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Analysis of the adaptation of the editorials of five newspapers from different European countries to the online environment

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Abstract

[EN] **Introduction.** This article analyses the main features and degree of adaptation of the editorials of five newspapers from different European countries to the online environment. **Methods.** The study is based on the content analysis of the editorials published in the online editions of *El País*, *The Times*, *Le Monde*, *Diario de Noticias* and *Corriere della Sera*. **Results.** In the sample of online newspapers, the editorial genre maintains a privileged position in the online version and can be differentiated from the opinion pieces. In addition, this section retains its function as the institutional voice of the newspapers. **Discussion.** Despite the importance of the editorial, its role as shaper of public opinion in relation to current affairs is overshadowed by its role as political actor. **Conclusions.** The online editorial retains the traditional content and format features of the genre, and shows little adaptation to the internet platform and its possibilities to enable citizens' participation.

Keywords

Editorial; opinion; journalism; cyber-journalism; newspapers.

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in incipient change. 3.2. Adaptation to the peculiarities of the new platform. 4. Conclusions. 5. List of references. 6. Related articles.

Translation by **CA Martínez Arcos**, Ph.D. (Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas)

1. Introduction

1.1. Justification and importance

In recent decades, the editorial, which has been considered the most important opinion genre of the print news media since the 18th century, initiated a process of adaptation to the new electronic platforms which involves adjusting its format to the new textual structures and enabling audiences' participation. The new communicative online environment has welcome a traditional genre that has survived in the pages of the major European newspapers during the last centuries and has undergone important innovations in its format and content, but without abandoning its main function: to transmit the opinion of the medium on a current and important affair, with the objective of orienting and shaping the public opinion (Blanco, 2007: 27).

From an empirical perspective, this article furthers the emerging research work on the adaptation of different journalistic genres to the internet which indicate that the advent of the internet has provoked one of most important changes in the conceptual and practical levels of the traditional genres (Larrondo, 2010: 173).

In the current context, it is necessary to investigate the specific peculiarities of the editorial not only in this new communicative environment, but also in its coexistence with the variety of other participatory genres.

It is important to be aware of the situation of the editorial text, as important actors of the public opinion on the internet and, above all, to identify the real possibilities that the adaptation to the digital platform offers to citizens to collaborate in the creation and modification of messages directly from the newspapers' online outlets or to establish a conversation with the medium.

This set of challenges and needs are what motivate the study of the role of the editorial text of the main online newspapers of five European countries. In order to be able to characterise the actors and catalysts of the opinion agenda, the study pays special attention to the rate of participation in the selection and construction of issues of interest for citizens.

To this end, this article offers, firstly, a review of the studies conducted so far on this subject matter, followed by a brief description of the research methods and, finally, the most important results of the project.

1.2. Theoretical framework

1.2.1. The editorial 2.0: a genre debate

The editorial was born in the 18th century as a vehicle for the transmission of mainly political ideas in the press. Quickly, its model was incorporated in other media and areas of public opinion. In 1941

the editorial was used for the first time in a radio station in Boston, in relation to the Mayflower issue, and after WW2, in 1949, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) extended its use to radio and television stations (García Jiménez, 1998: 197).

Since these occasions, and for more than two centuries, the editorial genre has survived in the major newspapers, and has become a space for the formal expression, through different platforms, of the medium's attitude and ideological line towards a particular issue.

The editorial's influence on the audience has been very important from the beginning, although this influence has not always being direct, and remains intact at a time in which the public opinion's information and pressure sources are scattered throughout the new technologies.

When the editorial is well built and focuses on significant aspects that concern the public at the time of publication, it tends to be mentioned in other media. Through this procedure, the editorial can reach an unpredictable dissemination as a collectively-authored genre that is clearly identified with the editorial line of the medium (Cf. Fernández Barrero, 2003: 61; Cánovas, 2003: 526; Guajardo, 1998: 55; Caminos, Armentia, Marín, 2013: 7).

The importance of the editorial in the media has been reflected since the first theoretical contributions of the field of communication studies of the 20th century, which highlight its main elements. Firstly, it is described as the opinion of the newspaper about one or more current affairs and, secondly, as the shaper of public opinion on current issues that are considered important.

Already in the 1960s Bartolomé Mostaza defined the editorial as "the compass of the newspaper and the guiding diagram of public opinion" (Mostaza, 1966: 186), while Emil Dovifat pointed out that "the best editorialist is that who deals with a given issue in a way that, at the same time, effectively catches the public's attention and shapes the public opinion" (Dovifat, 1964: 130). The function of the editorial as an authorised interpreter of the current events is exercised not only through the treatment given to the subject, but also through the selection of issues that are presented as important.

The editorial is the medium's explicit voice, although it implicitly runs through the rest of the pages (López Hidalgo; Fernández Barrero, 2012: 202), through the selection of the topic, the language, the sources or the structure of the information. In fact, the medium tends to select a given news event that appears in its news section and to highlight it, interpret it and assess it in the editorial genre. In short, the editorial is the opinion and the point of view of the newspaper with regards to the news it publishes and that the public must know about, since it would be contrary to journalistic ethics to try to hide the medium's perspective behind the neutrality of the news section (Martínez Albertos, 2002: 367).

In contrast to these functions of the editorial that we might call "traditional" or "explicit" (to highlight, explain and assess events so that the audience can receive an opinion about them), there are others less explicit functions like the calls to action or social reaction (Carratalá, 2010: 111; Hernando, 2001: 284).

José Marques de Melo argues that editorials have a relation with the state, although they formally address the public. He believes that journalistic institutions aim to tell the leaders of the government how they would like to treat the public affairs (Marques de Melo, 1985). Morán Torres (1988: 139-

140) points out that the editorial is a great instrument in the development of ideological campaigns that orient and even manipulate readers.

Recently, Boscán and Navarro (2003: 60) pointed out that “newspapers tend to explain their position in comparison to the prevailing power or the values that predominate on the public agenda”, but remark that “the editorial line is much more inclined to perform an ideological function than to contextualise and describe a phenomenon or propose a different way of assessing an event”.

The importance of the editorial as shaper of public opinion has evolved and undergone transformations despite being one of the most stable and most homogeneous genres in the traditional categories (León, Blanco, 2009: 603). Based on the features listed by Graña (1930: 225) at the beginning of the last century (impersonal, serious and documented), other researchers agree to highlight three of its main features:

- a) It transmits the institutional opinion of the medium on a topic that this medium considers to be of importance and relevance (Gutierrez, 1984: 130; Canel, 1999; Merodio, 2010: 290).
- b) It does not only make assessments and puts forward opinions about a topic, but also gives importance and relevance to this topic, simply by selecting it as the topic of the day.
- c) It is an unsigned article, because it is the point of view of the newspaper regarding the selected news stories, although there are some exceptions like in the case of the Italian and French press, among others.

In summary, the editorial highlights a current event and explicitly presents the medium’s institutional arguments, assessments and opinions in relation to it. Its name comes from the fact that since its inception it includes an opinion article that, since it is unsigned in most traditions, is understood to express, as the genre with the highest hierarchy in the news company and among readers, the opinion of the director or editor of the publication.

1.2.2. Genre transformation in the internet

All the features developed and strengthened by the genre have been questioned with the arrival of the internet. Journalistic genres have modified their features with the arrival of the digital media (Larrondo, 2008: 172) and sometimes these transformations have been promptly described by the media’s style books (Le, 2007: 32).

The editorial is now in the crossroads between the continuity of the journalistic genres and the adaptation to the digital discourse. The pioneering theoretical contributions in the Spanish-speaking world began to be developed in the 21st century. Some of the most important works in this regard are *Manual de Redacción Ciberperiodística* (“Cyber-journalism Writing Manual”), coordinated by Javier Díaz Noci and Ramón Salaverría (2003); *Internet en la noticia, las fuentes y los géneros* (“Internet in news, sources and genres”) by Concha Edo (2003); and *Redacción Periodística en Internet* (“Journalistic writing on the Internet”) by Ramón Salaverría (2005).

After these works, several research projects began to produce research articles in journals and new books, most of them signed by researchers from the *Infotendencias* group. Of all these works, the one that marked a turning point was *Los géneros en la redacción ciberperiodística. Contexto, teoría*

y práctica actual (“Genres in cyber-journalism writing. Context, theory and current practice”), published by Ainara Larrondo in 2009. This article offers an analysis of the way the media convergence, the increasingly active attitude of the audiences and the changes in textual structures in the new communicative environment have provoked a transformation that involves a redefinition of the journalistic genres in the cyber-media.

In addition to the possibilities of constant updating, the cyber-journalistic language introduces new features, especially those resulting from the sedimentation of structures created by hypertextuality, multimodality and interactivity. In essence, multimodality implies the synchronous integration of contents expressed through text, video and audio in the same message.

The confluence of the multimodality and hypertextuality gives rise to the concept of hypermodality. This concept can be roughly described as a modality of hypertext that is built with text nodes, images, sound and a graphic interface where links can be both text and icons (Díaz Noci, Salaverría, 2003: 120).

However, the most significant contribution made by the digital media to the journalistic genres during the last years is the possibility to allow users to participate and express their arguments (Larrondo, 2009: 253). The participatory dimension of the argumentative genres of cyber-journalism allows us to break the linearity that predominated in the opinion texts of the traditional media and to turn a closed structure into an open and dynamic content.

Interactivity, which is the possibility of the news media to maintain an instantaneous exchange of information with the audience, dilutes, in principle, the features of the editorial and even the figure of the journalist in relation to the post-structuralist theories on the death of the author and the reservations of the information professionals (Örnebring, 2013). Participation is still concentrated in a small part of society which has a high degree of political activism and whose discourse is still facing major difficulties to access the organisational structure of newspapers (Rebillard; Touboul, 2010: 327).

The new possibilities even affect the definition of genre and the classifications traditionally analysed. In fact, some authors have added a new genre category that the three that already existed (informative, interpretative and argumentative): the dialogic category (Díaz Noci, Salaverría, 2003: 40; Edo, 2003: 364).

Regardless of the birth of a new macro-genre, the so-called argumentative cyber-journalistic genres are characterised by its ability to generate new forms of argumentative exposition which exceed the limits of the author’s writing and share a space of creation with new authors and texts.

In this environment, the potential of the internet oscillates from the creation of a new model of questionable quality, reliability and trust (Carballido, 2008, p. 61; Farias, 2010, p. 59) to the possibility of empowering citizens to practice journalism (Meyer, 2010, p. 43), but already with a clear change in the attitudes and habits of production and reception of information (García de Madariaga, 2006).

In relation to the transmission of the institutional opinion of online newspapers, the possibilities in the field of communications are also many and their development is variable and intermittent. ICTs can enable a qualitative leap in the editorial work and become new communication channels or, in

contrast, can give way to the end of the traditional editorial genre since they disperse opinions in different spaces both inside and outside the online newspaper.

The study presented in this article aims to empirically assess the current situation of the editorials in the online versions of the European print press in view of the new road opened by ICTs in recent decades.

2. Methods

This descriptive research study aims to make an in-depth analysis of the editorials of some of the most important online newspapers in Europe, and particularly to characterise their adaptation to the internet environment. For this analysis we selected newspapers from five different countries based on the following criteria: 1) they had to be produced by a European journalistic company which had produced a print newspaper and subsequently developed an online version; and 2) they had to publish one or more editorials in both versions of the newspaper, print and online versions, to enable the comparison between the two platforms.

The chosen newspapers were *El País*, of Spain; *The Times*, of Great Britain; *Le Monde*, of France; *Diário de Notícias*, of Portugal and *Corriere della Sera*, of Italy. In order to obtain data to assess the situation of the editorial genre in these newspapers, we examined the editorials published by these newspapers during a randomly-selected week in 2013: Monday, 28 January to Sunday, 3 February. The study also took into account the opinion articles published in the same week to make a comparative analysis.

This research was developed based on the following hypotheses:

- A) The online editions of the sample of European quality print newspapers use the opinion section to reinforce the topics and points of view presented in the opinion section.
- B) The editorial genre has undergone little transformations in the internet.
- C) The sample of traditional newspapers currently maintains the importance of the editorial in the internet, which continues to have a preferential role in the expression of the medium's editorial line.
- D) Despite its preferred role, the explicit opinion of the medium is scattered over the internet among its different instruments and genres.

In order for the collected data to serve to analyse the object of study and understand the plurality index offered to the public, the study included a description of the management of opinion within the newspapers and their general adaptation to the internet environment.

Content analysis was used for this study as it is a technique that has been used in similar research studies, and allows the development of a systematic examination of the characteristics of the object of study through a predefined set of categories. The categories of analysis examined in each newspaper are:

- A) General information about the newspapers' opinion sections: identification data, management, structure and location of the online opinion sections.
- B) Analysis of the newspaper's overall adaptation to the internet environment: particular use of technological resources and openness level of the different sections of the newspaper, in order to compare it to the editorial.
- C) Analysis of the editorial and opinion section: agenda, main propositions and approaches, evidence provided by the text, structure and language, based on an adaptation of categories proposed by Casals (2003).
- D) Adaptation to the internet: use of the main elements of the internet, i.e. hypertext, multimedia, users' participation, and updating in editorials; and changes involving each of these innovations in the message itself.

The study was carried out in four stages:

1. Development of the theoretical framework and methods.
2. Data collection.
3. Data analysis.
4. Interpretation and presentation of results

3. Results

The results are divided in two sections: the possible transformation of the editorial, in terms of its distinctive generic features, and the progressive adaptation of the editorial genre to the internet environment.

3.1. A genre in incipient change

The main finding that should be highlighted is that the editorial remains to be one of the central elements of the opinion section and of the journalistic content as a whole in the sample of newspapers, in which the editorial stands out from the rest of the content. The editorial retains, therefore, its traditional role of shaper of public opinion on a current affair in the internet environment. However, this genre is used primarily to exercise its role as a political actor, i.e. assessing the decisions made by the political elite and, above all, proposing new public actions.

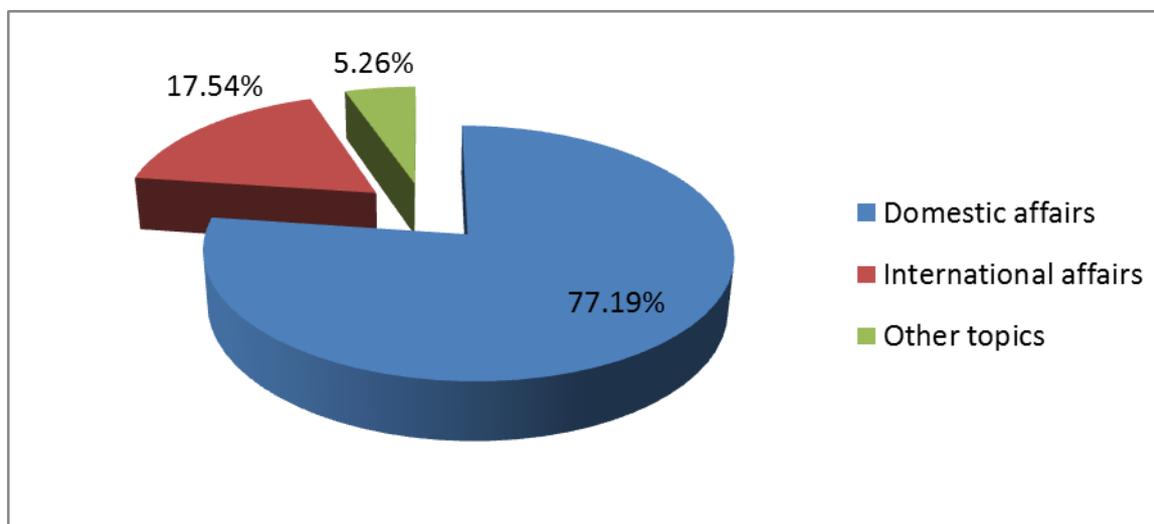
Many of the editorials are not positioned for or against a particular political action. Instead, they opine about an event with informed arguments, act as additional agents by proposing changes in legislation, concrete actions in the social sphere and, even, new perspectives about the proposals already made by some of the political groups in the country.

A high percentage of the sample of editorials (77.2%) are about the domestic political affairs of their country, which is their natural and main scope of dissemination, even though they are all online media with large audiences outside their national borders, especially in this current situation of crisis. Some examples of this type of editorials are: "La France ne sait pas lutter contre le chômage" (*Le Monde*, 28 January, 2013) and "Regular as drogas legais" (*Diario de Noticias*, 28 January, 2013).

In the majority of cases, the editorial does not revolve around the themes proposed by the hegemonic sources. Instead most editorials deal with broad, transversal issues allegedly promoted by the newspaper, such as education, health and employment. Only 17.54% of the sample of editorials refers to international politics, as it occurs with the following editorials: "Egipto ante el abismo" (*El País*, 27 January, 2013); "Beyond diplomacy" (*The Times*, 29 January 2013) and "L'Egypte dans la tourmente et la violence" (*Le Monde*, 31 January, 2013). Finally, as we can see in the following figure, 5.26% of the sample of editorials focuses on other issues, mainly culture.

With this situation, it could be argued that there is a trend in the editorial genre against the information that is increasingly homogenous and controlled by a small number of information sources. Due to the desire of newspapers to become a political actor through their editorials, the degree of homogeneity between the different newspapers is scarce, since they almost never deal with the same subject when targeting their readers and, above all, their government officials.

Figure 1. Main topics of the sample of editorials



Source: authors' own creation

The level of similarity is greater in relation to wider issues than to concrete news events (employment, health, education and the future of the European Union are recurring topics) in which, once again, the medium tends to be proactive without supporting or criticising the actions of the public authorities, and rather proposing new alternatives to address these issues.

The proposal of solutions makes the editorial to act as a sort of laboratory of ideas. This function is executed through one, two or even three newspapers, as it is the case of *The Times*. Some editorials

act as a laboratory of ideas by dealing with two issues under the same title, as it happens in the Portuguese newspaper *Diário de Notícias*.

In addition to this role, the message conveyed by the editorial in the internet maintains its essence as a serious text, with a formal language and a strong and rigid structure. Editorials are characterised by limited licenses, austerity, a focus on informing and, above all, guiding the opinion of the audience on the subject under analysis, and the use of logical arguments to achieve their objectives.

The analysis of the internal structure of the editorial reveals that most of the times it follows the genre tradition: use of facts, arguments and judgement and, in certain cases, speculation. This indicates that the predominant editorial structure is inductive, with an explicit, evaluative and expository judgement, i.e. includes the description of events, the extensive and formal explanation of the different arguments and the adoption of a final judgment on the described events, which explicitly reflects the position of the newspaper.

On rare occasions, there are inductive editorials with explicit, expository and speculative judgments, i.e. it includes the exposition of facts, arguments, hypotheses and predictions in addition to the judgment. Only 8.77% of the sample of editorials has a speculative and expository character, while the editorials whose judgment can be described as implicitly literary narrative only constitute 1.75% of the sample.

Similar to what happens with the structure, which remains almost identical in almost all newspapers, especially in *El País* and *The Times*, the language and resources used by the online editorials correspond to those used by most editorials in recent decades. In this way, 96.49% of the sample of editorials uses logical reasoning as the main tool to persuade the reader.

In rare cases the issues addressed by the editorials are the same as those examined by other columnists. Only 7.01% of the sample of editorials addressed the same issue examined by other columnists of the same newspaper, and on these occasions the similarities in terms of approach were scarce since, despite of making reference to the same issue, the aspects under examination were different. Examples of this situation are the editorials and opinions pieces published on 29 January, 2013, by *The Times* (an editorial titled "Fast Track" and an op-ed signed by Andrew McGuinness titled "We need a new digital network, not a rail one") and *El País* (an editorial titled "Más América en la UE" and the article written by Sergio Romero Pizarro, titled "Una cumbre y una alianza estratégica").

In nearly all of these cases, the opinion pieces provide explicit information about the author (in 50% of cases within the same column) and there is a wider use of evidence, as the author's own ethos. Writers, as usual, are not journalists, and instead are actors directly involved in the subject under analysis or regular columnists of the print and online newspapers. This is the case, for example, of Andrew McGuinness, one of the founders of Beattie McGuinness Bungay advertising and former President of the Advertising Association, and Michele Ainis, an Italian university professor. All the opinion articles included in the analysis are open to the comments of readers.

In practice, the editorial remains, therefore, as a privileged space of opinion that transmit the institutional voice of the news medium on a subject matter, which does not always coincide with the front page issue. The level of homogeneity among the opinion articles and readers is difficult to calculate because, despite readers are permanently marked by the issues they have access to through

the news medium and its ranking of the importance of this issues, on many occasions readers make comments that are not completely related to the subjects examined by the editorial. On most occasions, instead of stating their position towards the proposal made by the writer, readers present parallel discourses and even debates.

3.2. Adaptation to the peculiarities of the new platform

The structure, language and the message try to adapt to the characteristics of the new platform, despite the inertia caused by the halo of tradition that preserves the core of the editorial and certain peculiarities of the journalistic history of each medium. The transformation is still incipient since the online editorial texts coincide in all cases with the editorial in the print version of the newspaper and their developments are parallel and similar to the trend marked by each medium in the last years.

The editorial is still the privileged apace to transmit the institutional voice of the newspaper; it has a presence that stands out from the rest of the content; and often appears in the front page of the print newspaper and, to a lower extent, in the homepage of the online newspapers. Since it has been closely linked to the history of the newspaper, the genre has, therefore, still a certain dependence on some characteristics of other platforms, such as the primacy of the written word against the audio or video documents, or its understanding as a closed text with a rigid structure depending on the subject.

However, at varying degrees, the editorial is increasingly integrated in the process of adaptation to the new dissemination platforms, by changing its presentation, authors, messages and discourses alongside the other sections of the newspaper.

In relation to the textual structures, the most striking changes are the integration of hypertextuality in the very conception of the online medium and, specifically, within the editorial texts. Cases that stand out, for different reasons, in this regard are the Spanish newspaper *El País* and the French *Le Monde*. *El País* includes links to related news at the end of the editorial, which connects the editorial to the current news stories and allows readers to get a more complete picture of the subject matter addressed by the editorial. On the other hand, in *Le Monde* the online editorial differs from the print version because it offers readers a couple of hyperlinks to documents that expand the editorial information (reports, more complex information produced by the medium, similar examples, an interview with one of the relevant actors, etc.).

Table 1. Comparison between the print and online versions of the editorials of newspapers from five different European countries

Features	Traditional editorial	Online editorial
Role(s)	Institutional voice	Institutional voice
	Public opinion shaper	Public opinion shaper
Main objective	Guide / inform	
Structure	Semi-rigid	Semi-rigid
Text type	Argumentative	Argumentative
Use of hypertext	Non-existent	Scarce, external
Use of multimedia	Non-existent	Non-existent
Reader's participation	Non-existent	High
Updating	Every 24 hours	Every 24 hours

Source: authors' own creation

The other language features are maintained in the traditional editorial, which in most cases uses a formal and earnest tone and shows respect for the specific characteristics of the journalistic tradition of each country or newspaper. In this regard, the most expressive headlines are offered by the Portuguese *Diário de Notícias*, while the most informative are presented by *The Times* and *El País*. Some examples are: "Uma vergonha nacional", published by *Diário de Notícias* on 31 January, 2013; "Un pacto por el empleo", published by *El País* on 29 January, 2013; and "The eurozone crisis is far from resolved; the rigidities of currency union are forcing harsh cuts in living standards", published by *The Times* on 2 February, 2013.

In any case, the hypertext structure is positioned in the margins of the editorial discourse as a way of a thematic addition; the links are not incorporated within the editorial text; and the editorial is not illustrated with images or videos. Instead, the editorial focuses on coherently developing its arguments, which reaffirms its rational and declarative character.

The second main feature of the online journalistic genres, the multimediality, was integrated since the beginning of digital journalism by all media as one of the big bets, initially on the main page and gradually spreading, to varying degrees, to other areas of the newspaper. Depending on the media companies and their interests, the integration of sound and static and moving images gradually expanded, but a true journalistic message that integrated these different tools was rarely offered. In most cases there was just a juxtaposition of messages transmitted through different platforms, but with the same content.

In the case of the editorial, as we can see in the previous table, multimediality has not been developed, since this genre still does not include photographs, videos or audio. There are, however, other opinion sections that have incorporated this type of resources through video-blogs or interesting animations, like the ones included in the editorial cartoon section of *The Times* (www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion).

The reason for the lack of multimedia content in the editorial seems to be due less to a comprehensive strategy of the newspaper or a shortage of resources, than to a conception of the editorial as a text-based genre produced with the objective of transmitting a certain opinion to the reader, not interested in integrating any element of entertainment or communication innovation, just as it happens in the case of the structure and language.

Currently there is a double trend that again tries to combine the essence of the editorial with the possibilities provided by the new technologies. There is no direct link between the editorial and the front page news story and, in many cases, the editorials do not even address current affairs and examine timeless transversal issues. Most newspapers publish their online editorials earlier than the printed versions, some just after midnight (like *El País* and *The Times*), some first thing in the morning (like *Corriere della Sera*) and some even a day in advance (like the French *Le Monde*).

There are, however, some exceptions. For example, *Le Monde* published its editorial from 28 January on Tuesday 29 at 14.06 pm, which is even later than the editorial from the 29, which was published at 12.22 pm. In general, the editorial is understood as an article of in-depth reflection that is not pressured by the speed of the internet, since there are no editorials about the breaking news, and they all follow the traditional cycle of 24 hours.

The greatest innovation of the online editorial occurs in the area of audience participation, which is the most prominent feature of the so-called Web 2.0. The possibility of users' interaction penetrates in a transversal manner all the versions of the main print media in the countries under analysis, with a presence in virtually all of the sections.

Regardless of the degree of importance granted by the public to the openness of the published texts (in some cases with specific sections that are highlighted at the top of the page), all editors decided to embrace the benefits of the Web 2.0. At least a triple role is performed by the new ICT tools that have been incorporated over the years at the same time that they were developed in other areas of the internet perform.

The first function of these tools is to give the website the image of "innovation". The second function is to increase the hierarchy of and highlight the information in which they are integrated. The third function is to allow the readers to share their opinions. It is in the context of these common trends that the opinion section and, specifically, the object of our study, the editorial are developed with different procedures by each of the newspapers.

In the case of *El País*, participation in the editorial is limited to the assessment and distribution, through the internet, of a closed text in which the direct intervention of the public is not allowed. For all the opinion section, *El País* uses a common scheme that does not allow the addition of text by the readers. It includes the possibility of recommending the editorial texts in the most popular social networks in Spain (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn; Google+, Tuenti, Meneame) and the social network of the newspaper (Eskup), in addition to the traditional actions of "send, print and save".

The opinion section offers, thus, a level of openness that is lower than other sections. A possible reason is that this section is not one of the most popular in the digital version, which the newspaper tries to compensate by providing readers more documentation on the editorial's subject matter and links to related news published by the same newspaper and other media.

The online version of the Spanish newspaper is the only one in the sample that limits the public's participation in the opinion section. In the rest of the newspapers, the editorial is often presented as an open text in which readers can intervene through the posting of comments, in addition to the use of the dissemination and ranking tools, which are used by the Spanish newspaper. *The Times* implements a similar system of participation in the whole newspaper, including the opinion section and the editorial, which includes allowing and enabling readers to post comments, print, email and share in the three currently most popular social internet: Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

The same happens in *Corriere della Sera* and *Diário de Notícias*. In the Portuguese newspaper the opinion section appears as a secondary section, as it is located in a second level at the top of the page; while its integration of the so-called Web 2.0 tools is similar to the rest of the newspaper. In this case, the editorials also give readers the possibility of posting comments from their accounts in Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+. Similarly, *Le Monde* offers readers the possibility of sharing the information –and changing the headline of the link to make it more effective in the social networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+), making comments, recommending it, printing and emailing.

With this display of possibilities for interaction, the editorial is becoming a text written by the newspaper but open to the contributions from readers. The level of readers' involvement in the editorial through the posting of comments is lower than in other sections and the sample of newspapers rarely manage to establish a symmetrical bi-directional communication, since often the alleged conversation with the reader moves away from the issue proposed by editorial. The analysis did not detect a similar editorial line or agenda in the sample of newspapers in terms of arguments and topics, which are irregular and, on many occasions, did not even manage to establish a conversation with the public.

In summary, in the sample of newspapers the editorial retains the core elements that have characterised the genre in recent decades, as virtually in all cases the content of the editorial analysed were the same in the print and online versions of the newspaper. However, this basic structure and discourse are gradually adapting to the new online platform, primarily in the use of hypertexts and reader participation tools, which turn the traditional genre into an open text. However, at this moment we cannot talk of a real interaction between editorials and readers. Many of the possibilities of the internet for the editorial text have not been exploited, despite the fact that in recent years many developments have occurred in the consolidation of a road of no return that can change the genre and its location within the informative discourse in the near future.

4. Conclusions

The editorial survives as one of the main opinion genres in the digital edition of the sample of European newspapers analysed in this study. The main function of the editorial has not changed in the sample of newspapers as they continue to be the voice of the media institutions in relation to the most relevant topics. Its role as a leader of public opinion in relation to the themes of the media agenda, as well as its position towards the actions of the public, mainly political, actors, is in many cases overlapped with its role as political actor that puts forward alternative proposals to the situations under analysis. This is the reason why most newspapers focus on the domestic affairs of their countries, in which the media can exercise an influence.

The online editorial works, in general terms, more as the opinion of the online newspaper on a given subject than as a tool to set the public agenda. At the moment, the adaptation of the editorial to the internet is still limited, as there have only been few changes in its textual structure. The language of cyber-journalism has developed new features, like the approximation to the use of hypertextuality, although scarce and external to the text itself.

Overall, the online content of newspapers has not been organised through layers of depth and the decentralisation of information has not occurred. Multimediality, which has been developed in other parts of the opinion section, is not used in the editorial. More frequent updating has neither been adopted by the editorial since it is normally published between the 23:00 and 24:00 hours of the previous day and its content is the same that is published in the print media. This finding allows us to say that multimediality and updating are not characteristics of the new genre.

The greatest use of the potentials of the internet by the editorial genre has occurred in the area of interactivity, since the majority of the sample of editorials used tools that allowed readers to participate. However, the use of interaction tools in the editorial is lower than in other sections of the newspapers and rarely results in a symmetrical two-way communication.

Thus, this study has confirmed the last three initial hypotheses and refuted the first one. We can affirm that, in general, the sample of online newspapers under analysis do not use explicitly the opinion section to reinforce the topics and points of view presented in the editorial, since only a small percentage of editorials address the same issue examined in opinion texts. In contrast, as mentioned, the traditional print newspapers continue to treat the editorial as an important genre to disseminate information and opinions over the internet, and give a preferential role to transmit the editorial line, although its adaptation to the internet environment is still incipient and shares its role with other instruments and genres.

In the light of the previous conclusions, it will be interesting to carry out a follow-up study in the coming years to investigate the possible emergence of new mechanisms of audience participation that may allow the construction of more plural messages for the public opinion but also for the political sphere.

* This article is the result of two consecutive research projects that investigate the same subject matter. The first project is titled *Evolución de los cibermedios españoles en el marco de la convergencia. Arquitectura de la información* ("[Evolution of the Spanish cyber-media in the framework of convergence. Information architecture](#)"). This study (reference [CSO2009-13713-C05-01](#), sub-programme SOCI), was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation and directed by the *Novos Medios* research group, as part a project that had the participation of research groups from several Spanish universities.

The second project, still ongoing (reference: [CSO2012-38467-C03-03](#)), is funded by Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness: *Innovación y desarrollo de los cibermedios en España. Arquitectura de la interactividad periodística en dispositivos múltiples: formatos de información, conversación y servicios* ("Innovation and development of cyber-media in Spain. Architecture of journalistic interactivity in multiple devices: formats of information, conversation and services").

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