COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY

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The news gap in the 'triple digital agenda': The different interests of media, audience and networks

Abstract
Digital transformations entail continually reviewing the various Communication models and processes. The influence of the media themselves as agenda setters for an ever more active audience and social networks that select and make certain content they receive viral are also affected by such a convergent context. This current research analyses a model called here the 'triple agenda' within the media themselves, in which the journalistic criterion of relevance and their audience's preferences in the web and the networks travel along different paths. The proposal includes the users and the viral effect as influencing agents in the shape and selection of news, generating a *news gap* of interests between the media and their audiences. In order to test this model, we study an exploratory case in *ElPaís.es*, applying a content analysis to the information (n=420) distributed among the online front page, what is most read by the audience in its webpage, and the most viral in its Twitter account. The main objective is to check whether or not these three spheres of relevance operate independently, showing different informative interests from the thematic selection that the medium establishes from its agenda, its audience and its social networks. The results confirm that there is a gap in the informative interests of the three spheres analysed, especially between the agenda marked by the medium and the interests that are reflected in their web audience, which is more attracted to soft news and the clickbait technique; while there is a greater coincidence of interests between the newspaper's front page and the users' selection in their social networks.

Keywords
Digital journalism, news gap, agenda setting, audience, social networks, clickbait.

1. Introduction

The digital paradigm and the emergence of the liquid society (Bauman, 2003) have opened up ample possibilities for research in the field of the Social Sciences. These mainly concern technological transformations, the digitalization of communication and the consequent migration of journalism towards innovative languages and formats (Salaverría, 2019) in a context of convergence (Jenkins, 2006) and mediamorphosis (Fidler, 1997). These changes have already brought about: the disappearance of the sender/receiver dichotomy with the appearance of the prosumer or reader–author, as the user who participates in the construction of the stories and the content and who is capable of assuming both roles (Toffler,

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1980; Moreno, 2001; Castells, 2009; Ritzer, 2015); the break-up of linearity through hypertext as an interactive and transversal element (López-Hidalgo, 2002; Jones, 2003); and the emergence of multimedia as multiformat (Guallar, Rovira & Ruiz, 2010; Salaverría, 2014). It is a transformation in both substance and form of the communicative processes that modifies, among other things, the production and consumption of information (Masip *et al.*, 2020) or the relationship between the media and the public sphere (Calvo & Campos, 2016; Dahlgreen, 2018); while also inviting us to revisit some of the classical theories of communication in order to fit them into the digital context.

Following this line of formulation, the current research approaches the study of agenda setting, in order to understand how its adaptation to the digital environment is evolving and whether the phenomenon of the *news gap*, which Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2015) predicted and Bright (2016) further complemented, is occurring. We therefore analyse the existence of a triple selective agenda within the media that reflects disparate thematic interests in a triple sphere of interaction cybermedia–audience-social networks, suggesting that the selection of the user and the reception in networks can modify or influence a person's perception of the relevance of information.

2. Agenda setting: from the traditional to the online agenda

The different works of research on Mass Media and Information Theory confirm that the various media have an effect on public opinion, although its nature and reach vary over the years (Rubio-Ferreres, 2009). Agenda setting, in particular, rejects the idea that the press is an element capable of telling the public what to think, but it does sustain its influence when suggesting what issues the audience should think about (Cohen, 1963). Thus, the agenda of the medium transfers its relevance to those individuals exposed to it, consequently influencing the public sphere: "those themes prominent in the news, over time, came to be seen as important for the public. In other words: the mass media agenda establishes the agenda of the public" (McCombs, 2006, p. 29).

This concept forms a first level of influence around the topics shown by the mass media; taking into account the fact that most individuals form their opinions from third party sources, in this case, the images shown to them (Lippman, 1997). This concept is complemented later by a second level, called *framing*, which acts upon the attributes that characterise the said topics, influencing how the audience understands them and what the audience thinks about them (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006; McCombs, 2006), focusing on the resonance (Weaver, 2007). This vision is still under academic debate from a critical position of the validity of the traditional agenda setting (Takeshita 2006). Some authors separate the agenda from the attributes of *framing*, conceiving the latter as an independent effect that has arisen from cognitive psychology and interpretative sociology (Aruguete, 2017). Other authors have also separated them from the concept of *priming*, making three different models of the effects of the media (Scheufele & Tweksbury, 2007) in the digital environment. Despite this current theoretical discrepancy, the idea they have in common states that "the mass media not only situate and illuminate certain parts of the environment, they also give them meaning" (McCombs & Evatt, 1995, p. 8).

Over the years, with the consequent transformations of the socio-technological context, some studies have taken on the assumption that the social networks, as a new prosumer environment, also have an impact on the agenda (Berrocal, Campos & Redondo, 2014); even that the very contents the audience visualises influence their perception of what is deemed to be important and what is not (Feezell, 2017). Although the rapid development of the Internet and the digital media makes drawing firm conclusions impossible, other authors sustain that "the use of online media is also changing the way in which news is produced" (Hernández-Serrano *et al.*, 2017, p. 78) and that the contemporary formulas alter how the public agenda is fixed (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002). The audience, capable of adopting an active role in the

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selection, production, distribution and consumption of news through their prosumer potential, takes up positions, points to the value, and therefore to the visibility, of what is published, acting as a kind of *gatekeeper* (Singer, 2014; Tandoc, 2014) and curator of the contents (Hernández-Serrano *et al.*, 2017). This already serves to indicate a tendency in the different thematic preferences of the digital world, one which reflects how the interests of the audience and the media diverge, opening up a gap in the preferences regarding news between the public and the media (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2015), in both reading matter and shared contents (Bright, 2016).

On the basis of these initial signs, there are already several researchers who, in recent years, have presented renewed models of how agenda setting acts, stressing such aspects as psychology in the need to orient individuals; the consequences of the effects of fixing the agenda on attitudes, opinions and behaviour; and the influence of the cultural and ideological environments, or the relation between the media and their journalistic routines (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014).

Guo, Vu and McCombs (2012) developed a third dimension in the agenda, displaying a reticular model of themes and attributes, in opposition to their initial linear concept. This third level implies that the media are capable of telling their audience what to connect and how to do so (Carazo, 2018). Similarly, the media can also tell the audience to relate particular topics to specific mediums, a phenomenon of appropriation that can be seen, in particular, in political speeches (Guo & Vargo, 2015).

Among the different visions of the agenda, one tendency that can be appreciated is the phenomenon that some authors refer to as a *gap* between what they call 'public matters' (related to politics, the economy or international themes) and 'non-public matters' (concerning leisure, show business or crime). While journalists consider the former to be of greater interest, the audience would prefer the latter. There is, however, no consensus, maintaining this "gap between supply and demand in the case of online news" as "an unresolved question" (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2015, p. 8).

The emergence of the social networks in this area of study must be considered as such networks provide a decentralised, online context and are providers of information to a massive audience. In this sense, "the participatory potential of news media enables citizen generated content to be produced and disseminated" (Masip *et al.*, 2015, p. 364), modifying how the news is produced and received (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). Even though recent research works have indeed found correlations between, or a certain homogenisation of, the agendas of the traditional media and the social networks, the results are still varied and inconsistent (Chen *et al.*, 2019).

The social networks could be assuming roles as *agenda-setters* (Valenzuela, Puente & Flores, 2017), shaping an emergent process of crystallisation in which multiple sources of information come together. In this respect, online viral topics could make up part of this public agenda, being added as a criterion of newsworthiness and part of how the news is built up (López-Meri, 2015). Nevertheless, they also act as a reflection of the already existing public agenda, establishing a correspondence between them and the media, having a greater or lesser influence, depending on the subject (Rubio-García, 2014). This creates a hybrid agenda that brings together media issues with other issues from the public (Ardévol, Gil de Zúñiga & McCombs, 2020); this is a substantial change in news consumption, since "news values are not only considered part of the journalistic selection criterion but are also factors that guide audience's selection processes" (García-Perdomo *et al.*, 2017, p. 1183).

To be precise, Twitter enables direct communication without intermediaries, whose capacity for making things viral "allows its messages to reach a greater number of people quickly and easily [...] and even to be able to access the media agenda more easily" (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018, p. 1194). An environment in which the constant flow of messages generates the perception that the news is omnipresent and ubiquitous (Park &

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Kaye, 2020), leading people to believe that the contents they are seeing in it are sufficient to keep themselves well-informed and that they, therefore, have no need to actively follow the traditional media; a current line of research called the *news finds me* (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2018).

In this context, the readers, either through casual and fortuitous exposition to contents in the social networks (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks & Ardèvol, 2017) or to contents selected by them in their role as potential prosumers, form part of an audience mediatised by the web analyses: "in the assessment to determine what is news and what is not, the desires of the readers take on ever greater importance; passing from the public interest to the interests of the public" (Masip, 2016, p. 325). It is an idea that coincides with the concept of an audience that chooses the medium according to their necessities (McCombs & Evatt, 1995); one that makes sense for them and generates their own meanings (Jensen, 1992; Corominas, 2001). These factors are compatible with the appearance of *agenda melding* (Shaw *et al.*, 1999), through which the creation of the agenda transcends the mass media and adopts a horizontal dimension "that considers all the sources that intervene in the process of establishing an agenda of the public, such as their interpersonal relationships or the new ways of communicating that have arisen through the new technologies" (Palz, 2016, p. 111). This relevance of the audience in the process brings about a change from "what media do to people" towards "what people do with media" (Weaver *et al.*, 2010, p. 3).

Agenda melding takes particular note of the relationship between individuals and the formation of social groups. The people group together in communities according to their tastes, melding their agendas with those of their close contacts and thus generating a collective agenda (Ragas & Roberts, 2009). Although this phenomenon arose before the existence of the Internet, it continues to develop in the social networks, where audiences are able to join online communities related to their own interests (Weaver *et al.*, 2010), can choose which sources to pay attention to (McWhorter, 2020) and look for the agendas of other users, combining them and making them coincide with their own preferences (Palz, 2016), thus gratifying their needs (Papacharissi, 2011).

In short, each individual is exposed to different sources, to which they have a particular and diverse access, depending on their own consumption habits and the perception of which would be the result of this combination (Wohn & Bowe, 2016); a combination that acts as an indirect influence that does not always coincide with the predictions that journalists make concerning their audiences (Tandoc, 2014). It is a network of agendas (Shaw *et al.*, 1999) in which studies concerning the mass media and the public stand out, but they are not the only ones: "with the widespread diffusion of social media, agenda-setting theory can be applied to a much wider array of channels [...] extending far beyond the traditional focus on public affairs" (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014, p. 788).

2.1. *The personalisation of digital consumption: from the filter bubble to clickbait*

The redefinition of the transfer of thematic relevance in the digital communication environment is not only reflected in the theory of the agenda, but also in other phenomena that complement it, such as the filter bubble (Pariser, 2011), the sounding board (Jamieson & Capella, 2008), the economy of attention (Nordenson, 2009) or *clickbait* (Bazaco, Redondo & Sánchez-García, 2019). These recent theories and strategies affect both the way contents are created and the way they are received, and they serve to explain the new production and consumption habits which have repercussions for the proposed idea of the triple thematic selection.

Personalisation in the net has generated individual spaces that isolate the users, through the use of algorithms, in a selective information bubble far from a plurality of points of view: "Before the advent of digital media, news outlets generally featured exactly the same content

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for all users. Now, in theory, the same news website can show each visitor personalised content" (Zuiderveen *et al.*, 2016, p. 2).

The internet filters collect data concerning the personal habits of each user and try to extrapolate them through predictive mechanisms, creating a personalised information universe. Pariser (2011), father of the filter bubble, puts the stress on three fundamental dynamics in order to understand how this works: the bubble is individual, invisible and entering it does not depend on a personal decision, but is done automatically.

In a context where more and more users access information through the social networks (Bazaco, Redondo & Sánchez-García, 2019), the algorithms present in them are sensitive enough to affect both the diffusion and the agenda. The diffusion "of news consumers rely on algorithmically curated environments in which algorithms automatically select personalized news based on information about individual news consumers" (Haim, Graefe & Brosius, 2017, p. 330). The personalisation of the searches based on algorithms, adjusted to a fragmented and diverse audience, could suppose a difference in the thematic agenda adapted to the interests of each individual. This bubble could affect the perceived relevance of the objects that each user might see appearing in his/her online environment.

Therefore, if the filter bubble establishes a personalised universe that threatens to isolate the user within his/her own world view; the sounding boards (Jamieson & Capella, 2008) transport this effect to the social networks. This phenomenon occurs when only certain biased information is shared in a particular environment, so the user only finds ideas in this space that back up his/her own ideas, making him/her believe that they are the only ideas that exist in an exclusively positive *feedback* loop (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Garimella *et al.*, 2018; Dubois & Blank, 2018).

Finally, the over-abundance of information on the Internet generates a climate of greater competitiveness among the different media, not only among cyber-journalists, but also among all those options that the user can access through the Internet to get information and entertainment. The economy of attention poses the problem of too much information and too little time to attend to it all (Nordenson, 2009), thus making its assimilation difficult (Romero & Mancinas, 2016). In an environment in which immediacy takes precedence, this circumstance marks the news and business strategies, tending towards an "easily consumed journalism oriented towards people who do not have much time to concentrate and savour the information" (Rosique-Cedillo & Barranquero-Carretero, 2015, p. 452).

The attention of the public, as a fragmented audience, is more difficult to obtain due to the diversity of interests; even though it is vital for maintaining economic profitability (Bazaco, Redondo & Sánchez-García, 2019). Information is conceived as a competitive niche that needs to find contents with an attractive appearance, while also being relevant, urgent or sufficiently unusual as to gain the public's attention, as well as economic benefits based on monetisation (Kaplan in Roca, 2008; Nordenson, 2009; Molek-Kozakowska, 2013); becoming viral in the net is therefore crucial (Al-Rawi, 2017). This circumstance favours the emergence of such phenomena as journalism on demand, in which the media analyse the preferences of its audience in order to launch contents that will catch their attention (Corzo & Salaverría, 2018); or *clickbait*, an economic strategy that persuades the audience by modifying the headline in such a premeditated way as to attract the consumer (Munger *et al.*, 2018), introducing topics into the media agenda which do not fit the traditional criterion of newsworthiness of the generalist media, such as *soft news*, the famous, entertainment or surprise, which are more usual in the popular, sensationalist press (Palau-Sampio, 2016; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017).

The said conscious modification of the headlines can basically occur through two variables: its presentation, which incorporates information gaps, appellative expressions, reiteration or exaggeration; and its content, presenting soft news, sensationalist news or eye-catching audiovisual elements. To this conceptualisation of Bazaco, Redondo and Sánchez-

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García (2019), which brings together previous proposals of other authors (Palau-Sampio, 2016; Molek-Kozakowska, 2013; Silverman, 2015; Reinemann *et al.*, 2013), the present study adds two more within the variable of presentation: the importance of the subject and the appeal to immediacy. In the first case, the news attracts because of the personality, subject or theme it deals with, due to the popularity or importance it has already been given in the agenda. The second case puts the spotlight on the attraction of live or very recent news items which do not provide anything new, but which act solely as the hook in order to transmit a false relevance.

3. Objectives and method

In this media context, in which the fixing of the thematic relevance of the agenda is no longer coming solely from the mass media, the main objective of the present study is to analyse the existence of a *news gap* between the audience and the medium (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2015; Bright, 2016), transferring its application to a theoretical proposal that forms part of the cybermedia that divides the triple digital agenda into three spheres of informative preferences: the most relevant themes for the media, shown on the front page; those that attract the real interest of their audience, based on the most popular or most read on their website; and the most visible in the social networks, based upon what is most viral in the social network profiles. Three secondary objectives are considered in order to achieve this principal objective.

First of all, to provide a descriptive outline of the main characteristics that define each one of the spheres of informative interest (O1), taking as the main hypothesis that, in the same digital medium, different, parallel thematic selections can be found in accordance with the interests of its audience and the social networks.
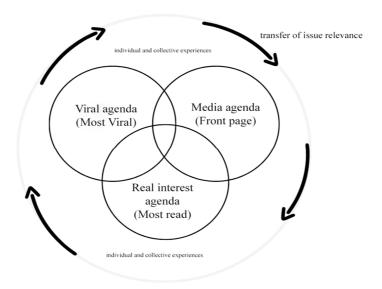
Secondly (O2), to analyse the influence of the multimedia narrative as a factor that can condition the selective interest of the audience, together with *clickbait* as a technique to get the public's attention. Along these lines, a third objective (O3) focuses on observing the presence and impact of the *bait* and *soft* content in all three spheres analysed, on the understanding that "the presentation of the news can be at least as significant as its ingredients" (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2015, p. 8), using the presentation itself as the *bait* (Bazaco *et al.,* 2019).

Both the main and the secondary objectives are based on the idea of the conjunction of three intertwined spheres of informative interest within the cybermedia's own agenda, in a loop. This means that a theme, from wherever it is launched, can take on greater or lesser relevance in only one of the spheres, in two of them, or in all of them (Figure 1). This approach is based on the possibility of the audience ignoring the front-page order, which follows the journalistic criterion of traditional relevance, and establishing its own thematic selection using selective and autonomous surfing of the net, as well as their individual reading decision, that is, acting as *gatekeeper* (Baresch *et al.*, 2011). At the same time, the audience can gain access to a medium, not only from the medium's website, but also through other platforms such as the social networks, which make up a third viral sphere, on the understanding that the user's agenda, and therefore his/her interests, are not generated solely through direct access to the media, but also through the idea of the mass media agenda as the configuring agenda of public opinion and transmitter of thematic relevance. In this sense, "the social networks, together with the mass media, would determine currents or climates of opinion, indicating what and how to think concerning a particular topic" (López-López, Martínez-Castro & Oñate, 2020, p. 25). At the same time, the medium pays attention to the web analyses in order to provide contents on demand (Corzo & Salaverría, 2018).

Finally, it is also necessary to remember that all this information, which arises or is transferred to and from any of the three abovementioned spheres, originates from individual and collective life events; that is, depending on their attributes, they and the treatment they

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receive are to a greater or lesser extent, subject to the particularities of a concrete socio-economic and cultural system. In this sense, although the global and ubiquitous nature of the net can increase the number of themes and their reach, they do not invalidate the factors of emotional proximity, personal experience or the need for orientation, as posed by McCombs (2006). In any case, the multiplicity that the Internet makes possible would generate a greater individuality and personalisation in the interests of each Internet surfer.

Figure 1. Proposal for the triple subsidiary digital agenda within a cybermedium: the spheres of informative interest of the medium, the audience and the social networks.

Source: Own elaboration.

The 'triple digital agenda' model that we aim to prove through an exploratory case study allows us to establish differences in the thematic selection, or the first level of the agenda, between the medium, the audience and the networks, using what we have gathered from the front pages, the most read and the most viral, respectively, so as to be able to confirm the functionality of the proposed model.

On the basis of the proposed scheme and the principal objective described above, we shall now specify the methodology and categories of study that allow us to do so.

3.1. *Material and method*

This current research draws on content analysis, as one of the most used techniques in Social Sciences, to discern the thematic selection of the media's agenda (López-Escobar & Llamas, 1996; Díaz & Vivero, 2014). This standard, systematic and replicable method, through the proposition of variables and previously established rules, allows us to study communicative products, whether they are messages, texts or discourses (Stemler, 2001; Piñuel, 2002; Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). Essentially defined as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1969, quoted in Stemler, 2001, p. 1), this method is appropriate for analysing both the "meanings" and "signifiers" of the said messages (Neuendorf, 2002; Igartua & Humanes, 2014), as well as for studying their narrative and interactivity. Thus, this present study collects the presence and frequency of appearance of certain characteristics of the contents (Porta & Silva, 2003), that is, both the "statistics based on the tally of units" and the "reasoning based on the combination of categories" (Piñuel, 2002, p. 2), in order to describe and confirm a

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phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), in this case, the different informative interests of the agenda setting of the digital media in three separate spheres.

To compare the diverse thematic selection within a digital medium, we set out our own methodological proposal, which is tested using an exploratory case study. To be precise, that of *ElPaís.es* and its expansion throughout the social networks, well-established as the most read generalist digital medium in Spain, according to the *General Media Study* (AIMC, 2019).

The analysis revolves around three principal axes that contain all the different thematic selections put forward: the online Front Page, the Most Read section and that corresponding to the Most Viral, whose results focus, in this case, on the social network Twitter. Each of these sections is analysed on the basis of the collected data publicly provided by the webpage of *ElPaís.es* itself (n=420).

To this end, a random but concrete period for data collection was designed covering fifteen days (March 18-31, 2019). During this time, a selection of ten daily contents per agenda was made: Front Page (n=140), Most Read (n=140) and Most Viral (n=140). They were gathered in two concrete time-slots, codifying five units of analysis from each one: in the morning, from approximately 11:00 to 12:00, when each day's current news agenda is considered to be fixed; and at night, from approximately 23:00 to 00:00, when the changes in the current news items of the day have been included and the greatest period of user activity has taken place. This codification includes the publications that can be found repeated, taking this factor as part of the analysis corresponding to the degree of updating in the themes and whether any sounding board effects can be appreciated (Jamieson & Cappella, 2010; Garimella *et al.*, 2018; Dubois & Blank, 2018). This is why the real daily sample fluctuates in accordance with this repetition variable, so the total number of units obtained is differentiated (n=420).

The proposed contents analysis is carried out by applying the same standard codification table, of our own elaboration based on previous studies of other authors (Alarcos-Llorach, 1977, quoted in Zorrilla-Barroso, 1996; Palau-Sampio & Sánchez-García, 2020; Bazaco, Redondo & Sánchez-García, 2019), to each item, considered as an individual subject of study (Neuendorf, 2002) that forms part of the proposed triple agenda. This record contains a total of 11 variables and 59 sub-variables grouped into three central categories, related to the abovementioned triple objective, which deal with different observable characteristics in each one of the proposed axes (Front Page web, Most Read and Most Viral):

– (C1) Themes of the digital agenda: Characteristics related to traditional journalism, such as the type of headline, section, theme, authorship, genre or actuality of the codified unit, are collected. The themes are selected on the basis of a prior analysis of the sample, detecting the most repeated and grouping them by similarity (Márquez-Domínguez, López-López & Estévez, 2017).

– (C2) Multimedia narrative of the digital agenda: This section includes the defining elements of the digital narrative: the use of photographs, galleries, videos, graphics, hypertext, etc. Similarly, it details their protagonism or complementarity of the contents to establish any possible influence of its presence on the various informative interests.

– (C3) Virality and clickbait of the digital agenda: This includes aspects related to the diffusion of the *soft* contents in social networks, irrespective of whether they are comments or whether they can be shared on the said platforms; as well as a breakdown of the virality strategies that can be present in the form of *clickbait*, already mentioned in the above section, based on the study of Bazaco, Redondo and Sánchez-García (2019).

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4. Analysis and results

The grouping of the data and the correlation of the variables allow us to obtain results concerning each one of the three proposed spheres of the digital agenda, showing a comparison between the three main categories applied to the three axes: the theme, the use of multimedia narrative and the presence of virality claims, which are set out in the same order in the following sections.

First of all, the comparative analysis of the hyperlinks brings 248 different news items of the 420 extracted, representing 59% of the total sample. As for the detail of repetition in the proposed areas, the Front Page has 91% of the different news items, while the Most Read has 63% and the Most Viral 61%. In accordance with the interrelation between the three, only 20% of the news items of the Front Page appear in the Most Read or the Most Viral. However, this phenomenon does not occur the other way round. This would suggest that the agenda ruled by the journalistic hierarchy of the Front Page maintains an independent line, without varying its content despite the popularity that the contents influenced by the decisions of the audience can reach. At the same time, the transmission of relevance within the medium does not originate from the said hierarchy, while the read and viral contents seem to rebound or maintain a resonance effect.

4.1. *Thematic differences in the triple digital agenda*

The analysis of contents allows us to group the analysed items (n= 420) into themes in order to compare their presence and prevalence in the different areas studied within the online medium. The results show thematic differences (C1) between the three spheres being dealt with.
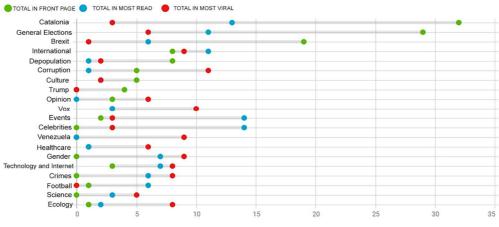
The specific data collected following the codification of this first category allows us to draw a thematic profile in the three spheres, as is reflected in Figure 2, which shows a comparative ranking of the ten themes with the greatest presence in each of the spheres. The publications found in the Front Page (n=140) are *hard news* or 'public matters,' especially national and international politics, such as Catalonia, which is at the top with a presence in 32 of the 140 items of this agenda, followed by the electoral process and Brexit, with 29 and 19 items, respectively.

In the case of the Most Read (n=140), linked to a second selection that represents the real interests of the audience, a greater fragmentation can be observed, with a predominance of reports of current events and gossip concerning the famous as opposed to a smaller presence of politics and international news. In addition, it includes a considerable number of publications related to gender (domestic violence against women and inequality of the sexes), as well as to technology and the Internet. These results suggest a low reader interest in politics, which stands out in the Front Page, postulating an alternative thematic selection.

As for the Most Viral in the analysed medium (n=140), the most salient point is one of fragmentation, similar to the Most Read, but with a thematic similarity close to that of the Front Page, with a predominance of national and international politics, also including other matters with a marked social tone, such as gender, ecology, health or science.

Thoroughly and in accordance with what we have found, it is particularly interesting to break down the general theme of International into related political sub-themes of which a great impact has been observed, as substantial differences have been found in the three digital spheres. Thus, the results show how, despite the fact that the journalistic criterion of the Front Page bestows greater importance to Brexit, this transfer of relevance (McCombs, 2006) is not equally successful in the readers of the newspaper and the online users, since the figure falls to less than half that of the Most Read and to one item in the Most Viral. In this sense, the viral agenda is more focused on the political situation in Venezuela, as an element more typical of the sounding boards, whose relevance is associated to the political discussion in Spain; while this theme does not appear at all in either the Front Page or the Most Read.

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Figure 2. Thematic differences in the agenda of the cybermedium in the three digital spheres analysed.
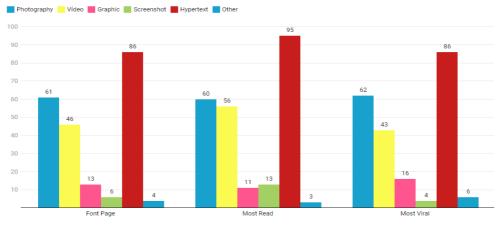

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2. *The presence of multimedia elements in the selection of news*

The results concerning the presence of multimedia elements in the analysed sample (C2) show a similar use of these resources in all three axes (Front Page, Most Read and Most Viral). A breakdown of the data is shown in Figure 3, where a predominant use of photography, around 60%, followed by video with around 48%, can be appreciated. Graphics, captures and other elements make up a minority, oscillating between 3% and 16%. Although hypertext stands out as the most used resource, 85% of the total corresponds to the variable of micro-navigation, that is, links which direct the user to other reports within the webpage of *ElPaís.es* and its supplements. This indicates that the information is complemented and enriched, and the non-linear narrative occurs within the margins of the cybermedium itself and not through external sources, characteristic of a macro-navigation which, in this case, is non-existent.
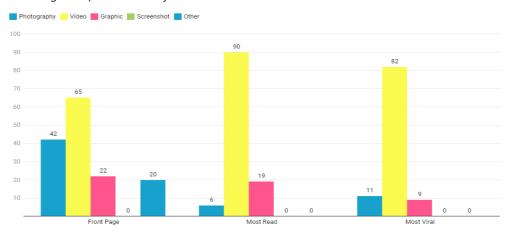
Figure 3. Presence of multimedia elements of the agenda of the cybermedium in the three digital spheres analysed.

Source: Own elaboration.

On another plane, and despite the similarities in presence, the multimedia narrative does vary between the spheres analysed, as can be seen from the protagonism observed concerning the elements in each one of them (see Figure 4). While the Front Page has video as the main element in 65% of its contents (n=140), the figure reaches 90% and 82%, respectively, for the Most Read and the Most Viral.

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Figure 4. Protagonism of multimedia elements of the agenda of the cybermedium in the three digital spheres analysed.

Source: Own elaboration.

These results spotlight a generalised use of the audiovisual as the protagonist of reports, while also stressing the readers' and social network users' particular interest in contents that use this resource. In this sense, it is necessary to look closely at how the lists of the Most Read and the Most Viral incorporate an icon, letting the reader know of the presence of this multimedia resource, next to the headline, so as to act as a hook. In addition, the possibility of disseminating the videos directly in social networks can also facilitate their virality. This would open up a window on complementary questions to the present study, demonstrating the importance of having a strategy in the networks and a paratext to accompany the publications as an influential element in the presentation and diffusion of news in the networks, thus indicating that a differentiated multimedia strategy can be used as a lure in the midst of the economy of attention (Nordenson, 2009).
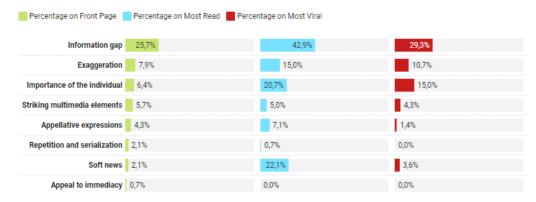
4.3. *Presence of clickbait in the triple digital agenda*

The third proposed category of analysis in the codification is occupied by the use of *clickbait* (C3) in the analysed contents. With respect to the first variable mentioned, this is present in all the items (n= 420): all the news items allow, within them, comments and sharing in social networks and other media, such as e-mail.

As for the incidence of headlines as bait and *soft news*, typical of *clickbait*, to act as the hook to attract the audience (Bazaco; Redondo & Sánchez-García, 2019), it is worth mentioning that there is a new difference, depending on the sphere being observed (see Figure 5). In the Front Page (n=140), associated with the traditional journalistic criterion, this technique has a low presence; while the variable of the *information gap* stands out in almost 26% of the contents, demonstrating a lack of the most relevant piece of information, unanswered questions, ambiguity or unattributed quotes. This percentage is even higher in the Most Read (n=140), reflecting the interest of the audience or the persuasive success of the *clickbait* in this area. In this case, what stand out are headlines with incomplete information which would be necessary to understand the news item, at almost 43%, with sensationalist or *soft news* at 22%, as well as the importance of the subject, that is, an item of news whose main focus is some kind of famous personality. In the viral selection (n= 140), the figure decreases, although it is larger than that found in the Front Page, with 29% for the *information gap* and 8% for exaggeration, yet hardly reaching 4% of *soft news*, far from that of the Most Read.

The data allow us to conclude that not only the apparent differences, but also the *clickbait*, do not act like closed categories. Here, we are dealing with a phenomenon that often combines various similar types that intertwine within a headline or in the contents.

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Figure 5. *Clickbait* typology present in the three digital spheres analysed of the agenda of the cybermedium.

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The bibliographic review, the proposed methodology to analyse the digital agenda setting, and the case study applied as an empirical test, allow us to declare as satisfied the proposed objective of proving the 'triple digital agenda' model and the *news gap* that is generated between the agenda fixed by the medium and what the audience really selects from its website or the social networks. The study points to a change in the relevance of the medium as the fixer of an agenda; an agenda that is now influenced by the user's decisions while surfing, selecting and making contents viral, as well as to the appearance of *soft news* and *clickbait* techniques.

The methodological proposal presented allows us to describe how the selection of newsworthy items of the medium takes place in three parallel spheres of interest: the selection of journalistic relevance represented in the Front-Page contents; the particular interest of the audience, found in the Most Read; and that of the virality in the networks in the Most Viral list. The three spheres reflect different informative interests influenced by the contents or the use of tabloid techniques for their presentation.

The case study carried out on the digital agenda of the Spanish daily newspaper *El País* (n=420) confirms the principal hypothesis that the three spheres observed in the media agenda should be considered in parallel, responding to disparate interests belonging to the three intervening agents: the medium, the web audience and the users of the social networks. Such particularities are considered sufficient to understand each selection as an entity in itself; although with interdependent relationships, as they originate from the preselection of the same medium. Similarly, the analysis of the narrative and the *clickbait* allow us to extract three specific conclusions from the detailed examination of the correlation between the variables of the case study.

First of all, the themes that are dominant in the Most Read in the web demonstrate the existence of a journalism that publishes contents on demand (Corzo & Salaverría, 2018), in accordance with the audience's *soft* preference (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2015). Nevertheless, it has been observed that such news items do not only appear in the Front Page, but that they are not modified under the influence of the most popular in the web or in Twitter, despite the fact that, in the latter case, the users have a selection which is closer to the *hard* contents of the Front Page. This phenomenon indicates a parallel access by the users directly to the contents that interest them, either from inside the website or from other networks or diffusion platforms; so apparently, it does not influence the make-up of the newsworthy agenda.

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Secondly, the high permanence of news items in the Most Read and the Most Viral, as opposed to in the Front Page, can be interpreted as a manifestation of a soundboard effect in the diffusion (Jamieson & Capella, 2008; Garimella *et al.*, 2018; Dubois & Blank, 2018), which causes these contents to remain visible longer, thus becoming an attractive space in itself.

Finally, the presence of *clickbait* indicates not only the success of the said technique among the spheres that specifically affect the audience, where it has a greater prevalence, but also its inclusion in the contents of the Front Page, influencing or altering the traditional criterion of journalistic relevance. Similarly, we can single out the explicit proclamation of the multimedia narrative, presenting the contents as an element to attract the readers' attention and the primacy of the video as the protagonist over the text.

In short, the study confirms that there is a theoretical and empirical basis for referencing the idea of a triple digital agenda made up of the disparate interests of journalistic relevance, the audience and the networks. The forming of an independent thematic selection, even though it has arisen from the medium itself, endorses the existence of a *news gap* marked by the difference in interests between the medium and the audience (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2015; Bright, 2016). The users' surfing activity apart from the order of the Front Page gives us a means to analyse the evolution of the agenda of McCombs (2006) within the world of agendas as perceived by McCombs, Shaw & Weaver (2014). It can then be applied to the digital sphere and can focus on the capacity of the media, now exposed to the challenge of the social networks, to fix and transmit the thematic relevance of the topics they choose and the methods they develop to capture the attention of the audience.

This work of research is not an end in itself, but merely an approximation, on the basis of a case study and a limited sample, which can lay the foundations for an analysis of the evolution of the agenda setting in different, parallel but interrelated, digital spheres that can allow us to delve into the abovementioned *news gap* between media, audience and networks, as well as how to delve into the loss of protagonism of the medium as a fixer of the agenda with the journalistic criterion of relevance.

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