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Digital resources in the current journalistic narrative: Uses and limitations of hypertext, multimedia and interactivity

Abstract

Characterised by its multilingual and multiformat features, the multimedia journalism narrative is shaping a new ‘archaeology of composition’ (Manovich, 2005), also called the ‘new textuality’ (Anichini, 2003). As digital media celebrates its 25th anniversary (Salaverría, 2019), this research aims to examine the current state of the multimedia narrative in journalism. The defining elements of this narrative in the generalist information media have been analysed through the observation of hypertextual, multimedia and interactive resources. The methodology used is content analysis, allowing for both the systemization and description of the predominant parameters through the comparative study of four media sources: two digital (*elconfidencial.com* and *eldiario.es*) and two with their origins in traditional print (*elpais.com* and *elmundo.es*). The sample (N = 560) consists of a wide spectrum of the most topical news items, positioned as the most relevant by the media on their websites. The key findings reflect a limited use of multimedia elements in the so-called ‘narrative immediacy’. In particular, we have detected a misuse of hypertextuality, rendering it ineffective; a lack of relevance in the interactivity, and scant presence of in-house multimedia resources, which are more often provided by agencies. This scenario confirms the more sceptical view of the ‘techno-euphoria’ that was a feature of the early days of digital media and, in the current situation of immediacy, points to the need to enrich the multimedia narrative beyond the mere juxtaposition of digital resources that characterised the first 25 years of digital media.

Keywords

Digital journalism, digital media, multimedia narrative, hypertext, interactivity, active audience.

1. Introduction

One of the major challenges facing digital media today is managing the multilanguage and multi-format aspect. The development of Internet “has favoured the birth of a truly new textuality” (Anichini, 2003, p. 22), heralding a change in narrative that redefines journalistic routines and affects professional profiles. This is because it requires not only a certain specialisation of skills, but also adaptability (Palomo & Palau, 2016). All of this lies within a process of “continuous convergence” (Deuze, 2004) in integrated and cross-media

newsrooms (García-Avilés & Carvajal, 2008), which can be described as having multi-factorial features involving new business models, changing media, connection with the audience, and the emergence of new narratives (Lawson-Borders, 2006; Quandt & Singer, 2009).

An evolution of language has been observed in the transformation from the ‘tri-channel’ media (press, radio and television) to the multi-support and multi-lingual web (Fitch, 2012, p. 27). This development comprises the recognizable stages of “repetition, enrichment, renewal and innovation” of the digital narrative (Salaverría & Cores, 2005, p. 148-149); and even today, they still overlap.

In digital journalistic language, which Manovich (2005) refers to as “digital composition” or “the archaeology of composition,” three differentiating components are interrelated with undisputed academic consensus: hypertextuality, multimodality and interactivity (Nielsen, 1995). The combination of these elements generates “multisensory communication” (Tejedor, 2007, p. 21), in which three types of grammar coexist: textual, graphic and interactive (Scolari, 2004). The evolution of this journalistic narrative over the last two decades has shown a dual process in which the mere replication of narrative conventions of the traditional media (Manovich, 2005; Himelboim, 2010) coexists with the integrated narrative, or hypermedia (hyperstory), which is more creative and has a more complex compositional structure (Landow, 1995; Fredin, 1997; Paul & Fiebich, 2004; Cover, 2006; Larrondo, 2009; Napoli, 2010; Arias-Robles & García-Avilés, 2018). Faced with the immediacy and content atomization that Internet encourages and spreads, such digital trends as slow journalism (Le Masurier, 2015) or digital longform stories (Dowling & Vogan, 2014), which promote large-format proposals and complex narratives, are gaining strength.

Bearing in mind the fact that digital media use multimedia language that is characterised by diversity, it is important to analyse which narrative predominates to know whether the media take advantage of this digital linguistic ‘flexibility’ in order to make innovations to their narrative on a regular basis; or whether current news, which we refer to here as an ‘immediacy narrative’, in daily practice, can avoid a well-prepared multimedia narrative that may well add value to the information and to the media from which it is offered.

2. The evolution of the digital narrative: between utopia and reality

Research into digital narratives has increased over the last few decades, focusing on renewed journalistic practices in the face of two realities: the rise of social media and their relationship to the culture of participation (Thorsen & Jackson, 2018). Investigations carried out over the past 25 years regarding digital media reflect different perspectives (Salaverría, 2019). Most studies have focused on the theoretical and taxonomic conceptualization of multimedia language (Nielsen, 1995; Deuze, 2003; Paul & Fiebich, 2004; Greer & Mensing, 2006; Guallar *et al.*, 2010), as well as on what differentiates it from linear language and non-digital journalistic narratives. Such a focus may well be due to the fact that multimedia language uses multilingual and multiformat tools (Salaverría, 2001; Deuze, 2004; Masip *et al.*, 2010; Jacobson, 2012). From such a perspective, what Manovich called ‘transcodification’ has been studied (Manovich, 2005). This makes it possible to analyse how the new journalistic narrative is structured as it makes the transition from linear to digital media.

Studies that are critical of technological determinism (Boczkowski, 2004) warn of the utopias and promises (Steensen, 2011) of an innovative, multimedia, journalistic narrative that, in many ways, is simply no more than a ‘myth’ (Sunday, 2008). Different international analyses have shown that multimedia elements have been used as a ‘sidebar’, a mere extension of the written word, and not as the main narrative format (Jacobson, 2012).

Hypertextuality, defined as non-sequential writing (Nelson, 1965; Landow, 1995; Himelboim, 2010), has become the basis for digital content (Arias-Robres *et al.*, 2018) due to its vitality, its ability to influence and its usefulness (Coddington, 2012). Furthermore, it is the most innovative feature of the new textuality (Anichini, 2003, p. 21), as it provides the

possibility of intervening directly in the text. Its study allows us to establish three types of hypertextuality (Shipley & Fish, 1996): one that leads to a document; another that moves to the same web page of the media (micronavigation); and another that goes to other websites (macronavigation).

There seems to be a certain consensus that using hypertextuality innovatively offers significant advantages to journalistic storytelling. Steensen (2011) points out that it provides the following: it breaks with the limits of space, broadens perspectives, contextualizes, accesses original sources, updates itself without limits, and offers personalized routes to groups of readers with different interests. However, research into its actual implementation in multimedia journalistic text reflects a limited use, with the placement of hyperlinks that mostly redirect the reader to the medium's own 'canned' content (Dimitrova & Neznanski, 2006, cited in Steensen, 2011).

The multimedia nature of journalistic storytelling is defined by the variety of communicative forms used (Deuze, 2004), with a narrative potential that has revolutionized reading and writing through the "extreme malleability of the text" (Anichini, 2003, p. 3), which is determined by the diverse nature of its composition (text, image, sound and animation). The study of this new type of newswriting brings to light enriching approaches from Semiotics and Narratology (De Moragas, 1980; Schröder, 1994; Santaella, 2001; Anichini, 2003; Scolari, 2004; Sánchez-García & Salaverría, 2019), and these still need to be explored qualitatively. In this sense, despite the advantages of almost instantaneous accessibility and apparent immediacy (Franklin, 2011), multimediality does not extend equally to all journalistic or media stories (Russial, 2009), as they are generally characterised by limited innovation (Palau-Sampio, 2007).

The original model of the hypermedia narrative began with the report entitled 'Snow fall', which appeared in *The New York Times* in 2012. It was rather exceptional; a new narrative was transformed into a 'product brand' that generated more visits and business to the medium (Dowling & Vogan, 2014) and was offered sporadically without time constraints. From that point on, the evolution of the multimedia narrative has been uneven. Warnings have even been announced that, in some cases, the multimedia narrative has remained only a 'promise' (Steensen, 2011), because in the day-to-day reporting of current event journalism, the predominance of a simple narrative limited to the reproduction of a text with images and hyperlinks can be observed. Multimedia structures make it possible to differentiate between a narrative in which elements are simply juxtaposed (Salaverría, 2005), a predominant situation in the generalist media, and the story that makes up such aspects; thus designing a communicative unit with features that enrich each other and lead to the final interpretation of the information contained within the story itself. So, far from being a mere decoration, digital elements are effective resources that provide a better interpretation of the information, as well as greater creativity and more innovation.

A multimedia narrative developed through integration, as opposed to juxtaposition, contributes to the 'efficiency of digital reading' as long as it achieves a better distribution and hierarchy of the content (Scolari, 2004), thereby becoming a persuasive narrative that connects with the reader through an effective 'stickiness,' as Manovich (2005) expressly points out. Studies developed over the last few decades show that photography and video are the best elements of a story to retain the reader (Jacobson, 2010).

Ultimately, interactivity can be defined as the possibility for the reader to participate in the production of media content or a public debate (Jensen, 1998; Schultz, 2000). In the early days of digital journalism, this was characterised by an overflowing optimism, even stressing the democratic opportunities of its contribution (Gilmor, 2004, Quandt, 2018). However, such interactivity, initially announced as having great potential, has been a disappointment (Borger *et al.*, 2013), given the modest amount of real use (Salaverría, 2019); along with the influence of "active audiences" who are in the "minority" and do not question "journalistic hegemony"

(Masip, 2015, p. 177). Added to this situation are criticisms of poor quality regarding the contributions (Reich, 2011; Robinson, 2010), or the so-called “dark participation.” This is a reference to detrimental types of involvement (Quandt, 2018, p. 37), in the form of disinformation campaigns (Frischlich, Boberg & Quandt, 2018), trolling and cyberbullying, which require the implementation of moderating actions (Wolfgang, 2018).

In the case of Spain, which is the focus of this research, the media is now considered to be fully evolved, with 3,000 active digital media, a third of which are digital natives (Salaverría, Martínez-Costa & Breiner, 2018). As such, the last quarter century reflects a quantitative increase in media, yet a slower than expected implementation of digital narration (Salaverría, 2019).

Within this context of a significant and profound development in theory and research, this study starts from the most sceptical view of the myth of ‘techno-euphoria’ so as to be able to analyse which narrative dominates in Spain’s general media, just 25 years after the birth of digital media. This is an ideal turning point for analysing the state of the multimedia narrative in connection with the most relevant news information from Spain’s generalist media, as well as for checking whether the innovative narrative, fully developed yet less dominant, is or is not a utopia in the current journalistic story.

3. Objectives and methodology

The aim of this research is to analyse how four of the main Spanish digital media use multimedia, hypertextual and interactive resources. The critical view of technological determinism is approached via the starting hypothesis that these media develop a limited and conservative use of digital resources in the most prominent news on the front page of their websites. The sample consists of two original digital newspapers: *elconfidencial.com* (EC) and *eldiario.es* (ED); and another two with print origins: *elpais.com* (EP) and *elmundo.es* (EM). This study delves deeper into their adaptation to the environment and the use of digital options.

The goal is to answer the following research questions (RQ):

RQ 1: What sections and topics are highlighted in the first five news stories on the digital front page? Are there differences between the various media?

RQ 2: Do digital editions propose an enriching use of hypertextuality with external resources to expand the information?

RQ 3: What degree of influence do multimedia features have in publications?

RQ 4: Which media and publications generate the most comments?

RQ 5: Are there any differences in the use of hypertext, multimedia and interactive elements according to section and topic?

This research uses a content analysis methodology (Krippendorff, 1997), applicable to the study of multimedia narratives (Jacobson, 2012), which allows for the observation and description of predominant parameters to be systematized by means of a comparative approach. This technique provides an “objective, systematic and quantitative description of the content of communication” (Berelson, 1952, p. 18) through a systematized process in the description of a reality (Bardin, 1996).

Data collection was carried out from February to May of 2018, with a systematic periodicity focusing on the first full week of each month. In order to achieve homogeneous characteristics, the units of analysis were taken from the five main front page news stories located under the header (that is, the media’s own selection of its most outstanding content), regardless of the way the content is accessed through various devices. The compilation was obtained by focusing on the time slot from 7.00am to 10.00am, this being the time frame when the latest news and in-house content of each medium are presented.

The methodology, which combines content analysis with a qualitative evaluation of multimedia and hypertextual elements, was applied to a limited random sample (N=560) in which 14 variables have been considered, one of them open (Table 1), and grouped into four

categories of study: content, hypertextuality, multimediality and interactivity. These categories enable the characteristics of the topics addressed to be connected to the resources of the digital environment. The selection of variables was related to the options developed by the media under study after a coding process had been carried out using the specific bibliography as a reference (Bachmann & Harlow, 2012; Fondevila-Gascón, Rom-Rodríguez & Santana-López, 2016; García-Rosales & Abuín-Vences, 2019).

Table 1: Analysis sheet of topics and multimedia resources in web news.

Category	Resource	Characteristics
Content	Section	International/Spain/Politics/Economy/Society/Culture/Other
	Topic	Topic that is the focus of the news (open)
	Authorship	In-house authorship/Agencies/Other
	Currentness	Substantially current/Immediate
	Genre	News article/Chronicle/Analysis/Report/Profile
Hypertextuality	Links	Number Internal/External/Repeated
Multimedia	Photography	Number/Gallery In-house authorship/Agencies/Other
	Illustrations	Number
	Documents	Number
	Videos	Number Duration In-house authorship/Agencies/Other
	Maps Graphics	Number In-house authorship/Agencies/Other Interactive Data source
	Screenshots	Number Social networks
	Interactivity	Comments
Social networks		Available options

Source: Own elaboration.

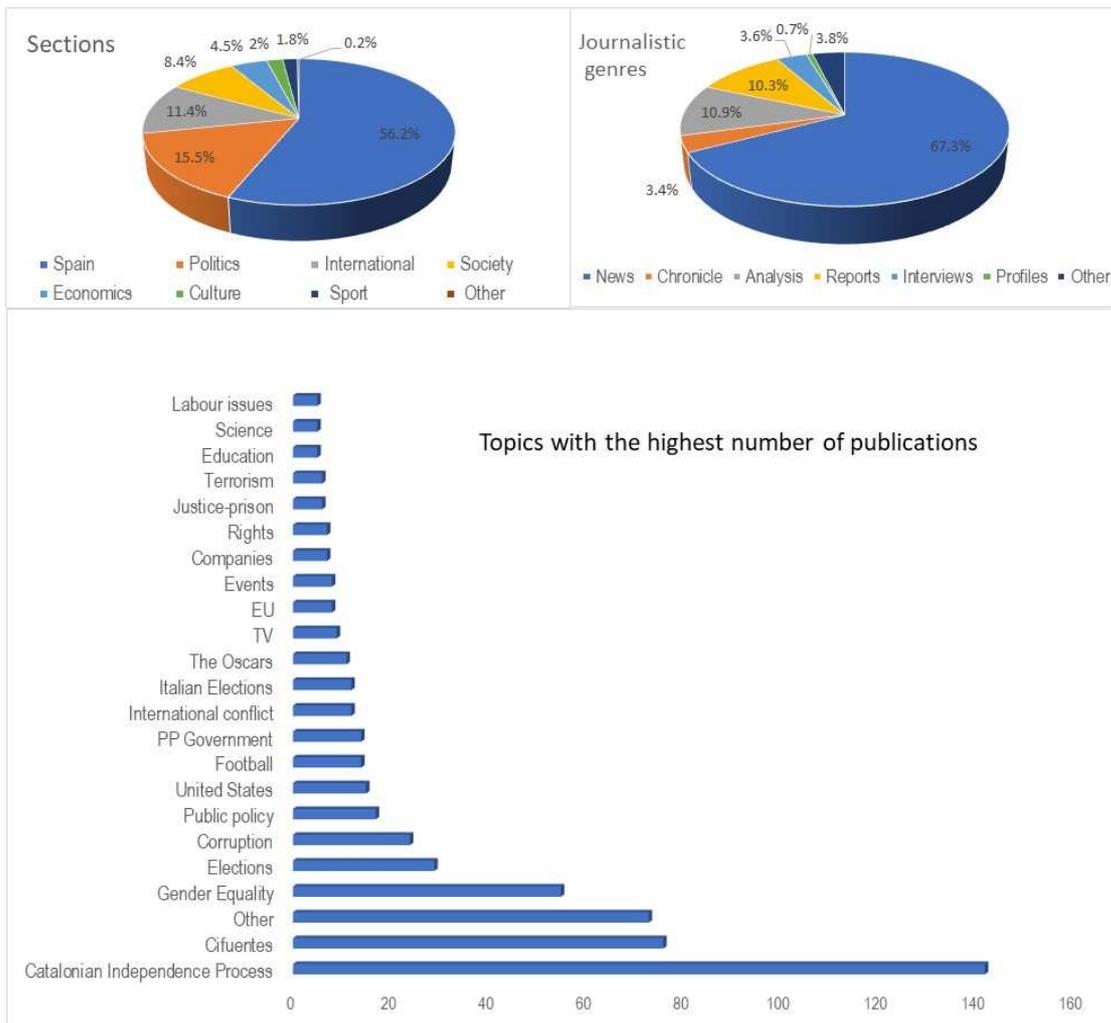
4. Results

4.1. Highlighted sections and topics on digital front pages

The immediacy factor has considerable weight when selecting the most relevant news items on a digital front page, as they are considered the most important pieces of the day and are located next to the header. An analysis of the five most outstanding news items in this range shows that 82.1% are breaking news stories or immediacy narratives, while less than one in five has a more relaxed connection to current affairs or topics without time constraints.

When comparing the media, EC has a clearer commitment to breaking news, with 93.6% of its headline information linked to this category, while the number decreases to 71.4% in the case of EM. This trend is also reflected in the preferred genre of the news pieces included in the compilation. Two-thirds (66.6%) are news and 4% are chronicles, while about a quarter would be considered new reports (10.3%), analysis (10.9%), or interviews and profiles (4.3%). In this distribution, a greater presence of interpretative genres can be seen in the two non-native media, EP and EM; while in EC, this presence is much lower.

Graph 1: Content of Multimedia Narrative: Genres, Sections and Predominant Topics.



Source: Own elaboration.

Over seventy percent of news items in the privileged position of the web belong to the national and political sections, mainly in EC (97.8%) and EM (83.6%). International and economic information has considerable weight in EP, with 27.8% and 11.4%, respectively. ED, on the other hand, gives prominence to society news (25.7%), while all of these, including cultural news, are absent from EM and EC.

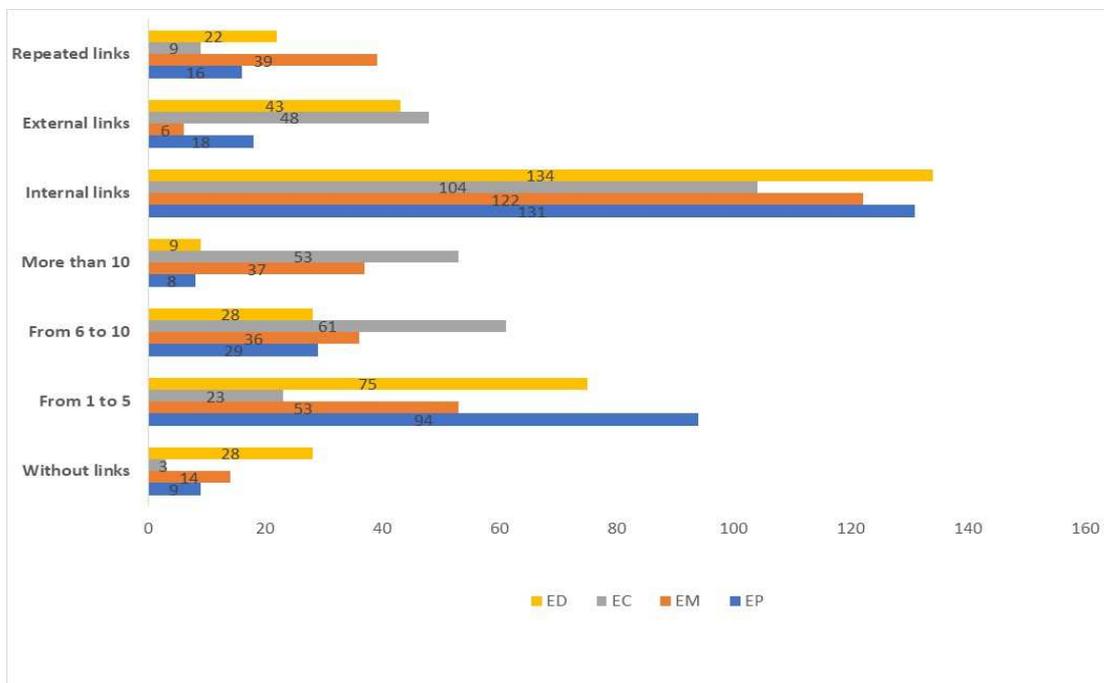
The prevalence of the source sections is correlated to the most repeated topics in the five front-page news items. More than half (58.2%) are included in the Spain/Politics section and revolve around five topics: The Catalan independence process, government formation in Catalonia, the Cifuentes case, the March 8th feminist strike, the possibility of elections along with a voting forecast, and finally corruption.

The presence of these is unevenly distributed. Thus, attention to the Catalan independence process and correlated issues are of particular concern to EC, making up nearly half the news items related to these topics (47.9%), followed by EM (25.3%). As for the Cifuentes issue, 58% of ED's publications were related to the case, since it was ED that brought the incident to light. Information relating to gender equality and the March 8th feminist strike has exceptional weight in ED (42%). With a smaller presence, corruption remains especially prominent in EM and ED, while it has less importance in EP and EC. The latter, however, is the medium that pays the most attention to information concerning electoral aspects, ranging from polls to the appointment of candidates (58% of those grouped under this heading).

4.2. Hypertextuality: characteristics and use

Hypertextuality is included in 90.3% of the news pieces in the media analysed in this work. Half the news items that omit this resource were found in *eldiario.es*, which is an original digital media, yet 20% of the news pieces analysed do not have links. In the news pieces that do incorporate hypertext, the media are generous, an aspect that readers value as positive (Arias-Robles & García-Avilés, 2017). More than five links are included by 46.6%, although the aggregate total of this resource shows significant differences from one medium to another. Thus, while 81.4% of EC news pieces and 52.3% of EM articles have more than five links, in both EP and ED, this figure barely exceeds a quarter of the total (26.4%). Positions are reversed if moderation in hyperlinks is considered. While two thirds of EP news and 53.5% of ED news incorporate one to five links, the percentage in the case of EM is reduced to 37.8%, and for EC it is 16.4%.

Graph 2: Use of hypertextuality: Number of hyperlinks and means.



Source: Own elaboration.

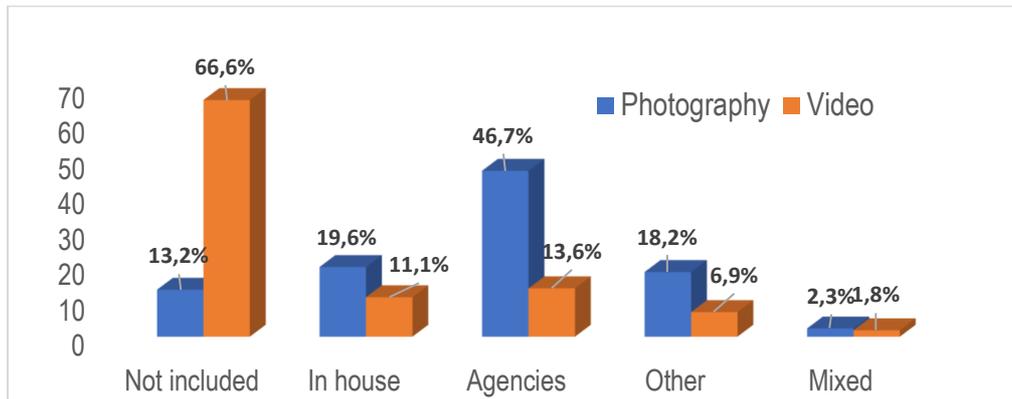
Far from increasing the amount of information, the inclusion of hyperlinks has, in reality, a conservative aspect, as 87.7% refer to their own medium through links to their own archives. In contrast, only one fifth of the pieces have an external link. In this case, it is the original digital media who commit to this resource: 30.7% of EC news and 34.2% of ED does so; while in EP, it is only present in 12.8% of news with links, and in EM, just 4.3%.

The hypertextual feature is also defined by the logic of its use. The study shows a certain incoherence, noting that 15.3% of news pieces include some repetition, and on some occasions a considerable amount. For instance, from a dozen published news items, there were between five and thirteen repetitions of information in the sites to which the reader was sent. EM accounted for 27.8% of the duplication. The use of links that lead to archive sections by subject or person, without specifying a particular document, distorts the resource and renders it useless. This is the case, for example, in the EP information entitled “Zapatero, the imaginary mediator in Venezuela.” Five links repeat each other, and several are generic, referring to archives identified as “Dominican Republic,” “José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero,” “Nicolás Maduro,” “Leopoldo López,” and “Venezuelan Elections.”

4.3. The Presence of multimedia elements in publications

As with hypertextuality, multimedia resources (screenshots from social networks, videos, snapshots, audio and graphics) are present in the vast majority of the publications. The most abundant of these is photography. In 86.8% of the publications, 22.5% incorporate two or more snapshots. Photo galleries appear in a dozen publications linked to social events, such as the Oscar awards ceremony, or acts of vindication, such as the March 8th feminist strike.

Graph 3: Presence and authorship of photography and video.



Source: Own elaboration.

Beyond the quantitative results, the importance given to these elements is determined by the resources allocated, a questionable aspect if we consider that only one in five publications includes its own images, signed by media professionals; while the rest come from agencies (46.7%) or have been provided by third parties, press offices or unidentified sources (18.2%). When several images are included, various sources are combined (2.3%).

A third of the publications in the compilation include at least one video, a rather low presence that is confirmed by other international studies (Ye & Starkey, 2018). The use of this resource is inconsistent. In fact, EP accumulates 49.2% of the videos and shows them in two thirds of its pieces. This contrasts with the presence of this resource, so characteristic of the digital environment, in the two original digital media, where EC incorporates video in only a third of its publications and ED in only 12.8%; while the average presence in EM is one video for every five publications.

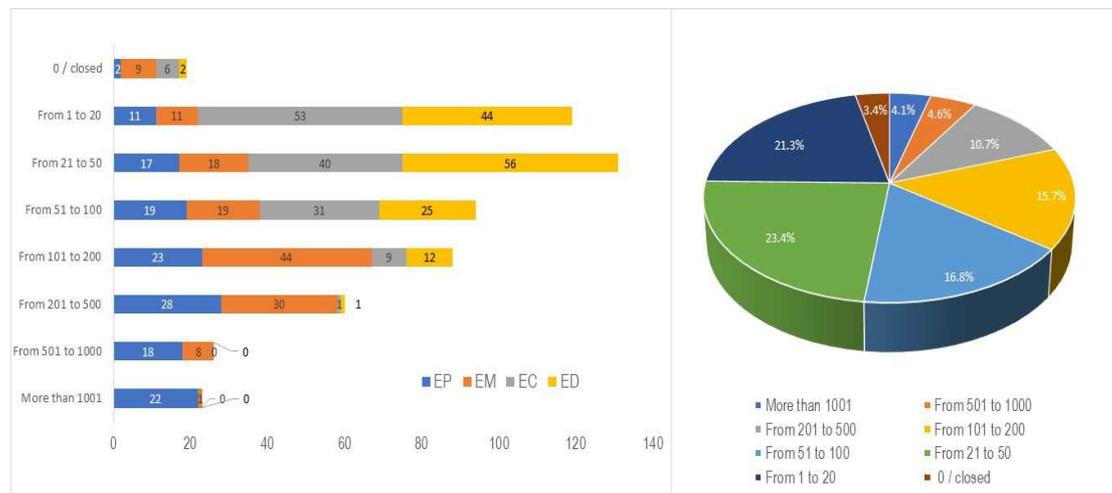
Authorship is once again an indication of the importance given to publications and the resources allocated to them. A third of the news items that incorporate video do so with a document created by the editorial staff (34.2%), while four out of ten come from an agency and a quarter are from other sources, or from mixed sources. This distribution explains, among other issues, the majority presence of videos in EP; as they come from the Atlas agency, part of the Mediaset group, which has been associated with the publisher of elpais.com ever since the merger of Spain's TV channels Cuatro and Telecinco, also part of the Mediaset group. To a lesser extent, videos also come from Reuters. On the other hand, EM relies on in-house videos, while most of those published by EC would fall into the category of other, the source being unidentified in many cases.

With much less frequency, 28 publications include scanned documents and 12 illustrations, a trend characteristic of the two original digital media. Maps and graphics are present in only 12.8% of the publications and, in general, they have little added value and few interactive options. Social networks appear as a complementary visual resource in one out of ten news pieces analysed, especially to illustrate public statements, notably in the sections entitled Spain and Politics, which account for 59% of the images. With the exception of two screenshots, the 56 included come from Twitter.

4.4. Interactivity: Media and publications that generate more comments

The third element that illustrates the nature of digital media, which is interactivity, has peculiar characteristics in the media analysed, especially when comparing the volume of comments they receive. Only 20.1% of the publications include more than 200 comments. If the data are broken down by media, it is striking to see how the items that accumulate the most interaction are published almost exclusively by the two digital media that originated in print. Thus, EP and EM amassed 97.5% of the references and continue to lead in commentaries in those publications that have obtained between one and two hundred interpellations from the audience. The two original digital media have less than one hundred comments, amassing 87% of such articles.

Graph 4: Interactivity: Number of comments per medium and overall percentage.



Source: Own elaboration.

Although only comments included on the web have been taken into account for this study, the media analysed offer the possibility of interacting through social networks. EP and EC operate with the highest number of networks (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google, Menéame), and EP is also on Pinterest; while EM and ED only offer this option on Twitter and Facebook.

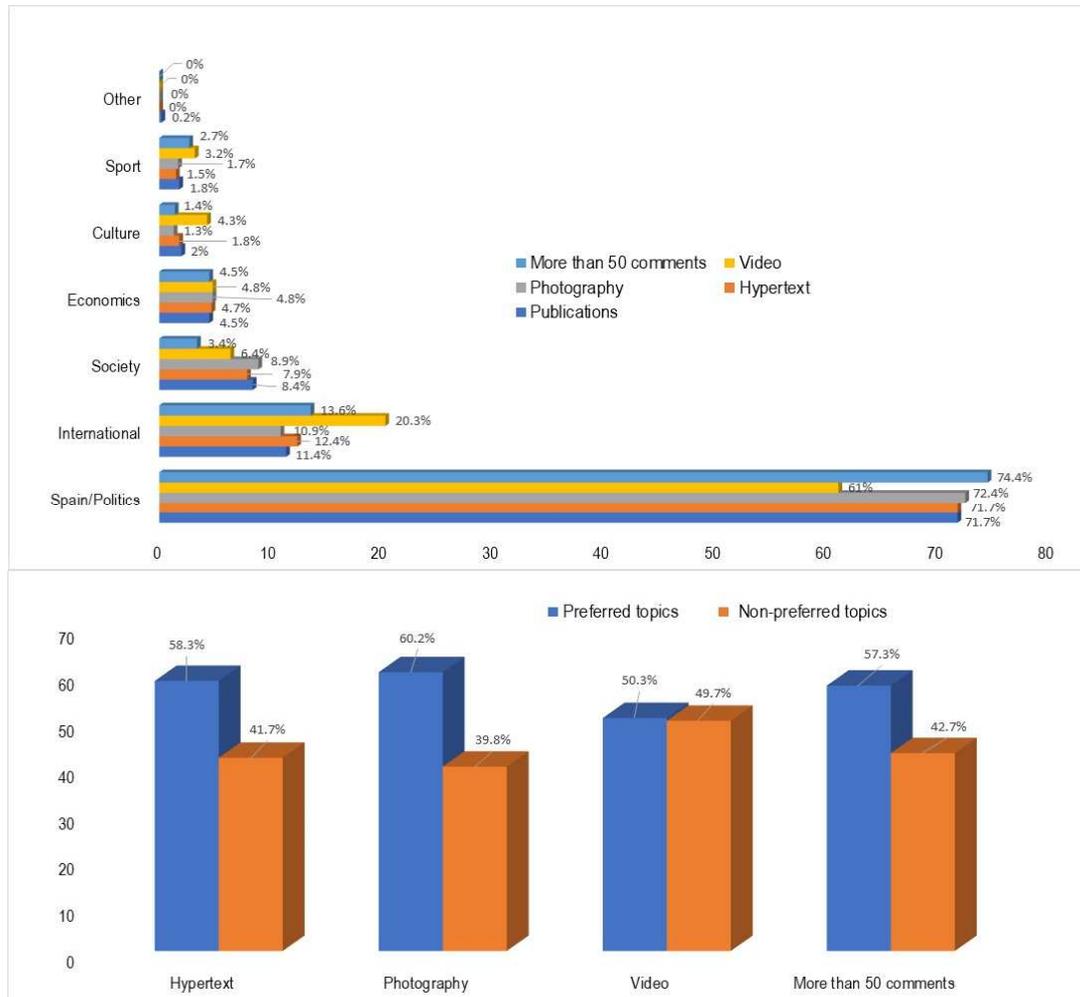
4.5. Hypertextual, multimedia and interactive elements by section and topic

If the results of the three criteria defining the digital editions are combined, there is a general correlation between the percentage of representation of each of the sections of the sample and the resources used, as well as in the distribution of hyperlinks by section.

Video has been used as a resource to analyse multimediality. The sections on Spain and Politics, which have the greatest number of publications, also have the highest concentration of videos: 61% of the videos belong to them, mainly containing information related to the Catalan independence process, the Cifuentes case, or the March 8th strike. However, in terms of percentage, this value is ten points lower than the representation of the news in both sections (71.7%) of the compilation. On the other hand, one of every five videos is in the International section, even though in quantitative terms its presence is limited to 11.4% of the sample. Essentially, this change is a result of EP's commitment to this multimedia resource in the section.

The evaluation of interactivity was performed only taking into account publications with more than 50 comments. This allowed us to see that the sections entitled Spain, Politics, and International, exceed the average number of comments published; while comments in the Society section number less than half that.

Graph 5: Digital resources by section and topic.



Source: Own elaboration.

To analyse the presence of resources in the preferred topics, the five themes that generated the most publications (58.2%) were selected and compared with the rest (41.8%).

This enabled us to see that, in general terms, the outstanding topics are also those with the most hypertextual and multimedia elements (although, in the case of video, the advantage is not significant) and they also generate a greater number of comments.

The differences can be seen in the five topics that have generated the most publications. Thus, if hypertextual elements are considered, the news on gender equality and corruption are below average in links, while the use of photography is homogeneous.

However, the contrast is evident in video, which is above average in information regarding the Catalan independence process or the Cifuentes case. The most numerous comments are associated with the former (64.1%).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The euphoria that characterised the first theoretical approaches to the possibilities of the digital environment for the multimedia narrative, considering the development offered by the main Spanish cyber media, is far from being endorsed by either print-origin media or original digital media. Following a quarter century of multimedia narrative development, the defining elements of the new ecosystem are present in most of the information, and those elements include photography, video and hypertext, in addition to allowing the reader to interact with the content.

However, this use of resources is primarily automatic and repetitive, more as a response to fashions or trends in audio-visual consumption rather than a prior reflection on how to use them in a complementary and enriching way. In the meantime, the integrated use of all elements in a more structured and multilingual format has been relegated to special events, historical dates, or works of greater importance and depth that are exceptional, sporadic and without time limitations.

First of all, research results show little difference between original digital and print-origin media, either in terms of selecting featured topics on the front page or developing digital resources. In this sense, in line with what has been said in other works of research (Díaz-Noci, 2018), the use of hypertextuality in all of them is questionable. This is either due to the repetition of links that lead to the same document (resulting from a lack of definition that redirects the reader to a generic file folder), or because of the tendency to want to retain the audience in the media's own website. This contrasts with, among others, the almost non-existent option of enriching content with access to primary sources.

This situation shows only a slight evolution with regard to the practices detected in studies carried out during the first decade of the 21st century (Tremayne, 2005), or at the beginning of the second decade (Barnhurst, 2010; Steensen, 2011; Coddington, 2012). This also contrasts with the assessment of academics and professionals concerning the importance of such practices (Arias-Robles & García-Avilés, 2018). Bearing these data in mind, it would be advisable in future research to pay more detailed attention to production processes so as to observe how this might have an influence on decisions that focus on quantity rather than quality; decisions that take place in a work context and are defined by the immediacy of technology and multiplatform management strategies (Cohen, 2018).

Secondly, the use of poorly produced multimedia features predominates and has an impact on the quality of the content, as well as on the logic of the resource itself. Most of these are supplied through agencies, a common practice in the digital environment (Boumans, Trilling, Vliegenthart & Boomgaarden, 2018). This situation especially affects video, which, rather than being a complement to the story, is more often a duplication of the text. The presence of video seems to be linked more to the business context of each media (Ye & Starkey, 2018) rather than to a commitment by original digital media to differentiate themselves from print through a specific resource. In fact, the print-origin media *elpais.com* has half the videos in the compilation, while they are sporadic in *eldiario.es*.

This also reflects structural and resource management aspects that should be addressed in future research to confirm whether the limited reliance on multimedia is due exclusively to financial aspects. In this multimedia situation, less well developed than expected (Palau-Sampio, 2007; Salaverría, 2019), the dependence on agency resources limits the possibilities of influencing an integrated narration with a commitment to innovation and creativity.

Thirdly, interaction distinguishes the digital identity, and this has fed the myth of audience participation and media democratisation (Gilmor, 2004; Quandt, 2018). This interaction is presented from a quantitative point of view as a limited element, particularly in the two original digital media sources analysed, whose readers are less active in comments than those of EP and EM. These results coincide with studies that point to a limited participation in the context of Iberoamerican cyber-media, characterised by a lack of dialogue with the audience (Suing, Ordóñez & Carpio, 2018). On the other hand, massive participation in commentaries is concentrated in a small proportion of political issues. Although this analysis has focused on participation through comments on a media platform, a comparison with the contribution through social networks, that is non-proprietary platforms (Westlund & Ekström, 2018), will allow a more accurate evaluation of the scope of the latter in future studies.

In short, with regard to its characteristic resources, the unenthusiastic development of the multimedia narrative in digital media dedicated to general news confirms that it has

typically remained focused on utopianism, promises and myths (Boczkowski, 2004; Steensen, 2011; Domingo, 2008). Therefore, this research confirms the most pessimistic view of the expected narrative reinvention, verifying the situation in the Spanish digital media, in both original digital media and those of print origin, at a time when a quarter century has passed since they first appeared on the web. In other words, the results have filled the empirical void of the ‘techno-euphoria’ current, since the reinvention of multilanguage does not extend to the entire present-day journalistic narrative.

Nevertheless, it is true that this situation is closely linked to a context of crisis in both the economic as well as the business model spheres, and these factors have slowed down the development of new, more demanding narratives. In this sense, the development options have reached a kind of glass ceiling in which, despite the technological possibilities of today that were unthinkable in the early days of digital editions, the proposals have not been developed at the same time in order to exploit the potential of the said resources in the news. This observation cannot be separated from the conditions required by a fully digital, quality narrative, with equipment and costs that some media in the full process of redefining a sustainable business model have not been able to assume until now (Newman, 2017), often due to scarce training in these skills (Du & Lo, 2014; Song, 2018).

The limitations of this study could be overcome through future research which would include interviews with journalists, decision-makers and media managers on the routines of these practices, as well as through a larger sample, both of the media and other countries, in order to allow for the design of more complex inferential statistical methodologies to test the results on a broader scale.

It remains to be seen whether the ‘immediacy narrative’, more closely linked to current journalism, can be enriched in the future with digital features that effectively contribute to the journalistic story, providing an informative context and creativity beyond the mere juxtaposition of elements.

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