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## Miscellaneous

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## Transmediatic depth of *The New York Times* and *El País* in their coverage of Boris Johnson's resignation

### Abstract

A decade after the implementation of multimedia frameworks in the news media, it is necessary to determine which mechanisms have been incorporated into the daily routines of the news media. To accomplish this, we analysed the channels, forms and intertextual modalities employed by two leading international newspapers in their coverage of an unpredictable news event with global repercussions and a specific period: the UK government crisis of July 2022, which led to the resignation of the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. We used a qualitative methodology of transmedia information analysis (Calvo & Serrano Tellería, 2021), adapted to assess the daily operations of online media in updating their content. Additionally, interviews were conducted with the teams responsible for this coverage. The coverage analysis revealed a transmedia depth of ten to eleven informative modalities. We found several residual differences in their audience participation policies. Certain generalist modalities, such as live streaming, video news, podcasts or social networks, were well established and used to attract readership. Furthermore, various models of newsletters and discussion forums with varying levels of access restriction were employed. However, neither of the studied media outlets offered an auditory transcription of their content. While a

specific transmedia information model is emerging in digital media, further research should be undertaken to complement these findings.

### Keywords

**Transmedia journalism, online media, *El País*, *The New York Times*, Boris Johnson.**

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## 1. Introduction

The news media have long embraced the role of prosumers and social networks in transmedia journalism, which uses different platforms to expand the information universe through audience collaboration (Rost & Bergero, 2016). This can be summarised by three key characteristics: multiple media platforms, content expansion through hypermedia and audience engagement (Canavilhas, 2018; Rampazzo Gambarato, 2019). Thus, a semantic galaxy has gradually formed around this concept, encompassing terms such as cross-media, multiple platforms or trans-medial worlds (Scolari, 2013). Other studies have focused on the incorporation of transmedia narratives in journalism (Galán *et al.*, 2018; Peñafiel Sáiz, 2016; Irala Hortal, 2014).

One of the proposed paths is to reclaim the fundamental principles of journalism through new narratives (Rost & Espiño, 2021) in order to depict a multifaceted and virtual reality. This trajectory involves navigating user networks fraught with threats to the journalism profession (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2003). The rise of convergence (Jenkins, 2008) has brought about technological changes and profound cultural, economic and social transformations. Consequently, Jenkins established the principles of transmedia narratives (Jenkins, 2003; 2009a; 2009b) that were adapted to journalism by Kevin Moloney (2011) and recently expanded (Astigueta, 2021).

Journalism seeks to adapt to these changes through product/production, organisation, distribution and marketing innovation to ensure the profession's survival (García-Avilés *et al.*, 2018). These far-reaching changes include production and social innovation in products, organisations or processes prompted by emerging modes of information consumption and new formats (Peña Fernández *et al.*, 2019).

However, in recent years, the effectiveness, depth and relevance of these transformations, notably in daily news broadcasts, have been questioned. It has been argued that the effective forms proposed by transmedia journalism can only be developed in the context of special reports but not in daily news reporting (Renó & Flores, 2018). While transmedia has a place in slow and long-form journalism, it does not appear to work in daily news coverage between websites and mobile phones and vice versa (Vázquez-Herrero, 2021b). These forms of journalism require greater planning in news coverage, data processing and audience participation (Costa-Sánchez *et al.*, 2021).

Thus, transmediality would appear to be best reserved for special news content as a replacement for the Sunday supplements that were typical in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the present century. In other words, transmediality, developed in each medium's innovation laboratories or highly specialised departments, can only complement news rather than be incorporated into daily news reporting (Sádaba & Salaverría, 2016).

The effectiveness of transmedia narratives in daily news reporting was tested by applying it to an unremarkable news product (Puntí-Brun, 2020). Ever since Jenkins (2009b) theorised about immersing the public in news consumption, in-depth research has been carried out on immersive and interactive journalism (Vázquez-Herrero, 2021a), forms of innovation used by online news media to seek user participation. Two examples are virtual reality (Sidorenko Baustista *et al.*, 2018) and 360° videos (Pérez-Seijo, 2021). Immersive journalism uses platforms and technologies to foster interactivity, a fundamental characteristic of the digital environment and online media. Despite a decline in the use of immersive journalism after 2018 (López Hidalgo *et al.*, 2022), extensive research continues to be carried out in this area, as demonstrated by recent publications (Uskali *et al.*, 2021; Colussi & Assunção Reis, 2020).

Reports and/or transmedia documentaries are another widely studied area of non-fiction transmedia narratives (Obando Arroyave, 2021; Vázquez-Herrero & López-García, 2017; Vázquez-Herrero *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, some authors have focused their research on applying transmedia strategies to cover scheduled events (Rampazzo Gambarato *et al.*, 2016; Rampazzo Gambarato & Peret Teixeira Tárchia, 2017). Studies have also been conducted on gamification and news gaming (García-Ortega & García-Avilés, 2018; Romero-Rodríguez & Torres-Toukourmidis, 2018), which seeks audience engagement in the news.

Trillo-Domínguez and Alberich-Pascual (2020) have highlighted the classification of emerging journalistic formats according to their genre (informative, interpretative or opinion) as well as the degree of innovation and transmedia evolution (adaptation, expansion and disruption). For their part, Casero-Ripollés *et al.* (2020) have classified journalistic formats into nine categories when they reach the social networks edited by local journalism.

According to the digital media map of Spain, by DIGINATIVEMEDIA 2019–2021 project, online news media are leveraging Twitter and Facebook, the more widely used social media networks, to reach a wider audience. (Sánchez-Blanco & Sádaba, 2021). However, they are also experimenting with other platforms such as Instagram, YouTube or Telegram. In their search for younger audiences, they have also launched experiences on TikTok and Twitch to ensure their future survival (Peña-Fernández *et al.*, 2022; Apesteiguía, 2021).

The first methodologies for the analysis of transmediality (Calvo & Serrano Tellería, 2021; Alzamora & Tárca, 2021) have been developed, along with a theoretical approach (Calvo & Serrano Tellería, 2020). In addition, a methodology has been published for analysing coverage of scheduled events to study transmedia news in two case studies from Brazil and the United Kingdom, based on a series of qualitative questions ranging from audiences to sources (Alzamora & Tárca, 2021).

Among the specific cases of the use of transmedia journalism application, one worthy of note is *The New York Times* case study, which delves into the world building process through six qualities: storyworld definition, serialisation, entry points, internal connections, additive comprehension and external connections (Moloney, 2020). Indeed, *The New York Times* has been extensively studied as an international reference in online journalism (Nafría, 2017; Usher, 2014). Similarly, *EL País* has also been the subject of research, including a study on the journalistic quality of its online reporting (Calvo Viota & Parrat Fernández, 2021), an evaluation of videos and the newspaper's YouTube strategy (Bernal & Carvajal, 2020) and an analysis of transmedia narratives in disaster communication during the 2016 Ecuador earthquake (Arrobo-Agila *et al.*, 2021).

Some authors question whether online media truly has a valid transmedia strategy, especially regarding the use of social media, or whether, on the other hand, it is actually a multiplatform strategy (Costa-Sánchez, 2021) and/or a replicating journalism (Costa-Sánchez *et al.*, 2017). To assess this, they propose a methodology based on analysing three aspects: a) story and content, b) channels and platforms, and c) experiences and audiences. This also applies to the characteristics of multimedia, interactivity and hypertextuality (Palau Sampio & Sánchez García, 2019). Other suitable fields for applying transmedia narratives are investigative journalism and data journalism (Renó & Flores, 2014), the results of which can be expanded with a transmedia strategy. The COVID-19 pandemic led science journalism to experiment with transmediality and the dissemination of content through TikTok (Martin Neira *et al.*, 2023).

## 2. Objectives

This article presents a comparative analysis of the journalistic transmediality content in relation to a high-profile unforeseen international news story: the UK government crisis and the subsequent resignation of its prime minister, Boris Johnson, on 7 July 2022.

The objective was to analyse the depth of transmedia treatment given to this news story by two internationally recognised media outlets: *El País* of Spain and *The New York Times* of the United States, specifically within their respective international and Europe sections. Unlike an election allowing newsrooms to prepare their coverage in advance, this unscheduled event required an on-the-spot response.

The study shows the multimedia mechanisms automatically applied in newsrooms and the narrative strategies employed during a major news story with a clear outcome: the British prime minister's resignation (or not) and the forming of a new (or reshuffled) government. Hence, the 15 critical days of Boris Johnson's government crisis provided an ideal opportunity to investigate

these aspects. Initially, it seemed unlikely that the so-called 'partygate' scandal would force Johnson to resign, but the story garnered considerable interest, leading to extensive coverage by correspondents worldwide.

The study addressed several research questions:

- RQ1. Definition of the transmedia universe used in each newspaper: what media channels and modalities were included in this high-interest international news coverage? What experiences of hypertextuality and intermodality did they present?
- RQ2. Did the transmedia content achieve autonomy and self-understanding? This question can be expanded into the following questions: was the content self-explanatory? Did it provide new information in addition to the previous points mentioned? Were there redundancies or duplications of content within a modality?
- RQ3. How was the task of correspondents and editors involved in reorganising the roles and content transformed in the light of news-intensive coverage? To what extent and how were these journalists involved in the development of transmedia content?
- RQ4. Were the different items of news content tailored to the channel on which they were broadcast, either by complying with the platform codes and/or by using their own resources? How was this done?
- RQ5. What channels were available for the audience to participate in and respond to this news event? Were there any provisions for sharing content? Were comments on networks or other forms of participation –virtual reality, etc.– encouraged beyond those considered traditional?

### 3. Methodology

This research employed a dual methodological approach, combining an analysis of the scope and structure of transmedia content used by *El País* and *The New York Times* with qualitative, semi-structured interviews with key players involved in the coverage. In *The New York Times*, there have been 68 analysis units found, of which 23 also appear in the print edition, and the newspaper *El País*, 50 units have been found, of which 18 are also published in print. It should be noted that the units of analysis can consist of more than one modality. For example, a news story published online can contain a text, two or three photos, and a video. Additionally, on social media, the coverage includes 59 posts derived from information in *The New York Times* and 35 in *El País*.

The two newspapers belong to distinct journalistic cultures that uphold a strong international focus. Notably, they have undergone significant reform and investment in resources, talent, and digital technologies over the past decade. These changes have not only transformed their internal structures but also reshaped their market presence and distribution models, which are now predominantly based on online subscriptions. Additionally, they have prioritised the renewal of digital formats, systems, and transmediality as critical strategies to penetrate the news (Nafría, 2017).

To undertake a comparative analysis of transmediality in news coverage, this study employed the methodological approaches of Calvo and Serrano Tellería (2021) to examine the depth, duration, and complexity of the coverage over multiple days. This encompassed the use of human and technological resources within the newsroom (Puntí-Brun, 2020, pp. 265-266). Far from being a text content analysis, this study explores the structure of the multimedia, multiplatform, cross-media and transmedia concepts applied to journalistic information "narrated across various channels" (Calvo & Serrano Tellería, 2021, p. 338). The authors located thirteen pieces of information produced between July 2017 and August 2019 for various media platforms, in which innovative multichannel formats were applied, lending these informative products a certain pilot project feel. Indeed, some of them were presented to the audience as ground-breaking.

The analysis of transmediality involves four steps in determining the typology of the information content. Calvo and Serrano Tellería's methodology acts as a kind of 'observation sheet' for identifying the channels and modalities through which the units of the coverage are presented (point C1). In C2, innovative (transmedia) content is recognised and its autonomy is analysed, considering how it is linked to the overall narrative, whether it stands alone sensibly, and whether it expands on the news, thereby adding depth to the story. Point C3 assesses the coherence of this content with the channel on which it is aired. Finally, at point C4 the possible responses to this information are determined, including participation, commenting, and interaction with the newsroom. This methodology was applied to the content of the websites and social networks between 5 and 20 July 2022.

After collecting and analysing the transmedia aspects of the coverage in both newspapers, qualitative interviews were conducted with the chief correspondents of *The New York Times* and *El País*. These interviews sought not only to establish their role in the coverage but also to link it with the localised transmedia elements and gain insights during the coverage into the inner workings of the newsroom, which the front-page editors controlled. Ismael Nafría, an expert on the new routines of digital newspapers and the trajectory of *The New York Times*, was also interviewed.

The first interview was conducted with Rafael de Miguel Lahuerta, *El País* correspondent in the United Kingdom and Ireland since 2018, on 16 December 2022, via Google Meet, lasting 55 minutes. Stephen Castle, the London-based correspondent of *The New York Times*, known for his extensive coverage of UK politics since 2010, was interviewed on 10 February 2023 via Microsoft Teams for 51 minutes. Lastly, Ismael Nafría was interviewed on 17 February 2023 via Microsoft Teams for 45 minutes. The entire research took place between September 2022 and March 2023.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Narrative and hypertextuality. Channels and modalities

The analysis showed that the transmediality of the coverage provided by the two news outlets exhibited similarities in terms of approach and internal organisation. The narrative presented by *The New York Times* encompassed up to eleven distinct modalities of content disseminated across various formats and channels (see Table 1). On the other hand, *El País*' coverage consisted of ten modalities, including digital and non-digital texts, photographs used as illustrations, stand-alone photographs showcased in galleries or as 'photo news,' podcasts, videos, newsletters, streaming, live streaming (direct webcasts), and engagement through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

**Table 1.** Modalities in the coverage of *The New York Times* and *El País*.

	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>El País</i>
<b>Digital text</b>	68	50
<b>Non-digital text</b>	23	18
<b>Photographs/Illustrations</b>	217	51
<b>Galleries</b>	1	1
<b>Podcast</b>	1	1
<b>Videos</b>	13	10
<b>Newsletters</b>	16	2
<b>Streaming</b>	2	2
<b>Live streaming</b>	2	2
<b>Social Media platforms</b>	59	35
<b>Gamification</b>	1	0

Source: Own elaboration.

The only minor difference observed between the coverage of the two dailies was that *The New York Times* incorporated gamified resources, which *El País* did not use. Regarding the rest, and to specify the scope of the transmedia constellation, neither of the two coverages used infographics or interactive elements, for example, nor offered the possibility of listening to any of the texts through an audio recording.

The coverage of Boris Johnson's resignation was co-led by the correspondent Stephen Castle and London bureau chief Mark Landler of *The New York Times*. Castle signed eleven out of the 33 pieces of content and remained actively involved throughout the unfolding crisis. Other localised by-lines included Mark Landler with nine pieces and Megan Specia with seven. Castle explains why his publication was particularly interested in Boris Johnson: "It was an exceptionally busy year, there's never been a year like this because three prime ministers in a year is not normal in British politics, and I've been covering British politics on and off since 1990" (Castle, personal communication, 10 February 2023). Additionally, Boris Johnson played a prominent role in three significant global political events: Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine. Castle remarks that these circumstances prompted *The New York Times* to report extensively on British politics, particularly during Johnson's declining influence following 'partygate' and the resignation of several government ministers.

According to Rafael de Miguel, *El País*'s London correspondent: "At certain times, prominent international newspapers need to flex their muscles" (De Miguel, personal communication, 16 December 2022). The two dailies provided continuous live updates of news content under the coordination of the editorial team, which decided the formats and channels through which the content would be presented on the website, especially concerning opinion pieces, analysis and some special features. Furthermore, they determined which updates warranted inclusion and how they should be shared on social media.

Castle and De Miguel were tasked with updating the news throughout the day while maintaining contact with their respective sources. While the two correspondents penned various updates for the Europe and international sections, other teams compiled news products such as podcasts and oversaw the reception and editing of photographs, two live streams, and various videos. *El País* produced its own videos<sup>1</sup>, while *The New York Times* used Reuters for some of theirs<sup>2</sup>. At the end of each day, both the print and digital newsrooms of the newspapers closed the editions that would appear on the newsstands or website at six o'clock the following day. It is worth noting that the editors and writers were primarily involved in these finalisation processes, despite the correspondents' names appearing as the authors of the information.

Specialist editors played a crucial role during the coverage. De Miguel highlighted that "editors bring a consistent overview to all the texts of the product," performing an "extremely important" but occasionally "undervalued" task (De Miguel, personal communication, 16 December 2022). Additionally, editors make fundamental transmedia decisions, such as choosing photos for articles, and deciding which links and videos should be included in the coverage, explains Castle.

However, the use and structure of transmedia information were coordinated primarily from each newspaper's home. Significant differences were observed in the use of hypertextuality between the two coverages (see Table 2), with a higher frequency of divergences in *The New York Times*.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://elpais.com/internacional/2022-07-10/las-horas-mas-amargas-de-boris-johnson.html>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/07/world/europe/boris-johnson-resignation-britain.html?searchResultPosition=58>

**Table 2.** Hypertextuality, links and references in both coverages.

Coincidences	Divergences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both media provided internal links to other news items within the text and featured a related news section below the content.</li> <li>Both media outlets provided chronological newsletters: <i>The New York Times</i>, <i>The Morning</i> and <i>El País</i>, with <i>El País de la Mañana</i>. Both also sent out a newsletter by the author of their respective International sections: <i>The Interpreter</i>, by Amanda Taub, and <i>Apuntes de geopolítica</i> (Geopolitical notes) by Andrea Rizzi.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>The New York Times</i> included two or three more links to external news items in each news item than <i>El País</i> did. It also highlighted that some links connected to other news outlets, even other newsgroups, a practice not found in <i>El País</i>.</li> <li><i>The New York Times</i> published five author newsletters dealing with international affairs, while <i>El País</i> offered none.</li> <li>The American newspaper provided a chronological newsletter called <i>The Evening</i>, which <i>El País</i> did not offer.</li> </ul>

Source: Own elaboration.

Not only were links inserted more often in the news items of the New York-based newspaper, but they were also qualitatively more relevant. The *NYT*'s coverage included intertextual connections to news from other media outlets, such as CNN, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mirror*<sup>3</sup>, whereas *El País* limited its links to the media of its own group, specifically the daily *Cinco Días*, on two occasions<sup>4</sup>.

Rafael de Miguel explains the importance of adding relevant links to other media, stating, "If some links to other media offer relevant information to your readers, then you must add them so that your readers are better informed." According to him, media outlets such as *The Guardian* pioneered the idea of linking to the day's most important news, even when they do not produce it. This practice paved the way for all media to imitate, either through hypertext links or as a "related news" section at the end of the organisation's own articles (De Miguel, personal communication, 16 December 2022).

#### 4.2. *Autonomy and content. Replications and reiterations*

Our examination of the autonomy of the content used by the two news outlets in their coverage of the event revealed similar approaches. Most of the informative, analytical and opinion pieces reviewed were self-explanatory, maintained their autonomy and provided varying degrees of expansion on the event. However, some clarifications are necessary.

We were forced to make immediate decisions to report on the unfolding events daily, but at the same time, there was a greater need to explain things so they could be understood [...] Digital journalism in online news media has shifted from preparing the next day's edition to reporting events as they happen, involving various sections such as audio, video and social media sections [...]. These sections focused on delivering information tailored to their respective channels (De Miguel, personal communication, 16 December 2022).

Stephen Castle describes a similar situation in the website's newsroom and the correspondent's London bureau, even though the various sections are located in New York. However, whether the consecutive decisions made were part of a genuine transmedia strategy remains unclear.

In some instances, some stories did not contribute crucial new information to previous ones. For example, the headline in *El País* "A vueltas con la mentira y la verdad en el número"<sup>5</sup> (General print edition, 6 July, p. 3) matches word for word the ninth and tenth paragraphs of a

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/11/opinion/boris-johnson-conservative-party.html?searchResultPosition=32>

<sup>4</sup> See <https://elpais.com/internacional/2022-07-11/el-partido-conservador-endurece-las-normas-de-las-primarias-para-acelerar-la-sustitucion-de-boris-johnson.html>

<sup>5</sup> "The truth and lies in Number 10" (General print edition, 6 July, p. 3).

piece published on the website on 5 July, which had a very similar headline: “El Gobierno británico estalla por el goteo de escándalos”<sup>6</sup>. The online edition was posted the previous day at 19:41. In contrast, *The New York Times* includes a note in its online edition when intentional repetitions occur, acknowledging that the exact text has been published in the print edition, on the website, and in the edition in question.

Other content not providing additional information was automatically posted to social networks (Instagram, Twitter or Facebook). This content typically included the headline and subtitle of a recently published news item on the news outlet's website, accompanied by a relevant photo. As this offered new and informative content, the information appeared self-contained. However, as discussed in more detail in section 4.4, this content only included the necessary links to redirect readers to the website to access the original content. Therefore, it served more as a teaser or announcement of new information rather than as stand-alone content.

Both correspondents interviewed largely agree that their respective sections have experienced a significant change in mind-set in recent years, with the implementation of new routines and the deployment of resources to adopt new transmedia news methods. They also believe that these transformations are still on going.

### 4.3. Tailoring the content to the platform

The various forms of information are self-explanatory and generally adapt easily to the platform used. In media outlets with a background in printed newspapers, text remains the central component, but multimedia elements such as audio, video and photographs are increasingly being introduced. This approach, which both news outlets employed in their coverage of the new event, warrants several observations.

Our research findings indicate that photographs are often used to complement news articles without possessing a complete meaning of their own but only as a resource to illustrate a news item.

The photography section takes its work very seriously and carefully selects the images for its coverage. However, the website has a pernicious effect on photography, not only because of its immediacy but also because it makes it impossible to choose the most relevant photos. Also, a webpage weakens the impact of a full-page photo, making the ritual of selecting photos for the print edition no longer applicable to the digital edition due to the markedly different effects (De Miguel, personal communication, 16 December 2022).

It is important to note that during the coverage of the news story under study, no specific photographs were taken, save for those of senior officials going into and leaving meetings and making brief statements. However, as De Miguel points out, some photographs used merely for contextual purposes were often used more than once in the two outlets' coverage. Whether as support for online content or as part of Twitter or Facebook posts, photos were frequently used as simple add-ons, not always accompanied by the standard caption and not necessarily aligned with the facts of the news story.

However, photographs published without text, in the photo-gallery format, were particularly informative, a resource used by the two outlets as a graphic summary of the events<sup>7</sup>.

One notable transmedia development was how *El País* covered the government crisis on the afternoon of 7 July, adopting an extended live news broadcast format reminiscent of the live coverage of a major sporting event. Throughout the afternoon, up to five news items were uploaded to its online edition. Once the live feed concluded, it was renamed “Así le hemos contado la dimisión de Boris Johnson”<sup>8</sup> at 10 a.m. on July 8, preserving the tone and uncertainties

<sup>6</sup> “British government explodes due to the trickle of scandals” (*El País*, 5 July). See <https://elpais.com/internacional/2022-07-05/el-gobierno-de-boris-johnson-estalla-por-el-goteo-de-escandalos-que-acorralan-al-primer-ministro.html>

<sup>7</sup> See <https://elpais.com/internacional/2022-07-07/la-vida-politica-de-boris-johnson-en-imagenes.html>

<sup>8</sup> “This is how we reported Boris Johnson's resignation” (*El País*, 8 July). See: <https://elpais.com/internacional/2022-07-07/la-dimision-de-boris-johnson-en-directo-ultima-hora-de-la-crisis-del-gobierno-en-el-reino-unido.html>

of the original live feed from the previous day. Meanwhile, a continuous live connection to a camera in front of Number 10 Downing Street was maintained in case, as eventually happened, the Prime Minister emerged to make a statement. *The New York Times* also streamed the Prime Minister's hypothetical appearance and maintained a live news feed throughout the afternoon of 7 July.

In terms of audio format, Nafria (personal communication, 17 February 2023) explains that *The New York Times* has a team of more than 100 people assigned to this format and that one of the most downloaded podcasts is *The Daily*, which involves at least 30 professionals. Castle acknowledges that the podcast format has exceeded expectations in the past year or so, suggesting an increase in prestige and a possible podcasting boom. *El País* also produces a daily podcast called "Hoy en El País." According to De Miguel, this podcast "seeks diversity in topics and slow journalism" (De Miguel, personal communication, 16 December 2022). Additionally, an audio section has now been created within the Prisa group as a collaborative effort between *El País* and the Cadena Ser radio station. During the coverage of Boris Johnson's resignation, both news outlets dedicated an episode of their podcast to the event, featuring the correspondents Rafael de Miguel for *El País*<sup>9</sup> and Mark Landler for *The New York Times*<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding video content, Nafria (personal communication, 17 February 2023) explains that this format is not the *New York Times*' most developed format, as daily videos are easy for rounding the news in just a few minutes. However, Nafria (personal communication, February 17, 2023) states that this media organisation excels in high-quality data or visual journalism techniques. This is evident in the pieces produced by the Upshot team and the thematic videos in this section of the website. According to Castle, *The New York Times* has invested significantly in multimedia and is actively experimenting with different formats, particularly video, which has received substantial resources. De Miguel confirms that video embedded within texts on the website is losing ground to podcasts.

#### 4.4. Interactivity and participation

The Instagram (@nytimes and @elpais), Twitter (@nytimesworld and @elpais\_inter) and Facebook (@nytimes and @elpaisinternacional) handles of the two newspapers were selected to analyse the interactivity of their coverage and other actions taken to promote audience involvement and increase the reach and influence of their content. This analysis focused on the provision of comment sections for specific news stories and opportunities for gamification.

**Table 3.** Public participation.

Coincidences	Divergences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both media outlets enabled user participation through comments on news items, although one kept this option closed. Users must register to comment.</li> <li>• Both outlets enabled users to share news items on social networks (Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp) by mail or copying the link automatically.</li> <li>• Both media have social media profiles that allow users to comment, like, retweet, share, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The New York Times</i> also allowed sharing of news content via Telegram, LinkedIn and Reddit. It was also possible to save the text for future reference. Subscribers could also give away 10 articles a month to whomever they wanted.</li> <li>• Only <i>The New York Times</i> gamified the daily news by offering a current affairs quiz that included questions about the crisis.</li> <li>• <i>The New York Times</i> requested participation through the letters to the editor/editor section. It also offered the possibility of sending emails to briefing/newsletter teams. These letters are</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> See <https://elpais.com/podcasts/hoy-en-el-pais/2022-07-08/auge-y-caida-de-boris-johnson.html>

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/08/podcasts/the-daily/boris-johnson-resigns.html?searchResultPosition=49>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very similar format when posting news on social networks (lead-in + link with photo and headline).</li> <li>• Some news items were posted on Twitter more than once.</li> <li>• Minimal use of Instagram. One post by <i>El País</i>, two by <i>The New York Times</i>.</li> </ul>	<p>published in a specific section. The most relevant ones are published.</p>
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Source: Own elaboration.

We observed that both new organisations generally provided a comments section for specific news items, but access was usually restricted to subscribed or registered users of the website, and not all news items allowed for comment. The editors typically decide to open these sections, as it “depends on the sensitivity of the information” (Castle, personal communication, 10 February 2023). Castle explains that the editors are usually responsible for moderating the comments on the outlets’ online media, regardless of any automatic filters that may be in place. According to Castle, this is one of the key opportunities that online news media has yet to fully embrace.

There is an irresistible temptation not to read the comments or reactions on the networks. [Journalists] We aren’t made of stone; certain opinions can hurt us, but you must read them. I had a teacher who told us that the three great virtues of a journalist are humility, humility and humility. Thanks to the current interactions, we have seen that many readers are far more intelligent than we are. You must swallow your pride and admit you were wrong or that a colleague has done better than you (De Miguel, personal communication, 16 December 2022).

The London correspondent for *EL País* notes that the logical progression of journalistic production involves integrating the audience into the discussion and debate processes associated with the news. Currently, such participation is limited and sporadic due to the unpreparedness of the news system as a whole and the polarised views found in many of the audience’s comments. While De Miguel acknowledges the challenges and risks of journalists taking part in a personal capacity in the comments sections or social networks of the newspaper, he argues that the editors should ultimately facilitate quality participative debates on social networks. This can be achieved by involving qualified voices, or ‘experts’, to spread and engage with the news within the community. Similarly, Castle adds that conversations with readers can take place, especially on social media, where journalists can address things they may have forgotten to include or correct any mistakes made in their reporting.

The correspondents interviewed agree that participation in social media is underused. Castle attributes this to the problems that can arise when journalists express views in line with the company’s more specific and clear-cut editorial standards, which differ from those of *El País*. De Miguel believes this underutilisation stems from a structural distrust that persists in the online news system. As a result, they both acknowledge that Twitter and Facebook are primarily used as systems for alerting followers, sometimes numbering in the tens or hundreds of thousands, rather than incorporating audience participation into the professional routine through a comprehensive transmedia strategy. *The New York Times* is the only organisation that employs gamification<sup>11</sup> and offers a different form of participation through surveys. Nafría (personal communication, 17 February 2023) explains that they conduct at least 100 surveys annually to gather audience feedback on various topics.

Another crucial aspect highlighted by Castle and Nafría is the importance of adhering to the media organization’s code of ethics regarding the neutrality or impartiality of journalists on

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/07/08/briefing/news-quiz-boris-johnson-brittney-griner.html?searchResultPosition=52>

social media, particularly in the political arena. This policy is justified in upholding the reputation and credibility of the news media in the eyes of the audience and, above all, its subscribers. *EL País* tried to draft guidance on Twitter usage, but the editorial staff rejected it, as explained by De Miguel (personal communication, 16 December 2022): “While there are no specific rules on the topic, but I think there should be some coordination between the media and the journalists.” The journalist from *EL País* believes that traditional newspapers still need to learn to leverage social networks because they continue to approach them in “an excessively conventional manner,” merely considering them as “a referral to news.” He also advocates for journalists to take a more active role in disseminating news on social media and calls for more originality.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

As observed, *The New York Times* exhibits a slightly more profound transmedia constellation and depth compared to *El País* (RQ1). Hypertextuality is employed in a general manner, although with different meanings and scopes. On the one hand, photographs were decontextualised, while podcasts, live streaming, on-demand newsletters (briefings, thematic, author, etc.) and the concatenation of live updates were used during a breaking-news event, indicating a transmedia consolidation. On the other hand, the print edition receives less attention and fewer resources within a structure that is progressively embracing some of the transmedia possibilities offered by the new digital environments.

We can therefore conclude that these narratives have transitioned from being innovative to becoming part of the new routines. Thus, our analysis of the coverage shows a qualitative leap. However, it should be noted that the transmedia innovation levels predicted by some recent studies have not been achieved (RQ4). For instance, the coverage analysed only used two of the disruptors identified by Trillo-Domínguez and Alberich (2020, pp. 372-375) from the Joly group: photo galleries and, in only one case, clipnews. The news outlets' coverage under study did not incorporate timelines, time lapse, graphics, interactive content, micro-interviews, and video columns. Reflection and analysis, on the other hand, was associated with podcasts and text/hypertext, not web documentaries or interactive graphics, which though considered innovative trends by Trillo-Domínguez and Alberich, were not incorporated into the news outlets' coverage.

Hence, the transmediality adopted by these two leading newspapers did not encompass certain disruptive trends associated with scheduled news productions. There were some gamification elements; comments were restricted to subscribers on a few occasions, and, despite the presence of social networks, Instagram was seldom harnessed (RQ5). Other narrative techniques were rarely used. The more popular platforms, Twitter and Facebook, were primarily used to drive traffic to the news outlet's website rather than fostering debate, participation, or a sense of belonging to a reader community. Thus, anticipation for narratives expected by researchers in terms of participation has failed to materialise. While the investments made by *The New York Times* in social media might signal a substantial shift in the near future, this remains uncertain. “Specific guidance has been given that it is not about breaking a story on Twitter but about breaking it on your own platform and then leveraging Twitter or a similar platform to amplify it” (Nafría, personal communication, 17 February 2023). The use of social media remains underused (RQ2), although this aspect needs to be confirmed by future research.

On the other hand, the results call into doubt some of the conclusions drawn from recent research on news in online media:

Daily news production does not show significant multimedia-interactive development in the online media analysed: resources and the possibility of gauging their success and value are limited. Therefore, innovative formats are of an exceptional and experimental nature [...] in the offer of online media, despite being sustained over time (Vázquez-Herrero, 2021b, p. 693).

Contrary to this, as mentioned previously, hypertextuality, podcasts, live streams, on-demand updates in newsletters (briefings, thematic, author, etc.) and the concatenation of live updates are resources that have been incorporated into the newsroom routines of the two studied newspapers. Thus, a change in trend can be observed, warranting further research attention.

From this perspective, a methodological distinction should be drawn between research on transmediation in pre-produced, one-off and highly specialised products and other news products produced in routines and practically permanent production processes –active for at least 14 hours a day. These different forms of production entail distinct narrative demands and require specific research methodologies. It is to study not only how everyday production harnesses hypertext, multimedia, and interactive resources but also to establish comparisons between similar products to ensure meaningful research results and to capture ongoing trends within different areas of study.

Research on the transmediality of daily news media should focus not only on websites considered as references but also on the diversity of the environment. For example, new trends have not yet been evaluated, such as the efforts made by *La Vanguardia* or *Ara* newspapers (digital native since 2010) to adopt more innovative transmedia approaches. This includes a more measured use of hypertextuality and newsletters, ensuring they do not overshadow the information itself. Notably, *La Vanguardia* has introduced innovations like automated text.

The various efforts made by newsrooms to establish a distinct personality appear to be irreversible and are incorporating some transmedia innovations, albeit with unforeseen trends. The shift in mind-set in newsrooms noted by the two interviewed correspondents extends beyond the analysed coverage and is manifested in the new editorial routines aimed at user mobility (RQ3). As De Miguel (personal communication, 16 December 2022) puts it, “A paradigm shift is under way due to the emergence of smartphones as a new platform for news consumption.” This shift aligns with the changes observed in the adoption of transmediality within the analysed coverage and the routines that are gradually taking hold in newsrooms.

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