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OBRA DIGITAL

EDITORIAL

E

pp. 6-7

Storytelling in the Digital Age

Storytelling en la Era Digital

Julia Catalina Serrano Cordero
Mar Binimelis-Adell

MONOGRAPHIC SECTION

INTRODUCTION

I

pp. 10-24

Platforms, influencers and distributed narratives

Plataformas, influencers y narrativas distribuidas

Joan Ramon Rodríguez-Amat

1

pp. 25-40

Alternate reality games (ARG) and fandom involvement in Taylor Swift's narrative universe

Juegos de realidad alternativa (ARG) e implicación del fandom en el universo narrativo de Taylor Swift

Lucía Garrido-Rodríguez
Alfonso Freire-Sánchez

2

pp. 41-53

Interactive and transmedia narratives in crime fiction for teaching literature

Narrativas interactivas y transmedia en las novelas policíacas para la enseñanza de la literatura

Irene Solanich Sanglas

3

pp. 55-71

Transmedia and identity construction in the music industry: the case of the visual album Montero by Lil Nas X

Transmedia y construcción de identidad en la industria musical: el caso del álbum visual Montero de Lil Nas X

Ana Sedeño-Valdellós
Ana Alicia Balbuena Morilla

4

pp. 73-101

"VTubers' transmedia capacity: narrative and content production expansion based on the intersection with fan-culture by the Hololive agency"

Capacidad transmedia de los VTubers: expansión narrativa y de producción de contenidos a partir de la intersección con la cultura fan por parte de la agencia Hololive

Rafael Dirques David Regis
Paula Gonçalves
Júlio César Ferreira
Gabriela Diniz

MISCELANEOUS SECTION

- 5**
pp. 103-115
The perennial commitment of Francesco Rosi in his most contemporary cinema, through his work *Dimenticare Palermo* (The Palermo connection)
El compromiso perenne de Francesco Rosi en su cine más contemporáneo, a través de su obra *Dimenticare Palermo* (Olvidar Palermo)
Ludovico Longhi
Ezequiel Ramon Pinat
- 6**
pp. 117-132
Teaching of Philosophy through television series: a case study of Merlí
La enseñanza de la filosofía a través de las series de televisión: estudio de caso de Merlí
Aurora Forteza Martínez
- 7**
pp. 133-148
The productive routines of the Units of Scientific Culture and Innovation (UCC+i). Conditions for the creation of science news
Las rutinas productivas de las Unidades de Cultura Científica y de la Innovación (UCC+i). Condiciones de la creación de noticias sobre ciencia
Susana Barberá Forcadell
- 8**
pp. 149-167
Comparative analysis of public agenda and media agenda in Ecuador throughout president Guillermo Lasso's first year in office.
Análisis comparativo de la agenda pública y mediática en Ecuador durante el primer año de mandato del presidente Guillermo Lasso.
Sebastian Carrasco-Hermida
- DOCTORAL THESIS
- 9**
pp. 169-184
Un análisis de la discriminación de género en el contexto de convergencia mediática de las periodistas españolas
An analysis of gender discrimination in the context of media convergence of Spanish female journalists
Nan Chen

ÍNDICE

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How stories are created and conveyed in media such as film, television, literature, video games, and digital platforms has evolved as they have adapted to new technologies and cultural practices. This evolution not only reflects but also shapes contemporary social experiences and values.

By creating an emotional connection with the audience, storytelling makes messages more persuasive and relevant. The use of narrative elements such as characters, conflict and resolutions makes stories more effective and memorable.

In the monographic section, the latest issue of *Obra Digital* contains articles analyzing how well-known artists utilize tools such as alternate

reality games (ARGs) to achieve greater engagement with their audience. It also studies how literature disseminated through interactive and transmedia products operates, as well as how queer groups are represented to promote a positive change in the construction of their identity and the creation of virtual avatars as a marketing strategy to encourage collective creation.

In the miscellaneous section, various topics are addressed, such as the analysis of films that, evidencing the political commitment of director Francesco Rosi, explore high-tension relationships such as that between Italian politics and the Mafia. Another prominent theme is the abil-

ity of didactic audiovisual series to reach young audiences with topics as varied as philosophy teaching through a study of the series Merli. In addition, the dissemination of scientific knowledge and its productive routines are examined by benchmarking the practices of institutional communication offices. Finally, a study analyzes the correspondence between the public and media agendas in Ecuador's traditional print and independent digital media.

On the other hand, in an effort to offer a space for disseminating knowledge generated in doctoral research, this edition addresses issues related to the persistence of gender discrimination affecting women journalists despite technological advances in both digital platforms and the media.

This edition aims to deepen readers' understanding of the rapid evolution of communication tools, their applications, and their impact on different audiences.



OBRA DIGITAL

Universitat de Vic - Universitat Central de Catalunya
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MONOGRAPHIC SECTION:

**Innovations in Narrative and Media:
Transmedia, Interactions and Culture**

Platforms, influencers and distributed narratives

Sports communication, beyond sports journalism

INTRODUCTION

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Joan Ramon Rodríguez-Amat, PhD - Principal Lecturer at the School of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Sheffield. His main area of research revolves around communicative spaces, the cultural constructions of time and space, citizenship, and power (see <http://communicativespaces.org>). This threefold discussion emerges at the intersection of research on media governance, cultural production and democratic debates; and the communities and identities - including sexual, national and cultural identities - that emerge from the geopolitics of social networking platforms and communication technologies.

The proliferation of platforms in global media ecosystems has changed the forms of stories, and narrative processes in their entirety throughout cultural production (Poell, Nieborg & Duffy, 2021). This special issue anchors this premise to explore through its articles several cases of narrative innovations and aspects related to transmedia, social interactions, and culture. This starting point opens and contributes to updating a territory of academic and research discussion of more than two decades of transformation, which is mixed with other social and cultural phenomena such as fandom (Booth's volume, 2018 or Fiske's classic, 2002), and the role of celebrities (see, for example,

Turner's work, 2010), and *influencers* (Booth & Matic, 2011).

This introduction is structured around the concept of platformization in tension with works on celebrities to propose the notion of *distributed storytelling* as a concept that allows explaining some of the narrative innovations that emerge in this context of ecosystem transformation. The case used for this case is the analysis of the activity on social networks of Shakira's song that later earned her the Latin Grammy of 2023 (Sandhar & Dacosta, 2023). This initial reflection is just one more example that will contribute to contextualizing the fertile possibilities and combinations both for the creation and for the

analysis and understanding of the stories that weave global culture.

The concept of platformization, already used by Helmond to refer to “the rise of the platform as the dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web and its consequences, in its historical context. Platformization entails the extension of social media platforms into the rest of the web and their drive to make external web data “platform ready.” (2015). It is therefore a phenomenon that permeates many aspects of modern society, leading to the development of platformization studies, which focus on professional and labor dynamics (Casilli & Posada, 2019; Pires & Tomasena, & Piña 2024), creative, and interactional interactions in which they follow one another thanks to the mediation of a complex digital interface that extends social, cultural, or professional interactions, through mobile screens and data warehouses, building a “connective world” (Van Dijk, Poell & DeWaal, 2018). This field of study is distinguished by its emphasis on cross-cutting aspects that extend from the conditions of content production to the conditions of interaction with them; and in between, aspects related to distributed production (throughout the length and breadth of networks) and its algorithmic distribution. For this reason, platformization studies also consider the role of fans and *influencers* in the dissemination and interpretation of cultural production, in addition to paying attention to the precarious economic conditions faced by platform workers.

Within the complexity and simultaneities that occur in platformization, several logics can be distinguished that overlap and mix: Economic, productive and labor logics on the one hand; legal and governance logics on the other; and the logics of cultural production and consumption. In this way, while it is insisted that platforms function as intermediaries between

online access communities and proprietary industrial infrastructures, and often extend their influence to encompass physical and economic value, they also generate conditions for the formation of cultural communities in frameworks of precarious legality (Schor, et al, 2020, Duffy, 2020). To distinguish these three aspects, this text opens the three fronts separately.

The economic and productive logic of platforms modifies the relations between producers and owners in complex ways because the forms of resource generation and financing are also divorced from the complex processes of distribution and consumption. Platforms such as fast food, or parcel transport, or care for the elderly (Ticona & Mateescu, 2018), are installed in logics of precariousness and interaction that under masks of virtuality – or online interactions – mask conditions of materiality that evade legal protection frameworks. There are many open research fronts that explore these relationship conditions and the social communities that emerge in the shadow of these structures and interfaces (examples include booktubers (Tomasena & Scolari, 2024), riders (Pires, Tomasena, & Piña, 2024) or YouTube communities (Pires, Masanet, Tomasena & Scolari, 2024).

Platform revenue and monetization models are also part of these productive and economic logics, and while platforms are often oriented towards cultural production, traditional revenue models have also evolved in favor of digital logics of impact and reception measures that update contemporary ad-based revenue streams, for example in the music sector. subscriptions, online sales, or live events (Marshall, 2013). These dynamics extend – in cascade – to cultural creators who find monetization opportunities in models that simultaneously feed on complex algorithmic logics – and incomprehensible to the creators themselves – that send them to create in uncertain, precarious

and trans-platform environments (see, for example, Glatt, 2022). Among the platforms that complement the work of creators with much more personalized monetization models are microfinancing, or direct support from fans through platforms such as Patreon (Bonifacio, Hair, Wohn, 2023; Regner 2021) or OnlyFans (Hamilton, et al, 2022) among others. In this context, professional content creation is mixed and confused with the privacy of artists and with content created by fans or non-professional creators who distribute content through platforms and social networks. User-generated content (UGC) is spread and multiplied by platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, allowing individuals or small groups to create and disseminate content without large production budgets (classically anticipated by Jenkins, 2006b).

These dynamics that define the economic and productive logic of the platforms, generate – as a by-product of this activity – rich data repositories that turn the platforms into databases that can be analyzed and processed to identify – behaviors, models, patterns, and possibilities of demographic, sociocultural, or sexual analysis – that the platforms can return to creators to help them develop content by improving the quality of production (Anderson, 2006); or selling to help businesses determine consumer profiles; or to the security forces to identify models of criminal behavior, in data, dataism, or dataveillance (Van Dijk, 2014). This dynamic of monetization and datafication places large platforms at the top of a “winner-takes-all” structure, as Thomas Poell described it in his inaugural lecture at the University of Amsterdam’s Chair of Data, Culture, and Institutions (Poell, 2022). And although it could be argued whether it is more of a pyramid fraud, the exploitation model is clear.

From a legal and organizational point of view, platforms also happen in an intermediate zone of alegal or precarious opportunity. Many platforms operate globally, often within tax and regulatory havens, and adhere to selective sets of laws (Bloch-Webba, 2019). This dynamic has turned the idea of a platform into an economic and legal model that favors corporations; in this sense, corporations such as Pornhub have adopted the platform model (Rodriguez-Amat, & Belinskaya, 2023). For example, ride-sharing platforms such as Uber and Lyft connect passengers with drivers and control access to data, pricing structures, and user experiences, although users may perceive them as neutral service providers (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016). In addition, complex negotiations over access to resources such as data, information, decision-making processes, and legal frameworks further highlight the intricate dynamics at play (classically, Gillespie’s original work, 2010, and its development in 2017; Plantin et al., 2016) that establish conditions for publication, sharing and moderation of content. Economic processes, including profit generation, algorithmic management, and working conditions, are integral to these negotiations.

Precisely the issue of data is one of the key aspects that challenges the function and dynamics of platforms. Legal and ethical challenges include those related to copyright, fair use, and intellectual property, especially in the area of user-generated content and remix culture (Lessig, 2004; Sarikakis, Krug, Rodriguez-Amat, 2017). Lately, however, the discussion about the ownership of available content has shifted to the debate around the databases of generative artificial intelligence models. Examples of this new dynamic are Apple’s recent announcement of an agreement with OpenAI for its data to also be used to train ChatGPT (Kleinman, McMahon, 2024).

These legal and organisational frameworks, which slip platform logics between economic, labour, productive and legal precariousness, articulate cultural production more and more clearly and frame the forms of participation and production, consumption and distribution of content. While cultural platforms are built on the principle that they offer unprecedented opportunities for creators, they also present challenges, such as sustainability for creators and managing complex issues related to copyright and intellectual property (Sanchez-Cartas, 2021). These dynamics continue to shape and redefine the landscape of cultural production in the digital age.

In this sense, the cultural and community and platform logic extends symbolically from the ways in which platforms exert influence on cultural production, consumption patterns, and cultural diffusion, affecting both the intangible and material aspects of the creative industries (Duffy, Poell, Nieborg, 2019). These forms of influence include social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube that have revolutionized cultural consumption and interpretation by “democratizing” access to cultural production, and allowing artists, writers, filmmakers, and creators to reach global audiences and circumventing traditional mechanisms of control (Burgess and Green, 2009) and misleadingly feeding narratives about networks and platforms as spaces of “free access” and “solidarity” between participants (Yu, Trere, Bonini, 2022). It is true, however, that platforms have amplified diverse voices and perspectives, fostering greater inclusion within the cultural landscape, and that they foster hybridity and cultural fusion, leading to innovative forms of expression and dynamic feedback-driven creative processes (Lobato & Thomas, 2015).

Platforms facilitate audience participation and interaction, giving rise to fan communities, fan

fiction, remix culture, and active engagement with cultural products (Baym, 2015). The interaction between social media and traditional media involves a dynamic exchange of content, in which social media discourse shapes traditional media articles and vice versa. This exchange is facilitated by the convergence of different communities and audiences, which allows for the rapid dissemination of social media content (Giles, 2018). Traditional media content also finds a digital foothold, subject to wide dissemination and commentary in the online sphere. Social media platforms, particularly Twitter, exemplify the power of reciprocal exchange and community sharing, revealing intricate networks and patterns of content dissemination (Passman et al., 2014).

In the same way that platforms define conditions for interactivity and interaction thanks to the design of their interfaces, they also define the conditions for creativity. The rise of ephemeral content, popularized by platforms such as *Snapchat* and *Instagram Stories*, emphasizes immediacy and authenticity in content creation (Leaver et al., 2020). They are new forms of narrative creation that call for new forms of research and new conceptual models that help explain the processes that move viral through global networks, for example, memes (Gebbers, & Pilipets, 2024; Carpenter, 2024).

However, platforms’ sophisticated content management algorithms have far-reaching implications for cultural consumption patterns and in turn significantly influence users’ exposure to content, defining which artists or genres gain prominence and provoking debates about algorithms among users (e.g. Silva, Chen, Zhu, 2024, or Prey, Esteve-Del-Valle, 2024).

The platform model, moreover, is mixed with social media discussions and involves various entities, including traditional celebrities, in-

ternet celebrities, journalists, commentators, media organizations, high-profile or verified accounts, renowned fans, parody accounts, companies, brands, organizations, and bots. Each of these actors contributes uniquely to the intricate tapestry of social media discourse (Davis et al., 2018; Alterkavi & Erbay, 2021; Ferrara, 2020).

Influencers are agents who have a great capacity for dissemination because they have accumulated a large number of followers. Their activity shapes trends, disseminates content and influences consumer behaviour, which significantly affects the reception and popularity of cultural products (Abidin, 2016, Zhang, 2023). While celebrities often come from high-profile entertainment, sports, politics, or other fields, and their lives and actions are subject to intense public scrutiny and media coverage. In this sense, celebrities have a high public profile and can influence public opinion and behavior due to their visibility and social status (see, for example, the work of Dyer, 2019).

The centrality of networks and connections in the cultivation of celebrities is well established in some fields (Currid-Halkett, 2010). Online celebrities, in particular, rely heavily on strategic networking facilitated by mechanisms such as multichannel networks and collaborative ventures (Lobato, 2016; Rasmussen, 2018). Celebrity culture emphasizes interpersonal relationships, extending beyond individuals to include their associates, partners, and family members, who can also achieve celebrity status (Rojek, 2001; Deller, 2016).

The discourse around the private lives of celebrities, characterized by gossip and speculation, is prevalent in fan communities and has gained prominence on social media platforms (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Prins, 2020). The analytical discourse based on fans' interpretations of ce-

lebrities' creative products further contributes to the complexity of this interaction (Zhang, 2021). Fans, anti-fans, and general audiences often compete with celebrities and their proxies for narrative control (Dare-Edwards, 2014; Baym, 2018).

Platforms such as Twitter create a "context collapse", in which diverse audiences converge within a single social context (boyd, 2008). Navigating these multiple audiences is crucial for celebrities to maintain their public image and manage impressions (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). This underscores the importance of networking, relationships, and audience engagement in online celebrity culture.

Fan work encompasses a wide range of practices, from altruistic activities in the "gift economy" to monetized efforts (Chin, 2018). This includes the dissemination and recirculation of content on social media, often on behalf of celebrities and fan-centric entities, regardless of explicit endorsement. Tensions arise around ownership, authority, copyright, image governance, and the potential exploitation of unpaid labor (Jenkins, 2006).

In fan communities, certain individuals gain elevated status as "big-name fans" or "super fans," who possess substantial "fan capital" due to their sustained engagement, frequent contributions, entertainment value, demonstrated talents or skills, and access to insider information or individuals within the fan community (Hills, 2006; Sarikakis, Krug, & Rodríguez-Amat, 2017).

Shakira, and the distributed narrative

One of the cases that has marked the year 2023 is that of the phenomenon Shakira and Pique, which exploded in January with the publication of the song that anticipated the couple's

divorce, and rounded off in November with the confirmation of the Latin Grammy (Sandhar & Dacosta, 2023).

Shakira exemplifies stardom as a transnational celebrity, her music transcends gender and linguistic boundaries. Her ethnic identity and her portrait as an idealized Colombian and Latin American citizen make her a figure embraced by fans, political figures, and commercial brands (Cepeda, 2003; Fuchs, 2010; Douglas, 2022). Shakira's ability to cross cultural boundaries, negotiate feminine archetypes, and navigate her complex identities enhances her transnational appeal (Gontovnik, 2010).

Shakira's relationship with Gerard Piqué, a prominent figure in football, further underscores their collective influence as a Spanish-speaking and transcontinental power couple. Their partnership is significant for its appeal within Spanish-speaking communities and beyond (Quiroga, 2017). Shakira's music, which includes compositions that reflect personal experiences such as her separation from Piqué, illustrates her use of music as a means of personal expression (Doyle, 2013; Goodman & Carlson, 2014) in addition to their influence within the Spanish-speaking world, and their interactions through platforms with fan communities.

The example of Shakira and Pique can be studied as a reference opportunity to understand processes of innovation in the formation of narratives that emerge through social media platforms and that contribute to critical discussions about the creative industries and the political economy of *influencers* and celebrities. In this way, the dynamics of interactions between fandom and audiences, and the emerging platforms and music industry around the release of the song "SHAKIRA || BZRP Music Sessions #53" in January 2023 helps to open up the

space of cases occupied by this special issue of *Obra Digital*, as a case of distributed narrative, that is, a bouquet of stories that are disseminated through platforms and that acquire a distributed nature that is autonomous from more or less planned commercial narratives.

Computational methods (Trilling, van Atteveldt & Arcila Calderon, 2022) were used to collect and analyze Twitter data focused on Shakira's transnational stardom and her relationship with Gerard Piqué. Using a Python script (modified since Padilla, 2020), tweets were collected between January 8 and 16, 2023. The focus was on hashtags and keywords such as "piqué", "shakira", "BZRP", "Bizarrap", "mz53", "Piqué", "Clara Chía" and "ClaraChía". This method yielded a dataset of 6,815,565 tweets, most of them in Spanish (5,735,899), English (373,900), Portuguese (273,307) and French (72,691).

The findings of this study illuminate orchestrated promotional strategies and community-driven reactions within Shakira and Piqué's *fandom*. One notable aspect is the "Controlled/ Programmed Explosion," where strategically timed press releases generated anticipation for the song's release. Key *influencers* and prominent fans were recruited to amplify engagement, which contributed significantly to the campaign's reach. After the release, "Ripples, Branches, and Continuations" were detected, characterized by interpretive chains where fans explored, discussed, and created parodies of the song. These activities fostered parallel narratives and interconnected conversations, allowing an interpretive network to emerge in the hands of fans. This communal interaction was further underscored by the formation of distinct factions within the *fandom*. Fans aligned themselves with Shakira or Piqué, expressing their loyalty through hashtags such as #teampique and #teamshakira.

On the periphery of this very personal activity – of celebrities, influencers, and fans – new agents emerged that further developed the conversation and narrative networks. The involvement of corporate entities such as Casio and Renault opened the front for “networked brand management-driven responses.” These companies strategically aligned themselves with Shakira or Piqué to improve their brand visibility, demonstrating the interplay between celebrity culture and corporate branding. The social media managers of both corporations made gestures back and forth, starting by encouraging divergence and polarization, to end up retracting and returning to the central space of the discursive range.

In this sense, the research highlights an intricate dynamic of the platform’s logic, revealing a pyramidal scheme of *fandom* and network capital that opens up to a dispersed participation of users who end up appropriating the narrative generating new and decentralized journeys. The results emphasize the initial and orchestrated nature of the promotional strategies and organic, community-driven responses within Shakira and Piqué’s *fandom*; but they also underscore the opportunity to dedicate future research to the peripheries of these networks. Only by exploring outside the center of cultural-capital can one understand the real dynamics of fan engagement and their dynamics of narrative creation, as well as generate methodological and conceptual opportunities to capture that form of narrative innovation.

Innovations in Storytelling and Media

This special issue of *Obra Digital* compiles several examples of different nature of innovative narrative experiences and studies that explore these innovations. Each contribution delves into the specific applications and impacts of these

strategies, highlighting their importance in contemporary cultural and media landscapes: the body of contributions is made up of four articles that offer a range of cases and analyses: the first explores Alternative Reality Games versus the narrative universe of Taylor Swift (Lucía Garrido-Rodríguez y Alfonso Freire-Sánchez); the second, considers interactive crime novels and gamification theories as educational tools (Irene Solanich Sanglas). The third article is about the experience of rapper Lil Nas X and the transmedia strategies that surround his album “Montero” (2021) (Ana Sedeño-Valdellós y Ana Alicia Balbuena Morilla); and the fourth contribution considers the case of hololive, the Japanese virtual talent agency consisting of virtual YouTubers as a transmedia experience (Rafael Dirques David Regis, Paula Gonçalves, Júlio César Ferreira y Gabriela Diniz). The fifth article, in *doctoral thesis results section*, focuses on studying gender inequality in journalism in times of digital convergence and platformization (Nan Chen). These five articles open a space for narrative innovations and conceptual and methodological tools to study them within the framework of the media ecosystems of digital platforms

Alternate reality (ARG) games are a powerful tool for engaging fans within expansive narrative universes. In recent times, the impact of alternative reality games on the environmental knowledge of first-year students has been explored (Xiong, et al, 2024). Or to improve student learning in museums (Liang, et al., 2024). These games mix fiction with reality, creating immersive experiences for participants and help, for example, students to solve problems and explore solutions in game mode while developing their knowledge. In learning frameworks it is a very useful and creative way to increase the participation and involvement of students in the learning process; in fan frameworks,

success repeats and allows these principles of connection and engagement to be applied with brand strategies, illustrating the potential for ARGs to improve consumer engagement and loyalty. The article featured in this volume is a study of Taylor Swift's use of ARG and explores how different elements of the game are integrated into what becomes a communication strategy and narrative universe. The study consists of identifying the presence of the defining characteristics of successful ARGs following the theoretical foundations established by academics such as McGonigal (2011). In the case of Taylor Swift's communication initiative, the research positively identifies 19 of the 20 defining characteristics and concludes that Swift's communication strategy excels in the expert use of these elements to create a cohesive and engaging experience for fans across multiple platforms.

The possibilities of didactic exploration are also the focus of the second article of the volume. It uses the genre of crime fiction to investigate the didactic potential of interactive and transmedia narratives. The study analyzes how these narratives can be adapted, through interactive designs and transmedia, to be applied in educational contexts, and proposes innovative methods for teaching literature to secondary school students. The study is based on theoretical models such as that of Murray (1997), who highlighted the potential of digital environments to create attractive and participatory narrative experiences; and extends to educational theories of gamification and experiential learning, which suggest that interactive and game-based learning can improve student engagement and understanding (Gee, 2007; Deterding, 2015). The study describes the process of designing an engaging, educational, interactive narrative aimed at improving the teaching of literature; and in doing so, delves into the

practical aspects of the creation of interactive and transmedia crime novels for educational purposes, based on concrete examples and discussing the theoretical foundations of interactive narrative design.

The third article leaves the educational aspect and returns to the music industry, connecting again with the case of Taylor Swift. In this case, however, it is about the transmedia strategies employed by Lil Nas X in his visual album 'Montero' (2021) to understand how these strategies build the musician's identity and audience participation. Drawing on cultural and multimodal analysis, the study examines how the integration of visual motifs and social media content contributes to the construction of a queer identity and engages audiences through a cohesive narrative experience. To carry out this project, the theoretical frameworks of the construction of identity and media representation are rescued (Hall, 1997; Butler, 1990), and extend to digital narratives and transmedia through a multimodal analysis that allows us to understand the complex interaction between the different forms of media in contemporary storytelling (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). The study allows us to find out the potential of this rich narrative strategy to articulate and amplify marginalized voices. The intertextuality and cultural references within the visual album and its social media-related content underscore the innovative narrative techniques that define Lil Nas X's narrative approach.

The fourth article studies the world of VTubers – or virtual *influencers*. Recent research is dedicated to exploring the ways in which VTubers challenge the question of *influencer* authenticity (Schmieder, 2024). The VTuber phenomenon triggers debates about artificial intelligence and digital influencers and has generated a lot of exploratory work recently on ways to connect

with fans and their veracity (see for example Martin, et al 2024).

The article in this volume looks at the Japanese virtual talent agency Hololive and how it exemplifies the intersection of participatory culture and transmedia storytelling. The study explores how Hololive leverages the combination of narratives and engagement to increase audience engagement and engagement. The study provides insights into the mechanisms behind the success of VTubers and their fan communities, reflecting broader trends in digital culture and participatory media. The research highlights the role of fan-produced content and participatory culture in the broader success of VTuber's media. This reflects the significant impact of user-generated content and fan communities in shaping contemporary media landscapes.

In an era of complex platformization and convergence of the media, gender inequality in the journalistic professions remains a major challenge. A study investigates the factors that affect the careers of Spanish women journalists. Analyzing data from 387 surveyed professionals, the study shows the need for systemic change to achieve gender equality in the profession. Inequalities reflect ongoing struggles for representation and equity in media professions already systematically described (e.g., in Byerly, 2023; Melki & Mallat, 2019). Based on

the results, the article offers recommendations to promote gender equality in journalism, based on feminist studies on the media.

The studies presented in this special issue collectively underscore the transformative potential of interactive narratives and media convergence in various domains from advocacy in the music industry, to redefining gender inequalities in the professional sector. From music and education to journalism and fan culture, these innovative strategies not only redefine storytelling, but also foster deeper audience engagement and contribute to cultural and identity formation. Through the compilation of these various case studies, this issue provides valuable insights into the changing landscape of narrative and media and their opportunities for analysis.

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Alternate reality games (ARG) and fandom involvement in Taylor Swift's narrative universe

Juegos de realidad alternativa (ARG) e implicación del fandom en el universo narrativo de Taylor Swift

1

ARTICLE



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Abstract

The study aims to determine which elements of singer Taylor Swift's alternate reality games (ARGs) are integrated into her communication strategy and narrative universe. To achieve this, it proposes extrapolating the characteristics that ARGs possess according to specialized literature and applying these variables from the Swift Universe as a successful ARG model applicable to commercial brands. The results demonstrate that the ARG fulfills 19 out of 20 defined characteristics, and its communication strategy revolves around a narrative universe that has expanded across numerous platforms and networks over the years.

Key words

Narrative universe, Taylor Swift, alternate reality games, ARG, personal brand.

Resumen

El estudio tiene el objetivo de determinar qué elementos de los juegos de realidad alterna (ARG) de la cantante Taylor Swift se integran en su estrategia de comunicación y su universo narrativo. Para ello, se plantea detectar las características que poseen los ARG según la literatura especializada y extrapolar estas variables del *universo Swift* como modelo de éxito de ARG aplicable a marcas comerciales. Los resultados demuestran que el ARG cumple con 19/20 características definidas y que su estrategia de comunicación pivota en un universo narrativo que se ha expandido en multitud de plataformas y redes durante años.

Palabras clave

Universo narrativo, Taylor Swift, juegos de realidad alterna, ARG, marca personal.

1. INTRODUCTION

Alternate reality games, or ARGs (Alternate Reality Games), are fragmented, complex, and gamified narratives (Rojas, 2020) that combine elements of the real world and virtual elements to create an immersive and highly participatory game experience (Piñeiro-Otero & Costa, 2015). This typology derives from audiovisual, interactive, and transmedia narratives that have developed "strategies and mechanisms to encourage collaboration, participation, and involvement of audiences" (Gifreu, 2017, p. 7).

In this context, the manuscript aims to investigate the relationship between the narrative universe of the American singer Taylor Swift and alternate reality games (ARGs). This is done to determine which elements of this interactive storytelling technique are integrated into the 360° communication strategy and the construction of the Swift universe and are associat-

ed with the personal brand of one of the most influential and popular artists in the music and entertainment industry today.

2. BACKGROUND AND STATE OF THE ART

An ARG is a narrative that "requires a great deal of cooperation from participants and articulates activities inside and outside the media space" (Scolari, 2013, p.265). It is also categorized as transmedia because it is "a story composed of a series of fragments that may be disintegrated in different media; which must be reconstructed by users" (Villén, 2017, p.125-126), as if it were a puzzle. The ecosystems where the narrative develops significantly impact the plot and offer interesting options for the player to enter and participate, especially in those online, as they are "spaces capable of constructing stories that expand fictional worlds" (Villén,

2017, p.120). These require the construction of narrative universes where “other elements such as gamification, transmedia marketing or the creation of mixed narratives come to life” (Freire-Sánchez *et al.*, 2023, p.21).

According to Montola (2010), alternative reality games originated in Life Action Role Player, traditional board role-playing games that appeared in the 1970s and are characterized by users adopting a role under certain conditions and playing characters in a fictional world. They also point to video games as their origin (Montes, 2010), especially the adventure games created by Ron Gilbert, such as Maniac Mansion (1988) and Monkey Island (1990), a type of video game based on exploration and puzzle-solving in an interactive environment. Paradoxically, according to the acronym and their origin, these games are based on the principle or axiom: This is not a game, as their elements mimic reality and are perfectly integrated into the universes in which they occur. This means that the ARG does not look like a game and that the players forget that they are playing.

Thus, the line between reality and fiction is blurred. ARGs do not fully adhere to the definition of a game; however, due to the intentionality of the design that shapes them in terms of the relationship that is established between the dynamics and mechanics that govern it and the aspiration to win and reach the end of the question, it maintains similarities and characteristics. However, it should be noted that gamification is, to paraphrase Werbach (2012), the use of game elements and game design techniques in non-game contexts, and it is also considered a driver of ARGs. Huotari and Hamari (2012) claim that this technique transforms non-game environments into more interactive and fun spaces. Ramirez (2020), on the other hand, points out that gamification “has to en-

tain, engage, build loyalty and enhance the experience” (p.26). This puts the focus on generating passion, motivation, and participation.

The internal structure and the elements that constitute gamification, both mechanics and dynamics, are largely extrapolable to ARGs, hence their common denominator. On the one hand, the most common mechanics that can be present in both techniques are the accumulation of points, levels, incentives with prizes or gifts, the existence of leaderboards, the proposal of challenges, missions, and challenges that are achievable and motivational. On the other hand, as far as the dynamics are concerned, we talk about, among others, the aspiration to improve the status offered, the search for rewards, and the pursuit of the feeling of achievement and competition (Contreras, 2018).

The idea behind an ARG - whose narrative usually revolves around searching for a missing person, stopping a catastrophe, or solving an enigma - arises in very early forms of entertainment, such as treasure hunt games or mystery books (Lungo & Melon, 2016). Likewise, the first cinematic embodiment of an ARG is considered to be in the film *The Game* (Fincher, 1997). However, it was not until 2001 that alternative reality games took shape as such and officially materialized in the first ARG in history, with *The Beast*, created by Elan Lee in 2001 and developed by Microsoft and Warner Bros. to promote the film *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (Spielberg, 2001). The ARG lasted over three months and generated millions of interactions in forums and online communities, as seen in its platforms and RSS.

Therefore, it is not surprising that new proposals emerged that immediately gained popularity among users due to the results obtained from the implementation of ARGs in promo-

tional actions and their potential for application in other fields (Estanyol *et al.*, 2013). This was the case of Majestic (2001), Perplex City (2005), and I Love Bees (2004); the latter was part of the advertising campaign for the video game Halo 2 (Bungie, 2004). Some ARGs are on the Guinness World Records list, such as Why So Serious? (2007), which was designed by 42 Entertainment to promote the film *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) and was active for fifteen months, during which more than ten million people from 75 different countries participated (Piñeiro-Otero & Costa, 2015).

The ARGs evolved and magnified in size, hand in hand with new technologies and communication channels up to the present day (Rojas, 2020; Ruíz-García, 2022). Although there are certain discrepancies among theorists regarding the temporal division of the history of ARGs (Ruíz-García, 2022), experts agree that the boom occurred in what they consider the second wave, with proposals such as *Jejune Institute* (2011), *Cicada 3310* (2014) and *The Black Watchmen* (2014).

The IGDA (International Game Developers Association) identifies five general typologies of alternate reality games (Martin *et al.*, 2006). Firstly, promotional games are the result of marketing strategies. They are characterized by establishing links between the brand and its followers, which makes them believe that the game has been designed for them. Due to their high media impact, promotional games generate conversations and content that become advertising content. They are also characterized by the high interaction, emotional intensity, and immersion they offer their players.

Secondly, there are product or service games. These ARGs are products; therefore, something in return is required to participate. An example

of this typology is *Majestic* (2001). Another typology is the single-player ARG, designed for individual solving of clues and puzzles, which goes against the defining principles of ARGs and is, therefore, more of a surrogate for alternate reality games. In contrast, base games, created entirely by brand fans, can be considered ARGs in their entirety. These may be wholly original or a continuation of an existing idea from the brand's narrative universe. Finally, we find educational games designed as a proposal for a new learning model (Kapp, 2012) due to their collaborative character.

The typologies identified by the IGDA are not exclusive. In other words, more than one category can be present in an ARG. It should be added that ARGs are mainly based on three pillars: the narrative component, the action mechanics, and community interaction (De Beer & Bothma, 2016; Aldegani & Caballero, 2022). The narrative that integrates an ARG is atomized (Scolari, 2013); that is, it is presented fragmented in a series of pieces that players must find and unify to create a coherent narrative thread that makes sense of the story (Stewart, 2006). At the same time, these pieces are determined by a series of encrypted clues designed to be deciphered by the users.

The story that is presented and eventually shaped, as in any narrative, unfolds on a time axis, but the players' interaction develops the narrative thread's structure. This means it is a spontaneous narrative arising from interaction and what the individuals determine (De Beer & Bothma, 2016). Furthermore, it will continue based on the player's progress and not on what the creator wants. All this is done to encourage and generate a specific obligation to resolve the clues and problems from a group decision. The aim is to enhance the user experience and the link between the player and the game.

Moreover, in the narrative of an ARG, there is direct contact between characters and players (Rojas, 2020), which makes the user empathize deeply with the story and become part of it, also due to their essential role in the course of the story. Even so, even though individuals are playing, they are not shown in the game and the interaction with the characters as just another character or through an avatar; instead, they “retain their identity and do not pass through a threshold between real life and simulation” (Sicart, 2014, p.60). In this way, the action mechanics of alternate reality games are based on the search for clues and the determination of the position/protagonism that these take in the ARG story; therefore, it is sustained by discovery and secrecy (Scolari, 2013). According to Stewart (2011), the game is more relaxed if no one knows what they are doing or why. Moreover, although initially, the correlation between all the pieces of the narrative is practically null, they are all a determining factor in the discourse of the plot.

On the other hand, ARGs take place in both a simulated and an everyday world (De Beer & Bothma, 2016), combining the media and the extra-media (Scolari, 2013). Indeed, ARGs are more dynamic if they reach viewers through as many different conduits as possible because narrative expansions are not limited to a particular medium but “depend largely on the technologies that are available in the specific temporal context in which they are developed” (Aldegani & Caballero, 2022, p.45). These channels and formats can include virtual reality, augmented reality, and geolocation.

Structurally, in an ARG, the beginning is known - once it is discovered - and what the purpose is, but the end is not known because it can change; it is regenerative. The game begins with a dynamic of searching for one or several

clues (trails) scattered through different media that “can appear encrypted in paratexts, websites, blogs, videos, emails, SMS, audios, texts or objects from the real world to capture the attention of the largest possible audience” (Villén, 2017, p.125). Once these materials and the entry point to the game, called rabbit hole or trailhead, have been detected, the player decides whether or not to enter the ARG.

From that moment on, as they progress in the search and solving of clues, users spontaneously and naturally establish a knowledge of what the game field is, what their roles are, and what actions they can perform. ARGs do not always establish a clear register that structures and organizes their stages; therefore, it can be considered that the player will not understand the structure that has led them to the end of the game until the game is finished. Likewise, the game's rules and how they affect the narrative are established mainly by the players as the game unfolds (McGonigal, 2011). This turns out to be one of the elements that differentiates them, to a large extent, from gamified proposals.

This mechanic that sustains ARGs is possible thanks to the figure of the puppet masters, who are responsible for producing, regulating, and guiding the game. Experts such as McGonigal (2006) or Kim *et al.* (2009) play a crucial role in ARGs; they establish themselves as the point of connection between the players and the narrative. Puppeteers design the clues that players will encounter, and that will motivate them to continue playing. Consequently, they are constantly listening to what the players are saying, agreeing, and determining the resolution or continuity of the narrative thread to determine the channels and clues that will give succession to the story and reach the final objective for which it has been designed (Janes, 2015).

This active role makes it clear that the figure of the puppeteer requires a lot of creativity and adaptability, as the players may not act as expected. As Schell (2008) argues, games are about following the rules and breaking them. It may be that users do not find certain clues or that the difficulty of these clues slows down the game and, consequently, the course of the narrative. According to Rojas (2020), "ARGs teach designers when to hold the strings of the game like puppeteers and when to let go" (p.7). The involvement is so high that "new experiments have taken the puppeteer and turned him into a character within the narrative, who leaves cryptic messages to the audience intended to connect him to the story" (Rojas, 2020, p.7).

Regarding fandom interaction, it should be noted that "a game only exists when it is played" (Hunicke, 2004, p.429), which implies the need to make the ARG want to be played. Under this premise, alternative reality games move, especially games that are born, live, and end depending on the player's will to continue playing. The search for the link of complete dependence that is established between game and player is the engine and the explanation of everything that happens in an ARG and, therefore, a basic principle that guides them in their development and success is that "the participants are the stars" (Scolari, 2013, p.268). Each challenge and each clue has to get "the player to intervene and perform actions beyond a mere interpretation exercise" (Aldegani & Caballero, 2022, p.45). The user has to search, think, and fully immerse (McGonigal, 2011) naturally and deeply (De Beer & Bothma, 2016) in the narrative. They have to internalize everything thrown at them and accept that the elements of the game merge with their reality.

It should be pointed out that when we speak of a player, we should not simply think of them

as an individual acting alone but as a user who is part of a collective configured with a common identity. This identity captures the most essential traits of the members of the collective, which creates a shared and coordinated self-awareness and *modus operandi* (Turner, 2010).

ARGs thus create communities where the feeling of belonging is persistent and solidified. Without these interconnections, they could not be fully developed since, due to the multi-media and narrative expansion that arises - which moves both in real life and online life - it would be impossible to solve the enigma by oneself. Therefore, the very generation of clues itself is based on the intention that it should result in a collective, cooperative, and participatory experience (Scolari, 2013; Stewart, 2011), where the effort is coordinated (Jerret *et al.*, 2017) and the resolution of each clue that gives continuity to the story depends on the use of collective intelligence (Hook, 2017).

As for the characteristic of collective intelligence, it refers to what Jenkins (2002) calls *hive-mind* and, according to Lévy (2004), to "an intelligence that is distributed everywhere, constantly valorized, coordinated in real-time, leading to an effective mobilization of competences" (p.20). This intelligence of many, unified in a single line of thinking, is related to the emerging participatory culture that has been solidifying over time due to the synergy of three trends described by Jenkins (2006): the new tools and technologies that enable co-creation, the sub-cultures that promote the *Do It Yourself* discourse, and the media ecology.

New tools and technologies allow consumers to save, annotate, appropriate, and distribute the content found in the media. From the behaviors from which this participatory culture

derives, it is evident that the interaction and connection between users, especially in ARGs, is based on communication and information technologies. Initially, the first virtual communities of alternative reality games lived in blogs and chats; nowadays, social networks are considered the backbone of ARGs, as these digital social experiences mainly take place. Finally, it is worth highlighting the validity and topicality of ARGs, as Ruíz-García (2022) states: “They are ludonarrative experiences that are alive and present, minority, although with an effervescence fueled by new uses and new technological forms that enliven and reproduce them” (p. 385).

As far as fandom’s contribution is concerned, it is worth mentioning that ARGs are used for the phenomenon of transcreation and transauthorship, which, to paraphrase Papadaki and Volakis (2022), is produced by the characteristics of the current transmedia environment that cause synergies between many production companies and cultural industries with the users’ creations or the original creators of the alternate game.

As can be seen, studies on ARGs and the transmedia and interactive narrative universes that form the ecosystem in which they develop are very prolific and offer a very multifaceted vision of the state of the question. As mentioned above, the study’s main objective is to investigate the relationship between the narrative universe of the American singer Taylor Swift and the ARGs. In this way, it aims to determine which elements of this interactive storytelling technique are integrated into the 360° communication strategy and the construction of the Swift universe. It is associated with the personal brand of one of the most influential and famous artists in the music and entertainment industry today.

Singer-songwriter, producer, director, and actress Taylor Alison Swift is one of the biggest American stars in the world. In her 17-year career, she has released ten original albums and four re-recordings. Since her early days, Swift has been committed to expanding the musical experience beyond simply listening to her songs; she engages her fans, known as Swifties, in the imagery she has built up after the release of a new album. For this reason, it is appropriate for us to extract the main characteristics that have defined the recent history of ARGs according to the existing literature and to check whether the ‘Swift universe’ and its relationship with its fandom could be considered an ARG, even if it has not been defined as such.

3. METHODOLOGY

To determine which elements of singer Taylor Swift’s alternate reality games are integrated into her communication strategy and narrative universe, an interdisciplinary analysis methodology used by other authors such as Castelló-Martínez (2020) or Vidal-Mestre *et al.* (2023) is proposed. This methodology has made it possible to extract the main characteristics of the existing literature to date on ARG games and to establish the state of the art (McGonigal, 2011; Stewart, 2011; Scolari, 2013; Villén, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2019; Rojas, 2020; Ruíz-García, 2022, among others). The following table summarizes these main characteristics that allow us to analyze the Swift universe:

Table 1

Summary of the characteristics of an ARG extracted from the literature review

Base	Characteristics	Referents
Narrative	Fragmented narrative.	Jenkins, 2006; Scolari, 2013
	Dynamic narrative and co-created with the players.	De Beer y Bothma, 2016
	Story integrated with the game and the players.	Aldegani y Caballero, 2022
	It is developed on a temporal axis.	Scolari, 2013
	Direct contact between characters and players.	Rojas, 2020; Aldegani y Caballero, 2022
	Players keep their identity.	Sicart, 2014
	Creation of a transmedia narrative universe.	Freire-Sánchez et al., 2023
	Action mechanics	It is based on the discovery of trails.
Rabbit hole.		Stewart, 2006; Villén Higuera, 2017
Combines both online and offline worlds.		Scolari, 2013; Aldegani y Caballero, 2022
There is no structure to guide the game.		Stewart, 2011
Roles are established spontaneously.		Aldegani y Caballero, 2022
The players mostly set the rules.		McGonigal, 2011
There is a puppet master.		Kim et al., 2009; Rojas, 2020

Base	Characteristics	Referents
Fandom	Participation and collaboration.	Scolari, 2013; Ruíz-García, 2022
	Voluntary and natural immersion.	McGonigal, 2011; De Beer y Bothma, 2016
	Coordination among players.	Jerret et al., 2017
	Sense of belonging and group identity.	Jenkins, 2006; Turner, 2010
	Hive-mind. Use of collective intelligence.	Lévy, 2004; Hook, 2017
	Social and mainly digital experience.	Kim et al., 2009

Note: Own elaboration.

4. RESULTS

To analyze the ‘Swift universe,’ on the one hand, the publication of each of her works has been separated into what the artist has called different ‘eras.’ Each one maintains a particular aesthetic and has its own identity, thanks to linking the LP to a specific color and objects, among other resources. But they all follow the same narrative thread, which gives continuity and expands or changes the course of the story she has been creating album after album.

On the other hand, it has meant that everything that encompasses being in each of her eras, with their respective events - such as the release of a music video - as well as the journey and leap between them, has come about as a result of a process of collective discovery of clues and deciphering of cryptic messages by the fans. Fans become brilliant detectives who dialogue with each other to discover and

understand the clues, called Easter eggs, intentionally left by Swift; they also create their theories. The singer listens to what the fandom collectively decides and thinks and, based on these guesses, is inspired and sometimes even directly follows up on the cryptic game.

She mainly did this in his early days as a singer because she wanted people to pay attention to her lyrics. So, she decided to incorporate grammatically unjustified capital letters into some of the words in the lyrics of the songs found in the CD booklets. This way, if people paid attention and put all the capitalized letters together, a word or phrase was formed that explained what the song or album was about. However, it was with their album *Reputation* (2017) that the game went to another level, and its development expanded to many more channels, which meant that, nowadays, this dynamic expands along an infinite number of communication channels that can take shape in different ways.

The tracks, which present different difficulty levels, are present in both virtual and digital space. They can be found in places that, by their very nature, make sense and allow them to be hosted, such as video clips. But they can also be found in places that, to the naked eye of any individual, would pass completely unnoticed; being part of the swiftie world educates you to pay attention to things like, for example, the color of the nails she wears or the conditions of purchase of her merchandise. On occasion, the Easter egg has even been in the mention or commentary on the artist by a brand or other famous figure who initially seems to have no direct relationship with the American but who turns out to be linked to her in some way.

The rules and guidance as to what is considered valid and feasible in terms of where to find the clues have been shaped and established naturally, based on what the singer herself has

explicitly determined and said; it is also based on observation and knowledge of what Taylor Swift would and would not be able to do; and what has been collectively established as feasible within the fandom, based on theories created and resolved, along with learning from trial and error.

This has resulted in fandom developing inside jokes and, at low levels, its own jargon. While initially clues were given in relatively short time frames, today, they can be given well in advance, such as three years. But it is worth mentioning that the dynamic works thanks to the existence of a third figure directly linked to the singer, known as Taylor Nation (TN); this “nation” consists of a small group of people who are part of Taylor Swift’s management team, whose identity and number of users is unknown to anyone in the fandom. This group acts as a bridge between the artist and her fandom, mainly in charge of interacting with them and keeping the game running.

The release on 21 October 2022 of the American singer’s tenth and most recent original album, *Midnights*, is a clear example of how this dynamic interactive narrative is implemented.

Midnights is a thematic masterpiece, presenting the stories of thirteen sleepless nights spread throughout the artist’s life. It beautifully weaves the idea of insomnia and the myriad of thoughts it brings, creating a compelling narrative. The album’s seventies aesthetic adds another layer of depth, with objects like a vintage telephone or a disco ball becoming symbolic. The clock, a central element associated with the album, further enhances its thematic coherence.

Both Taylor Swift and Taylor Nation had given signals of the existence of the album’s idea, symbolism, and concept since 2019, following the release of her seventh album, *Lover*. In ad-

dition, to fuel the existing theories of fandom, both had for months signaled when she would announce the LP's existence - 28 August 2022 at the VMAs gala at midnight - and the date of its release.

Also, in the months leading up to the release date, and specifically in the week leading up to it, there was an abundance of Easter eggs and online calls for swifties to reveal information about the title, song themes, and music videos that would be released in the future for certain singles. These included *Midnights Mayhem With Me*, *Midnights Manifest*, and #CountdownToMidnightTS.

Midnights Mayhem With Me was one of the most complex communication actions that took place. In it, the artist revealed the titles of the songs that made up the album and the collaborations on it. It was a mini-series made up of thirteen chapters lasting two to three minutes, which were published on her TikTok profile always at midnight, but not every day or with a pattern that fans could guess. Thus, they could not know when they would see the next one. This action had thousands of fans worldwide, keeping an eye on the artist and making them analyze the chapters' content. They would check everything from her clothes and accessories to how she picked up the phone and wore her hair up. All this was done to develop theories that would make sense of previously found clues and create new ones that would reveal information about the album.

Following the completion of this series, the artist released the *Midnights Manifest*. This calendar summarized, by way of clues, all the events that were to take place from 20 to 27 October in the fandom and were vital to understanding the content of the album. On 20 October, there was a live broadcast on Amazon—during the

third half of an NFL football game—of a compilation trailer of the LP's music videos.

In addition, this trail of events served as a bridge to the final countdown with #CountdownToMidnightTS and brought the clue game into the real world. With the collaboration of Spotify and the clues left by Taylor Nation online, during the three days leading up to the album's release, digital clocks following *Midnight's* aesthetic appeared in iconic locations around the world—such as New York's Times Square—revealing lyrics from the songs as the clock struck midnight.

The swifties would discover, night after night, the locations of the clocks. Once the lyrics were revealed, the fans who were physically on-site would share them with the entire online community to jointly discuss their meaning and the song they were associated with. They would, in turn, get confirmation from Taylor Nation, who would interact with them to let them know if they were on the right track or not.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The primary purpose of this research has been to analyze the communication of the singer Taylor Swift, intending to determine whether the hypothesis that she incorporates alternative reality games in her communication strategy is fulfilled. To do this, we retrieved the table of ARG characteristics according to the specialist literature on the subject. This then allows us to see which elements are fulfilled in its narrative universe.

Table 2

Characteristics of ARGs drawn from the literature review that are fulfilled in Taylor Swift's narrative universe.

Base	Characteristics	It's true in the Swift universe
Narrative	Fragmented narrative.	✓
	Dynamic narrative and co-created with the players.	✓
	Story integrated with the game and the players.	✓
	It is developed on a temporal axis.	✓
	Direct contact between characters and players.	✓
	Players keep their identity.	✓
	Creation of a transmedia narrative universe.	✓
Action mechanics	It is based on the discovery of trails.	✓
	Rabbit hole.	✗
	Combines both online and offline worlds.	✓
	There is no structure to guide the game.	✓
	Roles are established spontaneously.	✓
	The players mostly set the rules.	✓
	There is a puppet master.	
Fandom	Participation and collaboration.	✓
	Voluntary and natural immersion.	✓
	Coordination among players.	✓
	Sense of belonging and group identity.	✓
	Hive-mind. Use of collective intelligence.	✓
	Social and mainly digital experience.	✓

Note: Own elaboration.

Based on the results obtained from the comparison, Taylor Swift's communication—which some researchers have described as choreographed engagement (Ryan and Edlom, 2023)—incorporates practically all the characteristics that define ARGs. Specifically, the results show that the ARG meets 19/20 defined characteristics. Its communication strategy pivots on a narrative universe that has been expanded across many platforms and networks for years.

The only element that is not entirely fulfilled is the existence of an initial clue, clear and perceived by all the players since the game dynamic she proposes moves on a very broad time axis in which several clues can coexist simultaneously. Therefore, in the case of the game proposed by the artist, the fans themselves detect the clue that could possibly initiate or, at least, indicate a new game. This is motivated by a previously non-existent pattern, a change in the singer's behavior, or something unusual in the dynamics or the communication that was taking place up to that point.

At the level of new components or considerations detected that Taylor Swift performs differently or that expand on what is stipulated in the bases that define an ARG, one should consider, firstly, the broad durability of the game. Secondly, the agreed, but also spontaneous, collaboration of brands and media figures configured to launch the clues and as alternatives to give continuity to the narrative thread. Thirdly, the very process by which the game comes to life, which has been the motive for the study of this work, is communication.

The artist does not normally create a playful game as such but rather, on many occasions, uses the communication she carries out for non-game purposes—whether to praise the work of a colleague, thank fans for attending

her concert, or accept an award—to incorporate the easter eggs that give continuity to the game that, in parallel, is developing in her universe and in that of her fandom.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The application of alternative reality games to achieve non-game objectives can be very extensive. Moreover, ARGs can be very effective with the right approach and management of their development. Some of their most common uses are in marketing and advertising (Estanyol *et al.*, 2013), entertainment (Huotari & Hamari, 2017), or education (Kapp, 2012).

Therefore, the list of benefits and positive purposes achieved with these types of games is complex and extensive. They can influence user behavior, build user loyalty, or educate them; they generate a good brand image, foster a sense of belonging to the group, help satisfy innate human needs, raise ethical or controversial debates, foster community building, enhance certain emotions, stimulate critical thinking, encourage creativity, etc.

This communication strategy carried out by the American artist, which incorporates practically all the elements and characteristics of the ARGs, could be considered a perfectly structured model that can be extrapolated to other commercial brands. For all these reasons, we consider it an example and a reference for interacting with the fandom, which emerges as an active, generative, and necessary part of expanding the universe and all the fragmented contents that, like a puzzle, are interwoven in an experience as immersive as it is complex, as deep as it is volatile and as original as it is creative. A well-designed ARG does not have a closed-end, and the limit will not be predefined by the narrative or the media and platforms but

will depend on the users themselves and the interest of the universe created so that it can be prolonged over time. Suppose brands now want to spend time with users/consumers. In that case, ARGs are a strategy that can lead to a more advanced level with greater possibilities than branded content or conventional advertising. It is undoubtedly a much more gamified experience and fits perfectly with the spirit of choreographed engagement with fans (Ryan & Edlom, 2023) that has always characterized Taylor Swift's personal brand.

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OBRA DIGITAL

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Interactive and transmedia narratives in crime fiction for teaching literature

Narrativas interactivas y transmedia en las novelas policíacas para la enseñanza de la literatura

2

ARTICLE



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Abstract

The plots of soft-boiled novels usually offer a game of riddles and puzzles that challenge the reader. That is why structures have been easier to adapt to new dimensions. Through interactive literature and transmedia narrative, the aim is to explore how this genre has been transferred to other works in different formats. The study will address some concrete examples to finally show the design of an interactive and transmedia product with the purpose

of teaching literature to high school students. The research does not aim to show a learning process but the design and development of a game to learn.

KEYWORDS

Interactive literature, transmedia narrative, soft-boiled, Sherlock Holmes, gamification, teaching literature.

Resumen

Las tramas de las novelas policíacas acostumbran a ofrecer un juego de enigmas y rompecabezas que retan al lector. Esto ha facilitado que estas estructuras se hayan trasladado a nuevas dimensiones argumentales. A través de la literatura interactiva y la narrativa transmedia se pretende explorar cómo este género se ha ido adaptando a otras obras en distintos formatos. El estudio abordará algunos ejemplos concretos para finalmente mostrar el diseño

de un producto interactivo y transmedia con la finalidad de enseñar literatura a alumnos de secundaria. La investigación no pretende mostrar un proceso de aprendizaje, sino el diseño y elaboración de un juego didáctico.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Literatura interactiva, narrativa transmedia, novela policíaca, Sherlock Holmes, gamificación, didáctica de la literatura.

1. INTRODUCTION

Interactive literature and transmedia narratives are two emerging forms of storytelling that have gained significant attention in recent years. These innovative media have revolutionized how stories are told and consumed, blurring the lines between traditional literature. Interactive literature refers to narratives that actively engage the readers, allowing them to participate in the story and shape its outcome. This way of consumption of stories has been transferred to different spheres. Thanks to the appearance of ICT, it has been exploited in many other ways involving multiplatform formats. As Pisan (2007) describes:

People are natural storytellers; computers much less so. Interactive Fiction (IF) is a unique collaboration among the author who composes the story, the computer that simulates the fictional world, and the interactor who explores and modifies the world through text-based commands. Although the possible endings are preordained by the author, the interactor is free to choose her own path. The pleasure of IF is in the balance of reading the story, interacting with the world, and solving the puzzles.

IF works crafted by talented authors go beyond games and should be treated as pieces of literary fiction. As such, IF is part of the electronic literature movement along with hypertext fiction, chatbots, email, text messaging-based novels, computer-generated poems, and collaborative writing projects. All of these forms are reaching out to the larger community for wider acceptance and recognition (p. 1124).

Within the concept of interactive fiction or literature, another term that has taken advantage of new media to expand new literary experiences. It is transmedia narrative, which involves the expansion of a story across multiple platforms and media, creating a rich and immersive experience, although not necessarily interactive. One of the most accepted definitions of the concept has been that of Henry Jenkins:

Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. So, for example, in *The*

Matrix franchise, key bits of information are conveyed through three live action films, a series of animated shorts, two collections of comic book stories, and several video games. There is no one single source or ur-text where one can turn to gain all of the information needed to comprehend the *Matrix* universe (Jenkins, 2007).

Both interactive and transmedia narratives offer unique opportunities for both authors and readers, challenging traditional notions of storytelling and pushing the limits of creativity. Although, they share some features, such as the fact that both are storytelling methods that can use multiple platforms or that they might take advantage of ICT, there are also some differences. On one hand, transmedia storytelling is a way of telling stories using multiple platforms: videos, books, movies, video games, podcasts, etc. The story can be explained in a non-linear way, and it is impossible to understand the whole universe unless the consumer goes into the different products. An example of this could be *Harry Potter*, which through books, films, fan-fics, and video games, the universe is expanding, creating new narrative lines. On the other hand, interactive fiction is a type of story that engages the reader in making choices that can affect the outcome of the action. The plot or storyline is normally text-based or in graphical formats. Examples would be *Zork*, an interactive fiction game in which players explore some dungeons, or *Choose Your Own Adventure*, a series of books where the reader assumes the role of the protagonist and by making choices determines the story's outcome. So, while the focus of the transmedia narrative is the multi-platform factor, interactive fiction looks to give the reader or player control over a story (McErlean, 2018, p. 164-167).

The rise of digital technology and the internet has played a crucial role in developing and spreading interactive literature. With the advent of e-books, mobile devices, and online platforms, authors can now create interactive stories that readers can access and experience in new and exciting ways. These narratives often incorporate elements such as hyperlinks, graphic elements, multimedia content, and branching stories, allowing readers to actively engage with the text and make decisions that shape the direction of the plot. This level of interactivity not only enhances the reader's immersion but also provides a sense of action and ownership over the story.

Transmedia literature, on the other hand, takes storytelling to a whole new level by expanding the narrative across multiple platforms and media. This approach allows authors to create a more expansive and interconnected story world where different elements of storytelling are explored through various media. By using different platforms, transmedia literature offers readers a more immersive experience as they can explore different aspects of the story and delve into different narratives. This cross-platform approach also allows for greater audience engagement and participation, as readers can actively contribute to the story through fan fiction, online discussions, and interactive experiences.

This article aims to demonstrate how the classic structures of crime novels have been used to create interactive and transmedia literature and how this genre can be leveraged to introduce concepts, genres, and literary works to readers in educational contexts. To do so, different examples of interactive and transmedia literature will be briefly analysed, discussing the unique storytelling techniques employed and the ways in which these media have challenged traditional notions of narrative structure

and reader-author relationships. In addition, the implications of interactive and transmedia literature for authors and readers will be explored, discussing the opportunities and challenges presented by these innovative forms of storytelling. By examining the evolution and impact of interactive literature and transmedia narratives, this paper also wants to show “the benefits of transmedia narrative in an educational environment from a constructive and participatory model, meaningful learning, zone of proximal development, active methodology, learning by discovery, cooperative, dynamic and communicative learning, dialogue, and multiple intelligences” (Peña-Acuña, 2020, p. 3). Lastly, a new project design using transmedia and interactive narratives will be presented. This work aims to introduce crime fiction, as well as literature concepts, to secondary school learners through a game designed following the structures of the soft-boiled work, and the objective is to find the culprit of murder among different famous literary characters. All in all, it is meant to be a tool for teaching literature through gamification.

2. METHODOLOGY

The question that arises is why crime fiction structures are ideal for using interactive and transmedia structures and how to take advantage of them to teach literature. To answer this, it is important to define the term crime fiction, which can be very broad and sometimes ambiguous. That is why we chose to focus on soft-boiled literature, which could be considered a subgenre of crime fiction. Soft-boiled novels have often been viewed as a puzzle to be solved that aims to answer the question “who

did it”¹ through an investigation that can be carried out by a private detective or an “accident”² detective. So, according to Vázquez de Praga (1986), the plot usually presents:

A man with a determined and constant mission: to discover the truth, a mission he has to fulfill from outside the story. The detective comes to unravel a mystery in the construction of which he has not participated, to star in a chase generally detached from his private life, from his authentic personality, which will only appear fragmentarily in the novel as an accessory factor to speed up and enliven the plot, which could continue its course without any alteration with another detective with different personal characteristics (p. 24).

The soft-boiled is considered to have originated in 1841 with Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, as the story stars the detective C. Auguste Dupin, one of the first detectives to appear as protagonists in a crime story. From this moment, the genre became increasingly popular with the addition of characters such as Sherlock Holmes (by Arthur Conan Doyle), Hercule Poirot (Agatha Christie’s hero), Monsieur Lecoq (Émile Gaboriau’s detective) or Judge Di (historical character of China, but who has starred in some novels by Robert Hans Van Gulik) (Hoveyda, 1967, p. 11-16).

Based on these structures and precedents, the intention has been to create a game of logic and deduction, which uses the narrative structure of a soft-boiled novel and multiple

1 That is why they are often also called ‘Whodunits’, a contraction of ‘who did it?’ or ‘who has done it?’.

2 A non-official detective but a person who accidentally or voluntarily takes the lead of an investigation.

platforms or resources to solve it, thus transmedia narrative and interactive literature. It has been proven that introducing a playful challenge to the students usually improves their motivation and, consequently, their engagement (Ling, 2018, p. 142). In addition, the aim is also to introduce students to crime fiction and soft-boiled, more specifically, structures and to explore some of the most important universal literary works. The authors, Sílvia Plana Molas (secondary school teacher), Aida Montoya Esteban (secondary school teacher), and Irene Solanich Sanglas (lecturer and researcher) (the three of them as members of *L'escriba*³) with illustrations by Sara Costa based the game on the structures of the Whodunit so that the students must investigate using different provided material the information they will receive and find out who the murderer is.

3. ANALYSIS OF EXISTING WORKS AND PRECEDENTS

Before creating the game, we thought it would be necessary to set how the soft-boiled premises have been adapted into other games and formats. We have seen that one of the most popular characters for interactive products and transmedia narratives has been Sherlock Holmes, created by Arthur Conan Doyle and first appearing in *The Strand Magazine* in 1887. Whether through adaptations, reinterpretations, and pastiches, the figure of the London detective has inspired products that have transcended the literary dimension. Some examples could be board games (*Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective* and sequels), films and

series (the most faithful ones like *The Hound of Baskerville*, 1983, crossovers like *Murder by Decree*, 1979, updated versions like *Sherlock*, 2010–2017, or the freer ones, such as *Detective Conan*, 1994 and still broadcasting), escape rooms or treasure hunts. Thon (2019) describes it in the following way:

Particularly in the context of transmedia franchises that are governed by “multiplicity” rather than “continuity,” modification will often be the dominant relation between work-specific characters. Indeed, there can be little doubt that the Victorian master detective Sherlock Holmes represented by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s short stories and novels (1892–1927), the 21st-century Sherlock Holmes represented by BBC’s *Sherlock* (2010–2017), and the 21st-century American immigrant Sherlock Holmes represented by CBS’s *Elementary* (2012–present), the 21st-century African-American Sherlock Holmes in Boller, Leonardi, and Stroman’s comics series *Watson and Holmes* (2013–present), the canine master detective in the Italian-Japanese anime series *Sherlock hound* (1984–1985), or the rodent master detective in Walt Disney’s animated film *The great mouse detective* (1986) do not – and do not seem to be intended to – coalesce into a single transmedia character (p. 188).

In the case of Sherlock Holmes, the entire universe is ramifying or branching out to continue expanding it and offering new plots. Often the same characters are used, with the same names and roles, or they are framed in different times and spaces. However, the narrative structures often remain. If we look at the list mentioned in the methodology of the study, we

³ *L'escriba* is an association and a website with literary and cinematographic content (reviews, articles, and recommendations). The internet platform of *L'escriba* is used to save and spread the contents of the game here, explained with the title of *El crim de L'escriba*.

can see how most of the works and products listed above about the London Detective are fulfilled.

Perhaps even more obvious and following the previously mentioned structures, we should also include here Cluedo (in some countries, such as the USA, it is called Clue), which would later be adapted into a film, *Murder by Death* (1976), that would continue to expand the narrative of the board game. Van Ditmarsch (2002) provides this summary of the context and history of the game's creation:

Cluedo was invented in 1943 by Anthony E. Pratt, a solicitor's clerk, and (his wife) Elva Pratt. Anthony Pratt is said to have invented the game when he was temporarily laid off because of World War II and was instead doing mostly boring fire brigade duty. Elva Pratt devised the board. The Pratts' original version was called 'Murder'. It had ten weapons instead of six, and some suspects had other names. In 1949 Cluedo was launched by Waddingtons Games in the UK. In the USA the game is called Clue. Apart from the original Cluedo, there are various other versions available. There is now even a Harry Potter 'Mystery at Hogwarts Game', that is obviously Cluedo-inspired. Anthony Pratt died in 1994, in obscurity. His death only became generally known in 1996, after a public appeal by Waddingtons. His tombstone reads 'inventor of Cluedo' (p. 20).

Cluedo illustrates the plan of a luxurious house on a board with all the rooms in which the crime has occurred. There are several suspects locked up (mostly middle/upper class as far as we can tell), all identified by colour. There is also a certain number of weapons that may have

been used to commit the crime. The players, by asking questions to each other and deducing from the answers, have to guess who killed the victim and how and where he or she was killed; therefore, at no time is there explicit violence because the crime happened before the start of the game (out of the scene) and therefore everything becomes a game of logic. In this case, like in many crime games, the player embodies the detective, and the competition focuses on who will be the first to discover the truth and, therefore, restore order.

Another quite paradigmatic case is that of Miss Fisher, the protagonist of twenty-one novels by the Australian author Kerry Greenwood (1989-2014), with plots located in Melbourne in the 1920s. The character became popular with the series *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* (released in 2012). From that moment on, the universe that Greenwood created for detectives expanded into other formats: in 2017 a digital game was created called *Miss Fisher and the Deathly Maze*, in 2019 the film *Miss Fisher & The Crypt of Tears*, and a spin-off from the 2012 series now titled *Miss Fisher's Modern Murder Mysteries*. According to Väliiso et al. (2020), "The pleasure of this story world strongly lies in its nature as historical fiction, as a heroine created in the twenty-first century has landed in the past to show her contemporaries a glimpse of future worlds" (p. 399). In addition, they also claim that:

The Miss Fisher storyworld negotiates the boundaries of several different media intertextually, multimodally and transmedially. It exemplifies how digital developments have changed the distribution of crime texts and series and also the modes of consumer engagement when they allow for (transnational) audience interaction (Väliiso et al., 2020, p. 399)

4. DESIGN AND RESULTS

As we have seen, the soft-boiled stories usually follow a closed structure and rarely move out from this narrative. *“L’argument comença amb un crim simple o múltiple que forma part de la introducció, la consegüent investigació que forma part del nus o cos i, finalment, la resolució del cas que conforma el desenllaç de la trama”* (“The story begins with a simple or multiple crime that is part of the introduction, the subsequent investigation that is part of the body, and, finally, the resolution of the case, which is the plot’s denouement”) (Solanich-Sanglas, 2023, p. 31). The following list enumerates some of the main characteristics of soft-boiled novels and will later be used to elaborate the game presented in this study:

- The main characters are often middle/upper-class white people. Actually, there is not a broad social representation in these stories, which is why some years later (during the 20s and 30s of the 21st century) the hard-boiled is created, proposing new plots and new social realities (Heath, 2003, p. 423-444).
- The detective who stars in the story usually has aristocratic connections and an overbearing or eccentric character.
- The detective is not usually completely solitary, but it can have small connotations of isolation. However, he or she often works through small circles, family ties, or friendships (Charles, Morrison, and Clark, 2002, p. 18).
- The detective’s objective and the novel’s action is to restore stability and order manipulated by the criminal or criminals.
- The characters have a blind trust in the power of reason and logic to solve the mysteries and achieve the goal.
- The investigation is always carried out using a list or closed circle of suspects, often quite prominent characters in the plot, to be able to play with the reader’s mind.
- Although the characters can often come from a city, the action is usually on the outskirts or in wilder or country landscapes, always framed and characterized by British aspects such as mansions, afternoon teas, etc. (Menand, 2009).
- There is not much explicit violence. The crime, often murder, always happens “off the scene” and usually the reader learns about it when it has already happened. In fact, it is most likely that the reader learns about the crime at the same time as the detective, the protagonist of the story.
- The plot is structured like a puzzle to be solved: enough clues are offered for the reader to get involved in the investigation, but they are complicated enough (sometimes some false) to make it difficult to identify the culprit. However, it follows the rules of fair play between the author and the reader.
- The antagonist usually assumes a false identity to pass himself or herself off as another character and deceive both the characters surrounding him or her in the plot and the reader.
- The crime weapon is usually strategically hidden and is not usually found until the end of the story.
- The chronology of the plot can sometimes be a little confusing since often all the characters (detective, culprit, suspects, and involved) are all together in one room or a certain location in order to unravel the mystery that surrounds the story (Panek, 2000, p. 96).

- The crime, at first, usually takes place in a closed room or in an unlikely situation but ends up having a logical explanation.
- The authors write and characterize characters' speech with linguistic traits (colloquial, slang, formal, and geographical) (Rzepka, 2005, p. 29).
- The vision of the world is one of order and coherence. Everything fits, and everything is in place, except for the moment when the criminal acts. When the mystery is solved, everything returns to the order established by the universe. "Evil is an abnormal disruption of an essentially benevolent social order" (Cawelti, 1976, p. 149).
- The aim of this type of novel is usually the discovery of the identity of the culprit⁴.

Bearing the list in mind, we created a plot that would engage students. The characters are chosen to offer diversity in terms of literary genre, territory, and period diversity. In addition, most of them have been represented and adapted into pop culture (media culture or mass culture⁵), so students might be familiar with them because some of the works might have been adapted into cinema or series or because they have already read the original story. Furthermore, most works come from British tradition and literature since, as mentioned in the Methodology of this paper, this is where most of the soft-boiled action takes place. However, the

4 The list has been adapted from the thesis titled *La novel·la criminal a les darreries dels segle XX. La Negra (1986-1998), el creixement i consolidació d'un gènere en català* (Solanch-Sanglas, 2023, p. 34-35)

5 According to Oxford Reference, the term "mass culture" refers to "Cultural products that are both mass-produced and for mass audiences. Examples include mass-media entertainments—films, television programmes, popular books, newspapers, magazines, popular music, leisure goods, household items, clothing, and mechanically-reproduced art" («mass culture», s.d.).

game is designed so that the students do not have to know the literary contents in depth before playing but as a starting point to present all the features.

The premise is that Phileas Fogg has managed to complete the journey around the world in eighty days and wants to celebrate with his most famous friends in literature. King Arthur decides to give the castle of Camelot, but he cannot be there because he has another commitment, so the host will be Queen Guinevere.

As mentioned before, to design the game's plot, we followed the rules and structure of soft-boiled novels. Therefore, the features mentioned above translate as follows in the game:

Closed list of suspects and characters within the game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vito Corleone (<i>The Godfather</i> by Mario Puzo, 1969). • Cacophonix (series of comics <i>Asterix</i> by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo, 1959). • Queen Guinevere (<i>Matter of Britain</i>, anonymous, 1335). • Dracula (<i>Dracula</i> by Bram Stoker, 1897). • Tarzan (<i>Tarzan of the Apes</i> by Edgar Rice Burroughs, 1912/1914). • Alice (<i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i> by Lewis Carroll, 1865). • Launcelot du Lac (<i>Matter of Britain</i>, anonymous, 1335). • Phileas Fogg (<i>Around the World in Eighty Days</i> by Jules Verne, 1872). • Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hide (<i>Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde</i> by Robert Louis Stevenson, 1886). • Sherlock Holmes (<i>series of novels and short stories</i> by Arthur Conan Doyle, 1887). • Julius Caesar (non-fictional character, though used a lot in other works, 44 BC).
Protagonist detective	Sherlock Holmes seems the detective and acts as one, however, the "accidental" detectives are the students.

The goal	Find out who killed Caesar and restore the stability and order that has been manipulated by the criminal or criminals.
Use of reason and logic to solve mysteries.	Through different clues, the students must make a final deduction.
Location of the action	Although lots of characters come from cities, the action takes place in the castle of Camelot, a remote location in the countryside. The United Kingdom is the location chosen for the action and where most of the literary works chosen come from.
There is no explicit violence.	The murder takes place in the library, while all the diners including the protagonist (the students) are in the dining room. Whoever finds the corpse is one of the main characters, so the players learn about the crime when it has already happened.
The plot is structured like a puzzle to be solved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are different types of clues: • Written: the real context of each literary work and each character. • Auditory: as detectives, students are supposed to interrogate the suspects and therefore must listen to each one's alibis. • Visuals: The illustrations also contain useful information to corroborate or disprove the alibis. • There is printed material and material that is projected.
Crime weapon	The crime weapon is not missing nor hidden but happens unnoticed. It won't be known until the end.
Chronology	The detectives (players) gather all the characters together in the library to hear the case resolution, after having interviewed them to find out their alibi one by one.
The crime	Crime scene evidence always points to the most obvious suspects, and it may seem like the crime or some of the alibis are implausible, but in reality, it ends up having a logical explanation.

The language and speech of the characters	The language used throughout the games is Catalan. The alibis scripts are performed by dubbing actors who emulate the characters' dialects, slang, tones, rhythms, and sociolinguistic features (sometimes even stereotypical).
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The game consists of a booklet written in the second-person singular so that the readers/players get an engaging sensation when they are reading or listening. The plot follows the structure aforementioned in the methodology. In this sense, part 1 would be the introduction, parts 2, 3, and 4 the body, and 5 the denouement. The parts are stated below (titles are literally translated from Catalan into English):

1. The crime—the assassination of Julius Caesar (in which all the previously explained context is also narrated, and it ends when the readers/players are aware of the murder but have not seen the scene yet).
2. You have been in the dining room the whole time... (this section provides an alibi to the reader/player by which we know he or she was not the killer. Also, there is information about who left the diner and at what moment).
3. The suspects (each of the suspects is illustrated and accompanied by a paragraph that shows the literary context. The work in which it appears is discussed, and a minimum of information about the historical and geographical context and the author is given).
4. The alibis (although they are voiced and recorded, the booklet also contains the script

of the interviews that the reader/player pretends to have with the suspects).

5. The deduction (it is the moment when all the characters meet to give them the proper explanations of who killed Julius Caesar and why).

In addition to the booklet, the students also have images that accompany each part of the text:

- The dinner (showing the distribution of diners at the Round Table and an empty chair representing where the reader/player is sitting).
- The scene of the crime (in the centre there is the corpse of Julius Caesar and all the characters surrounding the victim can be seen with fear and worry on their faces).
- The interrogations (there are ten images in which each of the characters is seen sitting in an armchair. The player/reader is supposed to be sitting right in front of them, asking the questions they are answering).
- Plan of the castle (it shows the layout of all the castle rooms that are mentioned at some point in the story).

The game has been developed in Catalan and has been tested in some secondary schools in Catalonia. However, no study has yet been piloted or data collected; therefore, this is not the focus of this study.

So far, the game has been tested with two different dynamics: autonomous and guided. In the autonomous system, the students have all the material from the beginning, and they read the texts from the booklet themselves, with the teacher helping them. They stop at the alibis part, where of reading them to each other or individually, they have an electronic device in which they have to listen to them. This same device is what they use to look for extra infor-

mation about the characters and the works if they consider it necessary. The characters often mention some aspects that refer to the original literary works from which they come, and students might not be aware of some concepts brought into the alibis, so an internet connection is useful for them to look for extra information, as well as the teacher in class.

On the other hand, the guided form is the one that makes all the students go at the same pace. It is the teacher who acts as the narrator and therefore reads the texts aloud. Often, he or she can also put a question to the students, who are normally taking notes, about the works, authors, and vocabulary, among others. In this way, the teacher can have information about what previous knowledge students have and it will facilitate subsequent guidance. The alibis are projected for the whole classroom and heard together.

In either way, students always have all the aforementioned material available so that they can elaborate the hypothesis and keep track of the movement each character is sating in their alibis. Students normally cooperate and explain their assumptions and deductions to each other, and a debate in class is created. Before ending the session, the deduction is read so everyone can hear who guessed it correctly and who did not.

When introducing a crime fiction game, following the soft-boiled and whodunit patterns, students have fun and engage in a cooperative game that uses transmedia narratives (or multiplatform formats) and interactive literature. In fact, beneath this game, there are two general learning objectives. On the one hand, to be able to explain and present the archetypical structure of the soft-boiled and take it as an excuse to talk about the genre and introduce it to classrooms. Also, from a more

vindictive side, it allows popular genres to also have a place in education. On the other hand, the activity seeks to be able to present literary content from different works and genres that the students probably know from other products of mass culture or popular culture (films or series, especially). Now, however, within the literary dimension, which really was the origin of the story in question.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The narrative structures of detective novels allow for the gamification of plots. The fact that the premise of detective novels is already a puzzle that aims to challenge the reader to discover, together with the detective, who has been the culprit, makes it easily transferable to new formats. In this sense, it is easy to find different crime genre products adapted to new structures and new narratives. Escape rooms or escape books have not been mentioned in this study, but they are also narratives that take advantage of the structures of crime fiction to create a real adventure or a role-playing game. So, given that the current digital world allows access to new models of narratives, it is not surprising that ICT can be used to preset new adaptations based on previous formats, or new stories that take advantage of spaces or archetypes of any genre, but especially the soft-boiled.

As it has been proved, proposing an activity or project using the structures of this sort of stories also allows to talk about other works and genres, not necessarily belonging to crime fiction. So, we can say that interactive literature and transmedia narrative allow us to emulate

gamified structures to be able to present literary content in more exciting and up-to-date ways to introduce concepts or works to be worked on in schools within educational curricula. According to Mills et al. (2022):

DIL [Digital Interactive Literature] is essential in school curricula that are oriented to the global trajectory of digital futures in multimedia communication and creative expression of contemporary and traditional stories. The iterative re-telling of some of the most enduring, entertaining and culturally and personally significant works of classic literature for adults and for children in concert with ever-changing new technologies would be reason enough for the embracing of DIL in future-oriented curricula. Such retellings, leveraging the affordances of new technologies, offer innovative, engaging and often challenging re-interpretations of the original and subsequent versions of these narratives, as well as emerging innovative digital narrative forms, all contributing to the ongoing vibrancy of literary experience (p. 215).

All in all, future and further research seeks to collect data from the application of this activity in different schools and centres and wants to put the focus on the learning process more than the design of the learning tool used, as this has been done in this study.

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Transmedia and identity construction in the music industry: the case of the visual album *Montero* by Lil Nas X

Transmedia y construcción de identidad en la industria musical: el caso del álbum visual *Montero* de Lil Nas X

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ARTICLE



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Abstract

Transmediality is a new paradigm of ideation and construction of cultural projects that consists of fragmenting the messages or meaning elements of a story between various media. The aim of this work is to analyze the visual album *Montero*, by the American musician Lil Nas X, as a transmedia, artistic and queer vindication project, with its visual imaginary and some actions in social networks. A methodology of cultural and multimodal analysis is used to know the intertextuality and cultural quotes in this visual album. The conclusions point to the generation of leitmotifs around the construction of an identity in transformation and a vital experience of rebirth or positive change. The generation of digital and 3D graphics, kitsch aesthetics and Afrofuturism, as well as visual motifs taken from the classical symbolic tradition and intertextuality and intermediality, define a narrative where lyrics, visual band and content shared on social networks build a personal storytelling.

Key words

Transmedia narrative, visual album, music video, LGBTQ+, Lil Nas X.

Resumen

La transmedialidad es un nuevo paradigma de ideación y construcción de proyectos culturales que consiste en fragmentar los mensajes o elementos de sentido de una historia entre diversos medios, para generar estrategias globales de promoción. El objetivo del trabajo es analizar el álbum visual *Montero*, del músico estadounidense Lil Nas X, como proyecto transmedia, artístico y de reivindicación *queer*, con su imaginario visual junto a algunas acciones en redes sociales. Se emplea una metodología de análisis cultural y multimodal para conocer la intertextualidad y citas culturales en este álbum visual. Las conclusiones apuntan a la generación de *leitmotivs* en torno a la construcción de una identidad en transformación y una experiencia vital de renacimiento o de cambio positivo. La generación de gráficos digitales y en 3D, la estética *kitsch* y el afrofuturismo, así como motivos visuales recogidos de la tradición simbólica clásica y la intertextualidad e intermedialidad, definen una narrativa donde letras, banda visual y contenido compartido en redes sociales construyen un *storytelling* personal.

Palabras clave

Narrativa transmedia, álbum visual, videoclip musical, LGBTQ+, Lil Nas X.

1. INTRODUCTION: TRANSMEDIALITY IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

One of the trends in the general context of cultural production, which tends towards the platforming of cultural consumption (Van Dijk Poell & De Waal, 2018; Gillespie, 2015), has to do with the emergence and consolidation of trans-

media, as a set of entrepreneurial initiatives spread across all types of media and channels. Its narrative form or facet was defined by Jenkins (2006) as the relationship of all the content generated across different visual and media platforms to fabricate worlds or story worlds as planned fictional narratives (Scolari, 2009) and multiplatform.

The convergence of media in the technological, social, and economic spheres makes it possible to disseminate and distribute messages, leading to their fragmentation, extension, and expansion. Collaborative production, fandom communities' production, and amateur' production multiply platforms' content and allow the growing competition between them to continue (Ballon & Evens, 2014).

Transmediality, the strategy of telling stories in different directions and media, has several possibilities that broaden the horizon of stories. Among them, storytelling involves a narrative presented from images, words, and sounds, which helps to understand the multimodal dimension (Rosales-Statkus & Roig-Vila, 2017) and "combines the art of storytelling with a mix of digital media, including text, images, recorded audio, narration, music and video" (Robin, 2016, p. 18).

The record and music industry has developed a rapid adaptation to the new cultural conditions in all its phases of creation, consumption, and reception (Garland, 2020). Since their birth in the 1950s, music projects have tended to relate to visual texts to expand their listening and promotional media. From there, television programs, rock youth cinema, and video clips were born. These formats have been the subject of some studies from a transmedia perspective (Fendler, 2022; Parahoo, 2020; Melzer, 2021). As a format prone to innovation, it is subject to genre specialization and modification towards hybrid forms. The music industry has shifted towards video - *a visual turn*- (Holt, 2011), which has become a format for listening to music.

Social networks have increased this trend: short videos have become the most shared and viralised format on social networks, where the mediation of content from different contexts also converges. Music and those respon-

sible for producing and distributing it (record labels, managers, concert impresarios) know that their work goes beyond musical creation. Musicians themselves are forced to perform an extraordinary range of tasks and to renegotiate their appearance in various contexts, genres, and media products (Jost, 2019).

Music artists construct an image of totality that is composed of the sum and accumulation of messages coming from the lyrics and music of the music project (main content), the performative part (concerts), traditional media, and new media (social networks, online media). In this way, it enhances the transmedia capacity of the contemporary music industry and generates both cultural and economic value (Brembilla, 2019).

From the sociology of popular music, the general perception of a musical artist has been referred to as a star-text (Goodwin, 1992), paraphonography (Lacasse, 1997), or metanarrative (Gare, 2017). More recently, Auslander's (2019) and Arne's (2019) concept of 'musical personae' shape this idea of complete identity construction by musicians, of how communicative management of a transmedia nature and inspiration takes place. It has, however, precedents in cross-cutting historical figures such as David Bowie, Madonna or Michael Jackson. All of them are prototypes of a habitual exploration of authenticity that has conditioned the aesthetics of popular music. As sociologist Frith (2001) puts it, good music is an authentic expression of something and someone.

This paper focuses on the construction of a specific narrative regarding the identity of musical artists in the current transmedia context. Specifically, the case of Lil Nas X and his project *Montero* (2021), belonging to the hip-hop genre, will be analyzed.

Lil Nas X is an American songwriter, hip-hop musician, and rapper who released *Montero*, his first musical work, in September 2021. A couple of years before, his early career was characterized by controversy as an avid fan of Nicki Minaj, his intense social media activity, and his creations of micro-blogging.

In 2019, he signed with Columbia Records and came out as gay, to which not everyone in the hip-hop world reacted positively. Since then, he has positioned himself and claimed his rights and those of the LGBTQ+ community, which is another example of how music is a generator of social realities.

In fact, hip-hop is a genre suited to social engagement despite its increasing commodification, as it “offers an interesting insight into the struggle for human freedom and aspects of people’s knowledge of the world” (Richardson, 2006, p. 9), especially concerning the “pleasures and problems of black urban life in contemporary America” (Rose, 1994, p. 30). As increasingly influential music in all orders of popular music, iconic artists such as the late Tupac Shakur are an inspiration for global popular culture.

On the other hand, visual content close to music, where we can mention music video clips, has been shown to allow the construction of social imaginaries (Martí, 2000) around its artists and producers: “Music videos are a powerful source of representation of identities” (Balaji, 2009). Many have social content linked to “the transmission of values and the vindication of rights” (Guarinos & Sedeño, 2020, p. 122). In this way, it has been a channel for race-related minority identities or, in recent years, especial-

ly for queer representation (Jorquera & Pérez, 2021) or for the construction of multiple identities empowered by black female artists (Crenshaw, 1993; Curiel, 2007).

Following the release of his first studio album, the artist has continued his social media activity. He has begun a tour, including the Coachella festival, and starred in two documentaries.

2. OBJECTIVES, SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to analyze the transmedial narrative around Lil Nas X artist *Montero*’s album. The methodology of multidimensional analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) tries to be creative (Botescu-Sireteanu, 2019) and hybridize textual and descriptive analysis of the qualitative nature of letters and sequential moving images to attend to the different states of the meaning of each material. An iconographic analysis has been added to this in search of elements of continuity - visual motifs - and quotations from other works and their comments on social networks. The exhibition comprises all the music video from the visual album. Below is a breakdown of the title, the link to view each video, and the lyrics of each musical composition (Table 1) for each of them.

Table 1

Music Videos from the album, links to their videos and lyrics.

Title of the work	Video	Lyrics
Montero (Call Me By Your Name)	See video	See lyrics
Dead Right Now	See video	See lyrics
Industry Baby (ft. Jack Harlow)	See video	See lyrics
That's What I Want	See video	See lyrics
The Art of Realization	See video	See lyrics
Scoop (ft. Doja Cat)	See video	See lyrics
One of Me (ft. Elton John)	See video	See lyrics
Lost in the Citadel	See video	See lyrics
Dolla Sign Slime (ft. Megan Thee Stallion)	See video	See lyrics
Tales of Dominica	See video	See lyrics
Sun Goes Down	See video	See lyrics
Void	See video	See lyrics
Don't Want It	See video	See lyrics
Life After Salem	See video	See lyrics
Am I Dreaming (ft. Miley Cyrus)	See video	See lyrics

3. THE MONTERO VISUAL ALBUM: MUSIC VIDEOS, INTERTEXTUALITY AND VISUAL MOTIFS

Montero, Lil Nas X's album, takes its author's first name, something familiar in the first full-length albums in popular music. It consists of fifteen tracks, fourteen conventional songs, and one skit, a short piece typical of hip-hop. The art of realization is a genre trademark. It is music that is very close to its producers and receivers, of an urban nature, and strongly involved in lyrics and aesthetics with the demands of black Americans. A visual piece in the form of a video clip accompanies each of the musical pieces. Together, they make up what is called a visual album.

The visual album, the central figure of many of the music industry's new promotional strate-

gies, arises from the need to create complete pieces of the entire album, resulting from an industrial context demanding audiovisual content. According to Harrison (2014), the visual album is constructed as a uniform visual and sound discourse, where each song on the album has a video clip. Faced with so much visual diversity, the author argues that techniques tend to be sought to give unity to the videos in themselves and to each other: these visual *leit-motifs*, in their recurrence, systematize themes, staging, and visual formulas. The intertextuality above is added, a fully transmedia feature; thus, other cultural texts are cited, situated in the spectator's collective memory, and perfectly recognizable, which helps to create meaning.

In short, the visual album is a global product that interrelates the artist's universe and story through the distribution of official content via social networks and everything created by fans (Sedeño-Valdellós, 2021).

Some African-American artists precede Lil Nas X in their decision to carry out transmedia work similar to this one as a form of self-expression and identity creation with a social scope or background. This is the case, first of all, of Beyoncé, who has a total of three visual albums: *Beyoncé* (2013), *Lemonade* (2016) and *Black is King* (2020). In her works, she has placed the African-American community at the center and explored sisterhood and feminist vision through visual motifs and performance techniques to achieve the aggrandizement of her central figure and an immersive experience for the viewer (Sedeño-Valdellós, 2021).

3.1. CONVENTIONAL MUSIC VIDEOS

On *Montero*, four tracks are singles with conventional full-length music videos: *Montero (Call Me By Your Name)*, *Industry Baby* (ft. Jack Harlow),

That's What I Want, and *Sun Goes Down*. These were the most visible singles on the album. All four cases involve mixed narrative/performative music videos in which the singer appears and plays the lead role. These stories are not complex but are generally linked to his lyrics.

Montero (Call me by your name) is the first song on the album, which also opens the visual album and refers directly to Luca Guadagnino's queer-themed film (2017). It begins with a crane-like overhead shot, the sense of which is the introduction, through a rural scene where trees are visible. A pink-colored countryside brings to mind a colorful fantasy or fairy tale.

After this, the singer is presented as an adamic character who begins a journey through places with no realistic solution of continuity, while he comes across some figures that refer to a biblical imagination. There is the tree with large fruit (apples) and the serpent, from which he flees. The serpent pushes him on a spatial journey that takes him from heaven to hell, which he reaches by climbing down a pole dance pole.

This discipline is used in several videos shared on social networks. Meanwhile, the lyrics address a vital duality: "In life, we hide parts of ourselves that we don't want the world to see. We lock them away. We say no, we make them disappear. But we won't do it here. Welcome to *Montero*". This is followed by a quote in Greek from Plato's *Banquet*: "After the division of the two parts of man, each one desiring his other half," while the image represents a trial reminiscent of that of Jesus Christ before Pontius Pilate - with his multiplied figure.

The last part of the video continues with this dance, as he sexually insinuates himself into a devil figure sitting on his throne. After that, he kills the devil and removes his crown. At this point, the Lil Nas X figure finishes transforming,

represented by a smile and glassy eyes, like a supernatural entity.

Therefore, the plot and connotative codes of the image are aimed at representing a process of individual transformation. The sexual content of the video - Lil Nas X has relations with the snake and with the devil - and the use of color - from primary pastel blue colors to saturated reds and blacks that differentiate the two parts of the video - are key elements that engage the audience in the analysis. The use of virtual scenarios (almost all of them realized as 3D scenarios) combines throughout the video to create a visual piece that is somewhere between computer graphics, video game figuration, and naturalistic daydreams.

Industry Baby is probably the most conventional clip within the typology of narrative videos: First of all, the singer does not modify his identity beyond what is conditioned by the plot, which is inserted in prison and an escape seasoned by a choreographic performance, starring semi-naked or naked black men. These again refer directly to the homosexual vindication contained in the album's narrative, included in the lyrics and the author's comments in all kinds of media. The prison space and the plot around an escape stand out as a unique metaphor for a flight of feelings and a situation of lack of identity authenticity that he complains about: "I told you a long time ago on the road. I got what you were waiting for. I'm not running away from nothing, dog".

That's What I Want is a story of heartbreak that places Lil Nas X in three very different settings. The first two are used to construct a classic love story between him and another man in situations about normative masculinity: an American football field and an American Western location (the latter is a specific quotation from Ang Lee's 2005 film *Brokeback Mountain*). In the

final scene, however, the story is set in a church where dressed as a bride, he weeps after learning of the conventional marital life of the character he loves.

Finally, *Sun Goes Down* is a hybrid between conventional narrative and the following visual type to be analyzed - visual postcards - which begins with a 3D-generated conceptual world, giving way to a story with a cinematic aesthetic inspired by the 1980s. However, the actual plot was set in 2017. The artist, in this song, talks about his experience when he attempted suicide as a teenager.

To begin with, the singer appears in a water-filled space that turns into mirrors, from which doors open into specific visions of other videos. One of them opens on what seems to be a journey into his teenage past. There, he appears at a party known as prom, a special time for every American teenager. Lil Nas X seems lonely and sad and wonders about himself and his sexuality, in contrast to the apparent normality of his peers, who attend the prom as a couple. At this moment, this sense of not belonging is accentuated when he locks himself in the bathroom and cries. Finally, after talking and seeing his future self (the current Lil Nas X), he rejoins the others at the dance.

The song's lyrics again refer to a scenario of confusion, negative feelings, and not belonging to the youth social group in which he is inserted. The chorus of the song says: "I want to run away. I don't want to lie, I don't want a life. Send me a gun, and I'll see the sun. I'd rather run away. I don't want to lie, I don't want a life. Send me a gun, and I'll see the sun".

Discrimination due to their physique and skin color also appears in the lyrics, which talk about bullying and the emotions of loneliness, anxiety, or depression that they arouse (also appearing in their messages on social networks). Despite

all this, the outcome of the song is positive and hopeful, as can be seen in the last chorus: "I know you want to cry. But there's so much more to life than dying".

According to the artist, the song is about his suicidal thoughts as a teenager and is intended to serve as an example for other young people in the same situation. As a construction of a queer subject, it requires a restructuring of experience and a departure from the norms of white heteronormativity experienced as a child. In this project, "queer is a form of longing to reconstruct outside the timeline of what was lost or repressed in childhood" (Grullon, 2022, p. 8).

In short, these music videos, which are closer to narrative classics, contain many references to the lyrics and their identity-claiming content. Moreover, they are highly intertextual.

3.2. VISUAL POSTCARDS

The rest of the videos on the visual album are of a simpler and more diverse production and take the form of 3D digital postcards. They are visual texts of concise duration, between 30 and 40 seconds, which are reproduced in a loop and repeated throughout the song. This is usually the result of production processes with lower quantity and quality of economic resources in the production phase, which is compensated for by this generation of 3D graphics.

It is worth noting the variety of settings that populate the digital scenographies, which are visually freer, less aesthetically, and creatively limiting, unlike the filming conditions of the natural settings. *Dolla Sign Slime* and *Lost in Citadel* start with a moving zenithal shot, like a bird's eye view, and *Void* or *Tales of Dominica* take a slower one. All have an immersive effect or an invitation for the viewer to enter a utopian world. Skyscrapers with glass walls that can be pierced, fairytale castles, and apocalyp-

tic, urban, and surreal scenarios make up the scenographic roster of Montero's pieces and, in them, we see a multitude of physical representations such as avatars or virtual characters performing basic actions of video game heroes. We also see classic animated stories such as flying, floating, or passing through glass to enter buildings. This clearly references a claim of identity construction or experiential transformation. Numerous doublings of his visual figure allude to the allegory of the *döppelgänger* or double.

In *Montero*, the artist plays all the roles; in *Void*, his avatar watches his own figure on television; in *Lost in Citadel*, he watches himself sleep; and in *Sun Goes Down*, he seems to be advising his adolescent self, which follows the spirit of the letter. This physical multiplication has also been employed in the promotional photographs of collaborations with fashion brands (Harris, 2021).

There are also several occasions where the naked or semi-naked torso is used, either alone or in a group. They refer to the homosexual iconography of San Sebastián. Choreographies of several semi-naked or naked black men are found in *Industry Baby*; also, there are kisses with himself (Montero) and with other male characters (narrative video clips such as *That's what I want*; a kiss with his partner was also used in the performance of the BET awards, Black Entertainment Television) (Figure 1).

Figura 1.

Queer bodies and desire in various music video



Industry Baby



Montero (Call me by your name)

At this point, it is necessary to reflect a little more on the character of the 3D digital image and its relation to queer aesthetics in recent years. According to Blanco-Fernández (2022), there is no real referent in them, which is why they are more suitable for disruptive narratives, worlds outside the norm, and utopian worlds, such as those presented by queer phenomenology, whose main referent is the figure of the cyborg, the new political subject. Indeed, 3D seems to be the most pertinent type of figuration to begin to "model worlds, speculate

bodies" (Blanco-Fernández, 2022) and create a revolution with the construction of more egalitarian and subversive identities (Swope, 2021).

This is the most important reference to Afro-futurist aesthetics, a term developed by Dery (1994). It is used to indicate a utopian reconstruction of the future through the black race, where aesthetic elements typical of science fiction are joined with others associated with black identity.

Another fully postmodern aspect is found in the *kitsch* inspiration of virtual scenography, where classical tradition and 3D merge. The accumulation and mixture of these components of varied origins creates a certain disorder in this desire to quote and produces a very artificial final effect that has a renewing will. As Meracci says, "The typical modality of *kitsch* is to quote out of context an aesthetic and artistic reference" (2018, p. 22) to completely reappropriate that form.

The columns of ancient Roman art in videos such as *Montero* (the first video of the album) and *Am I Dreaming?* (the last), with flowers and bushes in unnatural colors that do not hide their digital figurative modality, underline the opening and ending character of the entrance to a place, to a world of one's own, to a kind of great theatre where a story will take place or has taken place.

Medieval references, dream castles, and artificial exteriors (urban, bucolic) allow for an almost infinite set of visual quotations, which are re-appropriated to give shape to a utopia of identity or self-birth that can be seen, for example, in *Dolla Sign Slime*. There, a black king dressed in golden armor sits on his throne. This look has been employed by the artist in concerts and for guest attendance at events, in an example of the intermediality of his narrative (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Intermission between a Dolla Sign slime and Lil Nas X's Instagram moment.



Dolla sign slime



Instagram de Lil Nas X

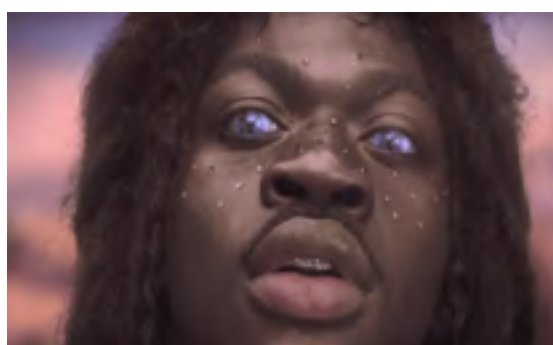
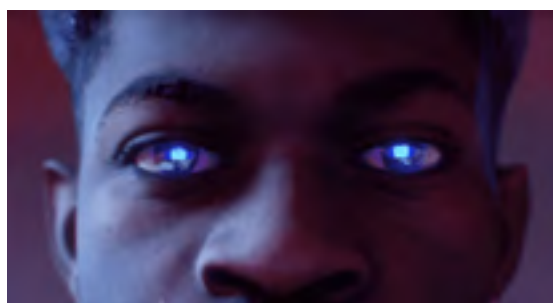
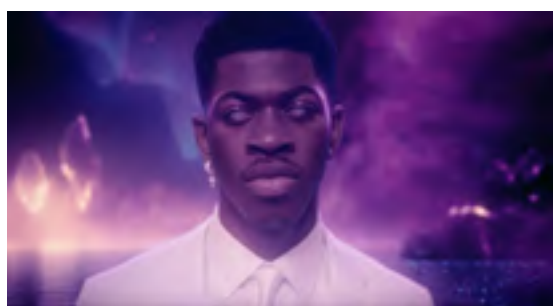
As the last noteworthy element of these four videos, it is necessary to discuss the visual motifs and cross-references that construct an intertextual coherence between videos.

Firstly, they have to do with the references to other visual texts close to queer iconography, although they are also related to everything related to a previously underlined biblical symbolism and specific global visual icons, such as the figure of *The Thinker* (Rodin, 1881-1882) in *Tales of Dominica*.

Similarly, a whole series of visual motifs recur between the conventional video clips and the digital postcards and refer to introspective characters who have visions, invoke, or see the future or the past. A parallel is made with the blind Tiresias, fortune teller and prophet of the city of Thebes, who metamorphoses into a woman in Ovid's work. A narrative of self-discovery, apprenticeship, and subjective quest lies behind the use of symbols such as water, mirrors, and watery surfaces such as eyes, which reflect objects or are sometimes glazed by blindness (Figure 3).

Figure 3

As a fortuneteller or prophet in various videos



These visual postcards refer in particular to queer desire and a series of quotations well known to the writer for their biblical content and their use of *kitsch* aesthetics.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL PROMOTIONAL TOOLS

The artist has used social media around his releases and visual works, which allows us to affirm that he has made good use of digital strategies, especially to achieve subtexts and link the themes of videos and songs with the tools that come from platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter.

First, in 2018, he promoted his song *Old Town Road* through the *#YeeHawChallenge*, launched on TikTok. The challenge consisted of users taking part in videos dressed as cowboys or cowgirls while dancing to the song¹. Such was its impact that the web was filled with versions, mashups, and visual ideas about this game.

Soon after, the renowned music production company Columbia Records signed the artist to release his first album. Then, the song was re-released, featuring country singer Billy Ray Cyrus, which changed his initial commercial strategy. Thus, he achieved a new record in the

¹ Compilation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxwpK-KK3P4s&t=53s>

music industry, with a total of fifteen platinum records awarded by the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America). In 2019, she added to the promotion another challenge that encouraged people to appear magically dressed like in the Wild West and to drink *Yee yee Juice*². TikTok's management highlighted the meme as a success story and took the song to the Billboard Hot 100, where it stayed for 17 weeks.

All this experience helped the singer to innovate on the release of his album *Montero*. The first single was accompanied by the launch of the "Satan's Slippers," created by a Brooklyn-based artist collective, MSCHF. According to the singer, the shoes in question contained a drop of human blood on the soles, an inverted cross, a pentagram, and the words of the bible verse from Luke 10:18: "Then he said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.'" The shoe was priced at around \$1,000, and there were only 666 numbered pairs. According to some sources, the shoes sold out in less than a minute. These shoes were a well-known Nike model, specifically the Nike Air Max 97 (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Satan Shoes



For all this, Nike sued Lil Nas X and MSCHF for trademark infringement. However, as if it were all part of the same strategy, the Nike lawsuit was used by Nas for the intro of his second single, *Industry Baby (feat Jack Harlow)*, which begins with a lawsuit against the artist himself for being homosexual. On his social networks, Nas has expressed his concern about the possible consequences of the lawsuit on several occasions. However, this has only been part of the planning for disseminating his work, which has created content that could quickly go viral due to its dramatic and provocative nature.

Because of this, Montero's narrative spread across all media and social media, generating a lot of public buzz. During the process, Lil Nas shared on his Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter profiles a lot of content created to keep fans on their toes and expectant. Specifically, the narrative was focused on the idea of pregnancy, where the release of his album was the birth of his baby (Image 2).

² An example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbhTEvcvmEU>

All this content has generated a lot of controversy. Still, it has engaged fans and generated high interest in his music, as all these audio-visual pills contained references and hidden messages concerning the album itself. Montero's story world goes beyond the visual album itself and its music videos, as he managed to create a story around the product that has enriched and elevated it.

Figure 5.

Content on Instagram regarding the launch of Montero



On another occasion, Lil Nas X released a personal letter he wrote to his 14-year-old self. This action was part of the promotion of his debut album, so it was released on Twitter minutes before the record's release. Its content helped millions of young people who identified with the artist's words. In this letter, he said:

Dear 14 year old montero,

I wrote a song with our name in it. It's about a guy I met last summer. I know we promised to never be "that" type of gay person, I know we promised to die with the secret, but this will open doors for many other queer people to simply exist. you see this is very scary for me, people will be angry, they will say i'm pushing an agenda. But the truth is, I am the agenda to make people stay the fuck out of other people's lives and stop dictating who they should be. Sending you love from the future. (Twitter, 26 March 2021)

The social media intervention has continued on both Instagram and TikTok, with comments on social media about his personal life and attendance at events, concerts, and live television performances.

Thus, these visual postcards are full of visual motifs and can be related, in particular, to certain controversies involving the artist that are present on his social networks.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Transmedia storytelling aims - and wants to ensure - access to the viewer's attention for communicative projects. While this is a suitable form from an industrial point of view for the marketing of cultural products, it is also relevant for the extraordinary dynamics of personal image management and the creation of storytelling. In Montero's case, the musical project also has a visual format, the album with video clips or postcards. It is maintained with a link through messages on social networks that involve the fans and consumers of this content, acting as a gateway or conduit to the whole album universe.

The main feature of the musical project analyzed, and its storytelling, is the production of a representation of alternative masculinity, constructed in process, in an effort to transform, where there are continuous moments of flight, failure, introspection, acceptance of his homosexual condition, and learning. Situations of suffering, social rejection, and reflection around personal moments are represented in the video plots and in the lyrics and messages on social networks.

An attempt to disrupt the meaning of being a man exists behind the representation of her pregnancy, her crying while dressed as a bride in her heartbreak, and her kisses with another boy dressed as a cowboy or dressed up after playing rugby. The scenes with homosexual content are distributed between narrative moments (love relationships) or performative ones (insinuating choreographies with completely naked dancers), with a fluidity, splitting or multiplication of roles, of identities, which in many cases refers to the dichotomies of good/bad and present/past.

In conjunction with this, the varied representations of the artist as an avatar or virtual character, in many of what have been called visual postcards, enrich this claim of queer existential fantasy of emancipation, where there is an emphasis on non-normative practices and bodies. This kind of radical birth or transformation also requires a spatial framework that is characterized by a visual figuration dominated by artificial scenarios made with 3D digital techniques, as well as a symbolism that combines biblical references, which was already profusely used in video clips (Monzón, 2013), objects with

a substantial charge of meaning (water, the mirror, the eye) and fantasy places (medieval castles, cities of the future). In this sense, the visual album continues to use the viewer's visual memory and knowledge of previous cultural texts to reinforce discursive coherence with minimal resources.

Two interesting aspects emerge from this kind of image system, which is at the heart of *Montero's* storytelling. This storytelling is conveyed by videos and messages on social networks and by the outfits she wears to social events.

Firstly, this hybridization of visual references and their recurrence results in a highly intertextual work and produces an audiovisual experience where the content and its delivery through the various channels is highly cohesive and refers to the kitsch aesthetic, so scarcely developed by the musical genre in which *Montero* is framed, hip hop, and very useful for sharing content in the digital medium. On the other hand, a conceptual framework is created that refers to the individual future of its main protagonist and creator, Lil Nas X, but also of the collective in which he is located, the black queer community. Race and sexuality appear as criteria of identity definition in a social and political sense, something that Afrofuturist philosophy has already invoked on several occasions. The project is similar to that of other musicians, especially black female artists. It is

somehow integrated into this genealogy, which is becoming increasingly established as a promotional campaigning and storytelling strategy in popular music.

The concurrence of this type of scenes, symbols, and splitting of characters as patterns of representation and the spatiotemporal construction described—fantasy worlds, avatars, references—allows us to affirm that *Montero's* Adanic proposal is coherent with a kind of presentation in society and exploration of identity and authenticity that has characterized popular music. After all, Adam appears as Lil Nas X in the first video, *Montero (Call by your name)*.

Montero is a project that makes explicit the convergence of media and materializes especially in a format, the visual album, helpful in sharing its pieces through the atomization of content - in the form of videos of songs - but which develops seriality and a sense of totality as an invention of media performance that needs to be ubiquitous but also refer to other previous visual texts as quotations. In doing so, Lil Nas X socializes his narrative, shares it, and confirms the efficacy of the transmedia media paradigm and its innumerable economic and promotional advantages.

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VTubers' transmedia capacity: narrative and content production expansion based on the intersection with fan-culture by the Hololive agency

Capacidad transmedia de los VTubers: expansión narrativa y de producción de contenidos a partir de la intersección con la cultura fan por parte de la agencia Hololive

4

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Abstract

The present article proposes to analyze the transmedia capacity of VTubers, content creators, independent or under agencies, who interact with the audience via a virtual 2D or 3D avatar generated by computer graphics and controlled by human movement capture. For the course of this work, through the perspective of a marketing strategy composed of collective construction, the analysis found an opportunity to prove that, through the use of *moe* sentiments, kawaii aesthetics, and incentives towards the participative culture of other social actors, VTubers have the ability to expand

their media market beyond that of their original live streams in media platforms. To prove such a hypothesis, case studies of the current portfolio of cultural products from Hololive, one of the biggest international VTuber agencies, and of the consumer/fan productions of these content creators under the Hololive brand were promoted. Other than proving the initial hypothesis, the results show that the agency's interface with the consumers/fans, constructed via providing infrastructural and financial incentives by the company, takes it to promising corporate results, indicative that such actions represent the birth of a new transmedia perspective.

Keywords

VTuber, Hololive, Transmedia, Engagement, Participatory culture

Resumen

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la capacidad transmedia de los VTubers, creadores de contenido, ya sean independientes o agenciados, que interactúan con un público a través de un avatar virtual 2D o 3D generado por computadora y controlado por captura de movimiento de un humano. A lo largo del trabajo, desde la perspectiva de una estrategia de marketing orientada a la construcción colectiva, el análisis ha demostrado que, mediante el uso del sentimiento *moe*, la estética *Kawaii* y el fomento de la cultura participativa de otros actores sociales, los VTubers tienen la capacidad de expandir su actuación en el mercado de medios más allá de su origen

en las transmisiones en vivo en plataformas de medios. Para demostrar esta hipótesis, se llevaron a cabo estudios de caso sobre el actual portafolio de productos culturales de *Hololive*, una de las principales agencias mundiales de VTubers, y sobre la producción de los consumidores/fans de estos creadores de contenido, agenciados por *Hololive*. Además de confirmar la hipótesis inicial, los resultados mostraron que la interfaz de la agencia con los consumidores/fans, construida mediante la acogida y el estímulo infraestructural y financiero por parte de la empresa, conduce a resultados corporativos prometedores e indicativos de que tales acciones representan el surgimiento de una nueva perspectiva transmediática.

Palabras clave

VTuber, Hololive, Transmedia, Compromiso de fan, Cultura participativa.

1. INTRODUCCIÓN

The COVID-19 pandemic and its social isolation have significantly influenced the production and consumption of newer cultural artifacts with greater potential for individual and remote enjoyment, such as the popularization of live streams, online games, and virtual interaction through avatars (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023; Tan, 2023).

Under these circumstances, the focus here is on a phenomenon originally from Japan on the internet and widely disseminated through live streaming platforms: the “Virtual YouTubers,” commonly referred to as “VTubers,” who are content creators that use software and hardware to represent themselves anonymously as 2D or 3D virtual avatars instead of their real personas (Regis, 2021; Regis *et al.*, 2022; Suan, 2021; Turner, 2022; YouTube Culture &

Trends, 2020). The authors highlight that the widespread popularization of VTubers was facilitated by the establishment and operation of talent agencies, which provide structural support for enhancing the skills and capabilities of these content creators, particularly before the widespread adoption of new technology and the subsequent decrease in production costs, which paved the way for more independent VTubers on the platforms.

Just as with other productions in this niche cultural market, identified as part of otaku culture (Azuma, 2009), the engagement of its fanbase leads them to produce their own content, unrelated to the creators and/or agencies, which, on the other hand, adopt the strategy of not fully exerting their property rights. This approach aims to bring fans closer to the production chain and enhance narrative expansion

through the creation of new products, thereby also expanding the possibilities for the use of media platforms.

Despite being a relatively recent phenomenon on the internet, VTubers draw attention due to their high levels of engagement with the audience, which manifests in multiple forms of consumption and brings Jenkins' (2006) idea of participatory culture to another level, not seen in other media products of *otaku* culture (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis, 2021; Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023; Tan, 2023; Turner, 2022).

In the case of VTubers, this fan-culture no longer operates independently. The agencies themselves have begun to invest in this type of narrative expansion through in-house production and collaborative partnerships with fans. More specifically, the agency where this strategy forms a transmedia ecosystem is Hololive, a Japanese company that currently ranks among the largest in the industry, considering its revenue and the number of VTubers it represents (COVER, 2024; Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023).

In seeking to understand the dynamics of such a market and its internal and external impacts, it became necessary to establish a theoretical framework that encompassed the foundational elements of this network. Subsequently, supported by this framework, two case studies were undertaken. The first pertained to the Hololive agency, while the second focused on fan-produced content circulating in the market, which has already adopted the strategy mentioned in the previous paragraphs of narrative expansion to achieve the status of a more diverse company in terms of commercial assets and intellectual properties.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. OTAKU CULTURE

VTuber content can be understood as yet another niche of the Japanese "*Otaku*" culture (お宅 or オタク), which originally meant "your home" (Azuma, 2009). This term emerged in the 1970s to refer to individuals who excessively enjoy anime (animated cartoons), video games, computers, science fiction, special effects films, and action figures (Azuma, 2009; Galbraith, 2019). Over time, *otaku* culture expanded to encompass a broad community of fans and consumers of cultural products, becoming an important part of the Japanese economy and an essential component of the Cool Japan policy for promoting the country internationally (Galbraith, 2019).

On the other hand, Azuma (2009) describes the nature of *otaku* culture as a phenomenon driven by consumer culture and the fragmentation of identity. *Otakus* are among the biggest consumers of "database," referring to their tendency to selectively use and reinterpret cultural elements, creating a database of references and images.

This idea can be integrated into the discussion about *Otakus'* affection for characters, highlighting how they construct personal identities and emotional relationships based on these fragmented cultural references. Characters become anchor points for the expression of fans' identity and desires as they reinterpret and remix them according to their preferences and experiences (Azuma, 2009; Condry, 2013; Diniz

et al., 2023; Galbraith, 2019; Otsuka & Steinberg, 2010; Steinberg, 2012).

Much of this emotional connection between the character and the consumer is due, in various aspects, to the sentiment of “Moe,” which is a common production strategy through “databases.” “Moe” is a complex and multifaceted concept in Japanese pop culture, describing a specific emotional response often associated with anime characters, manga, games, and other forms of media. “Moe” is typically interpreted as a feeling of tenderness, affection, or emotional attraction, often accompanied by a desire to protect or care for the character in question (Azuma, 2009; Condry, 2013; Diniz et al., 2023; Galbraith, 2019; Regis et al., 2022).

This sentiment can be evoked by a variety of characteristics, such as adorable physical traits, diverse personalities, and situations that evoke sympathy, along with the use of the *Kawaii* (可愛い) aesthetic. *Kawaii* can be understood as cute, charming, innocent, sweet, gentle, small, lovable, and friendly, but primarily, “adorable.” It’s an aesthetic choice native to Japan that is becoming increasingly globalized. (Galbraith, 2019; Okazaki & Johnson, 2013), illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Video covers from Hololive VTubers, invoking various Moe and Kawaii elements.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJFZiqLMntJufDCHc6bQixg/videos>

Therefore, “Moe” plays a vital role in building emotional bonds between fans and characters, contributing to the popularity and success of many media works and, consequently, in developing licensed products such as collectible figures, clothing, and accessories. These products capitalize on the emotional attraction that fans have for these characters, influencing various industries, including entertainment, fashion, technology, and art (Azuma, 2009; Condry, 2013; Galbraith, 2019), and can be interpreted as yet another facet of the affective economy around Japanese pop culture.

According to Jenkins (2006), the concept of affective economy relates to how emotions such as love, enthusiasm, nostalgia, anger and sadness, among others, are incorporated into commercial and cultural practices to engage the audience, build brand loyalty, and encourage specific forms of participation and consumption. It can be cultivated, exploited, and monetized.

In this sense, affective economy, especially based on the construction of socioemotional relationships with characters linked to *otaku* culture, has become an important part of the Japanese economy, driving sectors from services and media to various industrial parks such as cosmetics, electronics, and toys (Condry, 2013; Diniz et al., 2023; Galbraith, 2019). This includes products and services based on VTubers (Regis, 2021; Regis et al., 2023; Tan, 2023; Zhao, 2022).

Finally, according to Regis et al. (2022), Turner (2022) and Tan (2023), the possibility of interacting with VTubers with cheerful appearances, even if anonymous, can attract groups of young men and women by evoking comfort, identifi-

cation, romantic interest, and curiosity. Therefore, being characters portrayed anonymously by real people capable of real-time interaction and dialogue during live streams, VTubers can evoke various feelings that result in engagement from the otaku community (Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023; Suan, 2021; Tan, 2023; Turner, 2022; Zhao, 2022).

2.2. PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

The concept of participatory culture is a phenomenon characterized by the active involvement of consumers in the creation, modification, and sharing of cultural content (Jenkins, 2006). In this context, individuals engage in activities such as creating videos, music, art, texts, and other content, often using digital platforms and social networks to share their creations with a wide audience, promoting collaboration among participating fan social circles and generating social affinities and communities (Jenkins, 2006). These diverse fan creations can be understood through User Generated Content (UGC), which is the production of content by users about the products and services of companies (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Santos, 2022).

Furthermore, continuous technological evolution allows more and new cultural niches to become economically viable, developing new communities and creating a new media “Long Tail” (Anderson, 2006), with VTubers being understood as yet another facet of the Japanese cultural industry (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2022).

Brand love (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Palusuk *et al.*, 2019) refers to the loyalty and emotional and affective bond consumers develop with a specific brand, usually promoting positive custom-

er engagement. Among other topics related to the construction of brand love are affinity and cultural relevance, which involve alignment with relevant cultural trends and issues for the target audience, a strong brand identity, customer experience in creating positive memories, and finally, emotional engagement by creating campaigns that foster emotional connection. That is to say, tapping into the emotions promoted in the affective economy (Jenkins, 2006).

Finally, UGC becomes the main and initial part of a user generated branding (UGB) strategy, which consists of using UGC to collectively construct brand value and love. In this sense, the user feels invited to create content, which will later be integrated into official marketing. Therefore, the consumer feels they are collaboratively creating the branding, leading to a sense of belonging and importance (Burmann, 2010). In this way, UGC becomes the consumer’s desire for recognition is fulfilled (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Santos, 2022).

2.3. VTUBER

Created in 2016, *Kizuna AI* is a pioneer as a VTuber, being owned by *Kizuna AI Inc.* (based in Japan), which offers real-time avatar control technology software through body sensors and a microphone (Regis *et al.*, 2022; YouTube Culture & Trends, 2020). Although it started in Japan, *Kizuna AI* has expanded its influence to other nations and platforms in East Asia (Regis *et al.*, 2023), including customized versions for each country (Figure 2), driving the emergence of VTuber companies worldwide as the technology becomes more accessible (Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023).

Figure 2

Ai-Ge (Chinese sister of Kizuna AI) and Kizuna AI.



Source: Regis et al. (2023)

It is worth noting that the VTubers' phenomenon, besides being a new form of entertainment, fun, and community building in the post-pandemic context (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023; Tan, 2023), is deeply immersed in the realm of otaku fan-culture. Today, it has evolved into a global cultural industry, enabling the emergence of specialized companies in this product.

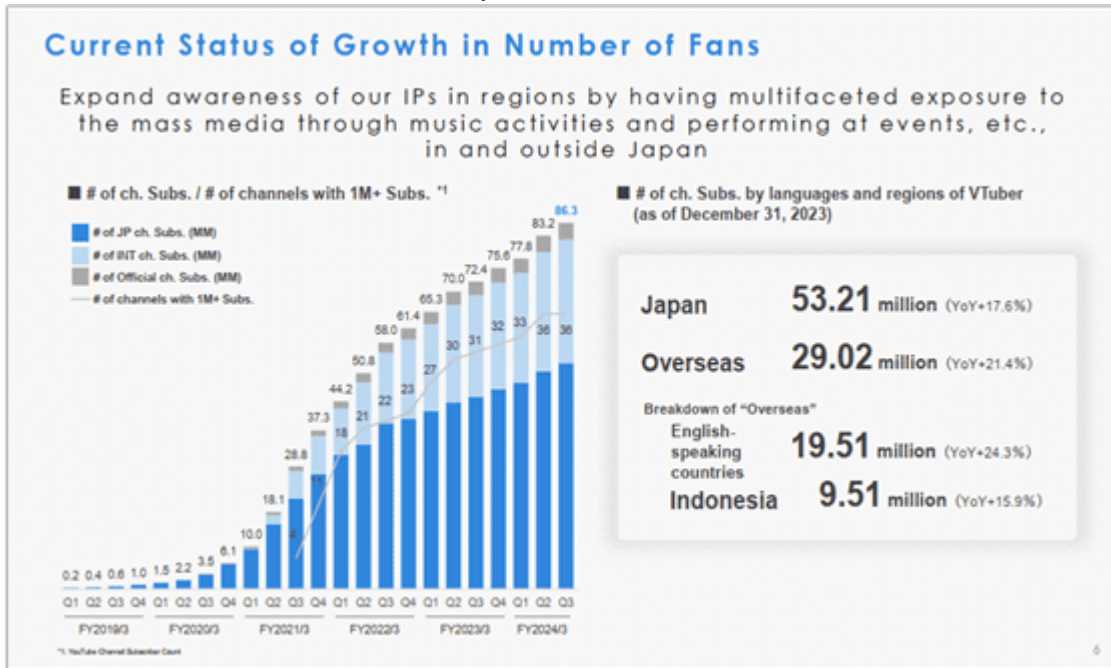
2.4. HOLOLIVE

Hololive is a VTuber agency company. It was founded in 2017 with investment from "Tokyo VR Startups", a technology startup incubator. By 2023, the brand already had 492 employees divided into five branches: (i) Hololive, the leading group of Japanese-language talents, (ii) Holostars, to manage male VTuber idols, (iii) Hololive Indonesia, (iv) Hololive English, responsible for global growth, and finally, (v) Hololive Alternative, responsible for the company's transmedia projects, especially manga, games, and anime, for the creation of a shared narrative universe in which all brand idols are inserted and are protagonists (COVER, 2022; COVER, 2024; Hololive Alternative, 2024). Currently, all these brands are owned by a holding company called Cover Corp.

Regarding media size and expansion, as of February 2024, Hololive had 86 VTubers, 36 of whom had more than 1 million subscribers, totaling 86.25 million subscribers on YouTube across all brand channels (Figure 3). In its financial results report, Hololive highlights the significant contribution of its Hololive English VTubers to the brand's globalization (COVER, 2022; COVER, 2024). Finally, the average revenue per VTuber in 2023 for Hololive reached 312 million yen (approximately 2.1 million dollars) (COVER, 2024).

Figure 3

Growth in the number of subscribers to Hololive brand channels.x



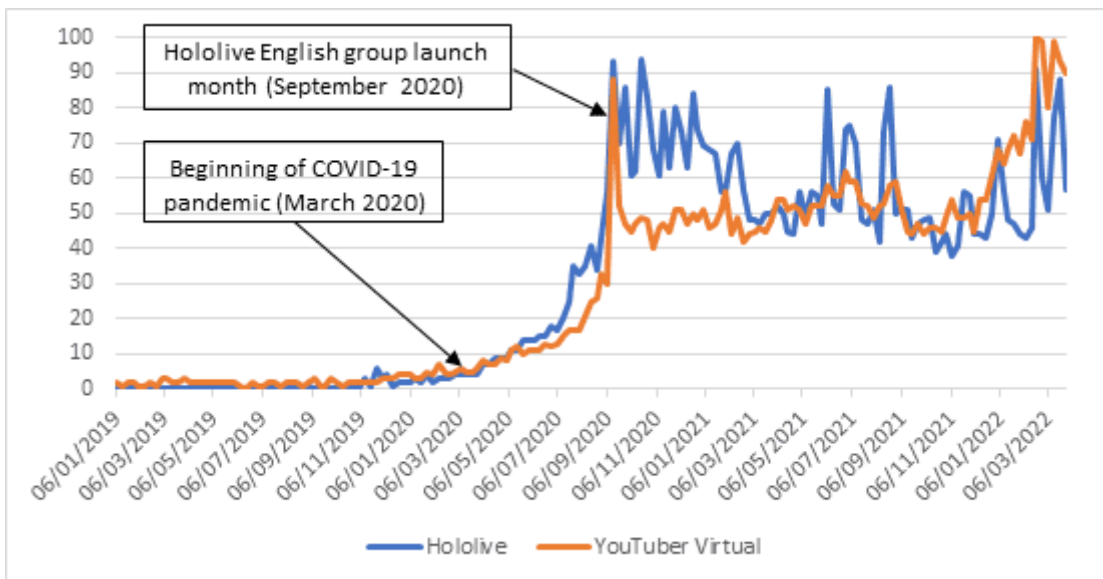
Fuente: COVER (2024)

The popularity of Hololive in the West is partly explained by the COVID-19 pandemic, which opened up new opportunities for online content consumption. This is due to both the audience's increased availability of time and their

greater openness to new types of digital cultural content, as evidenced by Figure 4 (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2022). The role of Hololive English in popularizing the brand in the United States is also highlighted (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2022).

Figure 4

Frequency of the term "Hololive" and "VTuber" (Virtual YouTuber) on Google Trends in the United States between 01/01/2019 and 31/03/2022 (DD/MM/YYYY).



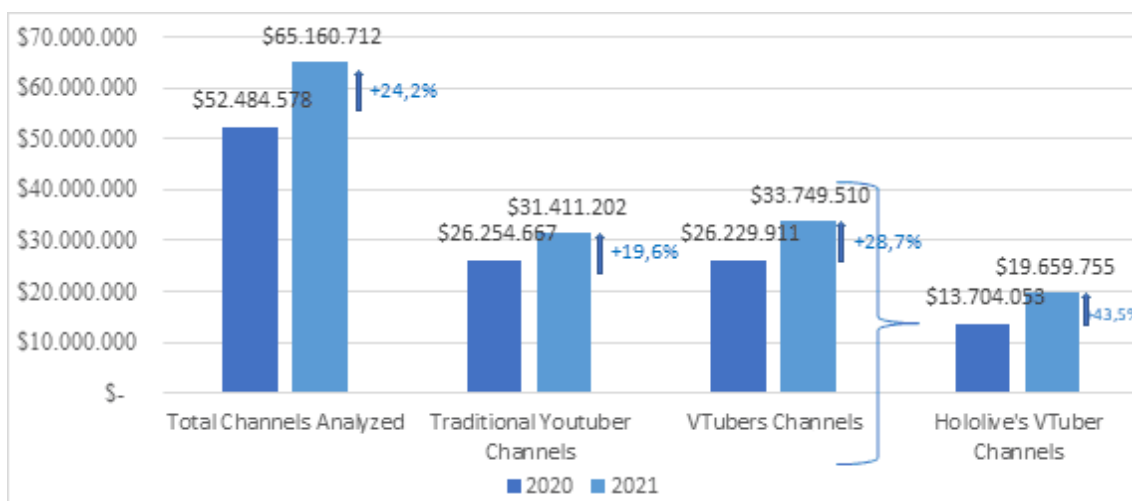
Source: Regis *et al.* (2022)

Another essential data point supporting this observation is related to audience donations to streamers (producers of live videos on the internet), one of the most important indicators of audience engagement (Hilvert-Bruce *et al.*, 2018). In this regard, VTubers had higher audience donation rates than “traditional” content creators on YouTube. These donations are even more substantial when considering VTubers from the Hololive company. For example, Hololive received by fan’s donations 36.9 million dollars between 2019 and 2021 (Regis *et al.*, 2022).

Based on the data, as described by Diniz *et al.* (2022) and Regis *et al.* (2022), and by the YouTube Culture & Trends Report (YouTube Culture & Trends, 2020), it can be affirmed that VTubers are already an essential part of the YouTube ecosystem, especially when considering engagement through special audience donations (Super Chat) (Figure 5). This proves great reciprocity between the audience watching this type of content creator and the VTuber themselves, which is also reflected in the various parallel works created by fans in homage to their favorite VTubers, expanding their respective narratives.

Figure 5

Evolution of total revenue from public donations via Super Chat to the 300 channels that received the most donations on YouTube.



Source: Diniz *et al.* (2022)

2.5 TRANSMEDIA

Transmedia is the use of various types of media strategically employed to create various complementary and interconnected content within the ecosystem of otaku culture, as discussed in this article.

As a tool for narrative expansion, the term transmedia was proposed by Kinder (1991), who approaches it by expanding the formats of intertextual signs made possible by digital media artifacts. Later, Laurel (2000) elevated transmedia to a conceptual level by stating the necessity of it being a guiding principle in content production for the concreteness of narrative expansion, no longer producing content for a specific media and then generating derivatives for other media afterward.

This framework provided Jenkins (2006) with the establishment of transmedia within the convergence of media, identifying it as a flow of content across various media platforms, which is also permeable to cooperation between markets and the audience (established in the field presented in this article through participatory culture, a fundamental otaku element). As a result, consumption becomes a collective process with actors in this sociotechnical system occupying multiple positions simultaneously, whether as creators, producers, receivers, or distributors.

Lastly, it's worth noting that Jenkins (2006) emphasizes that such a culture of convergence in transmedia production occurs not only in the mediation between technological artifacts but primarily in the processes of socialization among the social actors of the sociotechnical system.

3. METHODOLOGY

To accomplish this article, initially, a theoretical framework was established based on the scrutinized references in the work by Regis *et al.* (2022), where a narrative review was conducted on the VTuber topic to establish conceptual landmarks about this manifestation of otaku culture, complemented by theoretical contributions on the same topic published by Regis *et al.* (2023).

The results were obtained from two case studies, one regarding fan transmedia production and the other about the Hololive agency. They were conceived from the perspective described by Yin (2017), who argues that the case study is the technique with the greatest eligibility capacity when three questions are combined in research: (i) the investigation proposes the questions “how” or “why”; (ii) the reduced control over events, and (iii) the focus placed on a contemporary phenomenon, with reduced data synthesis. Also based on Yin (2017), the discussion was guided by triangulating the data obtained from corporate reports, observation of marketplaces with products inspired by VTubers, analysis of content consumption data on social networks such as YouTube, Spotify, Pixiv, and MyAnimeList, and journalistic articles on the implementation of transmedia products, supported by the author's experience in this work, reflected in their previous publications.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. HOLOLIVE'S TRANSMEDIA PRODUCTION

Hololive's transmedia production is diverse and strategically positioned. In its official financial report (COVER, 2024), the company presents its VTubers in various means of communication, not only in search of new sources of income but also demonstrating that its talents can be present in multiple aspects of daily life (COVER, 2022; COVER, 2024). This positioning corroborates what Galbraith (2019) has said, which points towards the fact that many otaku fans accept that the fictional universe overlaps with the real universe, their favorite characters being another extension of reality. This company vision can be observed in its marketing, as seen in Tokyo in 2023 (Figure 6), with the company's VTubers being present in various aspects of the city's daily life (Baseel, 2023). Another example is the recent selection of VTubers Gawr Gura, Mori Calliope, and Sakura Miko as ambassadors of tourism for the Tokyo Prefecture, illustrated in Figure 7 (Harding, 2023).

One of Hololive's first experiences with transmedia production launched in 2018 on YouTube: the anime *Miko no Tsutome!*, which focused on the VTuber character Sakura Miko. Considered experimental, it finished its course with only ten episodes. However, it was an important test and experiment for its more robust subsequent project: *Holo no Graffiti*.

Anime *Holo no Graffiti* (Figure 8) launched in 2019 to tell stories about the VTuber's fictional

daily lives in the office and unusual situations. It was distributed by and featured on YouTube for free. It had short episodes (no more than 6 minutes), which added layers of interconnected narratives for fan consumption as well as thickening the plots and personalities of each of the company's VTuber characters, revealing friendships, interactions, personality traits, and romantic interests.

Dubbed in Japanese, English, and Indonesian by the very same anonymous actresses who interpret the brand's VTubers, the episodes are also available in Japanese, Mandarin, English, Spanish, Korean, and Indonesian to reach audiences beyond Japan. As of now, the series has over 250 episodes.

Regarding its popularity, *Holo no Graffiti* has a view rate of around 500 thousand and 5.2 million views per episode on YouTube, expressive numbers for a niche product. Another metric, "MyAnimeList" (MAL), has been adopted to indicate insertion into the occidental market. It's a North American website intending to group up and catalog anime, as well as gather information on user evaluations from the public that accesses it, allowing to analyze the profile of the anime consumer and anime technical data (Ferreira *et al.*, 2023). According to MyAnimeList (2024), in March 2024, anime *Holo no Graffiti* occupied rank #378 in quality, with a score of 8.19 by the public, and ranked #2780 in popularity, with 54,619 following members, demonstrating that it's still a niche, restricted anime, but with growth potential. For comparison's sake, we list MyAnimeList's popularity rank data

Figure 6

Hololive publicity in Tokyo representing VTubers in daily life.



Source: Basel (2023)

Figur 7

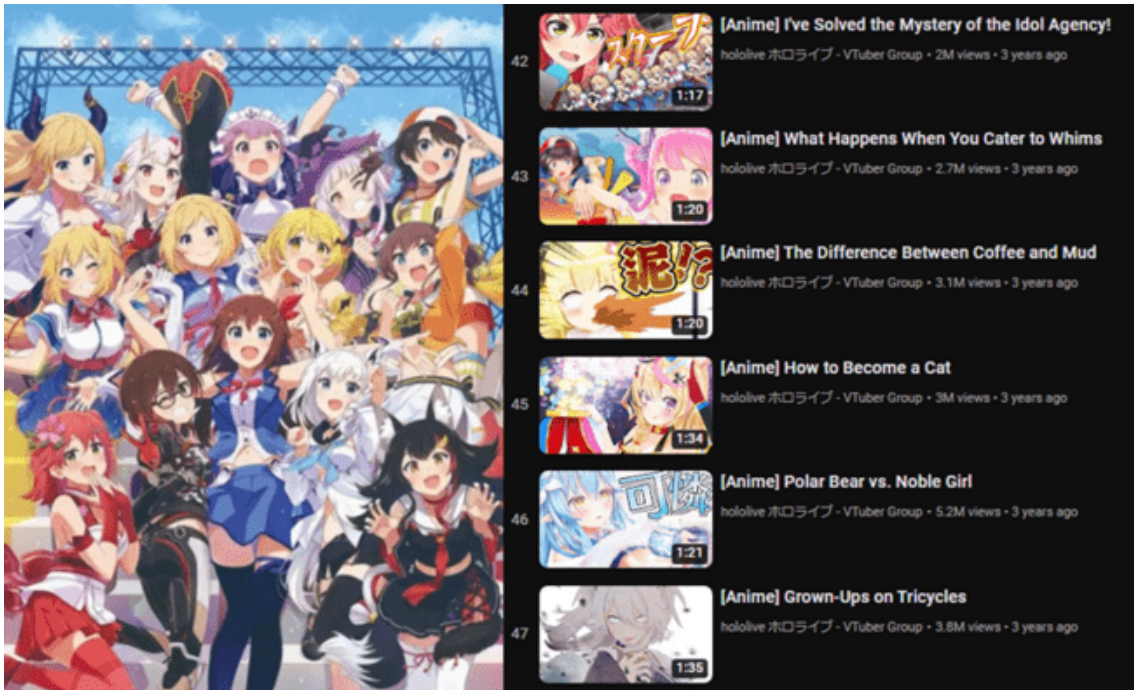
Hololive VTubers selected as ambassadors of tourism for Tokyo.



Source: Harding (2023)

Figure 8

Videos of the anime Holo no Graffiti in free distribution on YouTube.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJFZiqLMntJufDCHc6bQixg>

Table 1

List of the most popular animes on My Anime List.

Anime	Grades (0-10)	Followers (Popularity)	Popularity Rank
Shingeki no Kyojin	8,54	3,909,915	#1
Death Note	8,62	3,866,121	#2
Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood	9,09	3,313,403	#3
Naruto	7,99	2,828,124	#8
Dragon Ball Z	8,17	1,216,476	#112
Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon	7,73	380,141	#604
Girls & Panzer	7,52	300,029	#788
(...)			
Holo no Graffiti	8,19	54,619	#2,941
Miko no Tsutome!	6,09	2,348	#10,649

Source: MyAnimeList (2024)

in conjunction with the quality rank data (Table 1):

Parallel to the anime project, music production was being implemented, and various items related to the phonographic industry were being added to the catalog of narratives for consumption, the expansion into the musical market being a central part of the growth and diversification strategy (COVER, 2024). Many of the company's VTubers are professional singers and release music, albums, and music videos for original songs and covers of popular songs, with distribution on platforms like YouTube Music, Spotify, and Apple Music. For example, the success among the public, as demonstrated by Figure 9, VTuber Mori Calliope, was on the cover of the special edition of the Rolling

Figure 9

VTuber Mori Calliope on the cover of Rolling Stone magazine.



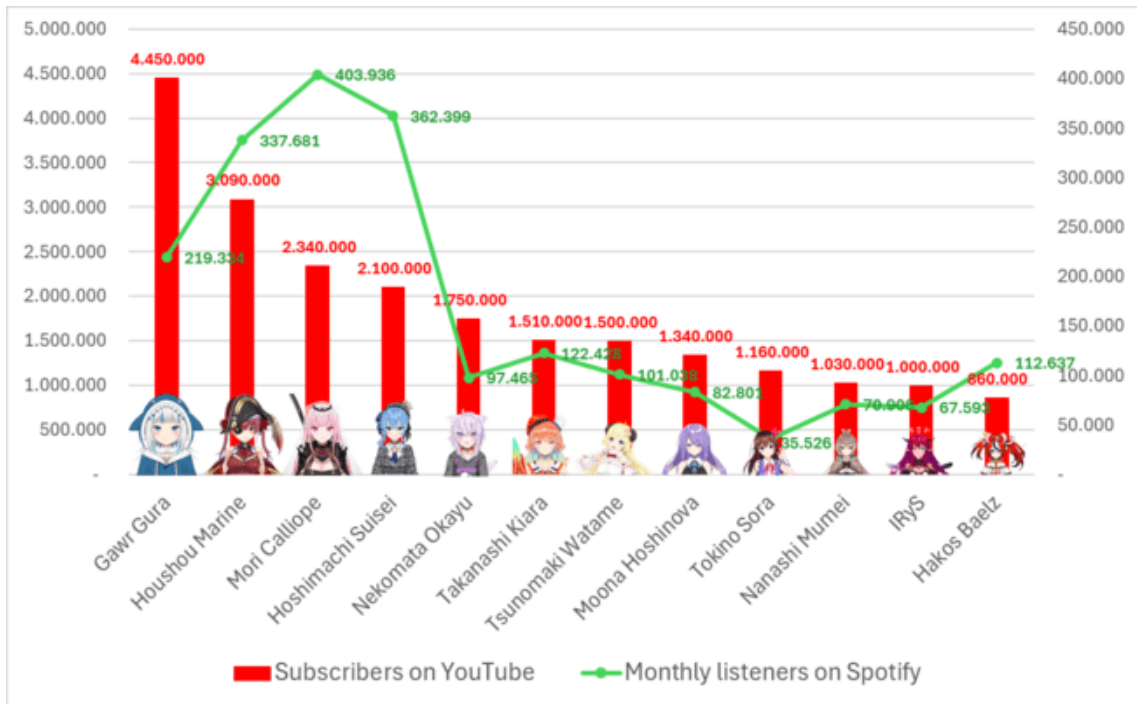
Source: Regis et al. (2022)

Stone Magazine for Anime Expo 2022 (Regis et al., 2022).

Another piece of data that corroborates the company's VTuber success is illustrated in Figure 10, which shows that the leading singers in the agency already reached millions of month-

Figure 10

Monthly listeners on Spotify and total subscribers on YouTube in March 2024 of some Hololive's VTubers.



Source: Spotify y YouTube

ly listeners on Spotify and total subscribers on YouTube in March 2024.

With the end of the more acute period of the pandemic, a new captivated consumer market has been established (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis, 2021; Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023; Tan, 2023; Turner, 2022). Through technological advancements that made resources like holography, body mapping, and real-time processing more accessible, the company initiated holographic live concerts in real-life stadiums in 2022. That is to say, it starts making musical

performances on stages with a live audience where, through optical illusions, holographic technology, 3D mapping of movements, and real-time processing, the VTuber interpreters can transmit their actions and voices onto the stage. The audience can experience the sense that these same characters are present on stage and performing in real-time. Exemplifying this type of spectacle, Figure 11 depicts one of

Figure 11

Hololive 4th fes live concert.



Source: Hololive Super Expo (2023)

the Holo 4th Fes concerts, taken place in Tokyo in March 2023 (Hololive Super Expo, 2023).

Holo no Graffiti and the musical productions were essential products in introducing transmedia content in Hololive. These initiatives were the first of their kind in the company's transmedia project, Hololive Alternative (Figure 12).

Hololive Alternative was announced in February 2021 as a project consolidating the narratives created around the Hololive VTubers, synthesizing them into a single shared universe containing other original official works such as manga (Figure 13), anime and the game *HoloEarth* (Figure 14) (COVER; 2022; COVER, 2024; Hololive Alternative, 2021; Hololive Alternative, 2024), expanding the story and narrative of all of the company's characters into diverse transmedia stories, amply meeting the consumer demands for new narratives, typical of otaku

Figure 12

Hololive Alternative project, "In supplying projects like manga, anime, etc., we are supplying different forms of entertainment from live streams and idols" (author's translation).
[漫画やアニメPV等を展開することで、「ライブ配信」や「アイドル」以外でのコンテンツの楽しみ方を提供] (original)



Source: COVER (2022)

Figure 13

Manga Yamato Phantasia



Source: <https://alt.hololive.tv/holonometria-en/manga/yamatophantasia-chapter9/>

Figure 14

Commands screen for the game HoloEarth.



Source: Regis et al. (2022)

fans (Azuma, 2009; Galbraith, 2019; Otsuka & Steinberg, 2010; Steinberg, 2012).

Hololive Alternative aims to consolidate the company's VTubers not only as streamers or content creators on the internet but also as characters with IPs (Intellectual Property) capable of being consumed and licensed in various ways (Figure 15). It's prudent to mention that commercialization and licensing of VTubers are already important sources of income for the company, representing 38,9% and 18,1% of their income, respectively, as indicated by Figure 15 (COVER, 2024).

4.2. FAN TRANSMEDIA PRODUCTION

On Hololive's website, there's a clear description, in English, Indonesian, and Japanese, of its free usage policies for the brand and images of their virtual idols in fan works, which can be understood as UGC, with its precautions and

warnings. Consider writing in the active voice: The company identifies these derivative work policies as a crucial part of its success with the public. Here is the complete passage available in the Hololive Derivative Works Guide (Hololive, 2024):

We consider derivative works to be creations born of fans' ideas and creativity based on content created by us.

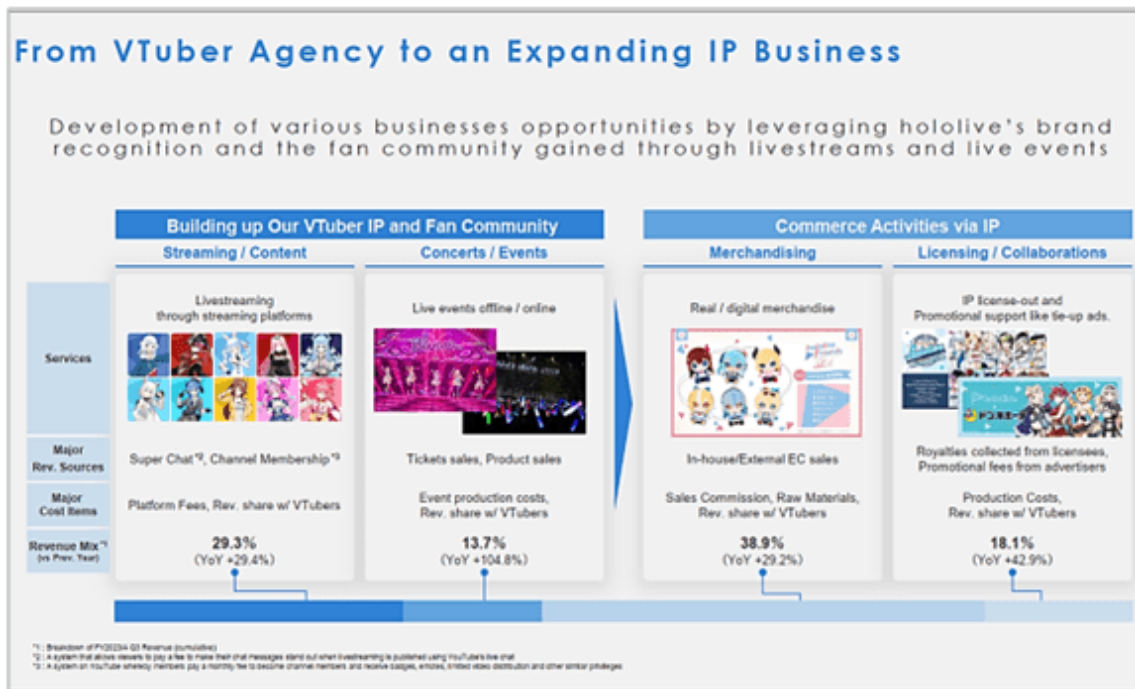
We will not exercise our rights regarding works that we deem to be derivative works as long as they comply with these overall guidelines.

Please note that we may use any derivative works you create as stream thumbnails on social media, etc.

* We do not consider the use of our content as is, or with modifications lacking creative input to be classified as derivative works. Such use does not fall within the scope of these guidelines.

Figure 15

Hololive's strategy in constructing their IP Business.



Source: COVER (2024, p. 28)

Amongst the alerts described for the use of the brand and images of its VTuber idols are (Hololive, 2024):

- 1) Please be mindful of our talents and refrain from creating derivative works that they may find unpleasant.
- 2) Please limit your creation of derivative works to a fan or hobby level. Do not use our content for business purposes (including, but not limited to, cases where a business bears the production costs, etc., even if it is under the name of an individual) or for purposes that can be deemed as for-profit.
- 3) Please comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including the terms and rules of any relevant platforms.

Please refrain from creating derivative works that fall under the following categories:

- 4) Content that is falsely represented as official or can be misinterpreted or mistaken as official
- 5) Content that is contradictory to public order and morality or exceeds what is socially acceptable
- 6) Content that includes matters pertaining to any particular ideology, belief, religion, or politics
- 7) Content that damages our image, or that of our talents or our content
- 8) Content that damages a third party's image or violates their rights
- 9) Other content that we deem unsuitable

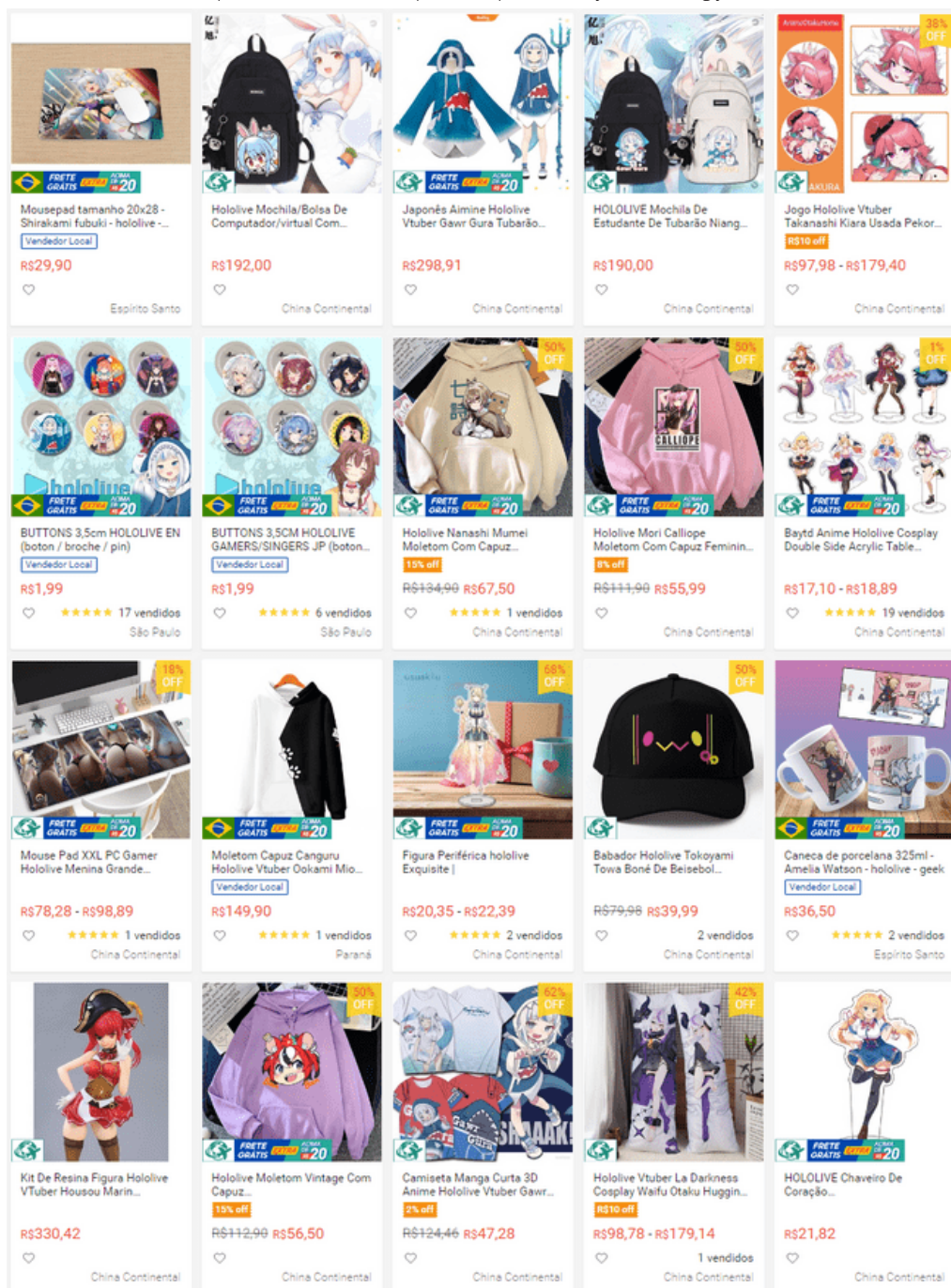
However, fans and businesses, with the perception of this demand in expansion for more content derived from this Hololive transmedia ecosystem, ignore part of the brand's terms of

use, even though they were significantly frank, to produce and sell various unofficial derivative contents such as cosplay outfits, fames, fan-arts, backpacks, shirts, caps, mugs, pillows, dolls, action figures, manga and pornographic content related to these VTuber idols. These

ensembles produced by fans are made available for purchase online in marketplaces like Shopee, AliExpress, and Taobao (Regis *et al.*, 2023; Zhao, 2022), as shown in Figure 16.

Figure 16

Holive derivative products on the marketplace Shopee Brazil after searching for the term “Hololive”.



Source: Shopee Brasil, <https://shopee.com.br/search?keyword=hololive>

Other fan-created transmedia products include fan-art, animation, music, and manga (Figures 17 and 18). For comparison's sake, in the digital fan-art sharing website Pixiv, there are over 448,800 Hololive fan-arts (Pixiv, 2024). All of these items add more consumable parallel narratives to the ones already established

by the brand, simulating situations, events, social interactions, outfits, and art styles, therefore feeding into the otaku community related to the Hololive content. It's worth noting that Azuma (2009), Condry (2013), Galbraith (2019),

Figure 17

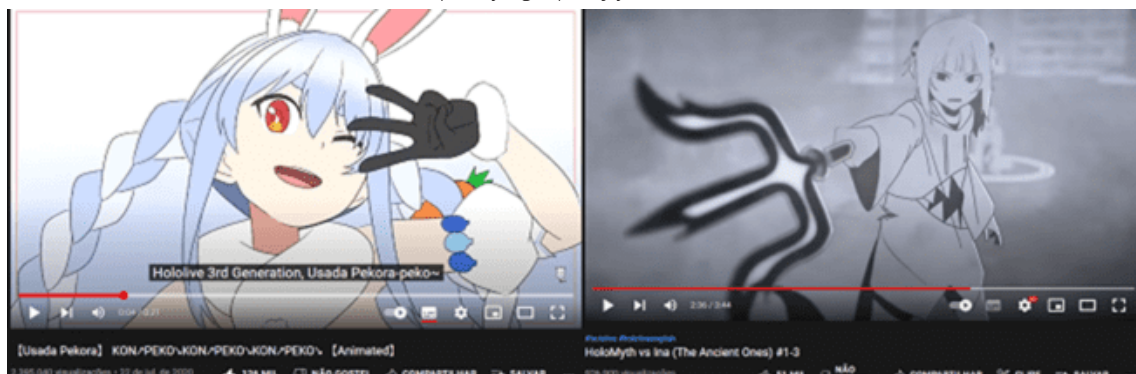
A scene of a doujinshi about Hololive's Korone and Miko (left). Fan-art of Houshou Marine from Hololive (right).



Source: Dynasty Reader, https://dynasty-scans.com/chapters/yohanes_hololive_twitter_shorts_ch75; Pixiv, <https://www.pixiv.net/en/artworks/97839952>

Figure 18

Examples of high-quality fan-animation.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQYNaxRkaWs>; https://youtu.be/vWLBfdj_ss0

Otsuka and Steinberg (2010), and Steinberg (2012) point out that derivative works by fans are positioned as hallmarks of otaku culture.

It is common for the company's VTubers to record content of themselves consuming these fan productions live, like the manga, games, memes, and artwork, in a show of mutual recognition and interaction with the community around them, incentivizing even more this parallel production. In fact, many narratives created by fans are incorporated by the VTubers and their company, for example, certain romantic interests, tastes, eccentricities and even new group formations.

Considering these interfaces, Azuma (2009) discusses that otaku culture is governed by the consumption of narratives formed by these derivative works, being that technological advancement has allowed an increase in the production and dissemination of otaku content by fans, simplifying processes (Regis *et al.*, 2022), corroborating with the formation of new consumption niches on the long-term (Anderson, 2006). With this, the lines between official content from the company and those produced by fans are blurred, bringing with it a new concept of the existence of several simulacra, slightly different from the one conceptualized by Baudrillard (1981), as well as erasing the differences between producer and consumer, where the latter both produces and consumes the works (Otsuka & Steinberg, 2010; Steinberg, 2012), questioning, then, the concept of au-

thorship, added on by the fact that consumers rarely remember the origins of the authors of subsequent narratives (Azuma, 2009).

4.3. TRANSMEDIA INTERSECTIONS MEDIATED BY HOLOLIVE

Considering the continuous and prolific fan production, it becomes essential for VTuber businesses like Hololive to unilaterally let go of specific terms in the copyright laws of the countries where their products circulate and ignore particular commercialization of non-official products, like manga, cosplay costumes, and games, etc., intending to feed and maintain these vibrant, growing *otaku* communities that manifest around them and its talents, even incentivizing its VTubers to produce content consuming and analyzing such derivative works, interacting with and incentivizing fans to consume and even make more works, then paving the way to new forms of transmedia mediation between the IP holders and fans who produce new narratives and cultural artifacts, in a way expanding on the UGB strategy.

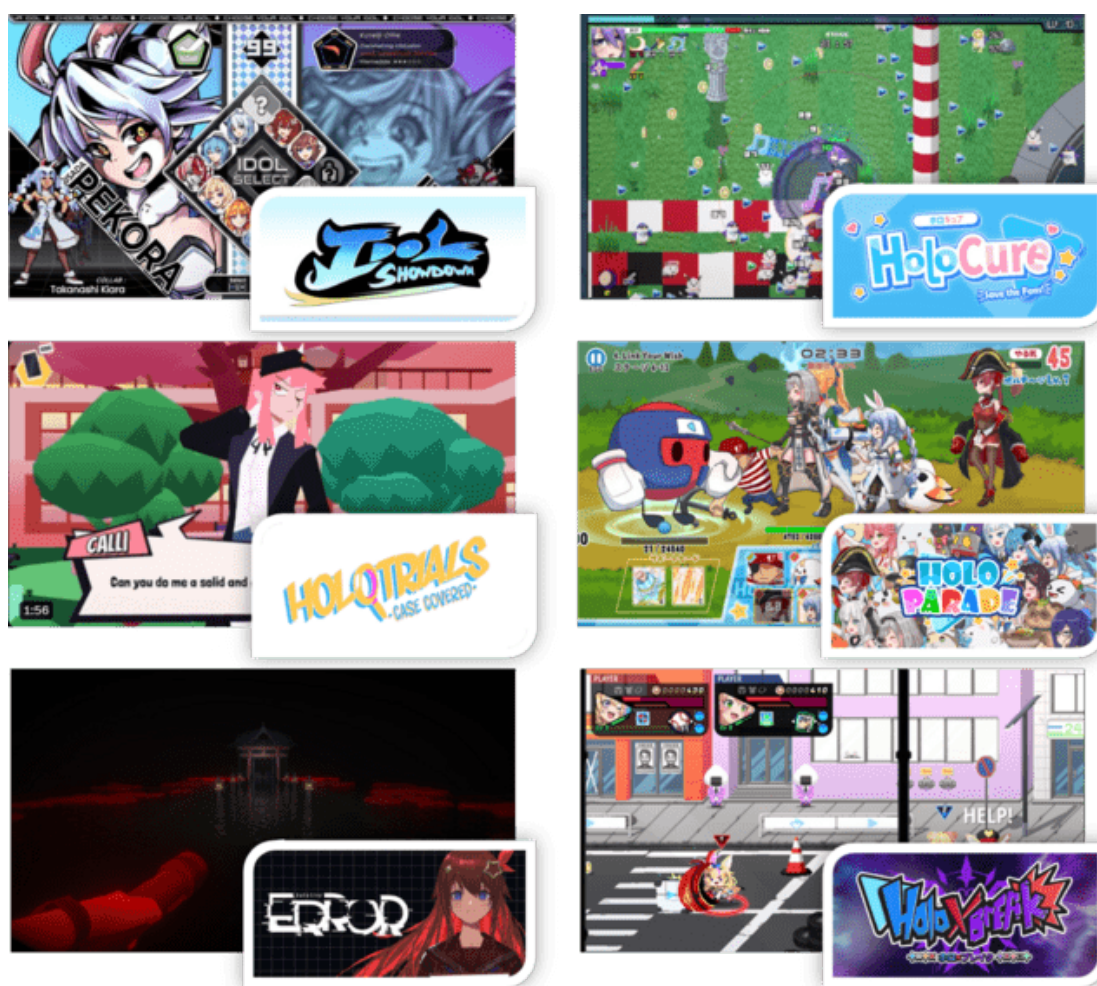
One of the most complex artifacts produced by fans that garner the most public attention is the fan-games. Fan-games about Hololive and its VTubers are many, with varying degrees of complexity and effort put into them, and they are constantly shared and played by VTubers on stream.

In this sense, in 2023, the company has instilled a new policy in regard to these works, the creation of an official distributor called “Holo Indie”, where these game producers could distribute their work officially under the Hololive brand, even with the potential of being monetized, in platforms like Steam and Xbox, creating even more stimuli for these developers, which directly helps in promoting the brand (COVER,

2024; Hololive, 2024). The success of a portion of these games has already reached the general public, no longer restricted to the captivated Hololive consumer, and it stimulates the production of denser, more complex games with bigger budgets, as represented in Figure 19. So, Hololive configures an experimental laboratory for digital game development, diversifying and

Figure 19

Hololive fan-games being officially distributed or in developmental partnership.



Source: Steam

potentializing its transmedia capacity and long-term engagement with audiences, creating new narratives for consumption.

The company also absorbs other UGC elements like art and comic products. An example is the group *Holo Tori*, created by Hololive VTuber fans whose designs are based on birds ("tori" means bird in Japanese) (Figure 20). In this case, the intersection mediated by Hololive

Figure 20

HOLOTORI DANCE! music video.



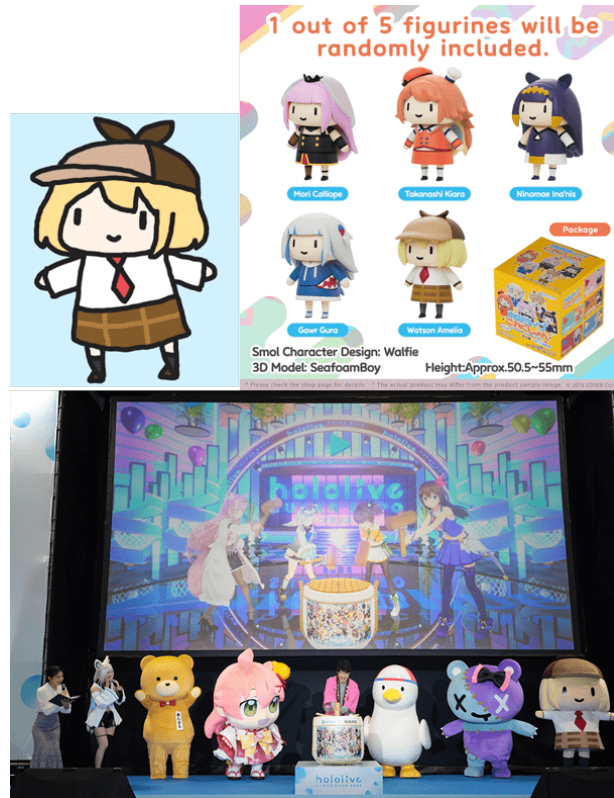
Fuente: Hololive Español, <https://youtu.be/BcO9bZavHRg>

advanced to the point where the company financed a music video that is currently available on the official Hololive YouTube channel.

Another result of this intersection is Smol Ame, a cartoon version of the VTuber Amelia Watson, created by the digital artist @walfiee. *Smol Ame* has become so popular amongst fans that other VTubers have been converted into the

Figure 21

Smol” version created by @walfiee (left). “Smol” merchandising and official appearance in Holo Fest 2022 (right). Hololive mascots in Hololive Super Expo, including Smol Ame (below).



Source: @walfiee <https://twitter.com/walfiee/status/1505753371914997760/photo/1>; Hololive Official Shop https://shop.hololivepro.com/en/products/hololivecollection_vol1; Hololive Super Expo (2023)

same “Smol” design in their avatars, as well as “Smol” versions of official Hololive products already being commercialized by the company, as observed in Figure 21.

In this way, analysis of these results points to these intersectional actions with fan productions as being part of an ample UGB strategy, incrementing engagement with and recognition of the audience in their collaborative process of construction of the brand as well as brand love, with the consumer-producer fan recognizing

themselves as a participative actor with agency in influencing the path of their favorite VTubers in Hololive.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The internet has increased the flow of media production and exchanges. By aligning with participatory culture, a social scenario that blurs the roles of media sender and receiver. In the case of VTubers, the engagement generated by such culture is enhanced, as the archetype of the sender is an avatar. Although there is a human behind this construct, receivers are

consuming and/or producing content from a virtual entity, which brings all actors in this sociotechnical network closer to the idea of a collaborative construction process.

By producing artifacts with content based on their virtual idols, users increase their engagement in a cultural product of affinity and add another layer to the official content. This addition occurs through the capitalization of positive social experiences during interaction with VTuber content, which allows for the continuous redesign of aspects presented by these avatars.

Given this panorama, Hololive's commercial strategy is centered on the consumers' emotional connection with their VTuber characters and promoting participatory culture. In this context, the concept of brand love is operated with the aim of the company creating deeper bonds with its audience. By exploring cultural affinity and stimulating physical and emotional engagement, the company strengthens its fan base and fosters consumer loyalty, a fundamental capability to transform media companies into intellectual property corporations.

By identifying the potential for fan participation of VTubers managed by Hololive, the company stimulates this production to popularize the brand and leverage the feedback loop present in *otaku* fan-culture. Such stimuli go beyond simply allowing the use of corporate content, extending to the embrace of this product in its official channels and providing funds and infrastructure for the realization of fan products.

The results presented by Hololive are promising and indicative that such actions represent the emergence of a new transmedia perspective, which involves increasing levels of intertwining between companies and consumers in the production and distribution of content, which, due to the different means and expedients that each actor possesses, allows us to affirm that this whole will be a set of productions of different hues and disseminated across different media platforms.

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OBRA DIGITAL

Universitat de Vic - Universitat Central de Catalunya
Universidad del Azuay

MISCELLANEOUS SECTION

The perennial commitment of Francesco Rosi in his most contemporary cinema, through his work *Dimenticare Palermo* (The Palermo connection)

*El compromiso perenne de Francesco Rosi en su cine más contemporáneo, a través de su obra *Dimenticare Palermo* (The Palermo connection)*

5

ARTICLE



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Abstract

Throughout his work, the film director Francesco Rosi adopted a political commitment to the current affairs that afflicted Italy, especially the south of the country. In one of his last works, *Dimenticare Palermo* (The Palermo connection, 1990), he delves into the relationship between politics and the mafia. Conditioned by the topics he deals with, his films end up adopting a film noir narrative. Contemporary to the debate at that time, he was in favor of a controlled legalization of drugs, although the confrontation with the PSI, which advocated a different position, has jeopardized his project.

KEYWORDS

Francesco Rosi, The Palermo Connection, Italian cinema, Political Cinema, Gangster thriller.

Resumen

A lo largo de su obra, el director de cine Francesco Rosi adoptó un compromiso político sobre los temas de actualidad que aquejaban a toda Italia, especialmente al sur del país. En una de sus últimas obras, *Dimenticare Palermo* (1990), se adentra en la relación entre política y mafia. Condicionado por los temas que trata, sus películas acaban por adoptar una narrativa cercana al cine negro. Contemporáneo al debate de aquel entonces, se posiciona a favor de una legalización controlada de las drogas, aunque el enfrentamiento con el PSI que propugnaba una postura diferente haya hecho peligrar su proyecto.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Francesco Rosi, *Dimenticare Palermo*, Cine italiano, Cine político, Thriller de gánster.

1. INTRODUCTION

In all his works, the film director Francesco Rosi has adopted a civil commitment to the issues that afflicted the entire Italian Republic, with particular attention to the connection between organized crime and the national and international political world. Thanks to the international success of his feature films, he was seduced by seductive proposals from national producers that diverted him from his initial purpose (*The Moment of Truth*, 1965 and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, 1987). In other projects, however, he adopted a fabulistic metaphorical register (*Siempre hay una mujer*, 1967) or an operatic one (*Bizet's Carmen*, 1984) to achieve global transcendence, albeit with irregular success.

This research proposes to reconsider *Dimenticare Palermo* (1990), the penultimate feature film made by the Neapolitan filmmaker, as a return to the path of social denunciation. This film, almost testamentary, once again delves into the relationship between politics and the Mafia. Although, this time, the criminal conspiracy is focused from an American perspective. His interest in an argument as lively at the time as the controlled legalization of drugs is developed within the codes of gangster movies and film noir thrillers.

After a long career as assistant director and co-writer for Goffredo Alessandrini and Luchino Visconti (among others), Rosi made his debut in 1958 with *The Challenge*, a fresco of the pulsating Naples working class, in whose misery

are hidden the roots of a young man's ambitions for power, anxious to climb the Camorra hierarchy. At its premiere, the director exposed the narrative rhythms typical of gangster films inserted in a Mediterranean setting. In his later film *The Merchants* (1959), the Parthenopean atmosphere expatriates and contaminates northern Germany. There, the voices and figures of Neapolitan swindlers surround Alberto Sordi's grotesque mask, which sustains a narrative tension that balances between comedy and film noir.

In his next film, *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), he re-traces the exploits of the bandit Giuliano from his years of militancy in the ranks of Sicilian separatism to his paid mercenary activities in Mafia and the latifundium interests. It tells the story of the massacre of the peasants of *Portella delle Ginestre*. The historical facts are reconstructed and represented with a complex flashback architecture that fuses photographic coverage, performance, and journalistic coverage. It is an austere and vigorous register that Rosi applied to successive works of cinema research. In *The Hands on the City* (1963), he transfers the same stylistic register to the urban setting of Naples to narrate the ravages caused to the city's fabric by real estate speculation. Later, in *The Mattei Case* (1972), he takes his model of dramaturgy of reality to its ultimate consequences, recounting the intertwining of international political strategies and the interests of the big oil industry.

In both features, Rosi organized his civil denunciation around the presence of world-renowned performers, such as the American Rod Steiger and Gian Maria Volonté, a transalpine icon of political cinema. As the historian Stefa-

no Masi intuits, the disturbing presence of this great actor, controlled by the director with meticulous subtractive attention, becomes almost a trademark of Rosi's civil cinema, from *The Mattei Affair* to *Lucky Luciano*, the criminal biography of an Italian-American kingpin (2006).

Rosi's characters, so strongly committed to the chronicle, nevertheless live their presence in the story in a dimension of archetypal dramaturgy. This approach, which cools their substance and transforms them into symbols of elemental passions, distances her from the narrated circumstances and brings it closer to universal archetypes. Thus, the antiheroes and palace intrigues of Italian politics in *Excellent Corpse* (although clearly inspired by real characters, everyday occurrences in the press and on the RAI news) become, in the chilling formal representation of the film, metaphysical and timeless figures (Masi, 2006). From a visual perspective, the metaphorical and, in some cases, abstract turn of his involvement was possible due to the change in the direction of photography. The dry and vigorous look of the late Gianni Di Venanzo gave way to the more spectacular chromaticism of Pasqualino De Santis. The change has provided discontinuous results that have not always harmonized the vision's pyrotechnics with the discourse's seriousness.

2. MAFIA AND SCENIC ARTS

Traditionally, Southern Italy has been strongly identified with the presence of the Mafia and its stereotypes through fiction. In Italian literature, the culture and thought of Verga, De Roberto, Pirandello, Brancati, Sciasciacia, and Bufalino, among others, have contributed to accentuat-

ing the negative aspects in the strong characterization of Sicily. On the other hand, one cannot do without the idealized and mystical look under which it has also been represented on many occasions. In any case, it can be affirmed that it continues to arouse interest throughout the decades. This is attested to by the stainless mythology of *The Godfather*, a saga inaugurated in 1971 by Francis Ford Coppola and Mario Puzo (with Marlon Brando and Al Pacino), and the successful series *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), by David Chase starring James Gandolfini.

In the scenic and cinematographic arts field, the Mafia, in a way, has become the calling card of the island's identity, intimately linked to the concept of *Sicilianity* and, therefore, understood as the binder of the island's own culture. The presence of violence in the Sicilian imaginary is not only present in cinema and literature but even long before it was recognized as a feature of its own. Already in the famous play *I mafiusi de la Vicaria*, by Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaspare Mosca, written in 1863, a world composed and ruled by mafiosi in the prison of Palermo is described, albeit under a positive connotation (Cannizzaro, 2019).

In 1890, Pietro Mascagni's opera *Cavalleria Rusticana*, based on Giovanni Verga's novel of the same name, depicts southern Italy as a land of illiterate peasants, of men fiercely jealous of their wives, with archaic traditions and trapped by primitive feelings and passions. These elements are also reflected in the various film versions of other Verga novels, such as *La storia di una capinera* (Giuseppe Sterni 1917, Gennaro Righelli 1943 and Franco Zeffirelli 1993), *Los Malavoglia* (plot of Luchino Visconti's *La terra trema*, 1948) and the 1886 theatrical text,

La lupa, made into a film by Alberto Lattuada in 1953. Finally, it is necessary to recall the interest of the seventh art in the literary work of Leonardo Sciascia, who denounced the collusion between the state and the Mafia in *The Day of the Owl* (1961), *To Each His Own* (1966) and *Il contesto* (1971). All of them were made into films by Damiano Damiani (1968), Elio Petri (1967) and Francesco Rosi (1976). The latter changed the title to *Illustrious Corpses* (1976).

Unlike the previous texts, the latter aims to underline the national and international dimension¹ of this powerful criminal organization, as it happened in his *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), *Il caso Mattei* (1972), and *Lucky Luciano* (1973) and, definitely, in *Dimenticare Palermo* (1990). He is an author linked to the cinematic sensibility of modernity, jointly attentive to the story and its form of construction (Stefani, 2019). On his last trip to Sicily, he combines a linear narrative structure in an attempt to respect the construction of the original story, the starting point of the film's plot. It is a novel written by the French journalist Edmonde Charles-Roux, who had already garnered some recognition in the literary field. The author, the daughter of an ambassador in the diplomatic corps, grew up in the interwar period, surrounded by diverse European cultures. She lived in Prague, in the former Czechoslovakia, and in Rome, at the French embassy of the Vatican.

However, his stay in Sicily and the fascination he felt for Palermo would mark his future and his intention to capture his experiences in a story. There, on the island, he lived intense situations that would remain imprinted for life in his memory and nourish his work's content.

1 Actually, the film *Mafioso* (1962, directed by Lattuada and written by Azcona and Ferreri) already illustrated the international links of the Mafia. However, the presence of the comedian Alberto Sordi as the protagonist diluted the initial critical intention.

Near the old Vucciria market, located in the historic center of the Sicilian capital, he witnessed a knife attack motivated by jealousy, in which a reputable American citizen with native roots stabbed a fresh fish vendor.

The geographical context of the author's origin and the story's protagonist ensure its international dimension. Rosi maintained that Naples, his city of origin, and Palermo were the focus of the same disease, a criminal virus that affected Italy and, consequently, the rest of the planet. These assertions were made during an exchange with spectators after the screening of *Hands on the City* (1963), in a colloquium where he interspersed his film with documentary fragments on Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, anti-mafia judges assassinated in 1992 in the Sicilian capital (Marrone, 2022).

3. OUBLIER PALERME, THE POWER OF GOOD STORIES

The novel written by Charles-Roux still preserves, after more than half a century, the atmosphere of the land annexed to the Italian peninsula and the chromatic range that nourishes it and gives it life. The story's protagonist is a skilled New York politician, a second-generation immigrant who doesn't even babble Italian. Like many Brooklyn natives, he had never even gotten to know the land of his ancestors. Finally, he is given a chance on his honeymoon when he and his new bride decide to go to Sicily and get first-hand contact with his ethnic and cultural roots. There, he reconciles his past with that of his parents while at the same time discovering a new and obscure facet of his personality.

The story *Oublier Palerme* won the prestigious Goncourt Literary Prize in 1966, which led to several filmmakers' interest in bringing it to the big screen. Luchino Visconti was one of them, although he finally gave up the difficult task of adapting it, citing an excess of narrative material in the manuscript's pages. Empowered, his disciple Francesco Rosi perceives it as a stimulating challenge, which also satisfies his intentions before knowing the book, capturing a story about a character of Sicilian origin who visits Italy and the island for the first time:

A character is suddenly confronted with his cultural origins. I had been thinking about this topic for some time and knew about the novel's existence. When I read it, I realized that the author adopted a perspective exactly like mine (Rosi-en-Ciment, 2008, p. 185)

Rosi meets Edmonde Charles-Roux during the shooting of *Carmen* (1984), which has locations in Marseille, as she lives with her partner in that Mediterranean town. The Neapolitan director confesses his intention to use only the last hundred pages of the monograph for length reasons. He considered that the whole book was long enough to edit several chapters. Rosi argues the need to update the collective imaginary and defends that in the last decades, the mechanisms of power of the system have changed radically. On the one hand, it becomes a free adaptation of Edmond Charles-Roux's novel, with echoes of *Illustrious Corpses* (1976), in which it starts as a realistic film and ends up evolving into a metaphysical allegory (Crowdus, 1994).

Since the accidental shooting of Visconti's *The Earth Trembles* (1948), Rosi has visited Palermo assiduously. First with *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962) and later with *Lucky Luciano* (1973), he has considered the evolution of the sizeable clandestine structure of tobacco cigarettes into an intense drug trafficking trade. It is a fluid exchange between America and Italy, in the hands of mafias protected by an impenetrable political power worthy of Lucky Luciano himself. On the other hand, the director has never abandoned his interest in revisiting the issues that afflict southern Italy, at least not since *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1978), where there was a favorable ideological context.

He argued that he had made a film about the problems of the Lucan territory in the 1930s rather than portraying the present because the problems afflicting society were the same. In the south of the country, it is possible to find issues identical to those suffered by those in the north, such as the uncertain future that awaited young people. In the 1970s, many of them, children of peasants from all parts of the country who managed to graduate from prestigious universities, were torn between rejecting their peasant heritage and continuing their way of life. Both the graduate degree and the working conditions were unsatisfactory (Betella, 2010).

As in *Illustrious Corpses* (1976), Rosi delves into the interplay between legal and illegal power to reflect on why attempts to put an end once and for all to mafia organizations have failed. At the time, the Italian Parliament was debating to tighten existing legislation against drug trafficking. The film revolves around the degeneration of a culture and the mafia's ability to produce a subculture of violence. Rosi's perspective depicts the island as a labyrinthine landscape where man is a figure of agony (Marrone, 2022).

In *Dimenticare Palermo*, he raises several unresolved questions about the tremendous dramatic disease of the South: the power game trapped in hierarchies rooted in political power brokers responsible for the Mafia's criminal activities. As far as public opinion is concerned, while in the United States, a developing debate on the decriminalization of narcotics was beginning in the transalpine country, the issue had not yet entered the political, media, or civil agenda.

Rosi, for his part, in a colloquium with Edmonde Charles-Roux, declared himself a fervent advocate of legalization. He advocated a regulated supply by the state where, in a controlled manner, those who signed up on a pre-established list of consumers could be supplied with a certain amount of hallucinogens per month. The primary motivation of the initiative consists in counteracting the criminal business harming the health of a community that is no longer provincial or national but global. The French writer, who also agreed with the proposal, was delighted to cede the exploitation rights to her novel.

The fascination was mutual and the synergy, total, since Rosi appreciated Charles-Roux for her sensitivity, quibbling, and courage: "Despite many others who, if they could, would take me to court, she agreed with me on the issue of drug legalization. The drug addict is treated as a sick person and not as a criminal" (Francesco Rosi in Kezich, 2005). Both, without being natives, lived in the same Sicily and drank from the essence of that land during the same period, between two and three generations.

4. THE UNCOMFORTABLE POLITICAL LINE OF LEGALIZATION

Since his debut with *La sfida* (1958), Francesco Rosi has been making a cinema strongly linked to reality, except for only two detours: one fabulist (*C'era una volta*, 1967) and the other operatic (*Carmen*, 1984). The leitmotif of his filmography undoubtedly privileges the relationship between cinema and politics (Stefani, 2019). But, in this case, he wants to broaden the horizon of a small group of bandits that grows in age and size until it expands its tentacles in the different strata of the planet. The protagonist is Carmine Bonavia, who aspires to be mayor of New York. The plot revolves around him, making it necessary to move physically and narratively to the city that never sleeps. For this purpose, Gore Vidal was hired as co-writer.

The writer had been politically active in the Democratic Party in the Big Apple and shared his residence between the American capital and the cities of Rome and Amalfi. To maintain the Palermitan cultural imprinting, he turned to Tonino Guerra, a screenwriter sensitive to poetically perceiving the melancholic vein of urban spaces. His pen recreates an image of the city as a superimposition of voices and characters, foreshortenings of locations through plausible portraits free of folkloric colorism:

Scattered fragments of unreachable truths, a surprising way of facing impenetrability, the stainless lying word of power in a zigzag journey that defies the rules of silence, the baroque darkness of a corpse that needs to be interpreted and deciphered as a text, the theater of justice, of the process, of the subtlety of law, of the sentence as

mask and falsification (...) Places where history is inevitable, like a car accident, where the same geographical nature provokes history. (Andò, 1991, p. 161)

The Rai journalist, who travels to New York to interview him, becomes the catalyst of these two intimate reactions. Characterized by a young and radical personality, not by chance, played by Carolina Rosi, the director's daughter, she asks him to make a genuine mutation of the political situation. Under typical behavior of a young age, she asks for a total and sudden change. The correspondent provokes him to analyze and externalize his state of mind and to face his most profound aspirations. She indicates the absolute; she wants no concessions and no grayscale. Bonavía understands that the journalist is the moral spokesperson of the new generation.

Rosi also employed the resource of the protagonist's journey toward a change of position in the metaphysical thriller *Illustrious Corpses* (1976) mentioned above. In the director's own words, this film is a journey in the company of a detective who gradually loses his trust in state institutions (Marrone, 2022). In *Dimenticare Palermo*, the same Democratic candidate understands that the citizens of the future will not want a welfare state. They will not need an administration that, on the one hand, opens detoxification centers and, on the other hand, operates in collusion with the big drug dealers.

A first reflection pushes him to radically modify the political line: thanks to a timely survey, he obtains absolute leadership in the electoral polls. Another meditation forces him to proceed along deeply intimate paths: a journey into the past in a land devastated by the violence of the few and the misery of the many. It

is a place that his parents have wanted to forget as unworthy, as a violator of historical, cultural, and scenic beauty. Breaking the pact proposed in the title and remembering Palermo means opening dangerous memory archives:

Archives in ruins, where the betrayal of memories takes place, where civilization commits suicide, where devastation and violence acquire an even sensual nuance, an eroticism that many sensitive locals confess (with annoyance and shame) to have tasted. Archives are where traces of slow and criminal cancellation are accomplished, and human intelligence is regularly ridiculed. Archives as a projection of simple data, facts and documents on which the sense of human reflection has been lost. (Andò, 1991, p. 161)

Remembering Palermo means undergoing small but constant mutations. He becomes vulnerable to jealousy, gradually more intense, because of the compliments offered to his wife. He is the victim of a hidden power that determines his mental itinerary, a helpless and indefensible hostage of a powerful criminal will. He is always more disturbed by Medusa's fascination with the Sicilian mysteries, to which he feels an ancestral bond.

Finally, he is forced to forget all the new routes. As the visible face of criminal power enigmatically predicts, one must remember Palermo and then forget Palermo to survive Palermo. All the modifications brought to the original plot and, mainly, the political line proposed by Rosi's character, with plot and opinion twists, did not find favor with the socialist party. Its charismatic leader, Bettino Craxi, at the time, had present-

ed a bill that dictated the imprisonment of drug addicts, and the entire press close to the government fiercely attacked the Neapolitan filmmaker's project:

My friend, the journalist Antonio Ghirelli, who was the head of Craxi's press office, wrote me a very long letter, three pages long, asking me if I wanted to confront the leadership of the party. I answered him with arguments that he knew better than me (...) I resigned from the PSI National Assembly, which did not decide anything, had no decision-making power, and never met. I have always felt closer to the socialist party, but I must admit that (excluding the complaint of my film *Cadaveri Ecellenti*), I have always had excellent relations with the communist party. (Rosi, 2012, p. 416)

5. FROM THE DISCOMFORT OF THE SOCIALIST *RAIDUE* TO THE ENTHUSIASM OF THE "COMMUNIST" *RAITRE*

At the time when the feature film was still a project, Francesco Rosi was highly regarded in the circles of Rai, the Italian national public radio and television network which, before the private competition, was already blatantly politicized: *Raiuno* belonged to the Christian Democrat orbit, *Raidue* to the Socialist and *Raitre* to the Communist one. On the occasion of the World Cup in Italy, the government decided to produce a collective film in which twelve great national filmmakers presented many cities, each the official venue of the competition. Rosi was chosen to narrate his hometown, Naples.

His declared intellectual closeness to socialist ideals aroused the sympathies of the Italian Socialist Party and, consequently, of *Raidue's* management. The productive management of the national television channel, reinforced by the success of the above-mentioned tourist-documentary project, promised Rosi the financing of his next film, the cinematographic transposition of Edmonde Charles-Roux's novel. After the six-handed rewriting (those of Rosi, Vidal, and Guerra, as mentioned above), the plot assumed the value of the protagonist's double journey: interior and exterior. On the one hand, the realization of the great responsibility he acquired once he became mayor of New York; on the other, the necessary transparency of conscience that necessarily involved the recovery of his origins. Both paths led to counteracting the perverse and criminal drug trade with the drastic decision of controlled liberation, just the opposite line to the positions of the socialists.

Thus, after a delayed formalization, the project passed into the hands of the administration of the 'communist' Raitre. The delay made hiring an Italian-American actor of the caliber of Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, or Joe Mantegna impossible. When an agreement with Ricard Gere, the male sex symbol of the eighties, finally seemed definite, Rosi thought of bringing Mario Cecchi Gori, famous for his remarkable ability to hire actors, to the project. The veteran Florentine producer, whose rich filmography was mainly in the comedy of manners genre (hence his skill with actors), accepted the proposal enthusiastically since he had been trying to internationalize and diversify his production for a few years, with some films of social denunciation². Cecchi Gori considered the protagonist of *American*

Gigolo unsuitable for the role (P. Shrader, 1980) and proposed James Belushi, an actor who had just triumphed with *Danko* (W. Hill, 1988), a story of espionage linked to international drug trafficking. Belushi, after a passionate reading of the novel, enthusiastically agreed. In addition, Rosi was very positive about his Albanian origin, which is culturally very close to southern Italy:

Jimmy is a great actor. Very intuitive. At first, I had other actors in mind, but when I found out that he really wanted to work with me on this film, I contacted him. He comes from Albania, a country very close to Puglia. His father, like Bonavia's father, was a restaurant owner in Chicago, and since he was a child, he had learned, by living there, what it means to live in a small ethnic community. Before starting the shooting, I asked him to come with me to Sicily. (Ciment, 2008, p. 188)

Accustomed to working with actors whose character, psychology, and existential projection match those of his characters, Rosi accompanied Belushi to Sicily. They went to Portella della Ginestra (site of the massacre perpetrated by the bandit Salvatore Giuliano) and to the adjoining Piana degli Albanesi, where the American actor was able to dialogue with his heirs of his former compatriots: Belushi literally imbibed the *genius loci*. He began to share an attractive discovery of belonging to the group with his character. Rosi managed to turn Belushi into Carmine Bonavia himself. He was opaque, like a particular political class, but with a presence that bears the stigmata of his ethnicity, a body that perfectly narrates the story of his past events. He defined himself as a character who

² He had produced, for example, Damiano Damiani's political films such as *L'istruttoria è chiusa: dimentichi* (1971), *Perché si uccide un magistrato* (1974), *Goodbye & Amen* (1977),

accepts the idea that the culture of violence is ramified everywhere and who, to secure the mayoralty of New York, does not renounce the use of more or less debatable trickery:

Rosi has not transformed his main character into an ideal paladin or, for that matter, a nice man. James Belushi does not have a friendly face. Bonavia is ductile, skillful, and telegenic but not uncorrupted. His return to Palermo on the occasion of the wedding forces him to reveal a secret part of himself. In him are awakened impulses that his birth in the United States (his father emigrated there shortly before World War II) has cleansed but not extirpated. (Bolzoni, 1992, p. 107-108)

At the same time, Rosi did the opposite work with Mimi Rogers, an actress who had recently achieved global success with *Desperate Hours* (Michael Cimino, 1990). He kept the future interpreter of Mrs. Bonavia totally isolated from any Sicilian influence. Her character, as also contemplated in the novel, is an independent and complicit companion simultaneously: inflexible at the moment of validating the husband's political action but strategically willing to understand the compromise when the situation requires it. Her understanding of her husband's behavior represents a small flame of hope within the dark pessimism of the epilogue. It is a tragic conclusion hinted at by Vittorio Gassman's surprisingly melancholy cameo:

A prince who, for having offended the mafia organization, has been condemned not to show himself, under penalty of death, outside the doors of a luxurious hotel. He will spend the

rest of his days there, in halls and gardens where kings and celebrities have stayed. It is a figure dictated by an almost surreal taste that, in other hands, would have fallen into the sketch. Gassman, guided by Rosi, makes him a character of significant dramatic volume, a key to solving the thriller that sustains the moral concerns that constitute the initial motif of the film. (Bolzoni, 1992, p. 108)

In this way, the prince's character, in homage to *El gatopardo* (Luchino Visconti, 1963), represents the longevity of a criminal power that constantly changes its appearance to continue committing crimes with impunity. Only at the end does the face of power appear: the impenetrable mask of Joss Ackland. It is the decisive encounter between Sicilian and Sicilian: the ultimate fulfillment of Bonavia's initiatory journey into the deepest darkness of his Sicilian roots, into the relentless darkness of power. Faced with this threshold, this abyss of conscience, the protagonist is forced to decide whether or not to become the mayor of the Mafia: now it is no longer just a matter of ideological conviction but of a solid inner acquisition.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In the same way that Leonardo Sciascia's novel *Il contesto* was the origin of *Cadaveri eccellenti* (1976), and Carlo Levi's memoir *Cristo se paró en Eboli* was the origin of the 1979 film of the same name, the Edmonde above Charles-Roux's *Olvidar Palermo* (1966) inspired the plot of the film under consideration here. As Francesco Rosi acknowledged, this book could not have left him indifferent because he found the themes he has been dealing with since 1960 in his successive attempts to depict southern Italy in cinema (Esteve, 2001).

However, the greater complexity of the writer's pages, mainly originating from her own experiences as an ambassador's daughter, dictated a more linear exposition of events. The international cast, coming from big commercial successes of the old Cecchi Gori's hand, brought a representation closer to the thriller. However, the filmmaker did not betray his intention to denounce the contemporary social situation in southern Italy. Still, he had to assume narrative configuration standards more comparable to the crime films of the time:

These norms allow him to underline the collusion between the criminality of the overt executors and the hidden political principals. In other words, even if, by hypothesis, everything that Rosi denounces in *Salvatore Giuliano*, *The Hands on the City*, or *Dimenticare Palermo* were a big lie, all these films would still be masterful examples of film noir. (Toffetti, 2015)

The harshness of the attacks made by many specialized critics or, even worse, the absolute indifference has shown how *Dimenticare Palermo* defied many contemporary national critics. The majority spoke of a production that "aban-

doned its duty of testimony "by inertia or confusion of ideas" (Argenterì, 1989). Rosi adopted the rough and coarse features of the crime thriller to investigate uncomfortable and censored issues. His return to Palermo concluded a particular line of research on the hidden and criminal power of the Mafia: its first connection with the constituted order in *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), the industrialization of its families in *Lucky Luciano* (1973), the mysterious fatal incident of an enlightened industrialist who does not yield to the blackmail of the international oil cartel in *Il caso Mattei* (1972), the strategy of tension that defuses reformist drives in *Cadaveri eccellenti* (1976) and, finally with *Dimenticare Palermo*, the definitive representation of Mafia globalization.

With this last film, Rosi crowned a necessary investigation that set out to denounce the clandestine drug market, spread everywhere, and to unmask the guilty ineffectiveness of repressive measures. The insinuation of a personal proposal, under the forms of legalization and not liberalization, aroused panic among moralists and the hatred of conniving politics. The historian Francesco Bolzoni recalls that, with *Dimenticare Palermo*, Rosi reaffirms his belonging to a committed cinema. A personal line that ignores fashions is insensitive to easy infatuations and that, above all, recovers the strength of Hollywood expressive conventions (1992). Consequently, the respect for a narrative configuration following the same chronological order as the original text reaffirmed the intention of focusing on the tragic plot reference rather than the enunciative construction: the importance of the rebuke rather than the aesthetics.

The Neapolitan filmmaker, therefore, demonstrated his commitment to take on a project only when he considers it unavoidable when the need arises to investigate the dynamics of a tremendous plague such as drug trafficking

when the ineffectiveness of the means employed to counteract it is incomprehensible and, once the governmental collusion with the merchants of death is implied, to arouse debate among the public to find the most appropriate solution.

His authorial legacy required him to coordinate all the expressive elements regarding communicative effectiveness. Pasqualino de Santis' help allowed Rosi to count on the wide Kodak chromatic range. His inseparable cinematographer experimented with this new emulsion, which was much more sensitive and allowed him to shoot in real locations without needing a lot of light. It allowed him to obtain a morbid tonality and a great depth of field without having to open the diaphragm excessively. The versatility of the impressionable support made possible a differentiation of shades between the more contrasting colors of New York and the softer and more subdued colors of Palermo.

The strong contrast between the pragmatic time of the Big Apple and its fast-paced modern life, embodied in the dizzying election campaign, marriage, and interviews, with the interior, slow, and almost motionless time of Palermo, was represented chromatically. The same duplicity was expressed in musical terms, which Rosi had entrusted to Ennio Morricone. Concerning the spirit of the original story, the Maestro worked on two distinct themes. The first was challenging and rigorous, like an algebra equation linked to the idea of criminal power, extended to an economic and international political dimension. The second was sweet and melancholic, introducing the affective concept of memory and nostalgia.

The abandonment of the author's modern and 'Brechtian' look could have been interpreted as a cession to ensure commercial success. On the contrary, they have been somewhat necessary discursive simplifications when assuming more immediately effective thriller codes. The strong contrasts of this genre and its dry dialogues effectively and forcefully transmit information. Because, as Bolzoni (1992) reminds us, all cinema, not only minor cinema, lives by conventions.

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OBRA DIGITAL

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Teaching of Philosophy through television series: a case study of Merlí

La enseñanza de la filosofía a través de las series de televisión: estudio de caso de Merlí

6

ARTICLE



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Abstract:

Series are one of the formats most consumed by young people. Thanks to them, teachings are transmitted through the content shown. The aim of this study is to find out the relationship between philosophy and the daily life of teenagers in the series *Merlí*. A qualitative methodology has been chosen through an analysis of content and characters. The results show how philosophy is brought closer to teenagers through the issues that interest them. It is concluded that educational series have a great didactic value for the audience.

Keywords: Series, television, education, philosophy, teenagers

Resumen:

Las series son uno de los formatos más consumidos por los jóvenes. Gracias a ellas se transmiten enseñanzas con los contenidos que se muestran. El objetivo de este estudio es conocer la relación entre la filosofía y la vida diaria de los adolescentes en la serie *Merlí*. Se ha elegido una metodología cualitativa a través de un análisis de contenidos y de los personajes. Los resultados muestran cómo se acerca la filo-

sofía a los adolescentes a través de los asuntos que a estos les interesa. Se concluye que las series educativas tienen un gran valor didáctico para la audiencia.

Palabras clave: series, televisión educación, filosofía, adolescentes

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, audience habits have altered due to, among other things, the arrival of the Internet (Forteza-Martínez et al., 2021). Television series have become one of the most preferred formats among viewers' preferences. They have gained importance in recent years in entertainment (Moreno-Mínguez & Rodríguez-Julián, 2016). Moreover, according to Galán-Fajardo (2007), "fiction series, in addition to serving as entertainment, present models of identification that are imitated and tend to foster and further entrench stereotypical representations" (p.236).

With serialized fiction, society is shown as it is through the stories told in them. According to Vasallo-de-López (2008), television series become an element that "preserves, constructs and reconstructs a common census of everyday life" (p.38). In short, television series influence the development of the audience's personality through their behavior or approval of the contents shown (Chicharro-Merayo, 2011).

It has been found that, in recent times, there has been an increase in the number of studies linked to television series, either from an analysis based on entertainment (Álvarez-Rodríguez, 2021), related to culture and media (López-Rodríguez & Raya-Bravo, 2019), as well as discursive and audiovisual elements (Masanet & Fedele, 2019; Barra & Scaglioni, 2020; Castro & Cascajosa, 2020; De-Caso-Bausela et al., 2020; Wilke-François & Seide-Froemming, 2021).

Among the genres of television series, the most popular with the youth population are those known as teen TV series, which have some peculiar characteristics that facilitate their classification (Fedele & García-Muñoz, 2010). According to different researchers, these types of series are characterized by the fact that the actors are usually teenagers, and the audience that watches them is generally young (Davis & Dickinson, 2004; Ross & Stein, 2008).

According to several studies, the stories told in these series revolve around two environments: the family and the educational environment. The latter has the most significant presence in the scenes (García-Muñoz & Fedele, 2011; Lacalle, 2013). In this sense, great importance is given to plots centered on social elements, such as relationships with their peers (Lacalle, 2013), as well as those stories that focus on the conflicts of young people, rebellion against adults, or the control of their feelings, among others (Falcón & Díaz-Aguado, 2014).

Among other themes in these series, those linked to self-concept, character, and personality development stand out (Falcón & Díaz-Aguado, 2014). Likewise, the representation of roles and stereotypes associated with gender (Signorielli, 2007; García-Muñoz & Fedele, 2011; Masanet & Aran-Ramspott, 2016), as well as the elimination of barriers imposed by being male or female (Raya-Bravo et al., 2019; Masanet & Fedele, 2019; Mateos-Pérez, 2021). It is important to highlight those that analyze the creation of identities (Padilla-Castillo & Sosa-Sánchez,

2018) or didactic topics (Forteza-Martínez & Conde, 2021; Forteza-Martínez, 2023).

Generally speaking, the actors who play these series' protagonists usually have specific peculiarities. As Lacalle (2013) expresses, the peculiarities are about being "young, attractive and fashionably dressed, belonging to a uniform middle and upper-middle class" (p.30). Moreover, teen TV series usually feature stories where first-couple relationships are shown; these are seen as true platonic love, where the protagonists experience them as if they were love for life (Masanet & Aran-Ramspott, 2016).

Among the series for adolescents, *Merlí* stands out, which has achieved excellent audience success. As a consequence, numerous types of research have been conducted around it, where elements such as its discursive elements (Martínez-Pérez, 2020), aspects linked to sex education (Alcalá-Angiano et al., 2018) or freedom of thought and expression (Pascoal & Novaes, 2019) have been studied. In addition, the series has been analyzed from an educational point of view (Leduc & Acosta, 2017; Cambra-Badii & Mastandrea, 2020), as well as the importance given by young people to philosophy as a result of watching the series (Martínez-Cantos & Rodó-de-Zárate, 2020).

This research focuses on the characters and philosophical themes reflected in *Merlí*, as it shows the daily life of adolescents in an educational center, where the conflicts that may arise at this stage of life and their possible solutions through reflection and philosophical thought are reflected. This series belongs to the drama genre and consists of three seasons and 40 episodes, averaging 50 minutes per episode. It was created by Héctor Lozano, directed by Eduard Cortés, produced by Veranda TV, and broadcast on TV3 between 2015 and 2018. It

can be seen on the RTVE Play website and the Prime Video platform.

To this end, the following research question is posed as a starting point: How does philosophy relate to the everyday problems of young people?

2. METHODOLOGY

The general objective of this research is to know the relationship between philosophy and the daily life of adolescents in the series *Merlí*. In addition, the specific objectives are: 1) to study the characters that appear in the series and 2) to identify the teachings of *Merlí* and their link with the conflicts of young people.

The entire series has been visualized to form the corpus of this study, allowing for a complete manual analysis of its themes and characters. In addition, an extensive and updated bibliographic review was carried out to lay the theoretical foundations for the study. For the control and format analysis classification, the researcher's criterion was considered based on analysis matrices already elaborated in previous studies.

A qualitative methodology with quantitative support was chosen to respond to the objectives proposed in this research. A content analysis has been developed since this study meets the criteria established by Igartúa-Perosanz (2006) to "scientifically approach the analysis of messages (whatever their nature), to understand their genesis and formation process, and to obtain precise descriptions of their structure and components" (p.180).

On the other hand, the characters will be analyzed by counting all the characters appearing in the series. The following elements are studied (Table 1).

Table 1*Categorization of character analysis*

Type of character	Teachers/Students/Family/ Others
Gender	Male/Female/Other
Nationality	Spanish/Other
Age	Adolescent/Adult/Late Adulthood
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual/Homosexual/ Bisexual/Not Specified
Academic background	No studies/High school Ed./ University/University/ Not specified

Source. Own elaboration

According to Koeman *et al.* (2007), when studying a character, they must appear in the scene and have a dialogue with other characters.

The analysis of the characters is seen as an essential element in constructing the stories shown in the series. The characters come to create affective bonds with the viewers. This is expressed by Galán-Fajardo (2006) when he says that:

Characterizing characters in television series requires a deep and detailed elaboration, focusing on their past and motivations to explain the actions that will take place during the narrative evolution of the story. (p.65)

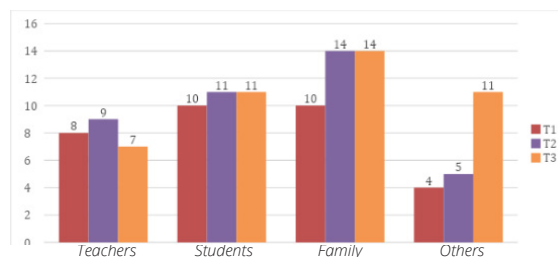
In addition, a narrative analysis (Fisher, 1985) was conducted to study the discursive elements of the series through characters, plot, narrative structure, and themes. Every chapter was visualized and reviewed independently, and the data were analyzed in a way that could provide answers to the stated objectives in Marradi *et al.* (2018).

3. RESULTS

The results are structured around two main blocks: 1) characters and 2) themes.

3.1. CHARACTERS

In the series *Merlí*, the characters are stable throughout the three seasons, as they are maintained throughout the series, although there are some additions and departures. It should be noted that a character fulfills a dual function; that is, he or she is a teacher and a family member. Thus, in the first season, there are 32 characters; in the second, 37; and in the third and final season, there are a total 41 (Graph 1).

Figure 1*Total number of characters in Merlí by season**Source. Own elaboration*

When analyzing the main characters, who have a greater presence within a series, there are 10 (31.25%) in the first season and 11 in both the second (30.55%) and third seasons (26.82%).

Regarding the socio-demographic profile of the first season, 17 are men (54.83%), and 14 are women (45.17%). Concerning age, 10 are adolescents (32.25%), with ages between 17 and 19 years; 19 are in the age range of 30 to 55 years, which is considered adulthood (61.29%); and 2 are over 60 years old, which places them in late adulthood (6.46%). It is also observed that all the characters are of Spanish origin since no individuals of other nationalities exist.

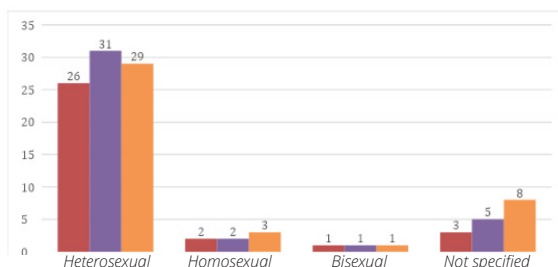
In the second season, 20 are men (52.63%) and 18 are women (47.37%). In terms of age, 11 are adolescents (28.94%), 25 are in the adult age group (65.78%), 1 is a child under five years of age (2.64%), and one is in late adulthood (2.64%). Regarding the nationality of the characters, 37 are Spanish (97.36%), and 1 is a girl of Ukrainian origin (2.64%).

In the third and final season, there are 20 males (48.78%) and 21 females (51.22%). When paying attention to age, 11 are teenagers (26.82%), 28 are in the adult age range (68.29%), 1 is a child under five years old (2.44%), and 1 is over 65 years old (2.44%). Regarding the nationality of the characters, 40 are Spanish (97.56%), and 1 is a Ukrainian girl (2.44%).

When examining sexual orientation, it can be seen how, in all three seasons, heterosexual characters predominate. The first season is where this group is shown the most (83.87% in the first season, 81.87% in the second season and 67.44% in the third season). About homosexuality, it is observed how it is also represented in the series. This group is more represented in the last season (6.45% in the first, 5.26% in the second, and 7.14% in the third season). Finally, bisexuality is also a group that is also reflected. This orientation is reflected through the same character in the three seasons (3.22% in the first, 2.63% in the second, and 2.38% in the third season) (Graph 2).

Figure 2

Sexual orientation of the characters in Merlí

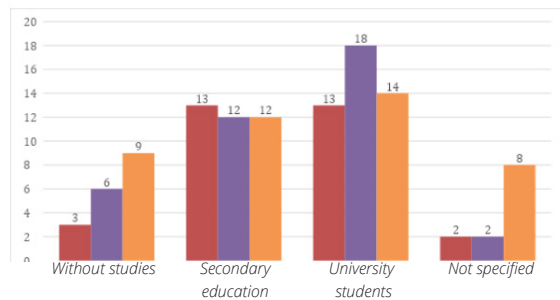


Source. Own elaboration

In terms of academic background, characters with university studies are the majority group in all three seasons. They are more represented in the second season (41.93% in the first, 47.36% in the second, and 33.33% in the third season). Those in Secondary Education or who have already completed these studies are the second most numerous. For them, the first season is the most representative (41.93% in the first season, 31.57% in the second season, and 28.57% in the third season). The group with no studies is the third group, with the highest representation in the third season (9.67% in the first, 15.78% in the second, and 21.42% in the third season) (Graph 3).

Figure 3

Academic background of the characters in Merlí



Source. Own elaboration.

3.3. THEMATICS

The series deals with different themes through philosophers, each associated with various aspects and problems concerning adolescents (Table 2).

Table 2*Philosophers associated with themes by chapters*

Season	Chapter	Title	Subjects worked on
1	1	Peripatetics	Ability to reflect
1	2	Plato	Platonic love; reality
1	3	Machiavelli	Success in life; State Power
1	4	Aristotle	Happiness
1	5	Socrates	Questioning things; distrust
1	6	Sohapenhauer	Desire; suffering
1	7	Focault	Normality
1	8	Guy Debord	Exposure on the networks; entertainment
1	9	Epicurus	Money; hedonism
1	10	The skeptics	Epogeo
1	11	The sophists	Education and work
1	12	Hume	Perceptions
1	13	Nietzsche	Death; following rules
2	1	The Presocratics	The principle of everything; questioning things
2	2	Thomas Hobbes	Demagogy; chaos
2	3	The Stoics	Lack of passion
2	4	Kant	Lies
2	5	Hipparchy	Superfluous; austerity
2	6	Montaigne	Truth
2	7	Judith Butler	Sexual freedom
2	8	Freud	The unconscious
2	9	Descartes	Existence; doubt

2	10	Engels	Money; love; family
2	11	Zizek	Love
2	12	Taoism	Life
2	13	Boecio	Freedom
3	1	Walter Benjamin	History; interpretation of facts
3	2	Adam Smith	Success
3	3	Albert Camus	Suicide; the meaning of life
3	4	Karl Marx	Capitalist society; consumption; money
3	5	Hannah Arendt	Forgiveness
3	6	Kierkegaard	Making decisions
3	7	Thoreau	Civil disobedience
3	8	Plotino	Beauty; knowing oneself
3	9	Zygmunt Bauman	Uncertainty; decision making; liquid reality
3	10	Heidegger	Death; future plans
3	11	Hegel	Dialectics to reach knowledge
3	12	Saint Agustin	Passing of time
3	13	The peripatetics of the 21st century	Future; studies; university
3	14	Merlí Bergerón	Death; friendship

Source. Own elaboration

With Plato, teachings related to Platonic love are transmitted, where the meaning of love is explained. They are made to see that love is the impulse that leads to the knowledge of beauty, which makes it possible to distinguish between the sensible world and the world of ideas. On the other hand, Plato's myth of the cave urges one to look beyond the cave to understand what is happening around each person.

Machiavelli conveys the idea of success in life and the power of the state in people's lives.

Merlí: Machiavelli tells it like it is: that force is force, violence is violence, and lies are lies, and that there is no need to disguise it with nice ideals.

Tania: What does it mean that it is not necessary to disguise it?

Merlí: Well, in short, Machiavelli defends evil to save the State. Tell me, Gerard.

Gerard: There's something that doesn't make sense to me: Why is it important to save a State that can harm its citizens? Is it worth saving if the end justifies the means? What justifies the end?

Merlí: That is the most intelligent reflection that a student has ever made to me.

Merlí (TV3: September 28, 2015). Season 1. Chapter 3: Machiavelli

The theme of happiness is introduced with Aristotle. It is explained that without friendship, *eudaimonia*, i.e., happiness, is not possible, although achieving it has become an obsession for society. This is considered a right for them, although it is at the end of life when one can take stock of whether one has been happy.

With Socrates, mistrust and questioning are introduced, such as whether parents are right to instill ideas in their children, thinking it is best for them. Therefore, they are encouraged to distrust everything that comes before them. With Schopenhauer, desire and suffering are discussed.

Merlí: According to Schopenhauer, man is a disgusting creature. To desire the immortality of man is to desire the perpetuation of a great error. How can it be that man is corrupt, a torturer, and a murderer that he organizes wars and genocides? (...) According to Schopenhauer, animals are not cruel; for man, they are because you have to be intelligent to want to harm. (...) For Schopenhauer, the only way to combat desire was to opt for nothingness. Nothingness is emptiness, the absence of desire. For him, it was the only way to fight against suffering.

Merlí (TV3: October 19, 2015). Season 1. Chapter 6: Schopenhauer

With Guy Debord, he deals with issues related to the society of the entertainment industry, such as social networks.

Merlí: His name is Guy Debord. According to him, ours is a model of society that has turned people's lives into a spectacle. For this thinker, who did not know social networks, we live on a kind of global screen where everyone wants to be visible at any price. In other words, if you don't show yourself, you don't exist (...) According to Guy Debord, man becomes a spectator of himself when he sees himself reflected on any screen. But he also becomes a

passive being, incapable of making decisions, incapable of living his own life.

Merlí (TV3: November 2, 2015). Season 1. Chapter 8: Guy Debord

With Epicurus, we speak of hedonism, which is living for and to achieve pleasure and money. He explains it with the term *ataraxia*, which means the absence of any disturbance. However, he argues that it is difficult to achieve happiness without money. On the other hand, with the skeptics, the apogee is exposed.

Merlí: Apogee. Suspension of judgment, to be attentive to the things that happen, but not to pronounce on reality (...). The skeptics aspired to nothing more than silence so as not to have to separate themselves from the reality of the things that happen. They limit themselves to observe them. The skeptic looks carefully, examines, considers the facts, and remains silent. He does not make judgments, apogee.

Merlí (TV3: 9 November 9, 2015). Season 1. Chapter 9: Epicurus

With the sophists, the relationship between education and work is exposed, dealing with the current academic overqualification and the lack of job opportunities, where work is understood as a means to achieve a goal through sacrifice. On the other hand, perceptions and feelings are taught through Hume, which shows that the reception of a habit does not explain the truth of things since it is necessary to base knowledge on experience.

Through Nietzsche, the theme of death and God is presented.

Merlí: Nietzsche speaks of death, specifically of the death of God. He says that we have all killed him because we men do not need him to live. Until now, we have lived under the shadow of a protective father who has told us how we should behave. He has made us feel guilty when we have not done things right, but now we can break away from this father; we can build new values that have nothing to do with the idea of God.

Merlí (TV3: December 7, 2015). Season 1. Chapter 13: Nietzsche

With the pre-Socratics, young people are encouraged to question the origin of things and not to conform to what the rules dictate, asking what the main element that makes things the way they are, known as *argé*, the principle of everything that surrounds people. To work on demagoguery and chaos, Hobbes is studied, who explains that man is usually a wolf for the man himself since he is a selfish being by nature. Therefore, a government capable of organizing and ensuring the security and order of society is required.

The Stoics discussed the world of passions since they spoke of *apatheia*, which is the absence of any kind of passion. They let themselves be led only by reason to overcome desires and means. Kant introduced the subject of lying, affirming that one should not lie under any circumstances, even when one believes it is justified. This exposes that truth must be above the physical integrity of any person.

With Hipparchy, austerity and the superfluous are discussed:

Merlí: Hipparchy led a life far away from her loved ones. She believed that to reach happiness, we had to eliminate everything that was superfluous. From the most absolute austerity, she wanted to expose the artifice of our life (...) For her, happiness did not consist of living following the crowd. In the cynical philosophy, there is no difference between the image we project and who we really are. (...) Hipparchy only wore four rags and had a very simple law: to satisfy only the most elementary needs.

Merlí (TV3: October 17, 2016). Season 2. Chapter 5: Hipparchy

Truth is also discussed with Mointagne through the term aretheia, which refers to everything that is shown to people as they are. There, truth is beyond contradiction since it exists by itself. Upon the arrival of a transgender teacher, the topic of sexual freedom is discussed with the philosopher Judith Butler.

Merlí: Judith Butler, one of the great feminist theorists of the queer moment. According to her theory, our sex, that is, that which supposedly defines us as men or women, is nothing more than a social construction. The fact of being a man or a woman is not determined by our birth, but instead, we have been taught to be so. We have learned to be men or women in a cultural and educational context that has heterosexuality as the norm. Anything outside this norm is excluded. (...). She argues that we do not necessarily have to perceive ourselves as men or wom-

en; that is, in the same way we construct gender, we can also deconstruct it by going beyond its limitations.

Merlí (TV3: 31 de octubre de 2016). Season 2. Chapter 7: Judith Butler

Thanks to Freud, the unconscious and its consequences on the actions of human beings are explained. The unconscious is shown as that which forces us to do inexplicable things or to have feelings that we do not know very well why we feel them. Likewise, Descartes presents aspects such as existence and doubt:

Merli: Descartes, unlike other thinkers, does not begin by establishing truths about how the world is and, what the human being is, and what the soul is. He wonders how we can arrive at a truth we can be entirely sure about.

Merlí (TV3: November 14 2016). Season 2. Chapter 9: Descartes

A relationship between money, love, and family is established through two phrases by the philosopher Engels: "In the history of mankind, there are two great businesses: the business of having money and the business of making love" and "The family is an instrument of the ideological apparatus of the State". Love is analyzed with Zysek, explaining that in any love relationship, it is essential to love the person with their imperfections and accept them with all their defects. Taoism explains life and the risks it entails, where the art of living is more like sailing than war, and taking risks is necessary because, without risk, there is no freedom.

On the other hand, happiness is introduced with a phrase by Boethius: "If you want to be happy, do not base your happiness on such

fragile foundations as those of luck." It is made clear that, for Boethius, there is the possibility that people's destiny is controlled by God. If this is so, one comes to think that it automatically nullifies men's capacity for freedom.

Adam Smith discusses success and envy. He expresses that, on most occasions, knowing that a person succeeds in any aspect of his life provokes society's envy.

When discussing Karl Marx and what he exposed as the fetishism of merchandise, it is about capitalist society, consumption, and money.

The conditions of production, where the human being is a simple instrument in a production chain, are hidden.

Hannah Arendt questions the limits of forgiveness and whether anything, such as the Nazi extermination, should be forgiven. According to this philosopher, all those unwilling to think cannot be forgiven, and there can be no forgiveness without repentance. Kierkegaard explains decision-making since one is alone and each one is responsible for his decisions, which generates fear and anguish due to making one's own decisions.

As expressed by Plotinus, beauty is associated with knowing oneself, which generates a debate on beauty and its subjectivity. To this end, it is explained that it is necessary to understand the two possibilities of beauty: that of the body (sensible world) and that of the soul (intelligible world).

Merlí: True beauty does not reside in matter, in the body. Matter is evil, it is evil. Plotinus says: "Turn your gaze inward and through reflection and thought make the soul beautiful, for

when the soul is reflective it is beautified. But when it is not, then it is only a slave of its own body".

Merlí (TV3: November 13, 2017). Season 3. Chapter 8: Plotinus

Thanks to Bauman, uncertainty and decision-making are also visible in the series. Today's society is shown as precarious and changing very fast, where we are forced to make decisions more and more quickly and rapidly. At the same time, we have less capacity to make decisions. We live in a liquid society where making sensible decisions is practically impossible.

Death, an aspect that makes the students uncomfortable, is explained by Heidegger:

Merlí: We know perfectly well that we are condemned to die, but we behave as if we did not know it. According to Heidegger, we live in the mode of not yet; I am so far from dying that I don't bother to think about it. And that is the paradox. I know I will end, but that does not prevent me from making plans for the future (...). Heidegger distinguished between two types of existence: what he called authentic existence and inauthentic existence. We could say that inauthentic existence is you, those of you who make those faces when they talk to you about death (...). The inauthentic non-existence is that of those who live pending plans for the future to try to deny that they will die. And authentic existence is that of those who know they will die, but that does not prevent them from living. They can even live with more joy because what provokes anguish is not death itself but pretending that it does not exist.

Merlí (TV3: November 27, 2016). Season 3. Chapter 10: Heidegger

With Hegel, dialectics are approached to reach knowledge, where the way to absolute knowledge is explained. This concept is worked through an association of knowledge. The morals of the master and the slave are used, and some people tend to exercise power while others are subjected to it.

Finally, we work on the passage of time with St. Augustine of Hippo. An hourglass is used since it graphically represents the passage of time. This term is complex for young people to define. For this reason, a phrase the philosopher said is an example: "If no one asks me what time it is, I know it very well. But if they ask me and I try to explain it, I do not know what to say". St. Augustine delimits it by saying that the present is a point without extension between two nothings: the past, which no longer exists, and the future, which does not yet exist. For this reason, time is associated with happiness since we cannot enjoy things forever because once we have them, we fear losing them.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Once the results have been presented, it can be seen how they respond to the objective proposed for this study to know the relationship between philosophy and the daily life of adolescents in the Merlí series and the two specific objectives proposed.

In responding to the first specific objective, to study the characters that appear in the series, the philosophical teachings are carried out through its protagonists thanks to the dialogues and debates that are generated among

them when they talk about a philosopher and relate to some aspect that young people are interested in. About the second specific objective, to identify the teachings of Merlí and its link with the conflicts of young people, it is observed how the series presents philosophical content related to the problems and situations that can arise in adolescents' daily lives.

It has been possible to see how, through Merlí, questions are posed that are of interest to young people, which confirms what Mateos-Pérez (2021) stated when he explains that the series poses "contents that seek authenticity, stories, and characters linked to reality (and that) use a youthful, reiterative, spontaneous jargon, typical of the social class they represent (p.154). It can be affirmed that this type of series presents real situations that occur in society. (Rincón, 2011; Martínez-Lucena & Cambra-Badii, 2020).

As far as the characters are concerned, the cast is stable throughout the series. Regarding the socio-demographic profile, it can be seen that, in the first and second seasons, men are the majority gender, while in the third season, women are the majority. Throughout the series, the most represented age range is that of those between 30 and 55 years old, considered to be of adult age; the most common nationality is Spanish; the predominant sexual orientation is heterosexual; and, finally, the most common level of studies is that of university students. Even though the profile shows a greater representation of adult characters, the specific weight of the interpretation falls on the young protagonists. However, it is observed that in the series, there is no great diversity among the population analyzed, something already pointed out by López-de-Lara-Marín (2019), who explains that this series is a clear example of the so-called white society.

Several investigations have been carried out on the characters in television series for adolescents, including those related to their sexual orientation (Platero, 2008; Fellner, 2017; Calvo-Anoro, 2017) and the roles and stereotypes that are reflected in them (Guarinós, 2009). In the words of Lacalle (2013), the young character is shown as a young, good-looking person who follows the dictates of fashion.

In Merlí, teachings related to the problems of young people are developed, all linked to the approaches of different philosophers. These themes are platonic love, beauty, power, friendship, happiness, mistrust, desire, questioning things, suffering, social networks, hedonism, money, education, work, perceptions and feelings, death, God, questioning the origin of things, demagoguery, chaos, passions, lies, austerity, the superfluous, truth, sexual freedom, human actions, forgiveness, decision making, fear, anguish, uncertainty, dialectics to arrive at knowledge and the passage of time.

In addition, among the themes most often shown in this series are the rebelliousness and nonconformity of young people, uncertainty, and opposition to parents and teachers. Another strong theme relates to relationships, where platonic love is shown based on myths, stereotypes, and uncertainty about the future. This

shows how this series raises the need to think, reflect, and express one's own opinion, all from a communicative and respectful point of view (Echegaray & Expósito, 2021). Educational centers are seen as spaces where the exchange of ideas and dialogue is encouraged (Martignoni & Giovine, 2020).

Television series for adolescents present a series of characteristics that identify them through the stories they tell (Fedele & García-Muñoz, 2010). Likewise, these series are structured around two large blocks: family and friends, where the stories generated in a social context stand out (Guarinós, 2009; García-Muñoz & Fedele, 2011). There, themes related to love and friendship prevail (Lacalle, 2013).

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The productive routines of the Units of Scientific Culture and Innovation (UCC+i). Conditions for the creation of science news

Las rutinas productivas de las Unidades de Cultura Científica y de la Innovación (UCC+i). Condiciones de la creación de noticias sobre ciencia

7

ARTICLE



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Abstract

Most science in Spain is generated in universities and research centres and it is there where the Units of Scientific Culture and Innovation (UCC+i) are created to promote science communication. This article analyses the productive routines of these agents. We have used a mixed technique based on a survey of UCC+i professionals and interviews with experts in science communication. The conclusions show that their routines are similar to those of the

communication offices of their institutions and that they use the same channels to disseminate their research.

Keywords

Divulgarion, Science Communication, Science journalism, UCC+i, universities

Resumen:

La mayor parte de la ciencia en España se genera en universidades y en centros de investigación y es ahí donde se crean las Unidades

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de Cultura Científica y de la Innovación (UCC+i), para impulsar la comunicación de la ciencia. Este artículo analiza las rutinas productivas de estos agentes. Se ha recurrido a una técnica mixta basada en una encuesta a profesionales de las UCC+i y entrevistas a expertos en comunicación científica. Las conclusiones permiten avanzar que sus rutinas se asemejan a las de

los gabinetes de comunicación de sus instituciones y utilizan los mismos canales para difundir sus investigaciones.

Palabras clave

Comunicación científica, divulgación, periodismo científico, UCC+i, universidades

1. INTRODUCTION

The communication of science has its origins in the scientists through their disclosures. It began as a literary genre in the 17th and 17th centuries (Calvo, 2002). Previously, there were great men of history such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), who considered that the first duty of the man of science is communication, or Gerolamo Cardano (1501-1576), who was one of the precursors of scientific popularization with books on mathematics, medicine, and physics. This task has been professionalized over the years (Rodríguez, 2013; Calvo, 2002) with the emergence of science journalism, which aims to explain in clear language to the public what are the advances in science so that they can understand these issues better (Elías, 2008).

In this sense, the main difference between scientific dissemination and journalism is based on the fact that dissemination is done by the sources, in this case, the scientists, and one of the objectives is to benefit their environment. Meanwhile, journalism discloses and analyzes whether the experiment is socially worthwhile, so its objective is to benefit society and not the source. One of the current examples of science journalism can be seen in the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the evolution that both the dissemination and communication of science have been undergoing for some time (Plaza et al., 2020).

It should be noted that the topics that make up the scientific news are concentrated on a few issues. For example, a group of only ten topics in the health field accumulates more than half of everything published in ten years. Not all events have the same probability of becoming news (Revuelta, 2008). For the author, science communication is nothing more than the communication of a small part of science, specific topics explained by a group of information sources. This theory is reinforced by a study conducted by Alonso, Serrano, and Moreno (2018), which shows that researchers who participate in communication actions are usually a minority, even though they recognize that, after publishing their scientific work in the media, the research is more recognized among their colleagues in Spain and abroad.

Science is mainly generated in universities and research centers; therefore, both institutions must carry out this transmission of knowledge to society. To carry out this management coherently, universities have a department in charge of managing communication (Simancas and García, 2017), offering an idea of institutionalizing communication. In these departments, public universities, in particular, pursue a double objective, as Simancas and García (2022) state. These are to achieve greater social valuation and accountability. One of the resources to achieve a projection beyond the university campus is the creation of expert guides as a

service for media relations (De Vicente and Sierra, 2020).

Added to this, as López-Pérez and Olvera (2019) point out, is the fact that Spanish science of excellence still does not consider the Internet a valuable channel for disseminating its advances to the public, as evidenced by the difficulty in accessing its websites and social networks. When they do, they use technical language and direct their messages to experts.

Therefore, it is necessary to train these experts to transmit their message in an understandable way (De Vicente and Sierra, 2020) and to prevent possible false information with the appearance of a scientific nature from being easily disseminated through social networks. This is because the consumer of information cannot easily contrast it, nor do they know which reliable sources to turn to (Molina-Cañabate y Magallón-Rosa, 2020).

This absence of researchers in specific networks, such as Twitter, is valued by a somewhat skeptical current of opinion, which points out that a certain level of activity distracts from the actual research activity (Alonso *et al.*, 2020). Other authors claim that scientists who use their time to feed public social network profiles with scientific production publish fewer articles than those exclusively dedicated to research (Hall, 2014).

To this, it should be added that when an expert uses language with an aggressive style, the information they want to convey is perceived as less credible, and when discussing science topics, less is learned (König and Jucks, 2019). On this point, it should be noted that scientists interact more with other scientists on Twitter than non-scientists, even though they value the communication of science to society by ad-

justing their vocabulary with different registers while using more neutral language towards their peers (Walter *et al.*, 2019).

With all that has been said about this social network, research focused on Twitter (Denia, 2021) points out that the main functions of this network are to be a scientific communication tool to inform the interested public, to consolidate and develop communities, to account for interactions between journalists, experts, and the public; to increase the impact of scientific publications; and, finally, to align science and society or to confront them. Another study (Gil and Guallar, 2023) points to Twitter as a relevant channel for disseminating science, even though this social network is sometimes associated with hate speech on the part of society.

This increase in the presence of scientists has led Spanish universities to use this social network to showcase their actions related to innovation and knowledge transfer to society (Carratalá and Menencia, 2019). Along with this and other social networks, streaming platforms such as YouTube (Rajas *et al.*, 2022) have been gaining prominence in recent years, serving as a loudspeaker to disseminate the work of scientists in a more pleasant and closer way with audiovisual and multimedia contents.

This space that scientists do not occupy is sometimes taken by politicians, especially on the issue of climate change, where they appear as sources of information without doing much pedagogy on the subject (Abejón *et al.*, 2020). In contrast to this theory, a study by San Cornelio *et al.* (2021) focused on eco-influencers on Instagram assures that these new agents propose a sustainable lifestyle to change society while offering solutions to climate change in favorable terms to reach the most significant number of people.

Another channel through which the dissemination of scientific content is intended is television. In this sense, recent research (Carcaboso *et al.*, 2023) focuses on the fictional series *The Big Bang Theory* to show the relationship that may exist between audiovisual production and the dissemination of science. The results show that audiovisual products and television series can include scientific content and are opportune media to carry it out. Thus, they have an educational function, also attributed to the media.

1.1. THE UCC+I AS AGENTS FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF SCIENCE

In 2007, in the context of the Year of Science in Spain, the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT) promoted the Network of Scientific Culture and Innovation Units (FECYT Network). This network aims to set up organizations that promote interest in science and scientific culture in society by transmitting knowledge generated in research centers, universities, and other science-related institutions. In addition, they work to promote scientific and innovative culture in civil society and the productive fabric (FECYT, 2021).

For this reason, the relatively recent creation of these units has meant that only a few studies focusing on them have yet to be published. Despite this, the interest in science communication favors the research of these unique, specialized communication units.

Before the creation of the officially recognized UCC+i in Spain, Science Communication Offices (SCO) have worked in Europe and the United States for more than fifty years. However, they are relatively recent in Spanish-speaking countries such as Mexico (Frías and Rueda, 2014). As far as Spain is concerned, the UCC+i has meant a structure in many universities and centers that gives them visibility and the possibility of relating to the general population or groups. Among these groups are journalists specializing in science (Moreno, 2022) who, in recent years, have acquired greater relevance in the media. They make scientific content understandable to the public, which fosters interest and also favors the cultural advancement of society.

Therefore, for some theorists, UCC+i are unique SCOs since they are officially recognized as institutionalized figures at the state level to fulfill a social function (González-Pedraz *et al.*, 2018). The work of these UCC+i had great social recognition during the pandemic by Covid-19. It was in March 2020 when the professionals of the UCC+i adopted an active attitude as an informative source and worked more *ex officio* by explaining, through their researchers, the possible doubts of society at the demand of the media (Sanz-Hernando and Parejo-Cuéllar, 2021). In addition, it launches innovative initiatives through the Internet.

1.2. AREAS OF ACTION AND PROFESSIONAL FUNCTIONS OF THE UCC+I

Like any other organization, the UCC+i has specific objectives for its professionals. Below are the leading professional functions (Table 1) of the UCC+i workers and their areas of action, based on the manual 'UCC+i: origen y evolución (2007-2014)' by FECYT (2015).

Table 1

Spheres of action and functions of UCC+i employees

With the researchers	<p>Collaborate with researchers from their universities and research centers to disseminate their projects and results.</p> <p>Advise and train researchers in science communication and popularization of science.</p> <p>Serve as intermediaries between university researchers and research centers that generate research and journalists.</p> <p>Increase the participation of scientists as generators of opinion on topics of their competence in the media.</p>
With the journalists	<p>Maintain a constant relationship with journalists to increase their interest in scientific information.</p> <p>To elaborate scientific information with quality and clarity.</p> <p>To give visibility to scientific information in the media.</p>
With society	<p>Promote scientific culture and innovation to society.</p> <p>Organize scientific dissemination and popularization activities, such as workshops, fairs, guided tours, and open days.</p> <p>Research on the social perception of science.</p>

Source: Own elaboration based on the manual 'UCC+i: origin and evolution (2007-2014).

1.3 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research is to know the productive routines of the UCC+i in Spain. It is expected to be known from the following specific objectives:

01. Identify the relationship with the communications office and researchers.
02. Determine the demands of the UCC+i to improve their productivity.
03. Analyze the use of their tools to communicate science.

2. METHODOLOGY

Following the objectives set, the analysis was carried out using two methodological approaches. First, a quantitative technique was used to survey UCC+i professionals to analyze their work exhaustively. This technique measures the variables under study objectively and highly precisely (Lafuente and Marín, 2008). Specifically, data are collected and analyzed on certain variables that support and reinforce the in-depth identification of the reality of science communication generated by the UCC+i of Spanish universities and research centers.

Thus, the survey is used as a first sample among the specific population to be analyzed, which will advance the research. Data collection is carried out through a questionnaire to a sample of the population, where the anonymity of the participants is a priority. The main phases of this technique include the design of the sample, construction of the questionnaire, interviews, coding, fieldwork monitoring, data preparation for analysis, analysis techniques, and presentation of results.

In the present research, a survey was carried out to analyze the situation of science communication in Spanish UCC+i. For this purpose, all the UCC+i that were part of the Network of the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT), which depends on the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the Government of Spain, were taken as a sample. The universe of the sample is the 96 UCC+i that were registered in the network in 2019. Under the umbrella of the Foundation, this network promotes the exchange of experiences and the search for synergies between entities, improving the quality of the products and services of the UCC+i and optimizing resources.

Online surveys were conducted among the persons responsible for the UCC+i to carry out the study, with the collaboration of the FECYT as the coordinating entity of the network. Specifically, the questionnaire was sent by e-mail to the Head of Unit of the Department of Scientific Culture and Innovation of the FECYT, César López García, so that he could send the survey to all the UCC+i in the network since he has a database with all the units. To obtain the maximum number of responses, these surveys were carried out through multiple invitations to all those responsible for the UCC+i. The survey was developed using the free Google Form ap-

plication, which allows the researcher to pose multiple-choice and open-ended questions for respondents to answer using any electronic device connected to the network.

The questionnaire developed for the units was sent to 96 UCC+i in December 2019 and January 2020. Fifty-eight completed questionnaires were collected, representing 60.4% of the total population of the existing UCC+i in Spain in that period.

Secondly, a qualitative analysis was carried out using the semi-structured in-depth interview technique, which offers the researcher considerable scope for probing the interviewees and maintaining the basic structure of the interview. Interviews were conducted with fifteen experts in science communication with outstanding experience in this field: five researchers, five science journalists, and five UCC+i professionals. The objective was to investigate the interaction between these three profiles of actors and the importance they give to UCC+i.

For each of these profiles, the journalists belong to different media: news agencies, newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet. Researchers work in Spanish public universities. Finally, UCC+i professionals work in Spanish public universities and research centers. The in-depth interviews were carried out in May and June 2020, each lasting an average of one hour.

The interviews were conducted in Spain, except for one in which the interviewee was in Argentina. Of these, twelve were conducted through the Google Meet platform due to the State of Alarm caused by the health crisis caused by COVID-19. Three were carried out using a questionnaire of closed questions, but with one of the interviewees, a call was made later

via Google Meet to collect more answers to the questionnaire.

The interview questionnaire was elaborated with different questions for the three profiles mentioned above. In this sense, for researchers, the questions were divided into four blocks that addressed knowledge and valuation of UCC+i, digital resources, productive routines, and digitization and visibility. For journalists, there were four blocks on productive routines, the importance of UCC+i, communication actions, and digital tools. Finally, for the UCC+i professionals, a questionnaire was elaborated with four blocks on the institution and training, visibility of UCC+i, digitalization, and productive routines.

3. RESULTS

The analysis allows us to delve deeper into the productive routines of the UCC+i professionals. The results obtained on three questions are detailed below: relations with the communication office and with researchers (3.1), the units' demands to improve their productivity (3.2), and the tools they use to communicate science (3.3).

3.1. RELATIONS WITH THE COMMUNICATION BUREAU AND RESEARCHERS

The results of the UCC+i survey show a relatively complete diagnosis of the productive routines of the units' employees. Most respondents, 93.1%, agree that their work is coordinated with the institution's communication office. In addition, more than half said they share physical space and even human resources with the office, although only some who say they are in coordination have a location close to the of-

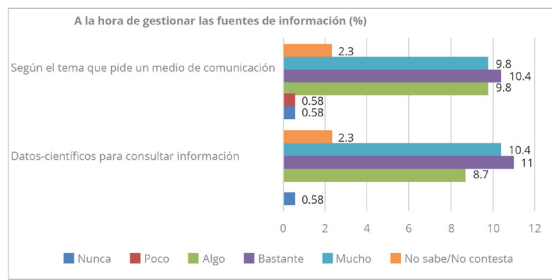
fice. Added to this is the difference in the number of hours they dedicate to the unit, as some of them share this task with other duties in the communication office or do not have a full-time contract; this fact hinders their total dedication to the UCC+i.

On the other hand, the professionals of the units consider it essential, and that is why they do so, to have a fixed agenda of researchers collaborating with their institution (Figure 1), even though they indicate that they do not always turn to the same researcher to meet the demands of the media. Hence, it is essential to have a constantly expanding agenda. Most of the professionals surveyed have a fixed agenda of researchers who collaborate with the unit. These contacts are made, in a high percentage (81%), through occasional meetings with researchers for specific information, and secondly (34.5%) through conferences to encourage researchers to disseminate their knowledge. However, there are also those who say that there are teams of experts in different areas who can be consulted. Of the professionals surveyed, 1.7% responded that.

The frequency with which they are contacted varies widely, but as the results show, it is not very frequent. One-third say that they meet once a year with the researchers, and others meet once a month. In most cases, these contacts between the communicator and the researcher are made through personalized e-mails. However, telephone calls and visits to the researcher's office are also quite common. This suggests that there is a close relationship between some communicators and researchers, which facilitates the work of the former when preparing information for the unit.

Figure 1

Management of sources of information



Source: Own elaboration

These agendas are created through training sessions and periodic meetings to encourage researchers to be sources of information. In most cases, these meetings only go up once a year. Therefore, a lack of close collaboration between UCC+i and researchers is detected when scheduling communication. Faced with this lack of face-to-face meetings, personalized e-mails, phone calls to researchers, and even visits to their offices are the most frequently used ways to contact them. This shows an interest in getting closer and personalizing the relationship. On the other hand, contacts through events and general emails are not used very often.

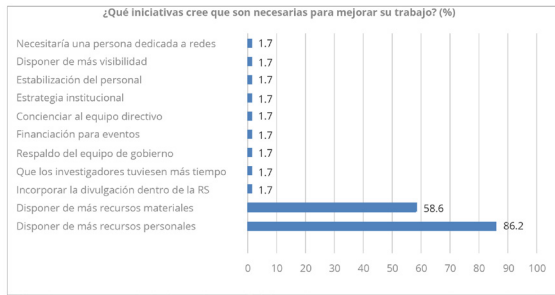
3.2. DEMANDS OF THE UCC+I TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

According to the results, the primary demand is for more personal resources (86.2% of the cases), followed by the need for more material resources (58.6%) (Figure 2). The rest of the responses collected propose, as initiatives to improve their work, the need for a person dedicated to social networks (1.7%), more visibility (1.7%), stabilization of personnel (1.7%), and an institutional strategy (1.7%), raising awareness among the institution's management team (1.7%), having funding for events (1.7%), having the support of the government team (1.7%), researchers having more time (1.7%) and, finally, incorporating scientific dissemination into Social Responsibility (1.7%).

Regarding the provision of more personnel, the majority opted for reinforcing the existing staff (96.1%) as opposed to those who chose to subcontract external personnel (31.4%). Regarding the provision of more material resources, they affirm that this could be obtained with an increase in the budget for the units (76.9%). Some say that they have no budget allocated to them and, therefore, it is difficult for them to carry out their work.

Figure 2

Proposal for the improvement of work



Source: Own elaboration

3.3. USE OF TOOLS FOR SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

The results obtained from the interviews show that the productive routines carried out by the unit professionals are similar to those of science journalists working in the media since both share the task of informing. For this reason, both groups see the creation of an agenda of researchers to whom they can turn as sources of information as relevant.

“Yes, there are researchers with whom you have more contact because they are very active, and others with whom you have contact from time to time” (UCC+i professional 1).

The researchers also value this consideration, even though, in some cases, they express the idea that the same sources should not always be used, either because of their availability or because of a good way of communicating with the media. They ask that the agenda be open to the entire institution.

“Ideally, they should have all the researchers of the entity [...]. I think that one of the missions of the UCC+i and the communication departments is to scratch the other researchers so that, in the end, all of them participate in the communication” (researcher 4).

Along with the researchers’ agenda, journalists can turn to the institutions’ websites for information. These websites publish pieces prepared by the professionals of these structures, who consider them their priority channels for disseminating their information.

“We use the institutional website as the first container to bring together the work carried out by the UCC+i. In addition to more traditional channels such as sending notes to the media and sharing content on YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook to reach younger generations” (professional UCC+i 1).

However, these websites are not the primary channels for journalists to seek information because they consider them containers where they only publish what is favorable for the institution, just as press offices do.

“The communication offices or the UCC+i, if they want more presence in the media, would have to be more proactive” (journalist 1).

On the other hand, researchers who say they visit the media point out their curiosity to learn about the work being done by colleagues from their own or other institutions.

“Because I follow the scientific news and in case there is something in my field that might interest me too, to see ideas and because it is my field of interest” (researcher 5).

In this sense, one of the actions most frequently carried out by the professionals of these units continues to be the preparation of press releases, a means used to send information to the conventional media since the early years of the appearance of the communication cabinets (Simón, 2017). According to the responses obtained, these press releases are published on the websites mentioned above and sent via email to the media. These press releases are generally well regarded by journalists and researchers since they facilitate the work of both, which gives the most accurate information possible on the research being carried out. In many cases, this translates to the complicated language of scientific work.

“Press releases are important because they report something that was a paper no one understands” (researcher 1).

Despite this, journalists recognize that they do not use them as they come to them but as future contacts or as a preliminary to expand the information later. Thus, they avoid having the same information as the rest of the media.

“On the assumption that we do not pay attention to the press release, I am interested in receiving the press release because they are those little grains of sand that someday may be useful to me” (journalist 2).

These investigations disseminated through press releases are carried out once the results have been obtained and usually when the study has already been published in a scientific journal. In most cases, researchers do not favor publishing their work in the media when it has not yet been fully completed. However, this has been changing in recent years due to the obligation of some projects to publish what they are researching.

“I think they can come out in many phases because they do not only have to be results, that is, many times they are results, and I think that is fine, but sometimes it is very relevant to bring out the research you want to do because that gives it visibility [...] science is a continuous thing, and it is a process and it is not only the results” (researcher 1).

On the other hand, journalists see the need for the studies to be carried out to be covered by the media from the beginning because they consider that there are interesting topics from the start of the research process. In the middle are the professionals who are indebted to their institution’s researchers and who cannot disseminate their information without the corresponding permission.

“I am hypercritical of post-publication communication in a ‘here you have it all and it has done’ kind of way. There is no history, and there is nothing. To me, one of the things I am liking about Covid, despite its imperfections, is that you are seeing science in process, as it is being done” (journalist 1).

The reason explained above leads, on many occasions, to journalists not going to the UCC+i to request information because they know how they work. Many times, they encounter an insurmountable wall that will not be able to meet their requests. For this reason, they turn to researchers, if they have a relationship with them, to ask for information about their work.

“We skip as many intermediate steps as we can by system. [...] All those channels that are very good when you do not know how to reach someone when you know how to get there, we try to avoid them to go directly to the source, to speed things up” (journalist 2).

In addition, the work carried out in these units is coordinated with the corresponding communications office, in most cases, to organize all the information coming out of the institution and give these structures greater visibility.

“You cannot have a UCC+i on one side and a communication office on the other because, in the end, what we are doing is showing society what we do, either by researching or disseminating [...] In the end, the objective of both the UCC+i and the communication office is the image of the university” (UCC+i professional 2).

All of the above leads to the conclusion that the unit professionals use the same communicative tools used by the press offices and coordinate with them to achieve greater visibility.

However, despite this, it seems that their efforts do not bear all the desired fruits, as they do not get journalists, their primary recipients of the media, to use all the channels they make

available to them, such as emails, websites, telephone calls, and social networks, to name a few. The fact of ‘skipping’ the UCC+i professional to go directly to the researchers is also present in these structures, as it happens in the press offices since the way of working is very similar. This, perhaps, should be reconsidered.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The data from this study show that the work carried out by the UCC+i professionals and that of the communication offices is similar. Both work with information to disseminate to the media, and the press release is one of the main tools they use. Although not all UCC+i professionals are trained as journalists, their main objective is to publicize the research carried out in their institution.

In line with the findings of previous studies (Nieto and Vendrell, 2001; De Semir, 2013; Bustos, 2012), the information produced in specialized press offices is still too institutional despite having the label of science. Authors such as Simancas and García (2022) state that universities have their own department to manage communication, and this makes the information more institutional since their objectives are to achieve greater social appreciation while at the same time being accountable to society for their work.

Although well received by specialized journalists, this information in press release format

is not published as it arrives. They argue that, based on them, they seek to expand this information in order to differentiate themselves from the information of the rest of the general journalists, who, they assure, will limit themselves to a “copy and paste” of the press release.

The priority channel through which they disseminate information to the media is email, and subsequently, they are published on the unit's website. This result coincides, in part, with previous studies by López-Pérez and Olvera (2019), who claim that the science of excellence did not consider the Internet to be a valuable channel for disseminating their advances to society because, although the results of this research show an interest in communicating the findings of their universities and centers on the Internet, they first use the internal channels of their institutions to do so.

Our findings allow us to make novel contributions to the forms used to communicate science in the UCC+i. The most outstanding one is that the specialization of the unit professionals provides them with a greater number of tools that enable more fluid communication with the media and, as a result, with society as the final recipient.

One of the tools created by half of the professionals of the units surveyed is the fixed agendas of researchers in their institutions, which they manage within each UCC+i. This allows

them to have a direct and continuous relationship with the generators of knowledge in their institutions and makes it easier for them to address them when they receive requests for information from the media. In most cases, the methods used to create the agendas are specific days, by telephone and email, although some still opt to visit the researcher's office. Although this fixed agenda would favor the work of the units, a part (30%) still chooses to look for a different researcher each time, depending on the topic requested by a journalist from a media outlet.

This is due, in many cases, to the difficulty of these professionals in the units to create a list of researchers who are available when required by the media, but also because they believe that a fixed agenda, even if it can be updated, does not reflect all the researchers in their institution.

Regarding the relationship with the communication offices of the institutions in which they perform their functions, the UCC+i teams work independently of the institutional office, preparing information and carrying out specialized activities in science communication. However, it should be noted that they are coordinated by the Communication or Research departments. These two are shown as the most repeated areas that supervise the UCC+i, although it is true that not all of them are in them due to the

relative novelty of these structures. This means that, in some cases, they belong to different departments or services due to the lack of a common set of regulations for universities and research centers.

Their relationship with the various institutions' departments means that they are not recognized as micro press offices or press offices specialized in science, as might have been expected. This is due to the specializations of each unit since not all cases are a question of producing information. According to previous studies, these have different functions from the press offices, and therefore, they perform complementary actions (Parejo *et al.*, 2017).

Now, in line with the findings of previous research (Bellón, 2018; Nieto and Vendrell, 2001; González-Pedraz *et al.*, 2018), the units that elaborate informative pieces involve the research staff to get that knowledge to the media since the communicator specialized in the science of the institution, being closer to the scientist, is the one who knows better his professional career and has a greater confidence to request the information than an external journalist could have. In addition, these units promote publicity and public relations among their tasks without losing sight of their primary objective, which is the social transmission of the knowledge generated in the institution.

Likewise, the data obtained in the research show that there are some shortcomings in these units in order to improve their production, which are claimed by the professionals working in them. Among them, the lack of personnel (86.2%) and material resources (58.6%) stand out. Regarding personnel, they are in favor of reinforcing the staff since, in some cases, the person in charge of the UCC+i performs other tasks within the communications office; they even see the possibility of hiring external personnel to perform more functions within their department. They demand more funding for material resources to improve technical equipment and carry out more dissemination and promotion actions.

The present research is limited to studying the units from their start-up to the present. Among the limitations of the study are the number of responses received from the UCC+i and the small number of in-depth interviews, which, nevertheless, have provided insight into the work carried out in these units. This, added to the recent work dynamics of these professionals on the Internet, will make it possible for future studies to investigate the work carried out in the UCC+i to analyze its impact on science communication at the national and even international levels.

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Comparative analysis of Ecuador's public and media agendas throughout President Guillermo Lasso's first year in office.

Análisis comparativo de las agendas ciudadanas y mediáticas en Ecuador durante el primer año de mandato del presidente Guillermo Lasso.



ARTICLE



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Abstract:

Ecuador is a country that, in the past fifteen years, has been characterized by the political polarization of the media. In that context, this investigation analyzes the correspondence of agendas that exists between the citizens agenda and the agenda of the media, both printed and digital, in Ecuador during President Guillermo Lasso's first year in office (May 24th, 2021-May 23rd, 2022). Public agenda data from the polling company Click Research, a company allowed to do public opinion research by Ecuador's Electoral Council, was retrieved and a topic content analysis of four Ecuadorian me-

dia, both digital (*Primicias* and *Radio La Calle*) and traditional (*El Comercio* and *El Universo*), was done, as well. The Matching Index proposed by Asp was used to analyze to what degree media and public agendas are corresponded. Results show that there is a correspondence between the agenda of different types of media and the public agenda. There is a bigger correspondence between public agenda and the printed media agenda in permanent topics for society; while the correspondence is bigger with digital media when it comes to immediate, circumstantial events that mark the public agenda on occasions.

Keywords: Agenda setting, agenda correspondence, media agendas, public agendas, Ecuador

Resumen:

Ecuador es un país que, en los últimos quince años, se ha caracterizado por una polarización política. En este contexto, este estudio realiza un análisis de la correspondencia entre la agenda pública y la agenda mediática, tanto de medios tradicionales impresos como de medios digitales independientes, en Ecuador, durante el primer año de gobierno del presidente Guillermo Lasso (24 de mayo de 2021-23 de mayo de 2022). Se recuperaron datos de agenda pública obtenidos por la encuestadora Click Research, avalada por el Consejo Nacional Electoral para realizar encuestas de opinión pública, y se realizó un análisis de contenido temático de las principales noticias de cuatro

medios de comunicación ecuatorianos, tanto digitales (Primicias y Radio La Calle) como tradicionales (El Comercio y El Universo). Se aplicó el índice de equiparación de agendas propuesto por Asp para analizar hasta qué punto se corresponden las agendas de los medios con la agenda pública. Los resultados demuestran que existe una correspondencia entre las agendas de los diferentes tipos de medios y la agenda pública, existiendo mayor equiparación de agendas con los medios tradicionales impresos, para temas más permanentes de agenda; y mayor equiparación de agenda con los medios digitales independientes, para temas inmediatos relacionados con acontecimientos coyunturales y específicos.

Palabras clave: *Agenda setting*, correspondencia de agendas, agendas mediáticas, agendas públicas, Ecuador.

1. INTRODUCTION

The media select several topics and events to cover. In doing so, they provide the public with talking points to build reflections and thoughts. This is known as the agenda-setting effect (McCombs, 2006). In today's academia, the question arises as to what extent the media select topics based on aspects such as the editorial line of the medium, the economic motivations of the owners of the press, or the closeness and relationship that these media have with the government in power.

This debate is supported by evidence from some Latin American countries, where media dynamics are governed by powerful economic groups that control the majority of media outlets. For this reason, the editorial line of press, radio, and television tends to be mostly aligned to the right of the political spectrum and critical

of left-wing governments and political actors (Schuliaquer, 2021). In Brazil, for example, it has been observed that the mainstream media attempted to associate left-wing figures in the country with negative attributes. Meanwhile, right-wing figures in that country were associated with positive characteristics during the 2014 presidential election (Goldstein, 2016).

Ecuador is another example of this. During Rafael Correa's left-wing government, there was a dispute between the government and the media, which established an agenda of negative attributes around Correa's presidency and the members of his cabinet (De la Torre, 2014).

In 2021, a right-wing candidate, Guillermo Lasso, from the country's banking sector, won the presidential election in Ecuador. If we consider what Schuliaquer (2021) states about media dynamics in Latin America and the concentra-

tion of power by powerful economic groups, it could be understood that the press in Ecuador would play a less critical role towards this government. Thus, the media agenda would focus on positive issues for Lasso's administration.

Faced with this scenario, it is worth asking what agenda topics the media select to transmit to the public and to what extent these topics correspond to the main concerns of Ecuadorians. In this way, it is possible to know what agenda items the media place on the public sphere (Habermas, 2020) and outline whether there is a power of transference of relevance from the media to the citizenry.

To answer this question, we have taken the case of Guillermo Lasso's first year in office, which runs from 24 May 2021 to 23 May 2022. The level of correspondence between the public agenda, which is understood as citizens' concerns, and the media agendas of traditional print media and independent digital portals with a news section during the established time frame will be analyzed.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 AGENDA SETTING THEORY

The first authors to coin the term agenda setting were McCombs and Shaw (1972), who stated that the media do not seem to influence the direction or intensity of people's attitudes towards specific issues. However, they successfully influence the relevance or prevalence of these issues for the citizenry.

This influence is achieved through increased exposure to the specific content that the media presents to the public. The more people are exposed to an issue in the media, the more acces-

sible it becomes to the public, the more they start to care about it and formulate their opinions on it. This produces the agenda-setting effect (Ardèvol-Abreu, de Zúñiga & McCombs, 2020).

Why this agenda-setting effect occurs can be answered in several ways. However, from a theoretical point of view, one of the most accepted is explained by the need for orientation, in which each individual has to locate and understand a series of issues. When there is uncertainty, the media will play an important role in orienting the population (Chernov, Valenzuela & McCombs, 2011).

Therefore, Chernov et al. (2011) differentiate between permanent agenda items and immediate or circumstantial items. Many public agenda items remain present and stable over long periods in a society. These issues are categorized as permanent agenda items. On the other hand, issues suddenly appear on the public agenda, usually because of a specific event, and people do not know much about the issue, so their need for orientation is greater. These issues will often not remain stable for long periods on the public agenda. Thus, they could be categorized as immediate issues.

The media seems to have given some guidance on both issues. This occurs so citizens incorporate permanent and immediate matters into the public agenda (López-Escobar, Llamas & McCombs, 1998).

One of the criticisms of agenda-setting theory relates to how the public is conceived, especially in mass behavior. On the one hand, McCombs & Shaw (1972) conceive society as a quasi-homogeneous mass with more or less similar reactions to certain stimuli. On the other hand, Coleman & Wu (2021) consider that there are individual differences in citizenship

when it comes to establishing a public and personal agenda for each person, so it cannot be said that the whole of society reacts similarly to a stimulus.

Dalton et al. (1998) consider that the power given to *agenda-setting* theory throughout history has been overstated. There is not necessarily a relationship between the public interest in an issue and its presence in the media. Zhou et al. (2016) consider that one of the main challenges for the study of agenda setting is that, in the current media fragmentation, it is unclear to what extent it is still possible to speak of a unifying ability of the media to set the public agenda.

This phenomenon has become more acute with the expansion of social networks and the globalization of communications. Some authors affirm that on digital platforms, there is a balance of influential power between media agendas, political agendas, and citizens' public agendas (Gilardi et al., 2021).

Others, in contrast, maintain the position that traditional media, despite specific circumstantial and contextual changes, still set the agenda for the population (Tan & Weaver, 2013). However, some argue that, in the contemporary world, there is already a power on the part of social platforms such as Twitter to set the public agenda and even that of traditional media (Boynnton & Richardson, 2016).

Agenda-setting theory has evolved from its origins and must now go beyond a simple model where the media talk about an issue and it is incorporated into people's lives. For example, Su & Xiao (2021) wanted to study to what extent social interactions on the Chinese social network WeChat could influence the content of partisan and metropolitan media in China. Therefore, it is necessary to talk about intermedial *agenda setting*.

2.2 INTERMEDIAL AGENDA SETTING

McCombs (2004) defined this phenomenon as the relationship between two or more media outlets regarding agenda setting. Generally, this relationship between two or more media outlets is established by the domination of the large traditional press, which transfers the thematic relevance of specific issues to small media outlets and local media outlets (Li, 2018).

However, this conception has been changing in recent years, and the debate has been opened on whether, through digital tools such as social networks, the public agenda can be said to have any influence on the communicational dynamics of media agendas (Guo, Mays & Wang, 2019).

Some authors consider that citizens' conversations and debates on Twitter depend on what is covered and disseminated by the media (Vargo et al., 2014). Other scholars point out that the conversations generated on Twitter can sometimes reach press and television media coverage (Meraz, 2015).

The literature indicates a bilateral relationship of influence between the public and the media. Above all, such influence will depend on the context and reality of the addressed news (Vargo, Basilaia & Shaw, 2015). The bilateral influence relationship evidences how the agenda-setting effect has become an international phenomenon. In the globalized context, agenda setting is due, in part, to citizens reporting on social networks about different realities that were previously not reached by the media (Guo, Mays & Wang, 2019).

This irruption of the citizenry in the intermedial relationship of the agenda through social

networks evidences the importance of analyzing the public agenda and how it relates to the media agenda of a country or region. For example, Wang et al. (2023) conducted a study in which they demonstrated that there is an empowerment of the agenda of the general public against the agenda of journalistic elites on issues such as global warming and environmental preservation.

This paper will study the public agenda and the media agenda. The public agenda can be conceptualized as the importance people assign to each particular issue, compared to other topics related to the society in which they develop (Peter & de Vreese, 2003).

On the other hand, the media agenda should be understood as the set of issues presented in the media, as well as their frequency of appearance in the media and their relevance (Vargo, Guo & Amazeen, 2018).

2.3 MEDIA DYNAMICS IN ECUADOR AND LATIN AMERICA

Throughout history, Latin American countries' traditional print and television media have given right-wing governments and political parties more favorable coverage. Meanwhile, they have been more critical of left-wing governments and political parties (Schuliaquer, 2021).

Faced with this dynamic, left-wing Latin American governments have had to take various actions to balance the plurality of voices in the political spectrum and ensure their administration was covered positively. Actions of this type may be the strengthening of public media, which have become governmental, or changes in the media legislation of a country (Schuliaquer, 2021). To extend the exemplification,

we can talk about the case of Gustavo Petro, in Colombia, who had to use social networks such as Twitter and Instagram to disseminate and massify his campaign messages. In this way, he tried to counteract the narrative the country's traditional media imposed on his candidacy for the presidency in 2021 (Restrepo & González, 2021).

In the specific case of Ecuador, Rafael Correa disputed the media field with traditional actors through the creation of a network of public media in press, radio, and television (Buenaño, 2015).

Likewise, a Communication Law was implemented with greater control over the media. Some authors call it a de-democratic communication law in Ecuador (Ramos, 2013). This generated an ideological polarization in the country's media field, which has resulted in the establishment of two different narratives and, therefore, different media agendas (Zuluaga & Gómez, 2019). This, in turn, has led to a social divergence that seems irreconcilable in the short term (Altmann, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 INSTRUMENTS

Public Agenda:

To know the public agenda, it is necessary to access quantitative data obtained in one or more surveys and applied to a representative sample of the population studied (López-Escobar, Llamas & McCombs, 1998). The polling company Click Research, based in Quito, Ecuador, was contacted to obtain this data. This pollster was used because they present periodic re-

ports on the country's situation. These reports include the question that is usually considered the most important when it comes to knowing a public agenda, according to Asp (1983). That question is: What is Ecuador's main problem at the moment?

The public agenda issues are presented as a percentage, which indicates how many people, out of the total sample, indicated that a specific issue is their primary concern. Four of its social climate and citizen perception surveys on how Ecuadorians feel and conceive the reality of their country were accessed. These surveys were conducted in October 2021, January, April and May 2022.

Click Research conducts quantitative research using simple random sampling. In each study, 760 surveys were conducted with people over 18 years of age in Quito and Guayaquil, the two most populated cities in the country. In total, we worked with 3040 cases. The number of respondents results from weighting the population size of the areas investigated (*Click Research*, 2021).

This methodology guarantees a representativeness, or confidence level, of 95% and a margin of error of $\pm 3\%$ (*Click Research*, 2021). The information was collected through face-to-face surveys in the public space of the research areas defined by the polling company.

Media agenda:

To analyze the Ecuadorian media agenda, we resorted to a content analysis of the front-page news of two traditional print media outlets in Ecuador (*El Universo* and *El Comercio*) and the news of two independent digital media outlets (*Primicias* and *Radio La Calle*) that generated the most Likes, Retweets and Comments on Twitter.

The choice of newspapers is because, in the years before conducting this study, they were the two newspapers with the most significant physical circulation in the country. *El Comercio* had a print edition of 125 thousand copies, and *El Universo* had 112 thousand copies (Viveros and Mellado, 2018).

In the case of independent digital media, we chose media with more than 45 thousand followers on Twitter, the most widely used social network for disseminating news (García-de-Torres et al., 2011). The tweets had to include a link so the reader could review a complete news article; otherwise, they would not be contained in the analysis.

The content analysis examined the topics covered in the top three front-page stories in each traditional print media. A similar study was performed on independent digital media news. In the case of digital media, because there is no printed front page, the three daily news items that generated the most interaction (comments, retweets, and likes) with users on Twitter were selected.

Thus, it was proposed to apply a content analysis methodology derived from the work of Rodríguez-Díaz and Castromil (2020), which analyzes the general themes in which certain specific events are framed and allows observing the agenda that each media has and how it differs from other media. Therefore, the variable to be studied in the content analysis was THEME, which refers to the general and most relevant topic being addressed in a news item.

For this variable, 17 categories were identified in which each news item could be placed. These categories were: crime and insecurity; employment; economy and poverty; corruption; prison crisis; essential services; taxes and tax reforms;

political disputes and conflicts between state powers; gender violence; demonstrations and citizen protests; coverage of the work of the National Assembly; coverage of the work of the presidency; Covid and the vaccination process; migration to Ecuador; sports news; international news; and, finally, the category other issues, for those news items that did not fit into any other category.

These categories were defined through a deductive and observational process that made it possible to match the media agenda's topics with the public agenda's main issues. Other current news topics and the reality of media coverage in Ecuador were added to these categories *ad hoc*.

Specific parameters were established to categorize a news item into one or another topic to facilitate the coding of the news items and avoid overlapping between topics. These parameters concerned the central idea shown in the news item, with particular emphasis on its headline. In a second instance, to discern the category to which a news item belonged, we resorted to the terminology used in that news item.

For example, to differentiate between "crime and insecurity" and "gender violence," it was defined that news using terms such as femicide or *machismo* would fit into gender violence since it was the most relevant topic in the news. In the same way, to differentiate between news items corresponding to "economy and poverty," "unemployment," or "taxes and tax reforms," the terminology used in the news item was read. When the news item talked about work or employment, it was attributed to the employment category. Likewise, if the news item used terms related to tax issues, it was assigned to the category of taxes and tax reforms.

Sports news, international news, and news related to other topics were discarded from the final analysis.

The front pages of the printed media between May 24, 2021, and May 23, 2022, were accessed to analyze the traditional printed media agenda. The three main headlines on the front page were identified, and the content analysis of these three news items was carried out.

Twitter's advanced search tool was used to analyze independent digital media. In this way, the tweets sent by the accounts *@radiolacalle* and *@Primicias* were obtained between May 24, 2021, and May 23, 2022. The three daily news items selected were those that had the most interaction with users each day. It was established that to analyze a tweet, it had to have a minimum of 30 interactions.

These parameters are obtained as a derivation of the work of Rolán & Otero (2017) and Meso-Ayerdi, Mendiguren-Galdospín & Pérez-Dasilva (2017).

Two thousand one hundred thirty-three news items from print media and 1,352 from digital media were analyzed.

As mentioned above, the main topic of each news item was identified, as proposed by Rodríguez-Díaz and Castromil (2020), and a record was kept in the SPSS database manager of each of the news items analyzed and their main topic. At the end of the information collection on media agendas, a percentage out of 100% was obtained for each of the issues presented in the news items.

3.2 CALCULATION OF THE LEVEL OF CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN AGENDAS

A matching index was calculated to analyze the level of correspondence between the public agenda and the media agenda, both traditional and digital, as proposed by Asp (1983). This matching index, also called the correspondence index, was obtained by calculating the difference in the percentages of each specific topic of the public agenda and the agenda of each analyzed media.

Once this difference in percentages was obtained for each medium, all the differences were added up, and the result was divided by the number of elements analyzed. This division was made by two for this work since two independent digital media and two traditional print media were analyzed. It is important to note that each media type will be analyzed separately. After this first division, the result obtained was subtracted from the value of 100 (which refers to 100%), and this value, in turn, was divided by 100.

This resulted in a number between 0 and 1, representing the level of correspondence between agendas. The closer the index is to 0, the lower the level of correspondence between agendas, and the closer the index is to 1, the higher the level of correspondence between agendas.

In Asp's original study (1983), for example, a correspondence value of 0.76 was obtained between the political agenda of the Swedish Communist Party and the media agenda of Swedish television. This means considerable correspon-

dence existed between the issues addressed in these two agendas. In the same study, a correspondence index of 0.61 was found between the political agenda of the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Swedish television media agenda. This indicates a lower correspondence of issues between television and the Social Democrats than the media had with the Communists.

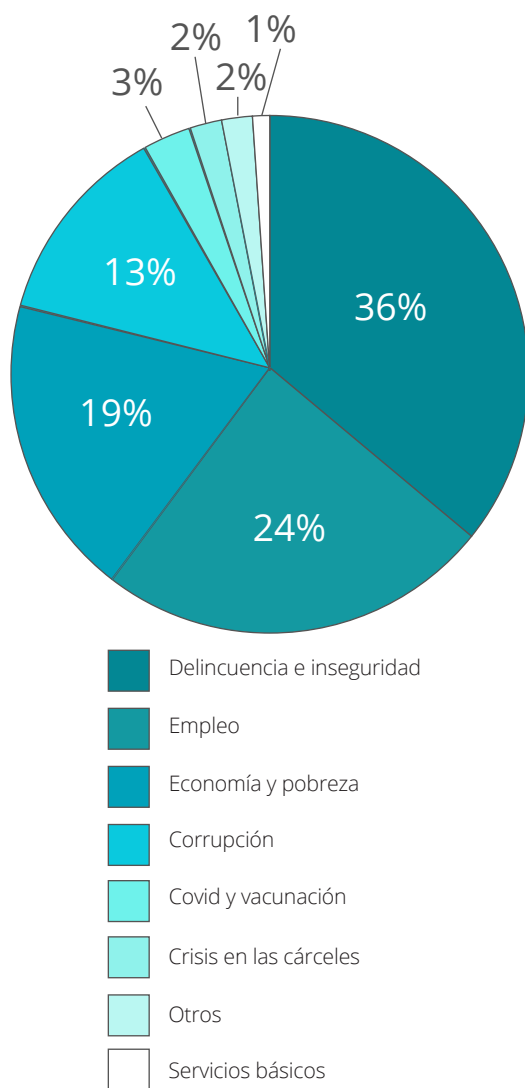
For this work, an index was obtained to compare the traditional printed media agenda with the public agenda. A specific index was obtained to compare the digital media and public agendas.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 PUBLIC AGENDA

As mentioned in the previous chapter, we worked with the social climate and citizen perception surveys of the pollster Click Research, which were carried out in October 2021 and January, April, and May 2022. The results are extracted from the question: What is Ecuador's current main problem? These results are presented as a percentage.

Figure 1 shows the average percentages for different issues across the four social climate surveys. The public agenda issues in citizens' concerns were crime and insecurity, employment, economy and poverty, corruption, prison violence, access to essential services, COVID-19 and the vaccination process, and others.



Note: Own elaboration based on data provided by Click Research (2021 and 2022).

The graph shows four main issues of concern to Ecuadorian citizens: insecurity and crime, employment, the economy and poverty, and corruption. Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated that the biggest problem in Ecuador when the surveys were conducted, was one of these four issues.

It is important to note that during the period analyzed in this paper (2021-2022), Ecuador experienced a crisis of insecurity and violence in different cities and the financial and unemployment ravages derived from the economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, during that year, several officials from the country's last governments were involved in a series of corruption investigations.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that issues such as the pandemic or the crisis in the country's prison system, despite having a considerable percentage in some of the specific reports, proved to be temporary issues on the public agenda that ceased to be of concern to citizens once the crisis had passed.

4.2 TRADITIONAL PRINT MEDIA AGENDA

The three main news items on the front pages of *El Comercio* and *El Universo* were reviewed from 24 May 2021 to 23 May 2022.

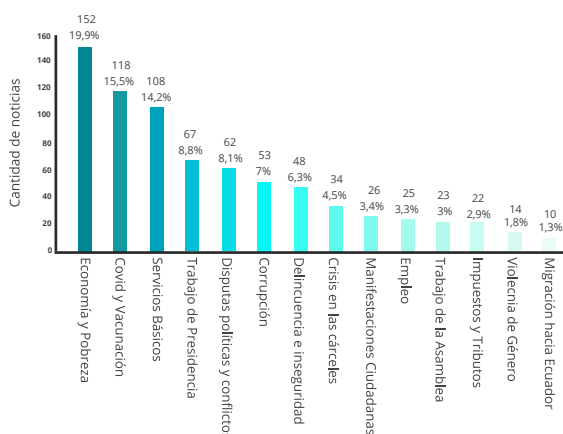
In total, 2,133 news items were analyzed. Of these, 1,054 were from *El Comercio*, and 1,079 were from *El Universo*. The disparities in the number of news items between each media are because, in some editions, the front page of one of the media presented less than three news items and dedicated its front page to a specific topic.

After discarding international, sports, and other news, we worked with 1,665 news items or 78.1 percent of the total news items on the front pages. Of these, 762 corresponded to *El Comercio* and 903 to *El Universo*.

The percentages of news items corresponding to each of the thematic categories defined and which allowed us to analyze the level of correspondence with the public agenda are shown below.

Figure 2.

Allocation of news items corresponding to each of the thematic categories defined for the analysis of the media agenda-Diario El Comercio (762 news items).



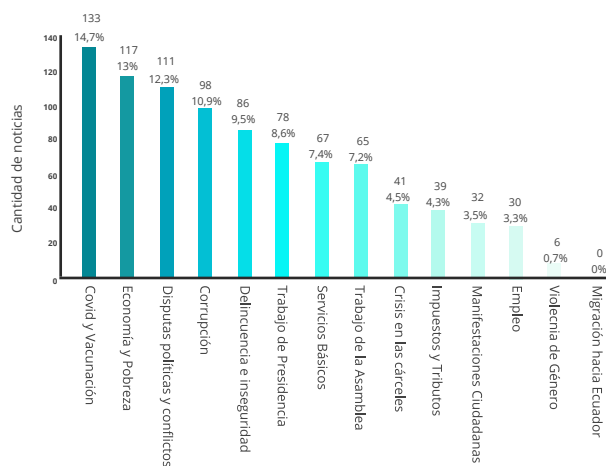
Note: Prepared by the author.

As can be seen, the topic most covered by *Diario El Comercio* is the economy and the poverty situation in the country. Almost one in five news items on the front page referred to these topics (152, 19.9%). Another topic that is recurrently present is the Covid pandemic, where the Delta and Omicron variants are included. Hand in hand with the pandemic, there was also news about the vaccination process deployed by the government of Guillermo Lasso in Ecuador during the first months of his term. One hundred eighteen news items (15.5%) dealt with these issues.

As for the public agenda topics observed in the previous section of this chapter, in addition to the economy above, 48 news items (6.3%) discussed crime and insecurity; 25 news items (3.3%) dealt with employment; 53 news items (7%) discussed corruption; and 34 news items (4.5%) discussed the crisis of violence in Ecuador's prison system.

Figure 3

Allocation of news items corresponding to each of the thematic categories defined for the analysis of the media agenda-Diario El Universo (903 news items).



Note: Prepared by the author.

Regarding *Diario El Universo*, it can be observed that the most covered topic is related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the vaccination process that took place during the first months of Guillermo Lasso's government. One hundred thirty-three news items (14.7% of the total) dealt with this topic. In contrast to the case of *El Comercio*, none of the issues accounted for more than 15% of the total news on the front page. The second most popular topic on this media agenda is the economic situation and poverty in the country. One hundred seventeen news items (13%) of its news items dealt with this topic.

In addition to the economy, which was reviewed in the previous paragraph, the results of the other main topics on the public agenda are presented. It is noted that crime and insecurity were the main topics of 86 news items (9.5%); employment appeared as the most crucial topic in 30 news items (3.3%) on the front page; corruption of politicians was present in 98 news items (10.9%); and the crisis in the penitentiary system appeared in 41 news items (4.5%).

4.3 INDEPENDENT DIGITAL MEDIA AGENDA

One thousand three hundred fifty-two news items from the two independent digital portals were reviewed; 561 belonged to *Primicias*, and 791 were from *Radio La Calle*. This corresponds to 41.5% and 58.5% of the total news analyzed in this media type, respectively. The differences between the amount of news analyzed in each press are related to the fact that there were days in which there were not three tweets that presented a news item that reached the minimum of 30 interactions with users.

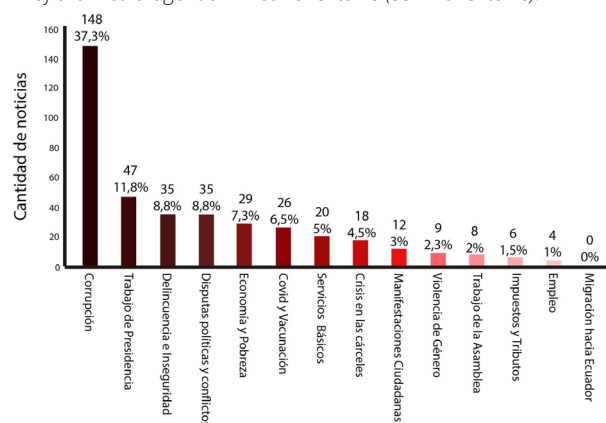
The thematic categories identified were the same as those used to analyze printed news-

papers' media agenda. In other words, there were 17 categories where a news item could be placed. Again, international and sports news, as well as those corresponding to other topics, will not be part of the analysis of this work.

Therefore, the digital media analysis worked with 1,114 news items assigned to one of the thematic categories mentioned above. This is equivalent to 82.4% of the total news items collected in the database. Three hundred ninety-seven of these news items belong to *Primicias* and 717 to *Radio La Calle*. The percentages of the total number of events that correspond to each of the central themes of the events are shown below.

Figure 4

Allocation of news items corresponding to each of the thematic categories defined for the analysis of the media agenda - First news items (397 news items).



Note: Prepared by the author.

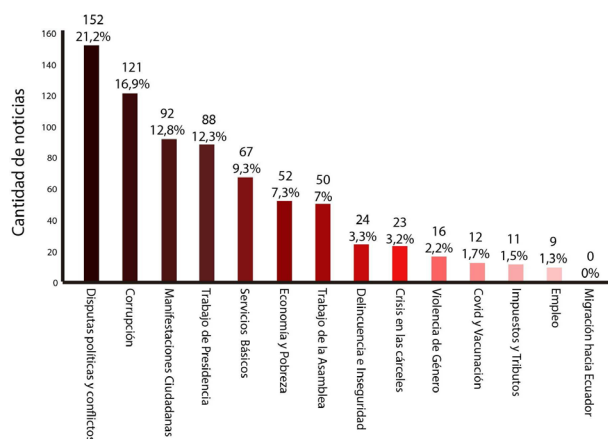
As can be seen, there is one topic that dominates *Primicias'* agenda, and that is corruption. One hundred forty-eight of its news items, 37.3% of the total, deal with corruption cases or judicial proceedings against public officials accused of corruption. The vast majority of the other topics do not reach 10% of the total news items analyzed.

Concerning public agenda issues, crime and insecurity is the central theme of 35 news items (8.8%); employment is present as the subject of only four news items (1%); the economic crisis

and poverty are the subjects of 29 news items (7.3%); and the crisis in the penitentiary system is the central theme of 18 news items (4.5%).

Figure 5

Allocation of news items corresponding to each of the thematic categories defined for the analysis of the media agenda-Radio La Calle (717 news items)



Note: Prepared by the author.

The topics most present in *Radio La Calle* are, in the first place, political disputes and conflicts between different branches of the Ecuadorian State. This topic is central in 152 news items (21.2%). In second place is corruption, which is present in 121 news items (16.9%).

Regarding the main public agenda topics, it is observed that crime and insecurity have 24 news items (3.3%); employment is the central theme of 9 news items (1.3%); the economic crisis and poverty have 52 news items (7.3%); and the topic of the crisis in the penitentiary system is covered in 23 news items (3.2%).

4.4 CORRESPONDENCE INDEX BETWEEN AGENDAS

The results of the application of Asp's (1983) methodology, presented in the methodological chapter of this work, to obtain a correspondence index will be explained below. The level of correspondence between the public agenda topics and the media agendas of traditional

print and independent digital media will be observed.

It is worth remembering that the correspondence index is a number that ranges from zero to one. The closer this number is to zero, the lower the level of agenda correspondence. On the other hand, the closer the number is to one, the higher the level of correspondence.

Table 1

Level of correspondence between public agenda items and media agendas, both in traditional print and independent digital media.

Agenda Pública	Agenda Mediática	
	Índice de correspondencia con medios tradicionales impresos	Índice de correspondencia con medios digitales independientes
Delincuencia e inseguridad	0,72	0,70
Empleo	0,79	0,77
Economía y Pobreza	0,97	0,88
Corrupción	0,96	0,86
Crisis en las cárceles	0,97	0,98
Servicios básicos	0,91	0,94
Covid y vacunación	0,88	0,98

Note: Prepared by the author. The topics were ordered from highest to lowest, according to their prevalence percentage on the public agenda. The highest correspondence index for each topic has been placed in bold type.

The correspondence index was carried out with the seven main public agenda items in Figure 1 of the previous chapter. The table has been ordered from highest to lowest, according to their percentage of prevalence on the public agenda.

According to the categorization derived from Chernov et al. (2011), five of the seven public agenda items presented would be permanent: crime and insecurity, employment, economy and poverty, corruption, and essential services. The categories of prison crisis and COVID-19 and the vaccination process correspond to immediate agenda items.

In the first instance, it is evident that there is a level of correspondence in the agendas above 0.7. This indicates that there is a correspondence between Ecuador's media and public agendas. Although all the indexes are high, it should be noted that the two main public agenda topics, such as crime and employment, have the lowest levels of correspondence.

On the other hand, two topics that also had an essential percentage in the public agenda of citizens, such as the economy and the corruption of politicians, show higher correspondence indexes. Especially in the comparison between the public agenda and the traditional media agenda, this index is close to the value of one.

It should be noted that the two highest indexes obtained are between the public agenda and the digital media agenda. Compared with the independent digital media, these indexes correspond to topics with lower prevalence in the public agenda, such as the crisis in Ecuador's prison system and the pandemic. Both reached an index of 0.98 out of one.

It is worth noting that the top four issues on the public agenda correspond more closely with the print media agenda than with the independent digital media agenda. These four issues, which accounted for 92% of respondents' main concerns, have correspondence indexes ranging from 0.72 to 0.97 with traditional print media.

On the other hand, the other three public agenda items, which had little weight in the public's concerns throughout the year, correspond more with the agenda of independent digital media. For these three issues, which are the prison crisis, essential services, and the pandemic, the level of correspondence with the digital agenda ranges between 0.94 and 0.98.

It should be noted that there is little difference between the correspondence index that the public agenda topics have about the traditional printed media agenda versus the correspondence index between the public agenda and the digital media agenda. There is no subject where the difference in agreement exceeds 0.1.

5. CONCLUSIONS

If we consider that all the correspondence indexes obtained for each of the public agenda items exceed 0.7, we can speak of a considerable correspondence between the media agenda and the public agenda. This correspondence is independent of the nature of the media, whether they are traditional print or independent digital media.

In contemporary Ecuadorian communication dynamics, an agenda-setting effect generates concern for a specific group of topics. These topics on the public agenda are crime and insecurity, employment, the economic crisis, and the corruption of politicians. With less prevalence, there was also concern about the prison crisis, problems in access to essential services, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this sense, the idea that the media emphasize the events of a society on a group of issues that come to be considered important by the audiences seems to be fulfilled, as proposed by McCombs (2006).

This work demonstrates that, even though the media in Ecuador have different agendas, as stated by Zuluaga and Gómez (2019), the diversity of agendas corresponds to citizen concerns.

A reflection that can be derived from the analysis of the results has to do with the fact that there are higher levels of correspondence between public agenda issues and the agenda of traditional print media, such as *El Comercio* and *El Universo*, for specific issues; while, for other matters, the highest level of correspondence is between the public agenda and the agenda of independent digital media such as *Primicias* and *Radio La Calle*.

The four issues with the highest percentages in the public agenda correspond more with the agenda of traditional print media. In comparison, the three issues with the lowest percentages in the public agenda correspond more closely with the agenda of independent digital media.

To analyze this reality, it could be observed that two of the three topics where there is a greater correspondence with the digital media agenda are conjunctural or immediate topics, according to the categorization derived from Chernov et al. (2011). These topics address specific events that generate an emotional, viral, and immediate conversation. These topics are the prison crisis and the pandemic.

Once this has been pointed out, we proceed to analyze why, in these issues, which are very

topical and with specific events that trigger the citizen conversation in the public sphere that Habermas (2020) mentioned, there is greater correspondence between the public agenda and the agenda of independent digital media.

This could be due to the logic of social networks themselves, which place a news topic that generates alarm and panic among citizens and provokes the immediate interaction of users in the digital environment. Here, the need for guidance discussed by Chernov *et al.* (2011) focuses on the uncertainty and fear that may exist among citizens.

That uncertainty can be resolved more quickly through independent digital media, which reports 24 hours a day, while traditional print media do so through their physical edition in the mornings.

In this media logic, independent digital media are favored, as they do not have to wait for their morning edition to be part of the digital citizen conversation. It corroborates, then, what Vargo, Basilaia & Shaw (2015) stated when they said that the power of the digital agenda depends on the news context and the journalistic reality of the news.

As the days go by, these last-minute issues are overshadowed by more traditional concerns rooted in society that transcend beyond a specific event, the permanent matters on the agenda. In the case of Ecuador, these concerns, which are rooted in society, are crime and insecurity, employment, the economic crisis, and the political system's corruption.

For these four points, it should be considered that the correspondence indexes of the public agenda are higher with the agenda of traditional print media. This could indicate that, in the

macro-spectrum of Ecuadorian events or the daily activity of the country, it is still the traditional media, such as *El Comercio* or *El Universo*, that set the public agenda. The power of the big media that Tan & Weaver (2013) talked about is maintained.

Once again, it is worth mentioning the need for orientation referred to by Chernov *et al.* (2011). This need for orientation in the face of more established topics that move away from the shocking and sometimes frightening novelty is reflected in the fact that the four main issues on the public agenda have a higher rate of correspondence precisely with the traditional print media such as *El Comercio* and *El Universo*.

There will be an agenda-setting effect, regardless of the new communication dynamics generated in the digital environment, as long as orientation is needed, both for permanent agenda items and for immediate and fleeting issues.

This research supports the idea that there has been a permutation in agenda-setting power. Traditional print media are ceding their ability to guide citizens in situations of high uncertainty, rapid development, and constant change. This guiding capacity falls over the media that operate in the digital environment.

Thus, it corroborates the idea presented by Gilardi *et al.* (2021) about the balance of forces between different types of media and even the power of social networks such as Twitter to set the public agenda about which Boynton and Richardson (2016).

Having mentioned this, it is also important to note that the difference in agenda-matching rates between traditional print and independent digital media is not overwhelming. Under no circumstances is this difference evident in favor of either type of media.

Looking at the results, one might wonder why the issues of most significant concern on the public agenda have the lowest correspondence indexes when contrasted with the media agendas. Insecurity has correspondence indexes of 0.72 and 0.70, while employment has indexes of 0.79 and 0.77. This could be due to the dynamics of journalism and the public's attention span.

While journalistic coverage presents a range of topics, citizens retain smaller portions of that range of issues despite the media's hierarchization of news. These smaller portions are the ones that are incorporated into their agenda. This reinforces the idea of Ardèvol-Abreu *et al.* (2020), who said that reducing topics in the media builds the public agenda.

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OBRA DIGITAL

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DOCTORAL THESIS

An analysis of gender discrimination in the context of media convergence of Spanish female journalists

Un análisis de la discriminación de género en el contexto de convergencia mediática de las periodistas españolas

9

DOCTORAL THESIS



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Abstract: In an era marked by rapid digitalization and the convergence of media platforms, gender equality, particularly within journalism, has gained prominence. However, gender discrimination remains a challenge for female journalists. This research collected 387 valid responses from Spanish media professionals through digital and other channels. Data analysis, including statistical methods like frequency analysis and chi-square tests, aims to uncover factors affecting the careers of Spanish female journalists. The goal is to provide empirically supported recommendations for gender equality in the dynamic Spanish media landscape.

Keywords: Spanish female journalists, media convergence, gender discrimination.

Resumen: En una era marcada por la rápida digitalización y la convergencia de las platafor-

mas mediáticas, la igualdad de género, en particular dentro del periodismo, ha ganado protagonismo. Sin embargo, la discriminación de género sigue siendo un reto para las periodistas. Esta investigación recopiló 387 respuestas válidas de profesionales de los medios de comunicación españoles a través de canales digitales y de otro tipo. El análisis de los datos, que incluye métodos estadísticos como el análisis de frecuencias y las pruebas de chi-cuadrado, pretende descubrir los factores que afectan a la carrera profesional de las periodistas españolas. El objetivo es proporcionar recomendaciones empíricamente respaldadas para la igualdad de género en el dinámico panorama mediático español.

Palabras clave: Mujeres periodistas españolas, convergencia de medios, discriminación de género.

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern times, media companies use innovative channels to reach and engage with their desired audiences. There is a general perception that conventional media is being overshadowed by new media, with newspaper readership in particular on the decline (Richardson, 2020). In the past, the communication and expression of ideas was primarily controlled by a hierarchical framework. However, the emergence of contemporary media offers many possibilities for expanding the reach of people around the world. The mainstream media landscape has created a level playing field, giving everyone a fair chance to express their views (Barone, 2020).

Initially, when these platforms emerged, experienced professionals had the upper hand, resulting in them dominating successful independent media accounts. However, with the advancement of technology, content creation is now accessible to everyone (Wong, 2020). Major social media platforms in the Western world are primarily developed and run by the United States. These platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, have a substantial user base and provide private and instant messaging features. According to the special report "Digital 2021 Epaña," released by a global creative agency named We Are Social in 2021, Spain has 42.54 million Internet users and 37.4 million active Internet users. In the data for 2022, compared with 2021, the number of registered users of Spanish social networks has increased significantly. According to the "Social media usage in Spain - Statistics & Facts report released" by Statista, Spain has a large social media market in Western Europe, with an expected 41 million users by 2023 and a predicted increase to about 46 million users by 2028. Most of Spain's internet users use so-

cial networks, leading to a considerable social audience and a thriving digital and social advertising industry.

In an environment of increasing digitization on a global and domestic scale, media professionals have tremendous opportunities for advancement in the evolution of traditional media, the expansion of emerging media, and the convergence of the two into innovative forms. As the converged communications market continues to experience increasing overlap, the relevance of media convergence in the digital creative economy is clear (Latzer, 2013). More and more journalists, including female journalists, are creating accounts on social media to showcase their work experience and expertise to gain more employment opportunities.

However, female journalists still face gender discrimination in such an environment that should be equal and free of speech. We used to talk about gender discrimination issues, such as job ceilings, office harassment, etc. In the digital environment, even though their workplaces are no longer restricted by time and space transitions, female journalists still suffer from online violence and harassment as well as harsh treatment in work assignments in the high interactivity of new media.

This article tackles head-on the job opportunities and challenges faced by female journalists in Spain amidst media convergence. It fearlessly confronts the gender discrimination issues that plague this industry.

1.1 MEDIA CONVERGENCE

In different domains, "convergence" is employed to explore and analyze transformations

that result in integration or harmony. Concerning communication, this is known as “media convergence” and has a significant connection to the digital creative industry. Grasping the ins and outs of media convergence, such as its approaches and effects, holds great significance in comprehending the digital creative economy (Latzner, 2013). Media convergence epitomizes the seamless integration of information and communication technologies, computer networks, and media content. This holistic fusion harmonizes the spheres of computing, communication, and content, stemming directly from the pervasive digitization of media materials and the omnipresence of the Internet (Flew, 2023). In this milieu, information dissemination exhibits noteworthy speed and quality. Presently, news dissemination transcends conventional reliance on periodicals, newspapers, and television broadcasts, encompassing diverse information technologies. The internet serves as a pivotal medium for diverse forms of information propagation, catalyzing the rapid advancement of the journalism industry and actualizing news digitalization. This transformation culminates in the unparalleled swiftness of news information dissemination (Zuo, 2021).

The phenomenon of media convergence has granted users the agency to generate and disseminate content, tailor their viewing schedules through on-demand features, and engage in peer-to-peer interactions through technology. This transformative shift reflects evolving consumer preferences and is further compounded by the digitalization and deregulation of media and communication markets, exerting substantial influence on the competitive dynamics within the media industry (Picard, 2010).

On a global scale, the notion of multimedia integration was introduced quite early, with academic discourse first emerging in the late 1970s. Prominent figures like Nicholas Negro-

ponte (1979) were among the early voices to discuss the emerging phenomenon of digitalization and its implications for the convergence of textual and audio-visual languages. In Spain, newsroom research methods gained prominence around 2005. Subsequently, researchers, supported by the Ministry of Science and Technology, delved into online news studies. Convergence emerged as a prominent research topic, leading to the formation of a robust research team comprising scholars with diverse perspectives on journalism and technology. Starting in 2006, increased funding for convergence research clarified the concept and aimed to establish guidelines beneficial to the media industry and professional training (Martínez, 2009). The single-platform cooperation model, characterized by the decline of print publications and the shift of remaining resources to digital platforms, has spurred conversations regarding the necessity of enhanced cross-media collaboration in the future. Audience engagement emerges as a pivotal strategic concern within all these models, intricately linked with the formulating of cross-media strategies within organizations and augmenting journalists’ competence in engaging across diverse communication channels. Establishing cohesive social media strategies and incentivizing user-generated content represent shared imperatives in this evolving landscape (García-Avilés, Kaltenbrunner & Meier, 2014). With increasing globalization and the rise of digital media, media organizations in Spain have begun to seek cooperation and integration with international media to expand coverage and increase competitiveness (Napp, 2022).

In the Spanish context, mobile devices have emerged as the prevailing conduit for accessing social media, with a remarkable 97% of the population utilizing them for this purpose. Messaging applications occupy a prominent

position, serving as the preferred platform for approximately 83% of social media users. WhatsApp, a property of Meta, commands a substantial presence, with over 91% of Spanish internet users adopting it as their primary choice and expressing notable satisfaction. Facebook is the second most frequently employed platform, followed by Instagram (Data source: 2023 Statista published in "Social media usage in Spain - Statistics & Facts").

A noteworthy phenomenon in Spain is the considerable inclination among its populace to maintain connections with loved ones, acquaintances, and friends through messaging apps. This predilection is underscored by the fact that over fifty percent of the population actively engages with social media platforms. This yearning for connection and closeness renders Spain an ideal market for influencers seeking to engage with local audiences. Furthermore, professionals operating within the media industry are eager to refine their digital competencies and capitalize on expanded networking prospects (Data source: 2023 Statista published in "Leading social media usage reasons in Spain 2022").

1.2 GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality has been a longstanding issue in various industries, persisting as a problem that has taken on different forms over time. Gender disparities persist in leadership roles within the technology, information, and media sectors. Despite ongoing endeavors to advance workplace gender equality, women continue to be underrepresented in key leadership positions. This underrepresentation not only constrains organizations from realizing their full potential but also perpetuates entrenched gender biases (Baird, 2023). Therefore, gender equality has begun to be vigorously promoted in various countries, especially laws and regula-

tions on gender equality, which have begun to be promulgated one after another, and many scholars have also formed special research groups to promote it more scientifically. The Commission for Gender Equality of the UPO (now the Negotiating Commission of the Gender Equality Plan) approved, on July 6, 2017, the II Equality Plan between Women and Men of Pablo de Olavide University. The Second Equality Plan promotes gender equality through six main lines: communication, language, and institutional image; teaching, innovation, and research; advocacy and training; representation and professional advancement; communication and coordination; gender-based harassment, discrimination, and violence (Office for Equality, 2022).

Out of the emphasis on "gender equality," many countries have promulgated legal provisions to protect women's rights and interests.

Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Commission:

Equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work, and pay.

The principle of equality shall not prevent the maintenance or adoption of measures providing for specific advantages in favor of the under-represented sex.

The mandate of Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) is to advance equality:

"...with respect to sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression through the inclusion of people of all genders, including women, in Canada's economic, social, and political life. This application of a gender and diversity lens will help us better understand the intersection of sex and gender with other identity factors. These factors include but are not limited to race, national and ethnic origin, Indigenous origin or identity, age, sexu-

al orientation, socio-economic condition, place of residence and disability.”

However, when the bill's provisions are implemented in practice, the effect will still be somewhat compromised, and female journalists will still be mistreated in the working environment.

The 2019 cross-national comparative study, the World of Journalism Study (WJS), delves into the disparities between the perspectives of male and female professionals within the journalism profession in Spain. This examination is based on a comprehensive questionnaire administered to a representative sample of journalists hailing from 124 distinct media organizations. The study discerns noteworthy distinctions in the viewpoints and experiences of female and male journalists within the field.

The findings from the WJS study reveal that female journalists exhibit a heightened awareness of the pressures emanating from corporate profit-driven objectives. Moreover, they express a greater sense of constraint stemming from business decisions, censorship, political influences, and pressure groups. Within this cohort, those with less influence demonstrate a tendency towards greater deference to political and economic powers. In contrast, those who manage to break through the metaphorical “glass ceiling” often experience a heightened degree of autonomy, potentially attributable to their empowerment within the digital media landscape. Interestingly, they are vocal advocates for justice, albeit displaying diminished interest in the supervisory role of power structures. These outcomes can be seen as intertwined with the necessity to “permit conformity” while simultaneously revealing a comparatively reduced awareness of the quality and ethical decline within journalism (Hanitzsch, Hanusch, Ramaprasad, & de Beer, 2019).

From the data published in the “Global Gender Gap Report 2021”, it can be seen that from 2019 to 2020, Spain's labor force participation rate by gender (women to men) showed a decreasing trend (-0.39%) (Sharma, Chawla & Karam, 2021).

Critical issues within the journalism industry were underscored in a separate article published in *Textual & Visual Media* in 2021 by scholars Belén Cáceres Garrido and Sonia Parratt Fernández from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. While confirming the existence of wage gaps, glass ceilings, and barriers to accessing leadership positions in journalism, the research also unveiled hitherto unobserved challenges faced by this group. These challenges encompass difficulties in mediation, the persistence of entrenched sexism, and instances of harassment. Notably, more than half of the respondents in their study were unaware of the existence of equality programs within their respective media companies. Furthermore, their perceptions did not align with the objectives and outcomes of these programs, indicating a potential disconnection that hinders progress toward achieving gender equality within the field (Cáceres Garrido, Parratt Fernández, 2021).

Collectively, these findings illuminate a complex landscape within the Spanish journalism profession, marked by gender-based disparities and a need for comprehensive efforts to address issues of equality, representation, and workplace conditions.

Regarding the issue of gender equality, Spain has also made many efforts. On March 22, 2007, Spain promulgated Organic Law No. 3/2007 on the effective equality of men and women (Organic Law No. 3/2007, 2007), which establishes a series of measures aimed at promoting real equality at work, a program aimed at promot-

ing mediation, promoting gender equality, fertility and avoiding sexual harassment.

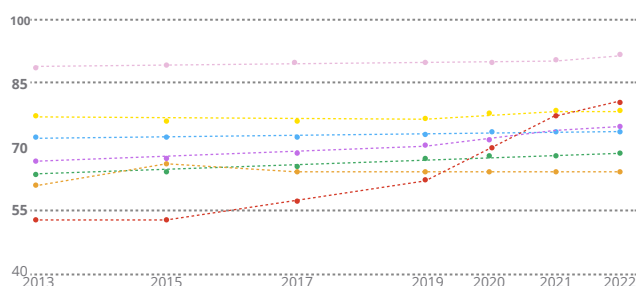
Spain ranks sixth in the European Union (EU) on the Gender Equality Index for 2022 with a score of 74.6 out of 100, 6.0 points above the European Union (EU) average. Researchers from the University of Seville (*Universidad de Sevilla*) and the University of Pablo de Olavide (*Universidad de Olavide*) conducted a study to analyze the 2020-2022 development of gender equality in the EU Member States. The study shows that Spanish society has made considerable progress in structural gender equality, reducing the gap between men and women (Eriksson, 2020).

Although the overall score shows an upward trend, in the analysis of specific indicators (work, money, time, knowledge, power, and health),

“Since 2019, Spain’s score has stalled in the domain of work (- 0.1 points), with a setback of 0.8 points in the sub-domain of participation. As a result, Spain’s ranking in this sub-domain has dropped from the 21st to the 23rd place (European Institute for Gender Equality: Gender equality index).”

Table 1.

European Institute for Gender Equality: Gender equality index, 2022



In the line chart, it is not difficult to see that, except for the “work” item, other indicators are more or less showing an upward trend, only this item does not rise but falls. Women still face a relatively large problem of gender discrimination in the workplace.

Reuters Institute’s report of 2023 covered 180 leaders from 240 media outlets, in which just 22% of the 180 hierarchical positions in 240 media outlets are held by women, even though, on average, women represent 40% of the total number of journalists who practice the profession in the 12 markets (Andi, Selva & Kleis Nielsen, 2023).

1.3 SPANISH FEMALE JOURNALISTS

Since the 19th century, journalistic activities have become one of the activities for women to gain economic independence. The publication of facts and opinions has always been a tool for the development of social movements and the defense of women’s rights. The authors made it clear in *La feminización de los estudios de Periodismo: análisis del caso español* that women play a vital role in journalism and have been involved throughout Spain’s transition period (Santamarina, Ayerdi & Fernández, 2015). As with many college majors, graduates of all disciplines in Communication Studies are overwhelmingly female. In the journalism profession, this male-female ratio should normally be reflected (Puerto, 2022). Women journalists have consistently contributed to the media landscape, introducing a distinctive perspective into news coverage and fostering greater diversity and inclusivity within the industry. As the media field evolves, ensuring equitable opportunities for women’s

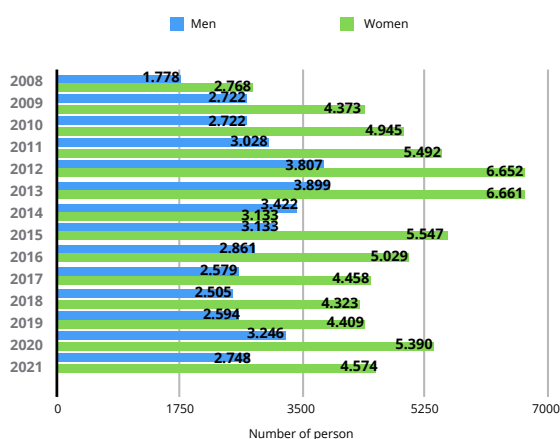
success and advancement in journalism remains a compelling imperative (Dhiman, 2023).

However, judging from the actual implementation, female journalists still face unfair treatment due to gender discrimination in the working environment and even suffer from online violence brought by social networks. According to the data published by APM in the 2018-2021 annual report, discrimination against women still exists objectively. Especially when it comes to the choice of management positions, women are at a disadvantage (2018-2021 APM Annual Report), which has to be done. We think of the decline in Spain's gender equality index score on the "work" indicator in recent years (2022 Gender Equality Index Report), which is also reflected in the news media industry.

María Grijelmo García's book *Claves para periodismo feminista* also mentions that management fired experienced journalists and hired professionals with junior qualifications or training scholarships to save costs. The most significant impact of this move was on female journalists group (2023). Regarding the unemployment rate, female journalists are also much higher than male journalists (Table 2).

Table 2

Unemployment journalists by gender, 2008-2021.



(Data from Reports annual of APM)

For women, there are usually externalized "sexual" stereotypes and a derogatory image of being consumed. Female journalists are often concerned about their appearance rather than their abilities in the working environment (2019 APM Annual Report).

2. METHODS AND ANALYSIS

2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

In this article, we address the following key inquiries:

- To what extent do female journalists acknowledge the evolving landscape of the journalism profession and the transformative impact of media integration?
- Do female journalists continue to contend with harassment within the digital work environment, and if so, what forms and frequencies characterize these experiences?
- Within the context of media convergence, do persistent workplace barriers, often referred to as "glass ceilings," remain discernible for female journalists in their career trajectories?

Then, we designed a meticulously crafted questionnaire comprising 41 discrete variables, including demographic information such as gender and age, which was developed to facilitate data collection. These questionnaires were distributed across various prominent social media platforms, encompassing Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Surveycircle, WhatsApp, WeChat, among others. It is noteworthy that the distribution strategy was underpinned by a deliberate focus on soliciting participation primarily from female journalists, with an overarching goal of ensuring the utmost authenticity and reliability of the ensuing dataset.

To mitigate potential sources of bias and enhance data validity, the distribution strategy was thoughtfully structured as follows:

Targeted Dissemination on Social Media Platforms:

Within the Facebook ecosystem, discrete alliances and thematic groups predominantly composed of Spanish journalists were meticulously identified as ideal channels for disseminating the questionnaires.

On platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, the questionnaires were judiciously distributed to individuals whose social media profiles bore the professional designation of “Journalist”. Further, they evidenced a discernible history of occupational experience within the Spanish journalistic landscape.

For chat software applications such as WhatsApp and WeChat, distribution was focused on groups known to comprise journalists or individuals pursuing journalism degrees and internships.

On LinkedIn and Surveycircle, a transparent and unequivocal stipulation was articulated, explicitly specifying that participation was exclusively sought from actively practicing journalists either currently employed in Spain or possessing prior professional engagements within the Spanish journalism milieu.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire instrument was designed with utmost care to elicit a comprehensive spectrum of data relevant to investigating gender disparities among journalists. Specifically, it was tailored to capture multifaceted aspects of reporters’ experiences and perspectives, grounding the research in real-world job roles and responsibilities.

A rigorous analytical process was undertaken after the meticulous data collection phase. The acquired dataset was subjected to exhaustive scrutiny and interpretation through statistical software tools, most notably SPSS and Excel. This analytical framework was instrumental in affording a comprehensive and empirically substantiated exploration of the research findings.

In summation, this research approach, characterized by the systematic construction of a robust questionnaire, targeted distribution to specific demographic groups, and methodologically rigorous data analysis, underpins a nuanced and academically sound inquiry into the dynamics of gender within the field of journalism.

2.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Determine the sample size required to estimate the proportion of female journalists in the Spanish journalist population in Spain with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. Assume a population ratio of 0.5 and no limit on population size. The z at the 95% confidence level is 1.96. Then, we conclude that 384 samples are expected to be collected.

A meticulous data curation process was conducted from the pool of collected questionnaires, adhering to stringent criteria to ensure the reliability and coherence of the dataset. The data curation process involved the following key steps:

Geographic Filter:

Questionnaires originating from IP addresses located outside of Spain were systematically excluded from the analysis. Exceptions were made for respondents with known identities who were invited to participate despite being outside of Spain.

Validation of Multiple-Choice Questions:

A comprehensive examination of questionnaires featuring multiple-choice questions was carried out with precision. Specifically, questionnaires that did not meticulously adhere to the prescribed number of choices were identified and subsequently omitted from further consideration.

Logical Consistency Assessment:

Rigorous scrutiny was applied to assess the logical coherence of responses. Instances of illogical or inconsistent responses were detected and addressed. For example, if a respondent affirmed a previous question with a “yes” response but subsequently continued to answer subsequent questions that should logically have been skipped, such discrepancies were flagged and rectified.

Frequency analysis, descriptive analysis, and chi-square test were used in the following analysis.

3. RESULTS

Following the application of these meticulous data-cleaning criteria, a total of 387 response sheets emerged as valid and were retained for subsequent analysis. These responses were distributed as follows: 317 emanated from female participants, while 63 were attributed to male participants. In the dataset comprising collected samples, female respondents constituted a predominant segment, representing 81.91% of the total, whereas male participants comprised a notably smaller fraction, accounting for a mere 13.7%. This gender distribution can be attributed to two probable factors: One plausible explanation pertains to the heightened enthusiasm exhibited by fe-

male respondents in their active participation in the questionnaire. This enthusiasm implies a heightened inclination among women to contribute their perspectives on issues pertinent to the field under scrutiny. Furthermore, the distribution strategy employed for disseminating questionnaires may have inadvertently favored reaching and engaging a predominantly female demographic. This unintentional gender bias in the distribution process likely contributed to the observed gender disparity in the collected samples (Table 1).

Table 1

Gender

Gender			
Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	317	81.91%	81.91%
Male	53	13.70%	95.61%
Non-Binary	2	0.52%	96.12%
Don't know/ Don't want to say	15	3.88%	100.00%
Total	387	100.0%	

Among the participants, the largest category of responses was “*Ha aumentado*” (Increased), which accounted for 50.90% of the total responses. The following most frequent response was “*Ha aumentado mucho*” (Increased significantly), with 9.56% of respondents choosing this option. The cumulative percentages provide insight into the overall trends. When we add the percentages of respondents who believe harassment has increased or increased significantly, we find that approximately 60.47% of participants perceive an increase in workplace harassment (Table 2).

Table 2

Probability of workplace harassment in the context of media convergence

In the context of media convergence, consider that workplace harassment...			
Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Has increased	197	50.90%	50.90%
Has increased a lot	37	9.56%	60.47%
Has decreased	30	7.75%	68.22%
Has decreased a lot	40	10.34%	78.55%
Has not experienced any changes	83	21.45%	100.00%
Total	387	100.0%	

The majority of female respondents, 55.84%, indicated that they perceive workplace harassment as "Frecuente" (Frequent). Another noteworthy segment, 25.55% of respondents, described workplace harassment as "Poco frecuente" (Infrequent), implying that they perceive harassment as a less common occurrence in their work environment. Just a smaller proportion, 11.36%, indicated that they consider workplace harassment to be "Bastante frecuente" (Quite frequent), and 7.26% described workplace harassment as "Inexistente" (Non-existent), signifying their belief that harassment is virtually absent in their professional milieu. From the data of female respondents, we can better feel that they suffer harassment at work (Table 3).

Table 3

Frequency of harassment occurs at work (Data source: 317 female respondents)

Given your professional experience, in a journalist's work environment, harassment is...			
Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Quite frequent	36	11.36%	11.36%
Frequent	177	55.84%	67.19%
Non-existent	23	7.26%	74.45%
Infrequent	81	25.55%	100.00%
Total	317	100.0%	

As can be seen from the table above, Chi-square test (cross analysis) was used to study the differential relationship between job stability and the work experience of being harassed by social networks. The table above shows that different job stability samples have different effects on the work experience of being harassed by social networks. The experience sample showed significance ($p < 0.05$), and the work stability sample showed 0.01 level significance for the work experience sample that suffered from social network harassment ($\chi^2 = 41.383$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$). By comparing the differences in percentages, it can be seen that the proportion of Buena (Good) choosing No is 65.52%, and it will be Significantly higher than the average of 33.75%. The proportion of Muy mala (very bad) choosing No is 62.07%, which is significantly higher than the average level of 33.75%. The proportion of Mala (Bad) choosing Sí is 81.02%, which is significantly higher than the average of 66.25% (Table 4).

Table 4

The correlation between job stability and whether you have experienced online harassment (Data source: 317 female respondents)

Items	Categories	Work stability(%)						Total	χ ²	p
		Good	Bad	Very good	Very bad	Don't know/ Don't want to say	Regular			
Have you ever suffered harassment for your professional work through social	No	19(65.52)	26(18.98)	6(46.15)	18(62.07)	11(52.38)	27(30.68)	107(33.75)	41.383	0.000**
	Si	10(34.48)	111(81.02)	7(53.85)	11(37.93)	10(47.62)	61(69.32)	210(66.25)		
Total		29	137	13	29	21	88	317		

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01

Most respondents (59.69%) indicated workplaces where both genders hold leadership positions, but men are more prevalent in these roles. A significant minority (11.89%) reported environments where both genders are in leadership, with women having a stronger representation. In some workplaces, exclusively male superiors were reported by 9.82% of respondents under “*Siempre hombres*” (Always men). Similarly, 7.24% of respondents indicated workplaces where women exclusively hold leadership roles, termed “*Siempre mujeres*” (Always women). The gender ratio distribution underscores an enduring disparity in leadership positions, with men maintaining a significant majority in decision-making roles (Table 5).

Table 5

Gender ratio in leadership positions

Your bosses or senior managers in the environment where you work have been... (please choose the gender here)			
Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Women and men, but more men than women que mujeres	231	59.69%	59.69%
Women and men, but more women than men	46	11.89%	71.58%
Others	44	11.37%	82.95%
Always men	38	9.82%	92.76%
Always women	28	7.24%	100.00%
Total	387	100.0%	

The majority of respondents, accounting for 59.17%, answered "Sí" (Yes), indicating that they have indeed witnessed cases where women were not promoted despite having similar qualifications to men. This suggests a prevalent perception of gender-based career advancement disparities in the field (Table 6).

Table 6

Gender discrimination in selection for promotion positions

Have you experienced a case in journalism or communication in which a woman has not been promoted because priority has been given to a man with the same abilities for said position?			
Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	158	40.83%	40.83%
Yes	229	59.17%	100.00%
Total	387	100.0%	

43.93% of respondents indicated that a significant portion of respondents perceive instances where their current workplace occasionally prioritizes men in the allocation of responsibilities and higher professional levels. A minority (17.83%) experienced frequent instances of men being prioritized in their workplaces. These findings shed light on the prevalence of perceptions regarding the prioritization of men in allocating responsibilities and higher professional levels within the respondents' current workplaces. A notable portion of respondents indicates that such practices occur to varying degrees, ranging from occasional to frequent (Table 7).

Table 7

Gender discrimination in job assignments

In the environment for which he/she currently works and when assigning the most important responsibilities and professional levels, priority is given to men...			
Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Sometimes	170	43.93%	43.93%
Many times	69	17.83%	61.76%
Never	50	12.92%	74.68%
Seldom	64	16.54%	91.21%
Always	34	8.79%	100.00%
Total	387	100.0%	

4. CONCLUSION

In synthesis, adopting a macroscopic lens reveals that the rapid proliferation of digitalization, propelled by technological integration, along with the integration of traditional and new media paradigms, has ushered in a transformative era replete with enhanced prospects for female journalists. This confluence has effectively dismantled the temporal and spatial constraints that hitherto circumscribed their professional domain, thereby endowing female journalists with a heightened capacity to reconcile their occupational commitments with their multifaceted roles in society, encompassing marital and maternal responsibilities. Of particular significance, the advent of the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 precipitated the widespread adoption of remote working modalities, ostensibly augmenting the professional autonomy of female journalists.

Within the ambit of our research, it becomes patently evident that despite the presence of legislative mandates and regulatory frameworks ostensibly designed to propagate the principles of gender equality, a conspicuous lacuna exists in the translation of these policy intentions into effective implementation. This lacuna is particularly manifest in the persistent conundrum of gender discrimination that continues to afflict female journalists, most notably concerning the constricted landscape of career advancement prospects.

In the crucible of the evolving digital media ecosystem, the conspicuous proliferation of interactivity has engendered a burgeoning tide of online violence, constituting a deeply disconcerting conundrum. The virtual expanse now

facilitates the dissemination of commentaries by individuals who often remain unacquainted with the female journalist under scrutiny. Regrettably, these digital dialogues often become reprehensible critiques of their physical appearance. Consequently, the intrinsic worth of female journalists, as measured by their professional contributions and competencies, is all too frequently consigned to the margins, eclipsed by undue fixation on superficial attributes. This troubling dynamic perpetuates pernicious gender-based stereotypes and subverts the rightful recognition of their expertise and adeptness within the contours of their chosen vocation.

These findings engender a clarion call for a more concerted and holistic approach that seeks to bridge the chasm between the original legislative mandate and its effective enactment. In confronting the pervasive quandary of gender discrimination and the ominous specter of online violence, an intricate tapestry of strategies must be woven, encompassing heightened consciousness, educational initiatives, and vigorous advocacy. Moreover, it behooves media institutions and society at large to shoulder collective responsibility in dismantling ingrained discriminatory practices. In this endeavor, a cultural metamorphosis is necessitated, one that truly appreciates the professional contributions of female journalists, valorizing their competencies and dexterity rather than perpetuating a myopic fixation on superfluous attributes. Only through such a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach can the authentic spirit of gender equality be fully actualized within the precincts of the journalistic profession.

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