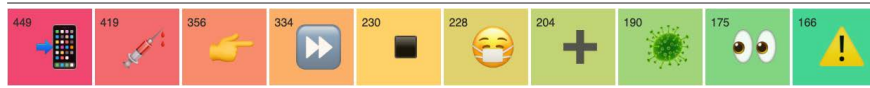
Figure 3. Average number of emojis per message sent by news outlets



Source: Authors' own based on the analysis of dataset COMP.

The main emojis used in the sample give a hint of the main topic in the sample: three of the top ten most popular icons (the needle, the masked face and the virus) were related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Top ten most frequently used emojis by the 18 channels analyzed

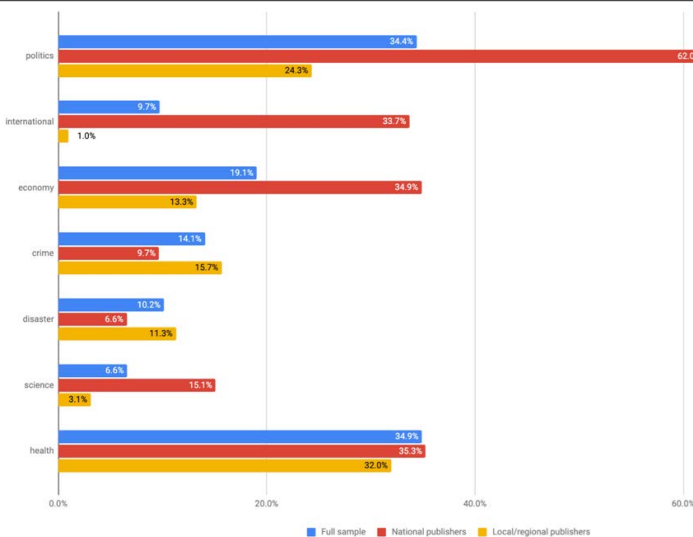


Source: Authors' own based on the analysis of dataset COMP.

3.1.5. Main news subjects

Our human-coded content analysis showed that the subjects most frequently addressed by the cases in our sample in the selected period on both platforms were, indeed, public affairs: *health* (34.9% of all the messages in dataset HUM), *politics* (34.4%) and *economy* (19.1%). We also noticed a high frequency of subjects such as crime (14.1%) and disaster (10.2%), but this was less a reflection of publishers' attempt to reduce the news gap identified by Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013) and more a finding related to the higher number of messages from local and regional publishers in the sample. In an attempt to compensate for this discrepancy, we also performed an analysis according to the reach of each publisher (local or national). As expected, we found that there was a very significant variation in the types of content prioritized by local and national publishers, with the exception of *health*, which remained a relatively constant topic of interest for all media in our sample (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Percentage of messages containing each topic on news channels analyzed



Source: Authors' own based on the analysis of dataset HUM.

3.2. The adaptation to WhatsApp for interpersonal communication and audience engagement

In their interviews, several editors and executives praised the possibility of directly connecting and engaging with their readers on WhatsApp without the mediation of algorithms. In practice, though, interpersonal communication with audiences through WhatsApp seemed limited. *Tribuna do Paraná* was the only news outlet in our sample that had dedicated staff (actually a single person) to manage interactions with its readers through WhatsApp.

Audience participation was hardly incentivized on publishers' usual channels on WhatsApp. Not a single WhatsApp group opened space for interaction from end-users: only company admins were allowed to send messages, showing that, from the media point of view, these channels worked mostly for simple news distribution. A quick content analysis of the profile pages of these distribution channels showed that only four (*O Município*, *O Município Joinville*, *GZH* and *Correio Sabiá*) stated whether that phone number or even another one was available to receive communication from the audience on WhatsApp. Most of the channels omitted any information, while *Jornal do Comércio* and *O Mirante Joinville* stated that those channels served only for the news outlet to send messages: responses or calls from readers were not welcome (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Profile pages of news channels that provided a phone number to receive contact from users, or stated that the channel was for news distribution only and contact was not allowed



Source: Screenshots of the channels' profile pages on WhatsApp on May 20th, 2022.

Taking this into consideration, the result of our search in the human-coded data for phrases that could indicate any interest among journalists in interacting with readers was not surprising. Similarly to Boczek and Koppers (2020), only 121 out of 965 messages (12.6%) made any form of request for engagement (Figure 7). Just 14 (1.5% of the total) were solely focused on

stimulating engagement with the audience. Seven of the 18 channels analyzed (38.8%), though, sent a call for engagement in at least 70% of their messages. *GZH*, *The Intercept Brasil*, *Aos Fatos* and *UOL Economia+* had those kinds of requests in all of their messages sent to users. However, they did not seem to have many variations: usually, it was the same sentence accompanied by a link in every single message, which potentially had a limited effect.

We can see that the cases analyzed mostly stimulated basic forms of reception-oriented engagement, such as *promotion* (present in 53.7% of messages that contained a call to engagement) and *share* (52.9%). Production-oriented categories of audience engagement such as *crowdsourcing* and *questions* appeared in 17.4% and 8.3% of the messages containing calls to engagement, respectively – figures largely influenced by very specific cases such as *Aos Fatos*, which encouraged crowdsourcing in all its 21 news distribution messages selected for human codification, as it largely relied on the support of readers to collect rumors that were circulating on messaging apps; and *UOL Economia+*, which asked users several questions in eight of their 22 messages.

Figure 7. Stacked bar chart showing the percentages of messages sent with the purpose of distribution, distribution and engagement and only engagement



Source: Authors' own based on the analysis of dataset HUM.

3.3. Reasons for and constraints on the use of WhatsApp for news distribution and engagement with audiences

The main reason for publishers to use WhatsApp, according to our interviews, was improving news distribution and reaching audiences – especially after Facebook's algorithmic changes in 2018. However, since December 2019, when WhatsApp started limiting the use of any bulk messaging or automation tool,¹ it became virtually impossible for medium and large publishers to build a significant audience on the platform: whether on groups or broadcast lists, each message could be sent to a maximum of 256 users each

1. HAZARD OWEN, L. (2019, June 21). "As of December, publishers will be no longer allowed to send out newsletters on WhatsApp". *Nieman Lab*. Retrieved from <<https://www.niemanlab.org/2019/06/as-of-december-publishers-will-no-longer-be-allowed-to-send-out-newsletters-on-whatsapp/>>. March 23, 2022.

time. In the case of broadcast lists, reaching tens of thousands of readers would require a copy-pasting process that would have to be repeated hundreds of times, using user phone numbers that had already been registered on a single mobile device (groups do not have this requirement, but phone numbers remain public for each group member).

According to *The Intercept Brasil*'s former director of social media, Juliana Gonçalves, the physical process of sending messages via the organization's more than 150 distribution lists, which had around 40,000 registered users on the platform, took half the working hours of a communication intern every day. The example is particularly significant because the online publisher, with over 600,000 followers on Facebook, 950,000 on Twitter and 1.2 million on Instagram, was the one that sent the least number of messages in our sample, with an average of only 0.3 texts per day (dataset COMP). The more messages, the greater the workload.

Because of its private nature, WhatsApp did not offer statistics about these messages, which is commonplace on open social media. Without analytics, uncertainties increased: respondents reported not being sure if all users subscribing to broadcast lists actually received the messages sent to them (the condition for users to receive them was to store the news organization's contact details on their devices). According to the interviews, bugs were also frequent, especially if publishers tried to use special text parameters such as bold and italics, or if they sent photos or videos.

WhatsApp's policies always seemed subject to change without prior notice or sufficient information, experts reported. This was more or less what happened with the December 2019 change: publishers read an official statement from WhatsApp in July, but it was ambiguous, and most editors and executives were unable to contact the platform through the usual official channels of communication they had with Facebook. No service was directly affected, since they were not using third-party tools. Anyway, a common feeling among respondents was that "WhatsApp was not meant for journalism".

Therefore, only emerging online and local publishers could actually use WhatsApp to reach larger audiences, i.e. in the tens of thousands, which for a news outlet like *O Município*, with just over 100,000 followers on its main Facebook page and not even 50,000 on the Joinville page, is already a significant number. Journalists from more established news players talked about "being where the people were" and providing their readers with a different product or service than usual to justify their presence on the platform. News organizations seemed, however, to be in a frequent wait for a measure from the platform that could facilitate their work or, eventually, could even completely prevent them from having a presence on the tool, as their distribution channels on WhatsApp were rarely promoted on their websites and official social media profiles.

4. Discussion and conclusion

4.1. Adaptation mostly at a technological level, and blame on the platform

Literature showed a relatively homogeneous trend among several studies on the adoption of new technologies by newsrooms: adaptation occurred mostly at a technological level (i.e. through the utilization of different social media platforms for similar distribution purposes) but it generally was not followed by profound transformations in journalists' relationships with their audiences (Hermida, 2010; Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton, 2012; Ekdale et al., 2015; Boczek and Koppers, 2020). To a certain extent, the adaptation of Brazilian newsrooms to WhatsApp followed a similar path.

The adaptation to WhatsApp seemed already limited in terms of news distribution (RQ1): none of the channels analyzed completely took into account the news consumption habit of news snacking by users of mobile devices. News outlets showed a tweaked understanding of ubiquity on the platform, sending messages mostly when they assumed readers were awake and not at an inconvenient frequency. The length of the messages varied significantly, and formats were notoriously inspired by models already widely explored in the dissemination of content via email or social media. WhatsApp did not create, and news organizations did not adapt to, a new format such as the short videos/reels that have now become endemic on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. In terms of topics, Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013) suggested that journalists should relax the coverage of public affairs during periods of stability and reinforce it during times of crisis, when denser information is considered to play a key societal role. The editors of the channels analyzed seemed to have made an adequate reading of the moment they were in, during a peak phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, which therefore justifies a wider distribution of subjects such as health, politics and economics.

Using the attributes proposed by Rogers (2003) to explain why some innovations spread more quickly than others, it seems obvious that WhatsApp only provides a relative advantage for the distribution of news for a very small portion of publishers – usually local and/or emergent digital news natives – which were not able to take advantage of the incredible audiences that Facebook was able to deliver to the media until the algorithmic changes of 2018. News organizations noticed that the tool has a high level of complexity that makes it very difficult for newsrooms to fully adopt it. When some of the experts interviewed vented their frustrations with the platform by saying that “WhatsApp was not made for journalism”, they meant that the tool was incompatible with the practices and values of the profession, even though, initially, they had identified a great potential for it to perhaps replace Facebook in their distribution strategies. In summary, when we analyze the adoption of WhatsApp by newsrooms, it has rarely passed the two phases of innovation diffusion proposed by Rogers (2003), namely initiation and implementation.

Regarding (mostly production-oriented) audience engagement (RQ2), there seems to be a lack of consistency in the practices of news organizations using WhatsApp. *Tribuna do Paraná*, for example, did not encourage engagement even though it was the only news outlet that had a dedicated professional for interpersonal communication with users. Organizations that informed users about the possibility of contact on their profile pages failed to stimulate participation in the messages they sent; and the few who did encourage engagement, missed the point, as discussed above.

It seemed clear that WhatsApp was still not a tool that solved the biggest issue relating to audience participation in newsrooms: how to operate it cheaply or effortlessly with the limited journalistic workforce available. Once again, in Rogers' (2003) terms, if WhatsApp did provide a relative advantage over other tools because communication with readers on the messaging app did not face the hurdles of algorithm selection, it did not seem to have a sufficient level of compatibility with the needs of adopters in the newsrooms. In terms of audience engagement, the adoption of WhatsApp by newsrooms has not yet passed the initial phase despite widespread testing; while the issue that demands innovation was identified, the media could hardly consider that WhatsApp matched their needs for direct communication with users.

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Digital-native news media: Reach in 46 countries, top brands and user profiles in Spain*

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Abstract

Digital-pure news publications have become competitive players in many countries, populating audience rankings in the context of a high-choice media environment. With the aim of gaining insight into the performance of digital-native news brands around the world and into how their audiences are similar or different to those of media with traditional roots in Spain, we draw on survey data for 2021 and 2022, respectively. First, we examine what proportion of online adults use any of the most popular digital-pure news brands in 24 mostly European countries and in 22 markets in America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, and we highlight how the main digital-native brands rank among online news sources, based on their weekly audience reach. Then we compare the user profiles of the five most-used online-only news organizations in Spain, against the audiences of the top five legacy brands ($N = 2028$), looking at reader loyalty, gender, age, income and education levels, and political leaning. With this media-centric approach to audiences, we find that digital-native news media brands either lead (in 15 out of 46 countries) or occupy some of the top positions by weekly reach in most markets, with Nordic countries standing out as an exception. In Spain, audiences of the top digital-native brands check them slightly less frequently than the users of news sites with traditional roots. News sites in our study are slightly more popular among males, older people, and more affluent and formally educated users who can define their political stance. Nevertheless, the diversity of editorial approaches found among sites in an externally pluralistic

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news media market inevitably results in brands with user profiles that show exceptions to these trends.

Keywords: digital journalism; online news; news publishing; news audiences; digital-native media; Spain

Resum. *Mitjans de notícies nadius digitals: abast en 46 països, principals marques i perfils d'usuaris a Espanya*

Les publicacions de notícies purament digitals han esdevingut actors competitiu en molts països i ocupen llocs destacats en les classificacions d'audiència en el context d'un entorn mediàtic d'alta capacitat d'elecció. Amb l'objectiu d'obtenir informació sobre el rendiment de les marques de notícies digitals a tot el món i de saber si les seves audiències són similars o diferents a les dels mitjans amb arrels tradicionals a Espanya, ens basem en dades d'una enquesta de 2021 i 2022, respectivament. Primer, examinem quina proporció d'adults connectats a internet fa servir alguna de les marques de notícies purament digitals més populars en 24 països majoritàriament europeus i en 22 mercats d'Amèrica, Àfrica i la regió Àsia-Pacífic, i destaquem com es classifiquen les principals marques nadius digitals en funció de l'audiència setmanal que aconsegueixen. Després comparem els perfils dels usuaris de les cinc organitzacions de notícies exclusivament digitals més utilitzades a Espanya, amb les audiències de les cinc principals marques tradicionals (N = 2028), i analitzem la lleialtat dels lectors, el gènere, l'edat, els nivells d'educació i ingressos, i la inclinació política. Amb aquest enfocament centrat en les audiències dels mitjans, trobem que les marques de mitjans de notícies nadius digitals són líders (en 15 de 46 països) o ocupen algunes de les primeres posicions per abast setmanal en la majoria dels mercats, amb els països nòrdics com a excepció. A Espanya, les audiències de les principals marques nadius digitals les consulten amb una freqüència lleugerament menor que els usuaris de llocs de notícies amb arrels tradicionals. Els llocs de notícies en el nostre estudi són una mica més populars entre els homes, les persones grans i els usuaris més benestants i amb educació formal, capaços de definir la seva postura política. No obstant això, la diversitat d'enfocaments editorials que es troben entre els llocs, en un mercat de mitjans de notícies pluralista, inevitablement dona com a resultat marques amb perfils d'usuari que mostren excepcions a aquestes tendències.

Paraules clau: periodisme digital; notícies en línia; publicació de notícies; audiències de notícies; mitjans nadius digitals

Resumen. *Medios de noticias nativos digitales: alcance en 46 países, principales marcas y perfiles de usuarios en España*

Las publicaciones de noticias puramente digitales se han convertido en actores competitivos en muchos países y ocupan puestos destacados en las clasificaciones de audiencia en el contexto de un entorno mediático de alta capacidad de elección. Con el objetivo de obtener información sobre el rendimiento de las marcas de noticias digitales en todo el mundo y de saber si sus audiencias son similares o diferentes a las de los medios con raíces tradicionales en España, nos basamos en datos de una encuesta de 2021 y 2022, respectivamente. Primero, examinamos qué proporción de adultos conectados a internet usa alguna de las marcas de noticias puramente digitales más populares en 24 países mayoritariamente europeos y en 22 mercados de América, África y la región Asia-Pacífico, y destacamos cómo se clasifican las principales marcas nativas digitales en función de la audiencia semanal que alcancen. Luego comparamos los perfiles de los usuarios de las cinco organizaciones de noticias exclusivamente digitales más utilizadas en España, con las audiencias de las

cinco principales marcas tradicionales (N = 2028), y analizamos la lealtad de los lectores, el género, la edad, los niveles de educación e ingresos, y la inclinación política. Con este enfoque centrado en las audiencias de los medios, encontramos que las marcas de medios de noticias nativos digitales son líderes (en 15 de 46 países) u ocupan algunas de las primeras posiciones por alcance semanal en la mayoría de los mercados, con los países nórdicos como excepción. En España, las audiencias de las principales marcas nativas digitales las consultan con una frecuencia ligeramente menor que los usuarios de sitios de noticias con raíces tradicionales. Los sitios de noticias en nuestro estudio son un poco más populares entre los hombres, las personas mayores y los usuarios más pudientes y con educación formal, capaces de definir su postura política. Sin embargo, la diversidad de enfoques editoriales que se encuentran entre los sitios, en un mercado de medios de noticias pluralista, inevitablemente da como resultado marcas con perfiles de usuario que muestran excepciones a estas tendencias.

Palabras clave: periodismo digital; noticias en línea; publicación de noticias; audiencias de noticias; medios nativos digitales

1. Introduction

Digital-native news media have become a sizeable part of many online news markets (Salaverría, 2016) and have thrived despite, or even as a result of, challenging circumstances (Salaverría, 2021; Salaverría and Martínez-Costa, 2023), populating the “media ecosystem” from the periphery to the epicenter (López-García, Silva-Rodríguez and Vázquez-Herrero, 2023; Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey and López-García, 2023), although legacy brands enjoy structural advantages (Nelson, 2020).

Nichols et al. (2018: 6) identified two “waves” of digital news start-ups: first, “ad-supported aggregators which bundled together news from multiple sources – often as part of a ‘portal’ model”, which we have shown is still present in some countries; and second, digital-born news sites that “produce their own content”. Writing about “web-only” publishers, Bradshaw noted that “Gawker Media, the Huffington Post and BuzzFeed launched in the US in 2003, 2005 and 2006 respectively, and were to have a massive impact on the wider industry, including on employment practices and pay” (Bradshaw, 2018: 11).

In a previous publication, we explored this phenomenon from the perspective of the digital transition of brands, we explored the international context with 2020 data, and we profiled the users of digital-native media in Spain (Negredo and Kaufmann-Argueta, 2021). Before that, we found (Arrese and Kaufmann, 2016) a high degree of similarity in the types of readers and reading behavior of legacy and digital-native news brands. Here, we will keep this media-centric approach (Webster and Ksiazek, 2012) in examining legacy and digital-native media audiences.

1.1. Studies on the audience development of digital-native media

Democratic societies with access to digital news exist in a “high-choice media environment” (Prior, 2007). This plentiful supply does not necessarily result

in very high audience fragmentation at the top, as the leading online brands in most countries are shared by many users, who consume both mainstream and niche sites (Nelson and Webster, 2017), and combine broadcast, print and digital-born sources (Fletcher and Nielsen, 2017).

Other studies have also used the Digital News Report to examine “the prominence of mainstream, digital-born and partisan or alternative news sources online” across countries covered by the survey (Jungherr and Schroeder, 2022: 32), whereas news repertoires studies have combined a variety of methods (Costera-Meijer and Groot-Kormelink, 2015), such as Q-sort exercises (Peters et al., 2022).

Despite the increased diversity in the news supply, only a few sites concentrate the audience’s attention (Hagar and Shaw, 2022). Morejón Vallejo and Villacís Morales (2022) noted the constant stream of launches and closures amid the constant growth of digital-native media in Ecuador. Buschow (2020) explored the obstacles to the development of such news startups in Germany, as Bruno and Nielsen (2012) and Nichols et al. (2018) had done previously across Europe.

1.2. News brand loyalty among legacy and digital-native media

With the digital transformation of news markets, consumers have claimed power back from brands (Gralpois, 2010). Sparviero (2019) defines the reader as an active user whose proactive actions build the brand image of media brands, shifting the balance that Webster (2014) established in the negotiation between individuals and media institutions, in *The Marketplace of Attention*.

The rise of digital native media has created the need to understand if and how the users differ from legacy media. One of these essential consumption patterns is loyalty of the audience towards the news brand. This particular behavior has been studied from a series of different angles: First, from the perspective of trust and how higher levels of trust increase the amount of news that users consume from the news brand (Nelson and Kim, 2021; Goyanes, 2020). Second, loyalty has been connected to the concept of brand attachment, and how to turn casual readers into loyal clients. Greater brand loyalty is related to the idea that user interaction, such as sharing or commenting on news sites, increases their brand loyalty to particular news organizations (Krebs and Lischka, 2019; Lin, Chen and Sung, 2018). Third, another way to measure loyalty is by quantifying the frequency of the audience’s exposure to the news site (Napoli, 2011). In other words, the number of times users visit the news brand. Fourth, loyalty has also been linked to social interaction. In accordance with Fournier (1998) and Ross, Lester and Konkes (2021), readers should feel that the news organization is a partner in an interdependent relationship in which they receive something they value in return for engaging with the brand. Most recently, Gajardo and Costera Meijer (2023) have even made the case that loyalty should be studied as a single phenomenon, and not tied to other behaviors such as giving continued attention,

sharing and subscribing. In their latest study, they argue that loyalty to journalism is less about actions than about feelings within a relationship, one that is often obscured as we focus solely on its most economically beneficial outcomes.

1.3. Socio-demographic, educational, income and political differences in audiences

We will now look at studies that analyze the audience segmentation variables we are considering in this paper. By tracking millennials' and boomers' use of news sites, Taneja, Wu and Edgerly found that "legacy media's online potential is heavily mediated by the users' generation and their relationships with these media on other platforms" (2018: 1807), making them the preference of older users, along with longer-running digital brands, therefore "foregrounding the residual effect of historical media infrastructures" (2018: 1808), although they describe the generational gap as "modest" (2018: 1809). Household income and formal education also influence media choices, establishing differences by social class (Lindell, 2018). Vara-Miguel (2020) found that traditional news media brands had more predominantly male audiences, with higher income and education levels, than digital-native media.

Finally, in the quest for differences and similarities between these kinds of media, Harlow (2022: 1338) surveyed readers of entrepreneurial, independent digital journalism sites in seven Latin American countries, considering many of the variables that we will use (gender, age, education and political ideology), and conducting focus groups with journalists. She found perceptions of "a model of a hybrid, or *mestizaje*, digital-native journalism" between mainstream and alternative media, shared by users and journalists alike.

2. Methodology

In the international results section, we will review how online-only brands perform in 46 markets, based on rankings in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (DNR) (Newman et al., 2021) and on a recount of digital-native brand reach by country. We will also compare the audiences of leading digital-native brands against the top sites with traditional roots, based on the most recent DNR survey data in Spain (2022), for which we will present previously unpublished audience breakdowns by gender, age, income, education and political ideology.

The survey fieldwork is conducted by the polling company YouGov in January and February of each year, with national samples based on age, gender and regional quotas (education and political quotas are also present in most markets), representative of adult internet users in each country. The sample size in Spain is around 2000 and the overall sample size in all 46 markets is above 90,000 participants. As contributors to the study from Spain, we provide input throughout the process, from questionnaire design and translation to data analysis, supervision and dissemination.

In this article we concentrate on the questions about offline and online media brands that participants remember having used for news at least once over the last week. As an indicator of greater fidelity and frequency of use, they are also asked if they used the brand on three or more days in the last seven days; we identify these as “loyal users”. We believe that comparing national markets and then focusing on one for further comparison between brands in a market is a suitable approach for our purpose, as audience networks are mostly defined by language and geographical similarities (Taneja and Webster, 2016).

We set out to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1.1. How does the penetration of digital-pure media in Spain compare to other countries?
- RQ1.2. In what markets are digital-pure news organizations market leaders according to their weekly reach?
- RQ2. How does the fidelity of digital-pure news media audiences compare with that of media with traditional roots?
- RQ3.1. Are digital-pure media audiences evenly distributed among males and females, or skewed towards a particular gender?
- RQ3.2. Are the audiences of digital-pure media younger or older than those of media with traditional roots?
- RQ3.3. Are the audiences of digital-pure media more or less formally educated than those of media with traditional roots?
- RQ3.4. Do the audiences of digital-pure media have a higher or lower household income than those of media with traditional roots?
- RQ3.5. Are the audiences for digital-native news sites more transversal or more polarized than those of the main traditional sites?

The next section addresses RQ1, while the following section covers RQ2 and RQ3. Later, we discuss the results in the context of similar studies.

3. International results: weekly reach of digital-native media and top brands by country

The average reach of digital-native brands in the mostly European countries surveyed in early 2022 was 54% of online adults: this is the average of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Poland, the Czech Republic, Turkey, Portugal, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Romania, Slovakia, Croatia and Bulgaria. National data for these countries is shown in Table 1.

In the European Union countries surveyed (the 24 countries listed above, minus the U.K., Turkey, Norway and Switzerland), the reach of digital-native brands was 56%, powered by their popularity in Balkan and Eastern European countries. This data point coincides with the average found in the

six Latin American countries surveyed (Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Colombia and Peru), which was also 56% in 2022. The average for the United States of America and Canada was notably lower, at 43%, in line with some Western European countries but higher than in the European Nordic countries.

In the Asian countries surveyed (India, Japan, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Hong Kong), the average reach of digital-pure or digital-first brands was 69%, with all countries except for Thailand standing above the 46-market average. In Africa, the average for South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria was 84%, with a similar reach in all three countries, where the sample represents a more affluent, educated and urban population with internet access (Table 1).

Table 1. Weekly reach of digital-native media in 46 markets among adult internet users, $N \approx 2000$ in each country

Country	Digital native reach	Country	Digital native reach	Country	Digital native reach
Indonesia	88%	Philippines	72%	Peru	52%
South Africa	85%	Brazil	68%	Australia	51%
Nigeria	85%	Singapore	67%	Switzerland	50%
Greece	84%	Hong Kong	66%	Norway	48%
Kenya	83%	Ireland	64%	Thailand	48%
Croatia	82%	India	64%	U.S.A.	44%
Bulgaria	81%	Mexico	61%	Canada	42%
Taiwan	80%	Portugal	60%	Chile	42%
Romania	79%	Japan	60%	France	41%
Turkey	77%			Germany	39%
Hungary	76%	Total (46 markets)	59%	Austria	37%
Czech Republic	76%	Argentina	59%	Sweden	32%
Slovakia	75%	Netherlands	58%	Belgium	23%
Malaysia	75%	Colombia	56%	U.K.	22%
Rep. of Korea	74%	Italy	53%	Denmark	19%
Poland	72%	Spain	53%	Finland	14%

Note: The percentage represents the respondents who selected any digital-pure or digital-first brand as a source of online news they used in the last seven days, from a list of several dozen of the most popular news brands in their country.

Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey 2021.

3.1. Top digital-native news brands in Europe

In 2021, a digital-pure brand was the online news market leader in eight out of the mostly 24 European countries surveyed: Croatia (*Index.hr*, with 64% weekly reach), the Czech Republic (*Seznam Zprávy*, 50%), Poland (*Onet.pl*, 50%), Slovakia (*Aktuality.sk*, 47%), the Netherlands (*NU.nl*, 41%), Hungary (*24.hu*, 39%), Greece (*Newsbomb.gr*, 33%), and Turkey, where *Sondakika.com* stepped up from third to joint first position, with 30% weekly reach,

shared with *CNN Türk*. In Portugal, *Noticiasaoiminuto.com* went down to second position (33%).

In the United Kingdom, only *HuffPost* remained a top digital-native alternative to legacy brands, ranking sixth, with 7% weekly reach. In Italy, *Fanpage.it* slipped to fifth in 2021, with 19% weekly reach. In Spain, three digital-native sites made it consistently into the top ten places in the latest few annual editions of the DNR survey; further details are provided in Section 4. In contrast, in France, digital-native outlets remained minority choices: *Brut* grew to 10% and climbed to ninth position in 2021, as the best-performing digital-native.

In Germany, the third most popular online news site in 2020 and 2021 (with 15% weekly reach) was *t-online*. Austria also saw *GMX* (.at, in this case) in a top five position: it was fourth in 2021 with 15%. In Switzerland, *Bluewin* (Swisscom) was fourth in the French-Speaking ranking (with 20% weekly reach) and fifth in the German-language Swiss ranking (18% reach), just below digital-pure player *Watson.ch* (20%).

Ireland is another country with strong digital natives: *TheJournal.ie* ranks consistently second (35% weekly reach in 2021). The only digital-pure operation in a relevant position in Belgium is *7sur7.be*, launched in 2006 by Flemish legacy publisher DPG Media; it was a top five site in the French-language online news list, with 20% weekly reach.

In Bulgaria, commercial publishers owning general online-only news sites alongside a network of specialized sites positioned *Novini.bg* fourth (35%), *Dir.bg* seventh (23%) and *Blitz.bg* ninth (18%), while an independent journalism site, *Bivol.bg*, ranked tenth (16%). In Romania, *Ziare.com*, part of a large network of specialized portals, was third in the online news ranking, with 28% weekly reach.

In Norway, the only popular pure player was digital-native pioneer *Nettavisen*, launched in 1996 and ranking fifth among online news brands, with 27% weekly reach. In the other Nordic countries in our study, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, digital-native outlets did not make it into the top ten brands in 2021.

3.2. Leading digital-native news sites in selected countries in other continents

Outside Europe, *Yahoo! News* remained the largest online-only news player in several countries. In the United States, it held second place in the ranking (16% weekly reach). In Canada, it was the fifth online brand (14%) in the English-speaking market, while *MSN News* was fifth (15%) among French speakers. In Brazil, *UOL.com.br* was second (45%) and *Yahoo! News* was fifth (20%).

In Latin America, *Infobae* ranks consistently first among online news sources in Argentina (46% weekly reach). *Aristegui Noticias* was the leading digital-native source (fourth, with 21%). In Colombia, *Las 2 Orillas* (fourth) and *Pulzo* (seventh) reached 22% of users each. In Chile, *Elmostrador.cl*,

founded in 2000, retained sixth place with 21% in 2021. In Peru, online-only *Peru.com*, owned by the main newspaper publishing house in the country, was fourth.

We now look at the Asia-Pacific region. *Yahoo! News* was the absolute leader in Japan (54%) and Taiwan (39%). In Indonesia, long-running digital-pure brand *Detik.com*, founded in 1998, came first (65%). Another digital-native launched in late 1999, *MalaysiaKini*, led clearly in Malaysia, with 50% reach. In South Korea two portals led the ranking consistently: *Naver* (62%) and *Daum* (29%), both operating since the 1990s. In the Philippines, Maria Ressa's *Rappler* (32%, fourth) overtook *Yahoo! News* (30%, fifth) in 2021, nine years after launch. Similarly, in Singapore, digital-native *Mothership.sg*, operating since 2014, was second (42%), and *Yahoo! News* was fourth (25%). Increasing press freedom violations saw two main titles in Hong Kong cease operations in 2021; alongside *Apple Daily* (second, 29%), digital-native non-profit *Stand News* (seventh, 21%) also had to close. In Thailand, *Voice* was eighth (18%). In India, *India.com* (seventh, 21%) belongs to a large media conglomerate and *Yahoo! News* was eighth (20%). In Australia, *News.com.au* lost ground to the public broadcaster, which pushed NewsCorp's site down to second place (22%).

Finally, in the three African countries surveyed, *News24* was the clear leader in South Africa with 73% reach; *Kenyan.co.ke* was third in Kenya (52%), while *Yahoo! News* was eighth (24%); the Nigerian top ten ranking of digital news sources included online news agency *Sahara Reporters* and digital-native *Pulse.ng*, both with 42% reach and sharing fifth position.

4. National results: the main digital-native media brands in Spain and their users

Based on the ranking of weekly online audiences in Spain in 2022, we picked the top five digital-native brands and compared them with the top five brands with traditional roots, discarding generic categories for regional media (Table 2).

First, we analyzed the loyalty of an audience to a media brand by calculating the proportion of the weekly audience that visits the site on three or more days in a week, taking this as shorthand for the loyalty that the media brand enjoys among its readership. The average was 56% for traditional-rooted media and 44% for digital-native media, showing a wide gap.

Of the traditional-rooted media, television brand Antena 3 enjoys the highest user loyalty, with 64%. Among digital natives, *OKDiario.com* has the most loyal following, with 53%. At the other end of the spectrum, *El Mundo* online, with 48%, has the lowest level of loyalty among the leading traditional-rooted media brands. This goes down to 32% for digital-native media, with *El Español*.

Table 2. Comparison between reach weekly and on three or more days in a week, $N = 2028$ online adults in Spain

Digital native	Rank	Weekly use	3+ days/week	Proportion
OKDiario.com	2 nd	13%	7%	53%
EIConfidencial.com	6 th	12%	5%	41%
EIDiario.es	7 th	12%	5%	42%
EIEspañol.com	13 th	8%	3%	32%
El HuffPost	17 th	7%	4%	52%
Traditional online	Rank	Weekly use	3+ days/week	Proportion
El País online	1 st	18%	10%	52%
Antena 3 online	3 rd	13%	8%	64%
El Mundo online	4 th	13%	6%	48%
20 Minutos online	5 th	13%	7%	53%
Marca online	9 th	11%	7%	62%

Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey 2022.

4.1. Gender

The average reach of digital-native media among male readers (12.4%) is higher than among female readers (9.2%). Traditional-rooted media are also skewed towards a male audience. Sports newspaper *Marca*'s percentage of male readers is 19%, while it only reaches 3% of female readers; without this, the difference between the average reach of the remaining top four legacy brands among men (12.5%) and women (10.5%) is just two percentage points. Of all the media sites in this comparison, only *20 Minutos* has a higher female audience than male audience, by four percentage points. (Table 3).

Table 3. Weekly reach by gender, $N = 2028$ online adults in Spain

Digital native	Total	Gender	
		Male	Female
OKDiario.com	13%	16%	11%
EIConfidencial.com	12%	15%	10%
EIDiario.es	12%	13%	11%
EIEspañol.com	8%	9%	7%
El HuffPost	7%	8%	7%
Average	10.7%	12.4%	9.2%
Traditional online	Total	Gender	
		Male	Female
El País online	18%	22%	15%
Antena 3 online	13%	13%	13%
El Mundo online	13%	17%	10%
20 Minutos online	13%	11%	15%
Marca online	11%	19%	3%
Average	13.6%	16.3%	11.1%

Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey 2022.

4.2. Age

The 65+ age group has the highest average results for both media types: 14% for the top digital natives and 16% for traditional media (Table 4). Digital-native media achieve the smallest average reach (8.9%) in the 18-24 age group. *ElConfidencial.com* is the digital-native organization with the biggest differences, found between the 45-54 age group (7%) and the 55-64 (17%) age group. The brand with the largest following among younger users is a traditional-rooted broadcast one, Antena 3 (16% for 18-24s and 25-34s).

Table 4. Weekly reach by age groups, N = 2028 online adults in Spain

Digital native	Total	Age					
		18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
OKDiario.com	13%	8%	12%	13%	15%	14%	15%
ElConfidencial.com	12%	9%	11%	12%	7%	17%	16%
ElDiario.es	12%	14%	10%	11%	9%	13%	18%
ElEspañol.com	8%	7%	8%	7%	9%	8%	10%
El HuffPost	7%	6%	7%	6%	5%	8%	11%
Average	10.7%	8.9%	9.6%	10%	9.1%	12%	14%
Traditional online	Total	Age					
		18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
El País online	18%	22%	15%	16%	16%	19%	24%
Antena 3 online	13%	16%	16%	10%	15%	10%	15%
El Mundo online	13%	15%	9%	14%	12%	13%	17%
20 Minutos online	13%	10%	11%	14%	13%	14%	11%
Marca online	11%	7%	10%	12%	12%	9%	12%
Average	13.6%	14%	12.3%	13.3%	13.6%	13.1%	16%

Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey 2022.

4.3. Education

Results for both media types show an ascending ladder in terms of education levels: both enjoy the highest reach among those with higher levels of education. Nevertheless, the audiences for some sites do not follow this pattern. For instance, *OKDiario.com* and *Marca* online achieve their highest audiences among the intermediate education level, with 18% and 14% respectively. *20 Minutos* online’s readership is evenly distributed among all levels of education.

El País online has a gap of 13 percentage points between their low-educated and high-educated bracket. In the case of *ElConfidencial.com* that space is 11 percentage points. These numbers reinforce the idea that audiences of both kinds of media are similarly educated (Table 5).

Table 5. Weekly reach by level of education, $N = 2028$ online adults in Spain

Digital native	Total	Highest level of education			
		Low	Medium	High	University
OKDiario.com	13%	9%	18%	15%	14%
EIConfidencial.com	12%	8%	12%	17%	19%
EIDiario.es	12%	10%	14%	14%	14%
EIEspañol.com	8%	6%	9%	10%	10%
El HuffPost	7%	5%	7%	11%	12%
Average	10.7%	7.7%	12.2%	13.4%	13.9%
Traditional online	Total	Highest level of education			
		Low	Medium	High	University
El País online	18%	13%	18%	25%	26%
Antena 3 online	13%	13%	13%	14%	12%
El Mundo online	13%	8%	15%	18%	20%
20 Minutos online	13%	13%	13%	13%	13%
EIDiario.es	12%	10%	14%	14%	14%
Marca online	11%	7%	14%	12%	13%
Average	13.6%	10.6%	14.6%	15.9%	16.5%

Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey 2022.

4.4. Household income

After answering the previous research question regarding education, we can argue that the level of household income follows a similar pattern. For both media types, the high-income bracket stands out, with averages of 15% for top digital native sites and 18% for the traditional-rooted. At the other end of the spectrum, the lowest income bracket has the smallest percentage, independently of the news organization's origins (Table 6). The brands with the biggest differences between their low and high-income audience are *El Mundo* online (15 percentage points) and *El País* (13 percentage points). The greatest difference among digital natives is for *ElConfidencial.com* (12 percentage points).

Table 6. Weekly reach by household income, $N = 2028$ online adults in Spain

Digital native	Total	Household income		
		Low	Medium	High
OKDiario.com	13%	11%	15%	17%
EIConfidencial.com	12%	8%	13%	20%
EIDiario.es	12%	10%	11%	18%
EIEspañol.com	8%	8%	8%	10%
El HuffPost	7%	7%	7%	10%
Average	10.7%	8.7%	11%	15.1%

Traditional online	Total	Household income		
		Low	Medium	High
El País online	18%	14%	19%	27%
Antena 3 online	13%	13%	14%	12%
El Mundo online	13%	8%	12%	23%
20 Minutos online	13%	12%	16%	11%
Marca online	11%	6%	12%	17%
Average	13.6%	10.5%	14.5%	18%

Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey 2022.

4.5. Political leaning

Audiences for top digital-native media brands lean towards the right, with a difference of four percentage points, while traditionally-rooted media perform better in the center (15.6%), with the difference between right and left being smaller, at three percentage points. Thus, some digital-native brands seem to be more polarized, especially *OKDiario* (22 percentage points more reach among right-leaning users than among left-leaning users). Users who do not define themselves politically use top legacy brands online (9.8% average) twice as much as top digital-native sites (5.4%).

Table 7. Weekly reach by political leaning, *N* = 2028 online adults in Spain

Digital native	Total	Political leaning			
		Left	Centre	Right	Don't know
OKDiario.com	13%	7%	14%	29%	7%
ElConfidencial.com	12%	10%	15%	17%	4%
ElDiario.es	12%	17%	11%	10%	8%
ElEspañol.com	8%	6%	9%	13%	4%
El HuffPost	7%	11%	8%	3%	4%
Average	10.7%	10.2%	11.3%	14.5%	5.4%
Traditional online	Total	Political leaning			
		Left	Centre	Right	Don't know
El País online	18%	22%	19%	16%	11%
Antena 3 online	13%	11%	13%	18%	13%
El Mundo online	13%	8%	16%	17%	9%
20 Minutos online	13%	13%	16%	9%	10%
Marca online	11%	7%	14%	12%	6%
Average	13.6%	12.1%	15.6%	14.2%	9.8%

Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey 2022.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Leading digital-pure media in Spain represent mostly journalist-backed ventures not linked to internet portals and not dependent on international fran-

chises, save for *El HuffPost*, *Yahoo! News* and *MSN News*. In 2022, they were just short of reaching top place in the ranking, with two different titles coming third in 2021 (*ElDiario.es*) and second in 2022 (*OKDiario.com*) (RQ1.1). Digital-only news organizations led online news audiences in 2021 in 15 out of 46 markets surveyed for the Digital News Report, and reached top ten positions elsewhere, with the exception of Nordic countries. National and international online brands dating back to the early ages of the Web and catering to a wide spectrum of readers coexist with more recently established independent journalism ventures (RQ1.2).

In Spain, average audience loyalty (the proportion of users visiting three or more days a week, based on the brand's weekly reach) is twelve percentage points higher for the top five legacy news brands than for the top five digital-born news brands (44%) (RQ2).

The top Spanish news sites in our study were more popular among men, older people, and more affluent and formally educated users who could define their political stance, with some popular outliers that cater for mid-market audiences. The gender difference is larger for digital-native brands than among traditional-rooted brands, if sports newspaper *Marca* is excluded; and *20 Minutos* stands out in being more popular among women (RQ3.1). All digital-native brands enjoy their highest reach among seniors, and traditional brands are most popular among the youngest and oldest, with *20 Minutos* countering this trend (RQ3.2). Top digital-pure media reach the highly-educated more, with the exceptions of *20 Minutos*, *OKDiario* and *Marca* (RQ3.3). Users with higher incomes are more likely to be readers of digital-native media, but while this is also true for websites and apps of paid-for newspapers (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *Marca*), in contrast, medium-income households follow online news with Antena 3 (TV) and *20 Minutos* (free newspaper) slightly more than wealthier people (RQ3.4). Finally, online audiences for digital natives *OKDiario* and *El HuffPost* are more politically polarized than for any of the main traditional brands we studied (RQ3.5).

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Quantifying digital-native and legacy, national and local news websites in Spain, their topic scope and platforms*

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Abstract

Digital media have become an integral part of the journalism industry and of audience habits – in 2021 our research registered 2873 active news websites in Spain. First, this paper explores trends facing online news; it sets out the criteria used to identify a news

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brand as digital-native or non-native; and it presents the results of our classification. This includes: data on the presence of news titles both on proprietary platforms (print, radio, TV or app) in addition to their websites, and on external platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Telegram); their geographic scope (hyperlocal, local/regional or national/global); their subject (general or specialized coverage); and on ownership and language used. Almost 70% of the media were regional or local, while 60% covered general news, and one in three were linked to a print product, almost as many as those with their own app for users. Social media uptake is so widespread that more than 95% of the sites are on Facebook, with a similar number on Twitter, while more than 60% can be found on YouTube, and similarly on Instagram. Among specialized sites, sport is the largest category, comprising twice as many digital-native sites (106) than sites with traditional roots (46). The entertainment focus expands in the digital environment, and online-originated culture, business and science and technology outlets also outnumber legacy publications.

Keywords: digital journalism; online news; news publishing; news platforms; digital-native media; Spain

Resum. *Quantificació de llocs web de notícies locals i nacionals nadius i heretats a Espanya, el seu àmbit temàtic i les seves plataformes*

Els mitjans digitals s'han convertit en una part integral de la indústria del periodisme i dels hàbits de l'audiència: el 2021, la nostra recerca va registrar 2.873 llocs web de notícies actius a Espanya. En primer lloc, aquest article explora les tendències que afronten els mitjans periodístics digitals; després, estableix els criteris utilitzats per identificar una marca de notícies com a nadiua digital o no nadiua, i finalment presenta els resultats de la nostra classificació. Això inclou: dades sobre la presència de marques periodístiques tant en plataformes pròpies (premsa, ràdio, TV, web i app), com en xarxes socials (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube i Telegram); el seu abast geogràfic (hiperlocal, local/regional o nacional/global); la seva temàtica (cobertura general o especialitzada); la propietat i la llengua. Entre els resultats, destaca que gairebé el 70% dels mitjans eren autònoms o locals, mentre que el 60% cobria notícies generals, i un de cada tres estava vinculat a algun producte imprès, gairebé tants com els que tenien una app pròpia per als usuaris. L'acceptació de les xarxes socials està tan estesa que més del 95% dels mitjans són a Facebook, un nombre similar són a Twitter i més del 60% es poden trobar a YouTube i a Instagram. Entre els llocs especialitzats, l'esport és la categoria més gran en els mitjans nadius digitals (106), que suposen més del doble dels mitjans no nadius especialitzats en aquesta temàtica (46). Així mateix, l'atenció a l'entreteniment s'amplia en l'entorn digital, i els mitjans nadius digitals centrats en cultura, negocis i ciència i tecnologia superen en nombre les publicacions tradicionals.

Paraules clau: periodisme digital; notícies en línia; publicació de notícies; plataformes de notícies; mitjans nadius digitals; Espanya

Resumen. *Cuantificación de sitios web de noticias locales y nacionales nativos y heredados en España, su ámbito temático y sus plataformas*

Los medios digitales se han convertido en una parte integral de la industria del periodismo y de los hábitos de la audiencia: en 2021, nuestra investigación registró 2.873 sitios web de noticias activos en España. En primer lugar, este artículo explora las tendencias que afrontan los medios periodísticos digitales; después, establece los criterios utilizados para identificar una marca de noticias como nativa digital o no nativa, y finalmente presenta los resultados de nuestra clasificación. Esto incluye: datos sobre la presencia de marcas periodísticas

tanto en plataformas propias (prensa, radio, TV, web y app), como en redes sociales (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube y Telegram); su alcance geográfico (hiperlocal, local/regional o nacional/global); su temática (cobertura general o especializada); la propiedad y la lengua. Entre los resultados, destaca que casi el 70% de los medios eran autonómicos o locales, mientras que el 60% cubría noticias generales, y uno de cada tres estaba vinculado a algún producto impreso, casi tantos como los que tenían app propia para los usuarios. La aceptación de las redes sociales está tan extendida que más del 95% de los medios están en Facebook, un número similar están en Twitter y más del 60% se pueden encontrar en YouTube y en Instagram. Entre los sitios especializados, el deporte es la categoría más grande entre los medios nativos digitales (106), que suponen más del doble de los medios no nativos especializados en esta temática (46). Asimismo, la atención al entretenimiento se amplía en el entorno digital, y los medios nativos digitales centrados en cultura, negocios y ciencia y tecnología superan en número a las publicaciones tradicionales.

Palabras clave: periodismo digital; noticias en línea; publicación de noticias; plataformas de noticias; medios nativos digitales; España

1. Introduction and background

The research presented here is part of a project to identify and classify all news websites active in Spain in 2021, including both digital-native news media and online journalistic publications with roots in traditional print or broadcast media. We believe that our market is a fruitful one to explore, given that in Europe, according to Nichols, Shabbir and Nielsen (2016), “digital-born news media are generally more prominent in Spain and France, with relatively weak legacy news media, than in Germany and the UK, where legacy media remain strong” (p. 6).

News websites, including digital-native operations, have existed for more than 25 years: some titles survived the early 2000s dot-com crisis, and others rose from two global crises: the Great Recession, spurred by the consolidation of traditional media particularly between 2008 and 2014 (Negredo et al., 2020), and, more recently, by the Covid-19 health crisis and its repercussions since early 2020.

Our research focuses on: 1) the digital-native or legacy (traditional) nature of the sites; 2) the proprietary and external platforms on which they are available; 3) their geographical scope; 4) their main subject; and 5) other aspects, such as whether they belong to a publishing group, or which languages they are available in. For preliminary analyses based on partial aspects of this data, see Negredo and Martínez-Costa (2021) and Sánchez-García and Amoedo-Casais (2021).

The next section will introduce the quantitative method we used, which was combined with further exploration of the cases collected in the study. Then the results will be presented and discussed. First, we review recent works on the characteristics of the digital news media that we researched, and on the trends that we set out to explore, thus placing our Spain-wide study in an international context.

1.1. Separated at birth or very different beasts?

Our research examines both digital-native media and sites with traditional roots. We compare them with each other because we consider the two kinds of news source to be complementary.

Researchers have tried before to identify differences between digital-born news organizations and their legacy counterparts. For instance, a report by Bruno and Nielsen (2012) focused on online news ventures that had three characteristics: their “journalistic” approach; that they felt “online” and “born digital” both in origin and in identity; and that they had been created as “start-ups”, which Bruno and Nielsen defined as “not affiliates of existing legacy media or spun off from older print or broadcast-based organisations” (2012: 4). Other authors have noted that digital-native media follow specific patterns of evolution and innovation, relatively different from those detected in non-native media (Küng, 2015; Tandoc, 2018).

Digital-native media emerged in the wake of declining non-natives (Postman, 2000; Scolari, 2012; Salaverría, 2017) and have adopted technological change fast and flexibly (Pavlik, 2000; Nee, 2013; Westlund, 2013), introducing new processes and roles for content production (Caminero and Sánchez-García, 2018) and establishing different models of audience relationships (Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013; Sparviero, 2019) that have permeated other kinds of media.

Studying such a phenomenon requires a multi-faceted approach. A study of Latin American “online-native” news media explored their “alternative-ness” and their “digitalness”. The first concept covered “editorial philosophies and practices, ownership, funding, type of content published, and organizational goals”, and the latter was measured based on the presence of three parameters: multimedia, interactivity and participation (Harlow and Salaverría, 2016: 1011).

1.2. Local independent ventures and expansive networks

Editorial models and business and ownership models are intertwined. In Sweden, Jangdal (2021) found that independent hyperlocal media “offer a diverse range of topics, providing inhabitants with a wide variety of information about what is happening in their communities, and with a clear emphasis on local material as opposed to regional or national material” (p. 450).

A counterexample is *Patch.com*, an ambitious, US-wide, digital-native initiative that supports 1,200 hyperlocal sites. After an expansive phase following its launch in 2007, it was forced to make severe layoffs, and the sites were criticized for their reliance on official sources and their lack of engagement with communities (St. John III, Johnson and Nah, 2014). However, the company has since managed to become profitable and to reach large audiences, supported by artificial intelligence and user-generated content (Kafka, 2019).

In Spain, following in the footsteps of private talk radio networks and newspapers such as *El Mundo* and *Diario 16*, which expanded nationally in the decades after the democratic transition period, some of the largest digital-native sites, namely *ElDiario.es* and *El Español*, have based their territorial expansion on alliances with hyperlocal, local and regional sites, thus enhancing their coverage and their audience reach.

Recent studies (Negreira-Rey, López García and Vázquez-Herrero, 2020) confirm this increase in local and hyperlocal media, driven by small media groups, entities or collectives, and embodying new models of proximity journalism. They have influenced the growth of the digital-native media map exponentially, and, like other media, face the challenge of their own sustainability (Kurpius, Metzgar and Rowley, 2010).

1.3. The temptations of sensationalism, partisanship and commercialism

Fierce competition for readers' attention and almost non-existent barriers to entry result in some sites lowering journalistic standards and deviating from core professional values. In their analysis of sensationalism in digital-native news publications, Kilgo et al. (2016) found that "even 'hard' news topics such as government affairs and science/technology were at times treated sensationally just as much as traditionally sensationalized categories such as crime or lifestyle and society" (2016: 1510).

According to Martínez-Costa, Sánchez Blanco and Serrano (2020), the distinction between hard news and soft news affects five areas: news topic; production; focus; style, presentation and format, and reception. They found that most authors identify the topic as the main criterion. This is a trend of digital news outlets that we explore in this study.

News sites catering for polarized audiences, blurring the separation between politicians and the press and sometimes giving voice to extremist views have bred the phenomenon of "hyperpartisan media", comprising outlets that sometimes define themselves as "alternative media", as opposed to mainstream media (Atton, 2001; Heft et al., 2020). These sites have also been defined as "alternative online political media". Based on a study of nine outlets in the United Kingdom, McDowell-Naylor, Cushion and Thomas (2021) identified four overlapping types: electoral hyperpartisans, cultural partisans, political cycle specialists, and vernacular macro-blogs.

The growing importance of alternative revenue streams such as branded content, affiliate marketing and public relations services alongside news operations may also shape some of the content that is available on these websites (Vara-Miguel et al., 2021), and may be decisive in the launch of new verticals on certain topics with commercial potential, at least in terms of "brand safety" for advertisers, in contrast to more contentious affairs including politics, social conflict or even health issues.

These practices, in which marketing criteria take precedence, correspond to the need to compete in the "attention economy" (Kaplan, in Roca, 2008: 136)

for a dispersed and reduced audience that reacts more emotionally to soft content, and is focused on entertainment and spectacle. This partly explains why the practice of clickbait, using captivating headlines and soft or misleading news (Bazaco, Redondo and Sánchez-García, 2019), is increasingly widespread in native and non-native media, skipping the journalistic criteria of relevance. This phenomenon even favors the emergence and expansion of media focused on sensationalistic and clickbait content, closer to the practice of marketing, mentioned above, than to journalism. Such a situation is linked to research on *fake news* (Trninić, Kupresanin and Bokan, 2022) and the infodemic, especially due to the interconnection between websites and social networks (Massarani et al., 2021).

Thus, digital change is not only reflected in the increase in media outlets, but also in changes to traditional news criteria, both in content and in editorial approach, targeted towards never-ending commercialism in the search for audiences.

1.4. Gatekeeping, but not like it used to be

Online platforms have redefined the concept of journalism institutions and professionals as gatekeepers, at a time when sources use them to publish directly to audiences, users select information from a broader range of sources, and algorithms influence the visibility of content (Wallace, 2018). This environment affects how existing and new media are shaped.

In the current context of online news, algorithms make something akin to human decisions in search engines and on social networking sites (Codina, Lopezosa and Rovira, 2022). Search engine optimization (SEO), social media optimization (SMO) and other adjustments to the editing of stories and to each site's news coverage aim to improve their performance on social media, on Google Search, and on newer recommendation services such as Google Discover.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is starting to be applied throughout the journalistic process. Its comprehensive use is still embryonic (Graefe and Bohlken, 2020), but it already generates interest as an enabler for new forms of digital media profitability (Caswell and Dörr, 2018). In newsrooms, user analytics influence editorial decisions at the levels of daily news coverage and business strategies (Corzo and Salaverría, 2019; Lamot and Paulussen, 2020). Practices imported from the world of advertising, such as datafication, now affect digital journalism's democratic role (Willig, 2022) in terms of professional criteria and the news agenda.

2. Methodology

So far we have summarized the state of digital news media when we conducted our research. Next, we will present the method we employed to identify and classify all active news sites in Spain and to detect and explain certain

underlying trends, starting with content analysis design, testing and coding, followed by the distinction between digital native sites and those with traditional roots.

For this study, which is part of an ongoing project (Salaverría, Martínez-Costa and Breiner, 2018), our group of researchers established and updated the criteria for searching for and classifying active digital news sites in Spain. Our unit of analysis was as follows: a news/editorial outlet with an autonomous brand identity and content, located in Spanish territory or with a specific edition for Spain, which was updated with new editorial content at least once in the three months prior to observation. The database was created in 2021 and updated in 2022 to add new entries and delete inactive ones through a quality control of records and variables. We found $N = 3949$ sites, of which 2873 were active, while 1076 were inactive and excluded from the analysis.

A codebook was developed and different coding procedures were performed for self-evident data and variables that required interpretation. Site name, URL, location, active/inactive status, languages and publishing company/group were entered or updated by a researcher. All other categories were tested for inter-coder agreement on a subsample ($N = 350$) statistically representative of all active cases in our database ($N = 2873$). The codebook was improved based on testers' suggestions and discrepancies, which were resolved case by case, by agreement among them. Database updates, coordination, directly observable parameters (launch date/year, social networking profiles, geographic scope, languages, location, company, publishing group) and coordination of inter-coder agreement tests were managed by three other authors of this work.

Sites were classified either as digital native or non-native (with traditional roots), based on the medium in which they originally appeared and which medium they considered to be their main one. Thus, digital natives are understood to be those that were launched on online media as their main format, while non-native or traditional media are considered to be those that were launched before the internet era, or were founded with an offline (print or broadcast) format as their main medium.

3. Results

In this section, we provide data on the aspects of Spanish digital media most closely aligned with our research aims, and we reference other works that have studied complementary aspects. We found 2873 active news sites in Spain, of which 1364 were digital natives (47.5%) and 1509 had roots in traditional platforms (52.5%).

3.1. Availability on proprietary and external platforms

Regarding the availability of each news operation on traditional platforms, taking into account all media, 32.6% had some kind of print product, 26.5%

offered a radio service, and 9.5% were present on television. Specifically, 31.2% of the digital-native brands were present on other platforms beyond the web: 14.3% had a print product, while almost half of non-natives did (49.1%); 6.6% were present on broadcast radio, contrasting with 44.5% among non-natives; and 3.3% were available on television, compared to 15% of the sites with traditional roots.

Applications (“apps”) for devices, available from the App Store or Google Play, were offered by 31.5% of the sites (906), but the contrast is stark: only 15.7% of digital-native brands offered an app (214), as opposed to no fewer than 45.9% of outlets with traditional roots (692).

Table 1 shows a different perspective on these figures: what proportion of titles present on each kind of platform were digital-native or non-native. For instance, there were three apps for legacy journalism outlets for every app from a digital-native operation.

Table 1. Availability of active digital media in Spain by platform, 2021

	Digital-native media		Non-native media		Total	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Website	1364	47.5%	1509	52.5%	2873	100%
Print	195	20.8%	741	79.2%	936	100%
TV	45	16.5%	227	83.5%	272	100%
Radio	90	11.8%	672	88.2%	762	100%
App	214	23.6%	692	76.4%	906	100%

Source: authors' own work based on the Diginativemedia project database.

All types of Spanish news websites had adopted social media: Overall, 96.5% were present on Facebook, 95.8% on Twitter, 62.1% on Instagram, 60.8% on YouTube and 13.5% on Telegram in the first quarter of 2021. Each platform's uptake was quite homogeneous: any difference between native and non-native, general and specialized sites, was less than one percentage point for Facebook and Twitter, and less than five percentage points for YouTube, Instagram and Telegram (Sánchez-Blanco and Sádaba, 2021).

3.2. Geographical scope

The majority of digital native media companies were regional and local (835; 61.2%). In the case of non-native regional and local media, the figure is even higher (1141), which is 306 more. There were 509 digital-native sites with a national or global scope (37.3%), which outnumbered the 335 non-native national outlets (22.2%). Hyperlocal was a very small segment: we found just 20 digital natives, representing just 1.5% of sites of this kind (Table 2).

Table 2. Geographical scope of active digital media in Spain, 2021

	Digital-native media		Non-native media		Total	
Hyperlocal	20	1.5%	33	2.2%	53	1.8%
Local/Regional	835	61.2%	1141	75.6%	1976	68.8%
National/Global	509	37.3%	335	22.2%	844	29.4%
Total	1364	100%	1509	100%	2873	100%

Source: authors' own work based on the Diginativemedia project database.

3.3. Subject

As for the most widespread subject matter, 60.4% of Spanish digital media covered general news, compared to 39.6% offering specialized content. Differences were even greater among online media with traditional roots, on which general news (67.6%) are more than twice as common as specialised news (32.4%). In contrast, among digital-native sites, the proportion between general news (52.5%) and specialized media (47.5%) was more balanced (Table 3).

Table 3. Subject matter of active digital media in Spain, 2021

	Digital-native media		Non-native media		Total	
Generalist	716	52.5%	1020	67.6%	1736	60.4%
Specialized	648	47.5%	489	32.4%	1137	39.6%
Total	1364	100%	1509	100%	2873	100%

Source: authors' own work based on the Diginativemedia project database.

Coding the 1137 specialized news outlets by subject, based on 19 categories, enabled us to identify the most and least widespread subject matter. Sport (13.4%), leisure and entertainment (13.2%), professional (11.3%) and cultural publications were the most popular. More than one hundred digital-native sites (106) were focused on sport, but just 46 non-natives.

The leisure and entertainment category was dominated by digital content, such as series and films; video games, consumer technology, as well as travel, society, varied trends, lifestyle and gossip. Sites with content for professionals was the third largest category, with more sites with traditional roots. Cultural publications came fourth, with 11%.

Other relevant categories were business and the economy, with 7.6% of digital natives, almost two percentage points more than non-natives; and science and technology, politics, fashion and motoring. Every other category fell below 2%, although this may include relevant publications in qualitative terms of brand relevance or audience following. There were huge differences in areas such as religion and spirituality, which accounted for 14 sites with traditional roots but just 5 digital natives; or education, for which there were almost twice as many legacy titles online than digital-native outlets; and, reversing the ratio, environmental publications, with 12 digital natives against just 2 sites with traditional roots (Table 4).

Table 4. Subject areas of active specialized digital news sites in Spain, 2021

	Digital-native media		Non-native media		Total	
Other	14.5%	94	22.7%	111	18%	205
Sport	16.4%	106	9.4%	46	13.4%	152
Leisure & Entertainment	13%	84	13.5%	66	13.2%	150
Technical & Professional	9%	58	14.3%	70	11.3%	128
Culture	11.3%	73	10.6%	52	11%	125
Business & Economy	7.6%	49	5.7%	28	6.8%	77
Science & Technology	6.9%	45	1.6%	8	4.7%	53
Politics	4.6%	30	2.2%	11	3.6%	41
Fashion & Trends	2.3%	15	5.3%	26	3.6%	41
Motoring	3.5%	23	3.1%	15	3.3%	38
Health	1.9%	12	1.4%	7	1.7%	19
Religion & Spirituality	0.8%	5	2.9%	14	1.7%	19
Food & Gastronomy	2.2%	14	1%	5	1.7%	19
Education	0.9%	6	2.2%	11	1.5%	17
Home & Family	0.9%	6	1.8%	9	1.3%	15
Environment	1.9%	12	0.4%	2	1.2%	14
Bullfighting	1.2%	8	0.8%	4	1.1%	12
Not identified	0.9%	6	0.4%	2	0.7%	8
Humor	0.3%	2	0.4%	2	0.4%	4
Total	100%	648	100%	489	100%	1137

Source: authors' own work based on the Diginativemedia project database.

3.4. Other dimensions of Spanish digital media: languages and ownership

Looking at language, the proportion of digital-native media published in Spanish (87%) is considerably higher than on sites with traditional roots. Other official languages in Spain are also present on digital-native media, but to a lesser extent than on media with an offline presence: Catalan (9.6% vs 22.9%), Basque (2.4% vs 4.4%) and Galician (2.3% vs 2.8%). The exceptions are media which describe themselves as using the Valencian language, with 2.9% among digital natives and 1.9% among non-natives.

With respect to ownership, there are 24 media companies or groups that publish more than eight sites, and 22 that publish between five and eight sites, considering both digital-native sites and brands with traditional roots. Only one out of seven digital-native media outlets belongs to a group publishing at least five brands. This is less than half of what we found among non-natives: one in three sites is part of a company publishing several titles.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This quantitative snapshot of the digital news media market in Spain leads us to try to shed light on the trends we identified, in dialogue with other studies.

To start with, we were looking at quantitative similarities and differences between traditional and digital-native media. In terms of geographic and topical areas, of the 2873 active news websites we found in Spain, 39.7% (1141) are both non-digital-native and regional/local. Meanwhile, 35.5% (1020) of them are non-digital-native and cover general news. So regional/local traditional media publishing on a wide range of topics are the backbone of the Spanish media map. Nevertheless, digital-native media already account for 60.3% of all national or global online news titles in Spain (509 of 844), and 42.3% of all regional or local sites (835 of 1976).

A particular concern of ours is deviations from journalism's core informational purposes, and the availability of digital news covering different interests. Generalist sites predominate over specialized media, nourished by national and regional content, but local and hyperlocal general news is a natural avenue for digital-native media expansion. It would be useful to distinguish between hard and soft news outlets, although many larger sites would present a combination of both. Some generalist digital-native media offer context and interpretation, but others, at all geographical scales, express ideological activism and partisanship in their news coverage, down to *ad hominem* attacks or campaigns against institutions or companies. Besides the segmentation by age targets developed in some large broadcasters' online portfolios, we found little content for young or elderly people, although some digital-native media offer specialized content aimed at multigenerational audience niches interested in new digital and entertainment habits.

The subject areas covered by the largest number of specialized outlets are sports, leisure and entertainment, followed by technical and professional publications, and those in the culture arena. Socially relevant topics such as health and the environment are covered by fewer specialized sites, mostly digital-native ones. Another challenge is to enable language diversity to flourish at least as much on digital-native media as among legacy media.

Besides the quantitative differences and the questions about diversity and purpose that we have just addressed, in this article we also set out to explore the dilemma facing digital news publishers, in terms of developing their own platforms and facing the challenge of building a readership, or populating external platforms and possibly developing a dependency on them for audience acquisition and setting editorial priorities. Starting with the media organizations' own properties, there are three-times as many branded news apps for legacy media than for digital-native media. This may be viewed as a weaker position for many digital-natives. Apps are "stickier" than mobile browsing for news; that is, apps are "associated with higher levels of loyalty and attention" from mobile news users, which "increases the incentive for publishers to monetize these traits" (Nelson and Lei, 2018: 620). Therefore, besides the expansion of digital-native publishers into print or broadcast, they may see a digital-native app as an investment offering new opportunities to develop their relationships with audiences, offer new services and contents, and explore brand extensions and new revenue streams.

As regards external platforms, many sites across all categories have a social media presence, generally on Facebook and Twitter, but a majority is also on Instagram and YouTube. Moreover, formats such as podcasts are published in a distributed manner, owing to platforms like YouTube, iVoox and Spotify being more popular for user consumption than the news media's own sites and apps (Amoedo-Casais, Moreno and Martínez-Costa, 2021). This points to the platformization of news and the dependence of media organization performance on external artificial intelligence (Simon, 2022).

Finally, our study set out to identify the ownership of the publications. Many digital-native outlets, as well as smaller sites linked to print professional or local titles, exist outside the realm of large publishing and broadcasting corporations. We found some companies with a portfolio of specialized or community publications, but the majority of sites are independent, not linked to any medium or large publishing group: only one in seven digital natives is published by a company owning five or more titles, compared to approximately one in three non-native outlets belonging to such a company. Retis and Cueva Chacón (2021) mapped 103 Latinx digital-native outlets in the United States, and these are “a mostly independent effort where the majority of outlets have less than 15 people and are not backed by the traditional media conglomerates” (2021: 51). In Spain, some national digital-native sites have woven alliances with regional/local and specialized digital natives as they compete with traditional sites. Future research may examine this relationship between national digital-native publishers and regional or specialized affiliates, as well as companies developing networks of local media.

A limitation of this study is that it provides a quantitative overview of Spanish digital media, regardless of each outlet's size. We aimed to organize, in part, this fragmented scenario, by grouping the cases by media companies. This is a difficult challenge to address, as newsroom size – the number of staff members working in each outlet – may be misleading due to the increasing reliance on part-time contributors and the shared resources between publications in media groups as a result of business consolidation and multimedia convergence. Audience size is another way to weigh the relative importance of each news organization in the market, although many of the smaller outlets are not audited (Iserte, 2022a), including general news operations (Iserte, 2022b) and specialized sites (Iserte, 2022c). Qualitative studies on aspects such as production, contents and other structural aspects may focus on leading or outstanding cases, but mapping the whole market and tracking the trends will still be needed.

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Transparency in informative content. An analysis of methods in Spanish data journalism (2019-2022)

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Abstract

The crisis of confidence in journalism has increased hopes of internal transparency. The technical possibilities of data journalism and its background in social sciences support the values of openness and transparency. This study focuses on the daily journalism produced by the data units of the Spanish media (n=10) between January 2019 and April 2022. Through analysis of quantitative and qualitative content of a random sample of articles (n=62), this study explores the transparency of sources and the use of a methodology section. The results reveal an unequal and, on many occasions, infrequent use of elements such as an explanation of the research process or the possibility for data download. A greater use is observed in native online media and small and specialised projects, with certain exceptions, reflecting the reluctance of some media to implement the new “transparency rituals” and the greater importance of attitude and individual initiative rather than resources. Finally, an ambivalent influence of COVID-19 is detected in these practices, which suggest a critical view of data journalism and the evolution of its transparency.

Keywords: data journalism; transparency; methodologies; social sciences; open source; COVID-19

Resum. *Transparència en els continguts informatius. Una anàlisi dels mètodes en el periodisme de dades espanyol (2019-2022)*

La crisi de confiança en el periodisme ha augmentat les esperances dipositades en la transparència interna dels continguts. Les possibilitats tècniques del periodisme de dades i la seva vinculació amb les ciències socials suposen una oportunitat per posar en pràctica aquests valors d'obertura i traçabilitat. Aquesta recerca se centra en les peces que, en el dia a dia (no projectes especials), van produir els mitjans espanyols amb unitats de dades (n = 10) entre gener de 2019 i abril de 2022. A través d'una anàlisi de contingut quantitatiu i qualitatiu d'una mostra aleatòria d'articles (n = 62), aquest estudi explora la transparència de les fonts i l'ús de la secció específica de metodologia. Els resultats revelen un ús desigual i moltes vegades poc freqüent d'elements, com l'explicació del procés de recerca o la possibilitat de descàrrega de dades. S'observa un desenvolupament més gran en els mitjans nadius digitals i en els projectes petits i especialitzats, amb unes quantes excepcions. Es constata així la reticència d'alguns mitjans a implementar els nous «rituals de transparència» i la major importància de l'actitud i la iniciativa individual enfront dels recursos de les redaccions. Finalment, es detecta una influència ambivalent de l'COVID-19 en aquestes pràctiques, la qual cosa suggereix la necessitat de fomentar una visió crítica del periodisme de dades i l'evolució de la transparència interna del periodisme.

Paraules clau: periodisme de dades; transparència; metodologies; ciències socials; codi obert; COVID-19

Resumen. *Transparencia en los contenidos informativos. Un análisis de métodos en el periodismo de datos español (2019-2022)*

La crisis de confianza en el periodismo ha aumentado las esperanzas depositadas en la transparencia interna de los contenidos. Las posibilidades técnicas del periodismo de datos y su vinculación con las ciencias sociales suponen una oportunidad para poner en práctica estos valores de apertura y trazabilidad. Esta investigación se centra en las piezas que, en el día a día (no proyectos especiales), produjeron los medios españoles con unidades de datos (n = 10) entre enero de 2019 y abril de 2022. A través de un análisis de contenido cuantitativo y cualitativo de una muestra aleatoria de artículos (n = 62), este estudio explora la transparencia de las fuentes y el uso de la sección específica de metodología. Los resultados revelan un uso desigual y, en muchas ocasiones, poco frecuente de elementos, como la explicación del proceso de investigación o la posibilidad de descarga de datos. Se observa un mayor desarrollo en los medios nativos digitales y en los proyectos pequeños y especializados, con algunas excepciones. Se constata así la reticencia de algunos medios a implementar los nuevos «rituales de transparencia» y la mayor importancia de la actitud y la iniciativa individual frente a los recursos de las redacciones. Finalmente, se detecta una influencia ambivalente del COVID-19 en estas prácticas, lo que sugiere la necesidad de fomentar una visión crítica del periodismo de datos y la evolución de la transparencia interna del periodismo.

Palabras clave: periodismo de datos; transparencia; metodologías; ciencias sociales; código abierto; COVID-19

1. Introduction

Content transparency is considered one of the main solutions to such pressing problems in journalism as information overload or lack of trust (Chadha and Koliska, 2015: 215; Diakopoulos and Koliska, 2017: 5; Karlsson, 2010: 535;

Plaisance, 2007: 187). It would improve authority (Singer, 2007: 79), credibility (Hayes, Singer and Ceppos, 2007: 262), differentiation from non-professional content (Karlsson, 2011: 279) and added value for users (Gray, Bounegru and Chambers, 2012: 22). Therefore, some journalists and news organisations view content transparency as a way to make journalism “more systematic, accurate and trustworthy” (Zamith, 2019: 1).

This internal transparency of journalism has limitations and is not a “silver bullet” (Karlsson, Clerwall and Nord, 2014: 668), as there are problems with conceptualization, appropriation by journalists, and practical application. This is why it is even more important to study its use in daily data journalism.

Although transparency is far from new to journalism, it has found a favourable breeding ground in recent specialisations. It has been studied in computer-assisted reporting, where transparency has intentionally been kept low (Coddington, 2015: 10); in fact-checking, incorporating more advanced methodologies (Beiler, Irmer and Breda, 2020: 4; Díez-Garrido and Farpón, 2020: 398); and in computational journalism, where coding presents challenges such as translating technical terms into understandable language (Calvo-Rubio and Ufarte-Ruiz, 2021: 673; Díaz-Campo and Chaparro-Domínguez, 2020; Dörr, 2016: 11; Shin, 2021: 1063).

But above all, transparency has been studied in relation to data journalism, a rare growth area in an industry battered by economic challenges (Zamith, 2019: 1). In Spain, its development began in 2013 (Antón-Bravo, 2013: 113; Chaparro-Domínguez, 2014; Ferreras-Rodríguez, 2013), coinciding with the creation of the transparency law (Appelgren and Salaverría, 2018: 9; La-Rosa and Sandoval-Martín, 2016: 1210; Tejedor Fuentes, 2014: 620). Three years later, Ferreras-Rodríguez (2016: 270) identified 14 Spanish media outlets that regularly or sporadically produce data journalism. In 2019, the specialisation was consolidated in legacy media with the creation of a data unit at *El País* (Rojas-Torrijos and García-Cepero, 2020).

The monitoring and analysis of COVID-19 gave a boost to this specialisation in Spain, as in the rest of the world (Córdoba-Cabús, García-Borrego and López-Martín, 2020: 333). The complexity of the situation demanded resources and time when news publishers were struggling to survive amid significant losses in advertising revenues that were not offset by increases in reader revenues (Westlund and Hermida, 2020). But this progress was not without certain limitations, especially due to dependence on official data (Wu, 2021) and lack of transparency (Díez-Garrido and Farpón, 2020: 397). This situation increased the need for a more critical reflection on the specialisation (Gray and Bounegru, 2021).

The consolidation of data journalism has not gone unnoticed in academia (Appelgren, Lindén, and Van-Dalen, 2019; Arias-Robles and López-López, 2020; Ausserhofer et al., 2017). “An explosion in data journalism-oriented scholarship” was noted some years ago (Fink and Anderson, 2015: 467), and soon included content transparency (Zamith, 2019: 2). However, data journalism is still evolving and remains a “largely unexplored” field in journalism

research, aside from national case studies, epistemological insights and ethnographies based on interviews with data journalists (Stalph, 2018: 1).

Therefore, it seems appropriate to look more closely into what data journalistic outputs look like (Loosen, Reimer and De Silva-Schmidt, 2017: 6). There is some research on data journalism content, which addresses transparency, including in the Spanish media context (Chaparro-Domínguez and Díaz-Campo, 2021: 11; Córdoba-Cabús, Huber and Farias-Batlle, 2023; Córdoba-Cabús and García-Borrego, 2021: 365), but it is often focused on large, internationally prize-winning projects. Chadha and Koliska (2015: 215) and Zamith (2019: 1) observed that comparatively few empirical studies have examined transparency in the context of daily news production.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Journalism and social sciences*

Inspiration from scientific methods was probably the origin of journalism's interest in transparency. At the beginning of the 20th century, Max Weber in Germany and Walter Lippmann and Robert E. Park in the United States already proposed the first synergies between the work of the journalist and that of the social scientist to overcome a crisis in the profession generated by the abuse of opinion (Dader, 1997). Most of these postulates crystallised with the implementation of the so-called precision journalism (PJ) (Meyer, 1973). Precision journalism entered newsrooms when journalists began to transform reports produced by experts such as sociologists into news, but especially when they experimented with methods from social and behavioural research (Cortés del Alamo, Elías and Luengo Cruz, 2018: 70).

Precision journalism soon evolved into computer-assisted reporting (CAR), data-driven journalism (DDJ) or computational journalism (CJ). All of these concepts incorporated new achievements such as open source or computer programming, but the basis continued to be in the inclusion of social sciences in the exercise of the journalism (Coddington, 2015; Sandoval-Martín and La-Rosa, 2018). This allowed journalists to go beyond the more conventional and impressionistic work based mainly on the juxtaposition of statements (Tong and Zuo, 2019).

The most common techniques come from disciplines such as sociology or anthropology, but also from other fields of knowledge, such as mathematics (López-García, Toural-Bran and Rodríguez-Vázquez, 2016). A recent study focused on the application of the scientific method in the data journalism project *Medicamentalía*, promoted by the specialised, digital-only outlet *Civio*, reveals various similarities with a scientific article, such as the presence of a methodology or the analysis of the results, which enhance transparency and information accuracy (Marín-Sanchiz and Arias-Robles, 2021).

Some authors doubt that data journalism work can always fulfil such standards. Weinacht and Spiller (2014: 412) argue that, unlike scientific

work, the data journalistic inquiry process often starts from the availability of data instead of from research questions. The selection of angles for reporting is influenced by news values and the public's interest in the respective field. Most of the literature highlights the danger of taking this relationship for granted, linking data journalism with greater objectivity (Beiler et al., 2020: 4; Tandoc and Oh, 2015: 997). Data journalism, like any specialisation, would only represent a part of reality, although sometimes a larger one, and it does not avoid possible biases (Anderson, 2018).

2.2. Transparency in journalism

Although not new, transparency has become an important value in today's society, from government and businesses to journalism and computer sciences. The metaphor of transparency encompasses three virtues to identify the motives behind actions and to improve trust: informational substantiality, accountability and participation (Balkin, 1999). The first two are closely related to the focus of this research and to the recently highlighted seven steps of transparency in statistical practice, which include assessing data pre-processing choices and sharing data and code (Wagenmakers et al., 2021).

This is accentuated in the current digital context, where open-source and hacker culture assume a "transparent rubric" in which source code is shared (Lewis and Usher, 2013: 608). And it has been assumed by journalism, often codified in professional codes of ethics (Córdoba-Cabús and García-Borrego, 2021), even as an alternative to the classic normative demands of objectivity, increasingly questioned since the 1980s (Vos and Moore, 2020: 18).

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007: 83) argued for journalism to be as transparent as possible about its methods and motives. Explaining how the story came to be and why it was presented the way it was would be critical to the development of a more discerning public. Deuze (2005: 456) argues for transparency in journalism to give everybody a chance to monitor, check, criticise and even become involved in the journalistic process. Moreover, Plaisance (2007: 187) defined transparency as an ethical imperative and as much of a mainstay of journalism as credibility, honesty and fairness.

There were some limits to keep in mind. Lewis and Usher detailed off-the-record confidentiality or state secrecy, and highlighted that open-source journalism does not mean revealing and documenting every conversation, but invites the reader to better understand the process: "Radical transparency is neither called for nor necessarily desirable" (2013: 614). According to this idealistic view, since media are facing increased scrutiny of their products, the best way to respond would be letting people see the process that leads to the creation of those products (Allen, 2008: 324).

Transparency was technically achievable but mostly absent in the analogue media system, as this was shaped by a closed news culture (Deuze, 2003: 539). However, the actual application of these postulates in practice was more limited than in theory (Lowrey and Hou, 2018: 8; Zhang and Feng, 2019: 14). Trans-

lating transparency into a commonly enacted ritual was not common (Singer, 2007). Sometimes, it was due to a conscious action of journalists. Chadha and Koliska (2015) revealed that, while most of the discussions around transparency in the news media are normative, many journalists have not yet embraced transparency. Hellmueller, Vos and Poepsel (2013: 288) add that some journalists still prefer objectivity as a guiding journalistic principle. According to Plaisance and Skewes (2003: 842), journalists often prioritise other values over transparency. Singer (2007) argued that journalists may see transparency as an intrusion on their autonomy, and Karlsson (2010) found that transparency is often routinized into a strategic ritual that separates execution from intent by promoting a small degree of transparency, but resisting too much of it.

These results contrast with one of the few surveys on transparency carried out among journalists. Beiler et al. (2020: 13) found that two thirds of the respondents from daily newspapers (66%) and seven out of ten from public broadcasters agree “rather strongly” that data journalism makes journalism more transparent. The practitioners of data journalism believe in their craft’s ability to transform journalism towards more transparency. Similarly, journalists interviewed by Ferreras-Rodríguez (2016: 261-262) support the convenience of publishing raw data and explaining the methodologies used to promote transparency. This highlights the divergence between what they think should happen and what they actually do. As we will discuss below, most recent research underscores the poor application of transparency in journalistic content. Only Felle (2016: 2) found that transparency is reflected in actions such as the publication of content methodologies that evidence “the strengthened accountability role” of this specialisation.

This is why many researchers are calling for a rethink of the concept, and view transparency as a normative goal, a consolidated routine, rather than an instrumental value. Calling for more transparency without consideration of what is trying to be accomplished might present more problems than solutions. Thus, journalists should not adopt transparency as a way of improving public standing or increasing legitimacy, mainly because it probably will not work (Allen, 2008: 333-336). To be useful, Karlsson (2010: 535-536) argued that journalists should adopt “rituals of transparency” that can be communicated, understood and accepted by audiences and colleagues.

Framed in this context, the main objective of this paper is to analyse the evolution and peculiarities of transparency in the content produced by the data journalism units of the Spanish media, through the following research questions:

- RQ1. What transparency-related features are used in Spanish data journalism pieces in the period from January 2019 to April 2022?
- RQ2. Are there differences in transparency levels between traditional Spanish news outlets and digital-native projects?
- RQ3. Has the COVID-19 pandemic increased transparency levels in Spanish data journalism?

3. Methodology

This paper uses a mixed method approach, similar to previous research (Beiler et al., 2020; Loosen et al., 2017; Stalph, 2018). First, we did a preliminary study of Spanish news outlets that have a data unit, through a directory and survey of more than a hundred journalists gathered from a previous research project (Arias and Carvajal, 2022). Forty-eight journalists from ten media outlets were identified.

Table 1. Analysed media outlets

Media outlet	Root	Focus	Period
Civio	Digital	Data journalism	2019 (S1) - 2022 (S1)
Datadista	Digital	Data journalism	2020 (S1) - 2022 (S1)
El Confidencial	Digital	Generalist	2019 (S1) - 2022 (S1)
eldiario	Digital	Generalist	2019 (S1) - 2022 (S1)
El Mundo	Print	Generalist	2019 (S1) - 2022 (S1)
El País	Print	Generalist	2019 (S1) - 2022 (S1)
La Sexta	Television	Generalist	2020 (S1) - 2022 (S1)
Maldita	Digital native	Fact checking	2019 (S1) - 2022 (S1)
Newtral	Digital native	Fact checking	2019 (S1) - 2022 (S1)
RTVE	Television	Generalist	2021 (S1) - 2022 (S1)

Source: Authors' own.

Next, all the articles published by these journalists between January 2019 and April 2022 were recorded from the author's pages in their media. When these compilations did not exist (RTVE) or there were no by-lines on the contents (Maldita), the media archive and their Twitter accounts – an important platform for data journalists, used by Felle (2016: 5) and Zhang (2018: 737) – were used.

From this collection, a random selection was applied. There were only two conditions: avoiding repetition in the same semesters, and including pieces that were part of the news organisations' own research (no replication of data). The aim was to obtain content from before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, a key moment for the evolution of data journalism (Desai et al., 2021).

Finally, one article from each of the ten media outlets in the seven semesters was analysed, except the eight in which there is no data. Because some media did not publish data journalism articles in 2019 and 2020, a final sample of 62 articles was obtained. The sample was subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. Using a Google Spreadsheet as a database, two different coders went over every article to characterise it, based on the following variables:

- Data sources. We detailed if the article appeared with the specific name of the source and if it is linked at the text and graphic footnotes.

This is what Leon (2021: 81) considers elementary even in works based on outside data.

- Methodology. After assessing whether or not there was a specific section, usually at the end, with the details of the journalistic work, two features were registered: a logbook or description of the details of the process followed by journalists, with special attention to the relationship with the sources and the limitations of the result; and a description of the variables or concepts used. Mazotte (2021: 87) points out that this is a practice already consolidated in most data-driven research, and is appropriate when journalists account for their own journalistic production process.
- Downloadable data. We differentiated between partial data, belonging to a concrete graphic, and the complete datasets. Including the complete database is the best way to guarantee the reproducibility of the research (Henkel et al., 2020: 1). In the most advanced phase, the inclusion of the programming code used (Leon, 2021: 81) was ruled out because it was not present in any of the studies analysed.

4. Results

One of the cornerstones of transparency in journalism is citing sources. Results show that virtually all the pieces analysed (98%) explain the origin of the different information. However, these sources were not always accessible, as only three news outlets (Civio, Maldita, Newtral and RTVE) provided links to the sources in each text analysed. The media with the greatest room for improvement were El Mundo and El País.

Table 2. Sources included in text

Media outlet	2019		2020				2021				2022				TOTAL	
	S1		S2		S1		S2		S1		S2		S1		F	L
	N	L	N	L	N	L	N	L	N	L	N	L	N	L		
Civio															100%	100%
Datadista															100%	80%
El Confidencial															100%	86%
El Mundo															100%	29%
El País															86%	57%
eldiario															100%	71%
La Sexta															100%	60%
Maldita															100%	100%
Newtral															100%	100%
RTVE															100%	100%
TOTAL	100%	86%	86%	86%	100%	78%	100%	67%	100%	70%	100%	80%	100%	80%	98%	77%

(Key: blue = sources included; white = not included; yellow = no data. "S" = semester; "N" = name of the source; and "L" = the inclusion of a link)

Source: Authors' own.

Sources are specified less frequently in graphics (Table 3). 79% of the pieces in the sample specify a source, but only six outlets include sources in all graphics, while 21% of them provide a link. For instance, Datadista and eldiario included zero links in their graphics, while Maldita (29%), Newtral (29%) incorporated them only in some of their articles.

Table 3. Sources included in graphics

Media outlet	2019		2020				2021				2022				TOTAL	
	S1		S2		S1		S2		S1		S2		S1		F	L
	N	L	N	L	N	L	N	L	N	L	N	L	N	L		
Civio															43%	14%
Datadista															100%	0%
El Confidencial															100%	43%
El Mundo															43%	14%
El País															43%	0%
eldiario															100%	0%
La Sexta															100%	40%
Maldita															100%	29%
Newtral															86%	29%
RTVE															100%	67%
TOTAL	71%	43%	57%	0%	78%	0%	89%	22%	80%	40%	80%	20%	90%	20%	79%	21%

(Key: blue = sources included; white = not included; yellow = no data. "S" refers to the semester)

Source: Authors' own.

Only 24% of the content analysed includes a methodology section. In fact, there are cases (La Sexta, El Mundo, Maldita, Newtral and RTVE) that do not explain their methods in a clearly bounded piece of content. The media with highest rates are Civio (86%) and El País (57%), and generally, the methods section specify the sources the content is built up on (93,3%).

Table 4. Existence of a methodology

Media outlet	2019		2020		2021		2022		TOTAL
	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1		
Civio									86%
Datadista									20%
El Confidencial									14%
El Mundo									0%
El País									57%
eldiario									14%
La Sexta									0%
Maldita									29%
Newtral									0%
RTVE									0%
TOTAL	29%	29%	11%	33%	20%	30%	20%	24%	

(Key: blue = methodology included; white = not included; yellow = no data. "S" refers to the semester)

Source: Authors' own.

Methodological sections usually consist of plain text with a few links to sources or e-mail addresses. They are often placed at the end of the content. Moreover, they are commonly written in the second person plural.

Figure 1. Excerpt from a methodology published in El País

Metodología

A continuación detallamos las fuentes y explicamos el proceso seguido para localizar cada servicio en el mapa. Es importante tener en cuenta que el análisis es una aproximación: las listas no son completamente exhaustivas y habrá errores en algunos municipios.

Hospitales. La lista de hospitales en el mapa proviene de [Catálogo Nacional de Hospitales](#) de 2018, elaborado por el Ministerio de Sanidad. Contiene más de 900 hospitales en toda España, con su dirección completa. Para ubicarlos en el mapa hemos geolocalizado cada hospital con un proceso automático que se alimenta de Google Maps.

Source: elpais.com.

These methodology sections are also characterised by a wide diversity in length. Although the general average is 331 words, Civio averaged 533 words over five pieces, while El País used an average of 168 to explain their methods. As a curiosity, El País published an article whose methodology was longer than the content itself.¹ The longest methodology sections were in Civio (1222 words) and El Mundo (1007), and the shortest in Datadista (48) and El País (44).

Table 5. Number of words in the methodology (“S” means the Semester)

Media outlet	2019		2020		2021		2022		TOTAL	AVERAGE
	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2		
Civio	236		360	599	1222		250		2667	533
Datadista			106	48					154	77
El Confidencial		110							110	110
El Mundo	1007								1007	1007
El País		373		44		147	107		671	168
eldiario	111								111	111
La Sexta										
Maldita	725				66	149			940	313
Newtral										
RTVE										
TOTAL	2079	483	466	691	1288	296	357		809	331
AVERAGE	520	242	233	230	644	148	179			

Source: Authors' own.

1. <https://elpais.com/politica/2019/10/25/actualidad/1572027354_718725.html>.

In most cases the methodology section lacks a “logbook” that would allow the reader to understand the steps followed by the data journalists. In fact, only 23% of the descriptions analysed include this item, and five organisations (El Mundo, eldiario, La Sexta, Newtral and RTVE) do not provide them in any content. Interestingly, Datadista, a firm specialising in data-journalism, shows a 20% rate.

Table 6. Description of the process included in the methodology

Media outlet	2019		2020		2021		2022	TOTAL
	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	
Civio	Blue	White	Blue	White	Blue	White	Blue	86%
Datadista	Yellow	Yellow	Blue	White	White	White	White	20%
El Confidencial	White	Blue	White	White	White	White	White	14%
El Mundo	White	White	White	White	White	White	White	0%
El País	White	White	White	Blue	White	White	Blue	43%
eldiario	White	White	White	White	White	White	White	0%
La Sexta	Yellow	Yellow	White	White	White	White	White	0%
Maldita	White	White	Blue	White	Blue	White	Blue	43%
Newtral	White	White	White	White	White	White	White	0%
RTVE	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	0%
TOTAL	14%	14%	33%	22%	20%	30%	20%	23%

(Key: blue = description included; white = not included; yellow = no data. “S” refers to the semester)

Source: Authors' own.

Explanations of variables (type of data, if the databases were built ad hoc for the articles, etc.) show a similar result. Datadista, El Mundo, La Sexta, Newtral and RTVE did not detail them, while Maldita (14%), eldiario and El Confidencial (14%) did so in a few cases. El País (43%) and Civio (86%) display higher rates of description of variables.

Table 7. Explanation of variables

Media outlet	2019		2020		2021		2022	TOTAL
	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	
Civio	Blue	White	Blue	White	Blue	White	Blue	86%
Datadista	Yellow	Yellow	White	White	White	White	White	0%
El Confidencial	White	Blue	White	White	White	White	White	14%
El Mundo	White	White	White	White	White	White	White	0%
El País	White	White	White	White	White	White	Blue	43%
eldiario	Blue	White	White	White	White	White	White	14%
La Sexta	Yellow	Yellow	White	White	White	White	White	0%
Maldita	White	White	White	White	White	White	Blue	14%
Newtral	White	White	White	White	White	White	White	0%
RTVE	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	0%
TOTAL	29%	29%	11%	11%	10%	30%	20%	19%

(Key: blue = explanation included; white = not included; yellow = no data. “S” refers to the semester)

Source: Authors' own.

Some articles also offer the possibility to download partial data (26%) or even the whole dataset (11%). El Confidencial included the partial data feature in all the articles in the sample. Datadista (40%), La Sexta (40%) and Newtral (43%) show similar rates. El Mundo (29%) also featured this functionality, but it was available on Civio, El País, eldiario, Maldita or RTVE. Again, news outlets rely on the technological possibilities offered by online services like Datawrapper or Flourish.

Table 8. Partial and full data download

Media outlet	2019		2020		2021		2022		TOTAL				
	S1		S2		S1		S2		S1				
	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T			
Civio											0%	86%	
Datadista											40%	0%	
El Confidencial											100%	0%	
El Mundo											29%	0%	
El País											0%	0%	
eldiario											0%	0%	
La Sexta											40%	0%	
Maldita											0%	14%	
Newtral											43%	0%	
RTVE											0%	0%	
TOTAL	14%	14%	29%	0%	44%	11%	22%	11%	30%	10%	10%	25%	10%

(Key: blue = download included; white = not included; yellow = no data. "S" refers to the semester)
Source: Authors' own.

Civio can be considered to be a benchmark of the willingness to offer a complete dataset, as they link to a new page in the methodology. Here, they publish the source, time range and format, as well as a thorough explanation of the dataset. To download the dataset, the user's name, email address and organisation are requested, and they are asked to cite and link to Civio.

Figure 2. Civio's dataset download page

Pruebas diagnósticas para detectar casos de coronavirus
Actualización con el número (total y relativo) de pruebas realizadas por comunidades autónomas para diagnosticar casos de covid-19

Fuente **Ministerio de Sanidad y comunidades autónomas**

Rango temporal **Febrero 2020 - abril 2021**

Formato **XLSX**

Laboratorios de toda España realizan a diario miles de pruebas para diagnosticar nuevos casos de infección por **coronavirus**. La falta de suficientes análisis para detectar personas afectadas por la **covid-19** fue uno de los grandes problemas para atrapar a tiempo al virus SARS-CoV-2.

Durante semanas, el Gobierno rechazó dar datos actualizados sobre el número de pruebas diagnósticas realizadas. Solo desde el 23 de abril de 2020, el Ministerio de Sanidad publica las PCR, los test de antígenos y las pruebas serológicas de forma semanal. Ante esta falta de transparencia, Civio decidió ir actualizando a diario los

Si eres socio o socio de Civio y quieres que te ayudemos a entender, tratar o buscar datos relevantes, escríbenos al [buzón de correo](#). Estaremos encantados de echarte una mano.

📄 descarga estos datos

Reutiliza nuestros datos de forma libre y gratuita. [Las reglas son claras](#): cita y enlaza. Y si encuentras algún error, por favor, avísanos.

Nombre

Email

Source: Civio.es.

Last, we observed the presence of a specific mailbox dedicated to communicating with users who want to provide new information or help amend errors. This is the least common feature, appearing in only 10% of the pieces. Maldita is the leader in this regard (43%), followed by El Confidencial (29%) and El País (14%). The offerings of Civio, Datadista, El Mundo, eldiario, LaSexta, Newtral and RTVE lack this feature.

5. Discussion

This study assessed transparency in daily content produced by Spanish data journalism teams from 2019 to 2022. Specifically, it sheds light on which transparency-related features are used (RQ1): they always indicate the source of their data, but do not link to them. Major news producers in the Spanish media ecosystem, such as El Mundo and El País, were among those that provided fewer links. A similar problem can be observed in the inclusion of sources in graphics and figures (e.g., maps).

Only 24% of the content analysed includes a methodology section, which is a hallmark of data journalism. Content often lacked an explanation of variables or a process outline to describe the steps that journalists had followed in obtaining and analysing datasets. Although it is clear that this practice is common of data journalism (Felle, 2016), the results are consistent with previous research on the topic: Díez-Garrido and Farpón (2020: 414) revealed that fewer than two of the twelve Latin American media outlets they analysed openly published databases. Chaparro-Domínguez and Díaz-Campo (2021: 11) also found that award-winning data journalism projects complied with verification and data analysis, but transparency and privacy principles were followed to a lesser extent.

The results also reveal low rates of downloadable data, which echoes Zamith's (2019) findings that only 13% of stories offered data downloads. The general absence of this added value reflects that, beyond the additional costs that transparency involves (Granados and Gupta, 2013: 640), the shortcomings in practice are mainly explained by the prioritisation of other issues (Plaisance and Skewes, 2003: 842) and by the fear of an intrusion into journalistic work (Singer, 2007). And this confirms how far transparency has to go until it is routinely adopted by journalists (Singer, 2007) or becomes a regular routine (Chadha and Koliska, 2015). Karlson's (2010) views of resistance of many journalists to incorporate high levels of openness in their content were confirmed.

Of course, there are nuances to these deficits and in many cases they depend on the type of media outlet (RQ2). In general, digitally-native companies are more likely to introduce transparency initiatives, and they lead in including methodologies, explanations of variables, the possibility to download data, and linking sources in graphics. This trend is particularly pronounced among small, specialised journalism initiatives such as Civio. However, not all digital-first organisations are more transparent than traditional

media companies, as the case of El País, a large legacy media outlet, shows. These exceptions reflect the complexity of organisational culture in newsrooms, and the different speed at which innovations are adopted (Porcu, Hermans and Broersma, 2020). This forces to refine the scant open culture attributed to analogue media (Deuze, 2003: 539). It also reinforces the idea of data units as autonomous entities in large newsrooms, and data journalists as agents of innovation, sometimes without the support of their company or environment (Appelgren et al., 2019: 1191; Arias and Carvajal, 2022: 21; Ausserhofer et al., 2017: 17-18; Baack, 2018: 674; Cheruiyot, Baack and Ferrer-Conill, 2019: 13; Mutsvauro, 2019: 1289; Wright and Nolan, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic, although considered an important period for data journalism, had a limited effect on transparency practices (RQ3). Our research shows that the description of journalistic processes was lower in 2019, and that the possibility of downloading data reached its peak in 2020, and maintained high figures over the last two years. However, the results on the percentage of links to sources or the existence of methodology sections do not seem to have increased as a result of the health crisis. The length of these appendices had the lowest number of words in 2020, in theory the hardest year in terms of deaths, hospitalizations and restrictions. This lack of growth, despite the rise of data journalism during the pandemic, is probably explained by the dependence on official data (Wu, 2021). Díez-Garrido and Farpón (2020: 397) already highlighted the lack of transparency despite the abundance of data in this period. The precarious situation of journalists due to the lack of resources and insecure working conditions under which many of these contents were produced also played an important role.

This study has some limitations. First, the inclusion of cases from a single country, although with important peculiarities: Spain was the last European country to pass a transparency law, and a dozen data journalism units have been established in media organisations over the last ten years. Second, the sample size is very limited and not representative; a large-scale mapping of Spanish data journalism output may offer more nuances on the different transparency initiatives.

However, this is an exploratory, pilot study that for the first time looks closely at the Spanish market holistically. It includes a qualitative perspective in the detailed analysis of specific practices, but semi-structured interviews would have been advisable, to obtain a more thorough understanding of the data journalism units' processes and decisions.

To overcome these limitations, we encourage future researchers to conduct semi-structured interviews with data journalists and editors, to better understand their strategies; and also to perform a cross-national study to compare the work of more news outlets and understand the influence of the media ecosystems in relation to transparency. Additionally, it is proposed that future content analysis research also looks at the identification and linking of sources; the specific elements of the methodological section; and the downloading of complete data. But analysis is also recommended regarding the

presence of the relevant programming code, which, as indicated above, has been omitted because it does not appear in any of the pieces analysed. This element will have more value in the future use of artificial intelligence tools.

In conclusion, transparency initiatives in Spanish data journalism must be boosted, although the simple application of a few parameters is not a sufficient condition to increase actual transparency. For this reason, this study supports the idea of creating “useful, everyday rituals of transparency” (Karls-son, 2010: 535-536) with the aim of defining an authentic system of transparency, accountability and legitimacy of news media. Integrating these practices into the professional culture of journalists, such as including references to sources, will be key to fostering the credibility and sustainability of the media. Showing “the back room” of information production in the methodology and disseminating the complete data of the investigation will differentiate quality journalism from false or biased content.

To achieve this, a training-focused approach must be considered, both in the heart of news outlets and in university programs (Lewis, McAdams and Stalph, 2020; Burns and Matthews, 2018). As Gray and Bounegru (2021) point out, this reality should lead us to be more reflective and critical in analysing the quality of data journalism development.

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Regulating dependency: The political stakes of online platforms' deals with French publishers

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Abstract

At a time when the news industry is struggling to cope with the dominance of the advertising market by large platforms, along with recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, commercial deals and regulatory initiatives are becoming increasingly common. While there is ample space for regulatory interventions seeking to level the playing field between news industry stakeholders and platforms, we are concerned these might further cement the dependency of the former on the latter through co-regulatory frameworks that epitomize the capture of vital infrastructures by platforms. This article examines the three-year negotiation of French news publishers with Google and Meta, which concluded with four framework agreements being signed. For our analysis, we first look at the historical trajectory of how these deals were made possible, using secondary sources such as leaks, press releases and the French Competition Authority's rulings; we then discuss their details and implications. We trace Google's attempt to capture news media in France and discuss the asymmetrical power it has exercised over the news industry, and how the subsequent deals with Meta were affected. Finally, our case study shows that these frameworks are not sufficient to tackle systemic imbalances – despite their good intentions – because they fail to challenge the concentration of power by a handful of oligopolistic private companies and, thus, effectively leave it up to them and the free market's idiosyncrasies to decide how they are implemented.

Keywords: platformization; copyright; related rights; Google News; Facebook News; Meta Journalism Project

Resum. *Regular la dependència: el que està en joc en els acords de les plataformes en línia amb els editors francesos*

En un moment en què la indústria periodística lluita per fer front al domini de l'espai publicitari per part de les grans plataformes, juntament amb crisis recents com la pandèmia de COVID-19, els acords comercials i les iniciatives reguladores són cada vegada més freqüents. Si bé existeix un ampli espai per a les intervencions reguladores que tractin d'equilibrar el terreny de joc entre les parts interessades de la indústria periodística i les plataformes, ens preocupa que aquestes puguin consolidar encara més la dependència de les primeres respecte de les segones a través de marcs coreguladors que encarnin la captura d'infraestructures vitals per part de les plataformes. Aquest article examina la negociació de tres anys dels editors de notícies francesos amb Google i Meta, que va concloure amb la signatura de quatre acords marc. Per a la nostra anàlisi, primer analitzem la trajectòria històrica de com aquests acords van ser possibles utilitzant fonts secundàries, com filtracions, comunicats de premsa i resolucions de l'Autoritat de la Competència de França; després n'analitzem el detall i les implicacions. Rastregem l'intent de Google d'aconseguir els mitjans de comunicació a França i analitzem el poder asimètric que ha exercit sobre la indústria periodística, així com la forma en què es van veure afectats els posteriors acords amb Meta. Finalment, el nostre estudi de cas mostra que aquests marcs no són suficients per fer front als desequilibris sistèmics —encara que tinguin bones intencions— perquè no aconsegueixen qüestionar la concentració de poder d'un grapat d'empreses privades oligopòliques i, per tant, deixen efectivament que siguin aquestes i les idiosincràsies del lliure mercat les que decideixin sobre la seva aplicació.

Paraules clau: plataformes; drets d'autor; drets relacionats; Google News; Facebook News; Meta Journalism Project

Resumen. *Regular la dependencia: lo que está en juego en los acuerdos de las plataformas en línea con los editores franceses*

En un momento en que la industria periodística lucha por hacer frente al dominio del espacio publicitario por parte de las grandes plataformas, junto con crisis recientes como la pandemia de COVID-19, los acuerdos comerciales y las iniciativas reguladoras son cada vez más frecuentes. Si bien existe un amplio espacio para las intervenciones reguladoras que traten de equilibrar el terreno de juego entre las partes interesadas de la industria periodística y las plataformas, nos preocupa que estas puedan consolidar aún más la dependencia de las primeras con respecto a las segundas a través de marcos coreguladores que encarnen la captura de infraestructuras vitales por parte de las plataformas. Este artículo examina la negociación de tres años de los editores de noticias franceses con Google y Meta, que concluyó con la firma de cuatro acuerdos marco. Para nuestro análisis, primero analizamos la trayectoria histórica de cómo estos acuerdos fueron posibles utilizando fuentes secundarias, como filtraciones, comunicados de prensa y resoluciones de la Autoridad de la Competencia de Francia; después analizamos sus detalles e implicaciones. Rastreamos el intento de Google de hacerse con los medios de comunicación en Francia y analizamos el poder asimétrico que ha ejercido sobre la industria periodística, así como la forma en que se vieron afectados los posteriores acuerdos con Meta. Finalmente, nuestro estudio de caso muestra que estos marcos no son suficientes para hacer frente a los desequilibrios sistémicos —aunque tengan buenas intenciones— porque no consiguen cuestionar la concentración de poder de un puñado de empresas privadas oligopólicas y, por tanto, dejan efectivamente que sean estas y las idiosincrasias del libre mercado las que decidan sobre su aplicación.

Palabras clave: plataformas; derechos de autor; derechos relacionados; Google News; Facebook News; Meta Journalism Project

1. Introduction

During the past few years, the discussion around the remuneration of news publishers by digital platforms such as search engines and social media has reignited public interest. What was once seen as ineffective or even impossible is now gaining traction in several countries, with perhaps the most prominent examples being France and Australia. Currently, policymakers in many countries are drafting or passing legislation seeking to regulate the relationship between press publishers and mainly US-based technological companies. This is primarily due to the news industry's need for new revenue streams, given the structural decline in traditional resources such as subscriptions and advertising. The digital platforms' gargantuan profits make them an ideal target for regulation intended to develop sustainable business models for journalism, especially since Google and Meta¹ have already been funneling money into the news media industry worldwide (Fanta and Dachwitz, 2020; Schiffrin, 2021; Papaevangelou, 2023).

This article examines the three-year negotiations between French news publishers and Google and Meta, which concluded with: a five-year deal struck in November 2021 between Google and *Agence-France Presse* (AFP);² a three-year deal signed in March 2022 between the *Alliance de la Presse d'Information Générale* (APIG) – the largest union of French daily newspapers – and Google, and between APIG and Meta signed in October 2021; and, last, a three-year deal between the *Syndicat des Éditeurs de la Presse Magazine*³ (SEPM) and Google in March 2022 (Rosemain, 2021). For our analysis, we look at the historical trajectory of how these deals were made possible and study them to identify similarities and differences. In the following sections, we examine the details of each deal by analyzing secondary sources such as leaks, press releases and rulings of the French competition authority, the *Autorité de la Concurrence* (ADLC). It should be noted that we did not analyze the documents from a legal standpoint; that is, we did not look closely into technical details, as we were mostly interested in their political-economic impact on the relationship between publishers and platforms.

We also show how France has served as the setting for many developments in regulating the publisher-platform relationship, from AFP's lawsuit against Google in 2006 (Cozens, 2005) to the creation of Google's Digital Innovation Fund in 2013, and the French publishers' complaint to the ADLC in 2021. Furthermore, we trace Google's attempt to capture news media in France and we examine the asymmetrical power it has wielded over the news industry. We demonstrate how Google's stance and the ADLC's decisions affected the outcome of the negotiations, including the deals signed with Meta. We explain how the EU attempted to satisfy publishers through copyright regulation, that is by creating a right to remuneration for the reuse

1. Formerly known as Facebook.

2. <<https://www.afp.com/sites/default/files/afpcommuniquede2021111/pdf/cpapfgooglefr.pdf>>.

3. Association of magazine press publishers.

of their content by infomediary platforms. However, this is just a part of a larger mosaic that brings together the political economy of platform governance along with issues of competition, privacy, platform funding, lobbying and others. With this case study, we wish to shed light on the ongoing transformation of the relationship between news organizations and online intermediaries which organize, curate, distribute and, increasingly, fund news content. All these dimensions are essential to understanding the complex functioning of the contemporary digital public sphere, and we aspire for our paper to contribute to this scholarly endeavor.

2. Literature review

Platforms have practically reconfigured the means of production and distribution of, as well as access to, cultural products, including news (Nieborg and Poell, 2018; Smyrniaos and Rebillard, 2019). The concept of a platform signifies a figurative bridging of two or more parties, thereby acting as an intermediary. However, as several scholars have argued, this metaphor obscures the question of liability for data and content circulation, as well as the agency that is exercised by platforms through algorithmic content curation (Gillespie, 2010; Bucher, 2018). The phenomenon of “infomediation” (Siapera, 2013; Smyrniaos and Rebillard, 2019) has enabled platforms to assume an authoritative role in defining, either directly or indirectly, the limits of freedom of expression and consequently how public discourse is constructed. As a result, it is crucial to critically discuss what this implies for the future of our public sphere, which predominantly exists online and is governed by private platforms (van Dijck and Poell, 2015; Napoli, 2019).

We also employ the concept of “infrastructural capture”, a term used by Nechushtai to describe “situations in which an organization tasked with scrutinizing another organization, institution, business or industry is incapable of operating sustainably without the resources or services they provide” (Nechushtai, 2018: 1046). The concept of capture derives from the economic theory of “regulatory capture” (Stigler, 1971), which was effectively a way of claiming that regulation might be designed by or for industry stakeholders instead of prioritizing public interest. The related concept of “media capture” was subsequently used to frame an identical situation, in which media actors are working to ensure the preservation of the status quo, often with potential benefits to governments or corporations (Schiffrin, 2014). The concept of infrastructural capture, then, is used to analyze the risk of media organizations’ dependency on platform infrastructure, with clear threats to their independence and the way news is produced (Sebbah, Sire and Smyrniaos, 2020).

Finally, we draw on the work of Smyrniaos and Rebillard (2019) to understand how the French news industry has historically spearheaded negotiations with infomediaries, a process characterized by “[the] dominance of the infomediaries over publishers and, simultaneously, a collusion between these

two types of actors that leads the latter to dilute their editorial autonomy while the former gain power over news production and distribution” (Smyrnaio and Rebillard, 2019: 45).

3. Methods, corpus and case study selection

Qualitative methods are widely preferred by researchers studying institutional processes of a given field and, largely, the political-economic implications of regulatory development. More specifically, case studies are often best suited for looking closely at a particular issue and examining it through close reading, paying attention to its nuances and its unique sociopolitical context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018: 557). We consider our paper to be a “detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events” (George and Bennett, 2005: 5).

Furthermore, our methodological and analytical approach was inspired by a scholarly analysis of the Australian New Media Bargaining Code (NMBC) passed in 2021, and how it was developed (Flew and Wilding, 2021). Specifically, Flew and Wilding analyzed a report from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) that examined the dominance that Google and Meta hold over traditional news media publishers (Flew and Wilding, 2021: 51).

For this paper, we studied relevant documentary materials, namely ADLC’s decisions; a parliamentary report on the application and impact of *related rights*;⁴ press releases from all negotiating parties involved; and numerous news articles containing information on the story’s development. We also conducted in-depth interviews with stakeholders, essentially with publishers.⁵ More specifically, the two decisions of the Authority examined here are *20-MC-01* of 09/04/2020⁶ and *21-D-17* of 12/07/2021.⁷ The former refers to the decision made by ADLC to grant the requests of the press publishers, namely APIG, SEPM and AFP, which had lodged an official complaint with the Authority against Google’s implementation of the French law transposing the European Directive on Copyright and Related Rights in the Digital Single Market,⁸ which introduced a related right for press publishers allowing them to demand remuneration for the (re)use of their content by intermediaries.

4. “Neighbouring rights”, “ancillary rights” and “related rights” are used interchangeably in this article. They describe the rights of a creative work not connected with the work’s actual author – in this case rights on content that are granted to publishers. We choose to use “related rights” as it is the term used in the European directive.

5. This is because our efforts to contact Google and Meta proved unfruitful.

6. <<https://www.autoritedelaconurrence.fr/en/decision/requests-interim-measures-syndicat-des-editeurs-de-la-presse-magazine-alliance-de-la>>.

7. <<https://www.autoritedelaconurrence.fr/en/press-release/remuneration-related-rights-press-publishers-and-agencies-autorite-fines-google-500>>.

8. <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/790/oj>>.

France has historically been at the epicenter of policymaking in relation to regulating publisher-platform relationships. For instance, in 2013, Google responded to pressure from the French government by creating a €60 million fund “to support press publishers’ innovation projects, which was the blueprint for the DNI & the GNI”⁹ (Fanta and Dachwitz, 2020: 89). Going even further back, the tumultuous launch of Google News in France in 2003 caused many French publishers, which were members of an association called *Groupement des Éditeurs de Services en Ligne* (GESTE)¹⁰, to temporarily withdraw their content from Google News (Smyrnaio, 2021). More recently, France was the first country to transpose the new copyright directive in 2019, showing the political will to regulate the relationship between press publishers and platforms, well before the Australian NMBC became law. For all these reasons, the way that this issue played out could set a precedent and, thus, impact the way that other countries attempt to regulate said relationship. It also serves as a prime example of the political-economic stakes of this relationship, with implications that go beyond the news industry.

4. Results

In this section, we look at the key developments indicated in the timeline we created to help readers contextualize the discussion (Fig. 1).

4.1. *The road to the updated European Copyright Directive and Google’s role*

France was the first member state in the EU to transpose the revamped European Copyright Directive, which, among others, included Article 15 regarding the “Protection of press publications concerning online uses”.¹¹ This Article introduced a related right to copyright for press publishers, thus opening the way for publishers to start receiving some sort of remuneration for the (re)use of their content – including indexing in search engines – by online intermediaries (Danbury, 2021). This right expires by default two years after the appearance date of a press publication (Art 15(4)).

It is worth noting here that Germany passed a similar law in 2013 in a bid to make Google pay for indexing news content.¹² However, due to the law’s vague language, Google proceeded with listing only links to articles on its search engine, and thus was able to avoid paying for the license demanded. As a result, German publishers had to waive their right to remuneration, as their readership coming via Google plummeted (Nordemann and Jehle, 2019).

9. DNI stands for Google’s Digital News Initiative fund, which later became Google News Initiative.

10. Group of publishers of online services.

11. <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32019L0790&from=EN>>.

12. <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_urhg/index.html>. This would later go on to serve as the foundation for Article 15 of the Copyright Directive.

Similarly, in 2014, the Spanish government passed a stricter law that essentially made it illegal for online services to use snippets of content without payment to the Spanish Association of Newspaper Publishers (Smith, 2014). Google retaliated by removing all Spanish media from the Spanish version of Google News for almost eight years, only for it to be re-activated after Spain complied with the new European copyright framework (Vincent, 2021).

Another similar story of platform power asymmetry played out in Australia, when Meta blocked dozens of news pages on Facebook following approval of the NMBC, including those of government and health officials (Taylor, 2021). Recently, whistleblowers have claimed that these pages were not affected by accident, as the company had previously argued, but that everything was part of Meta's deliberate strategy to improve its negotiating position (Taylor, 2022).

Following a historical institutionalist approach, we can indeed infer that “different countries or societies can develop dramatically different institutional responses to the same macrosocial structures” (Bannerman and Haggart, 2015: 5). Interestingly, though, the response of platforms in all the examples cited remains effectively the same: in addition to more traditional lobbying practices, they have been leveraging their power through censorship and media deplatformization in order to influence policymaking, with little regard for the public interest.

4.2. The role of the French Competition Authority

As noted above, a couple of months after France implemented the European Directive as national law, Google unilaterally stopped showing news snippets to its French users¹³ unless it had first explicitly received permission from the publishers, which would have amounted to waiving their right to remuneration. This reaction was what caused French publishers to come together and lodge a formal complaint to the ADLC against the way in which Google had interpreted and applied the copyright law, arguing it had “[abused] a dominant position” (ADLC, 2020: 3). The ADLC found Google's practices to be “anti-competitive” (2020: 4) and issued a decision in April 2020 (20-MC-01), ordering interim measures to be applied until the announcement of its final decision, namely that:

- Publishers and news agencies had to enter negotiations “in good faith” with Google, within a period of three months after such a request had been made, to discuss both the terms and conditions for the reuse and indexing of their content and the corresponding – retroactive – remuneration (Injunctions 4 & 5);

13. <<https://france.googleblog.com/2019/09/comment-nous-respectons-le-droit-dauteur.html>>.

- Google had to provide sufficient information regarding the criteria and parameters of calculating remuneration fees (Injunction 2);
- During the period of negotiations, Google had to continue displaying snippets and audiovisual content in its search engine in a neutral way, i.e. without downgrading it (Injunctions 3, 5 & 6);
- Finally, Google had to send an initial report to the ADLC on its compliance with the obligations (Injunction 7).

ADLC based its decision on the fact that, at the time, Google “[was] likely to hold a dominant position on the French market for general search services” (ADLC, 2020: 3). Specifically, it argued that “Google may have abused its dominant position to circumvent the Law on Related Rights” for having forced the hand of publishers to waive their right to remuneration by granting free licenses to Google, for not having shared critical information regarding the way of determining the level of remuneration and, last, for having unilaterally blocked short extracts and other audiovisual content from its search engine (ADLC, 2020: 4).

Another important point in the development of our case study was the decision of ADLC on 7 June 2021 (21-D-11) in relation to Google’s practices in the online advertising sector in France, which fined the company €200 million for “having abused its dominant position in the market for ad servers for publishers of websites and mobile apps” (ADLC, 2021a: 3). This time, the case was brought to the Authority’s attention by *News Corp Inc.*, *Groupe Figaro* and *Groupe Rossel La Voix*, all of which are press publishers and important stakeholders in the news industry in France and beyond.

One month later, on 13 July 2021, ADLC issued its final decision (21-D-17) concerning the interim measures that had been announced in its previous decision of April 2020 (20-MC-01). The Authority fined Google €500 million, primarily for not having complied with injunctions 1, 2, 5 and 6; most importantly, the decision condemned Google’s attempt to connect the payment of publishers’ related rights to their use of the newly launched Google News Showcase.¹⁴ The ADLC also took into consideration the decision of the Paris Court of Appeal of 8 October 2020, which dismissed Google’s argument that the company would jeopardize “improvements and innovations” of its services if it complied with all foreseen obligations (ADLC, 2021b: 3).

Subsequently, Google proposed eight commitments to the ADLC, applicable for five years, as remedies for the infringed injunctions (Allen and Overy, 2021), agreeing *inter alia* to negotiate a separate license for Google News Showcase. This was a concession from Google, which sought, on the

14. Google statement described Showcase as “a licensing program for news publishers that provides a customizable, curated space for news content in Google News and Discover. These are not payments for links, snippets, short extracts, or headlines.” <<https://news.google.com/news-showcase/>>.

one hand, to disengage itself from an on-going legal spar with the ADLC and the French news industry, especially shortly after Meta had announced a framework agreement with APIG, and, on the other, to avoid further negative publicity (Cohen, 2021). Through a historical institutionalist lens, this illuminates an institutional change in platform regulation, which Google attempted to oppose but had to ultimately give in to – albeit on its own terms, as we will see.

4.3. *AFP and APIG, the platforms' favorites*

APIG was created in 2018 following the merger of four different unions. The organization brings together and represents nearly 300 political and general news titles, both at the regional and local level, including the most prestigious Paris-based dailies such as *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *Libération*. Pierre Louette, the President of APIG and CEO of *Groupe Les Echos-Le Parisien*, part of the powerful LVMH group, has supported the idea of remunerating the news industry based on related rights, arguing that: “It is the birth of a new category of stable income” (Valentini, 2021). It is also worth noting that Philippe Jannet, the first press executive in the world to formulate a collective demand for remuneration from Google on behalf of the GESTE in 2003 when Google News launched in France, was also CEO of *Les Echos* at the time. Thus, the same prominent players, mainly Parisian financial and political newspapers, had for years been developing the arguments that were adopted by the French publishers involved in this litigation. APIG was the first among the three complainants to strike an agreement with Google, in January 2021, although it subsequently became inoperable, due to ADLC’s second decision in July 2021; finally, a new framework agreement was signed in March 2022.

Furthermore, APIG remains the only association to have signed an agreement with Meta regarding related rights. Specifically, the deal with Meta covers a period of three years, with an option to renew, and stipulates that every publisher participating in APIG will receive a minimum remuneration fee, retroactively, i.e. it will cover fees for related rights owed to publishers since the law’s implementation in July 2019. Through our interviews we learned that there are three factors that determine the amount of remuneration: (i) the number of Facebook followers; (ii) the number of interactions with publishers’ posts; and (iii) the number of visitors outside Facebook, as evaluated by ACPM.¹⁵ So, we could assume that similar parameters exist for determining the amount of remuneration from Google.

Nevertheless, financial details concerning these framework agreements were not made publicly available either for Google or for Meta. A report from Reuters mentioned that the initial deal with Google involved approximately €67 million over three years (Rosemain, 2021); details regarding the

15. <<https://www.acpm.fr>>.

second deal were not revealed. For instance, *Le Monde* would reportedly receive approximately €1.5 million, while a local outlet, *La Voix de la Haute Marne*, would receive only €12,500. Even though the initial deal is no longer in force, the fact that larger outlets would have received substantially more money than smaller ones reveals two things: on the one hand, that inequalities exist among industry players, and, on the other, that even though collective negotiation made striking deals more likely, it did not necessarily help remedy imbalances.

As we noted above, the French news industry has been at the forefront of demanding remuneration for the reuse of their content by online platforms. A case in point is when AFP sued Google in 2005 for having “breached its copyright by reproducing its pictures and articles” in the Google News section (Cozens, 2005). The two parties settled the lawsuit two years later, with Google paying AFP an undisclosed sum of money to continue displaying content on its services, but further details were never made publicly available (Auchard, 2007; Smyrniaos and Rebillard, 2019: 40). This deal, along with a similar one made with Associate Press, are the first occasions in history when Google agreed to share revenue with a publisher. Currently, AFP is not a part of any of the associations mentioned above. Nonetheless, it decided to collaborate with the other publishers’ bid against Google by lodging a complaint to the ADLC. AFP signed its own agreement with Google in November 2021, which, unusually, is valid for five years, compared to the three-year deals signed by the other associations (France24, 2022).

Fabrice Fries, CEO of AFP, also stated in the parliamentary hearings that the international status and elevated prestige of the news agency helped secure a higher level of remuneration than that obtained by other publishers (Duby-Muller and Garcia, 2022: 65). As a result, we would be remiss not to mention here some of the other financial arrangements between AFP and the two largest private funders of journalism, Google and Meta. Specifically, AFP has become one of the most important fact-checking organizations worldwide, with the support of the platforms and the French government. In December 2021, a month after signing the agreement on related rights, Google and AFP announced their collaboration on a fact-checking project called *Objectif Desinfox*, relating to the French presidential and legislative elections of 2022;¹⁶ this was seen as an expansion of their previous work on election-related fact-checking for the previous presidential elections in 2017. This time, the two parties created a coalition of 21 French news organizations coordinated by AFP which aimed to combine forces to combat disinformation, which put AFP in a rather privileged position within the media ecosystem. Also, AFP is currently the largest partner of Meta’s Third-Party Fact-Checking Network (Goldshlager, 2019).

16. Objective: Combat Fake News: <<https://www.afp.com/en/inside-afp/afp-google-team-fact-check-french-polls>>.

Figure 1. Case Study Timeline



Source: <<https://prezi.com/i/view/1VcwBpaUCyRnTp6CTWUO>>.

4.4. Magazines and independent online publishers: the outsiders

SEPM is the leading association of magazine publishers for the general public in France; it was first formed in 1982 but merged with the *Syndicat Professionnel de la Presse Magazine et d'Opinion* (SPPMO) in 2012,¹⁷ and now represents 80 publishers and more than 400 magazines across France.¹⁸ SEPM was the last association to sign an agreement with Google, in April 2022, following another complaint lodged on 10 January 2022 (Cohen, 2022). This time, the complaint was filed solely by SEPM, as the other two associations had already signed different agreements. SEPM argued that Google had not “respected” the injunctions announced by ADLC, indicating that the company had likely negotiated different terms with the other complainants. In any case, it seems that the pressure put on Google by that last complaint, along with its wish to conclude negotiations with the French news industry, opened the way for a framework agreement that will last three years, with Google distributing around €20 million per year to the association’s participants (OFFREMEDIA, 2022).

Moreover, it should be noted that one major point of contention between APIG and SEPM was that the latter did not accept Google’s framing of the scope of related rights: Google wanted the definition to cover solely publications that fell under the umbrella term “political and general information”, to which APIG agreed.¹⁹ In fact, ADLC’s 21-D-17 decision specifically condemned that framing, which would exclude numerous media from benefiting from related rights (ADLC, 2021b: 83).

Finally, in June 2021, SEPM joined forces with *la Fédération Nationale de la Presse d'Information Spécialisée* (FNPS), which represents “specialized and professional” press, and with *le Syndicat de la Presse d'Information Indépendante en Ligne* (Spiil), which represents independent online media, to launch a dedicated collective copyright management organization that will collect and distribute remuneration for related rights among member publishers. As the Parliamentary Report on the application of the law on related rights in France noted, such organizations “limit the [market] distortions without favoring the big publications and allowing the smaller ones to defend themselves” (Duby-Muller and Garcia, 2022: 51). This happens through the method of *péréquation*, i.e. balancing costs or revenue among different parties to achieve a fairer distribution than that obtained through simple market mechanisms.²⁰ However, neither AFP nor APIG, who appear to be Google’s

17. <<https://archive.wikiwix.com/cache/index2.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.sppmo.org%2FLe-2-mai-dernier-le-SPPMO-est.html#federation=archive.wikiwix.com&tab=url>>.

18. <<http://www.lapressemagazine.fr/presentation>>.

19. In France, media publishers that meet the criteria of Article 1 of the decree of 29 October 2009 may be recognised as providing “political and general information” (IPG), which makes them eligible for public funding and tax breaks.

20. In France, the newspaper distribution system is traditionally based on a collective mechanism of *péréquation*, i.e., the distribution of costs among publishers to assure diversity and pluralism.

privileged contacts, have yet joined this organization, which significantly weakens its negotiating power. Therefore, one can observe that power asymmetries characterize not only the relationship between publishers and platforms, but also those between different news industry stakeholders themselves.

5. Conclusions

Meta and Google are among the largest benefactors of journalism worldwide, with their Meta Journalism Project (MJP) and Google News Initiative (GNI) respectively (Fanta and Dachwitz, 2020; Jurno and D'Andréa, 2020). Indeed, Meta and Google have claimed that they have so far invested more than \$900 million in the news industry, and between them have pledged to spend close to \$1.5 billion (Scutari, 2022).²¹ These funding initiatives are distinct from the licensing programs they offer, such as Google News Showcase or Facebook News, or other commercial services such as Subscribe with Google. As a result, we are left in the dark regarding the figures for their funding for journalism programs, and we lack exact information about the reach of these initiatives due to the opaqueness and complexity of their activities.

A case in point, which is also related to our case study, is when Google signed individual agreements with more than a dozen French news organizations between the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021. (Duby-Muller and Garcia, 2022: 65). However, neither the content nor the amounts involved were disclosed. These agreements were based on related rights but were made outside the remits of the associations, even though some of these organizations, like *Le Monde*, partake in them; the selected publishers were also given privileged access to services such as Subscribe and Showcase. Consequently, we believe that this “divide and conquer” strategy among monopolistic digital platforms contributes to further fragmenting the news ecosystem and weakening smaller publishers. The same applies to audiovisual media and, particularly, TV channels; we did not include them in our study because they do not participate in the negotiations sanctioned by the French public authorities. However, the largest ones, such as the TF1 group, have signed deals of mutual agreement, notably with Google, including favorable revenue sharing for content published on YouTube.²²

Furthermore, while the ADLC played a positive role in limiting platforms' leverage, we also ought to underline the political context which undermined its work in favor of monopolistic platforms. France, alongside Germany, has been among the frontrunners leading the regulatory race in the EU. We could argue, thus, that there existed a political willingness to regulate US-based tech giants. French President Emmanuel Macron, though, did not renew the tenure of Isabelle de Silva, head of ADLC, because they did not see eye-to-eye regarding merger rules, with the former wanting softer rules that

21. <<https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/introducing-facebook-journalism-project>>.

22. <<https://www.reuters.com/article/ofrin-tf1-youtube-idFRKCN01Y27Q20141114>>.

would allow for a greater concentration of companies, so that French and European technological companies could “better compete against the United States and China” (Leali and Kayali, 2021). However, the swift and unprecedented decisions of ADLC during de Silva’s tenure, condemning the harmful practices of Google, makes the above reasoning questionable. We believe that, as with the agreement to create the DNI in 2013 by François Hollande and Google’s then-CEO Eric Schmidt, the French government demonstrates a preference for the market to self-regulate, even if this means perpetuating power imbalances among stakeholders.

To summarize, this paper set out to discuss the political economy of regulation of the relationship between press publishers and online intermediaries. We examined the three-year negotiations between a large part of the French news industry and dominant technological companies, specifically Google and Meta, and we inferred the following:

- i. Collective bargaining is more effective for news publishers in their efforts to negotiate commercial deals with online platforms but is also harder to organize because of market fragmentation and opposing interests.
- ii. There exists not only a power asymmetry between publishers and platforms but also among publishers themselves, e.g., with larger news organizations securing better deals, participating in separate commercial arrangements with platforms, and refusing to join a collective management organization.
- iii. Independent judicial authorities can play a positive role in regulating platforms and their relationship with other governance stakeholders such as press publishers if there is an enabling political and institutional environment.
- iv. Monopolistic platforms avoid sharing details of deals to ensure a fragmented negotiating front and to deter smaller publishers from increasing their demands.
- v. They also unilaterally utilize their power, in cases where they cannot avoid regulation, to enforce their interpretation of regulatory frameworks and, thus, influence policymaking and policy-enforcement.

In conclusion, our article highlights the existing risk of expanding the platformization of news (Nieborg and Poell, 2018) by attempting to force services like Google News Showcase onto the publishers. At a time when the news industry is struggling to cope with the dominance of large platforms in the advertising space, along with recent crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, commercial deals and regulatory initiatives are bound to become increasingly common. While there is ample scope for regulatory interventions seeking to level the playing field among news organizations and platforms, we are concerned these might further cement the dependency of the former on the latter through co-regulatory frameworks (Ouakrat, 2020: 51-52) that enable plat-

forms to capture vital infrastructures (Nechushtai, 2018). We believe that these frameworks are not sufficient to tackle systemic imbalances – even if they mean well – because they fail to challenge the concentration of power among a handful of oligopolistic private companies, and thus give way to platforms and to the free market’s idiosyncrasies to decide how they are implemented. Similarly, the lack of political will to democratize access to this new source of revenue for all publishers, for instance through a collective management system of related rights, may contribute to further concentration of the media industry, and may thus limit pluralism of opinions in the public sphere. Future research should focus on studying the progressively contentious relationship between publishers and platforms concerning issues beyond funding as well.

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Immersive media and social change: The ‘empathy machine’ is dead, long live ‘emotional geography’!

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Abstract

Since 2014, immersive media storytelling has gained significant attention, with technologies such as 360° video providing unique first-person experiences, leading to the emergence of immersive journalism and documentaries. Some view immersive media as an “empathy machine” for fostering social change by creating strong connections between the audience and the issues portrayed. This paper critically examines this claim through a practice-based research approach, exploring five socially-driven immersive media projects from 2018-2020 in various countries, and interviewing 21 experts, both scholars and practitioners. The insights derived from this research provide an innovative conceptual framework that encompasses socially-driven immersive media productions, moving from initial empathy towards a more comprehensive concept and phenomenon native to the medium, referred to as “emotional geography”. This framework aims to shed light on the affective dynamics of immersive media in relation to social change, and offers valuable insights for future research, productions and critical discussions on the growing, emotionally-charged digital media ecosystem driven by advancing technologies.

Keywords: immersive media; virtual reality; empathy; social change; emotion; 360-degree video

Resum. *Mitjans immersius i canvi social: la «màquina d’empatia» ha mort, llarga vida a la «geografia emocional»!*

Des de 2014, la narració d’històries a través de mitjans immersius ha guanyat una atenció significativa amb tecnologies com el vídeo 360°, que proporciona experiències úniques en primera persona, la qual cosa ha portat a l’aparició de periodisme i documentals immersius. Alguns veuen els mitjans immersius com una «màquina d’empatia» per fomentar el canvi social en crear fortes connexions entre l’audiència i les qüestions retratades. Aquest

article examina críticament aquesta afirmació a través d'un enfocament de recerca basat en la pràctica, explorant cinc projectes de mitjans immersius amb orientació social de 2018 a 2020 en diversos països, i entrevistant 21 experts, tant acadèmics com professionals. Els coneixements derivats d'aquesta recerca proporcionen un marc conceptual innovador que abasta produccions de mitjans immersius amb enfocament social i que passen de l'empatia inicial a un concepte i fenomen més complet del mitjà anomenat «geografia emocional». Aquest marc pretén fer llum sobre les dinàmiques afectives dels mitjans immersius en relació amb el canvi social i ofereix valuosos coneixements per a futures recerques, produccions i discussions crítiques sobre el creixent i emocionalment carregat ecosistema de mitjans digitals impulsat per tecnologies avançades.

Paraules clau: mitjans immersius; realitat virtual; empatia; canvi social; emoció; vídeo 360

Resumen. *Medios inmersivos y cambio social: la «máquina de empatía» ha muerto, ¡larga vida a la «geografía emocional»!*

Desde 2014, la narración de historias a través de medios inmersivos ha ganado una atención significativa, con tecnologías como el vídeo 360°, que proporciona experiencias únicas en primera persona, lo que ha llevado a la aparición de periodismo y documentales inmersivos. Algunos ven los medios inmersivos como una «máquina de empatía» para fomentar el cambio social al crear fuertes conexiones entre la audiencia y las cuestiones retratadas. Este artículo examina críticamente esta afirmación a través de un enfoque de investigación basado en la práctica, explorando cinco proyectos de medios inmersivos con orientación social de 2018 a 2020 en varios países, y entrevistando a 21 expertos, tanto académicos como profesionales. Los conocimientos derivados de esta investigación proporcionan un marco conceptual innovador que abarca producciones de medios inmersivos con enfoque social y que pasan de la empatía inicial a un concepto y fenómeno más completo del medio denominado «geografía emocional». Este marco pretende arrojar luz sobre las dinámicas afectivas de los medios inmersivos en relación con el cambio social y ofrece valiosos conocimientos para futuras investigaciones, producciones y discusiones críticas sobre el creciente y emocionalmente cargado ecosistema de medios digitales impulsado por tecnologías avanzadas.

Palabras clave: medios inmersivos; realidad virtual; empatía; cambio social; emoción; vídeo 360

1. Introduction

In today's digital era, everything is interactive, interconnected, participatory, more open, more global, multi-platform, multilinear, producing a constant stream of data, analysis and comment (Beckett, 2008, 2010). People's everyday lives are correspondingly lived *in* rather than *with* media (Beckett and Deuze, 2016). Thus, one might argue that today's challenge for the media industry is about becoming meaningful and insightful, and a trustworthy part of an emerging ecosystem powered by human emotion and profoundly influenced by technology. This means that people's lives are significantly determined by technology, but it also certainly implies that our perception of society, and the part that storytelling, for example, plays in it, is only possible through an understanding of the extreme mediatization of everyday life.

[It is undeniable that people have an] increasingly intimate relation with technology in general, and media in particular [...]. Several changes in media have contributed to people's increasingly personal and emotional engagement with the world around them. First of all, media are now predominantly mobile and profoundly personalized. Our devices are always with us. (Beckett and Deuze, 2016)

The way we experience content is physically different. Content is with us *anytime, anyplace, anywhere*. In terms of our relationship with the world, it all comes down to: “reading, watching, viewing, listening, checking, snacking, monitoring, scanning, searching, clicking, linking, sharing, liking, recommending, commenting and voting” (Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink, 2015). As media becomes more personal and social, we become more attached to a kind of digital co-dependency.

Recent years have witnessed the advent of new storytelling styles and formats that integrate that very same substance. Within this context, and approximately since 2012, a new ecosystem of immersive media technologies and experiments have emerged, and with it the promise of an innovative way of experiencing stories, as well as the claim of virtual reality as the ultimate “empathy machine” (Milk, 2015). Thus, and considering the supposedly empathic nature of immersive media, how exactly can this emergent technology generate an innovative, affective storytelling approach? If immersive media encompass profoundly affective affordances, how can these help us tackle, for example, critical social and cultural issues in such a way as to trigger processes of social change?

The use of socially driven immersive media has been explored mostly in the field of journalism – or more specifically immersive journalism (de la Peña et al., 2010). Although the first experiments with immersive journalism were at the intersection of journalistic narrative and virtual scenarios using computer-generated imagery to depict such narratives (e.g., Nonny de la Peña's seminal 2012 *The Hunger is Los Angeles*), but also using augmented reality as a tool for audiences to connect with news stories in an unprecedented way (Tejedor-Calvo et al., 2020; Aitamura et al., 2022), the fact is that the overall body of work of immersive journalism mostly makes use of 360° video to “transport” people inside news stories, i.e. the so-called “as if you were there” experience, triggered by the holistic combination of the feelings of immersion and presence (Vaz and Tejedor, 2019; Pérez-Seijo, Gracia and Reis, 2022; Baía Reis, Kick and Oliveto, 2023). Most of these 360° news stories transport the audience to remote or inaccessible places and situations drenched with social significance. Moreover, documentary filmmakers have also been experimenting with immersive media and 360° video to allow the audience to connect with serious social and cultural issues.

Inspired by the idea of virtual reality as an “empathy machine” and the fact that 360° video cameras are becoming progressively cheaper and more user-friendly, we were motivated to “move the spotlight” from media profes-

sionals to disadvantaged communities. In other words, we wanted to try to understand the potential for engaging people in collaborative, creative 360° video productions driven by specific serious social issues to ultimately trigger social change. This motivation led us to conduct some preliminary work that eventually paved the way for outlining this research project.

The preliminary work involved two projects: the first was to outline, design and deliver a collaborative 360° video workshop entitled “Immersive Storytelling and Digital Citizenship.” This workshop was held as part of the event “Creative CoLab 2017” in Porto, Portugal. Taking part were digital journalist and immersive media expert Thomas Seymat (Euronews), a representative of the Portuguese young LGBT+ association *rede ex aequo*, and a diverse group of participants, mainly digital media students and academics from areas such as engineering or communication sciences. The group created a short 360° video entitled *Don't see the world in black and white*, with the primary goal of raising awareness about some of the social struggles faced by transgender people. The second project was the production of *Plax* (2017), a short 360° video documentary about the life and struggles of a young Cape Verdean musician living in Portugal. This latter work was focused on the importance of music in maintaining an emotional connection with the protagonist's homeland, Africa. Inspired by all of the above, we sought to outline a research project to explore the potential of immersive technologies – focusing on 360° video – for engaging with serious social issues, i.e., concerning social problems such as those relating to inequality, poverty, government accountability and transparency, among others. By critically exploring the idea of the “empathy machine” (Milk, 2015) through creative collaboration informed by key immersive media concepts and assumptions, we established a basis for identifying, by means of a practice-based research approach, the fundamental ideas within the interaction between the fields of immersive media and social change. This allowed us to outline an innovative framework on the affective and behavioural dynamics of immersive media in relation to social change in a processual way, from “empathy” as an initial trigger towards “emotional geography” as a complex concept and phenomenon native to the medium.

2. Immersive media and social change: From “mere” social awareness to human agency

“Our social life is characterised by norms that manifest as attitudinal and behavioural uniformities among people. With greater awareness about our social context, we can interact more efficiently.” (Rakotonirainy, Loke and Obst, 2009). In other words, social awareness is all about sensing what others are feeling, being able to take their perspective, and appreciating and interacting positively with diverse groups. Taking this idea into account, one could argue, for example, that immersive journalism may have tremendous potential for developing journalistic works that can have a broader and much

more robust impact on people, going beyond the mere act of reporting information. This brings us to another and related notion, cultural awareness, which can be defined as: “the foundation of communication and [which] involves the ability of standing back from ourselves and becoming aware of our cultural values, beliefs and perceptions.” (Cantatore and Quappe, 2005). In this sense, the concepts of social and cultural awareness might trigger questions such as why we behave in a certain way, how we see the world, and how we connect with others? Social and cultural awareness become crucial when we interact with people from other cultures, and even more when interacting with people from subcultures within major cultures, e.g. urban minorities, as people see, interpret and evaluate things in entirely different ways, even within their home environment.

Let us consider the case of journalism as an example to inform immersive media in general. How can we relate social and cultural awareness to journalism and, more particularly, to immersive journalism? We know that people who watch a documentary on TV or online on a particular social or cultural issue are going to experience, through that documentary, a certain degree of understanding of what is portrayed, and it will also have a certain degree of impact on them. It has been demonstrated that immersive journalism creates a broader sense of immersion and presence, which leads us to conclude that the degree of understanding and impact is consequently higher than that experienced in non-immersive media. This opens the possibility of using immersive media to create works focused on portraying social and cultural issues around topics such as race, colour, sexuality and gender, language, religion and the arts.

By experiencing the feeling of “being there”, people can be more aware of these issues, and virtual reality might truly act as an “empathy machine” (Milk, 2015). If Milk (2015) is right, immersive media may become tools for re-humanizing the media landscape by triggering and enhancing attitudes and behaviours such as cultural sensitivity and cultural knowledge. There are examples of earlier works that – following on from the journalism example – go beyond the simple act of reporting information by adopting a more active approach, conveying stories in ways that have a strong impact on audiences: “Journalists do not only hold the power to inform the public, but have the moral responsibility as duty bearers to educate and increase awareness of their rights, and monitor, investigate and report all human rights violations.” (Shaw, 2011). Thus Shaw illuminates how journalists can craft a more informed and empowered public sphere. Drawing on Kant’s cosmopolitan principle of global justice, Shaw puts forward the case for human rights journalism as a more proactive approach in prioritizing the deconstruction of indirect structural and cultural violence, and as the best way of preventing or minimizing direct political violence. This example demonstrates that journalism can go beyond its traditional frontiers.

Furthermore, and expanding from journalism to the wider field of communication, “we have experienced a resurgence in practices of communica-

tion for social change, a plethora of agency in which voice, citizenship and collective action have centre stage as core values, principles and practices” (Tuftte, 2013). With the advent of a new digital media setup, in which people increasingly demand more emotionally complex media experiences and where interactive storytelling is a cornerstone, understanding the role of immersive media in relation to emotion and pro-social attitude change can have a huge impact on reshaping the way media practitioners, stories and audiences relate to one another; and ultimately sheds light on an understanding of the potentialities of citizen-led immersive media towards social change.

Thus, and given that our research focused on 360° video storytelling, but also considering the supposedly empathic nature of immersive media, we questioned how exactly this emergent technology could generate an innovative, affective storytelling approach. If immersive media encompass profoundly affective affordances, how can these help us tackle, for instance, critical social and cultural issues in such a way as to trigger tangible processes of social change? How to move from “mere” social awareness to tangible human agency?

3. Aims and methodology

3.1. *Research goals and questions*

The main scope of this study focuses on exploring the relationships between immersive media and social change in collaborative 360° video productions with distinct characteristics, particularly on the processes of transformation that occur across these spheres (immersive media to social change, social change to immersive media). Each sphere can be an input and/or an output of a collaborative 360° video production, and diverse configurations between the two can be explored, defining the outcomes, the type of interaction, and influencing the expressivity and impact of a collaborative 360° video production. As 360° video storytelling is part of the emergent and eminently multi-disciplinary field of immersive media, encompassing different backgrounds and perspectives (from film and visual arts, communication and media studies, and science and technology studies to engineering), it has led to the creation of works with diverse characteristics and with different approaches. Nevertheless, by finding commonalities through a critical, theoretical and empirical analysis, as well as by reflecting on the dynamic combination of the fields of immersive media and social change, we are able to establish an innovative framework to help design future collaborative 360° video productions for social change. Thus, this research is focused on two main questions and their specific objectives:

1. How can we define collaborative 360° video productions based on an analysis and critique of the relationships between specific fields of immersive media and social change?

- 1.1. What are the main attributes and processes of social change in collaborative 360° video productions?
- 1.2. How does immersive media theory inform collaborative 360° video productions in relation to social change?
2. How can we use the relationships between immersive media and social change manifested in collaborative 360° video productions with different characteristics to establish a common language and framework for future collaborative immersive media projects for social change?

3.2. Methodology

The methodological foundation for this study was the recognition of today's so-called “digital renaissance” (Vicente, 2018):

The multilayered nature and phenomena of digital media can only be properly addressed by a higher level of integration among fields and disciplines, working together to develop new theories, concepts, methods and applications around common problems. To this process towards transdisciplinarity we call a digital Renaissance. (Vicente, 2018)

It is within this “digital renaissance” that we might contextualize immersive media as an emerging multidisciplinary phenomenon. Moreover, our curiosity for “diving in”, as proposed by Haseman (“Researchers construct experiential starting points from which practice follows. They tend to ‘dive in’, to commence practising to see what emerges.” (2006)) motivated this research from its very beginning, leading us to adopt practice-based research as our core methodological approach:

Original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice [...]. A basic principle of practice-based research is that not only is practice embedded in the research process but research questions arise from the process of practice, the answers to which are directed toward enlightening and enhancing practice [...] in the creative arts, including new media arts, the emphasis is on creative process and the works that are generated: Here, the artifact plays a vital part in the new understandings about practice that arise. In this sense, practice and research together operate in such a way as to generate new knowledge that can be shared and scrutinized. (Candy and Edmonds, 2018)

Thus, making, reflecting and evaluating an artifact is essential for generating original research. In this sense, the works produced in this research must be experienced to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the overall importance and context of the research.¹ Nevertheless, it is equally important to recognize that practice-based research is research and not practice alone.

1. The five collaborative 360° videos produced within this research can be found at: <<https://www.antoniobaiareis.com/immersive-media>>.

This means that reporting the research requires a thorough description and critical analysis that demonstrates that the results are new, not just to the practitioner-researcher, but to the broader world (Candy and Edmonds, 2018). In other words, research allows us to document and examine practice to ultimately generate critical reflection.

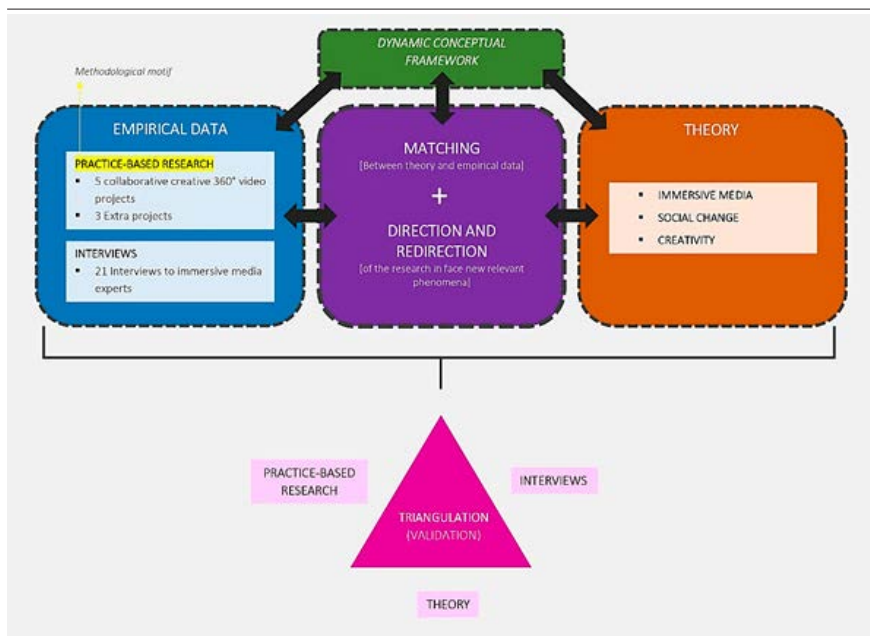
This study had three interconnected and parallel paths, with practice giving inputs and shaping many aspects of the theoretical path, and vice-versa:

- A theoretical path in which key literature on immersive media and social change was analysed and combined, providing a language for relating, analysing and criticizing collaborative 360° video productions.
- A practice-based research path focused on producing 360° video productions exploring the relationships between immersive media and social change. Five projects with distinctive characteristics were produced from 2017 to 2020: *Bailinha – O Mestre Calafate* [Bailinha – The Master Boatbuilder], (Madeira, Portugal); *Rendimento Diário – Uma escultura deixada ao esquecimento* [Daily Income – A sculpture left to oblivion], (Madeira, Portugal); *Schnauzer die Bewegen* [Moving Moustaches], (Passau, Germany); and *Essência* [Essence] and *Badedammen* (Stavanger, Norway). For each project, we aimed to reflect on and answer the following questions: What was proposed, discussed, decided and carried through? What stumbling blocks arose, and how were they addressed? Were the ideas proposed workable, interesting, challenging? Did the group collaboration work well, and if not, why not? What were the reasons for success or otherwise? Did the solutions work well? If not, why not? What were the viewpoints between collaborators, and what did one learn from any differences? What did one learn from any mistakes or things that failed? (Candy, 2020). Thus, for each project we outlined a thorough description, objectives, techniques, processes, data collection, methodologies and critical analysis. Moreover, this research was profoundly motivated by “an enthusiasm of practice” (Haseman, 2006). This enthusiasm guided the various paths taken throughout the empirical work. Many of the projects were created and developed to address this enthusiasm for exploring new interactions and new relationships between fields within diverse contexts. Given that immersive media is an emergent practical and academic field, the urge to ‘dive in’ and commence practicing and see what emerges becomes even stronger. We see our practice-based projects as an opportunity to bring creative activity together with academic debate and intellectual rigour, offering new models of knowledge to academia, and enriching creative practices (Arnold, 2012).
- A critical inquiry path focused on conducting a series of 21 interviews with immersive media experts directly involved in our research areas, namely academics who research immersive media and related fields, and media practitioners with vast experience in immersive media pro-

ductions. Interviews were conducted from 15 May to 23 August 2020. An overview of the interviewees, including their professional roles and places of employment, can be found in Annex 1.

The distinct nature of these various research paths led to the need for outlining a methodological design involving not only the practice-based research approach noted above – which established the primary methodological motif for this research project – but also other approaches adopted for different needs, moments or aspects of the research process. Different modes of inquiry, data collection and other approaches were therefore applied according to our research needs. Thus, we adopted “systematic combining” (Dubois and Gadde, 2002) as our framing methodological approach, in which practice-based research and other distinct modes were ultimately incorporated. Figure 1 illustrates our methodological research design, providing a clear description of its main dimensions and dynamics.

Figure 1. Methodological design



Source: Adapted from Dubois and Gadde (2002) and Hayashi, Abib and Hoppen (2019).

The “systematic combining” design allowed us to conduct a dynamic process of the constant interrelationship between theory and empirical data:

Systematic combining is a process where theoretical framework and empirical fieldwork evolve simultaneously [...]. We discuss systematic combining in terms

of two processes: the first is matching theory and reality, while the second deals with direction and redirection [...]. These processes affect, and are affected, by four factors: what is going on in reality, available theories, the case that gradually evolves, and the analytical framework. (Dubois and Gadde, 2002)

Thus, matching, directing and redirecting occurred between three theoretical fields (immersive media, social change and creativity) and two empirical dimensions (five practice-based research projects and three extra projects). Ultimately, this approach allowed us to “go back and forth” when necessary, and with empirical observations inspiring changes of the view of theory and vice versa:

We have found that the researcher, by constantly going “back and forth” from one type of research activity to another and between empirical observations and theory, is able to expand his understanding of both theory and empirical phenomena. (Dubois and Gadde, 2002)

Using systematic combining as our background methodological strategy, we then adopted specific modes of inquiry, data collection and other approaches to fit specific research needs, such as rapid ethnography, in-depth and asynchronous interviews, group discussions and video diaries. Throughout this thesis, each of these approaches is explained in context, allowing for an objective understanding of its adequacy in relation to specific empirical work or other research dimensions.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the entire research process was guided by certain ethical principles based on established ethical guidelines relating to qualitative research (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2001), ranging from the most fundamental ethical principles, such as compassion and minimizing the risk of eventual harm to participants, but also obtaining informed consent from research participants, protecting their anonymity and confidentiality, and giving participants the right to withdraw from the research at any time. In short, central to a consistent ethical approach is “whether the research participants’ subjective meanings, actions and social contexts, as understood by them, are illuminated.” (Fossey et al., 2002).

Finally, through triangulation (Hayashi, Abib and Hoppen, 2019) and the critical analysis of the main research areas – the theoretical framework, practice-based research projects, and interviews – we were able to achieve what is often called a dense description, a “holistic work” (Jick, 1979), or a convergent meaning (Bonoma, 1985), which ultimately enabled research validity:

Triangulation makes it possible to compare and to cross-check data, thus assessing the consistency of the information coming from different sources at different times [...]. Triangulation has been one of the most used methods to ensure validity in research [...]. The triangulation technique allows the researcher to explore several facets of the studied phenomenon. (Hayashi, Abib and Hoppen, 2019)

4. Results

In this study, we thoroughly analysed the potential of immersive media, focusing on 360° video, in the context of collaborative creative work for social change. We conclude that we have met our initial research expectations and goals by critically reflecting on the relationships between the fields of immersive media and social change to inform the production of an innovative framework on the affective and behavioural dynamics of immersive media in relation to social change, which ultimately becomes a relevant conceptual tool for designing future, socially driven, immersive media projects. In this sense, we were able to answer all our research questions. Below, we present the main findings and conclusions of this study, which correspond directly with our main lines of enquiry.

4.1. There is great potential for using immersive media as an innovative way to raise awareness about important issues in today's societies

Nineteen out of the twenty-one experts we interviewed strongly advocated for immersive media as an innovative tool to raise awareness about serious social or cultural issues. Nonetheless, and through our analysis of the collaborative 360° video productions, we concluded that raising awareness does not automatically imply social change. In other words, any medium has the potential to raise awareness. In this sense, when raising awareness, one wants to trigger a meaningful emotional connection to a given issue which leads, for example, to attitude change and ultimately to actual social change, i.e. emotional *reaction* leading to tangible *action*. This leads us to “empathy”, and the widespread assumption that this is the fundamental affective/cognitive variable responsible for triggering awareness or change. We conclude that such an assumption is somewhat reductive. The following ideas not only confirm that reductive nature but also present the most significant dimensions that, if combined strategically, provide a more effective approach to using immersive media for social change.

4.2. Virtual reality as an “empathy machine”: Going beyond the hype

By experiencing the feeling of “being there”, people can be more aware of the stories and issues depicted; thus, virtual reality can truly act as an “empathy machine” (Milk, 2015). Following Milk (2015), this idea has since become a cornerstone, and today, when talking about immersive media and social change, the idea of empathy is usually the first thing mentioned. Our research was no exception, and the idea of empathy was the most frequently mentioned element in relation to social change, as the central attribute to consider when creating immersive media for social change. The fact is that empathy within a cognitive/behavioural framework basically refers to the idea of understanding and sharing the feelings of another, or, as commonly stated

within the immersive media community, “putting oneself in someone else’s shoes”. In this sense, if one is “standing in someone else’s shoes”, then one might argue that one “has taken their shoes”. Ultimately, we arrived at the conclusion that if one only wants immersive stories to allow a given story to emotionally resonate with an audience, without any further intention to influence change or behaviour or pursue some form of human agency or social change agenda, then empathy might be effective in creating this profound connection with story and audience. On the flip side, if one wants to pursue something more than emotional resonance, compassion – or empathy leading to compassion – appears to be a better cognitive/behavioural paradigm for immersive media for social change, because compassion does not mean sharing the suffering of the other. Instead, it is characterized by feelings of warmth, concern and care for the other, as well as a strong motivation to improve the other’s wellbeing. Compassion goes further – it is all about *feeling for* and not just *feeling with* the other.

4.3. When creating socially driven immersive media, think strategically about audience: It’s not about “Who sees it?”, but rather “Who needs to see it?”

On the one hand, “Who sees it?” is related to the idea that by generating an empathic response in the audience, socially driven immersive stories respond to a more individualist need in the audience to be socially engaged with the world’s serious issues. In other words, immersive media work as a form of gratification to the emotional needs of the “global citizen”. Thus, it can be argued that immersive media do not promote actual social change, but rather a kind of global citizenship as an experience “in which empathic concern with a victimized Other becomes part of a lifestyle which does not challenge the political, historical and economic foundations of humanitarian crises.” (Gruenewald and Witteborn, 2020). Ultimately, they are a narrative “placebo” of sorts. The issue of “Who needs to see it?” is related to the question of thinking strategically about who ultimately needs to experience the stories. The content is as important as the container, i.e. importance should be given to how the content reaches the audiences, why they are invited, and what is the final call to action. This was crucial throughout all the collaborative 360° video productions developed during this research, i.e. instead of thinking about the audience as an undifferentiated mass of “global citizens”, the participants involved in our collaborative projects would be thinking about how to specifically reach certain political actors or those in a position to produce significant change in relation to the issues portrayed. Furthermore, in this research, storytellers and/or protagonists had a direct or indirect closeness/understanding of the issues portrayed, which also led to a profoundly lucid creative vision of what needed to be changed through the collaborative 360° video productions. Therefore, and following the previous analogy, it all comes down to a combination of “Who needs to see it?” and “Who needs to create it?”.

4.4. From “reaching” to “reaching out”: Immersive media allow audiences to experience inaccessible places and situations in a unique way

Transporting people to inaccessible places and situations is one of the major affordances in collaborative immersive media for social change. Audiences can experience new locations and alternative lives, and can potentially develop a better understanding of social and cultural issues by “being there”. This became quite clear within this research by allowing, e.g., viewers to be in the garage space where the sculpture *Rendimento Diário*, an homage to the “kids of the cardboard boxes”, is being “held captive”; or to be inside Bailinha’s workshop and see him work on his boat models, quite a poignant prolepsis given that the workshop was later demolished.

4.5. Immersive media as “emotional geography”: Cognitive/emotional embodiment is cornerstone in immersive media for social change

Immersive media are not about *watching*, they are about *witnessing*. Immersive media, and more specifically 360° videos, allow us to apply knowledge and cognitive paradigms through the representation of common spaces and scenarios. They naturally recreate a first-person, deep immersion, since they simulate the physical world that we are biologically prone to interact with and comprehend, and are therefore a profoundly embodied experience. In other words, if one is *in a “storyworld”*, one is *living it*, hence, “storyliving”. Virtual environments prompt us to recognize how body and emotions are fundamental for us to deal with the world; that is, how our body responds to and organizes an understanding of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). The “body-organism is linked to the world through a network of primal significations, which arise from the perception of things.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). In this sense, the audience is transported to a given situation and asked to feel through a given story, thus shifting from a more primal, cognitive embodiment towards an emotional embodiment. Given our research results, we conclude that if we combine emotional embodiment with reasoning to think about the very same situation we find ourselves in, we will obtain a perspective of the story comparable to the one obtained in the real world, potentially leading to a wider understanding of the issues depicted in relation to one’s attitudes, dispositions to act and even “unconscious allegiances.” (Sánchez Laws, 2019). In short, immersive media are all about “emotional geography”, i.e. how a place can evoke emotions like love, hate, pleasure, pride, grief, rage, guilt or remorse, but also how we think, feel and navigate the world around us, which helps us understand the relationships between subjectivity, emotion and place (Wilson, 2019).

5. Conclusions

The initial trigger for this research project was deeply connected to the idea of debunking the assumption of immersive media storytelling as the ulti-

mate “empathy machine” (Milk, 2015). As we went from one project to another, and as we analysed the combined inputs of the experts interviewed, we realized that empathy was part of the project focus, but just the initial trigger for the entire process. We realized we cannot use terms such as empathy or social change without a critical approach to support them; and most importantly, the need to demystify the idea of empathy as the ultimate key to unlock social change is paramount. Moreover, we conclude that there is a hidden nature in most so-called socially driven immersive storytelling projects, which is related to the idea that by generating an empathic response in the audience, these films respond to a more individualistic need in the audience to be socially engaged with the world’s serious issues. We argue that most humanitarian immersive films, for example, work as a form of gratification to the emotional needs of the global citizen. Thus, they do not promote actual social change, but rather a kind of global citizenship as an experience “in which empathic concern with a victimized Other becomes part of a lifestyle which does not challenge the political, historical and economic foundations of social and cultural crises.” (Gruenewald and Witteborn, 2020). In other words, it is a perspective that could be compared, by analogy, to the pressure that nowadays big companies face to pursue a social agenda or to have a tangible approach and strategy concerning climate change. Except in this case, it reflects an individual need that results from a given macrosocial pressure.

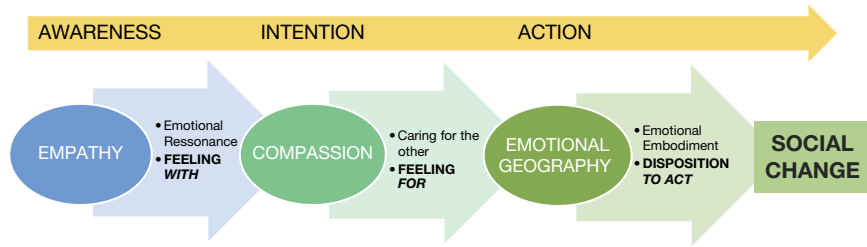
Ultimately, both the practice-based empirical data and the interviews with the experts revealed two key elements of interest that can be summed up in two questions: (1) How can socially driven immersive stories challenge the political, historical and economic foundations of serious social issues, and thus act as real drivers for social change instead of narrative “placebos” for the egocentric needs of today’s global citizen?; and (2) Is empathy the adequate mechanism/concept to be operationalized by immersive media? Here are possible ways to at least go beyond the idea of empathy and try to not trip over this idea of narrative placebos:

- *Collaborate with and, if possible, co-create.* A creative approach in which most of the people involved have a direct or indirect closeness to/understanding of the issues portrayed. In other words, the creative output becomes a tangible manifestation of the empowerment of the very same people who are directly or indirectly affected by the issues portrayed, rather than the result of the work of a filmmaker or storyteller who comes into contact with a given story and, through film, shows the audience an interpretation of that story.
- *Who needs to experience these socially driven immersive stories?* We have to think about who ultimately needs to experience these stories. This is crucial in defining a creative strategy. For example, instead of thinking about the audience as an undifferentiated mass of “global citizens”, storytellers should be thinking about how to specifically reach

certain political actors or those in power, in order to produce a significant change concerning the issues portrayed.

- *Stop using empathy as a “buzzword”*. The concept of empathy has been incorporated into immersive media and many other fields of digital media in relation to an understanding and meaning drawn directly from common sense. This shows that one should be careful when using and applying concepts without critically reflecting on their uses and challenges. Empathy makes it possible to identify with others’ positive and negative feelings alike – we can thus feel happy when we vicariously share the joy of others, and we can share the experience of suffering when we empathize with someone in pain. Importantly, in empathy one identifies with someone, but one does not confuse oneself with the other; that is, one still knows that the emotion one identifies with is the emotion of another (Singer and Klimecki, 2014). Thus, resonance is key here. Empathy is emotional resonance. Figure 2 illustrates the ideas discussed above, and presents a conceptual framework on the affective/behavioural dynamics of immersive media in relation to social change.

Figure 2. Affective processual dynamics of immersive media for social change



Source: Author's own.

Looking at Figure 2, one could argue that the affective dynamics of immersive media experiences for social change encompass a process that starts with: (1) the audience becoming aware of a given social issue by identifying emotionally with the story depicted in the immersive experience, thus establishing an empathic connection with it, and therefore the “feeling *with*”; then (2) the audience starts to develop an intention for action that goes beyond the empathic recognition of a given social issue depicted in the immersive experience, therefore establishing a compassionate connection for that social issue, “feeling *for*” it, thus, “caring for the other”; and finally, (3) the audience starts to develop “an emotional embodiment”, i.e. the dynamic combination of subjectivity, emotion and place in relation to the social issues depicted, thus fostering the previously triggered intention towards a “disposition to act”. Through the cumulative combination of the previous stages of “empathy” and “compassion” with “an emotional embodiment”, the audience ultimately develops a sense of “emotional geography”, i.e. a connection

with a “storyworld” through body, emotion and mind. The holistic cognitive and emotional nature that “emotional geography” entails will eventually impel people to some form of tangible action, leading to effective social change.

In short, immersive media seem to include and go beyond empathy as their sole mode of affect and, as with advances in the fields of documentary and films, the study of immersive media now requires a greater level of nuance in the articulation and understanding of their affects.

This highlights the importance of a critical and reflective approach to understanding the affective affordances and dynamics of immersive media storytelling, emphasizing the need to go beyond empathy and examine the potential for generating real social change. Clarifying concepts that are eminently interdisciplinary and placing them coherently within this emergent research field is at hand. Previous studies, for example on immersive journalism, address the terminological confusion surrounding immersive journalism, and the need to differentiate between interactive and immersive experiences (Vaz and Tejedor, 2019), which emphasizes the importance of a holistic understanding of immersive experiences and their potential for meaningful social impact, with the need to clearly outline and theoretically and empirically examine phenomena such as audience participation and the role of the user in immersive experiences.

In this sense, the core idea of this research project – engaging in creative, collaborative 360° video productions in which people and communities became content creators, inspired to reflect on serious social issues through the practical lens of immersive media technologies and narratives – established that very same critical and reflective nuance, which ultimately provided us with an understanding based on insights from these collaborations that go beyond enunciating the medium’s technicalities. In other words, the audience becomes content creator and primary source of advocacy for social and cultural issues of interest to them, which might entail an innovative vision and practical dimension concerning the use of immersive media for social change.

Good storytelling needs to be accurate, creative, credible and, most importantly, ethical. Immersive storytelling has an enormous potential to give voice to the voiceless, to comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable – or in other words, a good story should give people an insight, and should teach people something, even if those stories challenge our existing beliefs. The internet and all things digital brought a wave of disruptions that challenge every aspect of what we do; but with that wave of disruptions have come new opportunities and new story forms, including immersive storytelling. As we move towards the age of the so-called “metaverse” (Ning et al., 2021), in which real time social interactions will become the cornerstone of virtual reality worlds, looking back to lessons learned from 360° video productions might seem rather “archaic”, given that today, social virtual reality platforms, for example, are growing in number, and computer-generated worlds are increasingly more sophisticated. Nevertheless, we posit that at the base of meaningful experiences, whether spherical video or multisensory vol-

umetric virtual reality, content is king. Engaging people in processes of perspective-taking and emotional connection with a given social issue requires a meaningful use of emergent technologies, as long as these fit the story and effectively add something to the understanding of the issues depicted. From plain text, sound or 360° video all the way to titanic virtual reality platforms at the intersection of blockchain, cryptocurrencies, web 3.0 or real estate going digital, the main conclusions of our research – holistic understanding of the affective affordances and dynamics of immersive media storytelling – remain valid and can be applied to any immersive media endeavour seeking to generate processes of effective change.

The combination of a scientifically sustained approach and working with real people and real problems through collaborative creativity lead to what we believe to be the great outcome of this study, “the big picture”: namely that the strategic use of immersive media technology in collaborative creative storytelling approaches to social change leads to an innovative process of empowerment; a process that, by means of a shared creative motif and the affordances of new technologies, builds collective solidarity that leads to change – from power *within*, to power *with*, to power *to*.

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Annexes

Annex 1. INTERVIEWEES

Name and job title	Organization	Interview date
Ana Sanchez Laws <i>Associate Professor</i>	Volda University College	4 June 2020
Beck Stewart <i>Media Educator & Immersive Filmmaker</i>	Coventry University	19 May 2020
Ben Kreimer <i>Emerging Media Technologist</i>	Independent	28 May 2020
Clàudia Prat <i>Senior Producer at The ISS Experience</i>	TIME	16 June 2020
Daniel Rojas Roa <i>XR Producer</i>	3GO VIDEO	17 June 2020
Dooley Murphy <i>PhD Researcher/Fellow</i>	University of Copenhagen	18 May 2020
Galit Ariel <i>TechnoFuturist, Author, Creative</i>	Future Memory Inc.; Wondarlands; RSA	23 June 2020
James Taylor <i>Technical Demonstrator</i>	Cardiff University	26 May 2020
Karin Wahl-Jorgensen <i>Professor</i>	Cardiff University	8 June 2020
Laura Hertzfeld <i>Director, XR Partner Program</i>	RYOT/Verizon Media Group	14 June 2020
Mark Deuze <i>Professor of Media Studies</i>	University of Amsterdam	20 May 2020
Marta Ordeig <i>Founder</i>	Garage Stories	8 June 2020
Mary Matheson <i>VR Director/Creator & Course Director of the MA in Immersive Storytelling at Royal Holloway, University of London</i>	Royal Holloway, University of London	13 June 2020
Mel Slater <i>Researcher</i>	University of Barcelona	17 May 2020
Miguel Santesmases <i>Film Director, VR curator and creator, and Film Studies Professor</i>	Agency_VR; Universidad Camilo José Cela; UC3M	24 June 2020
Nili Steinfeld <i>Head, Digital Media Track, School of Communications</i>	Ariel University	31 May 2020
Nonny de la Peña <i>Founder/CEO</i>	Emblematic Group	23 August 2020
Peter Woodbridge <i>Director of X-Lab</i>	Liverpool John Moores University	15 May 2020
Radwa Madbrook <i>Journalism Lecturer</i>	Cairo University	20 May 2020
Rafael Pavon <i>VR Creator and Producer</i>	Independent (AtlasV, Future Lighthouse, Jaunt)	19 July 2020
Thomas Seymat <i>Digital Journalist</i>	Euronews France	23 June 2020

MISCEL·LÀNIA

Las estrategias multiplataforma de Euskal Irrati Telebista para las nuevas audiencias: los retos de una televisión pública en lengua minoritaria*

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Resumen

La industria audiovisual y los hábitos de consumo han sufrido una profunda transformación tras la incursión y el consecuente monopolio de las plataformas de distribución de contenidos en línea (OTT). Las audiencias infantiles y juveniles cada vez acceden menos a las televisiones públicas, a lo que se une el descenso imparable de sus audiencias. En el caso de la radiotelevisión pública vasca (EITB), su cuota de pantalla se ha reducido a más de la mitad desde 2004, por lo que la digitalización de sus contenidos en múltiples pantallas es una cuestión de supervivencia si quiere competir con las grandes plataformas. Este trabajo se propone describir las recientes estrategias multiplataforma de EITB para captar nuevas audiencias y comprobar si se corresponden con su mandato de servicio público, tanto para promocionar el euskera como para priorizar a su público estratégico infantil y juvenil.

Palabras clave: plataformas OTT; televisiones autonómicas; radiotelevisión pública vasca; audiencias infantiles y juveniles; estrategias multiplataforma

Resum. *Les estratègies multiplataforma d'Euskal Irrati Telebista per a les noves audiències: els reptes d'una televisió pública en llengua minoritària*

La indústria audiovisual i els hàbits de consum han patit una profunda transformació després de la incursió i el consegüent monopoli de les plataformes de distribució de contin-

* Artículo resultado del trabajo para el proyecto de investigación I+D+i titulado *Los retos de la televisión pública en España ante el Mercado Único Digital europeo: Estrategias multipantalla, innovación y renovación de los mandatos del servicio público*, con referencia CSO 2017-82277-R, financiado por el Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades de España.

guts en línia (OTT). Les audiències infantils i juvenils cada vegada accedeixen menys a les televisions públiques, a la qual cosa s'afegeix el descens imparable de les seves audiències. En el cas de la radiotelevisió pública basca (EITB), la seva quota de pantalla s'ha reduït a més de la meitat des de 2004 i per això la digitalització del seus continguts en múltiples pantalles és una qüestió de supervivència si vol competir amb les grans plataformes. Aquest treball es proposa descriure les recents estratègies multiplataforma d'EITB per captar noves audiències i comprovar si es corresponen amb el seu mandat de servei públic, tant per promoure l'eusquera com per prioritzar el seu públic estratègic infantil i juvenil.

Paraules clau: plataformes OTT; televisions autonòmiques; radiotelevisió pública basca; audiències infantils i juvenils; estratègies multiplataforma

Abstract. *Multiplatform strategies of Euskal Irrati Telebista [Basque Radio Television] aimed at new audiences: The challenges of public television in a minority language*

The broadcasting industry and consumer habits have undergone a profound change since the arrival and subsequent monopoly of online or over-the-top (OTT) content platforms. Children's and youth audiences tune in less and less to public television channels, which have seen an irreversible decline in their audiences. Euskal Irrati Telebista [Basque Radio Television] (EITB) has seen its audience share reduce by more than half since 2004, and the digitisation of its content is a matter of survival if it wants to compete with the OTT services. This paper aims to identify the recent multiplatform strategies implemented by EITB to attract new audiences; and to analyse whether they are consistent with its public service mandate both to promote the Basque language and to prioritise children and youth as key audiences.

Palabras clave: OTT platforms; regional television stations; Basque public radio and television; children's and youth audiences; multiplatform strategies

1. Introducción

La irrupción de las plataformas de distribución de contenidos en línea (OTT) ha traído una profunda remodelación de la industria audiovisual, cuyo destino está en manos de un mercado desregulado y dominado por una creciente concentración de poder en manos de plataformas y conglomerados (Donders, 2019).

Las plataformas OTT, sobre todo Netflix, han tenido más implantación en España entre los jóvenes menores de 35 años, lo que conlleva un cambio de los patrones de consumo a un modelo de contenidos a la carta. Los jóvenes de la llamada *generación Z*, los que tienen entre 16 y 24 años, prefieren ver vídeos en línea a través de dispositivos electrónicos, y los descargan de Internet, de plataformas de pago como Netflix y HBO y de redes sociales (Bustos Díaz, 2020; Navarro Robles y Vázquez Barrio, 2020). En este sentido, el crecimiento del acceso a dispositivos móviles, en particular *smartphones*, está fomentando un uso ubicuo y más intensivo de ciertos servicios y aplicaciones en línea, y cada vez a edad más temprana. Los adolescentes adquieren su propio *smartphone* a los 11 o 12 años, edad que también se convierte en el referente de acceso a las redes sociales y la mensajería instantánea (García-

Jiménez, López-de-Ayala López y Montes-Vozmediano, 2020). Los niños y niñas de entre 6 y 13 años utilizan una media de siete dispositivos diarios, entre los que destacan la tableta (un 39%), la videoconsola (un 34,7%) y el *smartphone* (un 27,1%). El consumo diario de contenidos audiovisuales en plataformas en línea por parte de niños y niñas de entre 3 y 6 años es de casi 3,5 horas, sobre todo de series infantiles, de YouTube y de YouTubeKids. Para los niños y niñas de entre 7 y 12 años, cuyo consumo diario es de 7,5 horas, las plataformas más usadas son YouTube, seguida de Netflix, Movistar, Amazon Prime y HBO (Pérez-Alaejos et al., 2020).

En la era de los *youtubers*, los públicos más jóvenes son, precisamente, los que muestran menos arraigo a las televisiones públicas. En la franja de edad comprendida entre los 13 y los 24 años, la audiencia acumulada por los canales públicos nacionales y autonómicos es de casi el 16% (un 10,5% de RTVE y un 5,3% de los autonómicos), por debajo de la media para la población en general. Cuatro de cada diez jóvenes universitarios no acceden a la televisión autonómica, y solo el 15% la conecta a diario. Asimismo, casi un 40% de los jóvenes considera la televisión autonómica poco o nada importante (Crusafon, González-Saavedra y Murciano, 2020a). Al efecto que tienen los nuevos hábitos de consumo televisivo en los canales públicos se une el imparable declive de sus audiencias en los últimos años. Entre 2004 y 2020 la cuota de pantalla de las televisiones públicas en España (el grupo RTVE y las autonómicas) se ha reducido de un 43% a un 23,6% (una pérdida del 45%). Las cadenas autonómicas tienen un nivel ligeramente ascendente desde 2017, pero su público solo llega al 8,2% del total (LOCALCOM, 2021a y 2021b; Mendieta-Bartolomé, 2022). Las televisiones públicas autonómicas sufren, además de la pérdida y la transformación de sus audiencias, recortes presupuestarios, escasos ingresos publicitarios y la percepción pública de manipulación informativa por parte de los gobiernos que las sustentan (Sacaluga Rodríguez, Pérez Sánchez y García García, 2018).

La cuota de pantalla de la radiotelevisión pública vasca (EITB) se redujo a más de la mitad entre 2004 y 2011, si bien en la actualidad es la segunda cadena autonómica con más audiencia después de TV3 (LOCALCOM, 2021c).

El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar si la radiotelevisión pública vasca ha adoptado nuevas estrategias multiplataforma y va más allá de la distribución lineal de televisión, para atraer a las audiencias infantiles y juveniles, su público primordial, y en euskera, su lengua prioritaria, según su mandato de servicio público.

1.1. El mandato de servicio público de EITB

Desde su creación en 1982, la corporación pública Euskal Irrati Telebista establece que entre sus principios fundacionales están la promoción de la cultura y la lengua vascas, así como la protección y promoción de la juventud y de la infancia (Boletín Oficial del País Vasco, 1982). La emisora Euskadi Irratia y el canal de televisión ETB1 comienzan a emitir en euskera a finales

de 1982. La oferta radiofónica juvenil en euskera nace con la emisora Gaztea en 1990 (solo en euskera desde 1994), pero no se completa con la televisiva hasta la aparición del canal infantil y juvenil ETB3 en 2008¹. Bajo el Plan Estratégico 2000-2007, en 2008 la radiotelevisión pública vasca también establece una estrategia de marca única en internet (Eitb.com), que aglutina en una misma web a Eitb24.com, Gaztea.com (para jóvenes) y Betizu.com (para la infancia) (Larrondo et al., 2012).

La *Estrategia eitb 2010-2013* propone rediseñar y segmentar la oferta en euskera por canales y públicos, con ETB1 como canal generalista y ETB3 como canal especializado en público infantil y juvenil por franjas, así como crear una única área de euskera para todo el grupo (EITB, 2010). En el siguiente Plan Estratégico 2013-2016, una de las prioridades de EITB es el refuerzo de la audiencia en euskera para afianzar el prestigio social y el uso del euskera, generando «un espacio de comunicación vasco con una oferta atractiva que logre conectar con nuevos públicos, ofreciendo una visibilidad natural al euskera en todos los soportes» (EITB, 2013: 11). Para ello el grupo se marca el compromiso de ofrecer diez horas de contenido nuevo diario en ETB1 y una tira de producción propia para ETB3, así como crear un equipo de mejora multidisciplinaria para integrar el euskera en los canales en castellano.

Los planes estratégicos más recientes y vigentes incluyen el impulso del euskera y de los contenidos infantiles y juveniles como misiones de servicio público. Según el contrato programa para 2016-2019², EITB debe incidir de manera particular en los contenidos en euskera dirigidos a las nuevas generaciones de niños y jóvenes bilingües a través del portal eitb.eus, accesible para dispositivos fijos y móviles, y de la incorporación al mismo del portal juvenil Gaztea y del portal infantil Hiru3. En este contrato programa se establecen por primera vez unos indicadores de rendimiento (KPIs por sus siglas en inglés) conectados al euskera y a los públicos prioritarios, como el número de contenidos de texto, audio y vídeo en euskera en eitb.eus, y de contenidos orientados al público infantil y juvenil en Hiru3, Gaztea, y en EITB a la carta entre 2016 y 2020 (EITB, 2016).

Por otro lado, en las Líneas estratégicas y proyectos 2017-2020, la radiotelevisión pública vasca reconoce la divergencia entre el aumento gradual del conocimiento del euskera y su uso, limitado al 13,5% de los hogares, así como el amplio espectro sociológico de la comunidad vascoarrolante. Su oferta en euskera pretende reflejar esta realidad con contenidos de naturaleza y tipología diversa, a fin de satisfacer gustos e intereses de nicho (EITB, 2018: 16). El grupo aboga por consolidar una oferta de contenido infantil en euskera para un público poco numeroso pero estratégico (p. 19) y activar un siste-

1. Hoy el grupo EITB incluye los canales de televisión ETB1, ETB2, ETB3, ETB4 y EITB Basque, las emisoras de radio Euskadi Irratia, Radio Euskadi, Radio Vitoria, Gaztea, EITB Musika y Euskal Kantak, la web <<http://www.eitb.eus>> y varias aplicaciones móviles.
2. En 2023 está en vigor el contrato programa 2022-2025, aprobado por el Gobierno vasco en marzo de 2022. Por esta razón, el contrato programa 2016-2019 se prolongó tres años y estuvo vigente hasta marzo de 2022.

ma normalizado para que los contenidos de EITB para jóvenes sean productos transmedia o muy adaptados a nuevos usuarios en internet. Como otras corporaciones públicas autonómicas con lengua propia, EITB se enfrenta al reto de la implementación de estrategias multiplataforma en el marco de su mandato público respecto a la normalización lingüística (Azurmendi, 2013; Larrondo Ureta, 2016; Pozo Montes y Larrondo Ureta, 2020).

Respecto a la utilización del euskera en el País Vasco, hay que señalar que su uso en la calle ha aumentado desde 1989, pero ha disminuido entre 2006 y 2016 (Soziolinguistika Klusterra, 2016). En 2016, el 33,9% de la población es vascoparlante activa, el 19,1% es vascoparlante pasiva y el 47% es castellanoparlante, aunque quienes utilizan fundamentalmente el castellano representan el 63,3%. Por el contrario, la mayor tasa de conocimiento del euskera se halla entre la población joven de 16 a 24 años (un 71,4) (Departamento de Cultura y Política Lingüística, 2020). En 2019, el 85% de los jóvenes de 15 a 19 años afirma hablar bien en euskera (Observatorio Vasco de la Juventud, 2021).

1.2. Evolución de contenidos digitales infantiles y juveniles

La comunidad digital infantil y juvenil de EITB nace en 2001 con el club Betizu a partir del programa del mismo nombre, que salta de ETB1 al nuevo canal ETB3 en 2008. En 2011, Hiru3 recoge el testigo del club Betizu, que tenía 70.000 socios, y una nueva web agrupa todos los contenidos de entretenimiento infantiles y juveniles (<<https://www.eitb.eus/eu/hiru3/>>). Para EITB el ocio juvenil es uno de los ámbitos prioritarios para el fomento lingüístico a través de la promoción y la participación en actividades de tiempo libre y entretenimiento (Euskal Irrati Telebista, 2021a).

En 2012 se empieza a publicar la revista digital *Hiru3*, y en 2016 llega la aplicación móvil de Hiru3 (hoy 3 Kluba) dividida por franjas de edad (de 0 a 4, de 5 a 7 y de 8 en adelante). La aplicación incluye dibujos animados y programas infantiles, también disponibles en tabletas, y es rediseñada en 2017 para permitir la selección de contenidos favoritos y ofrecer nuevas funciones en el menú principal, como el acceso a la programación de ETB3 o la opción de hacerse socio. En 2018 la aplicación está disponible en televisores con HBBTV, en Android TV y en Samsung Smart TV.

La apuesta del grupo EITB por el público joven, Gaztea Irratia, es una radio fórmula que ha experimentado un gran crecimiento e implantación social, con alrededor de 100.000 oyentes diarios en la actualidad (Del Amo Castro, 2019). Gaztea comenzó su proceso de digitalización con la web *gaztea.com* en 2002 (hoy <<https://www.eitb.eus/eu/gaztea/>>), y a partir de 2009, con las redes sociales Facebook, Tuenti, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram y WhatsApp, y con su aplicación para móviles y tabletas. La emisora también empezó a transmitir contenidos en la franja nocturna de ETB3 cuando este canal surgió en 2008, y ha tenido programas convergentes en televisión, la web y las redes sociales como *Lokaleroak* sobre las lonjas juveniles (2011-2012) en

ETB3, y el reality *GuTaGutarrak* en ETB1 (2014-2017). Desde 2013 Gaztea también añadió a su proceso de convergencia concursos de contenidos generados por usuarios, como *Youtuberrak*, con vídeos en euskera publicados en YouTube y mostrados en el programa de ETB1 *GuTaGutarrak*, así como eventos que se realizan en línea y fuera de Internet, como el concurso de maquetas, tanto en la web como en la radio en directo (Elordui Urkiza, 2015).

A la marca convergente de Gaztea se une el fenómeno *Golazen*, que empieza en 2008 como película musical. En 2009 se emite en ETB1 y es el film más visto en la historia de ETB1, tras lo cual se convierte en una exitosa serie de televisión con nueve temporadas en antena. La serie retrata las aventuras de un grupo de jóvenes de 16 años en un campamento de verano, y se ha transformado en una experiencia transmedia desde el estreno en 2017 de su aplicación móvil, la herramienta principal que ha asegurado la fidelidad de los usuarios y el refuerzo de la trama y los protagonistas (Larrondo-Ureta, Peña-Fernández y Agirreazkuenaga-Onaindia, 2020a y 2020b). En 2018 y 2019 se emiten tres webseries en euskera en eitb.eus (*Gutuberrak*, *Puntu Koma* y *Kartzela*), también orientadas al público juvenil.

Con el fin de contextualizar la digitalización de los contenidos infantiles y juveniles en EITB, cabe señalar que el 98,4% de los jóvenes vascos entre 16 y 24 años utilizan al menos un conocimiento informático, y están por encima de la media nacional (un 95,5) y de Madrid (un 96,9%), Cataluña (un 96,2%), Navarra (un 93,2%) y Galicia (un 89,3%). Asimismo, los niños y niñas vascos sobrepasan la media nacional en el uso de ordenador (un 99,3% frente a un 91,5%), el uso de Internet (un 95,9% frente a un 94,5) y la disposición de un teléfono móvil (un 75,5% frente a un 69,5%) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2020).

2. Metodología

En el marco del Mercado Único Digital (MUD) europeo, la televisión pública se enfrenta a importantes desafíos relacionados con las dimensiones tecnológica, económica y social. En la dimensión tecnológica encontramos los retos vinculados a la tecnología 5G. La dimensión económica está relacionada con la competencia de las nuevas plataformas audiovisuales y la financiación de los medios públicos. En la dimensión social, el nuevo escenario audiovisual digital obliga a las televisiones públicas a revisar su misión de servicio hacia sus audiencias. Esta adaptación supone ampliar su estrategia a la comunicación multipantalla, incrementar su transparencia y reforzar su contribución a la sociedad. Por tanto, el desafío actual de las radiotelevisiones públicas como EITB radica en renovar su mandato público, adaptándolo al nuevo ecosistema multipantalla (Carniel Bugs y Crusafon, 2019; Crusafon Baqués y Carniel Bugs, 2021).

Ante las novedades anunciadas por EITB en 2020 y 2021, este trabajo trata de confirmar si EITB tiene una estrategia multiplataforma en línea que va más allá de la distribución lineal de televisión y si hay una orientación basada en el servicio público en las estrategias de creación y distribución de

contenidos digitales propios. Para ello se ha utilizado un enfoque multimétodo en el marco de la investigación del proyecto *Los retos de la televisión pública en España ante el Mercado Único Digital europeo: Estrategias multipantalla, innovación y renovación de los mandatos del servicio público*, del grupo de investigación LOCALCOM.

Este enfoque ha estado basado en el análisis de fuentes documentales, la recogida de datos cuantitativos y la realización de entrevistas en profundidad. Los documentos examinados incluyen, entre otros, informes elaborados por EITB, como los planes estratégicos de la corporación vasca entre 2010 y 2016; el contrato programa para el período 2016-2019; las líneas estratégicas y los proyectos 2017-2020; los cuadros de mando con los resultados de 2020 del contrato programa; los balances anuales 2019 y 2020; las memorias integradas RSE/EINF (Responsabilidad Social Empresarial / Estado de Información No Financiera) de 2019, 2020 y 2021; los presupuestos de EITB de 2020 y 2021; los manuales para las redes sociales de 2014-2016 y 2019-2020, y el documento de la estrategia digital del grupo de 2020. También se han examinado los comunicados de prensa publicados en 2020 y 2021 en eitb.eus en relación con las estrategias digitales del grupo, blogs como el de madres y padres del club infantil 3 Kluba, y se han revisado con frecuencia las páginas web y las aplicaciones móviles de 3 Kluba, Gaztea y Golazen.

Los datos empíricos han recogido las audiencias digitales de EITB suministradas por Comscore entre mayo de 2019 y abril de 2020 y analizadas por LOCALCOM, así como la actividad en las redes sociales y en las aplicaciones móviles en 2019, 2020 y 2021, procedentes de la corporación vasca y de Google Play. El trabajo se ha complementado con dos entrevistas en profundidad con Lontzo Sainz, director de Transformación Digital de EITB, realizadas en 2020 y 2021. En base a esta información, el presente artículo se propone describir las estrategias multiplataforma más recientes implementadas por el grupo EITB para captar audiencias infantiles y juveniles, además de comprobar si estas estrategias se corresponden con su mandato de servicio público, tanto para promocionar el euskera como para priorizar a su audiencia estratégica, el público más joven.

3. Análisis de las nuevas estrategias multiplataforma

Las estrategias multiplataforma que ha puesto en marcha Euskal Irrati Telebista están sobre todo enfocadas a la captación del público infantil y juvenil, con contenidos digitales en euskera que abordan temas de su interés, y a través de las pantallas y de los formatos que este público joven ya utiliza para acceder a la oferta de las plataformas OTT.

3.1. Audiencias infantiles: 3 Kluba

Dos décadas después de crear la primera web infantil, la corporación pública vasca apuesta por varias plataformas para difundir sus contenidos digitales,

entre las que destacan las páginas web, YouTube y las aplicaciones móviles. Así lo recogen los documentos estudiados de EITB, incluidas las propias aplicaciones, los datos de audiencias de LOCALCOM y las entrevistas realizadas al responsable de la estrategia digital de la corporación.

En 2021, apenas un año después de estrenar nuevo canal de YouTube, el club infantil 3 Kluba (antes Hiru3) supera los 6.000 suscriptores, siguiendo la tendencia ascendente de YouTube en la radiotelevisión vasca desde 2019.

Además del canal de 3 Kluba y del propio canal de televisión ETB3, hoy los contenidos infantiles de EITB (programas, concursos, dibujos animados y películas íntegramente en euskera) también están disponibles en otras seis plataformas: la propia web de 3 Kluba, la web de EITB de contenidos a la carta eitb.tv, la aplicación 3 Kluba para móviles y tabletas, la aplicación 3 Kluba TB para las Smart TV, la nueva aplicación EITB Nahieran de contenidos a la carta y la Euskaltek³. Los espacios infantiles se suelen emitir primero en ETB3 y después están disponibles en los soportes digitales. Pero en 2020 ya ha habido estrenos simultáneos de programas en ETB3 y eitb.eus, como el espacio de canciones *3 Ene Kantak*, y de series en ETB3, ETB1 y eitb.eus, como la serie de zombis *Lars Zonbia*. Según el director de Transformación Digital de EITB, Lontzo Sainz, la oferta infantil está marcada por audiencias exigentes con demandas concretas:

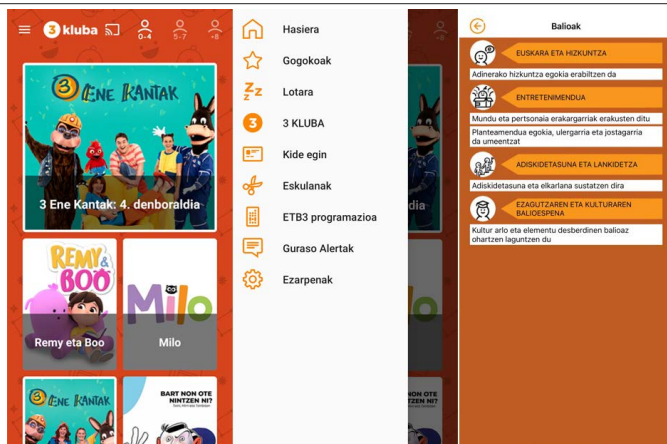
Somos conscientes de que el público de esta edad consume este tipo de contenidos y de una manera muy concreta [...] El factor euskera ya no es relevante para ellos [el público infantil]. Y hay bastante más competencia que en informativos. Porque el informativo va a tener contenido local que es el que atrae a mi público. Aquí lo que atrae son los dibujos animados. Me da igual cómo me los des, y dame los últimos, porque si no me los das tengo Netflix, tengo Amazon, tengo YouTube Kids... (Sainz, 2020)

La aplicación móvil 3 Kluba es la piedra angular de la estrategia multiplataforma de la comunidad infantil por su menú, opciones, funcionalidades y contenidos. La página principal divide los contenidos por tres franjas de edad. Los niños y niñas de 0 a 4 y de 5 a 7 años pueden ver dibujos animados, películas y programas infantiles adaptados a cada tramo de edad, y los niños y niñas de 8 años en adelante pueden ver programas juveniles y casi todas las temporadas de la serie *Goalzen*. El menú desplegable de 3 Kluba permite marcar favoritos, activar la hora de un vídeo para ir a dormir, hacerse socio de 3 Kluba y realizar trabajos manuales, aunque estas dos últimas opciones redirigen directamente a la web. El menú también tiene una sección de alertas parentales que se activan en los ajustes, junto al idioma y el rango de edad de los contenidos que se desean recibir, así como las secciones 3 Kluba y ETB3, que llevan a la propia web infantil y a la programación de ETB3 en la web del

3. La Euskaltek es un catálogo de contenidos audiovisuales en euskera, que está accesible de forma gratuita para los abonados de televisión de la operadora Euskaltel desde mayo de 2021.

grupo. En todos los dibujos animados hay un icono que da acceso a los valores que sostiene 3 Kluba para la infancia: euskera (adecuado por edades); entretenimiento (atractivo y comprensible); amistad y cooperación, y la importancia del conocimiento y la cultura.

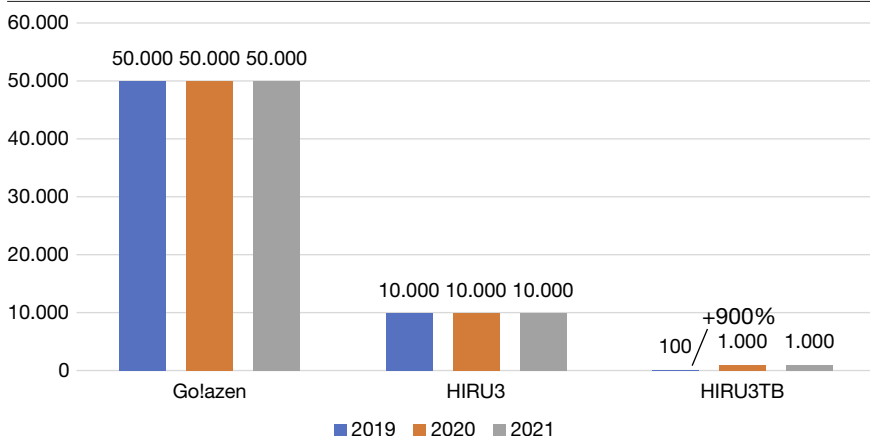
Figura 1. Secciones de la aplicación 3 Kluba



Fuente: 3 Kluba para Android. De izquierda a derecha: inicio, menú y valores.

La aplicación para televisión 3 Kluba TB (antes Hiru3 TB) es la que más ha crecido. Sus descargas se han multiplicado por diez, de 100 a 1.000 entre 2019 y 2020, como se ve en el gráfico 1.

Gráfico 1. Número de descargas de las aplicaciones móviles de EITB para la infancia y la juventud



Fuente: elaboración propia con datos de LOCALCOM.

La aplicación 3 Kluba (antes con el nombre Hiru3) se ha mantenido en 10.000 descargas de 2019 a 2021, aunque hay una disparidad entre el número de descargas y el número de visitantes de la aplicación. Según los datos de LOCALCOM, entre 2019 y 2020 3 Kluba tuvo un promedio de 3.000 visitantes únicos, por lo que solo la utilizaron tres de cada diez personas que la tenían descargada (Mendieta Bartolomé, 2021). Sin embargo, según Euskal Irrati Telebista (2021a: 88), su número de usuarios aumenta un 86%, de 47.637 a 88.689, entre 2019 y 2020.

Los juegos y los concursos infantiles y familiares constituyen otra novedad en la estrategia multiplataforma de EITB en la primera mitad de 2021. El club infantil 3 Kluba organiza dos concursos de preguntas en su web en colaboración con la Txikipedia, la Wikipedia en euskera para niños y niñas de entre 8 y 12 años. Las respuestas se pueden ver en la web de la Txikipedia y en su aplicación. En base a la serie de animación *Mya Go*, 3 Kluba ofrece unos juegos cortos interactivos que se pueden jugar en la web y ver en ETB3 y en las aplicaciones 3 Kluba y EITB Nahieran. Como concurso familiar destaca la aplicación *Egunean Behin* ('Una vez al día'), un juego de preguntas en euskera de estilo Trivial con 60.000 jugadores diarios, que celebraba su primera final simultánea entre la aplicación y ETB1 en julio de 2021. Los concursos multiplataforma se complementan con el estreno de *Zurekin Bat* ('Uno contigo'), una competición por equipos en directo desde ETB1 y eitb.eus.

Estas actuaciones se recogen dentro del contrato programa para 2016-2019, que establece unos indicadores de rendimiento (KPIs) para contabilizar los resultados asociados a los compromisos adquiridos por EITB. En cuanto a la estrategia digital infantil, el número de contenidos en euskera publicados en eitb.eus para el público infantil ha multiplicado casi por seis (8.652) el objetivo máximo de todo el año 2020 (1.500). La oferta infantil supone el 63% de los contenidos de eitb.eus creados para el público joven en general (EITB, 2021b)⁴.

3.2. Audiencias juveniles: Gaztea y Go!azen

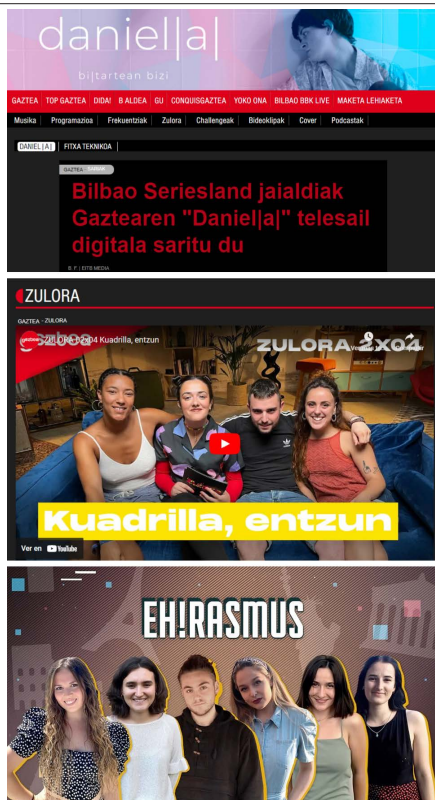
Gaztea ha pasado de ser una emisora musical a una marca multiplataforma que está en constante expansión con nuevos proyectos transmedia y formatos en YouTube, a los que se une la popularidad de la serie *Go!azen* en redes sociales y su aplicación móvil. El análisis de Gaztea y *Go!azen* parte del estudio de las propias aplicaciones, los documentos de EITB y la página web de la corporación, así como de las entrevistas realizadas al responsable de la estrategia digital de la corporación.

En septiembre de 2021 arrancaba la trigésima edición del *Maketa Lehiaketa* ('Concurso de maquetas'), emblema de Gaztea, pero también surgen varios formatos innovadores para la emisora juvenil. Estos formatos, íntegramente

4. Estas cifras no incluyen los contenidos de EITB en YouTube ni los seguidores en redes sociales, porque no están desglosadas por público infantil y juvenil.

en euskera, incluyen un proyecto transmedia, un vídeo pódcast (Moreno-Espinosa, Román-San Miguel y Flores-Vivar, 2021), un programa de debate en YouTube y un diario a modo de *sociality*⁵ en redes sociales. Cada uno cuenta con su propia web en Gaztea⁶.

Figura 2. Novedades para audiencias juveniles



Fuente: Portal eitb.eus. De arriba a abajo: la webserie *Daniel|a|*, el programa *Zulora* y el *sociality EH!rasmus*

Daniel|A| es una serie digital que trata la historia de una joven universitaria, Daniela, que inicia su vida como Daniel tras una crisis de identidad de género. Este proyecto transmedia crea un universo narrativo alrededor de la figura de *Daniel|A|* que se expande en diversas plataformas a través de seis

5. Emulando el formato del *reality*, EITB se refiere a *sociality* como un formato de experiencia real a través de las redes sociales: <<https://www.eitb.eus/es/grupo-eitb/detalle/8350547/eitb-estrena-nuevo-formato-de-sociality-chasmus-3-de-octubre/>>.
6. *Daniel|A|* <<https://www.eitb.eus/eu/gaztea/daniel-a/>>, *Yoko Ona* <<https://www.eitb.eus/eu/gaztea/yoko-ona/>>, *Zulora* <<https://www.eitb.eus/eu/gaztea/zulora/>> y *EH!rasmus* <<https://www.eitb.eus/eu/gaztea/ehasmus/>>.

capítulos, tres pódcast, un concierto y contenidos en las redes sociales de Gaztea. Los episodios, emitidos a la vez en el canal YouTube de Gaztea y en la web eitb.eus en septiembre de 2021, abordan los cambios que tiene que afrontar Daniela como Daniel al regresar a su casa después de una larga ausencia del País Vasco. Los tres pódcast expanden la historia principal en un bar en el que la amiga de Daniel|A|, cantante en la serie y en la vida real (Iholdi Beristain), actúa con las intérpretes de tres grupos musicales vascos. Estas actuaciones también salen de la ficción de los pódcast como conciertos reales en los que Beristain y el grupo Sua promocionan la serie días antes de su estreno, y en los conciertos se graban las últimas escenas de la serie con un público elegido por sorteo en la cuenta de Gaztea en Instagram. Tras su emisión, todos los contenidos transmedia de *Daniel|A|* están alojados en su propia web. Los episodios de la serie también están disponibles en el canal de YouTube de Gaztea, en el canal de contenidos a la carta en eitb.tv y en la aplicación EITB Nahieran. Los pódcast están en la web del proyecto y en la nueva web de pódcast EITBPodkast (<<https://www.eitb.eus/eitbpodkast/>>). *Daniel|A|* sigue la estela de las webseries previas *Gutuberrak* (2018), *Puntu Koma* y *Kartzela* (2019) y *Pikuak* (2020).

La creación de proyectos solo digitales (programas, series de ficción, concursos, *realities*) se corresponde con la estrategia de EITB dirigida al público joven, tal y como explica el director de Transformación Digital:

El año pasado (2020) se puso en marcha un equipo para trabajar contenidos nativos para jóvenes. La idea es hacer contenidos digitales que estén muy conectados con el resto de los soportes. Uno de los proyectos que ha hecho es el Gaztea 30 30 30, con experiencias presenciales como un sorteo para que 30 personas vayan a ver un concierto acústico el día 30 con motivo de su 30 aniversario. Es algo que la propia emisora Gaztea ya estaba haciendo. Ahora lo que intentamos hacer es dotarle de más recursos. (Sainz, 2021)

Estos proyectos incluyen el vídeo pódcast *Yoko Ona*, el primero en EITB, protagonizado por una periodista y dos cantautoras jóvenes que opinan sobre temas de actualidad (el miedo, la competencia, la imagen en las redes sociales) desde sus propias vivencias en la música y los medios de comunicación. Los episodios, de media hora, se ofrecen primero en EITBPodkast y después en el canal de Gaztea en YouTube. Por su parte, *Zulora* es un programa de debate que recoge las opiniones y vivencias de la juventud en asuntos como el machismo, el racismo o la pandemia. El eje del programa, que se emite en el canal de Gaztea en YouTube y en EITBPodkast, es una charla entre periodista e invitados, acompañada de secciones de humor, animación y reflexión. En el nuevo *sociality Eh!rasmus*, seis estudiantes vascos de Erasmus en diferentes ciudades de Europa y América Latina se convierten en reporteros y reporteras de EITB, y se graban para el canal de Gaztea de YouTube realizando un reto semanal en el que todos interactúan con grabaciones sincronizadas en clave de humor. Los estudiantes también intervienen en un programa de Gaztea para hablar de la

actualidad juvenil en el centro universitario que les acoge, y vía Skype en un programa de ETB1 para mostrar las ciudades en las que viven.

Además de las recientes novedades en Gaztea, en noviembre de 2022 se estrena en eitb.eus y en ETB1 la novena temporada de *Golazen*, que alcanzó un 32% de audiencia entre los niños y niñas de 4 a 12 años en su última temporada, según EITB⁷. Los diez actores de la serie la han promocionado con preestrenos en las capitales vascas, actuaciones en eventos a favor del euskera junto al club infantil 3 Kluba y una nueva gira de conciertos. La promoción realizada por los actores es una pieza importante en el engranaje transmedia de *Golazen*, pero no la única ni la más reciente. En 2021 aparecen el cuarto ejemplar de la revista digital y el cuarto libro *New York, New York*, que relata la estancia de dos protagonistas en Estados Unidos. La serie ya está presente en TikTok y en cuatro nuevos audiolibros en EITBPodkast.

La aplicación móvil *Golazen* es tan importante para la estrategia multiplataforma juvenil de EITB como lo es la aplicación móvil 3 Kluba para su estrategia multiplataforma infantil. Un menú con nueve opciones en forma de anuncios horizontales da acceso a los avances de la nueva temporada, el WhatsApp (*Go!atsApp*) interno de los protagonistas con mensajes y fotos relativos a la trama, la agenda de los eventos de promoción, los vídeos especiales (preestrenos, *making of* de las grabaciones, llamadas de los directores a los actores, sesiones de fotos, fragmentos de TikTok), los vídeos de los protagonistas al finalizar la última temporada, los karaokes, las canciones y coreografías de la serie y todos los episodios de la serie. Como novedad, la aplicación incluye respuestas en vídeo de los actores a preguntas de los usuarios formuladas por WhatsApp o en redes sociales, y permite recibir fotos y vídeos de los protagonistas en tiempo real al de la emisión de la serie.

Figura 3. Secciones de la aplicación *Golazen*



Fuente: Aplicación *Golazen* para Android. De izquierda a derecha: opciones del menú y *Go!atsApp*.

7. <<https://www.eitb.eus/es/television/detalle/8627006/final-de-temporada-goazen-80-4-de-febrero-en-etb1-y-eitbeus/>>.

No obstante, la popularidad de las audiencias de *Golazen* no se corresponde con las descargas de la aplicación móvil, que no suben y se mantienen en 50.000 entre 2019 y 2021, según los datos de LOCALCOM (véase el gráfico 1). Las descargas de *Golazen* tampoco tienen correlación con las visitas, ya que entre 2019 y 2020 la aplicación tuvo un promedio de 11.000 visitantes únicos y la utilizaron dos de cada diez personas que la tenían descargada (Mendieta Bartolomé, 2021). Según Euskal Irrati Telebista (2021a), los usuarios de la aplicación *Golazen* descienden un 2% en el mismo período.

4. Conclusiones

Euskal Irrati Telebista (EITB) afronta un nuevo escenario digital marcado por la fuerte competencia de las plataformas OTT, el declive de las audiencias de todas las televisiones públicas y los nuevos patrones de producción, consumo y distribución de contenidos en un mercado desregulado. El público, cada vez más joven y exigente, demanda contenidos digitales multipantalla que se adapten a sus vivencias generacionales y a las aplicaciones móviles y a las redes sociales que consume (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube). Además, este público es el que menos arraigo tiene en las televisiones públicas.

En este cambiante panorama mediático, los medios europeos de servicio público adoptan diferentes estrategias para diversificar su oferta a través de nuevos soportes digitales (D'Arma, Raats y Steemers, 2021). Este trabajo quería comprobar si las novedades anunciadas por EITB en 2020, y sobre todo en 2021, demuestran que la corporación vasca tiene una estrategia multiplataforma que va más allá de la distribución lineal de televisión, y si esta estrategia está basada en su mandato de servicio público, tanto para fomentar el euskera como para responder a la demanda de sus audiencias prioritarias infantiles y juveniles. Según el análisis realizado, se puede concluir que en general EITB ha implementado con éxito estrategias multiplataforma asentadas en la web, renovada en 2020 y cuyos visitantes han crecido más de un 50% desde 2019; las redes sociales, con un 38% más de seguidores desde 2019, sobre todo en YouTube e Instagram, y las nuevas aplicaciones móviles de noticias (EITB Albistek) y de contenidos a la carta (EITB Nahieran), creadas en marzo de 2021. Según EITB, en 2021 EITB Albistek tiene más de 350.000 usuarios y EITB Nahieran tiene más de 330.000 (EITB, 2022). La estrategia multiplataforma de la corporación vasca ha seguido su mandato de servicio público al poner a disposición de los espectadores infantiles contenidos digitales en euskera en varias webs, aplicaciones móviles y el repositorio de Euskaltek, a lo que se suman los estrenos simultáneos de series, programas y dibujos animados en la web de EITB y en ETB3. Los indicadores de la estrategia digital infantil han superado los objetivos marcados por EITB para 2020, multiplicándose por seis los contenidos web en euskera dirigidos a niños y niñas. Además, seis de cada diez contenidos de eitb.eus dirigidos al público joven son infantiles.

La estrategia multiplataforma para las audiencias juveniles ha sumado varios proyectos nuevos en euskera. Son formatos pioneros en la radiotelevisión vasca que incluyen una producción transmedia, un vídeo pódcast y un diario de experiencias reales en formato de *sociality* en YouTube. Estos proyectos tienen sus propias secciones en la web de Gaztea, pero lo más novedoso es que también están con todos sus episodios en el nuevo canal de pódcast EITBPodkast y en la aplicación móvil de contenidos a la carta (EITB Nahieran). A la estrategia multiplataforma juvenil de EITB se suma la serie *Go!azen*, que se ha emitido de forma continua desde 2016 y se ha convertido en un fenómeno transmedia con éxito de audiencias que expande la historia en conciertos, libros, revistas, promoción comercial y ahora también en audiolibros. Los resultados de los nuevos proyectos juveniles están por determinar, pero se puede constatar que los indicadores de la estrategia digital juvenil no han sido tan favorables como los de la estrategia digital infantil en 2020. Según Euskal Irrati Telebista (2021b), los 5.108 contenidos web en euskera dirigidos al público joven (no infantil) están un 7% por debajo del objetivo mínimo para 2020, que era de 5.500, y representan un 37% de los contenidos web en euskera orientados al público joven en general.

Por otro lado, el seguimiento de las aplicaciones móviles infantiles y juveniles merece un análisis más certero para evitar divergencias en la medición de las descargas y los visitantes. Según los datos de este trabajo, el número de descargas no se corresponde con el número de usuarios, ya que hay una proporción de dos o tres usuarios por cada diez descargas realizadas en las aplicaciones 3 Kluba y Go!azen. Por otro lado, según Euskal Irrati Telebista (2021a), los usuarios de la aplicación Go!azen han disminuido un 2%, y los de 3 Kluba han crecido un 86% entre 2019 y 2020. Los números de seguidores, las visualizaciones y las descargas son datos que ayudan a las cadenas a mejorar su imagen de marca y a personalizar su oferta de contenidos (Crusafon, González-Saavedra y Murciano, 2020b). TikTok y Twitch ya están presentes en varios programas infantiles y juveniles de EITB, y los seguidores de Instagram de la corporación se han duplicado, aunque el porcentaje de contenidos publicados sigue siendo escaso.

La reestructuración societaria de EITB bajo el paraguas de EITB Media y la nueva dirección han impulsado cambios en la digitalización de los contenidos. Así y todo, la radiotelevisión pública vasca, como el resto de las televisiones públicas españolas y europeas, debe combinar su adaptación a una realidad multipantalla con la necesidad de realizar un cambio en su sistema de financiación que garantice los recursos necesarios para implementar las nuevas estrategias digitales, sin olvidar las exigencias de su mandato de servicio público.

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La investigación en comunicación en la academia en español y portugués. Las revistas científicas presentes en los rankings WoS-JCR y Scimago-SJR (sección de comunicación). Un mapa del flujo de investigación en España y América Latina entre 2009 y 2019*

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Resumen

En este artículo se realiza una evaluación de las revistas en español mejor indexadas en el área de la comunicación en el periodo comprendido entre 2009 y 2019 en España, Portugal y América Latina. Para ello, se analiza el estado de la cuestión de las revistas científicas en este ámbito tomando como referencia el índice SJR-Scimago-Scopus, situadas en los cuartiles uno y dos (ranking a fecha de 31 de diciembre de 2019). Se ha analizado una muestra compuesta por 4.098 artículos pertenecientes a ocho revistas de investigación en comunicación que han sido analizadas a través de un libro de codificación en el que participaron cinco codificadores entrenados. Como parámetros de análisis se ha tomado en cuenta el género de los autores, del primer y segundo autor, su índice h, el número de autores por artículo, la internacionalización de los artículos, la financiación competitiva de los mismos, las regiones de publicación preponderantes de los autores y la tipología de artículos más frecuente. Tras desarrollar el análisis de las variables, se ha hallado una presencia significativa de autores e interés social en la investigación en esta área. Sin embargo, también se han detectado otras debilidades y amenazas, como escasez de financiación, una publicación muy focalizada en determinadas regiones españolas (Madrid, Cataluña, Andalucía) o la falta de revistas científicas en español y portugués, indexadas en los cuartiles 1 y 2 en los índices Scopus o JCR. Junto con estos datos, se han identificado numerosas oportunidades.

Palabras clave: investigación en comunicación; revistas científicas; España; América Latina; artículos

Resum. *La recerca en comunicació a l'acadèmia en espanyol i portuguès. Les revistes científiques presents als rànquings WoS-JCR i Scimago-SJR (secció de comunicació). Un mapa del flux de recerca a Espanya i l'Amèrica Llatina entre 2009 i 2019*

En aquest article es fa una avaluació de les revistes en espanyol millor indexades en l'àrea de la comunicació en el període comprès entre 2009 i 2019 a Espanya, Portugal i l'Amèrica Llatina. Per dur-la a terme, s'analitza l'estat de la qüestió de les revistes científiques en aquest àmbit prenent com a referència l'índex SJR-Scimago-Scopus, situades en els quartils u i dos (rànkning amb data de 31 de desembre de 2019). S'ha analitzat una mostra composta per 4.098 articles pertanyents a vuit revistes de recerca en comunicació que han estat analitzats a través d'un llibre de codificació en el qual van participar cinc codificadors entrenats. Com a paràmetres d'anàlisi s'ha tingut en compte el gènere dels autors, del primer i segon autor, el seu índex h, el nombre d'autors per article, la internacionalització dels articles, el finançament competitiu d'aquests, les regions de publicació preponderants dels autors i la tipologia d'articles més freqüent. Després de desenvolupar l'anàlisi de les variables, s'ha trobat una presència significativa d'autors i interès social en la recerca en aquesta àrea. No obstant això, també s'han detectat altres febleses i amenaces, com ara escassetat de finançament, una publicació molt focalitzada en determinades regions espanyoles (Madrid, Catalunya, Andalusia) o la manca de revistes científiques en espanyol i portuguès, indexades en els quartils 1 i 2 en els índexs Scopus o JCR. Juntament amb aquestes dades, s'han identificat nombroses oportunitats.

Paraules clau: recerca en comunicació; revistes científiques; Espanya; Amèrica Llatina; articles

Abstract. *Communication research in academia in Spanish and Portuguese. Scientific journals in the WoS-JCR, Scimago-SJR rankings (communication section). A map of the flow of research in Spain and Latin America between 2009 and 2019*

This article evaluates the highest-ranked journals in Spanish in the field of communication in Spain, Portugal and Latin America between 2009 and 2019. Using the SJR-Scimago-Scopus index, the current status of scientific journals in this field in the first and second quartiles (according to the rankings on 31 December 2019) is analysed. A sample consisting of 4098 articles from eight communication research journals was analysed, using a coding book developed by five qualified coders. Analysis parameters were: gender of the authors, first and second author, their h-index, the number of authors per article, the internationalisation of the articles, the competitive funding of the articles, the predominant publication regions of the authors, and the most frequent typology of articles. After running an analysis of the variables, we found a significant presence of authors and social interest in research in this area. However, other weaknesses and threats were also detected, such as a shortage of funding, publication very focused on certain Spanish regions (Madrid, Catalonia, Andalusia) and the lack of scientific journals in Spanish or Portuguese ranked in the first and second quartiles of the Scopus and/or JCR indexes. Along with these data, numerous opportunities were identified.

Keywords: communication research; scientific journals; Spain; Latin America; article

1. Introducción y estado de la cuestión

En los últimos años han proliferado los estudios sobre investigación en comunicación en la academia latina y se han llevado a cabo diversas investigaciones al respecto con abordajes diferenciados para analizar la producción investigadora en España. Es relevante señalar los estudios pioneros de Jones (1994 y 1998), que abordaron el análisis de la investigación realizada en las facultades de Ciencias de la Información en el vigésimo aniversario de su creación. Otros antecedentes destacados posteriores son los estudios desarrollados por Rodrigo-Alsina y García-Jiménez (2010) y Fernández-Quijada y Masip-Masip (2013) sobre el paradigmático caso de la investigación en esta disciplina.

Por otra parte, existen numerosos estudios que ofrecen visiones panorámicas de la investigación (Rodrigo-Alsina y García-Jiménez, 2011; Fernández-Quijada y Masip-Masip, 2013; Arcila, Piñuel y Calderín, 2013; Martínez-Nicolás, 2009; Vidales, 2015; Fuentes, 1994; Giménez-Toledo y Jiménez-Contreras, 2013; Vasallo, 1999; Piñuel, Lozano y Gaitán, 2015; Rodríguez-Serrano y Gil-Soldevilla, 2018 y Piñuel, 2009, 2011 y 2015, entre otros).

Así mismo, resulta imprescindible tener en cuenta los estudios que tratan de manera especializada la investigación publicada en artículos de revistas, si bien parcialmente o abarcando períodos no tan extensos como los que aquí presentamos, de once años (Masip-Masip, 2005; Castillo y Carretón, 2010; Martínez-Nicolás y Saperas, 2011; Fernández-Quijada y Masip-Masip, 2013; De-Filippo, 2013). El interés por el estudio de los artículos publicados en revistas de impacto en nuestra área, como unidad de análisis, ha dado como

resultado una proliferación de estudios sobre el impacto de las revistas mejor indexadas desde diferentes aproximaciones metodológicas y temporales (Rodríguez-Gómez, Goyanes y Cedillo, 2018; Heras-Pedrosa, Martel-Casado y Jambrino-Maldonado, 2018; Carrasco, Saperas y Martínez, 2018; Goyanes, Rodríguez-Gómez y Rosique-Cedillo, 2018; Piñeiro-Naval y Morais, 2019); o el libro compilado por Abadal (2017), en el que varios autores analizan la situación en España y las tendencias de futuro de las revistas científicas. Gran parte de este nuevo movimiento se centra en cuestiones como la baja replicabilidad del trabajo cuantitativo, la falta de generalización y el sesgo de publicación (Dienlin, Masur y Trepte, 2017). Con este trabajo se pretende poner de manifiesto la necesidad de un mejor acceso a la investigación desde contextos geográfica y lingüísticamente diversos. En este sentido, la invisibilidad de los académicos y el trabajo académico en continentes como América Latina, Asia y África en las principales revistas académicas (Ganter y Ortega 2019) y la falta de referencias a trabajos de estas zonas (Goyanes y Demeter, 2020) están bien documentadas. Otros estudios han demostrado la vitalidad del trabajo académico derivado de la comunidad académica de habla hispana y portuguesa (por ejemplo, Caffarel, Ortega y Gaitán, 2018).

Si bien se ha examinado ampliamente la invisibilidad del trabajo de investigadores de universidades en España, Portugal y América Latina en revistas altamente calificadas (Ganter y Ortega, 2019), se sabe poco sobre el flujo inverso y las estructuras editoriales generales que dan forma a las publicaciones académicas en español y portugués. El análisis de estos contextos contribuirá a comprender mejor las limitaciones y oportunidades entre las diferentes tradiciones de investigación (Waisbord, 2019).

Por su parte, en su análisis detallado, Walter et al. (2018) han revelado patrones de publicación en el *Journal of Communication* que mostraban una progresión lenta hacia la diversidad de pensamiento y la apertura a las voces académicas de fuera de los EE. UU. Estos hallazgos están en línea con otros estudios que mostraron la invisibilidad de ciertas comunidades académicas y prácticas de referencia dominantes (Ganter y Ortega, 2019; Goyanes y Demeter 2020). Estos hallazgos han permitido comprender y describir mejor las prácticas editoriales en las revistas académicas (Paine y Fox, 2018). El examen de estos patrones ayuda a revelar las estructuras de poder subyacentes y las disparidades geográficas y lingüísticas (Gaitán, Ortega-Mohedano y Caffarel-Serra, 2021).

La comprensión de estos aspectos está vinculada a una corriente de literatura relacionada con la idea de desoccidentalizar la academia (Hallin y Mancini, 2012; Waisbord y Mellado, 2014) y a la tendencia hacia el «cosmopolitismo académico» (Ganter y Ortega, 2019, Hanitzsch, 2019; Waisbord, 2015; Waisbord, 2019). El cosmopolitismo académico deriva de un ámbito de la erudición que discute el intercambio intelectual diverso y que apunta hacia el cosmopolitismo «metodológico» (Beck, 2006) y el cosmopolitismo «teórico» (Waisbord, 2015) como estrategias para abrir la erudición.

2. Metodología

El principal objetivo de este artículo es analizar los resultados más relevantes relativos a los objetos, las metodologías y los instrumentos de investigación más presentes en la investigación en comunicación en el último decenio disponibles en los repositorios y webs de las revistas seleccionadas. Para ello, se ha tomado como punto de partida las siguientes hipótesis de investigación:

- H1: las revistas científicas presentan una preponderancia del género masculino en la serie temporal frente a la autoría femenina, tanto en el primer como en el segundo autor.
- H2: las regiones preponderantes de publicación de artículos son las que cuentan con mayor número de universidades y grupos de investigación (Madrid, Cataluña y Andalucía).
- H3: la publicación en revistas científicas —WoS-JCR o Scimago-SJR en español y portugués— tiene un patrón regional asociado a islas de investigación geográficas y lingüísticas.
- H4: el número de autores moda del corpus de artículos se circunscribe a un autoría individual o dual.
- H5: la gran mayoría de los artículos no cuentan con fuentes de financiación competitiva y sus niveles de internacionalización son también marginales.
- H6: la mayoría de los artículos presentan una aproximación metodológica basada en el método científico.
- H7: el índice h de los autores que publican en estos artículos se caracteriza por pertenecer a investigadores en fase de consolidación de su carrera académica.

Para la recogida de la muestra se ha utilizado la herramienta de investigación y análisis estadístico Qualtrics, siguiendo un libro de codificación e identificación de las variables descriptivas presentes en las publicaciones de artículos (identificación del autor, universidad, país, número de autores, origen de los mismos e identificación de los índices h de los autores, entre otros).

La selección muestral se fundamenta en el indicador y ranking SJR-2018, Comunicación-*Communication*, a partir del cual se han seleccionado las revistas pertenecientes a los cuartiles uno y dos, Q1 y Q2. En el contexto de España se han incluido en la muestra las revistas *Comunicar*, *El Profesional de la Información*, *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* y *Comunicación y Sociedad – Communication and Society*. En Portugal se incluye la revista *Media and Communication* y en América Latina se analiza la revista *Interface. Comunicação, Saúde, Educação* de Brasil, *Cuadernos Info* de Chile y *Comunicación y Sociedad* de México.

La unidad de análisis de nuestra investigación son todos los artículos publicados en dichas revistas entre el 1 de enero de 2009 y el 31 de diciembre de 2019. En total, se analizaron 4.098 artículos. La codificación fue realizada

entre abril de 2020 y febrero de 2021 por cinco codificadores entrenados, a quienes se asignaron cuotas proporcionales, y especializados en una o dos revistas de la muestra. No se realizaron contrastes de fiabilidad entre codificadores al detectar que los ítems de codificación del libro de códigos no presentaban dudas para los investigadores entrenados.

Además, se realizó, un mapeo sistemático de las evidencias publicadas (Grant y Booth, 2009; Gough, Sandy y James, 2012; EPPI-Centre, 2018) utilizando una metodología de búsqueda comprensiva y estratégica y se analizó un total de 4.098 artículos.

Figura 1. Selección de revistas científicas de alto impacto en comunicación en España, Portugal y América Latina

Title	Type	↓ SJR	H index	Total Docs. (2018)	Total Docs. (3years)	Total Refs. (2018)	Total Cites (3years)	Citable Docs. (3years)	Cites / Doc. (2years)	Ref. / Doc. (2018)
1 Comunicar	journal	0.851 Q1	45	40	120	1666	427	120	3.36	41.65
2 Profesional de la Información	journal	0.601 Q2	33	122	298	4452	464	298	1.48	36.49
3 Revista Latina de Comunicación Social	journal	0.509 Q2	21	76	213	3045	197	213	0.84	40.07
4 Communication and Society	journal	0.331 Q2	19	59	132	2954	103	122	0.71	50.07

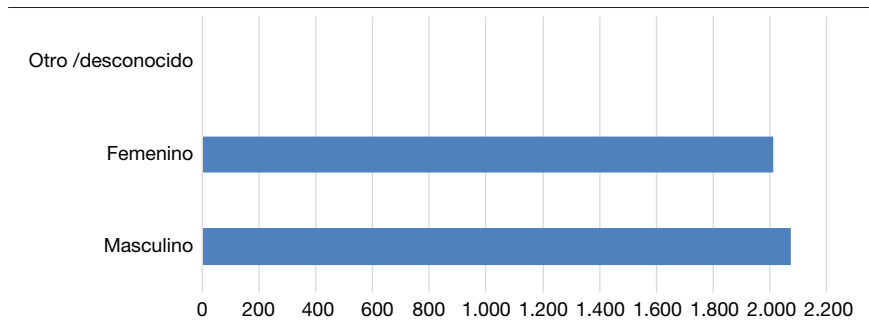
Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de *Scimago Journal and Country Rank* (2018) <<https://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php>>.

3. Resultados

H1. Las revistas científicas presentan una preponderancia del género masculino

Uno de los objetos que analizamos fue el género de la autoría. En este sentido, se ha detectado que el 50,76% de los autores son de género masculino; el género femenino representa el 49,17%, y en tres artículos no se ha podido definir el género de la autoría.

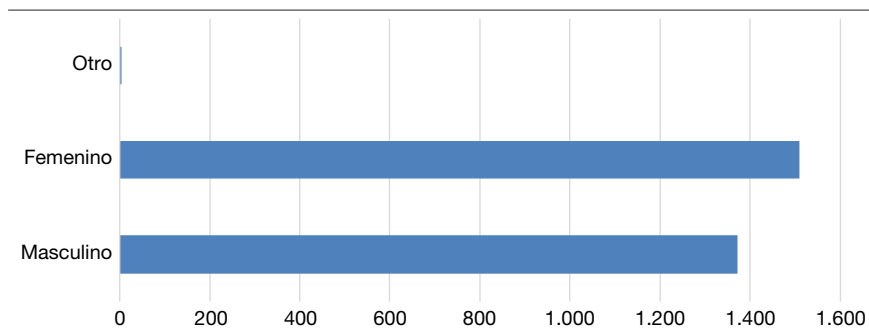
Figura 2. Género del primer autor en las revistas científicas de comunicación de 2009 a 2019



Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de datos de la codificación de artículos (4.098 artículos válidos).

Además, se constata que sigue existiendo una leve preponderancia del 1,59% del género masculino en el liderazgo de publicación de las revistas científicas analizadas en la serie histórica. En este sentido, se ha detectado que este predominio ha disminuido progresivamente y que en los últimos cinco años se ha impuesto el género femenino. En la siguiente gráfica observamos que el género femenino, con un 52,26%, es el que figura con mayor frecuencia como segundo autor en los artículos analizados, frente al 47,60% de los varones. Se detecta un patrón de progresiva incorporación y *sorpasso* de género en los últimos años, principalmente en el periodo de 2015 a 2019. En este caso, la hipótesis se contrastó parcialmente, ya que la autoría de género en el segundo autor es de género femenino, no así la del primer autor, que permanece en el género masculino.

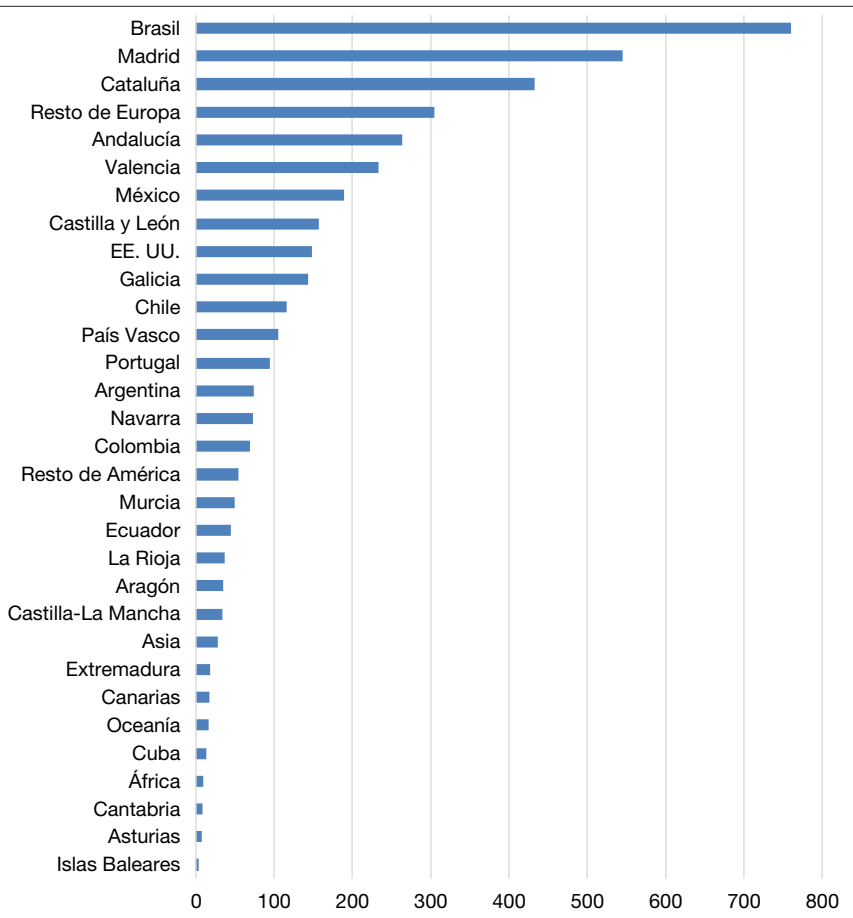
Figura 3. Género del segundo autor en las revistas científicas de comunicación de 2009 a 2019



Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de los artículos codificados. De un total de 2.872 artículos con codificaciones válidas —i.e. al menos dos autores— no se ha podido detectar el género en cuatro de ellos.

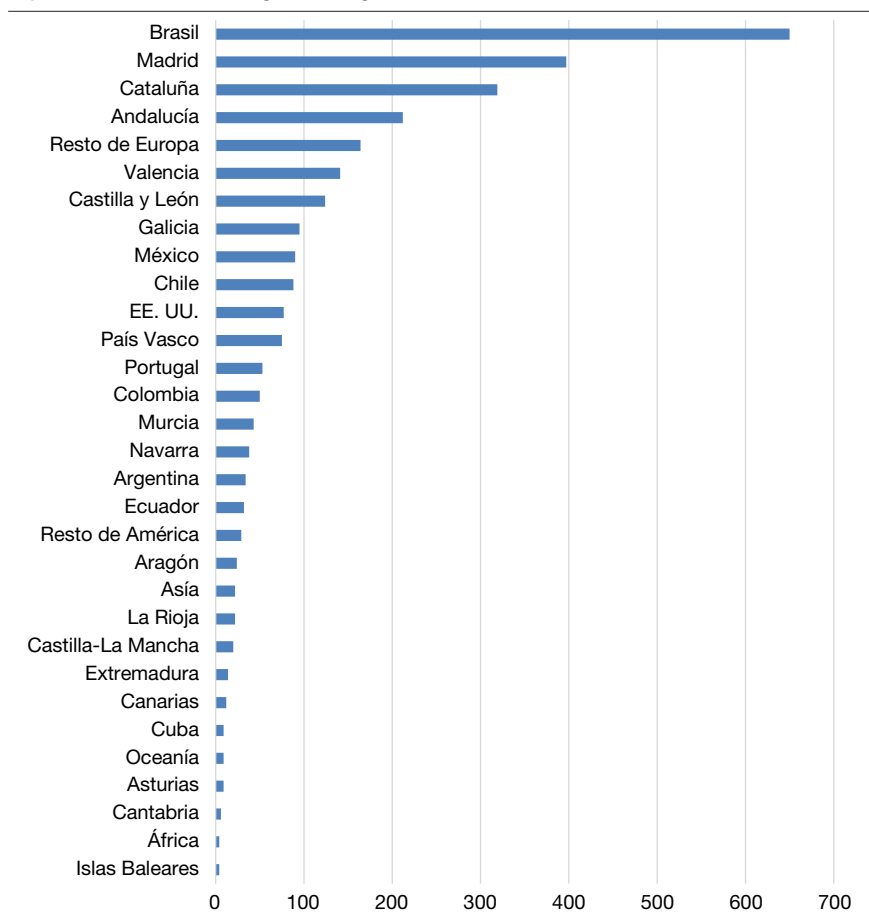
H2 y H3. Las regiones preponderantes de publicación de artículos son las que cuentan con mayor número de universidades. La publicación en revistas científicas —WoS-JCR o Scimago-SJR— en español y portugués tiene un patrón regional asociado a islas de investigación geográficas y lingüísticas

Otro de los objetivos de nuestro análisis era la detección de las regiones de mayor publicación de revistas de mayor impacto en el área de comunicación con presencia en los dos cuartiles superiores, Q1 y Q2, del SJR-Scopus en el ranking del año 2018. Podemos concluir que las regiones de mayor publicación, si analizamos la universidad de origen del primer autor (de mayor a menor), son las siguientes: Brasil (18,60%), Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid (13,29%), Cataluña (10,60%), resto de Europa (7,47%), Andalucía (6,46%), Comunidad Valenciana (5,70%), México (4,63%), Castilla y León (3,84%), EE. UU. (3,62%) y Galicia (3,5%), que representan el ranking de las diez regiones o islas académicas *premium* de publicación en las revistas mejor indexadas en el área de comunicación. Otras zonas geográficas como Chile y Argentina o regiones españolas como el País Vasco o Navarra se encuentran por debajo del 3% en el agregado.

Figura 4. Institución de origen del primer autor

Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de la codificación válida de 4.085 artículos con identificación geográfica.

En relación con la universidad de origen de publicación del segundo autor, hemos detectado que las diez regiones principales se corresponden con los siguientes datos: Brasil (22,68%), Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid (13,85%), Cataluña (11,13%), Andalucía (7,40%), resto de Europa (5,72%), Comunidad Valenciana (4,92%), Castilla y León (4,33%), Galicia (3,31%), México (3,14%) y Chile (3,07%). En este caso, se aprecia un relevante ascenso de Andalucía, Castilla y León y Galicia en la posición y porcentaje. Por tanto, estas hipótesis han quedado contrastadas positivamente.

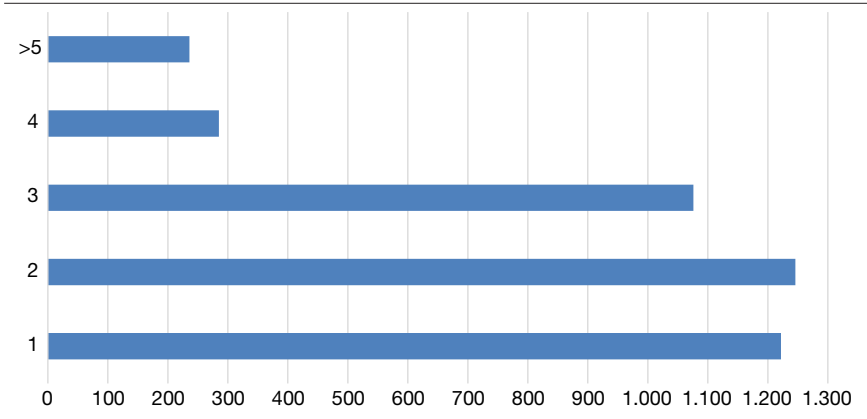
Figura 5. Institución de origen del segundo autor

Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de la codificación de 2.866 artículos válidos con dos autores o más.

H4. El número de autores moda del corpus de artículos se circunscribirá a una autoría individual o dual

A la hora de analizar la autoría de los artículos de las revistas analizadas hemos recabado el número de autores por artículo. La autoría del 30,65% de los artículos de la muestra analizada es de dos personas, seguida de la de una persona (30,06%) y de la de tres personas (26,47%). El 60% de los artículos son publicados por grupos de dos autores y la publicación de artículos por cuatro o más de cinco autores es marginal, con un 7,01% y un 5,81%, respectivamente. La publicación se da en grupos pequeños de uno o dos autores, principalmente.

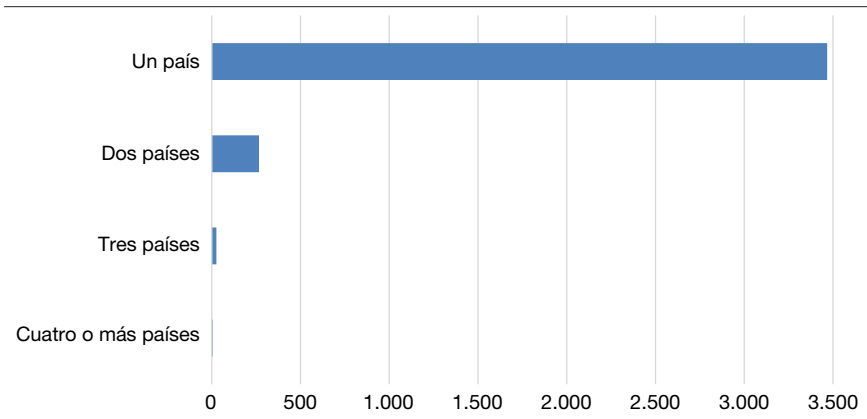
Figura 6. Número de autores por artículo



Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de la codificación de 4.065 artículos válidos de la muestra total.

La colaboración entre pocos autores muestra un área de conocimiento donde los grupos de investigación y publicación son reducidos y pertenecen a un único país en el 92,11% de los casos. Los artículos desarrollados en colaboraciones transnacionales suponen el 7,07% de los casos, los desarrollados en tres países, el 0,69%, y en cuatro o más países, el 0,13%. En cuanto a la colaboración transnacional, podría indicarse que es marginal en la publicación en estas revistas de alto impacto. Por tanto, la hipótesis ha sido contrastada positivamente, ya que la moda de autores es principalmente uno o dos autores.

Figura 7. Número de países que colaboran en el artículo

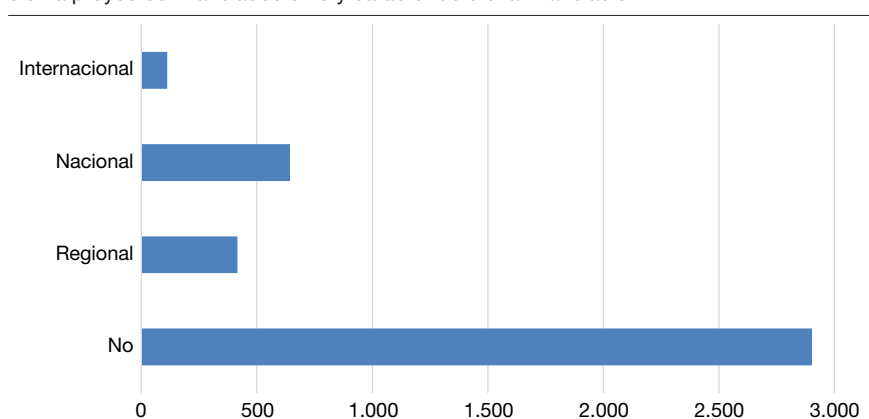


Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de la codificación de 3.764 válidos con detección del país.

H5. La mayoría de los artículos no contarán con fuentes de financiación competitiva y sus niveles de internacionalización serán también marginales

Una de las variables que ayudan a analizar la internacionalización de la publicación en comunicación es la presencia de financiación internacional. El panorama detectado muestra que el 71,24% de los artículos publicados no cuenta con financiación, únicamente el 2,75% son financiados internacionalmente, un 15,80% cuenta con financiación nacional y un 10,21% con financiación regional; solo el 28,76% de los artículos publicados cuenta con algún tipo de financiación competitiva. Por tanto, la hipótesis se confirma.

Figura 8. Financiación o no de artículos publicados en revistas de comunicación, asociación a proyectos financiados o no y carácter de dicha financiación



Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de la codificación de 4.075 artículos válidos con detección de financiación o no de las publicaciones.

H6. La mayoría de los artículos presentarán una aproximación metodológica basada en el método científico

Otra de las variables de análisis que identificamos es la tipología de artículos que tienen más presencia. La metodología central del 64% de los artículos es el método científico; el 13,44% son únicamente artículos teóricos; el 1,15%, únicamente históricos o de revisión de la literatura; el 2,77%, de opinión de libro-artículo y el 18,60%, de otra tipología diferente a las anteriores. Se concluye, pues, que la aproximación científica es la que prima a la hora de publicar en las revistas mejor indexadas en el área de comunicación. Por tanto, la hipótesis se confirma.

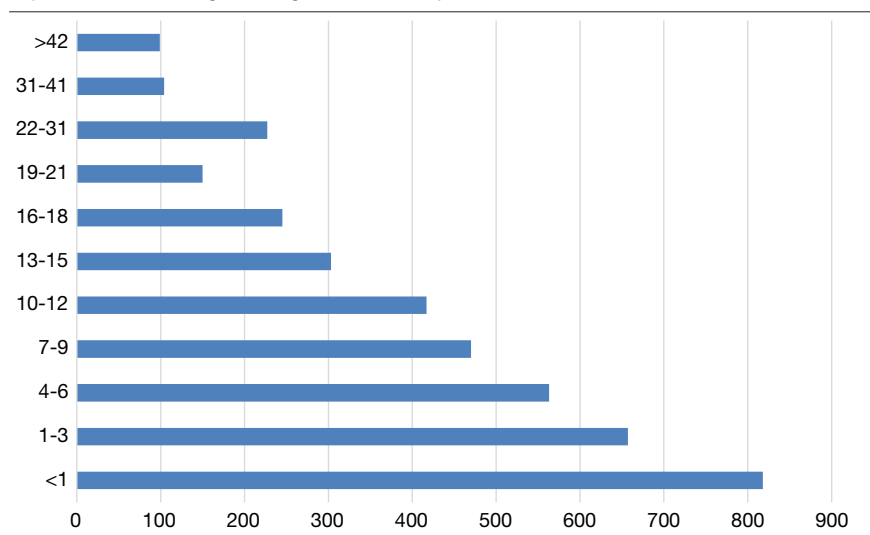
Tabla 1. Tipología de artículos en las revistas de comunicación de 2009 a 2019

	%	Recuento
Método empírico/teórico/histórico	64,03%	2.610
Teórico	13,44%	548
Histórico-revisión de la literatura	1,15%	47
Opinión de libro-artículo	2,77%	113
Otro	18,60%	758

Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de la codificación de 4.076 artículos con detección de tipología.

H7. El índice h de los autores que publican en estos artículos se caracteriza por pertenecer a investigadores en fase de consolidación de su carrera académica

Otra de las variables relevantes a la hora de definir la madurez de la disciplina se asocia al índice h de sus autores. Este indicador propuesto por Jorge E. Hirsch (2005) es un número que representa el peso que un autor tiene en una comunidad científica y mide la productividad e impacto de las citas de las publicaciones.

Figura 9. Índice h según Google Scholar del primer autor de los artículos

Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de la codificación de 4.075 artículos válidos con detección de financiación o no de las publicaciones.

Tabla 2. Distribución del índice h en las revistas analizadas

< 1	20,18%	Investigadores júnior (36,39%)
1-3	16,21%	
4-6	13,89%	Investigadores en fase de consolidación (35,78%)
7-9	11,60%	
10-12	10,29%	
13-15	7,48%	Investigadores consolidados de alto impacto (17,22%)
16-18	6,04%	
19-21	3,70%	
22-31	5,60%	Investigadores sénior de alta producción e impacto (10,61%)
31-41	2,57%	
> 42	2,44%	

Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de los datos de codificación de 4.053 artículos validados.

La muestra analizada indica que los investigadores jóvenes, con índice h inferior a 1, aparecen como autores en el 20,18% de los artículos, seguidos de aquellos con índice h entre 1 y 3, con un 16,21%. El índice h de niveles medios indicaría carreras en fase de consolidación (representado por valores entre 4 y 6, 7 y 9 y 10 y 12); respectivamente, el 13,89%, el 11,60% y el 10,29%. Los autores con carreras ya plenamente consolidadas tendrían índices h situados entre 13 y 21. Por su parte, los investigadores sénior y de alta excelencia contarían con índices superiores, situándose en rangos entre 22 y 41. Por último, los investigadores que superan 42 puntos en el índice h representan el 2,44%. En definitiva, la producción científica en las revistas analizadas tiene como principales autores los investigadores júnior, que representan el 36,39% de los artículos, seguidos por los investigadores en fase intermedia de consolidación, con el 35,78% de la muestra. Los investigadores consolidados de alto impacto o sénior de elevada producción representan el 17,22% y el 10,61%. Por tanto, los investigadores jóvenes y en fase de consolidación representan un 72,17% del total de la autoría en las revistas de alto impacto en comunicación en la academia latina. Estos índices muestran una disciplina en construcción donde los jóvenes dominarían los huecos de publicación en estas revistas y dejarían el 27,83% restante a los investigadores consolidados o sénior de alto impacto y productividad.

En esta ocasión, la hipótesis planteada no se contrastó positivamente, ya que se ha comprobado que este índice está más vinculado con los investigadores júnior.

4. Discusión y conclusiones

A continuación se presentan los resultados de esta investigación con un cuadro de debilidades, amenazas, fortalezas y oportunidades detectadas a la luz de los datos analizados.

Tabla 3. Debilidades, amenazas, fortalezas y oportunidades detectadas en la producción científica de las revistas analizadas en el periodo de 2009 a 2019

DEBILIDADES	AMENAZAS
1. Escasa proporción de artículos financiados en la publicación científica en revistas de impacto.	1. No continuidad en las carreras académicas de los investigadores júnior al encontrar barreras de progreso en su publicación científica y procesos de acreditación y progresión laboral.
2. Publicación científica focalizada en las regiones o islas científicas de publicación, principalmente. En el caso de España, en la Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid, Cataluña, Andalucía y Castilla y León representan el 40% de los artículos de las revistas de impacto.	2. Escasa financiación de proyectos de investigación para investigadores júnior y en fase de consolidación de su carrera académica; presentan un alto porcentaje de publicación con bajos niveles de financiación.
3. Índices h relativamente bajos, productividad y citación entre autores de las revistas mejor indexadas.	3. Inexistencia de suficientes proyectos profesionales y correctamente financiados de publicación científica en comunicación en la academia en español.
4. Necesidad de internacionalizar los equipos de publicación en las revistas de la academia latina.	4. Perversión del «efecto ANECA» en la carrera científica y la publicación de resultados de investigación en las revistas científicas. Limitación a un máximo de tres autores o autoría individual o de dos autores para no penalizar sexenios o acreditaciones.
5. Baja financiación de la publicación científica en las revistas de más impacto.	5. Pérdida de interés en el desarrollo de carreras científicas en comunicación entre los investigadores y en particular en el género masculino; disminución progresiva de un correcto balanceo de género en el área de conocimiento.
6. Limitación de oportunidades de publicación en las revistas científicas de primer y segundo nivel en el área de conocimiento de comunicación en el periodo de 2009 a 2019.	6. Inexistencia de suficientes revistas científicas en español, portugués o inglés indexadas en los cuartiles 1 y 2 en los índices Scopus o JCR con sede en las áreas de publicación tradicionales de la academia latina.

Tabla 3. Debilidades, amenazas, fortalezas y oportunidades detectadas en la producción científica de las revistas analizadas en el periodo de 2009 a 2019 (continuación)

FORTALEZAS	OPORTUNIDADES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interés social y económico en investigar la comunicación. 2. Dinamismo de las sociedades científicas nacionales e internacionales. La apertura de puentes de comunicación entre islas científico-idiomáticas. 3. Presencia cada vez más significativa de investigadores jóvenes principalmente y séniores emergentes en la publicación científica en inglés en el área de la comunicación (más allá de las revistas más prestigiosas y conocidas del contexto de la academia latina). 4. Mayor presencia en el liderazgo y coliderazgo en la publicación de artículos del género femenino, que pasa a ser mayoritario en la publicación científica en las revistas de más impacto en el área de la comunicación. 5. Presencia de una significativa diversidad de territorios origen de publicación en las revistas mejor indexadas, con presencia emergente de territorios de publicación fuera de la zona de tradición, presencia de Asia, Oceanía, el resto de Europa y el resto de América entre los territorios de publicación de las revistas mejor indexadas en el área de comunicación de la academia latina. 6. Presencia mayoritaria de publicación bilingüe o trilingüe en español, portugués e inglés en los proyectos editoriales; una especial atención a la publicación en inglés en los proyectos editoriales, en los que prima la publicación en este idioma para facilitar la citación en impacto internacional de los artículos trabajados. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Desaparición progresiva de las diferencias de género entre los autores que publican en estas revistas; incremento progresivo de la presencia del género femenino en el liderazgo de los artículos y los equipos de publicación. 2. Desarrollo de nuevos proyectos editoriales de revistas científicas de impacto en la academia latina e inclusión progresiva de revistas consolidadas. 3. Presencia de la comunicación como objeto de estudio en otras áreas de investigación, macrodatos, TIC, neurociencias... 4. Apertura de redes científicas entre la ciencia en español e inglés en América Latina, América del Norte y España-Europa. 5. Emergencia de proyectos editoriales de código abierto asociados a la consolidación y creación de revistas en índices regionales y globales, como Scopus, JCR, ESCI y Latindex principalmente. 6. Consolidación futura de un mercado emergente de ciencia en español en todo el continente americano y en Europa-España. 7. Área de conocimiento en desarrollo, emergente y que debe desarrollarse para mejorar la percepción social «positivista» y de emprendimiento, y las transferencias virtuosas de la investigación en comunicación a la sociedad y su tejido empresarial.

Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de los datos de codificación de los artículos y el proyecto Mapcom I y Mapcom II.

En el contexto actual, marcado por la gran transformación que vive el ámbito mediático debido al desarrollo tecnológico, se hace más necesario que nunca revisar el estado de la investigación en esta área del conocimiento.

Tras haber llevado a cabo este trabajo de investigación ha podido comprobarse que existe interés en la comunicación como objetivo de estudio, si bien es cierto que se trata de un campo emergente y en desarrollo. Por eso, se han encontrado algunas debilidades a las que habría que prestar especial atención, como la falta de financiación estable o la falta de apoyo económico en artículos de revistas de alto impacto. Además, se ha constatado que se trata de una publicación científica muy condensada en ciertas regiones con mayor número de población (con más universidades y grupos de investigación) y

que existe una falta de internacionalización, entre otros aspectos, que no beneficia la pluralidad científica y puede dificultar las carreras investigadoras incipientes. Asimismo, se aprecia falta de colaboración entre investigadores. A menudo, los grupos son principalmente de dos o tres autores y se profundiza el «efecto ANECA» de publicación.

Junto con estos aspectos, se han encontrado datos que reflejan interesantes oportunidades para el ámbito de la academia en el área de la comunicación, como la reducción de la brecha de género. Como ha podido constatar-se, se cierra progresivamente y se iguala en el segundo autor, igual que en el primero en los últimos años del periodo analizado. Al mismo tiempo, se aprecia falta el liderazgo en la dirección de proyectos, IP en grupos de investigación y acceso a categorías profesionales «altas» en la academia; pero en términos generales «el techo de cristal» desaparece progresivamente, aunque muestra resistencias significativas.

Así mismo, los resultados reflejan la necesidad de ampliar la cantidad y la calidad de las revistas científicas en los idiomas de la academia latina, hacerlas bilingües y profesionalizarlas para su inclusión en los índices JCR-WOS y Scopus-SJR, entre otros. Junto con estos parámetros, se hace necesario internacionalizar la producción científica de los grupos de investigación ibéricos y latinoamericanos fuera de la «zona de confort» tradicional y fomentar la colaboración internacional e interuniversitaria.

Tras haber llevado a cabo este trabajo, puede concluirse que las revistas de impacto de nuestra área de conocimiento se encuentran llamadas a seguir publicando artículos científicos que reflejen la investigación que se realiza en nuestro país y en la academia en español; su posicionamiento en los índices de calidad e impacto les obliga. A la luz de los datos que hemos identificado en esta investigación, detectamos las debilidades y amenazas, pero también las fortalezas y oportunidades que caracterizan un área de conocimiento que se encuentra en permanente construcción, con el objetivo de mejorar sus índices de internacionalización, la diversidad geográfica, la financiación competitiva de la publicación científica, la diversidad de género en la autoría, el impacto y la citación, entre algunas de las variables detectadas.

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News Life Cycle and the Hybrid Media System*

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Abstract

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

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

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: cycle de vida de la notícia; periodisme; periodisme transmèdia; sistema híbrid de mitjans

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

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

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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