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# NEW SCREENS... NEW LANGUAGES? Spanish Broadcast News Content in the Web

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This paper examines how Spanish television networks are adapting to the Internet's potential and how they are using the Web as a platform to elaborate and distribute news content. The redesign of the leading commercial networks Telecinco's and Antena 3's websites and the launching of an online news service by public channel RTVE indicate that Spanish broadcasters are increasing their convergence with online operations and are developing stronger journalistic offerings. This paper compares the online news services in each of these three networks, with the objective of finding similarities and differences, as well as outlining their main strategies. Using a content analysis methodology, the essential characteristics of online journalism are analysed in each website: multimedia, hypertext, interactivity, user-generated content and social networks. It is also enquired to what extent the journalistic content available in these websites is adapted to the online language or it rather maintains the basic audiovisual structure of conventional television narrative. The production of television and online news also shows an increasing level of newsroom integration in these media. Journalists' changes in the working systems and routines, as well as their attitudes towards converged news production are explored, with particular emphasis on how it might influence the quality of their journalistic output.

KEYWORDS interactive news; online journalism; Spanish television websites; user-generated content

#### **Literature Review**

Maintaining a presence on the Internet has become vital for television networks as an essential means of fostering contact with viewers, as well as extending a station's range to include new sectors of the television viewing audience (Ferguson and Perse, 2000). Comparative studies on the content and design of web pages maintained by television channels illustrate the networks' development of an online strategy aimed at attracting new viewers and gaining their loyalty (Chan-Olmstead and Park, 2000; López Carreño, 2004; Belanger, 2005; Thurman and Lupton, 2008). The convergence of media, technologies and the various processes of production on the Internet creates an audiovisual environment in which designs and applications with common characteristics are based. This is significant because the design of websites associated with both newspapers and television stations have begun to resemble one another more and more (Cooke, 2005).

In the online environment, interactivity alters the unidirectional model of the traditional flow of communications, providing users with a greater variety of options in the selection of news content, and allowing them to participate in the production process (Bruns, 2005; Chung, 2007). Deuze (2003) emphasizes three dimensions of interactivity

on news websites: navigational interactivity, adaptive interactivity and functional interactivity. According to Deuze (2003:214), navigational interactivity, like medium interactivity, allows users to 'navigate' a site with hyperlinks and menu bars; adaptive interactivity, much like the blending of medium and human interactivity, allows the users' experiences to have consequences on site content; and with functional interactivity, users can participate in the production process of the sites. The analysis of users' navigational guidelines shows how they employ different resources and their degree of usability (Ferguson and Perse, 2000; Tewksbury, 2005).

Characteristics such as hypertext, multimedia language, the personalization of information and continuous updates give cyber-journalism a unique character (Nysveen et al, 2005). News websites use linguistic code (written text and the spoken word), audio (music and sound effects) and icons (moving images, photographs, digital graphs, informational graphics, three-dimensional animations, etc.). In addition, they take advantage of a fourth, stylistic code that comprises the typography or the colours of the web site, and introduces usability as an important concept: "A system's utility in so far it is a means to achieve an objective" (Nielsen, 1993). Usability refers to the organization of the elements that form a web page and the degree to which the user can effectively interface with them. It includes the design of elements like the web's site map, the operation of search engines, access to the newspaper library or the application of the RSS technology that allows users to access content in a more complete and personalized manner.

Existing studies indicate that the television networks have not yet taken full advantage of the potential that this media offers, and that the use of interactive resources on news websites is limited (Thurman, 2008; Thurman and Lupton, 2008). The predominant style, based on the use of texts and static images, is being replaced by multimedia storytelling with the use of video, interactive graphs and audio (Quinn, 2005). Journalists are increasingly developing new ways of reaching their audience, creating interactive environments in which users are encouraged to spend more time on their websites. Likewise, a number of sites have harnessed the potential of user-generated content to involve individual users in the process of producing and distributing information (Domingo et al., 2008; Hermida and Thurman, 2008).

According to Lee-Wright (2008), the most recent studies indicate that networks have gradually begun to produce content specifically intended for use on the Internet. This material, in turn, can then be used as a starting point for the creation of content for television. In other words, through the emerging "TV-web synergy", networks are developing content that can be promoted and distributed via every available media platform. As Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2007) point out, networks aim to maximize their profit, investment and audience by being attentive to technological developments that maximize the impact of their brand name. "Re-purposing" the different kinds of content available is a strategy that is becoming more common on television news, primarily by means of the process of "adaptation or transferring" (Erdal, 2009), as well as through audio-visual browsers such as YouTube.

In the current market, the network's identity is integrated into different types of screens (Internet, mobile phones, PDAs, etc.) so that the channel "projects its brand, and is able to compete and take advantage of its reputation in an ever more frequently dispersed universe." (García Avilés and García Martínez, 2008: 287). Its power of attraction depends on the user's ability to employ the technology wherever and whenever he wants, without having to depend on a rigid schedule or tolerate commercial interruptions, all the while benefiting from the possibility of an intense, participative interactive experience.

# The evolution of Spanish television websites

Unlike newspapers, which have taken the lead in this field, Spanish television networks (like their counterparts in the rest of the Europe) have been slow to capitalize on the potential offered by online formats. Until they were redesigned in 2008 and 2009, their web sites played a secondary role in their business and news panoramas (López García, 2005). There are two principal reasons for this: restrictions from the technological point of view and the adoption of a defensive strategy on the part of the networks (Lehman-Wilzig and Cohen-Avigdor, 2004; Nguyen, 2008).

The limited availability of broadband technology for users, as well as the difficulties of compressing video, has delayed the full conversion of network content to an online format. At the same time, Spanish television networks have also reacted defensively to the emergence of new media, in what Hermida and Thurman have called "the fear of marginalisation" (2008: 347). The result of this has been that the networks' massive off-line audiences have not yet translated into similar numbers on their websites. Even after significant restructuring, the websites maintained by Spanish television networks are still far from occupying the first positions in the ranking created and updated by *Alexa*. While there are seven Spanish newspapers that figure among the most popular online sites, only three television networks have made the list. The sports journal *marca.com*, the first newspaper to appear in the *Alexa* ranking, ranks tenth on the list while *elmundo.es*, the first newspaper aimed at a general readership, is in the 17<sup>th</sup> position. You have to read down the list to the 55<sup>th</sup> position before finding *telecinco.com*; *cuatro.com* appears at 72<sup>nd</sup> on the list and *rtve.es* at 93<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>1</sup>

The news websites produced by Spanish networks have evolved remarkably since studies like the one by Lopez Carreño (2004) and López García (2005) were made. That latter study in particular made clear the absolute dependency of network news websites upon their media sources, as well as the preponderance of written text and the shortage of information on offer. Nevertheless, since the time of that study, the websites have been redesigned and the networks have invested considerable resources—economic, human and technological—in adapting them to a new media environment in which the influence and scope of the Internet's reach has increased considerably (Larrañaga, 2008).<sup>2</sup>

The three networks discussed in this paper—Antena 3, TVE and Telecinco—have demonstrated a clear commitment to improving their presence on the Internet throughout 2008. Following their agreement with YouTube to create their own channel in March 2007, Antena 3 introduced its first significant site overhaul in December of that same year, and continued adding significant new features afterwards until launching, in May of 2009, version 3.0 of its site. The unified, joint project consists of a cross-sectional management of all Antena 3's windows, and implies a greater convergence between TDT, Internet and mobile phone technology in the diffusion of entertainment contents. Telecinco's web, on the other hand, was updated in January of 2008, and again in September of that same year. Its editorial staff is comprised of ten professionals who carry out the jobs of production and editing of content.

TVE's new web was launched on 20 May 2008 with an ambitious new approach: its multimedia editorial staff comprised of 27 journalists (seven of them specialising in sports coverage) and five video operators managed, in only a few months, to create a style that is consistent with the network's public service policy, as well as coordinating the work of other professionals from RNE and TVE.

Telecinco continues to lead its network competitors in the number of online viewers according to the data compiled by the OJD, although *rtve.es* has experienced a significant increase in the number of one-time visitors in recent months (Table 1). It should also be

pointed out that visitors to rtve.es spend more time browsing on their website than those of their competitors do.

# [Insert table 1 here]

## Methodology

This study combines the qualitative analysis offered by websites with interviews with the professionals responsible for overseeing *Antena 3*, *Telecinco* and *TVE*'s multimedia development. It was decided to leave the other two Spanish networks, *Cuatro* and *La Sexta*, out of the sample because they have only recently been launched, and because they have very little Internet audience.<sup>3</sup>

Our analysis focuses on three days in May of 2009, selected randomly, in which the informative tools and multimedia resources with which each network approached the news of the day were compared. Also, special attention was given to the strategies of usergenerated content on each web site. What is presented is basically a quantitative analysis, with responses limited to binary possibilities—i.e. Yes/No. In the few cases in which a gradation is pertinent, it has been made according to the following ascending scale: null, poor, average, sufficient, excellent.

In addition, several interviews were made with journalists from the webs analysed in the study. This process involved conducting semi-structured interviews, with open questions and possibility of cross-examining them on the strategic, business and informative dimensions of the websites with which they are involved.

#### Results

The network websites continue to depend on off-line news content, particularly audio-visual content, but all of them have demonstrated an increasing interest in developing their own content. According to *rtve.es* News Content Director Charo Marcos (2009), the *TVE* web offers many of its own original videos that seek "to enrich the stories broadcast on radio or television".

## Web Design

An initial survey of the designs of the three websites in this study reveals that they all have a similar structure that mimics that of newspaper websites and divides their content into thematic sections. *Rtve.es* is a notable exception, since it usually highlights one topic of current interest (swine flu, the death of the singer Antonio Vega, etc.) in a bar which appears at the top of each of its sections. It also invites users to view the "television newscast in four minutes". The design of the *rtve.es* website effectively adapts to the potential offered by the Internet: it is the one that uses the most videos, integrating them into the presentation of the news, as we will see later. By contrast, *antena3noticias.com* and *informativostelecinco.com* tend to present their videos in a separate section—"Today's News on Video" and the "Special Reports" of *Telecinco*. The website of *rtve.es* integrates into the visual design of its interface one of the possibilities that best characterizes the immediacy of television: live news feeds. Of the three webs analyzed, *rtve.es* is the only one that offers this possibility on its portal. With the rest, users have to enter the site in order to find live transmission, which then opens in a separate window.

## [Insert illustration 1 here]

## Multimediality

As can be seen in Table 2, none of the networks employ video content from external sources on their web sites. All three constantly utilise images generated by their own off-line sources to supply the multimedia content of their webs. Although there has been a notable improvement following the redesign of their sites, the three networks are still in the process of perfecting their multimedia storytelling, since they have barely even begun to integrate text, audio and video into the information they provide. Normally, when a video is included, it has been organized independently with respect to the rest of the news on the site, or it duplicates what has already been presented in the written text. In this respect, Antena 3 may be the farthest behind of the three networks since their videos nearly always open in a new window, thus breaking the flow of any narrative provided by integrated multimedia. By contrast, TVE is the network that is most clearly betting on a formula that presents the news in a manner designed specifically for the Web. The integration of its videos is constantly improving and less broken up, they have experimented with enriching some of their news features with podcasts, and they utilise fragments of their news archives, all of which makes them the most advanced Spanish network in terms of multimedia storytelling.

## [Insert table 2 here]

# Hypertextuality

Both *Antena 3* and *Telecinco* make moderate use of links, the key to online hypertextuality (see Table 2). *TVE* has the web page best adapted to this feature, but one still finds the same restrictions as the other two: none of them utilise these links to cite information from sources outside the network itself. To cite but one notable example, it is interesting to note how when reporting the death of the famous Spanish singer Antonio Vega, none of the networks included links to YouTube pages on which the singer appeared. At most, *TVE* took advantage of the archives of its sister station *RNE* to include some podcasts of his songs. The rest of the networks used (and then only sparingly) archive images of the singer.

A greater interest in employing hypertext linking is evident when "related content" is included in each news story. *Antena 3* includes several related pieces (both text and video), whereas *TVE* prefers to include tags at the end of each news story that direct users to places where recent articles can be found. *Telecinco*, on the other hand, does nothing to exploit this way of expanding on its news coverage.

## [Insert illustration 2 here]

# Synergy with off-line news broadcasts

One of the possibilities offered by every process of online migration is the capacity that new media has for creating "synergies" with the old one. We have already indicated how almost all the audio-visual information that it is presented on the Web has its origin in off-line news broadcasts, but in this point we are interested in studying more comprehensive elements, such as the potential for accessing live news broadcasts or how easily they can be recovered.

Once again, *rtve.es* is notable for the decision it has made to employ its archival services. Its news broadcasts are easily recovered in the section "*TVE* on demand" (*TVE a la carta*), where any program from the past seven days can be viewed. In addition, the archives section offers abundant material from its news programs, something that radically distinguishes the network from its competitors. By contrast, *Telecinco*'s website only offers users the possibility of searching for older TV series and entertainment programs, although it does permit them to view some news videos via its *A3Videos* portal.

## [Insert table 3 here]

The synergy of the three networks' live and off-line editions is also unequal (see Table 3). The infomativostelecinco.com website doesn't offer its users this possibility, although it also does not with a channel specializing in news. While the *Antena 3* site does offer its *A3Noticias24* service, it does not take advantage of the headlines featured on its news portal—one must navigate through the site until finding the right window. *Rtve.es* makes good use of its 24-hour channel and offers a reduced screen inserted into one of the sidebars of its portal in order to facilitate direct access to its television broadcasts. In addition, as its News Content Director affirms, *rtve.es* has two windows that facilitate this integration: firstly, by virtue of being part of a public and multimedia conglomerate (*RTVE*), the website expands it synergies by having "one foot in television and the other in radio", and secondly, they can "offer more images than the rest of Spanish television networks" because they dispose of "a local coverage and international expansion that other networks do not have" (Marcos, 2009).

## [Insert illustration 3 here]

## Interactivity and UGC

Although the three networks encourage user interaction on their web portals, the involvement of spectators in the informational process is not as developed in Spain as it is with British or U.S. networks. All of them permit the syndication of material and allow the user to share his or her stories, but only *Telecinco* proposes something as fundamental as evaluation and commentaries about the news (see Table 4). It is significant that none of the three networks evaluated offer discussion forums in the style of the British "Have Your Say", nor even allows for the possibility of the network website becoming a platform for hosting user blogs. This conservative attitude contrasts with the fact that the three websites have been very active in chartrooms—with both journalists from the network and socially relevant individuals contributing—and, except in the case of *informativostelecinco.com*, also permit users to vote in surveys about political or social issues and sporting events.

#### [Insert table 4 here]

The phenomena of blogs created by journalists from each network can also be seen on the three webs, although none of them exploit the possibility of the video-blog, an interesting tool for professionals trained in the language of audiovisual communications. In any case, the most notable thing in this regard is the failure to take advantage of the enormous possibilities offered by user-generated content. None of the three websites has capitalized on the potential of the user as a source of news and information. Unlike the BBC or Sky News, Spanish television networks neither solicit stories, photos or videos

from the users nor take advantage of Twitter as a tool for gathering information. As a result, the impact of UGC in offline news stories can be classified as null.

#### **Conclusions**

Spanish television networks did not begin to take the potential offered by Internet seriously until 2008. This delay has meant that the kind of news presented still relies on the weight of an audiovisual rhetoric more appropriate to a televised format, with the result that there still remains much to do in order to fully take advantage of the broad possibilities offered by multimedia storytelling. From an informational point of view, *rtve.es* is the web that includes the most links when presenting a story. In any case, the three websites studied display an almost exclusive reliance on internal links, thus missing the opportunity of accessing the vast universe of information available via the Internet. Likewise, *rtve.es* also offers the best online selection of news and information: the enormous volume of its digital archives, the magnitude of it human resources, the possibility of seeing live news broadcasts 24 hours a day, as well as the large number of exclusive news stories drawn from the web, make it the standard bearer for the Spanish television networks' transition to online services.

The websites of the Spanish television networks are lagging behind in the use of UGC. They have developed blogs (*rtve.es* in particular), but interactivity with the news presented is restricted—only *informativostelecinco.com* allows it at present. It is interesting to note that none of the networks offer users the possibility of commenting on news stories in online forums and that, except in rare cases, none of them employ the web to take advantage of the potential offered by the public as a source of news, something that the *BBC* and *Sky News* regularly do.

In this panorama, the networks should not lose sight of the reasons why the Internet has experienced such spectacular growth: a technology and an infrastructure that has allowed it to penetrate into every area of society, and the multifunctional nature of the web, with its enormous interactivity and free content. The integration between the different elements of the web of values (production, distribution, packaging and customer service) also aims to generate a greater capacity for competition. Spanish networks must increase their multiplatform convergence, which projects their brand image, in order to establish themselves in an ever more complex (online) universe.

#### **NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> According to Alexa, *Marca* (10), *As* (15), *El Mundo* (17), *El País* (24), *20minutos* (43), *Sport* (44), *Telecinco* (55), *Cuatro* (72), *El Mundo Deportivo* (74) and *TVE* (93).
- <sup>2</sup> Internet penetration within over 14 years old Spaniards grew from 5,6% up to 26,2 % (2000-2007) (Larrañaga, 2008: 4). This study also shows statistical data that illustrate how the more the people use internet the less they watch television (2008: 6,16)
- <sup>3</sup> Cuatro and La Sexta got their license to broadcast in the Plan Técnico Nacional de Televisión Digital Privada, on 29th of July, 2005. On the one hand, Cuatro's online news has been scarce until its last redesign, on April 2009. On the other hand, La Sexta's website was redesigned on February 2009, even though the news section is still small.

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- José A. García Avilés, Department of Journalism, Universidad Miguel Hernández de Elche, Ed. Torreblanca, Avda de la Universidad, s/n 03202 Elche (Alicante) Spain. E-mail: jose.garciaa@umh.es
- **Alberto Nahum García Martínez**, Department of Journalism, Universidad de Navarra, Ed. Bibliotecas, 31080 Pamplona, Spain. E-mail: <a href="mailto:albgarcia@unav.es">albgarcia@unav.es</a>

# **Tables**

Table 1. Spanish website single visit users and average length of visits in 2009.

| 2009     | Unique<br>users<br>RTVE.es | Unique<br>users<br>Telecinco.<br>com | Unique<br>users<br>Antena3.<br>com | Visits'<br>average<br>length<br>RTVE.es | Visits' average length Telecinco. com | Visits' average length Antena3. |
|----------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| January  | 3.257.244                  | 5.295.818                            | 2.595.483                          | 05:22                                   | 08.28                                 | 05:26                           |
| February | 3.050.051                  | 4.077.355                            | 2.037.117                          | 04:56                                   | 07:24                                 | 04:33                           |
| March    | 3.559.297                  | 4.527.474                            | 1.999.452                          | 10:46                                   | 06:25                                 | 05:45                           |
| April    | 3.839.483                  | 4.683.206                            | 2.425.085                          | 12:42                                   | 06:00                                 | 06:11                           |
| May      | 4.568.975                  | 4.977.742                            | 3.200.743                          | 11:36                                   | 06:48                                 | 07:28                           |

Source: Authors own elaboration using OJD audit bureau figures.

Table 2. Multimediality and Hipertextuality in Spanish television news websites (May 2009)

|                                    | RTVE.es      | Antena3noticias.com | InformativosTelecinco.com |
|------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Use of in-house videos             | Yes          | Yes                 | Yes                       |
| Use of external videos             | No           | No                  | No                        |
| Audio, video and text integration  | intermediate | Poor                | Poor                      |
| In the same window or independent? | Same         | Independent         | Same                      |
| Use of Flash                       | No           | No                  | No                        |
| Use of Internal Links              | Yes          | Yes                 | Yes                       |
| Use of External Links              | Null         | Poor                | Null                      |
| Use of related articles            | Yes          | Yes                 | No                        |
| Use of related<br>Videos           | No           | Yes                 | No                        |

Source: Authors' own research

Table 3. Relationship between online and off-line news in Spanish television news websites (May 2009)

|  | RTVE.es | Antena3noticias.com | InformativosTelecinco.com |
|--|---------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Live TV News in the Front Page                             | Yes     | No                  | No                        |
| Live TV News inside the site                               | Yes     | Yes                 | No                        |
| Retrieval of latest news programme inside the site         | Yes     | Yes                 | Yes                       |
| Retrieval of latest<br>News programme in<br>the Front Page | No      | No                  | Yes                       |
| News Programme<br>Archive                                  | No      | No                  | Yes                       |
| Call for the next News<br>Program                          | Yes     | No                  | No                        |

**Source: Authors' own research** 

Table 4. User-Generated Content in Spanish television news websites (May 2009)

|                               | RTVE.es  | Antena3noticias.com | InformativosTelecinco.com |
|-------------------------------|----------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| News customization            | No       | No                  | No                        |
| Users' Evaluation of Stories  | No       | No                  | Yes                       |
| Users Comments on Stories     | Yes      | No                  | Yes                       |
| Sharing material              | Yes      | Yes                 | Yes                       |
| Polls                         | Yes      | Yes                 | No                        |
| Message Boards                | No       | No                  | No                        |
| Chats with journalists        | Yes      | Yes                 | Yes                       |
| Chats with news makers        | Yes      | Yes                 | Yes                       |
| Journalists' Blogs<br>/number | Yes (43) | Yes (23)            | Yes (13)                  |
| Journalists' Videoblogs       | No       | No                  | No                        |
| User's Blogs                  | No       | No                  | No                        |
| Material submitted by users   | No       | No                  | No                        |

Source: Authors' own research

# Illustration 1. A screenshot of the Informativostelecinco.com website



## Illustration 2. A screenshot of the Antena3noticias.com website



## Illustration 3. A screenshot of the rtve.es website



Debate del estado de la Nación

# Rosa Díez: "Si no es capaz de cerrar un pacto, convoque elecciones"

MARÍA MENÉNDEZ - CC, BNG, UPyD, NaBai y UPN cierran el debate sobre el estado de la Nación con críticas a las medidas anunciadas por Zapatero.

#### Corredor justifica recortar la deducción para acabar con los especuladores

La ministra justifica la medida sobre la deducción por vivienda. Cree que 'por primera vez la clase media tiene más libertad para comprar o alquilar.

Quitar la deducción, una medida polémica



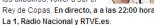
#### La inflación se coloc en abril en el -0,2%

Es el segundo mes consecutivo con tasa negativa, aunque los precios han repuntado 1% en un mes.

Copa del Rey

#### Uno a uno, los 22 hombres para una Copa histórica

Los culés se juegan el primer título para el triplete; los bilbaínos, volver a ser el



Todo en nuestro Especial Copa del Rey