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Production and distribution of media news on Telegram

Abstract

Against the backdrop of the new attention economy (Giraldo–Luque & Fernández Rovira, 2020), which is based on attracting audience interest, this research analyses the production and distribution of media content through the emerging Telegram platform. Attracting the attention of the audience has become the main objective of the media in the digital environment. To achieve this aim, more personalised content is now being produced, and attempts are being made to reach the user in a more direct and personal way through instant messaging platforms, especially Telegram. Through a methodology based on data triangulation, documentary analysis, interviews, registration techniques, analysis sheets, as well as direct and indirect observation (Fernández–Ballesteros, 2004), this study addresses the rise of Telegram in journalism, in addition to the way in which the Spanish media distribute, produce, and use the information, as well as interaction with the audience. To this end, a strategic sample has been used, the results of which are applicable to the media analysed. The results of this research show that nearly half of the media analysed produce content and inform the user without considering interaction, while others try to approach the user with language that is informal and friendly, or through multimedia content such as videos, emoticons, and others. The media have suddenly appeared on Telegram in search of new market niches where they can produce content for new users, thereby pursuing the rationale of the attention economy.

Keywords
Journalism, Telegram, mobile devices, the media, audience.

1. Introduction

Telegram has been introduced into the work routines of journalists and the media (Sánchez–Gonzales & Martos–Moreno, 2020). The technical qualities of this messaging platform have allowed the latter to start incorporating the tool into their activity of producing and distributing news in order to attract user attention, which is a scarce commodity, and the subject of this research as well. This situation is due to "information overload" (Toffler, 1981), as well as the development of cutting–edge technology that prevents the consumer's attention from being retained. Moreover, it exacerbates the struggle for audience share by media outlets.

This research offers new insights into the study of messaging platforms and the media with special emphasis on the theory of attention economy (Goldhaber, 1997). On the one hand, the various services offered by Spanish media on Telegram have been identified such as headline news, breaking news alerts, and multimedia content. On the other hand, it has

become evident that journalistic companies are already present on instant messaging platforms such as Telegram in an effort to benefit from the complementarities and advantages they offer, thereby incorporating them into their information strategy in order to capture audience attention.

This is possible thanks to the technical features offered by these mobile platforms, which include conciseness, quick access, and ease of sharing content. As an informative tool, mobile devices offer several advantages, such as "their interactive capability, adap.tability to the consumer's conditions and context, and the bond they create with the user's identity and personality" (Negreira-Rey, López-García & Lozano-Aguiar, 2017),

The rise of messaging platforms has led media outlets to start using them in order to keep their readers informed. The aforementioned multimedia features have become a key factor in the "exponential growth of its implementation," as explained by Sedano-Amundarain and Palomo-Torres (2018). Another factor is the reduced cost of tools for producing and distributing content by Internet, as well as a change in audience behaviour toward a more active role (Negreira-Rey, López-García & Lozano-Aguiar, 2017). Technology firms and media companies are aware of this new business model in which the goal is to capture the attention of the audience (BBC News, 2018), and where social networks and messaging applications are basic tools for disseminating information to users.

According to Cornia *et al.* (2018), these circumstances have led to increased investment in digital networks and platforms by European media for news distribution, using the following 3-point strategy: to direct traffic to their own websites; boost their scope and visibility on these third-party platforms; and increase their digital subscriptions.

News production on these platforms, which is driven by and focused on digitisation and the engagement of new users, has led to the concept of "the attention economy," developed by theorists such as Simon (1971) and Goldhaber (1997), and subsequently taken up by authors such as Celis Bueno (2017), Giraldo-Luque and Fernández-Rovira (2020), and Díaz-Noci (2010), all of whom support the present research.

This theory is based on information overload and the impossibility of paying attention and responding to all the content that exists on the Internet. The concept of "the attention economy" is based on the idea that attention is the main asset, and in the current production model it represents "a means for both the production of surplus value and the reproduction of power relations" (Celis Bueno, 2017).

A number of defining features have also been established regarding this concept of economy (Goldhaber, 1997), based on originality and diversity as essential requirements for attracting attention. In other words, content that is more original, diverse, or eye-catching will attract more attention.

Capturing the attention of others results in obtaining both benefits and power status (Celis Bueno, 2017). Attention, according to Pérez-Serrano (2011), is not a commodity like any other, but the prerequisite of any economic transaction. Moreover, the power of the audience is based on the selection of content due to the ever-increasing access to information. The user must be able to choose the content on which they spend their time and attention. The time a user dedicates to a given social network or a certain messaging platform is an indicator of its economic viability.

Therefore, the way information is processed can be summarised in three steps (Davenport & Beck, 2002): becoming aware of information; paying attention to a specific issue; and deciding whether or not to act. The rise of new technology implies a growing divergence between the limited nature of the human timeframe for paying attention and processing information, and the speed at which information flows (Celis Bueno, 2020). Herbert Alexander Simon, one of the first authors to address the importance of attention in developed economies, stresses the difficulty of dealing with an excess of information sources

and the expertise needed to filter the content in order to generate constant long-term interest by the audience (Newell & Simon, 1972).

Thus, digital news start-ups now emerging online (Carlson & Usher, 2016), as well as media outlets, are competing in a news-saturated market to capture the attention of consumers by using various initiatives and increasingly personalised strategies to sell their products and content. The more information available, the more scarce and valuable the attention.

However, the approaches of private sector news organisations to social media are still at an early stage and share common ground regarding the development and imitation of shared forms of what they consider to be "best practice" (Sehl, Cornia & Nielsen, 2018).

In addition, new digital platforms are delivering an increasing amount of information in a way that is disorganised and omnipresent, leading to "constant pressure on productivity that is driving the need to respond to these communications as fast as possible" (Roda, 2019). In this sense, the unique feature of instant messaging is the fact that it provides personalised information in a way that is private, yet accessible to the public.

Another novel aspect of this type of mobile platform is the concept of originality, referred to by Goldhaber (1997) in his theory of the attention economy. This is a key factor in capturing the user's attention because of the difficulty in gaining interest through the repetition of existing content. Messaging platforms offer advantages and technological capabilities to the journalistic market that distinguish them from other digital formats. Among these features, the most symbolic are immediacy, privacy, and the possibility of having a wide range of multimedia resources.

Table 1 compares the most widely used instant messaging platforms by the Spanish population, with regard to five indicators: spontaneous knowledge; suggested knowledge; use; rating; and frequency. It also includes social networks that have the highest percentage of knowledge, use, and ratings by users of Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter, which are compatible with Telegram. The selection criteria are based on similarity of format and the option of linking one application to another.

Table 1. Instant messaging applications similar to and compatible with Telegram.

	Telegram	WhatsApp	Snapchat
Spontaneous knowledge	10%	36%	14%
Suggested knowledge	66%	91%	56%
Usage/Visits	33%	85%	10%
Rating	7,6	8,5	7,1
Frequency of daily use	61%	97%	37%

	Telegram	Facebook	YouTube	Twitter	Instagram
Telegram		✔	✔	✔	✔
Facebook	✔		✔	✘	✔
YouTube	✔	✔		✔	✘
Twitter	✔	✘	✔		✘
Instagram	✔	✔	✘	✘	

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the
Annual Study of Social Networks 2021 (IAB Spain, 2021).

Telegram was created in 2013 by Russian brothers Pavel and Nikolai Durov, eclipsing the usual functions of instant messaging services. The technical aspects of this messaging platform are the differentiating factor (Dargahi-Nobari *et al.*, 2021), although it should also be noted that there are complementarities with other tools or social networks, as shown in the table above. The immediacy of Telegram, together with its ease of use in the transmission, privacy, and direct reception of information, has led to its consolidation in the journalistic profession.

In addition to the aforementioned advantages of Telegram, the use of visual or multimedia features is also an essential ingredient in the production of information through mobile devices. These resources are also useful in providing greater closeness and personalisation with the information produced and distributed (Sánchez-Gonzales & Martos-Moreno, 2020), which reinforces the connection between issuers (journalists and/or media) and receivers (users). This has resulted in Telegram's massive growth from 200 million users in 2018 to 400 million in 2020 worldwide, within a span of two years.

The search for new formats has not been abandoned in the automation of newsrooms. Moreover, a new path has been opened up toward journalism that is ubiquitous, personalised, multimedia, immersive, and transmedia (García-Orosa *et al.*, 2021).

1.1. *Media presence on Telegram*

Information consumption habits have undoubtedly changed, and the use of instant messaging sites is growing in the media ecosystem. An increasing number of media outlets have been taking advantage of the growing prevalence of messaging applications (Negreira-Rey, López-García & Lozano-Aguiar, 2017).

Other international media outlets such as Reuters, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* have also joined Telegram.

In the case of Spain, journalistic companies have been selected for this study, which comprise the strategic sample (n=16). These companies distribute generalist or specialised information, either periodically or daily, including magazines, newspapers, and news agencies.

Most of the media selected, which are 11 in total, are digital natives, while only five (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *El Periódico*, *El Economista* and *Cambio 16*) are traditional media that have been transformed by the emergence of mobile devices. Among the generalist digital newspapers, we have cited *Eldiario.es*, *El Confidencial*, *El Español*, *Público*, *Okdiario*, *Vozpópuli* and *Cuarto Poder*. Among the specialised journals, we have mentioned the following: *CTXT*, a political and economic information media; *El Jueves*, a satirical publication; and *Verne*, the cultural page of the newspaper *El País*. We have also cited the news agency EFE. A news agency has been included in the study in order to represent this group due to its importance as an "intermediary between news events and the media that inform the final audience" (Artero & Moraes, 2007). EFE was chosen due to its status as the largest and oldest Spanish-speaking news agency (EFE, 2014). The sample is strategic due to its composition as "units of analysis that differ in the characteristics to be analysed" (Otzen & Manterola, 2017, p. 229). For this reason, the present study explores the media outlets with the largest audiences on the platform, also taking into account the diverse content production and distribution units, including traditional media, digital media, specialised publications, thematic publications, and news agencies.

Eldiario.es stands out as the main Spanish digital media on Telegram, as it has 46,500 followers. Its prominence on the platform is largely due to the sociological factor (Rodríguez, 2018, personal communication), as the audience of *Eldiario.es* is young and activist, therefore well-suited to technological language.

With regard to traditional media on Telegram, one that stands out is *El País*, the most widely distributed, generalist daily newspaper in Spain (AIMC, 2020). It is also the Spanish media outlet with the third highest number of followers on this messaging platform at 10,800, trailing only behind *Eldiario.es* and *Público*.

Studies on the relevance of this phenomenon are both recent and scarce. The continued growth and use of messaging platforms in society has led to the need to examine how the media behave in these settings (Sedano-Amundarain & Palomo-Torres, 2018). Messaging applications are a field of study in which scant scientific and communicative research has been conducted.

Regarding the use of Telegram in journalism, studies on this instant messaging application as an alternative media channel so far have focused on countries such as Iran (Kermani, 2018) and Russia (Salikov, 2019; Akbari & Gabdulhakov, 2019). Research has also been conducted regarding its use in disseminating news by five local digital media (Negreira-Rey, López-García & Lozano-Aguiar, 2017), its possible impact on newsrooms (Sedano-Amundarain & Palomo-Torres, 2018), news consumption (Lou *et al.*, 2021), and the communication strategies used by the media on this type of platform (Sánchez & Martos-Moreno, 2020).

The present study analyses the way in which Spanish media produce and distribute content on Telegram, and how they interact with audiences to capture their interest based on the attention economy approach. We start with the following series of questions related to the object of study: Which media have been found on Telegram, and how many users do they have? What type of information do they distribute? What methods do the media use to distribute information? What functionalities of Telegram do they use most to disseminate content? Do they use graphic, iconic, or multimedia features? What type of service do the media provide to users on Telegram, considering the levels of attention? The study began with the following hypotheses:

H1. Media outlets focus their content production and distribution on Telegram in order to obtain audience attention.
H2. Interaction is not a key factor for the media in their Telegram strategy.

This paper contributes to the analysis of news that is processed and disseminated by media outlets, and to the perception by communication professionals regarding the object of study, which are aspects of this issue that have yet to be explored. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to carry out this research, as detailed below.

2. Methodology

The design of this research was based on a rigorous and systematic review of the literature, which has resulted in the main contributions to the state of the issue (Ramírez-Montoya & García-Peñalvo, 2018). The data triangulation method (Soler Pujals & Enrique Jiménez, 2012) has been used to contrast and cross-reference the information in order to study the phenomenon and obtain results. Three correlative steps have been followed, which are detailed below.

Firstly, the technique of direct observation was chosen as a strategy of the scientific method (Fernández-Ballesteros, 2004), as well as documentary analysis and interviews with professionals in order to carry out an in-depth examination of the media on Telegram. The observation period was from March to June 2019, prior to the general elections held in the same year. The method of data extraction was based on content analysis (Krippendorf, 1990; Neuendorf, 2004).

The exploratory unit of analysis, which was the object to be studied, was comprised of 16 media with a presence on Telegram, as well as their ongoing behaviour and attributes on this application, after they had been identified. The unit of measure was determined by occurrence and duration. The way in which the news is distributed and how it interacts with the user has been examined as well. The observation period of media activity on Telegram was three months, as mentioned above, taking into account the interval between the presentation of the stimulus (the sending of text by the user as a user member) and the beginning of the response (Cone & Foster, 1982) by the media.

The registration technique used was an analysis sheet based on three variables that provided an answer as to what information is distributed by the messaging service, and how it is distributed, as well as verification of interaction with the audience. Both the levels related to attention economy and the levels of attention (*focused*, *deferred*, and *captive*) have been considered as well (Titonet, 2010). The following indicators are presented, including the nominal measurement scale and the presence or absence of pre-established criteria:

- Number of members who have registered or joined through Telegram, as well as the frequency of the number of news items that each of the media and agencies distributes on the messaging service. The grouping of these has been considered in relation to the number of items of information distributed each day.
- With regard to the type of information distributed, we have considered the summary of the main news items (original publications and repetitions), the sending of information with links and text on a continuous basis, news of interest or breaking news, and the distribution of copies or documents in PDF format.
- In terms of how the information is displayed, we have examined the use of photographs at the beginning of the text to place the reader in the story or, in its absence, small photos within the information with their respective links to the media and the inclusion of graphic or iconic elements (emoticons, stickers, etc.) and multimedia features (video and audio).
- Interaction with the audience with regard to originality. A distinction has been made between the presence or absence of media that use phrases or words with polite language (Grice, 1975), and pragmatic expressions (deixis), such as the following:
  a) Attenuation through mitigation and respect, or in other words, the absence of direct, blunt, or harsh expressions or prejudiced social beliefs.
  b) Social and functional roles are "defined by the relative power of the receiver with regard to the speaker and represent the foundational aspect of the social relationship," as well as by the type of "exchange and role of the interlocutor in each discursive genre," respectively (Rebollo Couto, 2005).
  c) The type of interaction that considers politeness as a communicative exchange that encourages relationships and shortens the distance between interlocutors.
  d) Emotional bond. The use of images while considering the degree of experience and life lessons of the user.

Secondly, interviews have also been conducted (Flick, 2015; Gibbs, 2012) to provide testimonies about the use of Telegram by the Spanish media. A qualitative and flexible interview model has been chosen, as this method allows "the interviewees to speak from their own perspective using their own frame of reference and ideas as well as meanings that are familiar to them" (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Interviews were conducted by telephone between October and December of 2019.

The questions asked were the same for all interviewees, although some flexibility in the answers was allowed. The interview model was developed using the following indicators: Telegram's role in media activity; the main advantages of this application; type of information or content distributed; and the connection with the audience through this tool. To analyse the results, a matrix table was drawn up for each of these indicators and the responses were categorised according to semantic criteria. The coding process used to establish a comparison of the extracted data involved dichotomous variables of presence and absence, depending on the case. Finally, relevant unification and interpretation of the data was carried out.

We interviewed the managers in charge of social networks and digital content at the following companies: *Eldiario.es*, which is the Spanish media with the largest number of subscribers on Telegram; *El País* and *El Mundo*, as the traditional and generalist news media with the largest number of subscribers; *Verne* and *El Economista*, as media dedicated to specialised information with a presence on Telegram; finally, an interview was conducted

with a digital consultant who is an expert in social networks, in order to obtain a more technical and comprehensive vision of the phenomenon under analysis. Accordingly, a strategic sample was prepared with the aim of obtaining different perspectives within the spectrum of Spanish media and communication units that are present on Telegram (traditional and digital media, specialised information media, consultants with experience working for media that have chosen this platform, etc.). The people interviewed were as follows: Juan Luis Sánchez (deputy director and co-founder of *Eldiario.es*); Raquel Seco (director of the social media team at *El País*); Anabel Bueno (head of social media at *Verne*); Roberto Fernández (head of audience development at *El Economista*); Guacimara Castrillo (manager in charge of social media at *El Mundo*); and José Manuel Rodríguez (journalist and consultant in the development of audiences, business, and digital products, who has worked for media outlets such as *El Confidencial* and *Lainformacion.com*).

In determining the number of interviews, we considered the principle of theoretical saturation (Morales Contreras, Bilbao Calabuig & Meneses Falcón, 2016). According to Guest *et al.* (2006), this occurs when additional information no longer provides any further or relevant change to the information already registered. Thus, "To the extent that the target population is homogeneous and knowledgeable about the field of study, and the objectives of the study are well defined, a sample of six interviews is considered sufficient to achieve information saturation" (*ibid.*, 2006).

3. Results

3.1. *In-depth analysis of media presence on Telegram*

The Spanish media and news agencies analysed during the observation period of this research are now using this application. This is due to their having found a new channel for "getting closer to the audience and offering the main news accompanied by links and images for further information" (Sánchez & Sánchez, 2017). A significant number of media outlets (Table 2) are using Telegram to disseminate news and reach a wider audience, especially young people. This is the case with the following media: *El País*, *Eldiario.es*, *El Mundo*, *El Economista*, *El Español*, *El Periódico*, *El Confidencial*, *CTXT*, *Cambio16*, *Cuarto Poder*, *El Jueves*, *Okdiario*, *Público*, *Vozpópuli*, *Verne*, and the EFE news agency.

The following table offers a comparison between the number of followers and the range of the average number of news items disseminated per week during the research period, as well as the percentage attained by each media outlet or agency.

Table 2. Media and agency presence on Telegram.

Media/Agency	No. of Subscribers	No. of News Items	Frequency (%) % %
El País	10,800	1-7	25%
El Mundo	10,100	+50	12.5%
El Periódico	4,400	1-30	12.5%
El Economista	806	1-4	0%
Eldiario.es	46,500	1-6	25%
El Confidencial	215	2-3	31.25%
El Español	957	4-5	0%
Cambio16	125	1-3	0%
CTXT	2,000	1	18.75%
Público	16,200	1-6	25%
OKdiario	645	1-2	0%
El Jueves	1,600	41	12.5%
Vozpópuli	915	3-8	25%
Verne	2,800	1-2	18.75%
Cuarto Poder	1,100	4-5	0%
EFE	2,200	27	0%

Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of the number of followers for each media outlet or agency on Telegram, *Eldiario.es* is well above the rest at 46,500 subscribers, followed by *Público* at 16,200. *Cambio16* is the media outlet with the fewest subscribers at 125.

Regarding the number of news items published during the specified time interval, and according to the parameters of the methodology, the following percentages have been registered: 31.25% of the media disseminate between 3 and 5 news items (*El Economista*, *El Confidencial*, *El Español*, *Cambio16*, and *Cuarto Poder*); 25% disseminate between 6 and 9 pieces (*El País*, *Vozpópuli*, *Público*, and *Eldiario.es*); 18.75% publish between 1 and 2 (*CTXT*, *Okdiario*, and *Verne*); 12.5% issue between 10 and 40 (EFE and *El Periódico*); and another 12.5% issue more than 41 publications (*El Jueves* and *El Mundo*).

The hegemonic position of *Eldiario.es* on Telegram is due to the fact that the journalists in the newsroom have become accustomed to using this application. Juan Luis Sánchez (2018, personal communication), deputy director and co-founder of the newspaper, had this to say:

> We're heavy users of Telegram, both publicly and privately. We also use it as an internal work system. This makes it very easy to use the tool, and at the time, it's helped us to understand the right tone for this type of channel.

In this regard, Doods (2019) stresses the need to pay attention to the generational factor, as technology such as messaging platforms "might be putting older journalists at a disadvantage" as well as "preventing new generations from learning in-person tactics for gathering information."

3.2. *Type of content distributed*

With regard to the information distributed through this messaging service, here are some figures: 50% of the media disseminate content by means of links and text on a continuous basis (*El Mundo*, EFE, *El Confidencial*, *Cambio16*, *Okdiario, El Jueves*, *Verne* and *El Periódico*); 37.5% also include a summary of the main news of the day (*Público*, *Vozpópuli*, *El Español*, *El País*, *CTXT* and *Eldiario.es*); 44% include information of interest or breaking news (*Público*, *Vozpópuli*, *El País*, *Eldiario.es*, *El Economista*, *El Mundo* and *El Periódico*); and only 6% distribute documents or copies of the newspaper in PDF format (*El Economista*).

Raquel Seco (2018, personal communication), director of the social media team at *El País*, explains that the dissemination of breaking news has become a common practice on the app. As she puts it, "Telegram is used in the newsroom mainly to deliver breaking news and distribute content that's compatible."

Headline news is also one of the main types of content disseminated through Telegram, according to Bueno and Rodríguez (2018, personal communication). In the case of *Eldiario.es* and *El País*, the dissemination of multimedia content such as GIFs, videos, and audio is emphasised (Table 3). Furthermore, Sánchez (2018, personal communication) adds this comment: "We try to use a tone that's not the same as the news. In other words, we present topics of interest, although depending on the time of day, they might have a more entertaining tone."

Table 3. Responses of the communication managers to the following question: What type of information is distributed through the app?

Manager	Response			
	Breaking news alerts	Headline news	Entertainment	Multimedia content
Juan Luis Sánchez (Deputy director and co-founder of *Eldiario.es*)	x	x	x	x
Raquel Seco (Director of the social media team at *El País*)	x			x
Anabel Bueno (Social media manager at *Verne*)		x		x
Guacimara Castrillo (Head of social media at *El Mundo*)	x	x		
Roberto Fernández (Audience development manager at *El Economista*)		x		x
José Manuel Rodríguez (Journalist and consultant in the development of audiences, business, and digital products		x	x	

Source: Own elaboration.

3.3. *Strategies for information distribution*

Regarding the way information is distributed, these are the figures: 44% add photographs at the beginning of the text to make it easier for the user to understand the message, as well as to place the user inside the topic of the information (*El Economista*, *Eldiario.es*, *El Mundo*, *El Periódico*, *El Español*, *Vozpópuli* and *El Periódico*); 69% (more than half) include only small photographs, which appear automatically in the link to the information (*El Mundo*, *El País*, *El Confidencial*, *El Español*, *Verne*, EFE, *El País*, *Cuarto Poder*, *Cambio 16*, *CTXT* and *Okdiario*).

In addition, 37.5% insert emoticons next to headlines or news summaries (*Público*, *Vozpópuli*, *El País*, *El Español*, *Eldiario.es* and *El Periódico*); 44% add graphics together with the news (*El Español*, *Público*, *Vozpópuli*, *El País*, *Eldiario.es*, *El Economista* and *El Periódico*); 31% add animated GIFs (*El Español*, *Público*, *Vozpópuli*, *Eldiario.es*, *El Economista*); 12.5% include audio (*Vozpópuli*, *Eldiario.es*); and finally, 19% add video to complement the information (*El Economista*, *Eldiario.es* and *El Periódico*).

Regarding the inclusion of audio in the information, Sánchez (2018, personal communication) highlights this feature as one of the most successful formats of *Eldiario.es* on Telegram:

> One of the projects that has worked best for us from the beginning are the audio snippets we send with the analysis of the daily news, when something really important happens. They're easy to record, send and edit. Another of the great advantages of Telegram is that if you make a mistake in send something, there's flexibility to fix the problem through editing and re-sending. And in a media company, it's definitely possible to make a mistake, so it gives you security and peace of mind.

According to Seco (2018, personal communication), multimedia resources are gaining prominence in media such as *El País*: "We don't think so much about content made exclusively for Telegram, but more about the content the newspaper already has that we can adapt to a platform that's mobile and sociable," she explains. On the other hand, Castrillo (2021, personal communication) also highlights the wide range of functionalities that Telegram offers. As she explains, "The most important feature is the ease with which the user can share the content, which is why we select practical material for a broad spectrum of the population."

3.4. *Strategies for interaction and engagement*

With regard to user interaction, this research confirms that using these types of audio-visual features is an important part of the media's strategy in making a connection with users on Telegram. Moreover, the use of politeness is also seen as a way of participating on the platform.

In relation to the latter, the media use expressions of cordiality and courtesy in the language, thereby assuming a social and practical role. A total of 56% use polite expressions such as "Good morning," or "Hello, stay tuned live…" in order to establish closeness with the user (*El País*, *El Periódico*, *El Economista*, *Eldiario.es*, *El Español*, *CTXT*, *Vozpópuli*, *Cuarto Poder* and *Público*). "More than just increasing traffic, the value for the media is the contact they obtain with a loyal and regular user," explains Fernández (2021, personal communication).

As a pragmatic criterion in matters of courtesy, interaction is the purpose of a communicative exchange (Rebollo Couto, 2005). A total of 44% of the media try to approach the audience in a more personal, collaborative way by following the principle of listening and being listened to (*El Economista*, *Eldiario.es*, *El Español*, *CTXT*, *Público*, *Vozpópuli* and *Cuarto Poder*). An example of this idea is the following sentence published by *Eldiario.es*: "How are you coping with the heat? Any plans for today? Put on your sunglasses and make the most of the good weather so you can have a non-stop weekend. If you need ideas, here are a few…" As explained by Castrillo (2021, personal communication), interaction as well as caring for the user are very important:

> The interaction we see in the links we share allow us to better understand the tastes and interests of *El Mundo*'s loyal readers. We assume that if they subscribe to our channel, they're loyal readers. On some occasions, we have even conducted small surveys to test their preferences.

Sánchez (2018, personal communication) also affirms that *Eldiario.es* tries to "have an informal tone and give a wink with a GIF, emoticon, or more personalised features such as audio."

Finally, 12.5% of the media (*Eldiario.es* and *Vozpópuli*) offer attenuation resources to reduce any possible negative effects being experienced by users: "Cold, eh? With these temperatures, as nesting with a sofa and blanket for the weekend seems to be quite trendy, we offer these ideas for your enjoyment…" (*Eldiario.es*). As emphasised by Sánchez (2018, personal communication), "The idea is to gain loyalty with a very intense group of readers who trust our medium so much that they have it available on a less common tool." Fernández (2021, personal communication) adds the following comment: "For a user to decide to follow you on a network that's just emerging, or at least is not so established, you have to offer something really special, like your own content, but in a way that's different, either by trying to get closer, or by using good curation and multimedia formats, but without saturating too much."

Returning to the theory of the attention economy, which focuses on how much it will cost to consume the information produced and shared (Giraldo-Luque & Fernández-Rovira, 2020), the media offer mechanisms for participation and loyalty as added value (Díaz-Noci, 2010). For this reason, media seek a connection with the audience, although Telegram users do not interact with the news on the basis of feedback, or two-way communication, but rather through views, message forwarding (Dargahi-Nobari *et al.*, 2021), and the sharing of content through other networks.

3.5. *Telegram's features for communication and distribution*

From the point of view of the media, the main advantages of this platform include the possibility of creating large groups and distribution channels, and the multimedia nature of the tool. The communication managers surveyed also highlight the following strong points: the option of issuing breaking news alerts, the multimedia functionalities of the application,

direct communication, and the security offered by Telegram. As affirmed by Sánchez (2018, personal communication), this messaging service is highly useful as an internal communication tool within the newsroom, as a source of information, and as an "influential channel" in the case of *Eldiario.es* (Table 4):

> With Telegram, we have at hand the option of sending a message to influential people [...] For example, our editor follows Unidas Podemos, and when he has to talk to the party's leadership, he does it through Telegram. Also, the journalists in our newsroom are used to working with the tool.

Table 4. Responses of the communication managers to the following question: What are the advantages of Telegram that stand out?

Manager	Response						
	Breaking news alerts	Large groups	Multimedia capabilities	Internal communication	Direct communication	Privacy & Security	Source of information
Juan Luis Sánchez		x	x	x	x	x	x
Raquel Seco	x	x	x	x			
Anabel Bueno	x	x	x		x		
Guacimara Castrillo	x				x		
Roberto Fernández			x		x	x	
José Manuel Rodríguez	x	x	x		x	x	

Source: Own elaboration.

Telegram's technical qualities are a strong argument in its favour compared to other messaging applications, including WhatsApp. "The whole process is less complex for both parties than trying to organise a similar distribution by WhatsApp," explains Bueno (2018, personal communication). The reason is that WhatsApp limits the maximum number of members to 256, whereas the maximum number on Telegram is exponentially higher at 200,000.

Telegram's differentiation lies specifically in its privacy features as well as its communication security. For Fernández (2021, personal communication), this is what makes the platform special:

> The important thing is how users perceive and use it, and this is influenced by issues beyond the technology itself. For example, users turn to Telegram as a refuge because they're sceptical about the privacy of WhatsApp and Facebook [...] the sense of privacy the user feels when accessing the news is much higher.

Another of the features that is highly valued by the managers surveyed is direct communication. Castrillo (2021, personal communication) describes it this way: "It's our most direct channel with the reader, so it's also the most intrusive, and this means we have to be much more selective about the content we send."

In its defence, other studies have demonstrated the usefulness and impact of WhatsApp as a tool for obtaining information, contacting sources, and producing news (Doods, 2019; Sedano-Amundarain & Palomo-Torres, 2018). Moreover, it currently has hegemonic control over instant messaging in Spain, with a total daily use rate of 97% (IAB Spain, 2021), which makes social entrenchment its main strength.

The social omnipresence of platforms such as WhatsApp, along with other more established social networks, is a major drawback for Telegram, according to Castrillo (2021, personal communication), although she highlights its usefulness in the journalistic field:

> I honestly don't believe it can compete with Facebook or Twitter, because these networks are already well established in news ecosystems. But I do believe it has more chances than WhatsApp of becoming a communication channel between the media and its community of regular readers.

The results obtained from the testimonies of the media managers indicate that news organisations are not trying to choose among tools, but rather to benefit from the complementarities and advantages offered by the different applications and incorporate them into their news strategy. The media's aim in using these digital platforms in their production is to gain the user's attention and offer personalised content.

In this way, the media are trying to benefit from these platforms, their characteristics, and their market niches, thereby "maintaining an active presence in continuous adaptation" (García-Orosa *et al.*, 2021). This is an important part of the media's strategy in becoming "a multiplatform service adapted to the needs of users" (Negreira-Rey, López-García & Lozano-Aguiar, 2017).

In the case of Telegram, the media have chosen this app because of its usefulness and attractive features, such as the option of mass distribution. "It's as easy to send a message to 21,000 people as it is to send a WhatsApp to a friend," says Sánchez (2018, personal communication). In spite of this, Fernández (2021, personal communication) does not see functionality as its main advantage, but rather its innovative nature. "The sense of novelty that still exists with Telegram helps keep it going as a less worn-out distribution channel in the minds of users."

Figure 1. Telegram channels of Spanish media

Source: Telegram.

3.6. *Strategies for capturing attention*

Given the scenario of the diverse media channels on Telegram, and according to the analysis of the sample, we have identified three types of services provided to the user on this platform, with consideration given to the levels of both economy and attention (*focused*, *deferred* and *captive*) (Titonet, 2010).

The first service to be addressed, or the *captive* type, pertains to media that publish news with a link so that the user can delve deeper into the information provided. The amount of news they distribute can vary from 2-3 publications up to 50+ items. They do not include sentences that bring the user closer to the news. This service level encompasses media such as *El Confidencial*, *Cambio16*, *Okdiario*, *Verne*, *El Jueves*, *El Mundo*, and EFE.

Media of this type also use Telegram to promote their products. "I think it's a good channel for distributing newsletters, offering premium content, advancing exclusives, promoting subscription offers, and so on. And this will be our goal once we have a larger and more established community," says Castrillo (2021, personal communication). This is also the case with the magazine *Cambio16*.

The second service, or the *deferred* type, refers to media that distribute information on Telegram along with a certain degree of closeness. They identify with the user through a greeting in the morning and another in the afternoon or evening. This is the case with *El Español*, *Cuarto Poder* and *CTXT*. Moreover, not only do they send news with links, but they offer headlines of the day as well, which users can access for further information. They even distribute news of interest and breaking news.

In some media, headlines are accompanied by emoticons. These are graphic symbols placed next to the headline to make the news more pleasant to read and more visual.

El Periódico should also be mentioned, as it includes videos to expand the information. In these cases, Telegram is used as a one-way distribution tool rather than a two-way system involving the user. This is explained by Seco (2018, personal communication) with the following comments:

> We use it as a distribution tool, but it's not designed to work with a group, where there is interaction. [...] The one-way model is what I generally see in the media. They're not conversations between users and the media as equals. It's just a way of distributing content. So unfortunately, we still don't have as much feedback compared to the rest of our networks.

As further stated by Seco (2018, personal communication), the current model that the media use on Telegram is one-way communication (Sánchez-Gonzales & Martos-Moreno, 2020). Therefore, interaction is not a key factor for the media in the first two levels when distributing news. These types of applications are designed for dialogue between users; however, the media use them as one-way communication channels (Negreira-Rey, López-García & Lozano-Aguiar, 2017).

Another example is *Verne*. As pointed out by Bueno (2018, personal communication) these distribution channels enable one-way communication. According to her, "The way they're used by the media is to send alerts of the top news of the day, without the need for the user to search for it."

The third service, or *focused* type, pertains to the media that not only distribute headline news but try to make a connection with users as well. Moreover, and they include multimedia features in their content by disseminating audio, video, GIFs, graphics, and images. Sometimes, this content is presented before the text of the news in order to place the reader in the event. This is the case with *Eldiario.es*.

Likewise, one can see that the media at this level offer more to the user, such as the option of downloading the printed edition of the day, or a special PDF. According to Roberto Fernández (2021, personal communication), "The right thing to do is to offer exclusive information, or at least as original as possible, because nowadays the user is overwhelmed by platforms, social networks, and brands that broadcast content." Some media even publish a video of the top news of the day at the end of the edition.

According to the three service levels proposed, 50% of the media belong to level 1, or the basic level (*El Mundo*, EFE, *El Confidencial*, *Cambio16*, *Okdiario*, *El Jueves*, *Verne* and *CTXT*).

Another 31% are at level 2, or the intermediate level (*Público*, *El Español*, *Cuarto Poder*, *El Periódico* and *El País*). Finally, 19% are at level 3, or the advanced level (*Eldiario.es*, *El Economista* and *Vozpópuli*). These data clearly show that the media examined are highly present on this messaging application with regard to their correspondence with the audience.

4. Conclusions

Guided by the attention theory approach, this research shows that the media and communication businesses are focusing on capturing the user's attention as the main driving force of the current production model. Thus, they are producing and distributing news in scenarios that are both novel and private, one of which is Telegram, due to its technical qualities and competitive advantages aimed at retaining user interest. As such, new formats are being sought in order to expand the audience to a new and younger profile, as well as to produce and offer content that is innovative and adapted, which in turn will result in added value in economic terms, according to Celis Bueno (2017).

However, it has been observed that this type of model is still in its early stages for the media, due to the fact that while new social media platforms promote and reward native formats of articles, most organisations and media outlets are finding it difficult to monetise their reach, and therefore do not prioritise these formats, believing there are no well-defined nor sustainable business models for social media news (Cornia *et al.*, 2018).

With regard to the present study, the exploratory analysis shows that the Spanish media model on Telegram is still growing but in the experimental stage. Thus, the first hypothesis is confirmed: media outlets are adapting their news production and distribution to grab the attention of users and expand their reach on this platform. To illustrate this point, a tiered categorisation model is proposed based on the research, which addresses information services, formats, and relationships with users. These data could be used as a basis for further investigation.

Half of the media analysed find themselves in the *captive* category, as mentioned above, due to the fact that they do not provide personalised information nor include attractive visual features. Generally, only automatic links have been found. Unlike the *captive*, the *deferred* category includes information that is more tailored to Telegram and the needs of the audience. It also offers daily news summaries and breaking news, yet without ignoring visual aspects. In other words, this category includes visual features, but mainly graphics and emoticons, although a few media, namely *El Periódico* and *Eldiario.es*, offer multimedia content such as audio and video as well. There is also a perception, though rather modest, of closer contact with the audience through more polite and personal relationships. For example, "Good morning" or "Good afternoon" is used to accompany the messages (*El Español* and *Público*).

The *focused* media category provide the user with content adapted to Telegram, and they tailor the information to the user by providing a PDF copy of the newspaper (*El Economista*). This category takes into account visual and audio-visual features, with *Eldiario.es* as an example, and it fosters collaborative participation with information services and a high level of affectivity. It also offers a reciprocal relationship between journalists and the audience.

Therefore, it can be inferred that interaction and the search for a more intimate approach to the audience are not priorities for most of the media that have established themselves on the platform. Thus, our second hypothesis is confirmed. Although they value the characteristics and technical capabilities offered by Telegram (privacy, multimedia features, mass distribution, etc.), only a small number of the media analysed adapt their content and try to strengthen ties with users. As a complement to the data collected in the research, Negreira-Rey, López-García and Lozano-Aguiar (2017) list the following as the most recurring news topics (apart from significant differences between media): culture, economy, meteorology, politics, society, events, and sports.

At present, Telegram's prevailing model is one-way, based exclusively on the direct sending of news from media to users, with no special consideration given to feedback. In terms of numbers of readers, *Público* and *Eldiario.es* are above the rest of the Spanish media. Both are in second and third place, respectively.

On Telegram, media companies and journalists have found a new way to improve their communicational relationships and develop their professional skills. This tool enables internal communication in newsrooms, and is also a source of information, as well as a news distribution channel with a more personalised multimedia service. According to (Sutikno *et al.*, 2016), Telegram is still growing, thanks to its ease of use and technical features.

The extent of its growth will depend to a large degree on its implementation in society, although it has already gained a foothold in newsrooms. Other authors, such as Doods (2019), go even further by pointing out the tendency toward instability experienced by professionals using this technology, due to the fact that messaging platforms have had such a strong impact on this business that journalists depend on them to carry out their work, and there is a fear that they might face professional consequences if they abandon its use.

This study reinforces the media's commitment to new methods of news distribution, yet this effort will not stop with the research herein. One of the limitations of this study is its exclusive focus on the national scene, which offers opportunities to expand the investigation in the future to the international realm.

It is hoped that these messaging platforms will be addressed with further study. Some examples would be to analyse the behaviour of "the media when faced with socially significant events, or over longer periods of time" (Sedano-Amundarain & Palomo-Torres, 2018), as well as the privacy of the information flow on Telegram, and even the recommendation of channels based on the preferences of each user (Dargahi-Nobari *et al.*, 2021).

Specifically, with regard to the field of content production and distribution on this platform, future research based on the present study could be conducted by expanding the object of analysis to the international scene, either by mapping the media using Telegram at the European level or, on the other hand, by carrying out a study similar to the present work yet applied to media in other countries on the same continent, which would allow a comparison to be made between those countries in addition to verification of the scope of this tool.

The possible entry of a larger number of users onto the platform, or the evolution of its content, leaves this study open for future investigation, despite having confirmed the hypotheses from which we started. In the meantime, the professional work of journalists is currently expected to continue with regard to its development within these formats.

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