Simón Peña-Fernández (Eds.)
Koldobika Meso-Ayerdi (Eds.)

# News in the Hybrid Media System

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Simón Peña-Fernández
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In loving memory of Pere Masip

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# Prologue:
# The changing nature of news

Simón Peña-Fernández & Koldobika Meso-Ayerdi

(University of the Basque Country)

News is written fast. It takes the shape of journalistic articles or comments in social media that are transformed and shared, that are alive and mutate constantly on their way to the audiences, who continue to breathe life into them by spreading them mouth to ear until, in their fleeting existence, their place is occupied by other pieces of information as they set out on the same cycle.

Ever since the first rules on how to write them were established in the 19th century, news articles have circulated in myriad formats and media, from the crowded print of the mainstream press to the warmth of radio sound, or bookending the image with cinema or television newsreels.

The appearance of the first online media in the late 20th century multiplied the power of news, making it even more immediate, accessible and integrated, disseminating it with a multitude of devices thanks to which it has achieved greater presence and proximity in our lives. On its way to our doors and our living rooms, and from there to our pockets, news has continued to morph and mutate, in its constant endeavour to capture our attention, to reach us and engage us in fragment of the reality around us.

In this monograph, we try to explain the changes experienced by news in the last decade. A transformation that began with the consequences of an economic crisis which has endangered the business model of the traditional media, who see how a good part of their readers and their available resources have shifted towards the new actors in the digital information ecosystem. A decade which has given birth to a hybrid media system, where many compete and collaborate with one another, creating an intricate mosaic of texts, voices and images.

Of no less relevance, the technology transformation has continued to offer journalistic information new languages, means and formats, with algorithms and artificial intelligence as the latest guests on a long list of transformations to which information has had to adapt. And, lastly, we

must mention the latest crisis affecting the self-same nature of news, the one arising from the fact that in an era where there is more information than ever, the risks of misinformation and information disorders have multiplied.

In the endeavour to respond to all of these challenges, this monograph looks at the transformation of news in the hybrid media system from four different angles. The first section, "The transformation of the concept of news and changes in the media industry", addresses the conceptual changes to have taken place in recent years in the news market and in the mass media industry, and at the way its exponential growth has also given rise to an increasing digital divide and unequal access to information.

In the second section, "New formats and platforms for news content", an analysis is made of the innovative formats and contents to which journalistic information has adapted in the media, in its constant struggle to adapt to the new information environments and platforms, while creating new visual formats and multimedia.

The third section, "Online news and information disorders", describes the malfunctions to have taken place in the information ecosystem as a result of the appearance of myriad actors and the unbounded dissemination of contents, and the way the media and journalists combat these threats.

Lastly, the fourth section, "The impact of news on pluralism and the quality of debates", highlights the effects on society as a whole, based on the description of the important part played by information in conceiving democratic societies, and the way it can debase or condition dialogue in the digital public sphere.

The authors would like to extend their sincere gratitude to all of the people and institutions whose help has made this work possible.

# Section 1

## The transformation of the concept of news and changes in the media industry

# Introduction:
# Are people ready to pay for the news?

Fernando Zamith

(University of Porto)

The question posed by Javier Díaz-Noci and Laura Pérez-Altable in the first chapter of this book is not only entirely pertinent as a nowadays question, but it is crucial for the future of the media industry to find an answer to it. After several attempts —most of them failed— to find a sustainable business model for this digital age, the media industry has been betting in recent years on convincing readers to pay for their news consumption.

Díaz-Noci and Pérez-Altable describe two movements that have gained strength in recent years in the media industry: the implementation of different kind of paywalls —the most applied— and the membership models, like the one used by *The Guardian*. Subscription models are increasingly growing, but with very dissimilar results all over the world. In some countries, like Spain, readers are not yet sufficient prone to pay for news. Like Pérez-Arozamena and Odriozola-Chéné enhance at the third chapter, younger generations tend to move away from traditional media, preferring to focus on alternative media and other new media actors, such as activists and celebrities. And accessing these new digital players is usually free.

In the second chapter, Ana Serrano-Tellería, Arnau Gifreu-Castells and Laura Pérez-Altable highlight the recent data from the *Digital News Report 2022*, which point to a further fall in confidence in journalism, after having risen in the previous year, largely because of the pandemic and the felt need to seek credible news. This trend is accompanied by another one: the progressive (and irreversible?) migration of readers from websites and news applications to social networks, especially those preferred by young people, such as Instagram, Telegram and TikTok.

For the authors, those trends are reversable, but to regain trust and to reactivate the relationship with the audience, the legacy media outlets need to return to the value of a good story (empathy, emotion, and solutions), using the most appropriate genre, language, and format.

At the current transition to hybrid, networked systems, Serrano-Tellería, Gifreu-Castells and Pérez-Altable suggest a set of transmedia ideals, values, and logics, to add to the ethical and deontological code of the fundamental values of journalism: (a) authenticity, credibility and transparency; (b) creativity, innovation and originality; (c) plausibility, quality and trust; (d) the importance of belonging to a community or society and feeling like part of the solution (journalism); (e) cultivating collaboration among professionals, projects, and users; moving from hyperlocal and local issues, scopes, and perspectives to those that are global; (f) enhanced user experience; (g) 360º augmented-virtual-mixed reality, internet of things, artificial intelligence, and big data; (h) interface design and information architecture-SEO; (i) media integration or combination (critical selection) and media literacy.

Finally, Rosa Pérez-Arozamena and Javier Odriozola-Chéné contribute to this analysis by referring the "side doors" (social networks, direct searching, and content aggregators) that are being used as the preferred way of consuming news, especially for those under 35 years old.

In this new hybrid media system, "outsiders in journalism" or "peripheral actors" emerge, in the form of bloggers, activists, programmers, hackers, web analytics managers or designers. Can those new actors be a threat to the (traditional) professional journalists/journalism? Can we be able to distinguish them? And —more important— can the audience be able to distinguish them?

As the authors point out, "whatever happens in the hybrid context, we should not forget this core idea: journalism serves people and not the other way around".

# Financing the media.
# In search of reader (and Google) revenue models, and its impact in news consumption

Javier Díaz-Noci & Laura Pérez-Altable

(Pompeu Fabra University)

While the media industry as we know it (as well as news reporting, its main product and activity) continues to undergo a broad range of dramatic structural changes and finds itself obliged to face, collaborate and compete with many other agents within a new hybrid media system (Costera-Meijer, Rogers, Westlund & Witschge, 2021), the framework under which news reporting and the media industry operate is being restructured at the expense of characteristics that have defined the discipline of journalism for the last four centuries. Conventional media outlets, long considered the fourth power in democratic societies, now constitute only a part (not necessarily central) of a broader media system characterised chiefly by its hybridity and media are fighting for a seemingly battle to preserve their historical role as creators of public opinion and gatekeepers of the news.

We aim to examine the nature of the transformation the media industry is undergoing in a hybrid media system through the prism of its main product (the news) as well as the legal, professional, and business ramifications of this shift, to determine the ways in which the structures under which the media function have been altered, paying close attention to the economic and, most especially, the legal aspects of these changes in Spain and submit this information to a comparative analysis, to examine the role played by public sector entities and the effect of their private-sector interventions in the market (i.e. by means of subsidies to legacy media). Finally, it is our intention to study how legacy media organisations, especially those in Spain, are reacting to this structural crisis, as well their lobbying efforts, paying special attention to the pressure they exerted on EU entities to ensure that "press publishers" rights' were recognized in the European Union's Copyright Directive for a Digital Single Market.

In this chapter we intend to explain the latest movements in the media industry during the last five years, specially two related ones: the implementation of different kind of paywalls, specially from 2020 to our days, and, to a lesser extent, of membership models (a model preferred by *The Guardian* and, until 2022, by e*ldiario.es*). In this respect, during the last years, and especially from 2020 onwards, at the same time that the world was under a massive lockdown ordered by authorities due to the COVID-19 pandemics, the media industry, namely the legacy media and especially the large newspaper companies- the same that were actively lobbying in Europe and in other parts of the world- were trying to reverse a strategy of offering all contents for free from the very beginning of the Web editions in 1995. We examine the different types of subscription and membership models, from the most porous to the hardest ones. As a provisional conclusion, we advance that many media all over the world, especially in Europe, and also in Spain, are going decidedly towards a hard model, although some great media, specially in the United States (*Washington Post, The New York Times*) can afford a more flexible one, because of the volume of their subscribers worldwide. In this respect, not every media can allow for themselves such a successful strategy (previously explained by Usher, 2014, and Nafria, 2017) like the one designed by the *New York Times* in March, 2022, in the document entitled *The essential subscription for every curious, English-speaking person seeking to understand and engage with the world*.

This is a result of a more general movement: media industry, especially legacy media —newspapers, namely—, remarkably from 2008 onwards, are seeking for reader revenue models in order to adapt themselves to the decline of the printed advertisement model which has been dominant from the eighteenth century onwards, and which has characterised the industrial journalism. In a period of post-industrial journalism and of a hybrid media system, facing a substitution technology and the power of giants such as Google, which are in a dominating position in the advertising market, media companies are desperately trying to find a sustainable economic model. But, at the same time, a major question arises: Are people ready to pay for the news? Is this deepening the digital divide or digital gap?

## Paywalls (and other subscription models)

There are many business models, out of a combination of financial sources (profit reinvestment, raising equities or stocks, baking debt) and revenue sources. The first part is extremely interested, and it related to the form of ownership of the different media companies. At least, we distinguish three main forms of media property:

1. Private ownership (families or media moguls have control of the company's stock, but it may happen that financial entities are in control).
2. Public ownership (the company is listed in the stock exchange markets and there is no family or media mogul in control, but a myriad of small or financial shareholders own the company).
3. Mixed ownership (the company is listed in the stock exchange markets but there is still a family or a media mogul in control).

Some other financial sources are possible: charitable and public funding can adopt many different forms (for instance, the particular case of the Scott Trust behind *The Guardian*), from rich philanthropists to crowd funding, from objective governmental aid to public subsidies that are politicized.

This will be a matter to be analysed in the next future. Financial money (banking loans mainly) has become a core element in many newspapers' business models in the recent past. For many this has substantial consequences on the degree of journalistic independence. New young native-only newspapers are trying to avoid this source of funding to protect their independence and avoid banking debt. When revenues and profits are not enough, a loan is used instead. This practice was carried out massively by the whole industry in the Western countries for many years and is at the roots of the 2007-2015 crisis, in which the printed media lose more than two out of three readers —or, more properly speaking, clients who paid for the news—, more than 10 million readers in Spain. Many of them migrated to the online editions, of course, but the income they bought when going to the newsstand has never been the same.

We will concentrate, however, in this section exclusively in revenue sources. So far, advertisement has been, from the advent of the industrial journalism established in the second part of the nineteenth century, the main source for media companies (this includes institutional advertising, by the way), alongside with direct paying —or even taxes, in the case of the public broadcasting corporations—, added value, commerce, private donations, public subsidies and other complementary revenue sources. This has dramatically changed with the Internet. Many legacy media did not trust on the future of the World Wide Web editions, so they decided to give their contents for free on the Internet, and at least until 2004 many digital editions were simple shovelled contents from the printed editions of newspapers and magazines, and audio-visual contents from televisions. Broadcasting is a different business model, benefited by the reductions of the geographical barriers and the possibilities of combining synchronous and asynchronous consumption (archives, on-demand services).

Some early attempts to make people pay for the news failed, except in the case of the economic press, for instance *The Wall Street Journal*, now

a generalist medium. Prisacom, the company then in charge of producing all the digital contents of the Spanish trust Prisa, including those of the digital edition *elpais.com*, then *elpais.es,* failed to implement a paywall between 2002 and 2006, and only returned to have benefits when they came back to be free, after accumulating a loss of more than 19 million euros. After that time, Unidad Editorial, the publishing house behind *el-mundo.es* (both *El País a*nd *El Mundo* have traditionally fought to be the most consumed media outlet in both the printing and the online editions in Spain) created Orbyt, a platform for subscription, and Vocento Kiosko y Más, another platform joined by other Spanish media to vehiculate PDF contents. But it was not until 2019-2021 that many Spanish, European and American media decided to stablish paywalls. The way went from free content to freemium models (where some specific contents are free, some others are not) to subscription models, from metered ones (where the reader has access to a number of items a month, once they reach that number they are required to be subscribed) to full paywalls, losing porosity in the path. Even hybrid models, in which some specific contents (for instance, those related to the pandemics) are free and some others are nothas been generally abandoned. Sponsored content, for instance related to technological innovation, is still important.

Many media have combined a paywall with another strategy —once clickbait and real-time link measurement in newsroom strategies have been massively abandoned—, which is the internal recirculation of contents within media. This is a strategy to prevent abandonment and news avoidance, but it has not been able to prevent access to the news from other sources and gates, which was defined as "incidental consumption of news", those that are not searched for directly in the media but that reach the user, mostly young people, through recommendations from digital social networks (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi, 2017). The concept has been developed and investigated through other techniques, such as eye tracking, by Vergara *et al.*, 2021. Subscription models have been proposed as barriers to prevent hate speech (Paz-Rebollo *et al.,* 2021), since they enhance quality - but, on the other hand, they may cause inequality in access to quality news as well, and an unbalanced news consumption due to social classes and unequal incomes. We will develop this a little bit further in another section of this paper.

Membership is, to some extent, an alternative model implemented originally by *The Guardian,* so some members accept to pay as early birds for getting some relevant news before anybody else in exchange of financing the medium. This model was adopted originally in Spain by *eldiario.es*, a digital daily news site created in 2012. Some Latin American media have adopted membership model during the first times of the COVID-19 pandemic as well (the so-called *COVID-19 bump effect*), sometimes after us-

ing crowdfunding, with different results (see Alarcón, 2021). Normally, at least in Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico Peru or Chile, the media that have go to membership models are not legacy but independent ones, and they are getting only a percentage of the total income through it (Oliver, 2021).

It is obvious that not all the mechanisms guarantee journalistic independence in the same way, and this is another topic to be further investigated as well, or at least, what is the perception that journalists have of the impact of the adoption of such reader revenue sources —and of automated journalism as well— in their jobs. The degree of interference may vary a lot but the type of owners and the interests they have may be very influential on media. If owners are financially-driven, the newspaper's main priorities may be revenues and profits alone.

## Legal movements

Alongside with the implementation of paywalls —more specifically, subscription models and membership models; subsidies have been also analysed in this project, especially the paradigmatic case of Catalonia in Spain— media have made a clear pressure on aggregators, namely Google, to get some profit in exchange of the reproductions of snippets —and of ranking the news through algorithms— changing copyright laws. The great newspapers have been very actively lobbying for more favourable copyright laws, both in the European Union, where the *Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market* was passed in 2019, and its subsequent current implementation process until 2022 in all the state members of the continent, and in Australia, where the *News Media Bargaining Code* (2021), a model for the ongoing Canadian reform as well. The greatest newspaper companies are trying to oblige Google and Facebook to negotiate with the media industry employing different legal instruments, with unequal results.

The movement to make Google pay, started some years ago (see Díaz-Noci, 2014, 2015a and b, 2018), has made their differences evident in a comparative perspective. France has managed to do it, while Brazil, for instance, has found it far more difficult, since it is a quite concentrated media market (Viana, 2022). France has traditionally been quite successful in forcing Google to negotiate and let the America giant pay media companies in exchange of using their contents in concept of news aggregation. The so-called *Autorité de la Concurrence* accepted in November 2019 the complaints against Google by both the Syndicat des Éditeurs de la Presse Magazine and France Press news agency. A first decision was adopted in 2020 (*Décision 20-MC-01 du 9 avril 2020*), and in June 2022, the Competence Authority imposed Google an obligation to proceed in good faith

(*bona fide*) and negotiate with the media some compensation, otherwise an arbitration directly supervised by the public administration would be compulsorily applied. This is a very similar solution to the one enacted in Australia in 2021 by the *News Media Bargaining Code*. Besides, and that is an important issue, Google has accepted to give away data about anything that any media indexed by the searcher may indirectly generate.

In this respect, the *Directive 2019/790* is being enacted in 27 members states in the EU. It was incorporated to the Intellectual Property Act in Spain in November 2021. At the same time, many major players were building paywalls for their digital editions. Some other countries, for instance France or Germany, have already did the same legal movements. In the French case, a negotiation between press publishers and Google was forced. In Spain, the collecting society Cedro sued Google, and a first decision came in 2022, favourable to the plaintiff. In Australia, the *News Media Bargaining Act*, although with some changes forced by Facebook before it was enacted, went in the same direction: Google and Facebook, addressees of this legal instrument, were supposed to be forced to negotiate with the media or to accept, otherwise, a mediation imposed by the government.

A first legal analysis of the Spanish modification of the *Intellectual Property Act* needs to take into consideration the freedom of negotiation, which means that Google is negotiating different agreements with each media company, in exchange of confidentiality clauses whose terms will be opaque. The adoption of the *European Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market* by the Spanish government in November, 2021, brought as a consequence the return in June 2022 of Google News —waiting to implement a further version of it, News Showcase, foreseen during 2022 as well—, once Google began negotiating with at least one hundred media in Spain, a good number when compared, for instance, with France, because at the same time, June 2022, Google was negotiating with approximately 150 media companies. Google decided to cancel Google News in Spain after the reform of the *Intellectual Property Act /TRLPI 1/1996* in 2015, boosted by media groups such as Vocento. Vocento, leader of the greatest regional press conglomerate in Spain, is decidedly against negotiating with Google, and it is behind the creation of News Media Europe, so far the most active lobbying association in favour of the press publishers' rights —and interests. Many media —Vocento and, to a lesser extent, *La Vanguardia*, are the exception to the rule— seem to be happy with it, and they argue that it will force Google to make its algorithms transparent, regarding the way they rank the news they aggregate.

The celebratory approach insists that the return of Google News —or of its successor, Google Showcase— will be beneficial for traffic (specially,

but not only, for small media). It is to be checked to which extent it is also beneficial for all great companies, for final users and for journalists, who should receive a proper compensation in exchange of aggregators using the news they are the authors of. At the same time, even Facebook is sure that the news that work best are those related to entertainment and lifestyle, not hard news.

Despite the legal efforts done to force Facebook or Google to compensate the media for using their contents in aggregators, many of those media, even the digital-born, independent ones are very dependent on those American giants in terms of audience. Tania Montalvo, deputy editor-in-chief of the Mexican *Animal Político* digital news site said in 2021 that "to be a digital [publisher] is very complicated. To have an audience you have to wait for Google to recognise you or for Facebook to decide you exist," (*apud* Oliver, 2021). Actually, this is confirmed by a study conducted in the United Kingdom by CJ Project: many local news' consumers know of them through Facebook rather than accessing directly the media that primarily produce them (Barclay, Barnet, Moore & Townend, 2022).

On the other side, the non-celebratory approach warns against the low traffic Google will generate in Spain. According to some research, Google will pay only 30% of the clicks, which means 20M euros (5% less than in Germany or France). Some journalists' associations have warned against the influence this movement may have on freedom of speech. So, in an open way —it is quite soon to answer these questions, since the *Directive* is currently under implementation in many countries in Europe— some questions arise. From at least 2014-2015, when such movements began with the (unsuccessful in practical terms) reform of the German and Spanish Copyright Acts, many scholars have wondered to which extent is an ancillary right the best way to deal with it. On the other hand, it is unclear whether making Google and Facebook pay for using the contents produced by media companies (and, never to be forgotten, by individual authors, who need to be fairly compensated) is sufficient as a complement for reader revenues, and whether are such revenues working well. The terms of negotiation between media companies and Google will remain opaque and probably subjected to confidentiality clauses, which might also raise suspicions between companies. So, we need to do further research on this particular aspect as well, may these legal changes mean inequal agreements (and unfair competition)? Last but not least, will those legal movements be able to prevent a dominant position of Google and Facebook (the companies where digital ads have gone to, more than 50 per cent in 2020), in spite of, or favoured by a diversity of media's responses?

**Does the search of reader revenues sources have an impact on equal access to digital news?**

Another effect to be considered is to which extent these movements are creating an inequal access to news and digital information. Are we assisting to a decline of the active audiences' role, as explained in a previous research project? We fully agree that "social inequalities have always shaped news consumption" (Kalogeropoulos & Nielsen, 2018).

The general framework was advanced at the beginning of our research project (Díaz-Noci, 2019). Since the nature of news is that of a commodity, the nature of information has dramatically changed due to digitisation, like it happened in some other cultural industries, e.g., the music recording industry. Since 1994, except for several media —namely, those disseminating economic information, e.g. *The Wall Street Journal*— decided to give all contents for free, so the reader was used to an unlimited news diet. Since this is not a sustainable model, many media decided to start charging for news. It is uncertain to which extent final users are happy with this solution, and, moreover —and it is to be developed in further research projects—, whether this can end up provoking a gap in news consumption. The results of a survey and some focus groups we have conducted at the end of 2021 in Spain go in this direction, and are consistent with some findings advanced by Masip *et al.* in the Newsnet Seminar of 2020: differences are related to age, training level, social class and income level, and are consistent with some other surveys, namely that of Kalegeropoulos and Nielsen, 2019, and Lindell, 2020. The effect of the pandemic may also result in an overwhelming information flow —or a perception of it by users, as suggested by a recent study published by a Spanish newspaper (*La Razón*, 2022).

News consumption is changing. Some companies have identified the most recent trends, for instance Froomle, which in 2022 was able to identify the common behaviours in news websites of Africa, North and Central America, and Southern Europe, to find out that news items, especially local ones on politics and sports are the most recommended products by media (Steisel, 2022).

In this respect, we will advance some of the results of a combined focus group + survey in Spain (2021-2022) on, precisely, this topic: willingness of Spanish people to pay in exchange of news (a commodity) and attitudes towards the consumption of news in the digital age, a hybrid media system and a post-COVID-19 scenario.

Actually, after analysing a complementary focus group set of sessions performed in the last term of 2021 in Spain for our project, we are able to advance some interesting results. In the current paradigm of informa-

tion consumption, the traditional media (TV, press and radio) appear as referents of news generators and information quality. However, the digital world and social networks have transformed the context of news consumption and the role and power of the media. Social networks present a wide range of information and news that traditional media outlets are used to offer exclusively. As such, they are considered to offer more information and voices of both very low and excellent quality and credibility, and more independent than traditional media. The key is considered to be knowing how to identify this quality and follow media and people with high credibility, as well as knowing how to contrast information.

The possibility of being informed is seen as more accessible than ever, with information within reach and free at any time. Paying for news or subscribing to a media outlet does not offer any added value, with some very specific exceptions. For this reason, social networks are the main media through which the first impacts and headlines of news are received, although, with the exception of Twitter, social networks are not generally considered to be a solely informative medium. However, they do have some characteristics that make them highly valued information channels. These include the concentration of diverse sources, the convenience, since news arrives effortlessly once preferences or who to follow have been determined, the dynamics of the social networks themselves are news (trending topics, viral news, opinions...), the presence of their own voices: current affairs personalities, politicians, etc. make statements on Twitter without going through a media outlet, and immediacy, especially on Twitter, the first way to find out the news. In general terms, there is a tendency to have a negative view of the Spanish media. They are considered partial and non-objective, markedly ideological, sensationalist, repetitive, manipulative, with a high presence of opinion, and little depth. It is aligned with the latest findings on why so many people is still reluctant to pay for news (Groot Kormelink, 2022) and why they even avoid some news (Lindell & Mikkelsen Bage, 2022).

Although this is a criticism addressed to the media more than to journalists, all of it makes hard for the Spanish consumers of news to be ready to pay for the news. The general tendency is not to pay for news. Many readers have the idea that news items will be accessible in some other media later without paying, because there is an abundance of information, an idea developed by Pablo Boczkowski in his latest book. Spanish readers, in general, think that advertising is the way through which media already get most of their revenues. Exceptions are mainly men aged 30-49 years old who subscribe to the economic press in print (*Cinco Días* and *Expansión*) and men aged 20-29 years old, left-wing and subscribers to alternative media both in print and digital (*El Salto, Revista Salvaje, Visual Politik*) as a commitment to the independence and subsistence of the medium.

## Future trends

The future of media financing seems to be clearly digital. In June 2022, Martin Sorrell, president of s4 Capital, said that in 2021 60 per cent of the global investment in media was done in their digital editions. Subscription models are increasingly growing, with very dissimilar results all over the world. Spain, for instance, is one of the countries wich, according to the latest *Digital News Report* by the Reuters Institute is one of the less prone to pay for news. A forthcoming study based on a national survey done for our research project corroborate this assertion.

The Spanish media are not positioned, so far, at the forefront of profitability and subscription growth. The Argentinean legacy newspaper *Clarín* is the only Spanish-language online media in the top-ten ranking of subscribers all over the world, with 414,000 people paying for the news: the first three media in this ranking are from the United States (*New York Times*, 7.6 million subscribers; *Wall Street Journal*, 2.8 million subscribers, and *Washington Post*, 2.7 million subscribers), and the rest are British (*The Economist*, *The Guardian* and *the Financial Times* have, as for 2022, one million subscribers each, approximately, *The Telegraph* half a million)[1], one Japanese (*Nikkei*, 812,000 subscribers) and one German newspaper (*Bild*, 812,000 subscribers). In France, *Le Monde*, a company with a simplified stock-holding structure has more than 400,000 subscribers, 28 per cent of its total income (48 million euros in 2022) and it is planning to reinvest profits on the digital edition. France is a country in which some serious concerns on the ownership of media and its impact on freedom of speech have been put in the public debate (see Cagé, 2015 and 2020, and Cagé and Huet, 2021). In Spain, only *ElPaís.com* has more than 200,000 digital subscribers, an increment of 33 per cent during the last three years, Unidad Editorial and Vocento gathered more than 100,000 subscribers each, but the fragmented landscape of digital media was only able to gather in April 2022 750,000 digital subscribers. The digital readers are much more: in Spain, in March 2022, according to the official audiences data audited by Gfk DAM, and considering that the Ukrainian war stimulated the demand of digital news, *ElPaís.com a*nd *ElMundo.es* only had an average of slightly less than two millions readers each. The distance between readers and payers is huge, and poses a major question: which kind of news are consuming those readers who are not paying for a subscription, and how are their news consumption habits?

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[1] At the time of implementing paywalls, media consumers in the United Kingdom (52 per cent) were still reluctant to pay for them, according to a study conducted by YouGov in 2020.

Inequality in access to the journalism profession —some social classes would be better represented than others— is a very interesting derivative indeed, and probably necessary to provide a more complete picture of the issue we address in the near future (Gill, 2013). Unequal opportunities in access to media industry ownership and concentration is another major problem affecting information supply and demand (again, Couldry & Rodriguez, 2016). It would be very naïve to think that digitisation has eliminated the problems of capital concentration. In this sense, as Elena Vartanova and Anna Gladkova highlight, "the logics of profit have dominated in the global economic perspectives" (Vartanova & Gladkova, 2019, p. 211). It is more than likely that the automation of journalistic jobs and the introduction of artificial intelligence will only complicate job insecurity in general (Alonso, Kothari & Rehman, 2020) and journalistic job inequality in particular. However, this is not, interesting as it may undoubtedly turn out to be, the subject of the study presented in these pages.

In the future, it is important to check the attitudes that different population groups, according to the usual statistical segmentation variables —which does not, by the way, avoid that of economic income, which we consider crucial— show towards the digital diet (Van der Meer & Hameleers, 2021), to confirm to what extent we are faced with patterns that reflect a digital divide in information consumption, which other studies have already detected, at least for some digital networks (Pérez-Altable, Serrano-Tellería and Fernández-Planells, 2020) and for a certain type of information, in this case political information, which also highlights gender differences (Sánchez Meza & Besalú Casademont, 2020; Castro *et al.*, 2021). It is obvious that there is a gender digital divide, and that other variables, such as age, also play a role (Azcona *et al.*, 2020). To some extent, this forces us, as researchers, to consider aspects such as message segmentation in the digital (or hybrid) media environment, as indicated by authors such as Slaets, Verhoest, d'Haenens, Minnen and Glorieux, 2020, which is a question to be developed in further research projects. It will interesting to link that question to the so-called *wraparound effect* which helps, according to Whitney Phillips, to "cements people's belief" (Phillips and Milner, 2021). Let us include as a crucial factor in the modern news consumption the so-called "news fatigue" and there we have the perfect storm (Groot Kormelink & Klein Gunnewiek, 2022). As some scholars have posed, an audience-based research means a turn in journalism studies, although it may also pose some dilemmas (Swart *et al.,* 2022), focusing not only in news media organisations, but in some other producers — and disseminators— of news, which is consistent with some of the trends drawn by the research project we are involved in and whose general preliminary results are presented in this volume. Time and further research will tell.

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# Media logics on the Internet: Actors, spaces and newsmaking

Rosa Pérez-Arozamena & Javier Odriozola-Chéné

(European University of the Atlantic)

Legacy media are having to adapt to the new forms of consumption of their audiences. In the digital context, these audiences are increasingly accessing through "side doors" such as social networks, direct searches or content aggregators instead of direct access to media websites (Newman *et al*., 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 & 2021). This practice is even more common among younger users: accessing news through social media has become the preferred way of consuming news, especially for those under 35 years of age (Newman *et al*., 2021). In this new digital environment, legacy media have to compete, not only with other non-news content (Newman *et al*., 2021), but also with other actors such as alternative media, politicians, activists, celebrities and even anonymous individuals who acquire the ability to fix the informative attention of users. Thus, it has been observed that, while in some social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, the legacy media maintain the hegemony of information, in others, such as Youtube, Instagram, Snapchat or Tik Tok, they are already being surpassed in terms of their capacity to fix media attention by new media actors such as celebrities (Newman *et al*., 2021).

In the context of this reduction of media power attention due to the emergence of new media actors, what are the media doing? That is, how are journalistic production and journalistic routines changing in the context of a hybrid media system?

## The hybrid media system and the interaction between older and newer media logics

Three decades ago, when traditional media outlets began to move online, the practice of journalism began to be based on "the intensification of social interconnections, which allows apprehending the world as a single place, creating a greater awareness of our own place and its relative location within the range of world experience" (Reese, 2010).

In this way, the media ecosystem is transformed, blurring the distinctions between the professional and the citizen (Reese, 2010). The former audience is becoming increasingly intertwined with all aspects of the news, as sources, content creators and disseminators and users (Anderson *et al.*, 2014), causing the traditional control of news by media organisations has changed (Anderson *et al.*, 2014). Journalists have lost the monopoly of news production (Anderson *et al.*, 2014; Fidalgo, 2009; Eldridge, 2020), due to the emergence of new media actors who adopt non-traditional approaches to gathering, verifying, and communicating information, and succeed in bringing information to public light (Eldridge, 2020).

This coexistence between new and traditional media actors has led to the development of a "hybrid media system based upon conflict and competition between older and newer media logics but it also features important pockets of interdependence among these logics" (Chadwick, 2013). Ward (2010) speaks of a layered journalism, in which coexist professional journalism performed as a full-time, paid, exclusive, specialised job in newsrooms in institutional media companies; professional journalism performed as a full-time, specialised job in new media (online) outlets, such as news sites and blogs; journalism performed as an amateur part-time activity in individual or collective news sites and blogs, as well as in institutional media companies; and journalism performed as a "citizenship practice", on an informal and casual basis, contributing to broaden and expand the sources of information used by old and new media (Ward, 2010). It should be noted that, in the last decade, user-generated content (UGC) has been encouraged by the context of the economic crisis because of the possibility of producing stories at no cost (Nicey, 2016).

Since the beginning of these processes of coexistence and cooperation, several changes are noteworthy (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009):

— Changes in the workflow mean more work because the professionals have to attend to more tasks and adapt to more media.
— Transformations in information-gathering practices due to ICT, mostly.
— Acceleration of times, because of the need to constantly refresh the websites.
— Convergence between broadcast and print media to get multimedia content.
— Existence of peripheric actors (Chua & Duffy, 2019) who appear as Agents of Media Innovation (MIA).

About these elements, that improve and innovate the practice of journalism, Lewis and Westlund's (2015) work is remarkable: the so-called MIA Theory. They develop the characteristics of four elements; the four

A's: human actors, actants represented by nonhuman technology, audiences, and activities —news production, distribution, and interpretation— through which all of them are interconnected.

Some other scholars have developed the characteristics of journalists linked to the development of new soft skills- mindset, being networked, personal branding —and new hard skills— specialist knowledge, data and statistics, understanding metrics and audiences, coding, storytelling, project management (Anderson *et al.*, 2014).

Moreover, these changes not only provoke changes in the news cycles (Chadwick, 2013), but also in the self-perception of journalists who, under a practice of journalism that is more open to citizen expression (Reese, 2010), place the highest value on their role of citizens' spokesperson as opposed to other classic roles such as disseminator of objective information, the watchdog of governmental activities or the "citizen oriented" role, based on the journalist who provides the necessary information to understand reality or to make political decisions (Berganza *et al.*, 2017).

## New media actors: strangers in journalism, interlopers and peripheral players

As we have mentioned before, according to MIA Theory, human actors (journalists, technology specialists, and business people), technological actants (algorithms, networks, and content management systems), journalistic activities and different kinds of (segmented) audiences have interrelated in ways that blur the boundaries between production and consumption, between the professional and the non-professional, and between intra- and extra- organisational spheres (Lewis & Westlund, 2015).

This competition is not entirely new for journalists in mainstream media as, historically, these journalists have coexisted with other professionals who differentiated themselves by publishing alternative accounts and interpretations of political and social events according to a perceived underrepresented agenda in the mainstream media, relying on alternative publishing routines via alternative media organisations or through channels outside and unsupported by the major networks and newspapers (Holt *et al.*, 2019).

However, the type of media actors is diversifying in the hybrid media system, particularly since Web 2.0, with the development of a new role of the user as a content producer that "allows a change in the relative position of journalists and audiences, from a one-way, asymmetric model of communication to a dialogical kind of journalism, through which news production becomes a collective endeavour" (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009).

Several "outsiders in journalism" or "peripheral actors" emerge, such as bloggers, activists, programmers, hackers, web analytics managers, designers... who, by adopting technologies, have opened up new [and challenging] ways of contributing to news production and distribution (Chua & Duffy, 2019; Holton & Belair-Gagnon, 2018).

Among these strangers, special mention should be made of the interlopers a category of new media outsiders who identify their work as journalism and themselves as journalists, challenging the status quo of traditional journalism, and speaking directly to the specific public they recognize as their own through digital media like blogs and independent websites (Eldridge, 2020, p. 15). The work of interlopers challenges the boundaries and traditional approaches of the journalistic field by gathering, verifying and publishing information in a way that differs from the traditional production process of legacy media (Eldridge, 2020). These changes lead to a lack of social recognition, despite their self-identification as journalists (Eldridge, 2020). In any case, in their relationship with journalists and traditional media, the proximity —physical, temporal, professional or control— of these new actors is a key factor in the recognition of their work and in the appropriation of innovation derived from their actions (Chua & Duffy, 2019), causing a gradual transformation in journalists and legacy media as they interact with the new actors (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015).

## How do the legacy media assimilate the new logics of production?

The relationship between journalists and new media actors began to develop with the arrival of the figure of the blogger, and immediately, differences in content, work processes, tone, values and format were observed (Lowrey, 2006), creating a tension between tradition and change in the journalists' everydays practices (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009). It is clear that just as journalists are seeing some of their routines changed, new media actors "may at times open the door to the field by introducing new ways of doing journalism, and at others, they may sit just outside the field's boundaries for going against its norms and ideals" (Eldridge, 2020).

These early interactions between professional journalists and bloggers highlighted how efforts to normalise or redefine blogs could change the nature of traditional journalism (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009). This is just one example of how journalists routinely appropriate the genres of social media sites and hybridise them with their pre-existing routine professional practice (Chadwick, 2013), displaying their strength in gathering information, framing original stories, interacting with sources and audiences, and applying ethical principles intrinsically associated with the pro-

fession (Anderson *et al.*, 2014). However, it is necessary to keep in mind that in this new hybrid media system based on the combination of old and new logics, hybridisation has an asymmetrical character as the logics of older media continues to powerfully shape journalistic practice, although it is important to underline that this domain is again contingent and prone to fracture (Chadwick, 2013).

In short, the emergence of these new media actors has not only led to the loss of journalists' monopoly on the processes of journalistic production, but the new actors' novel ways of developing the process of gathering, verifying and disseminating information in order to bring information to the public are studied by journalists, some of which are incorporated into their professional practice (Eldridge, 2020).

Accordingly, when news is consumed on smartphones, is ubiquitous, spreads faster than ever on the net (social media, platforms, or online media) by new actors, and is shaped over and over again by algorithms and human consumers, which we know as "news" and "news values" is expanding. In fact, these values change constantly because of social, economic, and tech evolution. In this way, in research, we might observe "the persistent challenges and confusions surrounding the concept of news values" (Paulussen & Van Alest, 2021). Regarding that, we could notice that news values fluctuate through the context and the moment. We found numerous studies about this issue beginning with the classic classification of Galtung & Ruge (1965) to Harcup & O'Neill (2001, 2017). The discoveries of Harcup & O'Neill (2017) emphasise that news values change through time. Nowadays, social media impacts the selection of news. This fact entails audiences having a direct and indirect influence on the gatekeeping process. So much so that the public might be considered secondary gatekeepers (Singer, 2014). Audience behaviour is linked to their likes, shares, and comments impacting news content and its visibility (Paulussen & Van Alest, 2021). On the other hand, the audience affects newsmaking through semi-professional amateurs. Especially in soft news, in other words: user-generated content or UGC (Nicey, 2016).

Finally, concerning the audience and its impact on news production, it is worth noting the contribution of Singer *et al.* (2011). They establish five stages for analysing public participation: access, selection, process, distribution, and interpretation. This is the way prosumers (Toffler, 1980) act, so they have to be recognized as primary communication agents in this ubiquity and hybrid society. In the future, they will play an integral role in remediating the Internet (Islas-Carmona, 2008).

All this leads us to wonder how valuable Arianna Huffington's prediction is nowadays: "The future [...] combining the best practices of traditional journalism —fairness, accuracy, storytelling, deep investigations—

with the best tools available to the digital world —speed, transparency, and, above all, engagement" (Huffington, 2013).


## Yesterday, today and tomorrow

Like every other sphere in life, journalism is alive. There is no other option since we use it as an instrument in our lives. It is as a necessity to inform, educate, and entertain. Those everlasting values that were BBC's founding principles when John Reith created it in 1922 (Wade, 2021) are still alive. Thus, journalism changes over time, as we explain in this chapter. The characteristics of traditional journalism persist, despite the influence of ICT, new actors, spaces, and routines.

By doing so, yesterday's practices have been modified, improved, they have progressed, but never forgotten. Therefore, they enclose current values. One of them, accuracy, is becoming increasingly important. Since the US 2012 elections, fact-checking has become a prominent aspect of campaign news coverage (Uscinski & Butler, 2013). The number of initiatives has increased extremely in the last ten years. FactCheck. org (founded in 2007) and PolitiFact.com (founded in 2003) are websites that protect candidates and politicians from misinformation. In addition, Poynter's International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) was established in 2015. Nowadays, it has 102 international verified signatories to its code of principles (IFCN, 2022). Obviously, accuracy has always been an ethical basis in journalism, however, within Internet appearance and misinformation and disinformation phenomena this reality increases[1]. "Accuracy is more than an ethical issue; it serves to define the journalism profession and its societal role" (Currie-Sivek & Bloyd-Peshkin, 2018). So, the commitment goes beyond fact-checking, a practice which has limitations (Walter *et al.*, 2019) and it will be necessary for journalists' work explaining, interpreting, and contextualization against platformisation and polarisation (Pérez-Curiel & Rivas-de Roca, 2022). In other words, as the European Commission points out, disinformation erodes trust in institutions and in digital and traditional media and harms our democracies by hindering citizens' ability to make informed decisions (EC, 2018; CE, 2022), so journalism might fight an *infodemic*, which brings an emergent populism within high levels of fake news (Crilley & Gillespie, 2019).

Despite this, one of the practices brought out the Internet: speed, occasionally seems to hit with accuracy (Brautovic *et al.*, 2020). However,

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[1] Please, read MIT's research: "The spread of true and false news online" (Vosoughi *et al.* 2018)

Brautovic (2020) highlights the main reason for the lack of precision: the use of secondary instead of primary sources; the mistakes transcended national boundaries and time/speed played only a minor role in their emergence and correction, etc. The Internet contributes significantly to news coverage in terms of speed and immediacy (Suárez-Villegas & Cruz-Alvarez, 2013). This challenging fact faced us with a live account of reality in which the information travels immediately through the network. For this reason, we talk about an accelerated era, as Williams and Srnicek mention in their #Accelerate Manifesto (2013). Leaving behind Politics and Philosophy, immediacy has impacted journalism and citizens are sceptical about the information (Newman *et al.*, 2021). Likewise, bad news which involves the elite —governmental, institutional, and economic elites, plus celebrities (Carlson, 2016)— travels fastest in the digital ecosystem (Buhl *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, journalists may reinvent messages and routines choosing slow journalism as a reaction to information devaluation due to immediacy (Romero-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2021).

In any case, speed is a basic characteristic of the internet and permeates everything. Today we discuss great phenomena based on it. Concepts such as Attention Economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Goldhaber, 1997), Platform Capitalism (Srnicek, 2016), Platform Society (van Dijck *et al.*, 2018), and Surveillance Capitalism (Zuboff, 2019) explain our lives in terms of immediacy. So, our approach to speed should not be apocalyptic (Eco *dixit*), since it is an irrefutable fact: the net began a disruption and it is unstoppable. In addition, speed, immediacy, and simultaneity explain actual news consumption and the way the audience uses ICT and communicates themselves (Keightley & Downey, 2018).

Notwithstanding, constant updating crashes with one of the most necessary and traditional traits: investigation. In contrast, we must understand it not as a dichotomy, but as a merger, an opportunity for both practices to live together with. Bradshaw, in 2007, already described in his News Diamond model the convergence between speed and depth. The model represents a process, not a product. In his own words: "the story that is forever unfinished" (Bradshaw, 2007, paragraph 24), or rather iterative journalism.

On the other hand, investigative journalism is rebuilt through collaborative journalism (Coelho & Alves-Rodrigues, 2020; Konow-Lund, 2019). Well-known Panama Papers (2016) and Pandora Papers (2021) are both initiatives of research on cross-border ICT collaboration, which help journalists to share risks or efforts, for example. Thus, dividing up resources, time, and networks fix the opposition between speed and depth investigation, creating a new routine for this practice.

Digging into investigation leads us to another hybrid practice: transparency. Currently, we could find a trend in the media to explain the jour-

nalistic process. Beyond fact-checking and its own steps, which are usually explained, we must enlighten initiatives that place professionals in the middle to describe their work. The media performs interviews, reportages, and documentaries to explain journalistic tasks. Therefore, the process of making news is open to the public as contingent upon perceptions of the news media's importance —PNMI— (Peifer & Meisinger, 2021). Transparency has been embraced by academics, journalists and the public as well. It has been completely established so it has been included in ethical guidelines (Vos and Craft, 2017). Furthermore, Gallup/Knight Foundation (2018) finds evidence from the general public that transparency is considered an important element influencing trust. Despite that, it seems that transparency is not a panacea (Koliska, 2015). There is Swedish research that suggests transparency has very limited reach as a cure for declining trust in, and the trustworthiness of, journalism, possibly since the acts of transparency themselves remain non-transparent (Karlsson, 2020). In this way, looking towards the future, considering the audience's position and its needs and preferences might be the way to enrich, to innovate in those practices and strengthen trust and credibility (Haapanen, 2022).

In addition, transparency improves engagement (Curry & Stroud, 2021; Javidiani, 2018). It is important to point out that we understand this concept as audience engagement which "refers broadly to exchanges between journalists and audiences. Journalism scholars and practitioners often use the term to describe interactions between news producers and the people they attempt to reach with their coverage" (Belair-Gagnon *et al.*, 2018, p. 559). And it seems one of the most important attributes in media journalism currently, however not only through social media and transmedia practices (Nelson, 2018). About the hybridization and the own remediation of social media, it is no longer just about publishing content, but improving the engagement with the audience, prosumers who want to participate and co-create (Moya & Moya, 2018). In this way, World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) Trends Outlook 2021-2022 shows journalism that puts people at the centre of the topics being covered can contribute to improving conversion rates or news performance, and help increase trust. Thus, it is remarkable how paywalls[2] are improving engagement (Pattabhiramaiah *et al.*, 2021). Media emphasise audience choices and preferences as Reader Center from *New York Times* does (Nafría, 2017). Paid content strategies include newsletters, which are increasing their popularity among audiences and they are springing up as a method to access news (Newman *et al.*, 2021). Newsletters from *Financial Times, Boston Globe or The New Yorker,* represent classic case studies already.

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[2] See chapter Financing the media: In search of reader (and Google) revenue models, and its impact in news consumption (Díaz-Noci & Pérez-Altable).

Then, we focus on an initiative that integrates fairness with this element. We are talking about one of the projects carried on by The Center for Media Engagement. The organisation designed an experiment in collaboration within Trusting News (a Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute and American Press Institute activity). In this project, we could find a proposal about coverage of partisan topics. They added a "demonstrating balance" box that directed readers of a partisan political news story to another story that offered an opposing partisan focus. They collaborated with *USA Today* and the *Tennessean* to test its approach. In the end, the results show that this "demonstrating balance" box slightly improved how people perceived the news organisation, although they admit that the findings were not conclusive (Chen *et al.*, 2019).

Regarding fairness, we must remember that it usually gets mixed up as impartiality. This last one has been imposed as the norm of professional journalism, but it is not possible, so we should be positioned on the criteria of consistency and justification of position-taking (Boudana, 2016), which means fairness. In this manner, we point out that polarisation is higher nowadays in online media (Fletcher *et al.*, 2020; Hart *et al.*, 2020; Tewksbury & Riles, 2015), thence initiatives that present partisan news from a more fair perspective —position-taking explain, accuracy mode— could help online media journalism reputation.

Finally, in a context that is *infoxicated* and polarised, we need new narratives, new patterns to reach out audience in an attractive way. For this reason, storytelling appears as a tool for increasing engagement (Zurita-Andión, 2019), narrating investigations (Cabra, 2016), explaining and showing the public how journalism is done (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007), explaining Politics to young people (Dennis & Sampaio-Dias, 2021) or spreading information on social media (Weber *et al.*, 2018). Going further, we must observe several formats: immersive journalism using storyliving (Bösch *et al.*, 2018; Nugaeva & Mira-Pastor, 2021; Wu *et al.*, 2021), structured journalism, 360° video reports, virtual reality and augmented reality, newsgames, and docugames (Lopezosa *et al.*, 2021) as the future becomes a reality today.

## And then?

Contemporary journalism is a complex subject. Journalistic work becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish from other components in the same system in terms of actors, spaces, and routines. We might affirm undoubtedly that the future will be a hybrid one. Thus, future research must go through the associations among different elements. We should link production and consumption (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009), because of the key role of the audience in a context where they are prosumers.

However, predicting the future is such an impossible task. By definition it is unknown, so we are just trying to contribute with several ideas:

Artificial intelligence (AI) in a scenario of increasing misinformation could be crucial. However, personal critical thinking could not be replaced. Thus, journalism has to explain, contextualise and give meaning to events —which are more unpredictable and complicated than ever. In a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the Russia-Ukraine war, communication emerges as a value in the resolution of conflicts, the well-being of individuals, and the understanding of peoples (Rivera-Betancur, 2022). As well, the Internet of things or 5G technology will determine the newsmaking and journalism studies at the university (Masip *et al.*, 2022).

The ideal-typical core values of journalism will be maintained while new forms of journalism developed in vastly different parts of the world, operating under a variety of material, economic, cultural, and political contexts (Deuze, 2017, p. 17). Thus, future research, when assessing changes in a professional culture, should take into account the influence of aspects such as changes in business models, the relationship of legacy media with public authorities, the regulation of competition in a new hybrid media system, or the regulation of journalists' working conditions (Díaz Noci, 2020, p. 10).

In any case, Journalism —in capital letters— must empower its ethic. Loss of trust is a problem that those new actors, spaces, and newsmaking as a job have to fight and defeat, given that journalism is a public service and, for this reason, uses any practice to reach citizens. Whatever happens in the hybrid context, we should not forget this core idea: journalism serves people and not the other way around.

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# News life cycle and platform logics

ANA SERRANO-TELLERÍA

(University of Castilla La Mancha)

LAURA PÉREZ-ALTABLE

(Pompeu Fabra University)

ARNAU GIFREU-CASTELLS

(University of Girona)

According to *Digital News Report 2022*, the connection between journalism and the public may be unravelling. Trust has decreased following last year's positive increase, there is evidence of a declining interest in news and a rise in news avoidance. This report also looks at audience polarization and explores how young people access news. It found an increase in accessing news via social media.

The report highlights that more people are selectively avoiding news (e.g. 54% Brazil, and 46% in UK). Some avoiders see the news agenda as overly repetitive (politics, COVID-19), and 36% says the news has a negative effect on their mood.

Just a few countries report that trust in the news has increased, continuing last year's COVID-19 related rise (the highest in Finland at 69%). However, trust has decreased in many more countries (it is lowest in the United States at 26%, where low trust is often linked to the vicious political debates). The Russia/Ukraine war has reaffirmed the value of high-quality news. A total 57% think the media have done a good job in keeping the people up to date with the conflict.

Even so, many people still need persuading to go directly to news websites or apps (direct access to websites/apps decreased by 23%, access through social media increased by 28%). Facebook continues to be the most important social network for news, but its influence is declining (36% 2014-30% 2022) as younger users spend more time on newer networks such as Instagram, Telegram, and TikTok.

Spain has a dynamic news market in which well-established print and broadcast brands, both nationally and regionally, vie for attention with highly competitive digital-born organizations. RTVE, the national pub-

lic broadcaster, had a mixed record in 2021, with impressive innovation to face the falling audiences. The group successfully launched an improved streaming service, RTVE Play, the RTVE Noticias YouTube channel reached 1 million subscribers within two years, and Playz, its platform for younger audiences, won an Ondas award for quality entertainment. Nevertheless, the report data showed that RTVE's weekly news audiences have decreased by three percentage points (pp) both offline and online.

Spanish publishers are looking for a new relationship with tech platforms after the country changed its online copyright laws in line with new EU regulations. Publishers have made good progress in boosting online revenues, after the widespread adoption of digital subscription models in 2019 and 2020.

Online measurement in general has had a shake-up with a new provider (GfK) taking over in January 2022, with a 15,000-strong panel and fortnightly data focused on consumption per user (rather than per device), thereby giving more importance to reader time and loyalty in an attempt to penalize clickbait. Podcast use (41%) is one of the highest in the report survey, with YouTube (30%) and Spotify (26%) growing among podcast users, while Spanish providers iVoox (19%) and Podium Podcast (4%) remain stable.

*Digital News Report 2022* ends its summary of key findings with the following questions. The Ukraine conflict, inflation, and the continued impact of the pandemic have led to some serious questions for media companies: How can the media counter news fatigue and low trust? How can the media engage with younger and other hard-to-reach groups who prefer accessing news via social media? How can they rebuild the connection between journalism and the public they seek to serve?

## News Life Cycle

In the *Hybrid Media System* (Chadwick, 2013 and 2017) the struggle to reach, maintain and retain the audience's attention as well as its active, involved participation, is divided between agents of very diverse origins, natures and different technological characteristics. The design of the interfaces that group, manage and promote this interaction is therefore a fundamental step and strategy for every kind of media.

The concept of news, current affairs and information has been adapting and evolving (Franklin & Eldridge II, 2017; Witschge, Anderson, Domingo & Hermida, 2017; Eldridge II & Franklin, 2018; Steensen & Westlund, 2020; Costera Meijer, Rogers, Westlund & Witschge, Díaz-Noci & Serrano-Tellería, 2021) in this *Hybrid Media System* (*ibidem*) where the liquidity of the media and the technological systems that sup-

port them facilitate their expansion and diffusion, but also weaken the borders that allow the content to be grouped and classified into its various rhythms, scales and levels.

From there arises the concept of the *News Life Cycle* (Serrano-Tellería, Jin & Arroyo, 2019), a proposal that seeks to describe the concept of news, current affairs and information in the *Hybrid Media System* and the liquidity observed in the media ecology and in the technological environments that design, structure and influence them. The design of their interface is also essential for understanding them.

Therefore, the concept of *News Life Cycle* arises from the combination of three fundamental axes: the *Hybrid Media System*, liquidity in the media ecology and its technological environment, and the interface design. The concept seeks to unite these three defining branches to describe how the news, the current affairs and the information are defined, connected and function together.

In this framework, we provide continuity to the ethical and deontological code of the fundamental values of journalism, to which we add a set of transmedia ideals, values, and logics, either because they are shared, continued, or required, or because they are part of the characteristics and demands of the current media ecosystem (Serrano-Tellería, 2019, 2020).

Therefore, in today's interconnected world, we suggest that transmedia ideals, core values and logics can offer a suitable framework for embracing the current transition to hybrid, networked systems:

a)  Authenticity, credibility and transparency
b)  Creativity, innovation and originality
c)  Plausibility, quality and trust
d)  The importance of belonging to a community or society and feeling like part of the solution (journalism)
e)  Cultivating collaboration among professionals, projects, and users; moving from hyperlocal and local issues, scopes, and perspectives to those that are global;
f)  Enhanced user experience
g)  360º augmented-extended-virtual-mixed reality, internet of things, artificial intelligence, and big data
h)  Interface design and information architecture-SEO
i)  Media integration or combination (critical selection) and media literacy

Therefore, the concept of *News Life Cycle* is defined as the period from the publication of a piece of news (which may also include other types of information and/or content) until the moment in which it is de-

cided to end it. This period, in the Hybrid Media System and its ecology as well as a liquid technological ecosystem, is likely to lack this purpose since the news item (information and/or content) may be constantly or sporadically updated, both voluntarily and involuntarily.

The design of the interface that encompasses the different layers of information, update rates, consumption, and dissemination, as well as the active and passive participation of the audience, is essential for facilitating and promoting the different phases, scales, and levels both in the journalistic routines of creation, production, and dissemination and in the aforementioned active and passive action, interaction and dissemination of the audience.

### *News Life Cycle* in social networks

The information ecosystem and access to information are changing rapidly and this has an important impact on the *News Life Cycle*. Society is moving from a traditional news cycle dominated by professional journalists to a more complex information cycle that incorporates ordinary people into the process (Bergström & Belfrage, 2018). Moreover, the consumption of news on mobile media means that there is a simultaneity of channels and devices (e.g. traditional television, mobile phone, digital social networks such as Twitter or Instagram, radio, etc.). This change in the way news is consumed in the digital world in general, and in social media in particular, has an impact on the life cycle of online news. Therefore, the constant accessibility of news makes its life cycle shorter and news becomes obsolete faster than in the past.

According to the research by Castillo *et al.* (2014), when we talk about the life cycle of news on social networks, we should distinguish between two types of news: breaking news and in-depth articles on a specific topic. In general, the lifecycle of a breaking news item is usually shorter, and many users just reproduce the headline when they share the news on social media. In contrast, in-depth articles tend to have a longer social media lifecycle and more sustained user response over time, leading to a more in-depth conversation between the users of the digital platforms. In relation to breaking news, it is important to note that social networks are one of the main media where users receive the first impacts and headlines of the news. However, Twitter aside, digital social networks are not considered solely informational media. They are also a means for keeping updated about entertainment and communication.

The abundance of media options is a central feature in today's information environment (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the issue of inciden-

tal news and the selective exposure to news are two crucial concepts in the life cycle and logic of social media news. According to Fletcher *et al.* (2017), digital environments characterized by selective exposure are accompanied by more incidental exposure via social media. But when we talk about incidental exposure on social media, it is important to bear in mind that we are doing so in the age of datafication and platformization. Therefore, these platforms operate within algorithmic logic and the content selection is shaped not only by user preferences and news gatekeeping processes but also by the dynamics of platforms themselves (van Dijk *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, current configurations of platforms, users, and news organizations appear to be designed to reinforce existing patterns of attractiveness to news (Thorson, 2020, p. 12).

## Approach to interactivity: degrees and types

Throughout the 20th century and especially the 21st, journalism has been adopting and migrating towards certain forms of narrative expression, such as interactivity, transmedia narrative and immersion. From the initial written form and later audiovisual form, in the 1990s and driven by digitalization and media convergence, hypermediality and interactivity burst into the journalistic field to propose new possible scenarios of representation.

The concept of interactivity, and especially its application to narrative, has been forged from key contributions in the field of communication by authors such as Marshall Mcluhan (1964 and 1972), Espen Aarseth (1997), Lev Manovich (2001), George Landow (2005), Henry Jenkins (2008), Janet Murray (1999 and 2012) and Carlos Scolari (2008 and 2021), among others.

The key to using interactivity in an effective and balanced way lies in knowing its different fields of application and their respective structures, i.e., knowing how to connect a set of mechanics used by interactive scriptwriters, information architects, designers and developers to establish and manage interactivity throughout the narrative discourse. Once the essential concept of what is understood as interactive in the digital realm has been delimited and defined (although definitions vary according to author and era), efforts in recent years have focused on delimiting an operational set of functional structures to be applied to different information and narrative systems (Berenguer, 1998 and 2004; Ryan, 2001 and 2004; Ruggiero, 2020).

Xavier Berenguer (1998, 2004) compares interactive design with the profession of "story choreographer", proposing three degrees of in-

teraction depending on the level of user involvement: "strong interaction" (1), characterized by the intervention and modification of the narrative through the user's active involvement and participation (such as video games, simulations, performances generated in real time, etc. ); "medium interaction" (2), which demands an active response from the user without too much complexity, ideal for regulating the pace of information assimilation (such as documentaries, journalism, education, museums, etc.); and "weak interaction" (3), which is characterized by a reactive use of language, i.e. the user reacts to a given stimulus (such as reading a book, selecting movies on streaming platforms, looking up a word in the encyclopaedia, etc.).

Berenguer associates three degrees of interaction with four typologies of non-linear narrative: "'branched narrative" (1), whose model of medium interaction follows the choose-your-own-adventure format through a narrative with twists and turns where one option directly excludes the other possibilities; "interrupted narrative" (2), a typology that uses strong interaction based on an adventure-game format in the style of building one's own story; "object-oriented narrative" (3), where the combination of the evolution of certain parameters and the narrative factor is decisive, as in role-playing games; and finally, a fourth type called "conservative narrative" (4), which has weak interaction and opts for a linear, sequential model, avoiding breaking the diegetic-extradiegetic balance of the narrative.

Another author who makes a noteworthy contribution in this field is Marie Laurie Ryan. Ryan also proposes four degrees of interactivity (2005), which in some cases are similar to Berenguer's proposal: "peripheral interactivity" (1), based on exploration, and with no ability to modify the predetermined story (similar to Berenguer's "branching narrative"); "interactivity affecting narrative discourse and story presentation" (2), whose actions direct the order in which content is displayed; "interactivity creating variations in a partly predefined story" (3), by acquiring the role of a character and their progression in the story (similar to Berenguer's "interrupted narrative"); and "real-time generation of the story" (4), where the user is placed within the narrative and the story is created in real time, partly by their actions and partly by the system (similar to Berenguer's "object-oriented narrative").

From the delimitation of the four types of interactivity, Ryan goes a step further and proposes a classification with nine different types of interactive structure. This has become one of the most accepted and consolidated proposals coming from academia: "The Complete Graph" (1), where the user can move through the entire structure bidirectionally; "The Network" (2), where circuits are generated through which the user can move in two directions and the user can decide the end of the

story; "The Tree" (3), a tree-like structure where the user decides where to move at pre-established moments of branching off; "The Vector with Side Branches" (4): minor branches are added to a main path (vector) to deepen the story, but always returning to the main vector to advance the story; "The Directional Network" (5), which presents sections connected as in a flowchart, allowing a bidirectional navigation that can have several endings; "The Maze" (6), whose labyrinthine structure allows the user to get lost in the network of infinite possibilities; "The Hidden Story" (7), a combination of visible and hidden sections which, when combined, allow the narrative to be reconstructed; "The Multiple Storyline" (8), which allows the user to define their own path and change their point of view at certain moments in the narrative; and "The Action Space" (9), where the user chooses a world from a universe that contains its own narrative.

In the development of her proposal, María Laura Ruggiero (2020) explains that it is crucial to follow the classical narrative structure par excellence in order to define the key aspects, that is, an Aristotelian scheme organized in three acts whose arc can correspond to a scheme defined as "Monomyth" thanks to the contributions of Joseph Campbell in relation to the structure known as the "hero's journey". From delimiting this initial plot (or not necessarily), it is possible to jump into other types of structures such as: the "parallel structure" (1), which contains a presentation and different options with plots that never touch; the "branched structure" (2), where the user makes decisions to be able to advance but excludes other paths; the "fish skeleton structure" (3), which allows the user to follow a narrative and make some exploratory detours of themes and then return to the main path (variant of the branched structure); the "gamified accordion structure" (4), which proposes a free-roaming exploration, but delimited in space and skills to achieve certain objectives; the "explorable experience structure" (5), where an empowered user can explore and move freely through the space interacting with people and objects; the "non-gamified 360 narrative structure" (6), in which the user is free to choose their view and what they see, which makes each experience unique and different; and the "gamified VR structure" (7), in which we start to superimpose layers that include immersion, interactivity, gamification, etc.

In addition to interactivity, another form of expression that combines with this is the one proposed by immersive narrative. Janet Murray (1999), using the holographic space of the Star Trek series as a metaphor, defines immersion as the part that makes it possible to incorporate dramatic aspects into the relationship with the computer. She breaks it down into two fundamental qualities: spatiality, which is the ability to show us spaces through which we can move; and encyclopedism, which is access to an ordered and unlimited data system. For Murray, the ultimate goal

of immersion would be to offer the user an unmediated experience. The transparency and invisibility of mediation and hyperrealism are not distinctive attributes of the digital environment, but in this case and according to Lev Manovich, "the real break is the introduction of a synthetic moving image, with interactive 3D images and computer animation. With these technologies, the viewer has the experience of moving through a simulated three-dimensional world; something we cannot do with an illusionistic painting" (2001, p. 246).

## Approach to immersion in journalism and provisional types

If we focus on the current interactive and immersive journalism, we observe that, according to several authors, journalistic activity on the Internet could be characterized by including elements such as hypertextuality, interactivity and multimedia (De Kerckhove, 1999; Deuze, 2001), although other authors also value the inclusion of other additional elements (Stovall, 2004; Paul & Fiebich, 2003). Another format that has shown its potential for incorporating multimedia logics in the field of digital journalism is the news report (Díaz Noci, 2001; Díaz-Noci & Salaverría, 2003; Salaverría & Cores, 2005; López García, Gago-Marino & Pereira-Farina, 2003; Larrondo, 2009 and 2010). Immersive journalism has also been addressed by several authors (Domínguez, 2013; De la Peña *et al.*, 2010; De la Peña 2011) and has gained new momentum during the last few years in the United States thanks to the efforts of the group "Immersive Journalism", led by Nonny de la Peña and Peggy Weil, in addition to other initiatives.

For immersive narrative, a provisional classification can be established according to the existing realities; however, the development of this type of categorization is not as advanced as in interactive narrative, as it is a field in the process of experimentation, expansion and consolidation. Starting from the "represented reality" (1), based on a linear reading of the content we have already described (reading a book, watching a movie, listening to an audio, etc.), a set of interactive narratives can be deployed. A set of realities mediated by digital technology unfolds, which we describe below only as an indication: "alternative reality" (2), games that make use of reality and its physical and virtual mechanisms where participants become the protagonists of an adventure; "augmented reality" (3), a set of techniques that allow virtual elements to be applied on a representation of physical reality; "virtual reality" (4), an environment generated by digital technology that creates the sensation of immersion (being inside) in the user; "mixed reality" (5), which merges a real environment with virtual elements; and "parallel reality" (6), a new space that we can inhabit and whose exponent could be the concept of "metaverse", made up of environments where users undergo experiences and interact through avatars.

### From traditional journalism to the platforming of journalistic practices

The isolation produced by the coronavirus pandemic has modified certain dynamics of coexistence since March 2020, when containment measures began to be applied worldwide. One of the most determining factors that has accentuated this change in dynamics has been the advance of the virtual sphere, which has begun to dominate the world of work, interpersonal relationships and entertainment (Quiroz, 2020).

In relation to information consumption, this fact has increased the differences between two generations: the so-called generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), which opts for television as a reference medium, and generation Z (born between 1981 and 1996), which prefers social networks for information. These data, presented in the study "Millennials vs Generation X" by IAB Spain (2019), emphasize how the younger generations not only use social networks and online platforms to communicate and keep themselves up to date with news, but also dedicate a large part of their free time to sharing videos, listening to audios, imitating others, playing and competing, etc. (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2019).

As an informative and communicative practice, journalism has also been affected by the new consumption logics of the different generations, and has found it necessary to adapt its discourse to the new times. Today's journalism is mediated by the technological advances of the late twentieth century, a time when a series of contributions from engineers and mathematicians became instruments and languages establishing what we now call the digital environment. This new scenario, which allows representation through information bits, is characterized by offering digital content for rapid consumption, the convergence of the media involved and a gradual change in cultural consumption habits. This is especially noticeable in the new generations, described by Marc Prensky (2001) as digital natives.

These new generations, who have grown up and have been formed within the digital space, have transformed their consumption logics if we compare them with those of the so-called "digital immigrants". With the emergence and development of the digital ecosystem, traditional media (press, radio and television) have been adversely affected, losing space in favour of new proposals conveyed through video and audio streaming platforms (OTT), video games, mobile applications, extended reality, etc.

As a consequence of the above, a new communicative structure is currently being configured in which a set of new species have proliferated and are transforming the ecosystem's own habitat in accordance with the theory of media ecology (McLuhan, 1964). Roger Fidler (1998), in enunciating his theory of Mediamorphosis, describes how the media have been forced to respond to a series of transformations due to cultural changes and contact with

new technologies, exposing six fundamental principles that support this logic: co-evolution and coexistence (1), metamorphosis (2), propagation (3), survival (4), opportunity (5), and necessity and delayed adoption(6).

This new habitat, with new laws and species, corresponds to the concept of "platformization", a dynamic that began with Web 2.0 and, according to Zang (2021), extends a new paradigm of communication based on the logic and architecture of the platform and the associated network automation. Several of this author's conclusions in his research into journalistic practices point to the emergence of a set of new logics derived from this new environment, such as the need to generate linguistic applications, narrative classification and methodological conversion in relation to the automatic curation of news.

It also affects the implications of artificial intelligence in journalism and the need to distribute and monitor news 24 hours a day, incorporate interactive and communicative actions, flexible and immersive personalization and interactive embodiment (Zang, 2021). All these dynamics, which have close links with news and information, although they may already exist to a lesser degree, are now enhanced by the logics imposed by the platforms that disseminate them.

## Interface design and platform logics

As the news is changing its nature and form, interface design has taken on exceptional relevance (information architecture, interactivity, and usability) as an intrinsic consequence of the need for an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach from all angles: academy, media literacy and profession. This requirement has also been determined by other disciplines related to Human Computer Interaction, Neuroscience, Psychology, Sociology, etc. in the *Liquid Media* and the *Liquid Society* (Serrano-Tellería, 2017a, 2017b). Furthermore, after some famous scandals concerning social media, there is now a demand for an Ethics Code for Interface Design (Serrano-Tellería, 2018).

Thus, despite lacking a wide variety of fully developed transmedia journalism projects worldwide (Scolari, 2013; Freeman, 2017; Rampazzo-Gambarato & Carvalho-Alazamora, 2018; Freeman & Rampazzo-Gambarato, 2020; Rampazzo- Gambarato, Carvalho-Alzamora & Tarcia, 2020), the dynamism and production process have been incorporated and followed at different levels and scales as artist, journalists and other media makers and professionals have started to experiment and incorporate different media (cross/multi/trans) in the context of converging media industries and digitalization. The transmedia documentary is one of the main genres explored (Vázquez-Herrero & Gifreu-Castells, 2019).

## Social media platforms linked to news consumption

The paradigm of information and news consumption is in a moment of continuous change and reformulation, mainly linked to the development of the internet and new technologies and the use of social network platforms and their logic. According to Yang *et al.* (2020), we can say that digital platforms have changed the way citizens access news. Active audiences (Masip *et al.*, 2019) now have more choice and flexibility when it comes to consuming news.

If in the past the personalization of information was limited, since the formats were closed and, therefore, limited to the selection made by the outlet media, the current moment is characterized by an absolute customization, both active (selection of media, channels, schedules) and passive, through algorithms that make suggestions according to the users' interests. In this sense, and within the logic of platforms, it should be noted that, in addition to finding anonymous actors or experts transmitting information on digital platforms, there is another dimension that must be taken into account when we talk about news and social networks: algorithms and their impact on news consumption. In algorithm-driven media platforms, people seek information less actively and the phenomenon of selective exposure thereby becomes increasingly automated on these platforms (Ohme, 2020). In general, when an algorithm operates within a given platform it adjusts the content that users receive (in this case, information) based on their history and preferences, general trends (an example of this would be Twitter's trending topics) or more or less explicitly sponsored interests. We can distinguish two types of information search: an active search (e.g. searching for a specific news item on the web or social media) or a passive search (e.g. when a user finds a news item on the timeline of a social media). In this sense, the concept of incidental news is particularly relevant and the incidental consumption of news in social media has risen in recent years, particularly among young people (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi, 2018).

Among the platforms linked to news consumption, Twitter is the social network most closely linked to information and current affairs. In fact, for some users, it is the only and main way of accessing information and, in this way, being informed. Two points should be highlighted about news consumption on Twitter. First, we have the maximum immediacy of the news. On some occasions, news can be consumed on social network before it is even published by news agencies and, of course, the media. The second factor to take into account when talking about Twitter is the mix between opinion and news. On one hand, Twitter allows access to the news published on the social network through hyperlinks to web pages; however, on the other hand, as users can react by posting their comments

on the social network, reactions, i.e. opinions, are also included in the news published. Therefore, Twitter offers access to the news, but also a digital space for debate and an exchange of opinions about the news.

The other social network that is currently the benchmark for accessing information is Instagram. This network, unlike Twitter, presents a particular pattern: information and socialization converge in the same social network. News is presented on the users' timeline together with personal information about the people the user follows in this social network. Therefore, the concept of incidental news, mentioned above, takes on a vital importance and sometimes means that users do not distinguish between the act of consuming news, i.e. staying informed about current events, and the act of socializing on the social network. Therefore, the competition for news is not only the rest of the news published, but also the rest of the content published by users.

Finally, we can find other platforms that also have an impact on news consumption. For example, the WhatsApp messaging platform, which could be the equivalent of analogue word-of-mouth, is also an important platform for news consumption. WhatsApp allows users to share news in a one-on-one exchange, or in a group of friends/relatives, but it does not permit spreading the message for everyone to see like in social media such as Twitter (Masip *et al.*, 2021).

Facebook could be considered the equivalent of Instagram, although this social network has recently been falling in popularity, especially among younger people. The most popular platform among young people is TikTok, although the use they make of it is more social than informative. Finally, another platform that is important when it comes to information is YouTube. The informative content of this platform differs from the rest in that on this platform you can find informative content and more extensive and specific information on certain topics than what is available in the traditional media.

## Telling good stories

The organizational structures primarily define the forms of interactive navigation. Each classification analysed contains proposals that stand out for combining a certain linearity with a hierarchical order. A possible effective strategy for using and combining interactive structures would be to use and/or mix a more complex form (with a clear hierarchy and structure) to give freedom to the user and a simpler form (with an evident linearity) to allow a logical and coherent progression of the narrative.

The most commonly used formula in current interactive storytelling consists of mixing structure models, based on a hierarchical and/or linear starting structure and complementing it with other structures that fit according to the type of story being told. In the case of immersive narrative, virtual reality has become consolidated as one of the most used exploratory formulas nowadays. It also attempts to constitute its own expressive language by developing certain immersive techniques, such as the subjective camera, the user's degrees of freedom, dioramas, etc.

However, the typology model, structure or interactive and/or immersive proposal, such as those presented in this work, will not be able to help the project if its narrative is not well constructed and developed. Therefore, the key lies in not starting to build the house with the roof, forgetting about technological fireworks and focusing on knowing how to create, mix and use the basic narrative elements well to tell a good story. First creators should find an interesting theme, refine the idea until they reach its essence (storyline), define the characters and how they will be developed, and weave together the different parts from a conventional linear narrative structure (beginning, middle, climax, end, etc.). Once the foundations of the building are solid, the creators can then begin to determine the adjective or adjectives that will accompany the story, and fit with the interactive/immersive premise: How am I going to make my audience feel and/or experience what I am telling them?

In relation to the typologies, structures and degrees of interactivity and immersion presented, it should be noted that currently several classifications coexist. With the increase in possibilities, new structures are emerging as a result of the pre-existing ones being mixed together. With the arrival and implementation of digital narratives, we begin to consider, in addition to time and space, the dimension of depth when we tell the usual stories in a paradigm that is already outside of the pre-established limits of the traditional media screen.

In this sense, in order to establish the balance between the development of potentialities and the critical use of technology, we consider that the two concepts proposed: the *News Life Cycle* and the *Platform Logics*, help to describe and simplify the complex and liquid process. Defining an ethical and deontological code for interface design, for example, could help establish a balance at all these levels.

The interface design, as a skeleton that unites, hierarchizes and organizes the access, creation, distribution, feedback and participation of both the content and the relationships between all the agents involved, should be intuitive, simple and usable in addition to complying with the code ethical and deontological proposal that stimulates, guides and protects the user, as well as guides the media and professionals on its critical and optimal use.

Recent success stories in both traditional and new media point to good practices as recovering the fundamental values of journalism (quality, specialization) to which we propose adding transmedia ideals, logic and values. These combine the journalistic tradition and seek to promote the critical use of technology through indirect media literacy where the concept of community is fundamental.

This critical and creative use is based on an interface design that serves to manage the various layers of information, rhythms-times and spaces where the relationship with social networks should be complementary, at your service. Regaining trust and the relationship with the audience aims, on the one hand, to return to the value of a good story (empathy, emotion and solution-s) using, for this, the most appropriate genre, language and format.

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# Section 2

# New formats and platforms for news content

# Introduction:
# Platform journalism

João Canavilhas

(University of Beira Interior)

In recent decades we have witnessed an increasing platformisation of society. Said this way, the phrase seems somewhat hermetic, but let's think about our daily lives: we clarify doubts on Google, we post on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, we communicate via Whatsapp, we transport ourselves via Uber, we watch movies on Netflix, we book accommodation on Booking and we buy airline tickets on Skyscanner. Usually, to refer to these online spaces we use words like "website" or "app", but that's just the interface used to access the services: behind them is an online platform and hence we talk about platformisation.

Although the use of this concept is relatively recent, it is not a recent phenomenon based on a technological revolution, but rather on a long process in which some companies knew how to seize the opportunities that emerged following two phenomena: web 2.0 and globalization. In the first case, because it was the decentralisation of online processes that allowed the Web to be opened to a more active participation of society; in the second case, because the concentration of various markets in a single consumption space gave rise to economies of scale with enormous potential. Thus emerged the so-called GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft), the five giants that today dominate the digital economy through the supply of goods and services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated platformisation: meetings on Zoom, teaching on Coursera, shopping on Amazon and food delivery through UberEats are just a few examples of how society has surrendered to platforms, creating a network of dependencies that goes unnoticed and often prevents us from seeing that we live in an oligopoly. Any emerging innovative platform is immediately acquired, as happened with the purchase of Instagram and Whatsapp by Facebook, now called Meta, keeping the market in the hands of this reduced number of technological giants.

And what is, after all, an online platform? In a simplified way we can say that it is a mechanism that uses algorithms to transform data into au-

tomatic responses to requests from users who have subscribed to a particular service. The answers are provided through simplified interfaces that seek to mimic procedures that we already use in our daily lives, thus facilitating a full integration of these platforms into our routines.

The advantages of the platforms are many, of course, hence their success. But they also present some drawbacks because their proper functioning depends on the data we provide them, and the way they have been used for other purposes has already created many controversies related to privacy. From more benign uses, such as commercial ones, to more dangerous ones, such as political ones, there are more and more cases in which platforms misuse our data. In addition, as previously mentioned, the market does not function freely because the dominance of the big technological companies means that they are the ones who collect most of the revenues online.

And this is precisely the case with journalism, which in recent decades has seen Alphabet (Google) and Meta (Facebook) take the advertising revenues that previously went into the media and are now directed to these platforms due to their characteristics. Platformisation has imposed itself in such a way that the legacy media have only two ways out: extinction or digital transformation to meet the new challenges.

It all started in the 90s, with the emergence of the Internet, which immediately weakened traditional media. Web 2.0 and later, the massification of mobile devices, which quickly became the preferred means of receiving news, only further deepened the crisis in which the media were already immersed.

In this new media ecosystem, legacy media saw the birth of new competitors from the GAFAM universe, such as Google News, Facebook's Instant Articles, Apple News, or Twitter Moments, just to name a few examples. From an ecosystem characterised by centralisation, mass distribution of standard content, expensive production and the conservatism of traditional media, we have moved to a decentralised environment where new players that are more flexible and open to users have started to produce multi-format content to distribute in a personalised way and with unlimited access. Always on the lookout for small projects born in this new environment, the technological big five acquired the most successful companies, seeking to have a varied and monopolising offer on the market.

In this situation, the traditional media business models no longer met the needs because the model was based on the sale of information units, interspersed with advertising units. Social platforms have disaggregated the traditional model: they have separated these two types of content and started to (re)distribute the information produced by the media associated with their own advertising.

News now circulates through social networks without there being any context, whether thematic (newspaper editorials) or economic-social (related news and background). The criteria used by platforms to offer us information is based solely on an algorithm that uses advertising and data regarding our consumption habits. This situation has several pernicious effects: first of all, the very decontextualisation of the contents, which makes understanding difficult, but also the potential closure of users in information bubbles. And here is a peculiarity of the platform society: in a global era characterised by the variety and richness of the information on offer, freedom of choice is captured by recommendation systems that lock users into monothematic bubbles.

Another change, motivated by the new social rhythms, was the adaptation of news to mobile reception devices. The news blocks are now shorter (often only automatic summaries), encouraging new consumption habits consisting of short texts or short videos. In this form of push distribution, some content gains more visibility and becomes viral due to the redistribution made by the users themselves within the platforms. The result of this effect is returned to the media through metrics, also produced by the platforms, leading to the replication of this type of content in legacy news outlets.

And it is precisely to respond to the audiences' interest that the production of viral content is gaining ground, establishing in newsrooms a new journalistic culture fed by the success in the metrics that bring new audiences and with them, more revenues. Being a business in danger, journalism has been sacrificing its editorial principles to market rules, increasing the dependence on these platforms that distribute informative content in exchange for metrics that proves a fake media success.

Although the media are the weakest party in this ecosystem, the truth is that these platforms need journalistic content to attract users, so activities are emerging that seek to establish links between the two worlds. Google News Initiative and the Meta Journalism Project are two examples of actions that aspire to create a more diversified, sustainable and innovative media ecosystem, but the specific actions they develop are far from being the salvation of the ecosystem.

It is not simple to counteract the growing platformisation of today's society. It is a process that has been internalised to such an extent that society has normalised it, no longer noticing its presence. More than the media, platforms are the true extensions of Man because they have managed to amplify our senses without us noticing that they are external entities to ourselves. In this process of platformisation, journalism is just another activity plunged into a dilemma: without platforms it dies, with them it withers away. But how long will it resist?

The answer is difficult, but journalism has one certainty: it must know how to respond to the audiences' interest. That is why, in recent years, journalism has followed all the technological trends that are emerging to attract the attention of users. Most of the time, these technologies are associated with online platforms or technological devices that allow the production of new content, with new languages or previous languages remediated. And this is precisely what is discussed in the texts that make up this section.

The first one "Visual and immersive journalistic formats" talks precisely about the new types of contents born from emerging technologies. The second text, "New formats for information. Choreographies to tell the news on TikTok" explores the effort made by journalism to adapt to one of the platforms preferred by audiences —online social networks— with particular focus on the one that has seen the most growth among young people, TikTok. Finally, the third text, "The rise of audio consumption in digital media" is situated in the field of remediation studies by analysing how online media use the native language of radio.

# Visual and immersive journalistic formats

Koldobika Meso-Ayerdi, Ainara Larrondo-Ureta
& Simón Peña-Fernández
(University of the Basque Country)

The media have always striven to find ways of explaining any type of event in a swift and straightforward manner, however complex it may be. And when dealing with processes that last some considerable time and require a greater degree of explanation, large-scale formats have been one of the key elements in engaging audiences in such content.

Since the arrival of cybermedia, traditional journalistic genres have evolved, from the textual basis of the earliest models, to the new forms and techniques with a growing visual content.

Over recent years, the use of big data and technological advances have facilitated the exponential growth of visual stories. The progressive expansion of the different types of software has allowed the media to insert graphics into journalistic content and to enrich their stories with images to a much greater extent than a decade ago.

New, visually enriched narratives have thus begun to deploy their full potential in the coverage of topics covered by large-scale journalistic formats, such as warfare, humanitarian crises, natural disasters, major sporting events such as the Olympic Games, and electoral coverage.

This development of visual and immersive formats has been facilitated by the expansion of data journalism, flexible, gradual and constant redesigns in cybermedia, and task automation (Palomo & Pérez-Monotoro, 2016). Likewise, this discipline has acquired greater prominence as digital platforms have progressively offered increased flexibility and better opportunities for representation, resulting in a growing presence of this type of content in cybermedia (Varona & Herrero, 2021).

Visual formats in cyberjournalism take advantage of technological capabilities to create content presented by means of graphical representation, developing novel narrative strategies. Their goal is to represent reality and to generate storytelling (descriptive, narrative or interpretative) regarding an event (Valero-Sancho *et al.*, 2014). All of which is linked to the concept of the image as an optimal resource to explain, show, engage

and make an event understandable (De María & Rocío, 2020) which enables storytelling by means of visual resources which are attractive, easily consumed, and encourage sharing via social media (Varona & Herrero, 2021).

The term "visual journalism" has typically been identified with the development taking place in the field of illustration and infographics applied to data-based interpretation and storytelling (Garner, 2008; Lankov, Ritchie & Cross, 2012). The development of infographics and information visualisation in cybermedia is specifically linked to data journalism, which has registered a boom thanks to the digital transformation of information and the progressive opening up of major databases.

More and more information professionals make use of statistics and visualisation tools to create and better recount stories in a manner which is both novel and attractive to an Internet audience (Flores & Salinas, 2013). The aim is ultimately for information to reach the public more clearly, with journalists using all manner of multimedia and infographic resources for this purpose (Chaparro, 2014).

In this regard, one of the first initiatives was the famed reportage *Snowfall* (2012) by the *New York Times*, which marked a turning point in cybermedia interest in such new forms of narrative. In fact this content, seen as a pioneering work, blazed a trail which was subsequently followed by the digital editorial teams of other media outlets (Gifreu, 2015).

In the current digital communication ecosystem, intensive use is made of information visualisation in journalistic offerings, making them one of the main narrative approaches to tell stories (Freixa *et al.*, 2017). Visual content takes on core importance, and thanks to its narrative and analytical power, helps to attract and retain new users (Pérez-Montoro, 2016). This discursive and narrative nature, alongside communicative intentionality, allows us to bring in a new typology of information visualisation product, to be found in cybermedia.

Alongside the more traditional forms, then, such as tables, graphs, maps or infographics, this new taxonomy also includes items which have emerged over recent years, such as interactive visualisations, in other words those which give the user the opportunity to explore the complete visualisation based on partial visualisations shaped by users themselves. Similarly, interactive photography is a very useful resource to extend the narrative possibilities of a fixed image (Varona & Herrero, 2021), since users move around a photograph, and begin to uncover added information which is not present in the snapshot.

Another visual resource very commonly employed is the timeline, the purpose of which is to help establish the chronological context for an oc-

currence or event, through the combined use of text, video, audio, maps, graphics, photos, etc.

Still images are also used as a fundamental narrative element to make up what is known as a photostory, a succession of images accompanied by brief texts in the manner of captions, used to recount a story in a swift, visual manner. On occasion, still images may be replaced by an interactive video illustrating the most important occurrences of an event, allowing users to browse through, selecting those aspects of greatest interest to them. The fact is that video has been adopted by the electronic media as a new and powerful narrative resource format (Jódar-Marín, 2019).

The new formats also include transmedia visualisations, in the sense of single narrative propositions which are released and distributed via different media platforms. One example of this would be series broadcast by TV channels which are simultaneously supplemented by the narrative account offered in the different episodes through video, text, etc. released via the channel's website.

However, visual journalism means much more than data journalism. Visual journalism has rapidly expanded and it is increasingly common to see journalists, programmers and designers working in unison. Such collaboration has resulted in a host of different narrative propositions, ultimately now resulting in the countless examples present today, covering a wide range of genres and formats. Combine this with the proliferation of tools which are being developed to provide information professionals with a straightforward way of creating a visual narrative, and it comes as no surprise that visual journalism has seen a manifold increase in its cybermedia presence.

One may, then, find examples of new journalistic formats which help the different media to recount a news event in a more attractive and effective manner. These more immersive options, which encourage greater interaction, allow the audience to take on a role that goes further than that of mere readership (Pastoriza, 2022). In such immersive journalism, which extends beyond visual formats, the content is controlled by the user, who builds their own account through their own decisions. (Usher, 2016).

Immersive formats, then, go a step further than visually enriched genres, since one of their key elements is active participation by audiences in the process of constructing the journalistic narrative. The key thus lies not in the visual representation of a large volume of data, nor in the use of technological tools to create the content, but in the way in which audiences can actively immerse themselves in the narratives shared with them, so as to develop a participatory and distinctive experience.

Influenced by the aesthetic and narrative of videogames, then, immersive journalism has, for example, given rise to formats belonging to what is known as gamification, a different way of presenting content which enhances user motivation and encourages participation (García & García, 2018).

Different media have incorporated gamification as a strategy to increase news consumption, with the aim of improving engagement, using narratives that strengthen intrinsic motivation for this purpose, turning the act of reading information into a fun, pleasant activity (Przubylski *et al.*, 2010).

As an example of their growing presence, one can even distinguish between different types of gamification format, such as serious games, docugames, reality games and political games, each with their own features, but all based on the idea of exploring the fusion between journalistic practices and videogames to generate new communication strategies (Martínez Cano, 2016). They use traditional elements for this purpose, such as texts, photographs, illustrations, colour, combined with the sound, moving images and interactivity permitted by new technologies (Gónzalez Diez *et al.*, 2019).

Those journalistic formats most actively engaging audiences also include immersive virtual narration, the application of which began somewhat over a decade ago within the context of non-fiction (De la Peña *et al.* 2010). Since then, given the lack of consolidated standards for production and consumption (Jiménez *et al.*, 2017), academic output regarding this matter has focused on raising awareness of the challenges and implications of this possibility at the epistemological level.

Immersive journalism also covers visual stories such as wraparound or 360° videos recorded using omnidirectional cameras, as well as more complex visual narratives produced with specific software and 3D technology, as in the case of Virtual Reality (VR) products, with an aesthetic and narrative similar to simulation videogames. This last possibility entails greater production costs and editing time. It also requires special devices in order to be consumed, such as glasses coupled to a mobile terminal (as in the case of Google Cardboard or Samsung Gear VR), or more advanced VR devices comprising controllers and headsets, such as Oculus Rift and HTC Vive. The need to conceptualise immersive journalism has led to the recommendation of the term Virtual Reality (VR) for this second product type, bearing in mind that 360° videos allow a lower-impact immersive experience (Cantero, Sidorenko & Herranz, 2018).

Whether in the simpler or more complex version, this type of visual narrative serves to convey real happenings, events or scenes in which the public can place themselves or be present in a virtual sense with differ-

ent roles. As opposed to other visual informative formulae or types, then, immersive non-fiction products stand out for their capacity to generate first-person experiences or realistic sensory experiences (De la Peña, 2011; Domínguez, 2015) based on the virtualised presence of the audience at the setting of the events narrated.

While wraparound videos allow one to experience the role of explorer (characteristic of hypermedia consumers) and to browse the scene of the events narrated, in the form of an "active observer" or "passive participant" (Barreda, 2018), advanced VR products allow a productive role or form of intervention in the narrative, deciding pathways, even influencing the events narrated, which make it helpful for the user to be furnished with an avatar or 3D animated character (Colussi & Assunçao, 2020; Engebretsen, 2020; Martín-Ramallal, 2021).

Spatial and temporal immersion eliminate certain psychological barriers, which is why experts see them as having great potential compared with other narratives in terms of generating empathy, entertaining (Barreda, Aleix & Pereda, 2020) and allowing the audience to perceive the events conveyed as genuine, thereby also helping to elicit a more committed response in viewers (Barreda, 2018).

It is precisely by placing the audience on the scene of the information that one facilitates an understanding that is hard to convey through other types of visual or multimedia rhetoric. For example, the immersive technique allows one to include in the narrative aspects of the inner life of the protagonists, information that goes beyond depth to achieve intimacy, lending the journalistic narrative a renewed, experimental or experiential dimension.

Immersive formats in fact seem particularly suitable for those topics that have greater emotional impact, either to represent scenes that users would find it difficult to witness in person, or in general to convey stories where the surroundings are key. Nonetheless, the use of immersive formats has been recommended as a complement, rather than as autonomous elements of information, given their greater potential for entertainment or distraction compared with the main informative focus (Barreda, 2018).

In this regard, in terms of the advantages of an immersive narrative, we should acknowledge their usefulness in generating greater informative depth and engagement, which facilitates cognitive and emotional comprehension of what is happening, and in general processes linked to media accountability. Immersive narratives here present particular implications with regard to journalism's social function and its impact on public opinion. Whatever the case, these impacts have been little explored to date, and greater analyses are required as to the impact of immersive journalism on audience participation and engagement (Lopezosa *et al.*, 2021).

There have to date been substantial efforts to exploit the advantages of immersive journalism, mainly within the context of more profitable media outlets, with a commitment to journalistic innovation (García Avilés, 2021). It has understandably been seen that this could be part of the response sought by the sector in order to reach new audiences in an ethical, effective and profitable manner, mainly the Generation Z and T audience (Martín-Ramallal, 2021).

Thanks to different types of joint venture with technology giants such as Google and Facebook, major media enterprises including the New York Times (Palmer, 2020), the BBC and ABC News (Paíno, Rodríguez & Ruiz, 2019; Paíno & Rodríguez, 2019) have led the development of immersive journalism at the international level. Spain is home to one of the most notable examples, in the form of the 2017 collaboration between the Google Digital News Initiative and El País (Grupo PRISA) for the launch of VR-Infographics.

In terms of 360° immersive journalistic projects, we would highlight the example of "The Displaced", published in 2015 by The New York Times. Such immersive reporting adds a new dimension to in-depth information, by focusing on and allowing for the detailed observation of various aspects of the story, whether children as protagonists, specific settings, etc.

As for advanced VR products, we would highlight such pioneering simulation projects as "Project Syria", produced by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), one of the university institutions pioneering the use of virtual reality (Vaz & Tejedor, 2019). More recent examples allow us to confirm continued progress in the development of this type of immersive digital journalism. This would include the case of "Re-educated", an immersive documentary about the Uyghur internment camps in China, published in 2021 by The New Yorker. The product combines 360° and virtual reality sequences, using eye-witness accounts to present the harsh situation faced by Uyghur detainees. "Living in the Unknown" by Al Jazeera Contrast, the digital and immersive media division of Al Jazeera, would be another example.

In Spain, immersive narratives have been explored in the main by Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE), the corporation which instigated the production of virtual reality content back in 2014, with the omnidirectional video release of the programme Emprende (Canal 24h) (Pérez-Seijo, 2018). Its Audiovisual Innovation Lab, the RTVE Lab, has been responsible for most VR initiatives by the Spanish public broadcasting corporation, mainly based on 360° video. One of the most notable experiments in this regard was the creation of the mobile app RTVE VR 360, and the 360° streaming broadcast on YouTube of the 2020 Goya awards, allowing users to watch the awards ceremony as if they were sitting in the front row, or up on the stage (RTV, 2020).

The Lab has produced other specific immersive reportage projects such as *Ciudades Vacías* and *Vreak*, as well as documentaries, as in the case of *Cervantes VR*, a production which had its own mobile app. At the level of advanced VR, RTVE Lab conducted a pilot initiative with an interactive episode produced for the series *El Caso*, in which the user was able to take on the role of one of the journalists depicted in the TV drama (Varona & Herrero, 2021).

The PRISA publishing group has also played a pioneering role, thanks to the launch in 2016 of the reportage feature "Fukushima, vidas contaminadas" (Benítez de Gracia & Herrera, 2018). Following the example of these initial incursions or first generation of immersive journalism in Spain, in 2016 the feature "Campo urbano/Ciudad rural" was released, as a co-production between the newspapers and television channels El Mundo, ElDiario.es, La Sexta and Cadena SER.

These and other examples may be found on the list of the Online Journalism Awards, which have over recent years bestowed honours on such innovative, immersive creations, in recognition of their capacity to combine technology, rigorous reporting (documentation, in-depth analysis, etc.) and quality, focusing on issues which the most widely consumed information products barely address in their daily coverage.

Immersive journalism thus represents one of the key strengths of in-depth reporting, and what is known as "slow journalism". This also lends a new rhetorical dimension to specific formats of this type of journalism, such as reportage and documentaries, just as previously occurred in the development of hypermedia language and web multimedia, or transmedia.

In short, new journalistic formats on a hi-tech scenario serve to address some of the key characteristics of the hybrid and liquid media system of recent years. In this regard, the techniques, narratives and formats examined throughout this chapter offer an exemplary, contemporary reflection of the type of creative and ethical demands faced by professional journalists, in that they complicate considerations as to what constitutes a subjective relationship with the narrative (De la Peña, 2011). In this complex environment, the analysis set out over the course of this chapter is also symptomatic of the need which exists now more than ever, to facilitate reflection and academic analysis within our context.

In short, visual and immersive formats prove highly representative of the key crossroads currently seen in cybermedia activities, facing opportunities to improve and adapt their developments to changing times (Tribusean, 2020), but also challenges which demand a response, if the aim is to avoid such opportunities becoming a threat to journalism.

First of all, the visual narrative supplied by cybermedia to explain the major events or newsworthy happenings of our day have found a huge ally in social media, in terms of distribution and viral propagation (Weber, 2018). Visual and immersive formats could therefore be one of the keys to greater audience engagement in cybermedia content, in a hybrid environment in which there are now many more different agents generating information, and platforms used for distribution.

Meanwhile, the use of visual and immersive formats likewise represents a challenge in terms of the way they could contribute to an increase in the credibility of cybermedia or the distortion of content (Kool, 2016). These risks would include manipulation, distortion and general alteration of realities, with the risk of recreating events, deepfakes being the extreme example. One could also list other more subtle dangers, however, such as the influence of the journalist in selecting the scene, the undermining of intermediation, or the potential impact of these techniques on sensitive content (violent situations, deliberate pursuit of an emotional and traumatic impact on the audience), as well as the ease with which all manner of sensationalist or voyeuristic content may be generated (Pérez-Seijo & López-García, 2019).

As a consequence, audiovisual formats have a growing presence in cybermedia through different formats, some of which are highly novel and others less so, through audiovisual features which are now really making their mark, supplementing digital media content, and representing a shift in information production methods and the establishment of audiovisual narratives.

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# New platforms for information: Choreographies to tell the news on *TikTok*

Jesús Pérez-Dasilva & María Ganzabal-Learreta

(University of the Basque Country)

The integration of the Internet and social media in our lives has not only changed the way in which we relate to one another, but has also affected the way in which we produce, distribute and consume information (Sterrett *et al.*, 2019). "It is well-known that each medium, irrespective of the cultural diversities which exist in different societies, generates specific relationships and consumption habits with its audience" (Dasilva *et al.*, 2013). In this regard, social media platforms such as TikTok have taken on a prominent role in the acquisition of information, in particular among young people, rapidly displacing what had previously been the pre-eminent information media for their parents. The media and journalists have thus lost their legitimacy as gatekeepers of information with regard to the Generation Z natives, with their mass, intense consumption of content via social media (Jarvis, 2015; Pérez-Tornero, 2020).

According to the Media Navigator report (Kantar, 2021), 71% of young people aged between 16 and 24 receive their information via social media. "This is unquestionably their natural milieu" (Yuste, 2015). Within this context, the combination with smartphones (Van Damme *et al.*, 2020) facilitates incidental news consumption (Yadamsuren & Erdelez, 2016; Gil de Zúñiga *et al.*, 2017).

"Incidental access to information has been one of the typical modes of the public information repertoire in modern societies. Following on from the emergence of incidental news consumption via social media, this type of access to current affairs content shifted from being peripheral and secondary to become central and primary, above all for younger and more connected users (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2018).

So young people are increasingly getting their information via social media, and one of the consequences arising from accessing news on such social media platforms as TikTok is the perception that these digital natives feel that they no longer actively need to seek out news in order to be well informed about current affairs (News Finds Me), as they find the news and relevant information they receive from their social media contacts to be sufficient (Gil

de Zuñiga & Cheng, 2021). "In the past, people kept up-to-date by actively seeking out media to inform them about the latest events. They now feel it is sufficient to be connected to their content feeds and online social media to maintain the same informational goal" (Gil de Zuñiga & Cheng, 2021).

We should, then, not be surprised that the use of platforms such as TikTok has become an important part of the communication strategy of journalistic enterprises. They have realised that they must have a presence if they want to reach and "converse" above all with this younger audience, who are a digital native audience. However, according to Alberto Pachano, director of We Are Social España:

> The most worrying aspect in all this is that users are moving far faster than brands and companies, or at least the vast majority of them. Although many are doing this well, understanding, reacting and even aiming to remain a step ahead, many are still Managing their digital and social environments in accordance with obsolete frameworks, or worse still, do not adapt their "non-digital" communication to what is clearly the reality of these people… A reality with an increasing divide between digital, non-digital, social… and probably even virtual… (Pachano, 2022).

Various studies have recently in this regard focused on the way in which media outlets have begun to deliver news via such platforms as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, TikTok and others. Examples here would include the studies by García-Avilés and Arias (2016), addressing the journalistic genres of the images used by the media to distribute content on Twitter; Negreira *et al.* (2017) analysed the distribution of news via WhatsApp and Telegram; Haimsong and Tang (2018) studied live event broadcasting on Facebook, Periscope and Snapchat; Weber *et al.*, (2018) focused on new formats to deliver information; Kalogeropoulos *et al.* (2018) measured whether readers of online news stories correctly attribute the stories they have accessed online to the media outlets that produce them; Dodds (2019) studied the use of WhatsApp by the media to present information; Boczek and Koppers (2020) explored whether editorial teams employ WhatsApp similarly to other social media platforms, which they have been using for longer, or whether they have developed new practices; Vázquez *et al.* (2019) analysed news distribution via Instagram; Peña *et al.* (2022) who studied media presence on TikTok and the virality generated by media content, and Vázquez *et al.* (2020), who addressed the adaptation of news for TikTok.

## Journalism, media and TikTok

Since its emergence in September 2016, TikTok has become one of the main social media platforms among young people (IAB Spain, 2020), a

group relatively unfamiliar with consuming journalistic information via traditional media (Pérez-Escoda *et al.* 2021), and that tally with what Scolari (2013) defined as liquid audiences. The fact is that TikTok very well illustrates the current media culture and the liquid modernity defined by Bauman (2003), given its implications for communication and audiences. A liquid ecosystem where this audience have a low and volatile degree of commitment and loyalty towards the media (Rojas & Mönckeberg, 2021).

On such a scenario, the media strive to attract the interest of this young audience by adapting the journalistic content to the characteristics of the different platforms frequented by youngsters, as in the case of TikTok. To do so, "the strategy used by the media is to generate the greatest impact, with instantaneous obsolescence, since in order to catch their attention, the contact must be impactful, while at the same time having a fleeting duration, given the obligation to make way for new impacts" (Bauman, 2004). The price paid in this effort is the "shrinking of content" Mönckeberg & Rojas, 2020).

In this regard, there is also space for current affairs information on TikTok, albeit adapted to the creative resources and jargon of the platform. The media adapt to this new communication context, with new, distinctive narratives emerging, characterised by the need to diversify the message across different pieces, as well as the host of media and platforms serving to build and extend stories (Renó & Flores, 2018). New narrative storytelling techniques which demand a high degree of creativity (Arrojo, 2015) to make content viral, thereby fostering interactivity with the audience. In the case of TikTok, one can create, edit and share videos, to which effects or musical backgrounds can be added. It also has the characteristics of artificial intelligence in the application of special effects and filters. The highly viral nature of challenges means that millions of views can be achieved.

All these resources are used by the media, such as the Washington Post, headed by Dave Jorgenson, making it an example of the attempts of various media outlets to deliver journalism by TikTok "making space for themselves among the choreographies, humorous sketches and videos of retriever puppies" (Manrique, 2021). "No specific narrative proposition has imposed itself, although initial observations would seem to indicate that in many cases the chosen option is for content lasting no more than 30 seconds. We find this with USA Today, NBC News and The Washington Post, since the original logic of the platform focuses on short and highly stimulating posts" (Sidorenko & Herranz, 2021).

To reach this young audience, the media find themselves obliged to adopt a laid-back and youthful form of presenting information. According to Emilio Domenech, creator of LaWikly (cited in Manrique, 2021):

"There are certain tools which help engage the TikToker audience, such as using memes to tell the news, or songs to introduce viewers to current affairs". In this regard, according to Peña *et al.* (2022) this "quest for virality and a presence in the continuous stream of videos results in trivial aspects taking priority".

The problem with such adaptations which "dance the news" (Vázquez *et al.*, 2020) is that they run the risk of presenting a distorted view of the journalist. Journalists have become "mood professionals" (Hermida, 2010) and in this sense, where use is made of exaggerated models in which the journalist aims to create a character, and furthermore serving as a source of information, the role of showman (adorning the information with a degree of spectacle) may affect the credibility associated with the profession. Journalists that use TikTok no longer aspire to win the Pulitzer Prize, and on this liquid scenario they are looking for likes, aiming to become a leading source of information for an audience segment that evade them, but will nonetheless be the readers of the future.

There are in this regard various studies that have focused on these new strategies, centred on humour or spectacle, deployed by journalists on TikTok and other social media platforms to "converse" with the audience (Holton & Lewis, 2011; Chovanec, 2011; Molyneux, 2015; Fox, 2018; Ödmark, 2021). Tactics that some see as a means of rejuvenating journalism, while others, such as Filloux (2019), define this as the expression of a dumbing down of the media landscape shaped by the growing dependence on influencers. "Traditional journalism is slowly giving way to 'information' driven by influencers. This is the result of an economic shift in favour of social media, and the widespread laziness of editorial teams. (Filloux, 2019).

These analyses ultimately highlight the increasingly evident fact that journalists on social media platforms such as TikTok play roles which are not well aligned with traditional journalistic functions. A recent study by Mellado and Hermida (2021) indicates in this regard that journalists perform the roles of influencer, celebrity and comedian on media such as TikTok.

These recent investigations suggest the idea that the behaviour of journalists on platforms such as TikTok may prove shocking, compared with traditional media. In this regard, Mellado and Hermida explain that this is because social media was not a forum devised for use specifically by journalists. It existed before journalism moved into such platforms.

> In the traditional media, for example, the journalists recounting a news item are assumed to be impartial observers of the events. On social media, they may form part of the story, becoming a topic in themselves.

Meanwhile, journalists may attempt to build up greater capital and symbolic power by negotiating their multiple digital selves with their target audiences, as demonstrated by previous exploratory studies (Tandoc *et al.*, 2019). As they do so, professional actions on social media may clash with traditional professional roles, generating tensions as to the boundaries between the personal and the professional, and increasing the gap between the editorial and commercial sides in the journalistic sphere (Mellado & Hermida, 2021).

The creation of such social media profiles by information professionals has in many cases been encouraged by the companies themselves (Bossio & Holton, 2018; Pérez Díaz, 2019). But there have also been many recommendations issued by the media themselves, advising their professionals to separate their online profiles so as to distinguish between their personal opinion and the professional opinion of the media outlet (Ganzabal *et al.*, 2021). On TikTok, the blurring of personal and professional accounts is inevitable (Hedman, 2018), thereby shattering the mould and recommendations previously offered by these communication companies themselves.

On this social media platform, the object analysed is not the media outlet account, but the individual profile of the journalist, whose presence thus takes on particular importance. Previously, the reputation of an information professional was tied to the media outlet where they worked. However, social media apps offer any professional the chance to engage with an audience, have a group of followers, and become a celebrity. In fact journalists offer trust and credibility, traditional values of the profession, which in this case reside in the physical presence of the communicator on this social media app.

In the case of TikTok, it is a tool for entertainment or infotainment, where information is a hostile narrative. Information professionals compete with megainfluencers, nanoinfluencers (Tonos, 2022) and celebrities who have a degree of credibility regarding a specific topic.

For the moment, the most recent studies, such as those by Peña *et al.*, (2022) indicate that there is room on TikTok for current affairs information, although it does not occupy the highest rankings among content generated by the media, a community with little engagement capacity on this social media platform.

A commitment would be needed to drive content connected with current affairs, despite the existing problems, such as the social media policy preventing the use of certain terms such as "terrorism", "drugs" or "rape", and the ban on the use of certain images or videos, which make a journalist's task more challenging. TikTok is the moment of app

with no impact on SEO, which also makes it difficult to have a specific news section.

Boeker & Urman (2022) suggest that a list of user-defined interests be provided, and constantly updated, using highly detailed content categories serving to identify the audience's interests. It is also proposed that the platform's recommendation system could be used for communication and information about major events or news items connected with current affairs. This could provide a way of consolidating current affairs content via this media outlet.

## A platform which raises queries

The China-based platform currently has more than 1 billion users worldwide (Statista, 2021; Forbes, 2021), making it one of the main social media players. However, the popular application has aroused mistrust in countries such as the United States as regards user data and its links to the Chinese Communist Party. Numerous experts and institutions have stated their suspicions as to the platform, which journalists and the media are now beginning to use. Enrique Dans, Innovation and Technology lecturer at IE Business School, deems this irresponsible:

> Not simply through neglect, error or omission: we are talking about deep-seated and bare-faced irresponsibility, of a philosophy focused on the constant capture of all types of user data, whatever terminal they use, their behavioural patterns… the type of app that one would expect of a Chinese company which operates in China and which simply adapts the look of its product, or not even that, to be offered in the West, with the same criteria and philosophy as applied to the Chinese market. An app which is indeed far from recommendable, capable of creating genuinely sinister and worrying behavioural patterns in both children and adults, with a truly dangerous content recommendation system. And all beneath the benevolent appearance of a western CEO with experience at a company like Disney (Dans, 2020).

In this regard, Steve Huffman, CEO of the news site Reddit, also describes it as parasitic spyware because "it's always listening. The fingerprint technology they use is really terrifying; I wouldn't dare install an app like that on my phone" (Matney, 2020). An aspect confirmed by Apple, when it discovered TikTok spying in secret on the clipboard screen grabs of users of its iPhones (Doffman, 2020).

The fact is that, unlike traditional media platforms, social media like TikTok has no reason to serve a democratic purpose (Mellado & Hermida, 2021). This opens up a line of research into the adoption by the

media of a platform such as TikTok, which raises doubts (apparently not as democratic as it should be), with content censorship criteria that some experts believe to be influenced by the Chinese government.

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# The rise of audio consumption in digital media

TERESE MENDIGUREN-GALDOSPIN & IRATI AGIRREAZKUENAGA

(University of the Basque Country)

The new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are characterised by a continuous development of new models and forms of information distribution. The creation and dissemination strategies of what were originally radio messages have also been caught up in this evolution towards innovative consumption formats. In the context of this modernisation of radio content, and its distribution forms, techniques and methods, the podcast format took shape.

Podcasts are audio episodes, normally created with a set frequency as a long-term project that can be downloaded from the Internet. This type of files can be downloaded and listened to on a variety of devices, such as a computer desktop, a mobile terminal, tablet or any other portable multimedia player (Harris & Park, 2008; Potter, 2006). As radio stations started to introduce audio content in podcast format to their communication strategies, "a community of podcasters started to appear who —although they did use radio language and expressiveness— laid the foundations of a new media" (Piñeiro, 2021). Podcasts enable users to decide what content they want to hear, and when they want to hear it. Podcasts can be tuned into live or downloaded à la carte, and also admit subscriber systems for their automatic download as they become available (Potter, 2006).

"The term 'podcast', which appeared at the beginning of the 21st century, was formed from 'iPod', the portable Apple music player and 'casting', which means transmission" (Marcu, 2019). According to the Real Academia Española (RAE) dictionary, the term podcast is not currently included in its entries for the Spanish language: "the term *podcast* is an anglicism widely used and with no universal equivalent in Spanish". It also explains on its website that it "can be easily adapted to our language by means of adding an accent: *pódcast*. In this case, its plural, the same as with *test*, would always be *los pódcast*."

Entries in English language dictionaries record the term as "a radio programme that is stored in digital form that you can download from the

Internet and play on a computer or on an MP3 player" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.); and as "A digital audio file made available on the internet for downloading to a computer or portable media player; a series of such files, new instalments of which can be received by subscribers automatically" (Oxford Dictionary-Lexicon, n.d.); or, according to Merriam-Webster, the online dictionary receiving most consultations in the United States for definitions, meanings and the pronunciation of words in English, as "a program (as of music or talk) made available in digital format for automatic download over the Internet" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The meaning can also be considered from the point of view of the content creator, given that it can be understood as a digital audio file, normally in MP3 format, which any person can create for upload to the website, thereby making it accessible to the whole public (Blanco, 2012). Arrival of the term podcast also brought the introduction of other words, such as "podcaster", referring to the author of the content, and "podcasting", referring to the way the files are distributed (Marcu, 2019).

Although podcasts were at first mainly created by aficionados in the field (Affleck, 2005), the traditional media has also embraced the trend by offering a wide variety of podcasts, seeking both to distribute regular radio content (in the case of radio stations), and to offer another type of complementary or innovative content. This chapter takes a closer look at how this format emerged in the digital sphere, the main characteristics and implementation of the podcast and its new way of understanding the way audio content is created and distributed in the digital media.

## Arrival of the Podcast era

In the context of the new communication technologies, radio stations in the USA and the West have been the first to adapt and redirect their radio content and products to the Internet (Macu, 2019). With the emergence of podcasting, the media have gradually introduced and placed many of their programmes on a variety of audio distribution platforms.

According to the latest report published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, located in the University of Oxford, in Europe, Spain (38%) is the most popular country when it comes to listening to podcasts, behind Ireland (41%) (Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2021). What is obvious is that they are being increasingly used as a tool for spreading information, both by the media and by organisations in other fields, such as trade and education. They have also consolidated themselves "as Do-it-yourself Media formats, both with respect to their production and as forms of entertainment and expression developed by Internet users" (Piñiero, 2021). "In today's society, where mobile devices

are becoming a social necessity, formats such as podcasts become new channels to offer listeners content on demand" (Hernandez *et al.*, 2013).

The process of downloading podcast files, and of distributing and developing programmes in this format, goes by the term of "podcasting" (Berry, 2006) a term which, as is explained in the introduction of this chapter, comes from an amalgam of the idea of playing music (iPod) and that of broadcasting it (casting). The technology was developed in 2004 and the process is partly attributed to former MTV VJ, Adam Curry. Fed up with the amount of time it took to manually download audio files from the Internet, Curry turned to Really Simple Syndication (RSS) technology as a means to automate the process (Marcu, 2019). In a fashion similar to the way RSS updates blog content, he created, together with a group of people, a program called iPodder that used RSS sources to automatically identify and send MP3 files to his computer (Twist, 2005). This system succeeded in automatically collecting and sending MP3 files to any digital music player capable of playing WMP formats. Users could select the podcasts they liked and subscribe, free of charge, to the programme feed. Curry was convinced that this would put an end to the traditional radio business model (Twist, 2005). Curry offered the program to open code developers who, in turn, helped to improve the application and to promote the popularity of podcasts (Affleck, 2005). A short while later, iTunes also started to offer podcasts (Marcu, 2019).

In Spain, the first podcast aired on 18 October 2004, when its creator, the journalist José Antonio Gelado, used the format to broadcast his *Comunicando* programme on the subject of digital technology and culture (Hernández Barreña, 2021). At that time, in Spain there was absolutely no documentary material related to podcasting in Spanish, "meaning that intense work was required to examine, analyse and translate the resources and materials that the first North American podcasters were producing in the English language" (García-Marín, 2019). Gelado is considered to be the pioneer of podcasting in Spain, given that he introduced and promoted its broadcasting. But first of all, he had to come to grips with an experimental stage using the "trial and error strategy to learn how to use the technology layer of the media while engaging collaboration of the early community growing around the subject" (García-Marín 2019), who reported any faults they observed in the audio files and thus helped to perfect the technique.

Although the podcasts were initially mainly created by aficionado content generators (Affleck, 2005), the traditional media have also gone on to offer a wide variety of podcast content. In fact, traditional radio stations use podcasts "as another way of distributing their content, enabling the listener to decide what they consume" (García-Marín, 2019). "We

should consider 2016 as the first big year of the podcast, with an important rise in its consumption at global level (…). In Spain Podium Podcast was launched, a platform promoted by the Grupo PRISA" (Terol *et al.*, 2021).

It is not only conventional radio stations that have turned to podcasts as a way of increasing their listeners' participation (Meduni, 2007); other types of companies and organisations not necessarily connected to communication are also producing podcasts. Corporate podcasting offers the opportunity to send messages to certain users or customers. They have also been introduced as an educational tool. "Numerous secondary schools and universities have turned to podcasting to record high-quality academic content" (García-Marín, 2019).

## Current penetration of the podcast format and the most popular platforms

After the consolidation of online radio stations in the late nineties (1996-2008) came the development of applications, social media and new narratives (2009-2015), which was later followed by a "third stage characterised by the incipient appearance of offers of periodic audio content with neither simulcasting nor associated radio continuity" (Martínez-Costa *et al.*, 2018), i.e. the podcasting era.

According to the Digital Audio Study carried out in 2021 by IAB Spain (IAB, 2021) mainly seeking to take a closer look at the quantitative aspects determining habits in the way digital audio contents are consumed and consumer preferences, the consumption of digital audio content continues to occupy a very strong place in users' everyday lives: 64.5% use it daily and only 3% consider themselves to be occasional users of the format. Young people aged between 16 and 24 years are the highest daily consumers of digital audio: 81% listen to it every day. Young people prefer à la carte music (it is consumed by 92% young people between the ages of 16 and 24) or podcasts (consumed by 52% of those aged between 16 and 34.) Older people (55+) prefer live (77%) or pre-recorded (54%) radio content.

The five best apps for listening to podcasts in Spain, according to a recent classification published by eldiario.es (Rodríguez, 2021), are the following:

1. iVoox. This platform is highlighted for its longevity, having been one of the first to achieve consolidation. It therefore has a wide variety of programmes. It is also a free tool.
2. Spotify. Has allowed users to upload their content for the last few years. Also offers the option of analysing content statistics in order to strengthen promotion strategies (Martos, 2022).

3.  Podcast & radio addict. This is an exclusive Android app that not only has a podcast but also a number of radio stations and audiobooks. It is compatible with Twitch and YouTube, but its videos are only available in audio mode.
4.  Podium Podcast. This is one of the most outstanding as a platform for original content in Spanish.
5.  TuneIn Radio. Offers conventional radio content organised into different sections (Sports, Music, etc.) and also has a varied podcast catalogue.

Wider classifications exist with a more geographic focus. For example, the Venezuelan sociologist Sol Martos handpicks the following 20 platforms for 2022: Apple Podcasts-iTunes, iVoox, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Audible, Deezer, Spreaker App, Pocket Casts App, CastBox, SoundCloud, TuneIn Radio, Podcast Addict, Breaker, OverCast, Podium Podcast, Stitcher, Clementine, Juice, Laughable and Podcast Go. On the other hand, from the point of view of distribution of the podcast format, García-Marín and Aparici (2018) single out seven categories or platforms: Repositories and podcatchers, webs and blogs, social media, digital radio and hertz radio, live podcasts/programmes, digital video channels (YouTube/vimeo) and newsletters.

## Sound milestones that connected with the audience

Accessibility to digital media has enabled the proliferation of more open and accessible journalism (Ortiz Sobrino, 2010), generating new content obliging traditional radio structures to adapt and create new resources and actions focused on helping to increase audience attraction. The general-interest radio stations run by public corporations in the Basque Country and Spain opted for live radio and, for the time being, a large part of their programmes are still broadcast in this format (Bonet and Sellas, 2019). Podcasts, however, require a post-production rich in sound and nuances, thereby establishing an aesthetic and audio framework differing widely from the live programmes broadcast on Spanish public radio.

The podcast combines the new models of digital consumption with the much longer history of auditory representation (Alexander, 2017) and, over the last decade, has become the platform most used to broadcast digital audio information (Beer, 2007). In fact, it is now more than ten years since the MP3 player became an important cultural icon of the digital era and a familiar and common urban technology which has later turned podcasting into a feature of everyday discourse. Podcasts repre-

sent the digital culture in which everyday life becomes digitalised and new forms of culture are created and commercialised (Deuze, 2006).

In this respect, several authors have analysed the characteristics that help to explain why the type of digital narration enabled by podcasts is so effective, and to what extent the popularity of the media is the result of the interests and capacities of a highly connected audience (Hardey and James, 2022). In the United States, the production and subsequent success of the *Serial* podcast was one of the milestones that marked the history of podcasting. It received a Peabody Award (championing the excellence of radio and television in the United States) in April 2015 for its innovative narration of a long-standing nonfiction story. Until September 2018, the episodes of seasons 1 and 2 had been downloaded more than 340 million times, setting a world record for podcast listening. As part of its launch, one of the founders (Ira Glass) presented a short video featuring an elderly neighbour who faces the camera and explains to the audience how to listen to a podcast (*Serial*) using the podcast website player or through a mobile app. The report suggests that, although the spectators had heard about podcasts, there were still barriers that seemed to prevent many people from listening to them (Berry, 2015).

The podcast in question was a work of investigative journalism hosted by Sarah Koenig, narrating a nonfiction story over several episodes. It was developed by *This American Life*, owned since July 2020 by *The New York Times*. It falls within the true-crime genre (Cavender, 2004) and, unlike many podcasts with a homemade feel, *Serial* stands out for its high production values, its successful commercial sponsorship, its accompanying website and other digital content, as well as the episodes of the podcast itself. Thus, following the tradition of many detective genres, the rhythm of the podcast narration divides the different elements of its plot into episodes. As per tradition, the audience is led to believe in the eventual solution of the crime and the punishment of its author. This narrative form is obvious in the idea behind the first season: the possibility of an earlier legal error that could still be put right so that the case could finally be correctly solved.

The use of narrative techniques to narrate real-life events is a strategy established to attract the audience, and the greater the narrative wealth, the deeper the levels of audience commitment and engagement (Fotopoulou & Couldry, 2015). Broadcasting the narration through digital platforms lays the way for alternative versions to the main narration and, in this respect, the multi-platform digital structure of *Serial* was one of the first cases in which narration through digital media enabled accompanying the narration of past events with social media comments (Hardey and James, 2022).

In these cases, serialising the podcast provides the hook to keep the audience interested. This type of practice is starting to be addressed in recent studies on online interaction with fans of the community; in fact, narrative analysts are starting to look at more recent media like video games (Newman, 2008). These serial forms have provided a vital incentive to explore narratological questions such as the dynamics of the plot and the suspense, in order to outline the evolution of certain serial forms from more conventional to more complex forms (Page, 2013). That combination of sharing and telling stories is key for the aesthetic success of creations like *Serial* in the new digital media (idem).

The conversational reach of *Serial* was formed based on the practice of sharing communication through social media and other online platforms, thereby enabling users to engage in a process of narrative augmentation and the audience to extend or give greater detail to the plotlines (Highfield, Harrington and Bruns, 2013).

**Genres and reference narratives in podcasting**

If in the production of a fiction podcast good casting and location work are essential (Orrantia, 2019 *upud* Otón, Luque and Borreguero, 2019), in the nonfiction podcast the fictional and nonfictional elements must be arranged in an ordered and believable fashion, almost like an aesthetic exercise from journalism. The post-*Serial* era brings with it more elements than simply following the series in chronological terms. Alongside bringing nonfiction podcasting and despite being explicitly built around notions of truth and reality, *Serial* represents the most influential force upon podcast fiction since the Old Time Radio (OTR) drama (Hancock and McMurtry, 2018). *Serial* has been identified as a podcast with components which are broken down to create a formula that a radio or audio content scriptwriter can use in their creations. This is due to the narrative style it established based on the identity of the podcast media that explored its possibilities of mobility, fragmentation and multiplicity of integrated platforms.

The fact that *Serial* has become a landmark in the podcasting space is related to the fact that it was a pioneer in recognising and taking advantage of radio and journalistic language, introducing a more immersive and, at the same time, interactive listening experience (Waldmann, 2020). Some authors state that part of the success enjoyed by *Serial* lies in its efforts to talk about issues that go beyond the digital era and situate themselves on a more humanistic level, such as national identity, masculinity or criminality (Hardey and James, 2022). This specific case prompts us to think beyond the simple fact of creating an audio podcast: it connects us

with the idea of the power of audio as an essential media for engaging the listener with online content and other materials created around the podcast world and may have unlimited implications. As indicated by Miranda-Galbe, Cabezuelo-Lorenzo and López-Medel (2021), the population that regularly consumes cinematic products, for example, is also the one most likely to approach other media unknown to them, such as graphic novels and podcasts.

The fact that a podcast makes the most of the possibilities of digital narrative to create an experimental intertextual space undoubtedly expands the limits of this type of creations to help understand the consumption practices and depth of engagement achieved by means of social media (Chan-Olmsted and Wang, 2020). As a result, nonfiction podcasts become narrative constructions inherent to the radio genre in order to document real facts. In this case, their innovation stems from the audio nature of the medium, which enables the listener to return to the oral roots of the narration and, therefore, to its literal definition. Thanks to the purely audio nature of the medium and to its specificity as an interactive, immersive and intimate medium, listening becomes a performative act in itself.

In the framework case of Spanish podcasts, today the four most important radio stations in Spain include podcasting services, thus covering the needs of different listening niches. Numerous podcasts have been created during the last decade which have been chiefly broadcast on the digital streaming platforms, Spotify, iTunes and iVoox (Moreno Espinosa, P., and Román-San-Miguel, 2020). Regarding their classification with respect to genre, the authors cannot agree on a single classification, meaning that we find a diversity of typologies which change according to the criterion on which they are based (Sellas, 2021). Some research works have opted for a classification around four types of podcast: entertainment, information, training and persuasion podcasts (Baltanás, 2016). Others make the classification depending on the source of their funding, distinguishing between commercial, governmental, municipal, cultural and community, school or university, personal or auteur, mirror (those broadcast on conventional radio) and educational podcasts (Tenorio, 2008).

Among these classifications we find investigation podcasts, which have the aim to inform on a topical subject (examples of these are the *Cuarto Milenio* and *Materia Oscura* podcasts produced by ABC Podcasts), and those based on true events (*Saliendo del Círuclo* and *Bala Extra*) (Eguren *et al.,* 2021), which are defined by telling true stories using the language and typical characteristics of sound, from the way the script is written to the chosen sound effects or atmosphere. According to the study carried out by Eguren *et al.,* (2021) over 7 days in January 2021, on Spotify the podcasts with most listeners came in the following order: *Nadie*

*Sabe Nada*, *Entiende tu mente*, *La Vida Moderna*, *Estirando el chicle* and *The Wild Project*. On iVoox the podcasts with most listeners were *Cuarto Milenio*, *Nadie Sabe Nada*, *Días extraños*, *El Partidazo de la COPE* and *Documentales sonoros*. In January 2022, *Nadie Sabe Nada* came behind *The Wild Project* podcast as far as listeners are concerned. If the former is the star podcast on entertainment, humour and monologues broadcast by Cadena SER, and hosted by Andreu Buenafuente and Berto Romero, the latter focuses on the latest news, sports, talk shows and other interesting subjects. It is the winner of the Esland Award 2022 for best talk show.

Thus, returning to the journalistic genre in a product such as the podcast, we can see that, while the podcasting phenomenon may be popular with the Spanish audience thanks to programmes providing entertainment or the analysis of film or literary works, it continues to generate doubts as to its function as a conveyor of information (Moreno Espinosa and Román-San-Miguel, 2020). Although the radio and, therefore, the podcast, has always had a distinct journalistic language to that of the other conventional media, such as the printed press and television, it seems that its function as a hybrid space between nonfiction, journalism and fiction has been less exploited in today's offer of podcasts in Spanish. This said, the analysis of hybrid products where fiction and journalistic genres come together is gaining weight because it may be a formula for the creation of fake news in the era of post-truth. In this respect, use of the podcast and of the sound narrative that composes it can be established as an important tool for investigating genre hybridisation.

## Hybrid genres

While it is true that podcasts initially emerged as spaces promoted by aficionados, the traditional communication media have gradually started to provide a widespread offer of content through this format, to which they also turn to distribute the content of their regular grid. In this respect, what podcasting has introduced is a very rich and varied panorama of audio content, and a change in the consumption habits of the audience, who have gained in flexibility and freedom when choosing content, the amount or time they listen for, and the time and place of use. As well as conventional radio media or stations, podcasts have also been taken up as a way of attracting or creating loyalty in their clientele by other types of companies and organisations not necessarily connected to communication.

In an increasingly more extensive and varied media ecosystem, it is expected that listeners will decide what to believe and on what additional information to base their decision. In this respect, reflection has been carried out around the case of the *Serial* podcast, which represents a gen-

eration of co-created narrative production that goes beyond the limits of the text and explores the limits of reality and fiction, which are in turn able to take hold thanks to the possibilities of the audio world.

For all of the above, it is indispensable to take a closer look at the aspects that determine habits of consuming audio content in this format, and the consumption preferences and platforms used. It is also interesting to turn the spotlight on the new narrative and content trends being generated depending on the objective and on the audience targeted by a certain podcast given that, for example, podcasts can allow themselves to hybridise characteristic elements of new genres with those belonging to fiction. Their immersive and participatory nature suggests that podcasts, as indicated by Wilson (2018), have a versality and a creative potential similar to those of theatre or performance, whose reach we are only starting to explore.

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# Section 3

# Online news and information disorders

# Introduction:
# Making Sense of Information
# Disorder Today

Claire Wardle

(Brown University)

It's been almost five years since I coined the term Information Disorder in a report co-authored with Hossein Derakshan for the Council of Europe. We wanted to bring some definitional structure to the many conversations taking place about "fake news", a term I refused to use. Not only did the phrase fail to capture the complexity of the problem (most content isn't actually fake and most of it doesn't look like news), it also quickly became a weapon used by politicians to undermine the mainstream media.

In the report, we explained the differences between mis-, dis- and mal-information, using the concepts of intent and harm to explain the different terms.
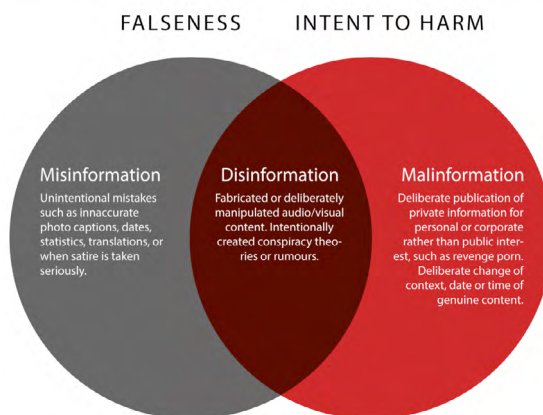


**Figure 1**

Types of Information Disorder Venn Diagram from the 2017 report
of the same name

People tend to be most interested in the difference between mis and disinformation and I frequently repeat the same lines when asked:

> Disinformation is false or misleading information shared deliberately to cause harm. This would be a Russian troll being paid to disrupt an election or a fraudster creating content to drive clicks to make money. Misinformation is the sharing of false or misleading information by someone who doesn't realize it's false and means no harm. This might be my mother sharing an image on Facebook, not realizing that it is out of context.

This neat differentiation works beautifully as an opening to a media literacy training or an answer to a reporter's question.

But over the past eighteen months I've been increasingly uncomfortable about these definitions. Events surrounding January 6th in particular, but also the characteristics of the newly strengthened anti-vaccine community have forced me to reconsider the original framework. When we first published the report, we did get some pushback from certain scholars asking us to work harder on defining the way we were using the term "harm". Our use of the term "intent" ruffled few feathers, but today, that is what I'm struggling with.

Would we say ordinary Americans who were propagating the 'Big lie' in the US in the lead up to January 6th were spreading disinformation or misinformation? They were certainly spreading false information but did they really believe it was false? Did they mean to cause harm?

For those who stampeded through the Rotunda on January 6, I would argue they did not perceive themselves as causing harm. Ultimately, *they believed* they were there to prevent the counting of the ballot, because *they believed* they were doing so to protect democracy. *They believed* the election was stolen, and therefore right was on their side. *They believed* they were preventing harm.

By the time the insurrection took place, there had already been a number of high profile statements that the election was not conducted fraudulently, including by the Department of Homeland Security itself. But as we now know from the January 6 hearings, many of the protestors believed passionately they were carrying out President Trump's personal wishes, so maybe we can't blame them for not taking the mountain of evidence that the election was not "stolen" seriously.

Can we also say they didn't intend any harm. I accept the insurrectionists believed they were taking action to save democracy. However, we're in a very different situation when people who are breaking the law so flagrantly, and causing severe injury to people and property can be excused and described as not causing harm.

For these reasons, I struggle to say they were pushing disinformation. I would argue they were victims of the disinformation propagated

by Trump and his conspirators. The insurrectionists were pushing misinformation, but for me, the original definition of the term misinformation applies to my mother mistakenly sharing a meme on Facebook, it doesn't apply to those caught up in the events at the Capitol.

Similarly, when I spend time in anti-vaccine communities I see people grappling with the hardest questions: how do I keep myself and my family safe? Many of them are sharing the latest research with each other, sharing first person experiences, and trawling online databases for more evidence to support their concerns. They believe deeply that they are preventing harm by pushing anti-vaccine claims.

And it's hard to say they're mistakenly sharing information they don't realize that is false. Many of them are actively seeking out evidence. They are consuming evidence, often that concludes that vaccines are safe, but they read the wrong conclusions from that evidence, twisting the results to support their own positions. They use first person experiences and extrapolate to conclusions that are just wrong. But in their head, they are right. Again, they are not my mother mistakenly sharing a meme on Facebook.

So I've updated the venn diagram (figure 1) and where the definition of misinformation previously read: "Unintentional mistakes such as inaccurate photo captions, dates, statistics, translations or when satire is taken seriously." It now reads: The sharing of false or misleading content because of a belief that it will help, either a) accidentally by people who did not check the veracity OR b) by people who believe deeply that the information is true.

This can apply to people who have been swayed by false information pushed by a political figure or personality (either for political or financial gain), or people who have been doing their own research and coming to inaccurate conclusions.
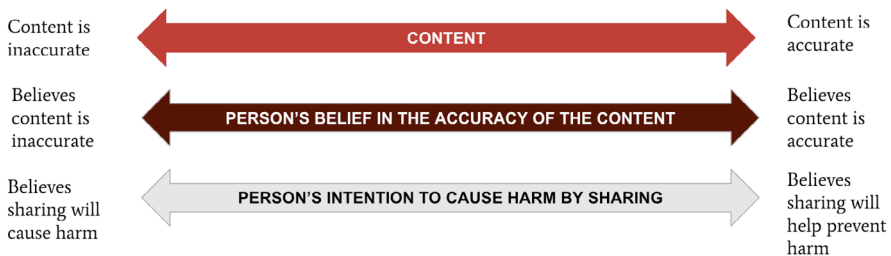


**Figure 2**

Three Considerations when analyzing the sharing of false
or misleading information

And I have created this new diagram, in an attempt to show the three different considerations we should have when we're looking at examples of people sharing content. I would argue this level of granularity forces a necessary recognition of the complexity of these issues.

As we stressed in 2017, definitions matter as they help us think about interventions. We need to update these definitions if we have any hope in tackling the situation we find ourselves in now.

Fundamentally, we've been operating on a flawed understanding that in almost all cases there is evidence that supports the truth, but the problem of misinformation emerges when people don't access that evidence before sharing. We repeat the narrative that disinformation agents create false or misleading content designed to tap into people's emotions, meaning people are less likely to check the available evidence before sharing.

In our Information Disorder report, we emphasized the power of emotion in the way humans process information, and we stressed why this was a problem. This battle over emotion and facts was challenging but through education it felt like a problem that could be, if not solved, mitigated. But we, and I mean the whole field of scholars and practitioners focused on information disorder, didn't understand how quickly we'd get to a point where the problem was not really about people's emotions preventing people from searching for evidence before sharing, it's actually about people no longer reaching the same conclusions from the same evidence.

This period of epistemological collapse is so much more significant than the way I understood information disorder just five years ago. It's no longer about people being mistaken. It's no longer about simply teaching people to pause and check before sharing. This is about something much more fundamental, where people are drawing diametrically opposed conclusions from the same evidence. This is a problem that will require enormous changes to the way we approach education, with an immediate need to focus on teaching people how knowledge is created and understood, not simply the need to add information literacy modules to curricula. It's going to require different, and clearer ways of communicating by government leaders and authorities to prevent inacurate conclusions from being reached. And it's going to require scientists and researchers to think much more carefully about the way they communicate the results of their studies. This is not going to be easy and it's not going to be quick, but it's going to require far more action and resources than the current range of recommendations we see discussed by those of us attempting to tackle the problem of information disorder.

# Innovation to reduce information disorder

Bella Palomo, María Sánchez & Jon Sedano

(University of Malaga)

Technological advances, the democratic consciousness of media companies, sustainable journalism, distrust of content and audience training are the basic axes that determine the present and future of the most complex media system in history. The recent data are worrying, as it can be seen that current media activity coexists with a social apathy that, according to the *Digital News Report 2022,* has caused a certain news fatigue and even an increase in the number of citizens who decide to avoid the news. Professional exhaustion must be added to this situation. In Brazil the report *O Impacto da Desinformaçao e da Violencia Política na Internet contra Jornalistas, Comunicadoras e LGBT+* [*The Impact of Disinformation and Political Violence on Internet against Journalists, Communicators and LGBT+*] confirms that the phenomenon of disinformation has a direct impact on professional routine that can even result in mental health problems.

This disheartening panorama of permanent uncertainties once again requires a reaction from the journalistic industry, which must commit itself to constant innovation (Palomo & Palau, 2016) in response to the demands of the changing environment and reconnect with its audience, especially in a time of global crisis. But isolated responses do not lead very far, and require a parallel coordination of the actors involved and the implantation of public policies that guarantee the stability of the media and the quality of their information production.

## The response of the technological companies

The technological companies have been affected and deprecated by the awareness that their platforms diffuse false content without any control. In 2018 researchers at the MIT demonstrated that false news stories on Twitter were 70 percent more likely to be retweeted than true stories (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018). This type of data has given rise to demands from those who hold these companies responsible for the existing information chaos, but it has also produced the reaction and direct in-

volvement of the companies, which connects with their corporate social responsibility and business ethics. In recent years their response has basically taken the form of supporting experimentation by means of formulas like hackathons, workshops and reviewing the self-regulation of the services offered, examples of which will be provided in the following lines.

In 2022 the Facebook Journalism Project became involved in the Fact-Checking Innovation Initiative, financing verification projects that explored new formats, sustainable business models and technological advances. Following a similar line, Google's Digital News Innovation Fund was launched in 2015, which has backed hundreds of projects in Europe, many of them focusing on the problem of disinformation. This support resulted in the creation of the Trend Recognition Tool, which makes it possible to predict which stories are potentially viral, memeCheck, TruDat and the videogame *Verdadero/Falso* [*True/False*]. In recent years, the Google News Initiative has also created the post of teaching fellow in different countries to improve the skills of journalism professionals and students, providing them with free workshops adapted to their needs.

Continuing with this technological aspect, there are labelling protocols to give greater visibility to the activity of fact-checkers, such as the ClaimReview, which enhances the promotion of their content in spaces like Facebook, Google Fact Check Tools, Google Search, Google News, Bing and Youtube.

But the technological companies have not only fomented innovation in the sector, they have also altered their contracts with users. Concretely, with respect to penalisation, Google has reached the point of withdrawing the monetisation of content of hundreds of media that disseminate false information or confusing articles.

In 2022 Twitter, influenced by the war in Ukraine, presented its crisis misinformation policy to increase the credibility and authority of media content and official government accounts. To reduce potential harm, they decided to post a warning notice on those tweets that contain false coverage or event reporting, or information that mischaracterises conditions on the ground as a conflict evolves; false allegations regarding the use of force, incursions on territorial sovereignty, or about the use of weapons; false or misleading allegations of war crimes or mass atrocities against specific populations; false information regarding the international community's response, sanctions, defensive actions, or humanitarian operations. Consequently, the tweet is not eliminated, but its spread is prevented by deactivating the like, retweet and share functions.

In the case of Youtube, content that violates its contract is withdrawn, recommendations are reduced when content is dubious, reliable informa-

tion sources are supported and reliable creators are rewarded. According to its misinformation policies it is forbidden to publish: videos promoting dangerous treatments or substances that might have health benefits; content that is deceitful about electoral participation or that might discourage voting; and even technically manipulated messages or old content presented as current if this might cause serious harm. However, the experts consider that this content supervision is not enough. In January 2022 a total of 80 fact-checkers published an open letter to their CEO, Susan Wojcicki, calling for stricter measures since, in their opinion, Youtube is one of the main channels of disinformation in the world. Their proposals included taking action against repeat disinformers, making it possible to contextualise the affected videos, or even superimposing a denial on the content.

Public policies are also forcing the technological companies to become more involved in supervising content. In June 2022 Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Meta (Facebook), Microsoft, Tik Tok, Twitch, Twitter and another thirty signatories subscribed to the Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation and committed themselves to sharpen their fight against deep fakes, fake accounts and political advertising in the short term. Not fulfilling these activities can result in fines of up to 6% of a company's global turnover, and if they are repeat offenders can even result in a ban on operating in the European Union. These self-regulatory norms began to be applied before the Digital Services Act (DSA) came into effect, which obliges platforms to rapidly eliminate illegal content on Internet.

### The necessary commitment of instant messaging

WhatsApp, Telegram and disinformation are three correlated terms. The two principal instant messaging applications in the West have become ideal channels not only for communicating but also for disinforming (Díez, Renedo, & Cano, 2021). For this reason in 2018 WhatsApp began to limit the resending of messages. Initially this consisted in a restriction to twenty chats and in 2019 this was reduced to five contacts or groups in an attempt to curb false content. Since 2022 there are greater restrictions on resending messages that have been shared massively, and as a result the user can resend content to a maximum of one chat or group. Another of the strategies implemented in recent years has consisted in adding a double arrow to those messages that have been resent many times, or a single arrow if they have not reached five users. These techniques enable the receiver to recognise when a message is not original or has not been directly created by the sender. These changes, together with the blocking of mailing lists that has also been in effect since 2018, have resulted in a massive

migration to Telegram, not only of users and groups, but of false content as well. Therefore, the problem has not disappeared, but has instead leapt from one messaging application to another.

In parallel, technology has also enabled these platforms to be used for positive ends. From the beginning, Telegram has stood out as it enables developers to create tools by means of its API, which has favoured the rise of bots. In 2019, Maldita was a pioneer in creating the @Bulo-Bot on Telegram; this is an automated system to which a link is sent to check whether content has been verified by Maldito Bulo, and the result is returned (Maldito Bulo, 2019). At the start of May 2020, motivated by the outbreak of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, the International Fact-Checking Network launched a chatbot on WhatsApp to fight disinformation. One month before, the government of Mexico through its application had presented a similar chatbot, the automatized assistant Susana Distancia, whose aim was to minimise the impact of misinformation and disinformation concerning health (Cahun, 2020). In May 2022 WhatsApp freed its Cloud API, which will help developers to create internal tools. In general bots have been integrated into the routines of fact-checkers, taking on diverse functions, such as managing requests for fact-checking (EsPaja) or serving as an assistant that teaches how to verify information (Chequea LaBot).

World conflicts, apart from terrestrial confrontations, have also been developed in the digital sphere. The creators of Telegram, the Durov brothers, were forced to leave Russia because of political pressure exerted against them from the Kremlin (Hakim, 2014). Years after their departure into exile, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, established Telegram as the preferred tool for citizen communication (Alazab & Macfarlane, 2022). The channel ITArmy, used by 260,000 volunteers, is an example of digital coordination for launching cybernetic attacks on Russia (Bergengruen, 2022). This is not the first time the application has been used to prevent spying via communications. The population of Belarus had already made use of it to organise a massive protest of 10,000 people against the leader, Alexander Lukashenko (Bordali, 2022).

While in Ukraine Telegram is the messaging platform par excellence, in Russia, where it has been banned for many years, many citizens use it through a VPN (Virtual Private Network), a secure tunnel that hides the IP address and encrypts private data, to receive news of their Ukrainian relatives (Safronova, MacFarquhar & Satariano, 2022).

At the journalistic level, the magazine *Time* announced that in February 2022 its Russian subscribers on Telegram had increased by 48%, coinciding with the invasion of Ukraine (Bergengruen, 2022). It has not been the only medium to promote its news items on this platform: *The*

*Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* opened channels on Telegram to reach more users.

Journalists like the Russian Farida Rustanova have seen Telegram as a means of evading censorship. While several media in her country of origin were closed down for going against the established regime, Telegram has enabled her to publish articles on her channel —@faridaily24— which has more than 24,000 followers. In the same vein, Ilya Shepelin, a former journalist of the independent Russian medium *Rain*, explains that after the silencing of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, "Telegram is the only place in Russia where people can exchange opinions and free information" (Safronova, MacFarquhar & Satariano, 2022).

In parallel, the Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior, through its Cyberpolice Department, has created a bot on the messaging application to fight against Russian disinformation: @stopdrugsbot. In this context, investigative journalism organisations that specialise in digital fact-checking, like Bellingcat, are searching the channels for images to document war crimes that might help the International Criminal Court.

In short, the battlefield between Russia and Ukraine has spread to the groups and channels on Telegram, where propaganda and disinformation messages are flowing in all directions (Schechner, Chernova & Kim, 2022).

## The media open up to the challenge of collaborative innovation

Collaboration amongst the media and trust in the collective intelligence are considered to be useful strategies for curbing disinformation, and this type of initiatives has been essential, especially in electoral periods (Palomo & Sedano, 2021). The pandemic also saw the emergence of the #CoronaVirusFacts Alliance, under the auspices of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) of the Poynter Institute, which in two years carried out more than 16,000 fact-checks. The war in Ukraine has boosted the presence of stories in media that are committed to truth and precision based on artificial intelligence and satellite images. To facilitate this task, From Above, a team of journalists from Bloomberg, *La Nación*, Data Crítica and CLIP, developed a guide to searching for stories based on this type of images.

In Spain, for example, Maldito Bulo has collaborated in specific sections in media like Onda Cero, RTVE, *eldiario.es*, Telemadrid and Cuatro ith the goal of giving greater visibility to their fact-checks and alerting the population. These synergies draw attention to a basic problem, namely the lack of mastery of the techniques required for autonomously implementing fact-checking in newsrooms and sharing this know-how with society in general.

The proliferation of sections in the media warning about the false news stories that circulate especially on social media are enabling society to advance towards media literacy, but they have also normalised coexistence with falsehoods. Workshops have even been held to explore the positive side of deepfakes, with applications in the artistic, entertainment, educational and training fields. This expansion of the "deepfake" concept might mislead the general public and decaffeinate the potential danger of its intentions, as it has been especially linked to manipulation and disinformation.

In addition to the journalistic links that are established amongst the media, there are other functions or essential services that have complemented and improved the activity of fact-checkers. The lack of training in universities in matters of data-verification has presented an opportunity to expert companies, which are responsible for alternative training projects, such as Newtral Educación and Maldita Educa —responsible for postgraduate courses— or, more recently, the Red Latinoamericana de Formadores en Fact-checking, which receives support from the Google News Initiative, Chequeado, Verificado, Colombia Check, Convoca and Ojo Público. This educational work has enabled the spread of a rigorous fact-checking methodology that has reached thousands of professionals in recent years and has strengthened the professional profile of the journalist, taking it closer to that of a social educator. These media literacy solutions have also reached the general public with the aim of providing it with training in the critical analysis of information consumption and thus prevent it from sharing content that is erroneous or unreliable. To achieve this end, attractive interactive formulas have sometimes been employed, such as La Bot Chequea, a robot programmed to teach how to fact-check information.

## Classification of innovation applied to fact-checkers

The companies and foundations that focus on the fact-checking process have set themselves the requisite of an attentive, permanent and transnational gaze, not only with regard to content circulating on social media, but also to innovations that enable the unmasking of unethical practices that might provoke democratic chaos or unnecessary scares in society. In this respect projects have arisen such as Factchequeado, an alliance between Maldita and Chequeado to reduce disinformation in the Latin community in the United States, or #UkraineFacts, a map containing thousands of fact-checks carried out by members of the IFCN since the start of the war in Ukraine.

These actors, whether they function as independent media or as sections or units integrated into media, have not always enjoyed a positive

evolution. It is estimated that one third of the fact-checking initiatives are inactive or have had a limited useful lifespan, although daily updating is the normal practice in the 135 registered initiatives (Vázquez-Herrero, Vizoso & López-García, 2019). One can therefore understand that if innovation is essential today in any journalistic organisation, in the case of fact-checkers, due to the nature of their activity and their predominantly digitally native profile, innovation must form part of their DNA.

In the case of the independent fact-checkers that form part of the IFCN, in different analyses undertaken as part of an official research project, we have observed innovations in different areas, some of which could even serve as sources of inspiration and benchmarking for other media. We will now enumerate the most outstanding initiatives and measures. To this end we will make our own classification of these innovations, as a type of X-ray arranged according to the organisational and company aspects on which they have an impact, taking as a reference earlier studies by different authors (García Avilés, 2014; Carvajal *et al.*, 2014; Carvajal *et al.*, 2015), and emphasising a typology of four main areas of innovation.

a) *Innovation in management: organisational aspects and business model*

Many of the IFCN's fact-checkers are micromedia, some of which function as startups, with an agile and flexible management, with interdisciplinary and collaborative teams of journalists, technicians and scientists, and with leaders and intrapreneurs who promote creativity, innovation and adaptation to change (Sánchez, Sánchez & Martos, 2022b). Some set in motion disruptive formulas in order to finance themselves, based, depending on the case, on diversification that goes beyond information and fact-checking —with value added services such as the above-mentioned training activities, a frequent line of business in these platforms— or, to a lesser extent, on audience participation —through crowdfunding or similar campaigns.

b) *Editorial and narrative innovation: products and content*

It is not only the work of fact-checkers that contributes to improving journalism, but also how they do it, in terms of formats, focuses and channels. Fact-checkers have evolved from the point of view of format, distancing themselves from a textual model influenced by the blog format, and simulating the structure of the online media and strengthening their multimedia production. This transformation is also visible in their strategy on social media. The fact-checkers of the International Fact-Checking Network are in general characterised by their intensive use of Twitter, the official net-

work of the IFCN, and other platforms with an audiovisual character, such as YouTube, Instagram and even other more emergent ones like Tik Tok or Twich, for which they produce adapted digital content, aimed at specific market niches, such as young readers (Sánchez, Sánchez & Martos, 2022a).

c) *Technological and digital innovation: processes of verifying and distributing information*

For fact-checkers technology is a means not an end, and it always serves as a complement to good professional journalistic practices at the service of their main mission, verifying information. In spite of that, the use of digital fact-checking tools, according to the type of content to be verified, is a more or less regular practice as part of this process, and the list is extensive (Accountanalysis, Botometer, Bot Sentinel, Chirpty, Exifdata, inVID, Jimpl, Social Bearing, Social Searcher, Telegram Analytics, TinEye, Trends24.it, TruthNest, Tweeplers...). The use of digital communication channels and collaborative databases created within the IFCN for making consultations or sharing fact-checking results has also been encouraged, so as to generate valuable information at the service of the media as a whole. And beyond the appropriation of, and dependence on, external digital tools or the creative use of certain technologies, the most consolidated fact-checkers have become involved in developing their own technological innovation projects, based on big data or artificial intelligence, and creating tools that are regularly placed at the service of the community of fact-checkers and/or society in general. To give an example, Chequeado's Chequeabot can "erase" or sub-title YouTube videos to avoid intermediations or false translations.

d) *Open and participatory innovation; relationship with audiences and interest groups*

While not all fact-checkers are open to audience participation in generating content or funding the platforms, in general they seek to promote a close relationship with their users and greater involvement by the latter. To this end they are almost always provided with digital channels on social media or mobile messengering applications, through which to make consultations or send suspect news for verification. It is also normal to have scientists and fact-checking experts on hand, especially when facing specialised subjects. Collaboration with civil organisations, local media, universities and other educational institutions, according to the cases, is another feature that characterises fact-checkers, whether on a one-off basis —with talks or specific interventions— or via media literacy programs.

## In search of innovation

In the case of the IFCN's fact-checking platforms, innovation nearly always arises in response to challenges linked to their own work as fact-checkers. Amongst others, the reasons why this is taking place include: increasing efficiency and making the most of the resources of these companies; using the potential of the technologies; responding more efficiently to the demands of audiences; or minimising the threats arising from their work and increasing their security.

Many fact-checkers appear to respond to the Blue Ocean strategy (Chan Kim & Mauborgne, 2004), insofar as they situated themselves as pioneers in the field of journalistic fact-checking when it was still little exploited and even today they are exclusive initiatives in their fields, where they are barely encountering any competition.

Moreover, besides the fact that many are characterised by organisational innovation, that is to say, innovation forms a part of their strategy, *raison d'etre* and form of acting, their mission and values take them close to the concept of social innovation, linked to their purpose as active agents in the fight against disinformation.

The fact of their belonging to the IFCN leads them to act according to the principles of collaboration, transparency and accountability, and this is also where their value lies. At the same time, this differentiates them not only from certain traditional media, but also from other fact-checkers that operate outside this network and its innovative philosophy.

## Time to reflection

In 2013 robot journalism was introduced into the field of fact-checking by means of software bot applications that took on repetitive tasks in an automatic form; this was the essence of Truth Teller, Trooclik or Pheme, amongst other initiatives. Ten years later the challenge of automating fact-checking continues to be a complex question because there is a porous frontier between truth and falsity that sometimes makes it impossible to classify content in one of these two options.

In this context initiatives are permanently arising that reflect a commitment to truth, the spread of a vigilant function by the media, and also the absence of a sole antidote that would resolve the problem of information disorder. To this must be added the lack of a unified pattern for labelling content, and the fact that each fact-checker proposes a different categorisation (Vázquez-Herrero, Vizoso & López-García, 2019), which can contribute to increasing confusion in the general public and hinder its training.

In spite of the involvement of the technological firms, the media and the institutions that lead public policies in the search for solutions to remedy this reality, the numerous activities carried out to curb the invasion of false content have in parallel constructed a powerful ecosystem centred on the lie deriving from social fracture and polarisation. This scenario demands reflection and self-criticism, not only with respect to its viability and future necessity, but also from the research perspective due to the magnitude acquired by the object of study (Cea & Palomo, 2021) and we should ask ourselves to what extent the academy is partly to blame for this filter bubble.

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# The impact of disinformation on journalistic content

NEREIDA CEA, LAURA TERUEL & BLANCA DUQUE

(University of Malaga)

According to the thinker Moisés Naím, populism, polarisation and post-truth make up the perverse combination —the triple "p"— that is threatening to turn democracies into autocracies (Naím, 2022). The current communications ecosystem has, in general terms, fed these three phenomena (Watts & Rothschild, 2017). Due to its digital and hybrid format it has especially favoured the spread of disinformation, the seed of post-truth (Chadwick, 2013).

With the latest international events —the most recent being the pandemic caused by COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine— information disorders, far from being contained, have become an issue of citizen, economic and governmental concern due to their geopolitical influence, as the European Union has warned. One example of this is that already in 2018 a Flash Eurobarometer study was dedicated to information disorder (Report 464 - "Fake News and Disinformation Online"), and since then the EU has surveyed the European public on this question every year. According to its figures, in 2021 82% of the population considered that false news stories were an important problem for democracy, a figure that rises to 83.3% in the case of Spain.

This problem had begun to be present in public opinion some years before. In 2016 in the presidential elections in the United States, the candidate Donald Trump based his campaign on branding the criticisms he received in the mass media as fake news. This was a strategy to discredit journalism, orchestrated by the person who was finally to become the country's President, in which the media were constantly classified as "the enemy of the people of the United States".

While it is certainly not a novel phenomenon, it has re-emerged with unusual strength. Numerous authors have inquired about the roots of disinformation, which shares features with so-called sensationalist journalism, as can be seen in the press belonging to William Randolph Hearst, the father of yellow journalism, whose false news stories about the sinking

of the North American cruiser Maine by Spain in 1898 caused the Cuban War. Historically, this usage has worsened in periods of convulsion, such as the beginning of the First World War. There is no doubt that in such contexts information disorders have been used as destabilising tools.

Trump's attack on the United States press, with the aim of discrediting it, was a decisive feature of his term of office. In spite of that campaign, journalism and social media functioned for part of the population as the only counter-power during those years. The main United States media worked to counteract that strategy of discredit after the ex-President referred to them as "the opposition party" or "presstitutes". Over 350 newspapers simultaneously published editorials refuting the arguments of the then incumbent President of the United States (Teruel, 2018). Thus, in 2021 *The Washington Post* provided the figure of 30,573 untrue statements that its fact-checking team had detected in relation to the Trump administration.

With its epicentre in the United States, the growing problem of disinformation has since then taken on a global dimension. In 2018, in order to curb this, the European Union convened the Group of High Level Experts to advise the European Commission with the objective of promoting initiatives aimed at mitigating the problems of disinformation (Tuñón *et al.*, 2019; Bechmann, 2020). On this side of the Atlantic, the disinformation concerning Brexit generated an interest that paralleled the events in North America (Bastos & Mercea, 2019). In the geopolitical field, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has been a focus of disinformation that has interested researchers in recent years (Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016), and the need to throw light on this conflict has increased since the invasion in 2022. In the context of Spain, a large part of the phenomenon of disinformation has revolved around the Catalan consultation held on 1 October 2017 (Aparaici *et al.*, 2019).

In all these scenarios the mass media have frequently been pointed to as a party involved in the information disorders. This is in spite of the fact that according to the perception of the public, the majority of disinformation and fake news circulate on social media. In Europe the surveys show that journalism is trusted as a quality source for obtaining information in the face of *infoxication* (García-Faroldi & Blanco, 2022).

In that context of social change in how journalism is perceived and the importance attributed to it, some authors consider that journalism has a great opportunity to assert the value of quality information, placing itself at the nerve centre of the fight against disinformation. Thus, on one side, Beckett (2017) considers that exceptional circumstances are provided for professional journalism to showcase its role as a guarantor of truth and defender of democratic values.

On the other, in opposition to that, journalism is considered to have been grievously damaged by this new hybrid ecosystem, which has resulted not only in its discrediting but also in the erosion of the quality of professional practice itself. McChesney (2014) holds that this threat has two aspects that affect both the media and democracy system. Hofseth (2017) concludes that disinformation has acquired a radically different dimension at present, due to the establishment in society of information relativism, in which a variety of possible truths coexist, with what the media offer constituting just one of them; i.e., the arrival of the post-truth society.

Therefore, there can be no doubt that disinformation is the main communication challenge and concern of the XXI century (Cea & Palomo, 2021). At this crossroads, it is more relevant than ever for journalists to defend the search for truth as a basic principle of journalism, one that legitimises their profession (Koliska *et al.*, 2020). However, to date the old values of journalism —rigour, quality and ethics, amongst others— do not appear to have been sufficient for combating that discredit. For all these reasons the aim of this chapter is to reflect on the extent to which the mass media have articulated an appropriate discourse on disinformation.

**The presence of disinformation on the media agenda**

There can be no doubt that disinformation has been a cause of constant concern to the mass media, as is shown by the important role that this issue has held on their agenda. They have dedicated news items and editorials to informing about the rise and consequences of this contemporary phenomenon, employing a line of argument that revolves around the responsibility of journalism in counteracting this problem.

A search employing the operator "*desinformación*" in the press archives of the Spanish media using the MyNews database, provides significant data on the scale of the issue on the journalistic agendas. A search was conducted for the items published between 1 January 2017 and the same date in 2022 in the digital versions of the mainstream media with the largest audiences, and that are representative of the press, radio and television accessible using this application (Table 1). More than ten thousand results were obtained, which evinces the importance given to the issue in journalistic discourse and the differing importance it holds for the various media.

An exploratory analysis makes it possible to observe the central position of the pandemic (vaccination, origin of the virus, negationism…), the Catalan conflict and the international scenarios of Russia, the United States and Latin America as predominant themes. The case of *Eldiario.*

*es* stands out due to the greater volume of news items that it dedicates to this issue in comparison to its rivals. With 2,924 items published in this period, it accounts for 67% more than the following medium, *Elpais.com*. *Eldiario.es*, a digital native medium, pays attention to current news about social media, digital rights and the social implications of technology. In this respect, it published a monographic number of its magazine titled *Las mentiras (y la guerra) que amenazan la democracia* [*Lies (and the war) that are threatening democracy*]. Similarly, this medium is frequently involved in projects, forums and debates on the role of journalism in the new context of innovation and disinformation.

To understand the role that the mass media play in the problem of disinformation it is essential to know their ideological position on this question (Izadi & Saghaye-Biria, 2007). Although there is extensive academic literature on information disorders, there are very few empirical investigations that identify the conceptual paradigms and the editorial position of the media on this question. Knowing the perception that journalists themselves have of the causes of, and possible solutions to, disinformation is an essential question, as Garcia-Marin (2021) observes, "in order to discern what the role of journalism is going to be in coming years in the fight against disinformation".

Following the qualitative analysis of 194 editorials published in the United States media, Tandoc *et al.* (2019) observed that two types of arguments prevailed in the coverage given to this issue in the U.S. newspapers. In the first place, by making disinformation a subject of their editorials, it is legitimated as a social problem of great complexity. In the second place, when assigning responsibility for the phenomenon, they point to the political environment, technological platforms and the audience's lack of media literacy as causes.

Lischka (2019) carried out a very similar investigation, but focused on the editorial coverage given to fake news in the newspaper *The New York Times*. Based on a content analysis of the editorials published, the author enumerated the arguments most used by the newspaper in the content published on disinformation. The need for quality journalism to combat disinformation stood out amongst the most frequently found ideas. Similarly, the technological platforms were identified as holding a great responsibility for the lack of effective measures adopted up until then to control disinformation, especially on social media.

Van der Steenhoven (2018) analysed the coverage of fake news in the Dutch media by realising a content analysis of 862 newspaper articles between May 2016 and April 2017. He observed an increase in media attention following the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. According to the author, the profusion of news items on disinfor-

mation was due to the fact that this question had not previously been the subject of public debate. The publication of so many editorials on the issue contributed to the idea that we were witnessing the start of the age of post-truth, which contributed to a certain demoralisation facing the effects of disinformation. However, the author shows that such fears appear to be based on speculation, since following a content analysis of news items published on that question, the number of references to concrete examples of fake news in the mass media is almost zero. This leads van der Steenhoven to wonder about the extent to which the attention paid to fake news by the media following Trump's taking office might be a media exaggeration and the degree to which this contributed to a self-strengthening of the production of such news items.

Employing the same critical focus, Egelhofer *et al.* (2020) carry out a content analysis of the news items on disinformation published in the press in Austria between 2015 and 2018. The authors studied the use of the term fake news in 2,967 news items and concluded that its use was ubiquitous and confusing. The greater part of the news items published mainly dealt with the threat posed by disinformation, which is why, according to the authors, journalists contributed not only to the term's prominence, but also to a questionable process of normalisation that has had a negative effect.

## The barrier of the mass media

Another focus employed in studying the role of the mass media facing the problem of disinformation is concerned with how "fake news" interacts with the production of "real news", i.e., what real impact disinformation has on the information coverage provided by the media. And this is a crucial question in supporting: (1) the difficulty that the spread of disinformation encounters when attempting to cross the barrier of professional scrutiny; (2) and consequently, the importance that the mass media acquire in counteracting its effect by providing accurate information.

Different investigations have confirmed the scant effect of disinformation in the media. In this respect, the works by Vargo, Guo and Amazeen (2018); Guo and Vargo (2020) and Rojecki and Meraz (2016) are outstanding. The work by Guo and Vargo (2020) analyses the repercussions of rumours in the Chinese mass media, where the media environment functions under government control. This investigation is notable because it tracks the origin and coverage received in the traditional media by the ten main rumours that circulated on Internet in China in 2016. In total, the content of over 4,000 news items proceeding from 345 digital media was analysed.

Their conclusions show that the government-controlled media also contributed to the spread of manipulated or directly erroneous information, although this was always restricted to questions that were not politically sensitive. Even the official national news media gave headline coverage to some of these rumours, with the result that they contributed to other media becoming involved in their propagation. The study confirms that the commercial nature of the media is related to their greater permeability to rumours, due to their having an advertising business model based on clicks, which favours the dissemination of this type of false content.

Following the same goal of evaluating the real impact on the traditional mass media of rumours that circulate on Internet, Rojecki and Meraz (2016) undertook an analysis of news items on U.S. media. They restricted their analysis to news items during the 2014 electoral campaign. The results showed that the partisan sources in the traditional media, and most especially Fox, functioned as feedback loops that amplified the influence of disinformation proceeding from Internet.

Taking a further step in this line of study that analyses the repercussion of disinformation in the mass media, Vargo, Guo and Amazeen (2018) considered the role of the fact-checking platforms. To that end they traced the impact of the work of these platforms on the mass media and concluded that the fact-checkers are autonomous in their selection of which issues to cover, and their work does not have an influence on determining the agenda of the mass media. Similarly, they confirmed that false news content is increasing and has a greater presence in the partisan online media, generally media that are emergent and thus digital native.

**Visual disinformation and post-truth: breaking the contract of veracity**

The study of disinformation and the manipulation of images and videos is also of special interest, since this is one of the modes that generates the greatest impact in the mass media (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020; Dixon *et al.*, 2015).

The articles related to the study of present-day photography set out from the concept of posterity. Photography framed in the period of post-truth is beginning to function within what is defined as a new stage in which opinions, emotions and beliefs prevail over objective facts (Rodríguez Ferrándiz, 2018). The digitization of the image and its infinite possibilities of editing increase this conception. To this must be added the social media that have situated themselves as alternative news references for society, contributing to a greater circulation of disinformation.

The visual aspect, now disconnected from the idea of reflection, today involves a broad range of meanings and is surrounded by a perception of distrust, which is not a synonym of falsehood. Alluding to the comparison that Vives-Ferrándiz (2021) draws between the concepts of post-truth and fake news, the latter is an erroneous or false creation or presentation, which is made-up to seem authentic (Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2018).

There is also a specific perspective that attempts to understand and break down visual disinformation. The taxonomical proposals of image manipulation contribute a basic schema with which to understand the different categories that exist within it. On one side, a differentiation is found that is constituted on the basis of three processes: *ex ante* manipulations, which are carried out prior to taking the photograph (artificially arranging the scene, for example); *ex facto* manipulations, which are carried out as the photograph is being taken; and *ex post* manipulations, which are processed once the visual resource has been obtained (Muñiz-Velázquez & Navazo-Ostúa, 2021).

On the other hand, together with the categorisations of typologies of disinformation defined by Tandoc *et al.* (2018), the categorisation proposed by Wardle (2017) and those collected by Garimella and Eckles (2020), there is a new format for measuring visual disinformation that involves studying the photograph according to its degree of manipulation or the intentionality of the alterations made to the image (Gómez-De-Ágreda *et al.*, 2021). The journalist's goal is to manage to stop the proliferation of deceitful communications, and by employing these categories it is possible to detect images that disinform by using a humorous tone, those that do so by direct manipulation with editing techniques, or those that can decontextualize visual elements by simply placing them in a different temporal space, amongst others.

## Media strategies for tackling disinformation

Donald Trump's attack on the press inaugurated the age of post-truth; a new stage in the relation between political power and the mass media in which the latter began to be identified as part of the machinery that encourages disinformation. This trend of discrediting the traditional media coincides in time with a decline in their credibility. Furthermore, this process is taking place in parallel with the rise of the hybrid communication that is being generated on internet and social media. Users increasingly spend more time in digital environments and the communication flow is blurring the barriers between personal dialogue and mass communication aimed at disseminating news content.

Academic investigation also has a special interest in studying visual disinformation, as this is what presents the greatest capacity to become viral,

due to the ease in manipulating digital images and the multiple editing options provided by the new information ecosystem. The fact-checking work of the photojournalism professionals is a maximum requisite in trying to stop the viralisation of false audiovisual content.

Without any doubt, the mass media have not remained as mere passive agents in the face of that phenomenon. Their responses have been different according to very diverse factors, amongst which the capacity to dedicate human and material resources to this task stands out. In broad terms, three forms of response by the journalistic newsrooms can be observed.

In the Spanish context, the mainstream media opt for the *responsible model*, which involves creating a fact-checking unit made up of a team specialising in verification tasks that works transversally for all the sections, depending on the subject of the information that needs verification. *El País* stands out in the group of media that apply the so-called *responsible model*, since it has an expert team that provides support in such tasks to the entire newsroom. For example, this Spanish newspaper managed to take apart the Russian disinformation concerning the attack on the station in Kramatorsk. Using similar techniques, concretely by means of fact-checking and analysing satellite imagery, the team at *The New York Times* refuted the Russian version of the massacre in Bucha. Amongst the public media that employ this model, BBC Reality Check, EfeVerifica and VerificaRTVE are outstanding.

Other mass media opt for the *educational model*, which involves training journalists from all sections, who then take up fact-checking tasks in their areas of specialisation. This is the model used in the Vocento group, for example.

Compared with the previous models, the smaller-scale mass media employ a passive *traditional model*, where their concern about disinformation is not made visible. The *traditional model* covers the majority of the local newspapers, where the work of fact-checking has been reinforced; but they have no full-time specialists in fact-checking or specific routines for tackling these tasks.

Finally, a new typology of communications companies has emerged that are specifically concerned with fact-checking and these correspond to the *specialised model*. The fact-checking agencies are outstanding due to their journalists' high level of training in verification tasks, together with data journalism and new journalistic narratives. They often integrate new technologies and innovations in their newsrooms. They provide training courses and collaborate with other general media to train other journalists and provide fact-checking services. Amongst the Spanish fact-checking agencies it is worth drawing attention to Newtral and Maldita.es. The lat-

ter also has agreements with different media, such as *Eldiario.es*, Telemadrid, Cuatro and Onda Cero, where it broadcasts the daily sections Maldita Hemeroteca and Maldito Bulo.

These different strategies for tackling disinformation have had repercussions on the media agenda and this has been analysed by the Communication Sciences. Different authors have observed the content of news items and editorials to detect the degree and type of coverage provided on this question. Their conclusions include the observation that despite the many times when disinformation finds its way onto the media agenda, on the majority of occasions this is in order to address it as a general set of problems that require reflection, and an appeal is made for policies that fight against this issue, whose epicentre lies in the technological platforms and social media.

Especially numerous amongst the scientific publications are those dedicated to untangling the origin of false news stories and their social consequences, and to novel phenomena such as *astroturfing* in the social media environment and its repercussions on processes of polarisation. It would be enlightening to inquire more deeply into the interdependence of these tendencies in the shaping of the media agenda. The interrelation of the discourses of the hybrid environment where the mass media, journalists and the rest of the actors converge is therefore a field of maximum interest to the Communication Sciences. A combined approach that involves digital methods and makes use of big data will enhance the scale and depth of the results. And, it is to be hoped, this will help in the fight against the proliferation of disinformation.

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# Training to empower citizens against information disorder:
# Media literacy initiatives in Spain

Francisco Marcos Martín-Martín, Jesús Espino González
& Elena Blanco Castilla

(University of Malaga)

The general public, the main target of disinformation campaigns, is proving to be vulnerable facing the rapid transformation and refinement of the different tools and procedures of online communication that are set in motion to generate chaos and confusion (Centro Criptológico Nacional, 2021). From the survey carried out by the consultancy *Ipsos Global Advisor*, it can be deduced that Spain is the European country with the most naïve attitude towards disinformation. 57% of Spaniards admit that at some time they have believed that the information in a false news item was true (IPSOS, 2018).

In this context, the population is also affected by the psychological effects of *astroturfing*. The term *astroturfing* can be defined as a communication strategy that uses websites or bots to create the false impression that a certain opinion enjoys wide public support (McNutt & Boland, 2007, p. 169). Antunes, Lopes and Sanches (2021) conclude that while knowledge can give rise news stories, news stories do not necessarily give rise to knowledge, and that news stories do not necessarily proceed further than the level of opinion.

The polarisation of society fomented by political atomisation and the lack of criticism and self-criticism can be counteracted by civic training and media education. Different initiatives with a public, private or mixed character have arisen from this approach that attempt to tackle the problems of the disinformation phenomenon.

The Government of Spain, taking as its starting point the Action Plan against Disinformation and the Plan of Action for Democracy, promoted by the European Union (EU) (European Commission, 2018a), has adopted its own national strategy facing information disorder. One of these initiatives is the Forum against Disinformation in the Area of Na-

tional Security. This working group was approved by the Council of Ministers on the proposal of Félix Bolaños, the Minister of the Presidency, Relations with the Court and Democratic Memory (BOE, 2022). The purpose of this working group, inspired by the collaborative public-private relationship, is to recommend initiatives in order to raise understanding of the threat posed by disinformation campaigns and carry out joint participatory activities. Media education has a central role in the Plan of Action.

At another level, numerous organisations have developed applied projects, courses or other activities to further media literacy. The most frequent educational practices consist in holding workshops and designing didactic programs. Our purpose in this chapter is to give visibility to some of the more successful media education initiatives that have been designed to fight against information disorder.

Many of these actions are developed in educational centres under the responsibility of teachers who, voluntarily and in a spirit of civic responsibility, are sowing the seed of a healthy scepticism in the student body. Nonetheless, teenage students spend more time connected to Internet than in the educational centres (QUSTODIO, 2019). Keeping in mind that digital platforms are where optimal conditions are found for information disorder, we find ourselves facing a situation that is disheartening. Central, regional and local government institutions, the mass media, the school and the home must all act against malicious content.

## Definitions of information disorder and media literacy

Solving a problem involves identifying its existence. However, recognising that a problem exists is not enough, it is also necessary to define it correctly. The phenomenon of disinformation is set in a complex and broad semantic field. In political, media and also academic circles the expression "fake news" has become standardised. However, it is recommendable to avoid the use of this term as it has been as a mechanism by means of which the political authorities can undermine the independence of the mass media (Wardle & Derakshan, 2017). In addition, as Tandoc *et al.* (2017) argue, the term "fake news" simplifies the multiple forms covered by disinformation: satirical information, parody, manipulation, advertising and propaganda.

In the same semantic field in the Spanish-speaking world, the recommendation is to use the term *bulo* [hoax]. The existence of this word makes it unnecessary to employ the Anglicism "fake". Aparici, García-Marín and Rincón-Manzano (2019) define *bulos* as "false messages fabricated on social media by users and/or groups in order to create a cer-

tain state of opinion". At the same time, Salaverría *et al.* (2020) consider a *bulo* to be "any intentionally false content with a truthful appearance, conceived with the aim of deceiving the citizens, and publicly spread by any platform or social mass media".

Due to the breadth of the terminology associated with the disinformation phenomenon, the Fundación del Español Urgente (Fundéu) recommends that the adjective "*falseado*" [falsified] should be used when referring to a news item that has been premeditatedly adulterated. Or to a false news item, since information can be false due to its failing to tell the truth, either unconsciously or deliberately. On the contrary, the European Union's High Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation, suggests avoiding use of the term "fake news", as they consider it to be inadequate for reflecting the complex problems of disinformation, whose content can combine fictitious information with real facts (European Commission, 2018a).

In the search for a way out of this terminological maze, Wardle and Derakshan (2017) propose the term "information disorder" to refer to bad information, erroneous information and disinformation. However, the High Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation suggests using the term disinformation as it "includes all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit" (Buning *et al.*, 2018). In this chapter we consider that information disorder is the term that best defines the problems associated with the object of study, although we do not rule out using the term recommended by the High Level Expert Group.

We find that there is less semantic complexity in the field of media literacy. Even so, numerous definitions of media literacy have been coined. For OfCom, the British regulatory authority, media literacy has an instrumental character: it is "the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts" (Lee & So, 2014).

UNESCO, in a recently published circular on media and information literacy, defines media literacy as processes for: "Understanding and using mass media in either an assertive or non-assertive way, including an informed and critical understanding of media institutions (…) Also, the ability to read, analyse, evaluate and produce communication in a variety of media forms (e.g. audio-visual, written, graphic, interactive games, etc.)" (Grizzle, Wilson & Gordon, 2021, p. 381).

The European Parliament took a further step in questions of media literacy. In the *Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)* of 2010, it considers that "'Media literacy' refers to skills, knowledge and understand-

ing that allow consumers to use media effectively and safely". In this way it emphasises the social resilience conferred on citizens be media literacy:

> Media-literate people are able to make informed choices, understand the nature of content and services and take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies. They are better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful or offensive material (European Parliament, 2010).

One of the most recent definitions is that proposed by the European Union in the report *Council conclusions on media literacy in an ever-changing world*. The Council suggests generic concept of media literacy that includes:

> (…) all the technical, cognitive, social, civic, ethical and creative capacities that allow a citizen to access and use information and media effectively, and to safely and responsibly create and share content through different platforms (European Council, 2020).

In this report, the Council considers that media literacy "should not be limited to learning about tools and technologies but should *also* aim to equip citizens with the critical thinking required for exercising judgment, analysing complex realities and recognising the differences between opinion and fact" (European Council, 2020).

### Educommunication to empower the public against information disorder

Numerous prestigious academics have been stressing the urgent need to implement educommunicative activities to alleviate the harmful effects that information disorder is generating in societies. There is certainty regarding the increase in skills for understanding, evaluating and analysing media messages amongst those people who take Media and Information Literacy courses (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; Suminas & Jastramskis, 2020). Based on this, the problems of disinformation are considered to be an opportunity for education in the mass media. However, authors like David Buckingham (2019) and Divina Frau (2019) warn that having recourse to media and information literacy as an urgent solution is an erroneous decision.

According to Righetto, Muriel-Torrado and Vitorino (2021), media literacy is a way of remedying but not eradicating the problem, "since it is essential to preserve critical and self-critical thinking so as to reduce and control the quality of the information that is consumed and shared". The solution to this problem should be considered from a holistic perspective, which underscores "'literacy' in 'media' and 'information', along with the emergence of 'literacy'

in 'news stories' and 'data'" (Valverde-Berrocoso, González-Fernández & Acevedo-Borrega, 2022). Furthermore, multiple literacies, including civic literacy, should be present in the different fields of social life.

On the other hand, a warning is issued to avoid underestimating the complexity involved in implementing media literacy programs (Buckingham, 2019). At present many resources are available to facilitate the creation, and guarantee the reliability and success, of educommunicative actions. One reference in this respect is the manual published by UNESCO (Wilson *et al.*, 2011): *Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers.* However, this "classic" work needs to be updated. Facing the vertiginous technological change associated with the mass media and the spread of disinformation, Alcolea, Reig and Mancinas (2020) propose updating the UNESCO curriculum from a structuralist perspective, with the aim of fomenting knowledge about the ownership of the media and the Internet. Similarly, they also suggest consulting another work published recently by the media literacy network Alfamed titled *Currículum Alfamed de formación de profesores en educación mediática* [*Alfamed Curriculum for Training Teachers in Media Education*] (Aguaded, Jaramillo-Dent & Delgado-Ponce, 2021).

Education manuals employing a concrete and instrumental perspective have also been published to fight disinformation. To be sure, many publishing initiatives have appeared following this line of action. However, we would emphasise a work published by UNESCO titled *Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training* (Ireton & Posetti, 2020) and the *Guía docente para el profesorado de Educación Secundaria. Alfabetización Mediática e Informacional* [*Teaching Guide for Teachers in Secondary Education. Media and Information Literacy*] (Herrero & La Rosa, 2021).

Research articles also contribute solutions to the process of creating and implementing media literacy programs to tackle the problem of falsified news. Works proceeding from the field of Library and Information Science contribute analyses, suggestions and tools for adapting educommunicative proposals to the phenomenon of disinformation. For example, De Paor and Heravi (2020) analyse the emergent and contemporary frameworks of information literacy and describe initiatives promoted by libraries to educate communities on how to browse the Internet in the era of post-truth and disinformation.

Information disorder has given rise to a social problem and the need to empower citizens in media terms. To fight this information pandemic numerous organisations have developed applied projects, workshops or other media literacy activities. In the following section we will describe some of the most successful initiatives.

**Initiatives with regard to media literacy against the disinformation phenomenon in Spain**

According to Ramón Salaverría (2022), there are three types of strategies to defeat disinformation:

— Technological strategies, which consist in developing artificial intelligence systems that identify potentially disinformational content and alert us to its appearance and origin;
— Legal strategies, resulting from the approval and application of specific regulations that establish or stiffen sanctions, as well as transnational laws that persecute disinformation;
— Educational strategies, which involve the deployment of training in media literacy. The present chapter is concerned with these strategies, with its focus placed on Spain.

There is growing tendency to opt for media literacy in the whole of the European Union, promoting "a growing model of co-responsibility of the citizens, who it is believed should be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to tackle disinformation" (Sádaba & Salaverría, 2023, p. 26-27). This is a question of any member of the public being able to judge for themself the information they receive and resend it, which requires not only digital skills (being able to manage a device), but also media ones (possessing criteria about content irrespective of the format used).

We have selected 18 initiatives that we consider to be the most outstanding amongst those that have presence on the Internet, with their own space and an appreciable promotion on social media. It is not an exhaustive list, but it is representative of what is being done in Spain and in Spanish.

As we shall see, the activities carried out by universities are the most prominent; followed by those of press associations and private enterprises, which can even end up becoming foundations; the Public Administration —either directly or through instrumental organisations; the mass media; and even a publishing house specialising in didactic manuals and resources for scholars.

**University projects**

a) *IBERIFIER*

The most powerful of the media literacy projects emerging from the universities is IBERIFIER. Co-ordinated from the University of Navarre by Ramón Salaverría, this is formed of twelve Spanish and Portuguese

universities, five fact-checking organisations and news agencies, and six multidisciplinary research centres. Although it emerged as an Iberian observatory of digital media promoted by the European Union, one of its missions is to encourage the media literacy of journalists, young people and society as a whole.

b) *SPOTTED*

The Loyola Andalucía University Foundation co-ordinates the project School Policies to Tackle and Detect Fake News (SPOTTED), with the participation of the specialist training agency INCOMA and the Italian fact-checker Pagella Politica, in addition to organisations from Greece, Lithuania and Poland. SPOTTED also combines investigation and training. It aims to evaluate and strengthen the skills of young Europeans for detecting and avoiding disinformation through an educational program aimed at secondary-school students throughout Europe. The starting point is a self-evaluation survey on false new stories, available online. Once evaluated, the system proposes to each student training by specialists in journalism and fact-checking to protect themselves from disinformation. The material is available to the general public, but is conceived for the use of teachers working with students in the classroom.

c) *Teaching Innovation Project ALFA (PID-ALFA)*

The University of Valladolid, through the PID-ALFA, headed by Itziar Reguero and Pablo Berdón, has proposed to improve the media literacy of the university community. For that purpose it has created a news fact-checker, organised conferences and workshops aimed at all the students, although with preferential participation by students of Journalism, and launched publications aimed at improving journalistic practice. The project is supported by a committee of multi-disciplinary experts formed of academics and professionals proceeding from different branches of knowledge.

d) *Programa Nuevos Escenarios Vulnerabilidad Digital (Provuldig2-CM)*
   *[New Digital Vulnerability Scenarios Project]*

Provuldig2 is a program of activities on digital vulnerability constituted as a consortium, with the participation of six research groups from four Madrid universities-CEU San Pablo, Rey Juan Carlos, Complutense de Madrid and Villanueva Internacional. It addresses media literacy with

the goal of achieving an inclusive society. It brings together and coordinates informative activities, as well as dedicating one of its lines of research to analysis of the interactions, discourses and data of teenagers on social media.

e) *MOOC europeo [European MOOC]*

In the field of distance education, the UNED [Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia-National Distance Education University] and its technological spin-off ECO (E-learning, Communication and Open-data) contribute to media literacy through the free, untutored MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) "Disinformation, step by step". This multilingual resource is supported by the European Commission, the French Ministry of Culture and the International Organisation of La Francophonie. The aims of the course, for which the lecturers Sara Osuna and Vicente Montiel are responsible in Spain, include shaping media literacy projects to fight disinformation.

f) *Disinformation Research*

Titled "The Impact of Disinformation in Journalism: Contents, Professional Routines and Audiences", this project began its research activities in 2019 and is therefore a pioneering R&D University Project in the study of the disinformation phenomenon. Its activity to further knowledge transfer in the field of media literacy has materialised in collaborative undertakings with different organisations and groups. It has organised Inter-university Summer Courses, training for members of the Malaga Press Association and the College of Journalists of Andalusia, and for students attending the Aula Universitaria para Mayores +55 at UMA [University courses for Over-55s of the University of Malaga], workshops in the framework of activities for teenagers with a high intellectual capacity (GUÍAME program), and the European Night of the Researchers of the University of Malaga.

## Initiatives proceeding from press associations

a) *Press Association of Madrid*

"Workshops to promote reading the press at school". Eleven editions have been organised: the workshops have been held in educational centres of the Community of Madrid since the year 2009, and the initiative is aimed at students in secondary education. It provides tools and resources

for fighting disinformation and fomenting a critical and responsible consumption of the mass media. It won the National Prize for the Encouragement of Reading 2020.

b) *Cadiz Press Association*

"Periodismo en las aulas" [Journalism in the classrooms] (2011). Aimed at teachers, students and their families. It includes modules such as Revista de prensa, Y tú, ¿por qué te vas?, El periodismo contado, or Yo, periodista, some in collaboration with the Campo de Gibraltar Press Association, the Provincial Deputation of Cadiz or the Presidential Council of the Regional Government of Andalusia, thanks to a protocol of collaboration signed with the Territorial Delegation of Education.

c) *La Prensa en las escuelas [The Press at School]*

La Prensa en las escuelas, an educommunicative project of the Seville Press Association with the support of the Seville City Council, is aimed at secondary school students with the goal of fostering media literacy. The axis of the initiative is a theoretical-practical workshop lasting four hours, taught by journalists in the schools. This workshop, based on the press and videos as didactic resources, offers the students tools to fight disinformation and aims to raise their awareness of the need to have recourse to the mass media to obtain evidence-based and accurate information.

d) *La Llave Maestra de la Comunicación [The Master Key to Communication]*

La Llave Maestra de la Comunicación is the media literacy project promoted by the Jerez Press Association (Cadiz). The goal of this initiative is to provide secondary school students, teachers and parents with tools to become critical and proactive consumers of information. This activity is articulated through training actions that address the media's evolution from print to social media, the media treatment of vulnerable sections of the population, and focusing on information from the gender perspective. The program of activities has been carried out in seven public secondary schools situated in the southern, northern and eastern zones and in rural villages of Jerez (Andalusia), as well as in five subsidised educational centres. In addition to Jerez, it includes educational centres in Arcos de la Frontera, Sanlúcar and El Puerto de Santa María. The teachers are graduates in Journalism who are on the Association's employment list.

e) *Prensa en mi Mochila [Press in My Backpack]*

Prensa en mi Mochila is an initiative of the media literacy project developed by the Malaga Press Association and is aimed at primary and secondary school students. It receives collaboration from the Provincial Deputation of Malaga and has three lines of activity: workshops for students and teachers, talks for families, and meetings between students and journalists. Prensa en mi Mochila is open to participation by schools in the province that wish to sign up, and to publicise its activities it is supported by several local media. Other projects that it develops include Prensa Sin Edad, aimed at the elderly, with the collaboration of municipal councils of the province.

## Educommunicative actions of private organisations

a) *Maldita Educa [Maldita Educates]*

Maldita Educa emerged in parallel with the fact-checker Maldita.es, which is now a foundation. The goal of Maldita is to promote media literacy amongst the public of all ages and professionals proceeding from different fields in order to contain disinformation, protect privacy and take decisions based on reliable information. The foundation collaborates on a Master's Degree in Journalistic Investigation, New Narratives, Data, Fact-Checking and Transparency, at the Universidad *Rey Juan Carlos.*

b) *Newtral Educación [Newtral Education]*

Newtral Educación forms part of Newtral, a media start-up founded by Ana Pastor, its sole owner. In addition to producing television formats, the company launched the pioneering fact-checker in Spain. Following a path similar to that of Maldita.es, it now has an educational division dedicated to training in schools and universities —with participation in research projects— and other educational centres. As in the previous case, the pinnacle of its offer is a postgraduate course, in this case a Master's Degree in Digital Fact-Checking and Data Journalism, at the Universidad CEU San Pablo. It also offers short courses and summer courses in collaboration with different Spanish universities.

c) *(In)fórmate [Inform/Train yourself]*

The Fundación FAD Juventud —previously the Fundación de Ayuda contra la Drogadicción [Foundation for Help against Drug Addiction]— in

collaboration with Google and Spanish Government, it promotes (In)fórmate, an educational project on mass media consumption that foments media literacy and critical thinking amongst students in the 3rd and 4th years of secondary education in schools throughout Spain. It has specific programs available so that students in primary education can safely browse the Internet (Sé Genial en Internet [Be Brilliant on Internet]), while those in secondary education can learn to detect disinformation. Its website houses free-access resources on media literacy and critical thinking programs for teenagers.

### d) *Fundación Atresmedia [Atresmedia Foundation]*

The Fundación Atresmedia has recently reoriented its task to focus on media and information literacy with the goal of providing guidance for schoolchildren and teachers. The purpose is to ensure that children and teenagers play an active role in consuming content. To that end it has set up research, consciousness-raising and learning projects. From 2022 onward all the Foundation's new projects (meetings, didactic workshops, grants, prizes and specific training programs) have been linked to media literacy.

## Educommunication proceeding from Public Administrations and official bodies

### a) *Is4k*

The Instituto Nacional de Ciberseguridad (Incibe )[The National Institute of Online Security], which depends on the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation, develops the project Internet Segura For Kids (Is4k) [Safe Internet For Kids]. Although the Incibe's programs and campaigns are more concerned with handling tools than with content, the organisation includes specific initiatives on media literacy amongst its activities: it has resources for learning to conduct searches for information on Internet, detecting disinformation and viral chains, understanding how cognitive biases operate, and learning about the effect of echo chambers in creating public opinion.

### b) *Interaulas [Interclassrooms]*

Interaulas is an educational project that emerged from an educational agreement between the Press Association of Cantabria and the Education Council of the Government of Cantabria. The goal is to use ICT to integrate the press into the classroom, and its development can be followed in

the digital journal *Red-acción*. By means of elaborating journalistic products, including videos, one of its goals is that schoolchildren should learn to interpret information by reflecting and employing critical awareness when facing content that reaches them through the mass media. Interaulas is coordinated by journalists who review its material prior to publication and provide guidance to teachers in the participating schools.

c) *Desenreda [Untangle]*

The Regional Government of Andalusia, through its Education Council and with the collaboration of the Andalusian press associations and the Andalusian College of Journalists, organises the Desenreda media literacy workshops. These are theoretical-practical workshops taught by journalists, divided into three face-to-face modules dedicated to disinformation, social media and the task of the journalist. In this way journalism is integrated into the classroom as a teaching resource to develop civic commitment, plurality and a critical sensibility in students. This didactic resource is implemented in the 3rd and 4th years of secondary education. Amongst the skills that the program aims to impart are the use and management of communication; these skills are needed to form one's own criteria based on the messages that are received through the media.

d) *El audiovisual en la Escuela [The Audiovisial at School]*

The Audiovisual Council of Andalusia holds an annual contest that awards the El Audiovisual en la Escuela prizes. These are intended to stimulate critical analysis by young people of the messages they receive through the mass media and Internet. The purpose of the competition is thus to introduce media literacy into the Andalusian classrooms. There are five categories that recognise the work of schoolchildren and one for the work of teachers, all worth 1,000 euros each. The videos submitted must be related to literacy as such, the educational possibilities of Internet, good use of the social media, false new stories, the phenomenon of the influencers, or the use of digital tools to avoid online harassment, sexting, grooming and online gambling.

**Other media literacy actions**

a) *Vicens Vives Live*

The publishing company Vicens Vives has set up Live, an initiative that consists in making open resources available to the educational com-

munity so that students in secondary education can do work on current affairs in the classroom. In March 2022, only one month after the invasion of the Ukraine by Russia, Live launched a didactic unit to explain in detail, based on validated news stories, the causes of the conflict, the reasons why the international order was being disrupted, the role of the main powers, and the war's effects on the civilian population. One of the activities consisted in dividing the class into two groups that had to focus on the war from the perspective of each side —using their mass media and their official sources— to contrast positions and make a critical analysis of the present moment. This was a clear commitment to live media literacy, as historical events as they were unfolding.

b) *Learn to Check*

Learn to Check is an educational Project of university lecturers Nereida Carrillo and Marta Montagut that aims to spread media education. It emerged from workshops held in the American Spaces of Barcelona, Madrid and Valencia, and finally grew to have nine workshops and a wide collection of resources, including games, videos, didactic guides and tools for verifying images and videos. It receives collaboration from the abovementioned American Spaces in Spain, from which it emerged, in addition to support from the Embassy of the United States in Spain and the Consulate General of the United States in Barcelona.

**A variety of actors fighting disinformation**

Following the tracks of the Spanish media literacy initiatives on Internet and in public conversations generated on social media, and even though there is an incipient transversal offer —not a specific one, as pointed out by Medina, Briones and Hernández (2017)— in compulsory education, it can be observed that the response to the challenge posed by disinformation is not yet structured in the public sphere. An example that evinces this situation can be found in the schools, which are ideal places for implementing educommunicative projects against disinformation. In this case, for the schools to become the cornerstone of media literacy, it is necessary to integrate media education into the educational plans. However, for this to happen the resistance of the administrative bodies must be overcome, the overload of the classroom curriculum must be managed, and the scant training of the teaching staff in mass media must be improved (the presence in the schools of journalists with an educommunicative profile would partly resolve this situation), besides developing high level research projects and curricular proposals.

In spite of the fact that universities and schools are beginning to have resources available, the most systematic actions proceed from organisations with which the Administration collaborates, not from the Administration itself. The role of the universities is outstanding, with proposals that go beyond the national sphere and have a European dimension (IBERIFIER, SPOTTED, Disinformation step by step). Research groups do not restrict their activities to studying and, in addition to gathering data, they deploy resources to contribute to media literacy. However, it should be verified whether the main goal of the educommunicative proposals that flow from these projects is to empower citizens or obtain data for use in academic publications.

Also notable is the role played by the press associations in asserting the importance of journalism and journalists as bulwarks against the disinformation phenomenon. In order to win back the public's trust in media professionals and generate job opportunities for their associates, they have developed media literacy initiatives. The example of Cantabria, where the Council of Education and the press association operate as equals through the signing of an agreement, contrasts with the initiatives in Andalusia, where the administrations that participate do so as collaborators together with the sponsorship organisations. The Fundación Caixa and Caixabank are prominent in the role of sponsors, and are firmly committed to the press associations as organisations that channel media literacy in diverse geographical, educational and professional contexts.

It is private initiatives that have the greatest reach. Maldita Educa, Newtral Educación and the Fundación Atresmedia have the dissemination channels of different programs with large audiences and the support of the mass media, which enables them to publicise their existence more widely. In addition, Maldita and Newtral have reached the point where they have their own postgraduate courses that train media literacy experts, many of whom will end up becoming educommunicators.

For its part, the Fundación FAD Juventud has an alliance with the multinational Google and the Government of Spain. Google's presence generates sensibilities with respect to a model that asserts a form of educommuncation, one that is inclusive, public and independent of the political and financial powers.

As noted above, the direct response of administrations and public bodies is still weak. We have found the best structured model in the programs and campaigns of Is4k (Incibe), a specific program of the Regional Government of Andalusia —with the support, once again, of the press associations— and the prizes awarded by the Audiovisual Council of Andalusia.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, the Vicens Vives didactic unit is an example of what can be done in the classrooms, in this case in second-

ary education, to fight disinformation and develop media literacy. Keeping in mind that text books tend to be updated according to the rhythm of the educational laws, the fact of its elaborating an appendix in only one month and making it freely available to teachers and students is both innovative and sets a good example. With respect to Learn to Check, the participation of a non-European actor (the Embassy of the United States) in an educational project shows that disinformation is a global, political and strategic question.

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# Section 4

## The impact of news on pluralism and the quality of debates

# Introduction:
# Understanding news users

DAVID DOMINGO

(Université Libre de Bruxelles)

The hegemony of social media platforms as the gathering space for many Internet users has redefined in the last decade how news are consumed, but research has tended to approach the phenomenon with a double and contradictory assumption: a determinism that expects technology to shape how journalism is done, and a normative ideal demanding media organisations to foster a vibrant public sphere in this evolving environment. Even critical research that demonstrates how much resistance to change there is in journalistic culture, how much counterintuitive it was for news producers to develop participatory practices with their audiences, has been based on normative expectations that assume active engagement of the public is a given in a digital networked world and necessarily good for democracy if adequately moderated (Borger *et al.*, 2013; Kreiss & Brennen, 2016). The rise of what Quandt has pertinently called "dark participation" (2018) has demonstrated how wrong were we all. It is not only that most users do not want to participate, but simply consume news. It is that those participating often have the motivation of shaping or disrupting public debate with a militant agenda, for better or for worse, depending on the political leanings of the observer. Nothing new under the sun, in fact, as the perfectly rational consensus envisaged by Habermas has probably never found the appropriate context to fructify, before or after the advent of social media, as sharply explain Capilla and Ruiz-Caballero in the first chapter of this part of the book devoted to news users.

Their chapter reminds us that research has the moral imperative of being normative, demanding a better journalism for a better society, but that it can only produce a legitimate analysis of a social phenomenon if those ideals are explicit and part of the inquiry, not taken for granted. Capilla and Ruiz-Caballero explain how the public opinion is a historically constructed concept that evolves over time, and that needs to be rethought in the context of digital platforms avoiding to completely disconnect it from the previous iterations that have shaped it. Even the most disruptive technologies are adopted and adapted by those who use them

(Boczkowski, 2004). And in the case of journalism competing for attention in the context of a social-media driven public sphere, we need to better understand not only how journalists adapt to this challenge, but even more importantly how users use the news and how do they find value in the information they consume (Costera-Meijer & Bijleveld, 2016, Costera-Meijer, 2022). In recent years, journalism studies have taken the audience more seriously as an object of study, and concepts that have been very influential to explore the implications of the new media ecosystem are being addressed with more nuance to acknowledge their complexity. Suau devotes his chapter in this section to a literature review of concepts such as filter bubbles and echo chambers. The mounting empirical evidence shows that most Internet users have access to a more diverse media diet in ideological terms that those relying on the press or broadcasting, but the selective exposure to like-minded content fostered by algorithms pushes a minority of citizens to very extreme and self-reinforcing rabbit holes (Bruns, 2019). Filter bubbles do exist, and they can be very dangerous in feeding conspiracy theories, but they are not prevalent across society. The accountability of the algorithmic rules that guide our online experiences is one of the challenges ahead for society, and journalism and researchers can help in deconstructing the biased built in the process of creating them (Diakopoulos, 2015).

In the end, we do not have to ditch the ideal of audience engagement for a journalism that better serves social need. We need to empirically test it in connection with the quality of new, as Vural and Puertas-Graell call for in the last chapter of this section. In order to do this, researchers need to develop methodological tools that grasp the wishes, needs, practices and expectations of news users. Many are showing the way, offering richer explanations of the hybrid media systems we inhabit, explanations that overcome simplistic definitions, catastrophist interpretations and utopian wishful thinking. The following chapters offer a good overview of the work being done to understand news users and what journalism means for them.

# Public opinion, paywalls
# and "snacking news"

PABLO CAPILLA & CARLOS RUIZ-CABALLERO

(University Ramon Llull)

The media's role in shaping public opinion has been diluted in the digital environment. This is an environment that the media do not control and in which they act without knowing clearly what their role is. The media no longer have the hegemony of symbolic power (Thompson, 1985), which now also falls on millions of citizens who have become an active audience and who are connected and who keep themselves informed through social networks (Masip *et al.*, 2015). The news generated by the information media is epistemologically matched in the Internet browsers with the rest of the information generated by other sources and which is not necessarily created with informative intentionality. The difficulty involved in the media fitting into this metamorphosis of the public sphere is the first focus of this text. In addition, the media are also unclear on how to compete with the other actors who coexist in the digital locus and whether their erratic participation guarantees them economic survival. Therefore, the second objective is to analyse, in the context of this structural transformation, some decisions that the media have made, such as establishing paywalls, in an attempt to obtain the economic viability of journalistic companies. These decisions could undoubtedly generate an information gap between citizens, thus resulting in a reduction in pluralism and threating democracy (Picckard & Williams, 2014), as the media, paradoxically, become "agents of exclusion" (Benson, 2019, p. 147).

## From illustrated salons to digital locus

The concept of "public opinion" has been marked since its birth, in the eighteenth century, by its communicative nature and its political connotations, as it emerged as an expression of an intellectual elite's desire to participate in government decision-making (Habermas, 1989). Originally, public opinion was an emanation of enlightened ideals and the search for *correct solutions* obtained through reason and rational dialogue, what Habermas calls "communicative rationality" (Habermas, 1984). Conse-

quently, public opinion was perceived as a form of knowledge because it was linked to a notion of "truth" that was possible and achievable. With the advent of fully democratic systems in the twentieth century, the concept of "public opinion" remained and even deepened its communicative nature thanks to the emergence of the mass media. However, its political dimension significantly changed: if at first public opinion mainly referred to the opinion of the intellectual elites, it later began to designate, in a somewhat imprecise way, what the social majorities thought about the shared issues of social life, especially politics. With this change, it was no longer a question of finding the best solutions for collective problems through communicative rationality, but rather of guiding and directing the opinion of society as a whole so that individuals would choose one solution or another, one political option or another. However, the solution that wins is not the *best*, but rather the one chosen by the majority (Mañas, 2016).

Therefore, it is the context that marks the concept of "public opinion" in each historical period. Among the most important elements of this context are, dialectically linked, the political and social structures in which the context develops, and also the technological instruments with which public opinion has been formed and expressed at every moment. It is reasonable to think, therefore, that if socio-political structures and technological instruments change, the concept of "public opinion" will also necessarily change.

Social communication has been interested in public opinion, especially in the role played by the mass media in shaping it, in the context of liberal democracies and the mass media since the second half of the twentieth century. This interest has been reflected, above all, in research on agenda-setting and framing (McCombs *et al.*, 2014). This research, following a Habermas perspective, analyses the media's capacity to provide the population with topics of public and private discussion, and also studies the terms in which these discussions are carried out (Dahlgren, 2005). From a sociological perspective, information transmitted by the media helps to *build* societies, and generates a sense of community belonging (Anderson, 1983). All this fuelled the idea of a public opinion, conveyed almost exclusively through the media, which was perceived as homogeneous, consensual and identified with an agora in which everyone could participate (as a spectator) and then (individually and privately) engage in conversations on a limited set of issues facilitated by the media themselves. Thus, the mass media were positioned as a kind of intermediary between reality and citizenship, in the sense that citizens could basically only access the social reality facilitated by the media. Given the centrality of the media and the journalistic profession's standardized use of professional techniques, it is possible to think about the existence of shared debates within

each society. Moreover, despite the differences in media bias, the terms of the debate were transversal to the set of media.

The emergence of digital media and, in the new millennium, of social networks has resulted in substantial changes in this paradigm, to the point that profound transformation of the concept of "public opinion" is beginning to be considered. This transformation pivots on two axes:

a) The emergence of new actors who interfere in the classical mediation function of the mass media. Among these new actors are the same news protagonists (politicians, institutions, celebrities, athletes, etc., as well as social network influencers and new opinion leaders) who can now communicate directly with their audiences without any media intervention. Journalists have now internalized, as an added professional routine, using these interventions on social networks as a source, especially in the case of Twitter (Eldridge *et al*., 2019). At the same time we also have active audiences who do not limit themselves to being mere spectators of the information provided by the media, but rather participate in the communication process by commenting, sharing and evaluating the news. These users give visibility to some news and condemn the irrelevance of other news (Bro & Wallberg, 2015) without following the classic criteria of *news values* that media have used in the past (García-Perdomo *et al*., 2018). Therefore, audiences, that is, private individuals, acquire a status of "secondary gatekeeper" from the moment that the exposure to the news, through digital platforms, comes not only from the news disseminated directly by the media, but also from friends, family and social groups of all kinds, both public and private (Crawford *et al*., 2015).

b) The same social media platforms, using big data and developing algorithms and artificial intelligence, have applied their own forms of news selection that largely condition what information reaches people, based on opaque criteria and, ultimately, applying the commercial logic typical of these platforms (Lewis & Westlund, 2015).

This transformation has affected, first, the *locus* of public opinion, that is, the public sphere. In the eighteenth century public opinion was formed in the clubs, cafés, institutions and by a nascent press; in the twentieth century the *locus* par excellence was the mass media. However, now, with digital information, the public sphere has progressively moved to the Internet, where the information provided by digital versions of the media coexists on an equal footing with statements from institutions, associations and individuals (Bergström & Belfrage, 2018). The information from all of these sources is conveyed by the same digital platforms, and

therefore subject to the *technological affordances* of each platform and the uses that people give to the capacities made available to them.

This does not mean that the media have disappeared as news providers for fuelling social debates. For example, different studies in Spain have all found that television is still the main means used by people to keep themselves informed; however, audio-visual information is mainly being consumed outside the media, on YouTube, Facebook and even on private messaging networks (Newman *et al.*, 2021). Likewise, one of the main uses of social networks is to search for information, but only 25% of people search for news in the actual media that produce it. Rather, people search through social networks or Google, or they *find* the news in instant messaging services, in a phenomenon known as *News Finds Me* (Gil de Zúñiga & Zicheng, 2021).

New forms of information consumption have appeared in this new environment, and they are far from the news hierarchies and interpretations proposed by the media. On the contrary, people look for specific news items, adjusted to their interests, meet with others and pick up news here and there in a phenomenon that we could call "*snacking news*", in many cases the result of chance (Van Damme *et al.*, 2019). The media's role, therefore, has been diluted in the *locus* of the digital environment, which the media do not control. Moreover, the media no longer know exactly what their role is or how they can compete with the rest of the actors present in this environment. They are also not clear whether this participation in the digital *locus* guarantees them a seriously compromised economic survival.

The digital *locus*, moreover, has not been designed from the logic of communicative rationality, but rather it has been shaped by a commercial logic in which marketing is much more decisive than the defence of democratic values. This does not mean that the classic mass media did not also have a commercial logic, since they did aim to be economically profitable; however, in that logic there was room for a conception of public opinion in which a certain idea of general interest and a unified debate on issues relevant to society could still be proposed. In the digital *locus*, however, fragmentation is imposed (the "segmentation of markets" typical of marketing), both of specific audiences and the segmentation provided by the various platforms and the different uses that people give to these platforms. Moreover, this logic of the social networks has even been transferred to the information media themselves (Tandoc & Vos, 2016).

Therefore, communicative rationality, understood as a form of knowledge, is replaced by the use of information, or what people increasingly perceive as information, as another resource with which to reaffirm their own identity (Byung-Chul, 2021) and whose purpose is to generate con-

crete communities focused on specific purposes. The algorithms used by platforms to provide news exacerbate this reaffirmation of the self, reiterating preferences already expressed in advance (Pariser, 2012), and thanks to which digital platforms are able to develop consumption profiles with which to obtain an economic benefit.

If the original notion of public opinion was to go beyond individual opinions to communicationally reach a general opinion (Mañas, 2016), and in the golden age of the mass media public opinion became a fundamental justification of democratic systems, with social networks these previous conceptions have taken an 180° turn and the particular, the individual, rises to the category of the communicatively substantial and is placed as a central element. The digital *locus* is not that agora in which the citizenry could participate, even passively, in the general debates, but rather it constitutes a refuge of individuality in which the subject can actively build their own debate, or choose a specific debate in which to participate, using heterogeneous materials, among which are the news provided by the media. This news, however, is epistemologically equal to the rest of the materials made available through social networks, which are not generated by the media and which are not necessarily created with informative intentionality.

As Pickard (2020) points out, when analysing the press crisis in a society of disinformation, the journalism crisis is a threat to democracy. The transformation of the public sphere described here has also meant the structural collapse of commercial journalism, which is exploring new models so as not to sink completely. It is difficult to think of a democracy without newspapers, as Jefferson has already pointed out. However, this search for a profitable model cannot mean that the commercial logic of the press acts by turning its back on its democratic commitments.

## The "original sin" of free of charge

Alan Mutter, journalist and CEO of three different Silicon Valley companies, considered that the "original sin" of traditional media was giving away online news content for free (Mutter, 2009). As Pickard & Williams (2014) pointed out, a few years later, an increasing number of journalistic companies tried to redeem this sin by charging for their online content. The paper press has historically always charged for its content; however, this new characteristic emerged with its digital transformation and the uncertain search for a business model that fostered the culture of free. As explained by Goyanes *et al.* (2022), the Internet is generally considered to be a medium that propagates a democratic ideal and, therefore, the consumption of news in this medium is related to its corresponding

*ethos* (democracy), which can lead to a different culture, that is, to a culture of the free. This *ethos* was already present in the beginnings of the Internet, for example, in the Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace by John Perry Barlow, when he describes a world in which "all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth", and where "your legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context" cannot be applied (Barlow, 1996). It is the context in which the "free" mentality takes root (Dou, 2004). In fact, various studies have found that one of the reasons that citizens choose not to pay for information is that there is a free information content alternative on the web (American Press Institute, 2017; Newman *et al.*, 2021; Groot, 2022).

There are two worrying data items involved in the relationship between citizenship, information and democracy, according to the Digital News Report Spain 2022. First, the percentage of people who do not trust the news in general (39%) exceeds those who usually do (32%). Second, one-third of respondents (35%) often or sometimes avoid staying informed about the news. To which we must add another fact: the majority of the respondents (67%) say they do not pay anything for obtaining information, either in printed or digital format. The number of people who do pay for digital news, remained stable at around 12% in recent years, 11.7% in 2021 (Vara-Miguel *et al.*, 2022). Some studies indicate that, in a context of disinformation, during the pandemic, subscriptions to digital newspapers increased in the search for trustworthy and quality information (Masip *et al.*, 2020).

During 2020, the year of the pandemic, the main Spanish media began to charge for their digital news, thus accentuating a process that had been started the previous year by other newspapers (Vara-Miguel, 2021). According to the Digital News Report Spain 2022, El País online (with paywall) retains its leadership as an information medium with a large weekly online audience, although it loses three percentage points compared to the previous year. In second place is the right-wing newspaper Okdiario.com (13%), which also leads the digital native media. The third place is occupied by a generalist television channel, Antena3 online (13%). It has displaced another digital native, Eldiario.es (12%), which now occupies the sixth position followed by Elconfidencial.com (12%), another digital native. These audience figures show that the digital native media has established themselves among the media with the highest audience and, in fact, the percentage of online readers of the main national newspapers already exceeds the percentage of offline readers (Kaufmann-Argueta, 2022). Digital media in Spain had 750,000 digital subscriptions in 2021, 90% more than in 2020, according to sector data. However, we must bear in mind, as stated by the Madrid Press Association (2020), that "there is

little verified information on the number of readers who formalize digital subscriptions". In general, it is difficult to obtain data on digital subscription numbers or revenue (Myllylahti, 2013). However, beyond the important economic considerations involved in establishing paywalls, the concern is whether this decision, as we have pointed out, affects citizens and to what extent.

In this sense, the Digital News Report Spain 2020 uses the concept of *media poverty* to define the situation of people with lower incomes who would not have access to quality information when payment systems are established. One third of Spanish Internet users (33%) believe that paying for news would prevent others or themselves from accessing the news (35%). As the report states, this concern is especially felt by people who have a more diverse and intense media consumption, are concerned about the independence of journalism in democracy and are willing to pay for access to information. From an ideological point of view, netizens closest to leftist positions are more concerned (38%) than those on the right (30%) (Negredo *et al.*, 2020).

Paywalls limit pluralism by further restricting voices and views in the press (Pickard & Williams, 2014). In its report "Information as a Public Good", UNESCO (2021) warned that, as the media are oriented towards serving their own paid subscribers, they may risk becoming more partisan "and serving an audience only what it wants to hear". In a survey of 246 media leaders in 52 countries in December 2021 by the Reuters Institute, nearly half of the respondents (47%) were concerned that subscription models could be "super-serving richer and more educated audiences and leaving others behind" (Newman, 2022). Therefore, some media are experimenting with more inclusive models. This is the case of The Daily Maverick in South Africa, which offers a "pay what you can pay" model, or eldiario.es in Spain, which allows people who can't pay anything access to information (Newman, 2022). As Benson (2019) states, as the press was in such a hurry to resolve the financial crisis, they forgot the civic challenge of educating and involving all citizens.

Myllylahti (2013) considers that charging for news content generates a new digital divide, and also raises the issue of what happens when the newspaper that erects the wall is financed with public funds. This issue points to a democratic contradiction: public financing, private access. By way of example, public sponsorship is the second source of funding in 193 cybermedia in Catalonia and 55 cybermedia in the Basque Country (Salaverría *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, leading media that have paywalls are among these cybermedia subsidized to promote the Catalan and Basque languages.

It is also necessary to determine empirically whether, as the literature states, there is a relationship between paywalls and quality information.

O'Brien *et al.* (2020) reviewed the literature on the factors that contribute to the audience's willingness to pay for information. They found that, as awareness of quality increases, the willingness to pay also increases. However, they are critical because many studies do not provide a clear definition of "quality". Chen & Thorson (2021) also analyse studies that relate the perception of quality information and the willingness to pay for that information. Being well informed about public affairs and politics is crucial in a democracy. If this depends on an economic capacity, the *watchdog* function of digital journalism is put in question, since it is not aimed at the entire population, but only at a part of the (well-informed) audience (Tóth *et al.*, 2022). According to the Digital News Report 2021 (Newman *et al.*, 2021), the vast majority of the population is still not prepared to pay for online news, and warns that "with more high-quality content disappearing behind paywalls there are pressing concerns about what happens to those who have limited interest or who can't afford it."

Benson (2019) warns that even if subscriptions contribute to higher quality news, if that news does not reach a wide audience, it will not solve the problem of an uninformed and distrustful citizenry. In addition, paywalls fragment the audience size based on the number of subscribers. As Tóth *et al.* (2022) states, the paywall strategies limit democracy because low-income citizens do not have the same opportunity to educate themselves and stay informed as high-income citizens. In addition, among other issues, it could mean leaving a large part of society in the hands of a journalism that seeks to obtain audiences at any price.

## Final considerations

The theoretical approach to the transformations of the concept of "public opinion" cannot only take into account the technological dimension, represented by the communication infrastructure provided by social networks. It must also incorporate, from a holistic viewpoint, the changes in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres that have been operating in recent decades, and that different authors, such as Beck, detected long ago, "The basic figure of fully developed modernity is the single person....The form of existence of the single person is not a deviant case along the path of modernity. It is the archetype of the fully developed labour market society. The negation of social ties that takes effect in the logic of the market begins in its most advanced stage to dissolve the prerequisites for lasting companionship" (Beck, 1992, pp. 122-123). Integrating the different elements that converge in the concept of "public opinion" is the only way to allow the development of a new conceptualization of public opinion or its definitive disappearance as an operational

concept. However, the disappearance of the concept would imply a democracy without information, without journalism, as we have understood it until now; that is, it would not be a democracy. The concept of public opinion, with or without Habermas, implies that in democracy the citizen needs information to make political decisions. The citizen requires a minimum epistemological dimension (Masip *et al.*, 2019), and it is necessary to establish or at least approach, in further research, what this minimum is. The economic viability of digital media is very complex in a high-choice environment, but formulas must be sought that do not involve informational discrimination against citizens based on their economic capacity. Paywalls further fragment the audience, and distance the press from what normative theories establish and what is considered one of its fundamental roles: fostering a citizenship informed with the same set of facts (Bennett& Livingston, 2018). Because, as Byung-Chul (2022) points out, we are running the risk of losing the common world.

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# Assessing the impact of echo chambers and their role in the spread of information disorders

Jaume Suau, Elena Yeste & Ester Almenar

(University Ramon Llull)

Public discourse is nowadays dominated by growing concerns about the possibility that hybrid media systems in which online platforms are becoming more relevant in news' access and consumption might be contributing to societal polarization. Part of this concerns are connected about how easily seem to spread disinformation disorders in media systems in which news media are becoming more partisan and news' consumption, although still dominated by legacy media, is becoming more and more related to online players. The fact that distrust on news media is also growing in most media markets contributes to a general state of opinion that questions the news diets and quality of the information that is actually consumed by citizens in Western democracies.

A key element central to these concerns is the high-choice nature of current media systems. Last decades have seen how from few choices of media sources citizens have now almost infinite possibilities to access news content. Access to news have also changed as citizens turn to social media and other online platforms as their main source of news. The question is, if citizens have all these possibilities to customize or curate the information they receive, how can we assume that they are going to be challenged by opposite points of view? After all, since the first inceptions of the public sphere concept it is normally considered necessary for a healthy democracy that its citizens make informative political choices basing on the different information they receive. In the ideal habermassian concept of the public sphere citizens are exposed to different points of view and, through public debate and deliberation, form their personal opinion about public issues and political positions. Are we witnessing then a disorder in the public sphere as citizens have it easier nowadays to refuse to be exposed to challenging points of view? How this interrelates with the growing political polarization that we can see in liberal democracies?

The most pessimist theories about the partisan echo chamber hypothesis defend precisely this: within media systems characterized by high choices and easy access to news sources citizens will be more likely to turn to those that reaffirm their core beliefs, rather than engage with those sources that challenge them. Therefore, echo chambers of the hybrid media system will be more likely to reinforce selective exposure while diminishing the chances for incidental exposure, magnifying pre-existent believes and isolating citizens from those that may present alternative points of view. As we will see, this effect implies two elements: citizens' personal factors (is easier for citizens to isolate themselves) and platform-related factors (social media and other internet-based platforms used to access news are characterized by technological affordances that precisely reinforce these trends).

It is therefore relevant to analyse more in depth how selective and accidental exposure function if we need to assess the existence, or myth, of echo chambers. Selective exposure theory was developed some decades ago, within the context of a news ecosystem dominated by press and audio-visual formats (Lazarsfeld *et al.*, 1948; Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). It states the preference of citizens to consume information from news media outlets in line with their political positions and core beliefs. Last decades have seen how media ecosystems acquire more diversity: not just from the widespread adoption of the Internet, but even before, with the creation of a higher number of private TV channels or cable and satellite TV. The atomization of audiences has been a topic of discussion by authors such as Sunstein (2018) or Galston (2002), warning about the pernicious effects that such trends may have for life in democracy. The fragmentation of the public sphere is precisely the main point of concern (Prior, 2007; Dahlgren, 2013) with publics lacking common informative reference, especially in countries such as the United States that lacks a strong public service broadcaster. Hence, within a high media choice scenario, selective exposure may lead towards a society based on citizens gathering around media choices that represent small groups of like-minded and non-critical parts of the public, diminishing the representation of common interest, societal goals and even more neutral points of view.

Fears about the substitution of the public sphere by "solo spheres" (Dahlgren, 2013) stress the existence of not just citizens' adoption of an active behaviour aimed at selective exposure, but also the declination or regression of mechanisms that facilitate incidental exposure. As Prior (2007) notices, the broadcast era was characterized, among others, by few media choices. The scarcity of choices implied also more internal pluralism in each one of them. Hence, within an environment with few media choices that are more plural, citizens' exposure to neutral or antagonistic points of view was more common. In the post-broadcast era characterized

by a high-choice media environment part of the academic debate has ben focused, last decades, in analysing if Internet and social media were promoting news diets based on selective exposure or if, rather, new patterns of media consumption were producing more possibilities for incidental exposure (Suau, 2015).

Here is key to understand that the current news media environment is not the same for all citizens. As recent research proves, different age cohorts tend to access news through diverse sources (Newman, 2022). While young access news through TikTok or other social media there is still a relevant group of citizens that follow news through radio and TV, like it was common in the broadcast era. Hence, as Chadwick (2013) highlighted, "old" and "new" media coexist in a hybrid media system, rather than substitute each other. Moreover, citizens do not stick to one format, but access news through multiple of them, in patterns of cross-media consumption that are hard to track using surveys and other traditional research methods (Schrøder, 2015). Hence, while some citizens follow patterns of media consumption that resemble those of former media environments, other audiences access news through channels and formats that directly challenge our traditional understanding of selective and incidental exposure. As a consequence, research done last decade about the existence, or not, of echo chambers provides sometimes what seems to be contradictory information.

Research that stresses the widespread extension of echo chambers highlights the growing importance of social media platforms in news consumption. As news become more "social", contacts on such spaces acquire more relevance to shape citizens' news diets (Guallar *et al.* 2016), becoming what has named as "secondary gatekeepers" (Singer, 2013). The more a citizen relies on Facebook, Twitter etc to consume news, the more relevant the nature of contacts on that specific social media will be: if we follow a varied number of people and news media accounts our feed or timeline will be very different than if we just follow high partisan news media and other citizens that share the same political positions and core beliefs. In this way, we can easily fabricate our own echo chambers if we access news mainly through a certain online platform and the contacts there are mostly like-mined individuals. Sunstein (2018) warns against a system of news' distribution dominated by social media platforms, as it allocates a great power (and responsibility) on citizens, contributing to increase political polarization. However, despite social media platforms are normally mentioned as a homogeneous group, the fact is that each one of them allows for different technological affordances that shape its social use and possibilities for news' consumption. For example, citizens tend to follow more acquaintances in platforms such as Facebook than in Twitter, while WhatsApp tends to be the platform where shared news are more trusted,

as it is the one with closer ties between contacts. The use of groups and the possibilities to spread messages are also very different depending on the platform (Masip *et al.* 2021). Platform factors and affordances are then relevant in shaping selective and incidental exposure and, as a consequence, the existence of echo chambers.

Fears about the spread of echo chambers sometimes use the concept together with a similar one, filter bubbles. Echo chamber is a concept designed to describe the limited or like-minded media space or media diet that a certain individual inhabits. Filter bubble describes the situation in which our feed or timeline in an online platform adjusts our news consumption according to ranking algorithms aimed at passive personalization (Pariser, 2011). Despite their similarity, the concepts describe situations that produce different outcomes: we may argue that abandoning an echo chamber depends on our own decision, while filter bubbles are harder to detect and, therefore, to abandon. Nevertheless, research sometimes studies them together, as is complicated to methodologically separate one from the other. For example, in survey research testing news from Facebook or Twitter, how can we be sure that the respondent tends to receive more news from that certain media due its selection of contacts or due an algorithm? Even though that, some studies attempted to focus on the personalization effects of algorithms, finding no relevant evidence of filter bubbles in Google or Facebook (Hannak *et al.* 2013; Bakshy *et al.* 2015).

Regarding echo chambers, results point towards a similar conclusion. A first wave of studies was centred in finding if social media were increasing accidental exposure or, rather, reinforcing citizens' strategies for selective exposure. First of all, some research was optimistic in the sense that, understanding social media as basically used for entertainment, the capacity of these platforms to make citizens "find" news while conducting other online participatory practices was celebrated (Mitchell *et al.* 2013; Barbera *et al.* 2015). Apart from "finding" news, research also showed that those content was more plural than some previous studies thought. This was due the fact that people on social media tent to reproduce their offline social networks. Hence, despite we all tend to gather predominantly with like-minded people, for most of us social life implies gathering with others who show ideological discrepancies. Social media, then, are not based on homophily but in more heterophilic networks (Purcell *et al.*, 2010).

Recent studies have focused also on analysing not just news from social media, but the overall media diets of citizens. With most research focused on USA or UK, Fletcher *et al.* (2021) found that citizens informing basically only from hyper partisan right or left wing media were just around 2-10% of the population. Similarly, another study from UK

(Dubois & Blank, 2018) established as around 10% those citizens that are never exposed to opposite points of view in their social media use. Different studies slightly differ about such percentages, but this is partially due the different definitions used to define those citizens "living in an echo chamber". While some studies define as inhabiting echo chamber those citizens with media diets of just extremely positioned news media, others focus on studying if citizens were aware of getting in touch with opposite ideas, when watching TV, radio, browsing Internet or through social media. Each methodology has its pros and cons. For example, as Arguedas *et al.* (2022) point out, Fox News is defined by some as a producer of fake news and hyper partisan media, while by a relevant sector of Americans is actually a well trusted news media. Hence, both citizens' perceptions in self reporting news consumption, as well as researchers' personal bias in establishing categories may play a role also in analysing the existence of echo chambers.

Despite this methodological issues, what can be argued is that most citizens do not inhabit echo chambers of information that avoid them to enter in touch with non-affine information. It seems, however, that a relevant number (between 2 and 10%, depending on studies and countries) do actually inhabit such media spaces. Even if most research has been focused on USA and UK, Spain shows similar results. For example, using survey research and web-tracking online data Cardenal *et al.* (2019) found that most citizens do consume mainly like-minded sources of news, but their media diets are diverse and news consumption includes (willingly or accidentally) also non like-minded news. Despite their results challenge the hyper partisan echo chamber hypothesis they do find also clues that help to understand which citizens may inhabit in such spaces. As "selective exposure intensifies as news consumption increases" (Cardenal *et al.*, p. 34) we may consider that citizens with more media and political engagement are among those more likely to have restricted media diets. Contributing to the explanation of how selective and accidental exposure work in a hybrid media system, Masip *et al.* (2020) found that social media use can be associated with greater exposure to non like-minded news in Spain. Even without considering for accidental exposure those Spanish citizens that regularly visit news media that they identify as ideologically opposite is around 27%. Researchers also found that the effect of social media in reinforcing accidental exposure differs depending on the platform, being this more restricted by Facebook and more relevant in Twitter, with no significant results for WhatsApp or Instagram. However, at the end the potential for incidental exposure of each online platform is shaped by both its technological affordances and also by the nature of the contacts we have there: the more diverse, the more likely we are to "find" non-like-minded news (Masip *et al.*, 2021).

However, despite we can dismiss the fact that echo chambers are something affecting overall society, we do have evidence that echo chambers exist in niche social groups. We may discuss if in a certain country or media market this means around 2 or 10% of the overall population, but by focusing on the overall number we might be missing the point. Dahlgren (2013) warned about a public sphere with no central point, atomized or divided into several smaller or "solo" spheres with scarce connection with others. Such spaces foster the spread of disinformation and, therefore, distrust and polarization, as citizens are trapped into a chamber of like-minded information, usually around a limited amount of topics related to conspiracy theories or hyper partisan media (Bakshy *et al.*, 2015; Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016).

The relevance here is to assess the capacity of such societal groups to shape public debate and even to grow and extend, attracting more citizens: rather than exist permanently hidden or in niche groups, echo chambers inhabiting the margins of society may become more relevant if their voices are amplified and their narratives accepted by more mainstream actors. To put an example, QAnon and other far right groups seemed marginal and too extreme to be politically relevant just one decade ago, but they helped to appoint Donald Trump in 2017, and some years later stormed the Capitol, making clear the dangers of niche groups inhabiting echo chambers and promoting political polarization. As a result, some of their beliefs and political positions have jumped from marginal echo chambers to mainstream news media outlets.

To understand this process, we need to consider that, as explained by Han (2021) echo chambers are not just a technological problem, but a societal one, as citizens inhabit them due factors such identity and distrust. Firstly, for far right and extreme left groups, as well as followers of conspiracy theories, their identity is based on a series of extreme attitudes and positions that are part of their life style: they do not merely define core beliefs, but daily life. Their isolation in terms of access to news and divergent opinions is more a personal choice than a technological outcome of the new media environment. In any case, technology reinforces their capacity to limit incidental exposure and reinforce selective one, allowing them to get in touch and exchange content with like-minded people. Furthermore, inhabitants of such spaces are likely to undertake cognitive bias when exposed to divergent opinions. Although most citizens do not avoid counter-attitudinal information and accept and even seek content from non-like-minded sources this do not apply to all societal groups (Guess *et al.*, 2018; Valentino *et al.*, 2008). Hence, for this 2-10% of individuals there is no need for the echo chamber to be fully isolated, as their identity is based on the fact that counter-attitudinal information must be rejected for personal identity reasons. Otherwise, the citizen loses identifi-

cation to the extreme group, loosing also friendship and spaces of interaction, both on and off line.

Secondly, we need to consider that echo chambers and extreme political polarization are fuelled by broader issues of distrust towards traditional actors, such as institutions, media actors and political parties. Increasing distrust is, precisely, the main goal of disinformation content, as it increases political polarization and reinforces extreme echo chambers: disinformation studies normally warn against the pernicious effects of the spread of such content for life in democracy, as disinformation is assumed to increase the crisis of trust on liberal democracies and society as a whole (Granelli, 2020). As it happens with echo chambers, the overall public is not drowned by a myriad of different disinformation content produced by bots and hyper partisan media. Recent research has proven that disinformation is a limited problem with limited reach among most western publics (Jungherr & Schroder, 2021). However, as with echo chambers, we might miss the point if we focus again in assessing its impact in terms of the overall population. To assess the real impact of disinformation we need to better understand which are the targets of disinformation campaigns in terms of societal groups. More specifically, we need to assess if these are likely to inhabit echo chambers, as well as the potential of those groups to spread the message and shape public opinion into a certain direction, always keeping in mind the interrelation between disinformation and spreading distrust.

Hence, we advocate for the need to design methodologies to better understand the impact of disinformation taking all aforementioned issues into account, basing into a two-steps design. The first step here is to analyse the spread of disinformation narratives among its intended or targeted niche group. After all, is hard for a disinformation campaign to create impact (diminish trust) if it does not reach its intended targeted public. To prove that a certain disinformation narrative has reached its target we will need for multidisciplinary and mixed methods approaches: depending on the targeted group and the identified channels of disinformation some methodologies and approaches will be more useful than others. For example, survey research may be interesting to assess how deep disinformation narratives have entered into certain social groups, as far as this can be defined and represented through survey research. However, to study the spread of disinformation narratives does not necessarily mean the same than studying their impact. Spread among the target group is a precondition to societal impact but does not ensure it per se. Research needs to move here into detection of broader impact out of niche target groups, identifying if these have been successful in amplifying the message and get into mainstream news media and broad public opinion therefore diminishing societal trust. This approach implies to move from the study of how

disinformation spreads to the study of its impact, understood as changing attitudes and motivations towards certain topics by different groups of citizens, as well as by its effectiveness in reaching public opinion. To summarize, we argue that disinformation campaigns need to be perceived as aimed at niche groups (likely to inhabit echo chambers), but that its ultimate goal is to affect, indirectly, overall society.

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# Participation as a guarantor
# of journalistic quality standards

ZELIHA IŞIL VURAL & DAVID PUERTAS-GRAELL

(University Ramon Llull)

Journalism continues to play an important role in shaping society, especially in an era marked by the global pandemic of COVID-19, continuing economic crises and geopolitical transformation resulting from conflicts such as those in Russia and Ukraine. However, the role of this profession as a mediator may have been weakened, especially as it has become increasingly fragmented, polarised and with multiple sources of moral authority. In this hybrid scenario, different factors coexist, such as the crisis of media mediation, segmented audiences, questioning of business models, and increasing public distrust of the media as a guarantor of quality information.

Currently, the journalistic profession is in a stage of reconceptualisation where it hybridises and confuses its informative exercise in a supposedly democratic coexistence with aspects more related to economic and business interests in a media "Super League" marked by the attention economy (Wu, 2020). According to the Annual Report on the Journalism Profession in Spain (APM, 2020) and through a professional survey of journalists, a substantial change can be seen in the consideration of communication work in relation to journalistic work. Thus, those who affirm that communication is not journalism assert that it does not try to inform about current affairs, but rather in terms of the company's objectives. For those who consider it journalism, the main reason is that in both cases the objective is to communicate certain content to third parties.

This chapter aims to show how the current state of journalism in the perception of its practices is conditioned by the way in which different audiences interact with the information content. In this way, we aim to offer an approach to the situation of contemporary journalism, marked by a crisis of mediation that goes beyond the consequences of disinformation and information disorders. To do so, we will review the most recent academic literature, a review that is inevitably influenced by the selection criteria and authors' judgements.

### What do we talk about when we refer to the quality of the content?

When we refer to the term "quality", we touch on the different properties inherent to a certain object or idea and which make it possible to generate a certain judgement about its effectiveness. The characteristics of what is observed, on the one hand, as well as the impact it has on the person who assesses it, must therefore be taken into account.

News media quality is a socially constructed argument, especially because of its political implications. When we talk about quality journalistic content, we refer to a concept that is complex to define, operationalise and measure. In a first approach, we can understand quality journalism as a process of filtering, contrasting, as well as an accurate writing that facilitates citizen knowledge about different topics related to current affairs. According to Reuters (2017), the definition of quality news is distributed in four key attributes: accuracy and reliability, helping with understanding complex issues, communicating strong viewpoints and opinions, and providing amusing and entertaining content.

However, public perception plays a determining role in the very definition of news media quality or quality journalism. Mistrust also plays an increasing and determining role in the conception of these concepts. According to the Digital News Report 2022 (Reuters, 2022), trust in the news has fallen in almost half the countries in their survey, and risen in just seven, partly reversing the gains made at the height of the Coronavirus pandemic. Thus, it continues to register one of the lowest levels in the last five years (Reuters, 2020). Moreover, Spain is among the Western European countries with the lowest levels of trust in the media (Pew Research Center, 2018). All this requires a more detailed reading if we take into account "the persisting 'trust gap' between traditional and online media. Trust in social networks has constantly declined, reaching its lowest since it was first measured in 2014" (EBU, 2021). In this sense, it is relevant to highlight aspects such as the use of TikTok to get information has increased from 3% in 2020 to 15% in 2022, especially in Latin America, Asia, Africa, the United States and Northern Europe (Reuters, 2022).

The attempt to define quality in journalism is not exactly new (Bogart, 2004). We understand news media quality as "a dynamic, contingent, and contested construct" (Bachmann *et al.*, 2021). In this sense, to speak about it implies the consideration of different approaches that affect the concept itself, such as the case of news pluralism, the more classic distinction between hard and soft news or media ownership, for example. As Lacy and Rosentiel (2015) explain, "the meaning of the term quality journalism will vary from individual to individual, but because of socialization, meanings are more likely to be shared by group members who have

some common experience" (2015, p. 10). Thus, the authors explain the difference between the definition of this concept from the academic, professional point of view, but also from the individual's perception of consumption, as well as their interests and needs. Given the circumstances, this paper aims to approach quality journalism from the point of view of its relationship with the audience and their involvement in the journalistic process.

Some authors have approached "good journalism" from a more primary perspective in terms of its function as a contribution to an informed society and guardians of the public's interests. In this sense, Gómez Mompart (2001) highlighted four broad general sections:

— Ethical and deontological issues.
— Sources and documentation for information.
— News processing and development (Nguyen, 2012).
— Relationship with public opinion.

This same author (2009) already mentioned a denaturalisation of journalism in relation to how the ownership of journalistic companies has passed into the hands of capitalist companies that speculate with the aim of pursuing commercial interests at a global level. More recently, other studies have proposed an approach to the term from different positions (Larrondo-Ureta *et al.*, 2014), differentiating the quality of journalism according to hypertextuality and website parameters such as information access, SEO and accessibility. In other cases, the confrontation of both perspectives has been highlighted: "The press versus the public" (Gil de Zúñiga & Hinsley, 2013).

The act of informing oneself is intrinsically related to the context in which the media is situated. Recent studies have been able to detect, for example, how news consumption and media coverage during the COVID-19 confinement in Spain has been perceived as over-informed, ideologically biased and sensationalist (Masip *et al.*, 2020). This audience perception of media practice during the pandemic, as well as declining trust in the media, has also been reflected in other countries such as Belgium and Hungary (Media Councils in the Digital Age, 2021).

Therefore, the audience's perception of the journalistic practice is also a value to be taken into account when addressing quality standards of journalistic content. Some studies have already shown some findings suggesting that journalists and citizens could cooperate perfectly to ensure a future for high-quality journalism (Van der Wurff & Schoenback, 2014).

The citizen informs himself in order to satisfy the different inputs they expect from the media. This is especially marked by a variety of emotions

related to the need to share knowledge, to have fun, or even to act as an information gatekeeper and alert other friends or family members. In this regard, it is imperative to take into account the digital transformation of the news industry, as well as how this may have impacted the news media quality (Martens *et al.*, 2018).

Thus, this meaning of news media quality or quality journalistic content also enters into the social media environment. There is a growing influence of online platforms in the media industry. This translates into a greater or lesser investment in the resources dedicated to the different possibilities offered by each of the existing social networks, such as the personalisation or combination of content (De Corniere & Sarvary, 2022). Similarly, it is also important to consider the user-generated content quality in the digital space (Agichtein *et al.*, 2008).

In other words, it is not possible to understand or study the media itself. That is, they are part of an environment that is especially characterised by participation and interaction with all kinds of audiences. In this sense, citizens become an indisputable element for the very definition of media. Citizens do not live with the media, but are part of them. It is, therefore, a relationship with the media (Deuze, 2011) where everyone is part of the creation of informative or uninformative content.

## Interaction with content in the crisis of democracy

The South Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2021) offers an approach to digitalisation and the crisis of democracy in his book "Infocracy". Han defines the "information regime" as the form of domination in which information and its processing by algorithms, together with artificial intelligence, decisively determine today's social, economic and political processes. Thus, in the capitalist transformation of information, people, as citizens but also as audience, undergo a mutation and degradation to the conception of data and consumer cattle.

What is the relationship between audience participation or audience interaction with journalistic content in relation to the conception of quality journalism? As Reifova and Svelch (2013) argue in their work with regard to the concept of participation, this chapter aims to delve deeper into its definition, beyond extolling or dismissing its different meanings. Thus, it is necessary "to invest it with meaning-to identify, examine, question, and critique it in its specific contexts" (2013, p. 264).

The concept of interactivity has been defined as polysemic by many authors (Carey, 1997; Godzic, 2010; Kim and Sawhney, 2002; McMillan, 2002; Rafaeli, 1988; Rogers, 1983). Other authors, moreover, highlight

that a determining aspect when approaching this line of research lies in the need not to confuse interactivity with interaction (Bergillos, 2015).

Carpentier (2011) developed the AIP Model (Access, Interaction and Participation) whereby he differentiated between interaction through socio-communicative relationships and participation in the co-decision process. In terms of interaction, Carpentier draws a distinction between the ability to co-produce content as a group or community and the consumption of media in a joint way from the point of view of reception. This leads to an assumed discussion of content in an organisational context that enhances feedback. For this, it is necessary that sender and receiver not only generate a transfer of ideas from one position to the other, but also share the same space in which reflection on their roles and adaptation to new needs and consumption habits are enabled.

## Social media pseudo-participation

Bergillos (2015) explains that a reformulation of "participation" is necessary. A concept whose definition does not include different terms that may be detached from the original one. Furthermore, as Carpentier (2008) mentions, when we include the media as facilitators of participation, the analysis becomes more complex.

For this reason, the author proposes the concept of pseudo-participation, given the complexity of its definition and the possibility of falling into a duality. On the one hand, it is positioned in a pessimistic camp, centred on media control, which some authors affirm (Hibberd *et al.*, 2000) and others deny (Andrejevic, 2004) when on the other optimistic side is based on the idea of citizen empowerment (Toffler, 1980; Bruns, 2009; Fumero & Roca, 2007; Jenkins, 1992).

In this context, it is worth mentioning the controversy that has arisen regarding the possible intentions of the media in terms of the participatory services they offer. Here it is relevant to differentiate between the idea of enhancing activism or executing practices with a more mercantile logic (García-Avilés, 2010; Meso-Ayerdi, 2013). It is here that the question arises as to whether the media "harness" participation rather than "trigger" participation. González and Ortells (2012) explain that the real question is not so much whether the participation tools available to the citizen can replace the media or the journalist's own work, but whether they can be integrated into daily practice and serve to generate an environment of greater connection between the parties.

Therefore, there is confusion in the meaning of the quality of the content generated by the media in social networks in terms of their relation-

ship with audiences through participatory processes and interaction. As Bergillos rightly points out, "the logics of social networks do not replace those of traditional media, but rather both are mixed in a new context where it is increasingly complex to interpret the differences between the commercial and the political or the private and the public" (2015, p. 71).

Traditionally, the media have used social networks, in some way, to continue controlling communication, establish the agenda setting and not to lose their position as broadcasters. This coincides with what several authors (Greer & Ferguson, 2011; Herrera-Damas & Hermida, 2014) have described as a use of Twitter focused on promoting content and the concept of "Tweeting but not talking". In addition, other studies talk about the normalization of Twitter in terms of its use and writing routines. These practices constitute the typical modus operandi in which social media functions as a source of information, offering opinions, gathering news, reporting and directing traffic to websites (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018; Lasorsa *et al.*, 2012; Hermida, 2010).

However, it is also true that the media have been forced to change their practices in terms of their relationship with their audiences through social networks. A recent example is Relevo (May 2022), the new media outlet focused on sports information belonging to the Spanish mass media group Vocento. This new digital media outlet appears with a supposedly clear commitment to image and audiovisual content. At the same time, it will prioritise the use of social networks other than Twitter, such as Instagram, TikTok and Twitch. Relevo's presentation strategy, at the end of May, consisted of starting to disseminate news and exclusives via the social networks, leaving the launch of the medium's website for a later date.

This is connected to what is described in studies such as Vu (2014), where the variation in the professional routines of editors in the triangulation of journalistic value, economic value and editorial decision is manifested.

In one way or another, the media is being forced to change their practices for a connection with the audience that they are not able or interested in managing or controlling. They are now trying to go where new platforms such as Twitch are, reinventing themselves with supposedly renewed bridges that continue to propose interaction with products or services, to the detriment of a community functioning capable of acting independently.

The media build loyalty through an ongoing participatory and informative process. Viewers and users of social networks cannot be part of the dynamics of the media if they do not immerse themselves in the media practices. They are therefore in what has been explained as a kind of ham-

ster wheel paradox (Puertas-Graell & Masip, 2021). Participation in social networks places the audience inside the hamster wheel. Viral content (trending topics), information and entertainment are used to attract users, then, due to the interactive nature of social media, the users stay in the wheel and keep it moving. However, according to the "transfer" logic, users now feel that they are not constrained by the hamster wheel, since they can leave the environment of that single screen in exchange for the multiplicity of other screens (multiple wheel).

## What do we mean by digital news interaction?

Today's journalism, which has undergone technological transformations, has difficulty in responding to the needs of users to receive news. For this reason, digital journalism, not to lose its audience, has started to keep up with current technological developments because of users' requests of interaction. Through this, users have become part of the news production processes in digital journalism and they affect the course of the transformation of journalism.

Technological advancements in the last decade led journalistic practices to include new technologies to the news in order to increase quality and interaction. Users have started to interact with digital news more deeply and become "produsers" as Bruns (2008) explained as a combination of the terms "producer" and "user" which shows how the users' role has evolved to include a potential aspect of production (Kammer, 2013). Through the technological influence in journalism, the public has become the creator and the consumer at the same time because users are encouraged to participate in the digital media by creating and contributing their own material (Guallar, 2007) specifically by uploading media, providing eyewitness reports, and leaving comments on news websites and social media, giving the story a new perspective (Fletcher & Park, 2017).

Another aspect that increases user interaction is defined by Chen and Corkindale (2008) as the combination of usability and enjoyability through the technological advancements used in journalism such as "multimedia content, interactivity, hypertextual interface" (O'Brien, 2011). People may choose and manage the information they wish to take because of the interactivity in digital journalism, which is known as "personalization". Bradshaw (2011) uses "geographical personalization" as an example of personalization. Users can, for example, give the website the relevant personal information and receive information about that location. Furthermore, by filling out the form of interests, users can only be directed to stories that are relevant to them, with no distractions. This allows enterprises to collect more information about users and identify

them (Vural, 2021). This type of interaction can be supported by Macmillan's definition of interaction. According to Macmillan there are 3 types of interaction as "human-to-human", "human-to-computer" and "human-to-content" which includes technological advancements and the platform as the technical features and user perceptions, beliefs as psychological aspects. Bradshaw's explanation of personalization can be defined with the human-to-content interaction in the light of the normative dimension of the user engagement which refers to 'finding media texts or topics relevant and meaningful" (Steensen et al., 2020). To sum up, we can summarise the types of interaction with the argument of Ksiazek et al. (2016) as "to act, interact, and co-create".

## Factors that shape news interaction

The relation between digital news interaction and news consumption habits is undeniable. Changes in news consumption and the effects that shape news consumption are influenced by four individual factors as Sang explained (2020). These factors are "demographic differences", "frequency of news access", "specific interests", and "trust in news". News consumption and interaction are affected by the age, gender, education level which also includes political alignment and beliefs. Also Reuters Digital News Report (Reuters, 2022) points that a significant proportion of young and relatively less educated people say they avoid the news because it may be difficult to follow or understand which can be linked with the demographic differences that shape news interaction. Frequency of news access is also linked with demographic differences and the access level of digital news. Demographic differences and frequency of news access can be also linked with Macmillan's "spatio temporal" dimension of audience engagement (Steensen et al., 2020). Users who are consuming digital news regularly have a higher level of interaction and are more likely to share and comment on news. Online interactive elements like direct feedback, comments, sharing options allow users to participate more, implying a deeper level of engagement with the information (Ksiazek et al., 2016).

Specific interests are also a key factor in interaction. When users are more interested in the topic of the news, they spend more time and interact with the news. Chu et al., explained the significance of specific interests as: "If there is no personal interest, even the best design may be unable to impact the reader's attention and recall of information" (2009). According to Tenenboim and Cohen (2015), news articles in some certain content drive more interaction than others without the specific interest of the user. These certain contents are described as emotional, political and controversial topics.

Level of trust in news has been decreasing each year. Based on the Digital News Report (Reuters, 2022), trust in news decreased in almost half of the countries and increased in only seven among the participating countries in the research. The report also points to the decreased interest in news. To increase this, while some organisations seek to increase the quality of news, others produce news that is simpler, more understandable and easy to consume to gain more interaction with fake news and clickbait news. From this point of view, the relation between news interaction and trust in news is easily seen as a significant point to discuss digital news interaction. Users who have a low trust in the news media are more likely to share or remark on it online. They also favour non-mainstream news sources such as social media outlets, blogs, and digital native sources over traditional news sources. Users with low levels of trust are more likely to interact with news through sharing and commenting options to "express their disapproval of news coverage". In addition, the motivation behind commenting and sharing is defined as 'a desire to voice opinions on matters of public concern, exchange information, vent, interact socially, enjoy a discussion, empower themselves as citizens, and influence others' (Fletcher & Park, 2017).

**The current state of digital news and its interaction level with the audience**

When we say digital news, we mainly refer to the quality content which is reliable, communicative and amusing (Reuters, 2017). Through technological advancements, digital journalism entered the social media environment as well. This, undoubtedly, affected journalistic practices and user-generated content came into prominence. In this sense, users started to interact more with the news and also became a significant part of it as called "produsers" in the literature. However, Carpentier (2011) explained the key necessity of this integration as the reflection on their roles and adaptability to new requirements and consumption patterns, sender and receiver must not only generate a transfer of ideas from one position to the other but also share the same place.

Today, journalism practices actively use the news gathering, reporting and traffic providing features of social media for interaction. However, it is also true that the media has been compelled to alter the ways in which they interact with their users on social media as we see the examples of many audiovisual journalistic content at Twitter, TikTok and Twitch. So, how do these audiovisual contents affect the interaction with users? Through digital news on online platforms, users can choose the content they would like to receive and consume. To achieve this, journalistic con-

tents offer hypertextuality and multimedia content on online platforms and social media environments to interact more with the users. In other words, personalization is the key element to increase interaction.

The literature also argues the media trust and its effects on news interaction. Previous research proves the decreasing interest and trust in news. To increase this, some organisations started to create fast consumable, easily-reading and fake news, despite the importance of quality news in user interaction. Users that are distrustful are more inclined to interact with those types of news by sharing and commenting to express their disapproval. Because influencing others, gaining awareness, and demonstrating one's level of knowledge are the driving forces behind commenting and sharing. Consequently, the journalism landscape has been changing for a long time and this change will remain in the agenda for a long time. Because digitalism in media always brings new topics to the table and the journalism profession is trying to keep up with the updates. Undoubtedly, interaction with the users will always be the main priority of digital journalism and users will continue to influence the journalistic practices.

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