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Newspaper design as a fundamental element of the tabloid press. An analysis of the causes of the closure of *Claro* newspaper

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Abstract

Introduction: This article aims to demonstrate the importance of newspaper design in the classification of the print press and particularly tabloid journalism, in which formal elements play a protagonist role. The study aims to examine one of the few attempts made in Spain to consolidate a tabloid newspaper of importance. In 1991, a strange alliance between German and Spanish publishers (*Axel Springer* and *Prensa Española*, respectively) resulted in the launch of the *Claro* newspaper, which aimed to become a large-scale national mass medium in Spain. **Method:** The study is based on the analysis of the graphic and typographic elements of a sample of the published

copies of *Claro*, which highlights the structure of its front page and the protagonist role of the visual resources that are implicit to this press model. **Results and conclusions:** *Claro* fits perfectly the European tabloid press model, not only based on the type of information it offered but, above all, based on its structure and typographic elements. All these features make *Claro* a very representative example of the purest form of the tabloid press.

Keywords

Press; sensationalism; newspaper models; design; *Claro*.

Contents

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Translation by **CA Martínez-Arcos** (PhD in Communication from the University of London)

1. Introduction

There is not only one reason that explains the preference of the public for certain types of press, just as there is not only press model that caters the needs of all the audience. In the majority of cases, the success or failure of a news outlet, especially printed newspapers, depends on a convergence of factors that include not only its information quality, but also its historic opportunity, political stance, economic situation, and formal appearance, etc.

The reasons why a new publication becomes or not a medium of reference are neither very clear. For the most pragmatist scholars, it would be a simple matter of how many copies are put for circulation on the streets: the one that sells the largest number of copies becomes an opinion leader. However, we know that this is not case. Without leaving the European space, the closest reference to the Spanish press model, we know that the newspapers that set the news agenda (*The Guardian*, *The Times* and *The Independent*, in England; *Le Monde* and *Liberation*, in France; *Il Corriere de la Sera*, in Italy; *Die Welt* in Germany; and *El País* and *La Vanguardia*, in Spain) are not the bestselling newspapers. All of them are far from selling the large numbers of copies sold by the German *Bild Zeitung* (four million copies a day for the period covered by this study) and the English tabloids.

The difference between the two newspaper models has been widely studied by different authors (Núñez Ladevèze, 1991; Edo, 1994; López López, 1995; Sparks and Tulloch, 2000; Steinberg, 2000; Rodríguez Infiesta, 2009; Redondo García, 2011), who generally differentiate between quality (or broadsheet) press and popular (or tabloid) press, although some of them identify subcategories. When describing the quality press model, most authors emphasise the purely interpretative sense of this model and its assessment of the news based on their actual informative value, without more

concessions. On the other hand, the popular press model is defined as the one that focuses on the human interest of the protagonists of the news, although their intrinsic value may be relative.

From this point onwards, different authors offer more precise definitions. For Sparks and Tulloch (2000: 15), there are up to five types of press: serious press, semi-serious press, serious-popular press, tabloid press sold in kiosks and tabloid press sold in supermarkets, a category that is apparently very American. The serious press, Sparks and Tulloch point out, would focus mainly on political and economic issues and, from there, the quality drops to the supermarket tabloids, which bet on scandalous events, sports and entertainment news.

For other authors, the definitions are not so clear. Steinberg (2000: 237) speaks of the blurred boundaries between categories and highlights the difference of themes when differentiating between the different types of press. He identifies sensationalist topics as recurring elements of the popular press but understands that, from a certain point in the last century “the thematic areas of sensationalism [...] are now also covered largely and intensely by the ‘big press’ and its television and radio discourses” (Steinberg, 2000: 235).

Luis Núñez Ladevèze (1991: 39 and 40) prefers to talk about quality journalism (*periodismo de calidad*) and sensation-based journalism (*periodismo de sensación*) and points out that, on the basis that any event can become news, framing in one or another journalistic world will be determined by the professional criteria of the journalist and the medium that publishes the news. The classification of the author is based on the idea that quality journalism responds to the reader’s public interest, as citizen, in matters of politics, economics, institutions, etc., and that sensation-based journalism is associated with a psychological interest focused on events that move people, and awaken their emotions and feelings.

In short, there are at least two factors that tilt the balance towards the aforementioned models: the topics and the treatment given to them. At this point, we must ask ourselves whether there are more elements that accentuate this difference. In this sense, Manuel López López (1995: 23) believes that the sensationalist or popular press is defined by a more eye-catching layout, with big headlines and plenty of images.

In the same vein, Armentia and Caminos (2003: 153) point out that the serious press describes the events with sobriety and avoids “eye-catching resources, scandalous photos and large headlines”; while the tabloid press is characterised by the use of many and large pictures and the eye-catching design of its pages, which graphically highlights the most resonant elements.

Finally, we could also point out that different authors make allusions to the sort of language that is used by one or another type of press. It is said that language is conditioned, from the linguistic point of view, by quality (serious, cultivated, informational) journalism, in the first case, and entertainment (colloquial, plain and very expressive) journalism, in the case of the tabloid press; but also from the morphological point of view, by the different sizes and designs applied to headlines: complete sentences (subject, verb, predicate) in quality journals and the use of few and very expressive and large words in the popular press. For Manuel Casado (1978),

“the evocative value of certain phrases of spoken language; the replacement in fixed locutions of one of the elements; the idiomatic parody; the omission of an indirectly implied word that the reader can guess with ease, etc., are some of the linguistic resources used by a certain type of press”.

The conclusion seems obvious: in the differentiation of the most obvious press models what is told is as important as the way it is told. That is why there are authors who classify daily newspapers based on their design and content. Casasús and Roig (1981: 61), for instance, distinguish between the informative-interpretive press, and the popular-sensationalist press and the opinion press, which is a classification that is more complex than the previous ones.

Some authors consider that we can classify daily newspapers based on the relationship between their form and content. In this sense, some describe the serious press as one that is sober in the use of typographical elements, with proper not-large headlines, a balanced use of graphic material, without large elements, with systematic organisation based on the content’s informative value, a moderate use of organisation elements (dashes, bullet points, boxes, etc.) and a moderate use of colour.

The popular press, however, is associated with an unbalanced layout, with various centres of visual interest, a hierarchy based on novelty and human interest, a more bold use of typographical resources (use of capital letters, decorated capital letters, negative fonts, translucent fonts, etc.), exaggeratedly large headlines in bold sans serif fonts, a spectacular use of graphic material (silhouettes and various effects) and a baroque use of colour, not only in images but also in backgrounds, text and typographic resources.

“In the tabloid press, emotional tension prevails over rationality, as well as the appealing to human instincts and morbid incitement. They are, thus, two clearly divergent models and any reader can actually notice their antagonistic identity in the kiosks. In the quality press, typography tends to be moderate -with headlines that are discrete and whose size serves to rank the importance of the contents- and the graphic material is displayed in a very contained way, through pictures and infographic solutions whose size and composition aim to illustrate reality instead of supporting a biased view” (León Gross, 2005: 35).

Casasús and Roig describe the opinion press as having a heterogeneous design, which gives priority to opinion articles and pieces and, accordingly, makes a moderate use of typography and images (in which drawings and illustrations dominate over photographs), and a generous inclusion of tables and organisation elements. Casasús and Roig also point out that these models are not always offered in a pure state and thus complete their classification with ‘hybrid’ models that exhibit the formal characteristics of the previous three models. The sensationalist-informative press and the opinion-informative press are the hybrid models proposed by these authors.

2. The tabloid press in Spain

If we take into account the previous considerations and review the history of the Spanish daily press, it is difficult to find newspapers that fit all or most of the criteria laid down as characteristic of the popular-sensationalist press. We are not categorically denying its existence but question whether the press models established in Spain can be considered as equivalents of those that succeeded and continue to succeed in Europe.

For example, Marta Redondo (2011: 113) maintains that, in the same way that “the coverage of the war in Cuba meant changes in the appearance of American newspapers, the Fuencarral [street] murder [of 1889] contributed to the modification of the appearance of Spanish newspapers”. The author also considers that this situation prompted the emergence of the sensationalist press model in Spain.

While it is true that crime stories (“Lady killed by the maid in complicity with the deceased’s son”) and the sensationalist treatment given to them by newspapers (whose judgements managed to be as important as the official ones) could constitute an attempt to consolidate a model of popular press, if we accept the importance of graphic design in the definition of the press model, we must dismiss this hypothesis because the layout of -virtually all- the newspapers that published these types of news (with the exception of the use of page-wide headline in *El Liberal* and *El Resumen*) did not experience noticeable structural modifications. Mainly because the newspapers were not able to carry out these modifications, technologically speaking.

In those years, and until much later, the majority of Spanish newspapers were printed on press machines that only allowed the configuration of a vertical layout, with texts arranged in columns, and alleys that limited the width of items and did not allow headlines to grow in proportion to the importance of the news. The rotary printing press ended this inconvenience and the use of the stereoplates ended the tyranny of the alleys.

Naturally, popular or sensationalist news had already been produced in Spain before the Fuencarral street murder, and in a way they could have contributed to the emergence of traditional sensationalist newspapers. However, as María Cruz Seoane (1983: 225) points out, “still during those years it is surprising not to see the exploitation of news as sensationalist as the assassination of Prim, the arrival of King Amadeo and proclamation of the first Republic”. In addition, despite what Marta Redondo points out, the tabloid press was neither consolidated many years later with such important events as the sinking of the *Maine* (1898) in Cuba. This was because, contrary to the thematic and technological coincidence (the North American newspapers were already printed with the rotary printing press) in the American side that consolidated the model, the technological delay of the structures of the Spanish press prevented the development of the popular newspaper.

2.1. Peculiarities of *El Caso*

When speaking of the tabloid press in Spain, the weekly newspaper *El Caso* is always mentioned as an undisputed example of sensationalism in the press. *El Caso* is a successful newspaper that had a circulation of 400,000 copies during the Franco regime.

It would certainly be absurd to argue that “the doorwomen’s newspaper” - as it was widely known - did not fully fit the traditional popular press model, but if we compared its page layout with that of the current press models, we would be surprised to find out that the weekly sensationalist newspaper is not, strictly speaking, a sensationalist newspaper based on its typography, the size of its headlines and its page layout. In fact, the design of this newspaper exhibited more moderation than the current hybrid models that aim to attract readers not so much with information quality as with design resources.

The relationship between the design and content of *El Caso* has not been studied in depth, but we know that its periodicity separates it from the daily newspapers and that does not affect our hypothesis that there was a lack of sensationalist daily newspapers in Spain until the late 20th century. Why did this happen?

2.2. The shortage of the tabloid press

The different reasons put forward to explain the lack of the ‘non-serious’ daily press in Spain include the competition from other media (especially television, with programming dedicated exclusively to sensational news events), the greater success of the daily sports newspapers (which emulate the tabloid press in some ways, especially in terms of design), and the lack of audacity from publishers, who always tried to stay away from this type of journalism.

And, of course, the constant assertion made by Marta Redondo (2013: 252) about the journalistic features of certain Spanish mainstream newspapers: “in terms of thematic selection, intensity of coverage, graphic treatment, provision of material, use of sources and narrative style, they move away from the serious journalism model, and are closer to the sensationalist paradigm, in tune with more popular media and lower ethical and quality standards”.

However, we have identified four attempts to consolidate a model of purely popular press in Spain. In chronological order, the first was the evening newspaper *Diario Libre*, launched by Grupo 16 on 14 February, 1978, and closed down two months later, on 8 April. *Las noticias* was launched in 1990 in Barcelona but only lasted for a few months. *El eco 24 horas* was another Catalan newspaper launched by Grupo Godó in 1995 in an attempt to steal readers from the hybrid newspaper *El Periódico de Catalunya*, however, *El eco* did not last more than a year.

The most powerful attempt, and the one that is of interested to this research study, is the *Claro* newspaper, which emerged in 1991 from the alliance between two large media groups: the German Axel Springer and the Spanish Prensa Española, the publisher of *Abc*. Each group owned 50% of the newspaper. The venture lasted four months: from 8 April to 6 August, 1991.

3. The importance of the front page in the tabloid press

As we have seen, the ranking of information based on the size and width of the headlines and the possibility of making certain news more obvious and more visible played a key role in the

development of the press in general, and particularly, of the popular press. The change of the 19th century newspaper to the mass press affected the design of newspapers and their front page became the showcase for a business that needed to attract readers. Víctor Rodríguez Infiesta clearly explains it:

“If a particular newspaper is sold exclusively by subscription and is distributed only by mail, the front page will not matter much, and instead the general content will be much more valued: If, on the other hand, the same newspaper has to be sold on the streets, everything changes, because it has to win readers one by one, by presenting an eye-catching external design, with big headlines that attract the attention and can be shouted out by the vendor to achieve a shocking effect” (Rodríguez Infiesta, 2009: 271-272).

Newspapers are no longer cried out by hawkers in Spain. Not even in 1991. But nobody underestimates the strength of a front page that stands out among many others on the shelf of a kiosk. *Claro* bet on an eye-catching front page, as it is characteristic in the tabloid press model, which makes it an interesting object of study in itself. We should note, however, that the idea of front page in this publication was highly conditioned by the chosen structure (two different sheets) and its format (a Berliner of 470mm x 315mm, when in Spain the majority of the newspapers were tabloids), which forced the distribution of copies folded to the centre, which reduced its display area by 50%.

This configuration was crucial in the typological selection of the front pages of the newspaper which, from the first issue, sought to give the reader as much information as possible, which made it similar to the ‘showcase’ formula (Canga, 1994; Martín Aguado, 1981) or ‘signal and text’ formula (Evans, 1984: 65), in contrast to the ‘poster’ or ‘invitation’ formulas, “which demands the readers’ attention on a specific aspect or news [...] and aims to be a shout that attracts people’s attention towards the kiosk” (Canga, 1994: 82).

The result of our object of study -as we shall see later- would be closer to what Mario R. García (1984, 50-55) considers “broad-sheet sized tabloid-styled newspapers”, i.e. newspapers that use their front page as a tabloid-poster without giving up on a considerable number of news.

4. State of the art review

In 1991, seven general-information newspapers were published in Madrid: *El País*, *Abc*, *Diario 16*, *El mundo*, *El Sol*, *Ya* and *El independiente*. In addition, there were important Catalan newspapers like *La Vanguardia* and *El Periodico de Catalunya*. This is why Maximiliano Fernández (2008: 144) believed that there was “no place for new papers”.

However, Silex Media, the new company created by the German and Spanish publishers decided to launch a new daily newspaper “for those who don’t read the press” (*Abc*, 26 March 1991), which, according to the newspaper, constituted a broad market for the new publication. In various press conferences prior to the launch, those responsible for the project and the appointed director, Ferrán

Monegal, focused on highlighting the features of *Claro* as the first “popular” newspaper of Spain, “a Boulevard daily newspaper, as they are known in Europe”.



Figure 1. Comparison of formats and designs in the Spanish press at the closure of *Claro* in March 1991.

Year	<i>El País</i>	<i>Abc</i>	<i>Diario 16</i>	<i>El Mundo</i>	<i>El Sol</i>	<i>Ya</i>	<i>Independiente</i>
1991	394,686	292,631	156,137	131,626	71,057	46,263	No data

Table 1. Print run of newspapers in Madrid in 1991. Source: Edo (1994), according to data from OJD.

While Guillermo Luca de Tena, President of Prensa Española, defined the project as ‘exciting’ and completely different from the rest of the Spanish newspapers, Günter Wille, from Axel Springer, insisted on taking advantage of the success of the German newspaper *Bild*, but also remarked that “*Claro* would not be a mere imitation of the model but an adaptation to the mentality and preferences of the Spanish people”.

“The underlying idea was that a cheap tabloid would find a place in a country with one of the lowest newspaper reading rates in Europe, finding its readership not only among those who do not read any newspaper, but hoping to steal some hundreds of thousands readers from the established newspapers. The German model of the *Bild Zeitung*, with a circulation of five million, would be their role model, but adapted to the specific characteristics of this country” (Fernández Sanz, 1999: 235).

Not all those involved were so excited about the idea. Luis María Anson, the director of *Abc*, made some statements about his decision to stay away from the initiative.

The adventure began on 8 March 1991 and lasted four months: it was a resounding failure. The 600,000 copies of the first edition were a mirage and the circulation never passed the 400,000 mark, which was considered vital to the sustainability of the project. In August of the same year (and selling about 70,000 copies, which would have been more than enough for the maintenance of other less pretentious newspaper), *Claro* was closed down after having four different directors.

Numerous reasons have been put forward to explain the limited success of *Claro*. Berrocal and Rodríguez-Maribona (1998: 149) identify some causes: the natural public targeted by *Claro* were the classes less prone to read, but for these groups television was the preferred medium, which at the time provided an increased offer, with the emergence of the first private channels (Antena 3 and Telecinco in 1990). In addition, the topics traditionally preferred by the tabloid press –sports and celebrity gossip– were sufficiently covered in Spain. The sports newspapers, led by *Marca*, and the gossip magazines were consolidated and successful products in kiosks. Gossip magazines offered a range of information, from the carefully-crafted and friendly news stories of *¡Hola!* to the most scandalous stories of *Pronto*. *Claro* was unable to steal readers from these media. “As in previous situations, it seems that *Claro* was born too late, when its potential audience, the less prone to reading, had gotten used to the audiovisual consumption and when there was a nationwide coverage of its subjects by gossip magazines and the sports newspapers” (Berrocal and Rodríguez-Maribona, 1998: 150).

Based on the proposed reasons, other statements suggest that the failure of *Claro* was not exclusively linked to media competition. Arsenio Escolar, the second direction of the newspaper, said that the management of the company “was a disaster: bureaucracy, duplicated positions and functions, really slow processes that no one wanted to review and change, resistance to technological innovation, evidence of corruption” (Escolar, 2005: web). To understand what Arsenio Escolar (current director of the free newspaper *20 Minutos*) is saying, it is necessary to clarify that he had a vast experience in the daily press when he was hired to direct *Claro* and that his previous position was Deputy Director of *El Sol*, “the first newspaper in the world to be produced, in its pre-press stage, with decentralised computers and the first fully digitised newspaper in the world (text and images)” (Pérez Cuadrado, 2004: 17).

In other words, *El Sol* was a newspaper already on the streets with a method of production that was proven to be more functional and quicker than other types of newspapers as it was computer generated (desktop publishing became the production method par excellence) and did not require the traditional assemblies involved in phototypesetting. This contrasted with the traditional production model that the Germans imposed to *Claro*, which was created in the image and likeness of the *Bild Zeitung*, where the concept of ‘hot formatting’, used by Ferrán Monegal (*Abc*, 26 March 1991) to define its newsroom’s work style, bet on the news content, a hierarchy based on headlines as a priority element and, of course, a constant and continuous re-adaptation of the page layout, which delayed the production processes and required many more technical staff.

There was at least an error of calculation in the choice of the production process of *Claro* and this very quickly became evident in the obsolete and outdated workflows that made the project even less profitable.

Based on the initial hypothesis of this study, which proposes that we cannot speak of the sensationalist press without making reference to the particular design and page layout that meets the criteria to be considered popular, to what extent does the design of *Claro* is also ‘guilty’ of its failure?

5. Object of study

This study offers an analysis of the universe of the front pages published by *Claro* (121) throughout its existence in 1991. This involves a thorough review of nearly 1,700 information units, understood as a set of distinct news stories, regardless of whether it contains a series of elements (headline, text, photos, etc.) or only a small headline.

The main objective is to determine, based on the structural and design elements of the front page of the *Claro* newspaper, whether it constituted a pure (not hybrid) form of the sensationalist press model in the evolution of the Spanish press.

The specific objectives of the study are to analyse -one by one- the elements that make up the front page (headlines, images, non-textual typographical elements, etc.) of *Claro*, to establish whether it conforms to the criteria that different authors identify as characteristic of the tabloid press and whether this design fits the types of news content it offers.

Finally, the article aims to identify the causes of the failure of this newspaper, which aimed to reach a circulation of 400,000 copies but never sold more than 120,000 copies.

6. Methods

The study is based on the analysis of 50 variables that affect the information units contained in the front pages of the *Claro* newspaper. The sample is composed by all the front pages published by the newspaper, which are curated by Madrid’s National Library in Madrid. Although the newspaper launched editions in Catalonia and Andalusia, the work is based on the Madrid edition.

The variables are very diverse and include the placement of the information unit, the area (in square centimetres) occupied by the units and the percentage it represents with respect to the total area of the newspaper, the type of information unit (leading stories, secondary news, brief news, only title), and the size (in points) of the headline.

Some of the premises of the analysis are based on the idea that “if the content and news selection of the front page are important, so it is the number of news and the surface they occupy within it” (Canga, 1994: 78), which has been pointed out by several authors.

The Didot point measurement system was used to calculate the size of the headlines. In order to avoid errors provoked by unprofessional use of the measurement system -and given that measurement has been carried out directly over the printed pages of the newspaper-, we used the

formula proposed by Martínez de Sousa (1974): measure the height of a capital letter in millimetres, multiply it by 4 and express the result in points.

In addition to the size of the headlines, we also took into account important typographic concepts such as the column-width of the headline, the number of lines, alignment, font category (with or without serifs), orthotypographic style, and font colour.

The analysis also took into account criteria for the analysis of the images included on the front page of the newspaper: category (photos, drawings, illustrations, etc.), size in square centimetres, relationship of the image with the headline, shot and angle, use of colour, shape, distribution effects, etc.

Finally, and given the characteristics of the information to analyse, it seemed very important to examine the prominence of the non-textual typographic elements, such as boxes, dashes, bullet points, backgrounds, EM spaces, and all the elements used to rank and highlight information.

It also seemed important to register the position of the information units with respect to the location of the nameplate of the newspaper (given the size of the newspaper and the need to fold it half) as well as to register the exact headline of each news story in order to study the use of language, the writing and the number of words used.

All the collected data was contrasted with personal interviews with the people responsible for the different areas of the newspaper, who offer their views as direct sources and protagonists of the project. To be precise, we talked to Arsenio Escolar, the second director of the newspaper; Julen Echeverría, technical director; Julián Mora, head of design; and Ricardo Gutiérrez (*Curtis*), editor-in-Chief. In addition, we carried out an intense review of the literature on the tabloid press in general and the case of *Claro* in particular.

7. Results

Performing a quantitative analysis of the formal structure of a newspaper can involve important big errors if we do not use a rigorous observational method based on prior knowledge and verified documentation of the history of the medium. In the case of *Claro*, we know two fundamental data: that the press model it aspired to emulate was the German *Bild Zeitung*; and that one of the first things requested to the deputy director of art, Julián Mora (who was part of the staff since the first issue) was the detailed hand-drawn sketch of the newspaper.

But more important than the layout of the page, understood as a reading unit that had to contain a diversity of themes that might be of interest to different readers (crime stories, celebrity gossip, fashion, etc. Curiously, *Claro* never had these types of sections located in specific pages), was the configuration of the working process. The production model, an identical copy of the German newspaper, was slow, improvised, and repetitive to exhaustion.

“As Ricardo Gutiérrez (*Curtis*), the newspaper’s editor-in-chief, points out, the leading front page news were defined and then the remaining spaces were filled up with very diverse news

stories whose only requirement was that they had to be different and of interest to diverse readers. Thus, the mounting of a page -because that could not be called page design or layout- was eternal. News was configured to a given width and if it was of not use it had to be mounted in another column until it fitted. Very often, our only function to cut and add text. It was real work on the plate as in the old times. And all this was done only because that was the German way” (Gutiérrez Retuerto, 2015).

Based on this premise, the data deriving from this work result questionable but, as we shall see, many other findings confirm the hypothesis that this newspaper was a tabloid.

7.1. About the information units

We have considered three factors about the information units on the front page of *Claro*. The first one is the number of units. In this regard, the newspaper included on the front page a high rate of news (up to 20 news items were counted in the first months), with an average of 15 (17 in the first months and 13 in the last ones), and a minimum of seven units.

There is an explanation for the decrease in units: the appearance a contest (in the middle of the newspaper’s life) that aimed to attract readers and occupied a large space in the front page. Having said that, we are able to affirm that front page model, based on the amount of news should fit the ‘sign and text’ model, although the text was just a long summary placed after the headline.

A second aspect of interest is the surface occupied by the information units in relation to total surface of the newspaper. In this case, the difference between the size of the leading news stories (about 22% of the total) and the secondary news stories is noticeable, with 8% in average. Except for the front page photo, which is usually placed at the bottom of the page (which means it was out of sight when the paper was folded). This photo had a surface area equal to or greater than (up to 24%, and 40% in the nude picture of Marta Sánchez) the leading news story.

In this case, large headlines (above 100 Didot points) used for the leading news stories and the versatility of the images as a centres of visual interest could be considered as belonging to the poster type front page.

What makes the two models coexist in *Claro*, as Mario García pointed out, is the third analysed aspect: the position of the information units with respect to the nameplate of the newspaper.

While classic newspapers placed all the news under the nameplate heading, which stays in a fixed position, in the non-serious newspapers the displacement of the nameplate, especially in tabloids, requires an unstable equilibrium of typographic hierarchy. This does not happen in *Claro*, where the nameplate moves but not too much. Usually located in the upper left corner, the red square nameplate moves along the top of the page to stay on sight when the paper is folded.

The leading news stories appear below the nameplate only in 42% of cases; above the nameplate in 36% of cases and next to it in 21% of cases. These percentages change in the case of secondary news (which appear below it in 60%, above it in 17.5%, and next to it in 22.5%). In the case of brief news and summaries on the front page, they always appeared (in 100% of cases) below the nameplate.

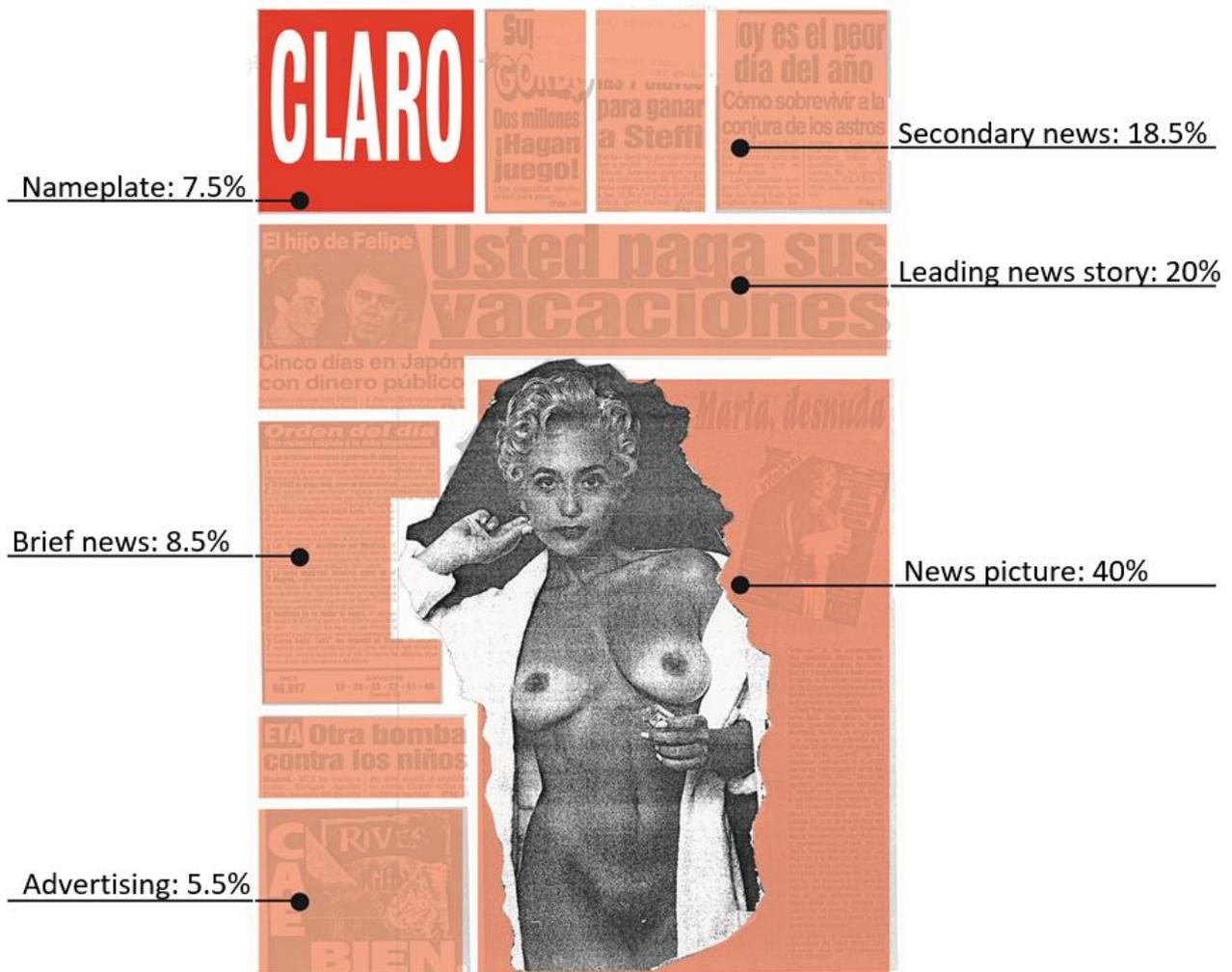


Figure 2. Distribution of information units and percentage of the front page's surface they occupy in *Claro* of 6 June, 1991.

When we talk about composition it becomes evident that, in many cases, the information units contained in front pages of *Claro* (also in the interior pages, which are not analysed in this study) are intertwined as pieces of a puzzle, which is a typical arrangement of old-fashioned typographic productions.

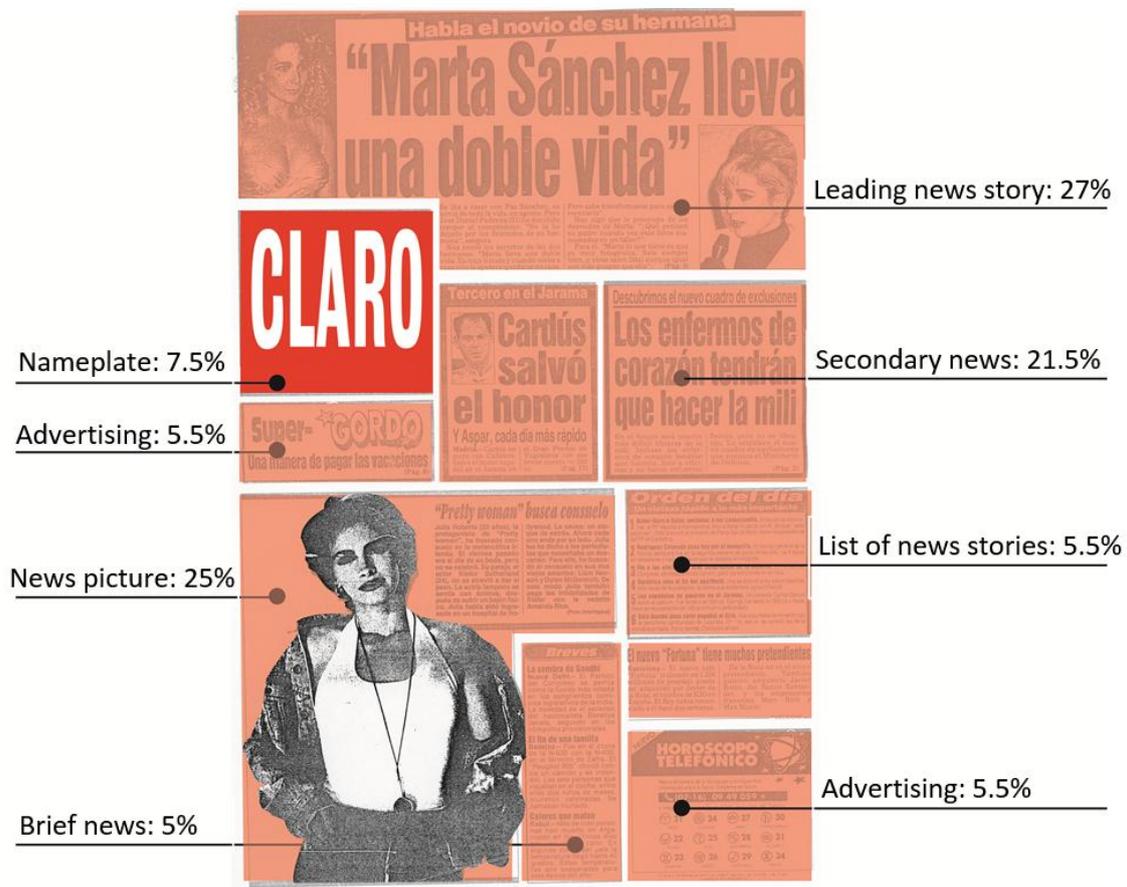


Figure 3. Distribution of information units and percentage of the front page's surface they occupy in *Claro* of 17 June 1991.

7. 2. About the typography

One of the characteristic features of the popular press that has had one of the greatest impacts on the front pages of *Claro* is the size of its news headlines, as large as 160 points (and an average size of 128 points). This is more than twice the usual size (between 40 and 60 points) of the leading headline of a tabloid in 1991, when newspapers such as *El País* and *El Mundo* rarely exceeded the 50 points and *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico de Catalunya* were around 64 points and could reach 80 points.

Even the newspaper's second-level headlines were large, with sizes ranging from 28 to 80 Didot points and an average of 46. However other typographical factors do not clarify *Claro*'s sensationalist bias. For example, it always used lower-case letters instead of the typical capital letters of the British tabloids; the predominant use of a single sans serif typeface (except in the front page girl photo), which reflected a systematic arrangement untypical of the sensationalist designs. The only orthotypographic concession focused frequently on the deformation of the counter of the letters,

which condensed or expanded (sometimes both) the typeface for the sole purpose of completing lines of text.

There are neither strong signs of sensationalism in the heads of the front pages of *Claro*. 90% of the headlines are printed in positive, black over white, and the use of reverse type is very sporadic. The use of other colours on the headlines of the front pages of *Claro* is neither an exaggerated (in less than 11% of cases). If anything, the use of blue in sports news is the one that breaks the rule.

Above all, it is the size of the headlines of the leading front page stories what almost always requires the entire width of the page (in 68.3% of the cases), in two lines (85%) and to write with economy of words (between six and seven).

7. 3. About the impact of images

Contrary to what might appear in a newspaper of these characteristics, neither the size or the arrangement of the images on the front page of *Claro* constituted an exaggerated layout (except in very specific cases, like when they coincide with the leading headline). The average of nearly three pictures per front page can be deceiving due to the inclusion of ‘masks’ (one-column wide close-ups of the protagonists). The structure, as we anticipated, places the main picture to the bottom of the page where it is accompanied by a small headline (in comparison to the size of the rest of the elements), in serif typefaces (the only headline with serif typeface) and a not very long text.

It is the typical structure of the news picture, but in this case the headline is not attached to the body of text. In any case the idea is to make the image the protagonist and the centre of visual impact.

The data clearly indicate that the average occupancy of images per front page in *Claro* is around 22%. However, there are even more compelling data: all images are photographs (there are no drawings or illustrations); and there are almost as many black and white pictures (41.6%) as colour pictures (58.4%), despite the fact that *Claro* was always published the front and back pages of its two sheets in the four-colour system (not the interior pages, which were always printed in two or three plain colours with black and white photographs).

Another aspect of the image that bring us closer to the idea of a popular newspaper is the types of shots used in photographs. Long and full shots are more characteristic of the informative/interpretive press and the closer the shot the publication uses, the greater the apparent interest of the publication in the news’ protagonists. *Claro* predominantly uses the big close up (in 36% of cases) and the medium shot (22%); followed by the American shot and the full shot (16.6% in each case), the close up (5.5%), the long shot (2.7%) and the extreme close up (in 0.6%).

Regarding the angles of the photographs included in the newspaper, we can only point out that 95% of them exhibit a normal-angle shot and only 5% use a low-angle shot. With regards to the position of the central subject in the frame, we found out that: in 76% of cases the subject appears facing the camera and in 24% the subject is showing one side of his face.

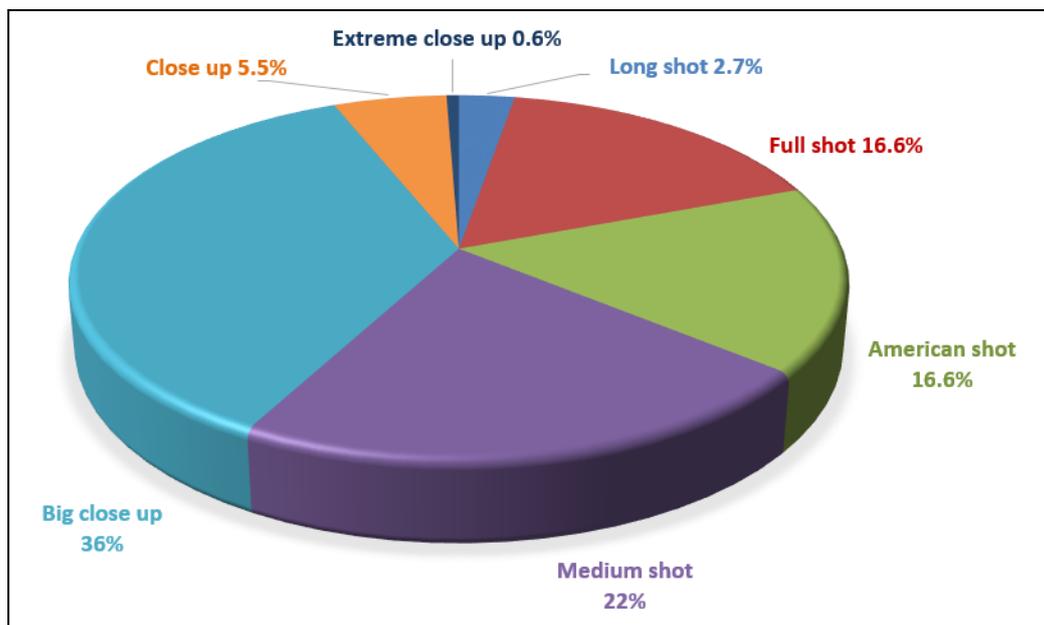


Figure 4. Shots used in used photographs on the front pages of *Claro*, 1991. There is a prevalence of close shots: medium shots and big close ups.

Despite what might seem a priori, the effects of the distribution of the images in the front page are not representative of an extremely complicated design. In 75% of cases, the pictures are arranged within a traditional geometric framework, in which there is a predominance of pictures in portrait mode (83.5%), to the detriment of the landscape and square frames (5.5% and 11%, respectively).

Burned (overexposed) photos and photomontages are hardly ever used. The types of pictures that from time to time break the tranquillity of the front page are the silhouette photos (which appear in 21% of all the front pages). They are cut-out photographs (rarely in their entirety), that highlight some detail (a hand, an elbow or a leg, for example) and break the limit of the information unit and invade other information spaces. They are an important part of the dynamism of the page.

7.4. About the use of non-textual typographic resources

The use of resources to generate centres of visual attractions around headlines, images and complete information units with is very common in the popular press (due to its simple implementation and economy of resources). The most common resources are the dashes (a punctuation mark used to underline, join or separate elements), boxes, coloured backgrounds (that partially or completely cover an information unit) and a wide variety of bullet points, EM spaces, triangles and effects that are placed among the typography in order to draw the attention of readers and get them to read.

Claro used these typographical resources, of course, but with less frequency and prominence than we would expect based on its sensationalist content. We registered a total of 202 fine dashes and 323 thick dashes (more than 4 points) on the front pages of *Claro*, which results in an average of two dashes per front page (used primarily to highlight kickers) and more than three thick dashes per page (used to emphasise the headline of the leading news and to separate information blocks).

Boxes always appear on the front pages of *Claro*, but are not quantitatively significant, given that they are always used in brief blocks of text and news summaries only to group different news together. The style of boxes is the most significant aspect to emphasise because although in 77% of cases they are solid (simple lines, stripe regardless of the thickness), in 23% of cases they feature an eye-catching design. The most peculiar style on the front pages is the box formed by lines of stars (always in red) and also by dashes, dots or bullets.

Two other features of the boxes used on the front pages of *Claro* deserve to be highlighted: they are rarely homogeneous and symmetric (many of them are shaped as figures or puzzles that try to fit with the surrounding news) and they are always printed in one of the three basic colours of the newspaper: black, red and blue, with red being used most frequently for celebrity gossip and blue for sports news.

Perceptions on other non-textual typographical elements are answered by themselves when looking at the numbers: not a single EM space was found on the front pages of the newspaper; only bullet points and dots were identified; But coloured backgrounds are frequently used to limit information units: at least in 10% of the front pages.

7. Conclusions

To argue that *Claro* was not a traditional sensationalist newspaper is beyond all logic. It was and this is demonstrated by many of the data collected about the structure of its front pages: the size of headlines; the unbalanced page layout; the use of full width to present the leading news stories; the design and colour of organisation elements such as boxes and dashes, etc.

However, the same data also questions whether the decisions on the overall design of the newspaper were consistent with the type of information it intended to offer. The uniformity in the use of typography (practically a single font family and always in lower-case), the systematic arrangement, the need to reproduce the broadsheet model of the *Bild Zeitung* in a Berliner format (with the corresponding accumulation of information units), the improvisation in the final product “where there were no layout artists but page assemblers” (Gutiérrez Retuerto, 2015) suggest that the design of *Claro* also contributed to its non-consolidation in the Spanish market.

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