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iWatch: the intense flow of microformats of “Glance journalism” that feed six of the main online media

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Abstract

Introduction. Digital media needed to adapt, in these last years, to numerous changes affecting both contents production and reception. The *wearables* or devices we carry along with us, specially smartwatches, can offer an interesting option in the diffusion of journalistic products. **Objectives and Methods.** To study the trends in the production of contents for iWatch, we used a quantitative methodology based on analyzing apps for Apple smartwatch from a total of fifteen cybermedia of informative communication of generalistic character and daily publication, with printed matrix. **Results.** Results show that the platform demands renewed narratives and online media still have very primary models available to face the new informative challenges of ubiquity. **Discussion and conclusions.** Exploit personalization, audios or customization, are some of the challenges editors and journalists must face in the current journalistic context.

Keywords

Microformat journalism; glance journalism; iWatch; personalization; apps; watch; cybermedia.

Contents

1. Introduction. 2. State of the art. 3. Objective and methods. 4. Analysis. 5. Discussion and conclusions. 6. Note. 7. List of References.

Translated by **Yuhanny Henares**
(Academic translator, Universitat de Barcelona)

1. Introduction

Communication and information technologies (CIT) accompany us everywhere in the third millennium. Data show that about 3.200 million individuals are on line, which represents 43.4 percent of the world population and the number of subscriptions to the mobile signal increases up to 7.100 million around the world. More than 95 percent of the world population can receive a mobile signal and the fastest growth can be seen in the mobile broad band, which number of subscriptions around the world has shifted from 800 million in the year 2010 to 3.500 million in the year 2015 (UIT, 2015). The technological movements that outstand from the start of the second decade of the third millennium in Spain have accelerated in the year 2015 (SIE, 2015). Connectivity and mobility are more present every day in our lives.

Technological progresses in the last years have made possible that mobile devices turn into a platform through which all kinds of contents are channeled. The characteristics of these devices for a technologically mediated total communication always and everywhere, have worked as engines when it comes to turn mobile communications into a unifying and acceleration force of the convergence process that characterizes the communicative ecosystem (Aguado & Martínez, 2008). Technological evolution placed mobile devices as a very important platform for the media industry (Silva, 2013) and for all producers of informative contents for the network society.

With the second decade of the third millennium, a new phase for mobile communications began. Protagonists were smartwatches, new devices integrating new functionalities in the universe of connectivity, with Internet as main reference. Apple and Samsung established a new field of competence in the market between Apple Watch and Samsung Gear, at the same time in which other technological companies also launched their own devices. The main actors of the media ecosystem didn't want to lose the possibilities of the new platform and prepared contents to make the dream of being present in all platforms and devices come true.

2. State of the art

The technological model, as baseline of the economic and social progress in the network society (Castells, 1989), sets the pace of mobile communication below the large shadow of what has been named 'Internet of things'[1] (Ashton, 1999). The so-called smartwatches constitute one of the most recent devices that the progress of technological innovation has made available for users, who have welcomed them as a new device for total communication. The interest awakened has encouraged actors of the media ecosystem, especially the old and new industry, to prepare contents to make the most of opportunities wearable devices offer for communication and businesses.

From the academic perspective, the deep transformations caused by the digital contexts have awakened the attention of many researchers who, as they confirmed the consolidation of cyberjournalism or online journalism, tried to know the ins and outs of the new field (Salaverría, 2007). The characteristics of the new technological environment have opened new research lines to understand multimediality (Deuze, 2004), interactivity (Scolari, 2008), participation (Masip et al, 2015), personalization (Thurman, 2011) and the use of new platforms (Westlund, 2014), among some dimensions which characterize the new media. The passing of the years has demonstrated the consolidation of research in this field (Masip & Micó, 2010) and, from the launching of new devices

and renewed trends, the search of new spaces and study lines for the renewal of research (Salaverría, 2015).

The characteristics of change in journalism in the last years, promoted by current technologies and the new communicative scenario, have been analyzed by numerous authors, with a general vision linked to platforms (Meyer, 1991; Boczkowski, 2004) as well as concrete aspects derived from the evolution of the network society (López and Campos, 2015), where information travels at great speed, practically in real time (Guallar, 2011). In this scenario, the informative production of media, in its adapting process, acts with a dominant logic of constant news updating, implementing a never-ending cycle (Rodríguez Martínez; Codina, Pedraza-Jiménez, 2010; Casero-Ripollés, 2012). In this field, wearables or devices we take along with us, specially smartwatches, can offer an interesting option for journalistic products.

3. Objectives and methods

The purpose of this research consists in analyzing apps for iWatch from a total of fifteen cybermedia of informative communication of generalistic nature and published daily, with a printer matrix.

These are the newspapers with the higher share of digital audience in their respective countries. They are the so-called “reference” media (Merrill, 1968). This terminology was proposed by John C. Merrill, who identifies the “quality newspaper” with the “newspaper of reference” or “elite newspaper”. This synonymy is established as a guarantee of homologation of the different media, taking their prestige in the printed matrix as guideline and becoming aware, at the same time, that their quality as reference media is not extensible to their level of diffusion.

Therefore, the definitive sample is comprised by the following media: *La Voz de Galicia*, *Faro de Vigo*, *El Mundo*, *El País*, *El Periódico* and *La Vanguardia*, in Spain; *The New York Times*, in USA; *Times* and *The Guardian*, in United Kingdom; *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, in France; *Corrière della Sera* and *La Repubblica*, in Italy and *Jornal de Notícias* and *Público*, in Portugal.

The final purpose of this article is to know the general context of implementing technology of smartwatches in the production of communication media. To do this, in a first stage, the availability or not of the app for iWatch will be analyzed for each one of the media selected in the sample, to later confirm how the information is organized, distributed and hierarchized in the new communicative platform.

We start from initial studies about the production of mobile contexts of François Nel and Óscar Westlund (Nel and Westlund, 2012: 745) which have been considered also by other authors (Aguado, Feijoo & Martínez, 2015: 249). We focus specially on those concerning the analysis of four interconnected areas that authors call “4C”: channels, conversation, contents and commerce. Absence of studies about elaboration of news for smartwatches obliges, in a way, to take the scientific production about mobile devices as reference.

We decided to center the study in the analysis of conversation. It has been defined by Steuer (Steuer, 1995: 46) as “the degree in which users can participate in the modification of the form and contents in an environment mediated in real time. Personalization is the technological response of the web by

the user, based on his explicit or implicit actions. The analysis of interpersonal dialogs is also included here (chat, messages, blogs, etc.) as well as diverse forms of expression created (Bucy, 2004) as texts, images or video. Deuze also mentions interactivity of browsing, that is, an interactivity that allows the user to browse in a more or less structured manner through the contents of the web site (Deuze, 2004: 214).

4. Analysis and results

Informative alerts, through SMS or MMS, are one of the first products of informative distribution through mobile devices. They were launched between 2000 and 2002 in what we can consider a first stage in mobile journalism (Aguado and Martínez, 2008:108), in a moment whereas original technological limitations (connectivity, size of screen, device's processing capacity, etc.) restricted the mobile phone role to a platform dedicated to the distribution of contents with brand promotional value.

Little by little, thanks to the evolution of technology and progress in devices, the mobile web and native or specific applications became popular. However, with the coming of the smartwatches we go back, in a way, to the starting point of the mobility journalism. Information based on headlines or small alerts and informative notifications achieve the boom it has reached at first.

With so much competence, the key challenge for the mobile consists in knowing how to catch user's attention. Here is where the coming of push notifications becomes especially noticeable, granting editors the capacity to reach users directly. A study of the Reuters agency confirms that the use of news notification has doubled in many countries thanks to the incursion of mobile devices such as smart watches which, very probably, will end up accelerating this trend (Reuters, 2016).

It is not strange either that, in a context where information is consumed into movement, "microformats" predominate. Microformats in the media can be defined as elements with a sense of their own, which semantic capacity, indexation and management allow to widen contents through physical browsing or hypertext links.

Space-time delocalization of reading that Internet allows, obliges editors to a new effort for looking complex redactions allowing a correct communicative efficacy both in the same web of the mass media as well as in social networks or mobile devices (García and López, 2014: 834).

Launching of iWatch from Apple has radically disrupted the way of consuming information. The device, even smaller than smartphones, shows a series of characteristics which can be summarized as follows:

- Turning off the screen reader: Interesting functionality for users because it provides a voice service.
- Zoom: allows the user to increase part of the screen he wants.
- Font size adjustment: Allows to increase or reduce font size.
- Alerts: This new characteristic makes the watch provide a tactile feedback to the wrist to send alerts or any other information requiring the attention of the user.
- Grey scale: Color characteristics to help people with visual disability related to color.
- Text in bold: Capacity to set the text in bold to help individuals with poor vision.

- Mono audio: Capacity to choose the ear through which the user wants to receive all audios, which is useful for individuals with audition disability.

The digital era requires a new narrative. Thanks to Smartphone, a new era begins, the era of *glance journalism*. Dan Shanoff, founder of Quickish, a company of news curation, considers that the launching of Apple watch leads to think that media should adapt to even briefer formats, even atomic units of contents. As mentioned by Shanoff, *glance* is one of the characteristics of the Apple Watch, because it allows users to browse through a series of notifications of subsets of a type of “ultra-brief news” (Shanoff, 2014). “Atomic Unit” is a metaphor useful to explain these kinds of actions will increase. In his opinion, that is the experience of the user the news industry can approach by distributing clear and concise information. Distribution, contents and their reception suffer alterations with the arrival of smartwatches. Consumptions is more and more fragmented.

If due to the emergence of smartphones and tablets as media support, we already talked about reading segmentation, the arrival of the Apple smartwatch positions us in a scenario marked by a journalism that could be called “of interruption”. In this strive to catch the attention of the reader to the Smartwatch screen, quite small compared with other devices, headlines acquire a really relevant role. Captivating becomes one of the challenges editors and journalists in the context of the era of smartwatch journalism. Likewise, images are more important than ever. The WAN *Wearables* report. *The Key Considerations for news publishers* (WAN, 2015:15) emphasizes in some of the qualities journalism must exploit through this new technology. Among them, they mention that the stories should include appealing and alluring headlines. Personalization will also be a key element for the “most intimate of platforms”, the only one touching our skin. Finally, the report of the World Association of Newspapers mentions that the recommendations through personal algorithms will play a relevant role in the journalism of *smartwatches* and that brand extension and continuity will also be another of the aspects to keep in mind.

For this study, we start from the exploratory analysis of a total of fifteen cybermedia of international reference. From this initial sample, less than half has an app for Apple iWatch (Table 1).

Table 1. Digital Media with Apple iWatch version available

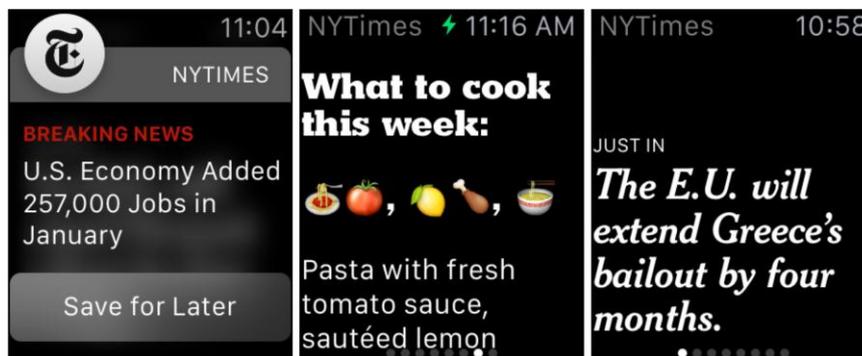
Media with iWatch	Date of launching	Media without iWatch
The New York Times	March 31, 2015	La Voz de Galicia
El País	June 26, 2015	Faro de Vigo
El Mundo		El Periódico
The Guardian	March 9, 2015	La Vanguardia
Le Monde	April 1, 2015	The Times
Le Figaro	April 24, 2015	Corriere della Sera
		La Repubblica
		Jornal de Notícias
		Publico

Source: Author’s own creation.

The first ones to get on the technological train have been the newspaper *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, shortly after Apple announced the launching of the smartwatch. Afterwards, media from the rest of the world have summed up to this initiative.

The new journalistic narrative obeys essentially to a series of patters that repeat in all cybermedia analyzed. Headlines are protagonists for iWatch apps. All newspapers offer news in a single line, imitating the informative alerts of the past. There is a play with “glances”, in such a way that information might be consulted in at a single glance. The United States newspaper includes different sections such as business, politics, science, technology and arts. Moreover, the same as happens with the rest of media, it offers the possibility of using *Handoff*, an application that allows starting a reading in a device and continue the activity in another. Likewise, it allows saving news to read them afterwards (Image 1).

Image 1. iWatch App of *The New York Times* newspaper



The Guardian assumes the same strategy than the North American reference newspaper and introduces a combination between alerts and notifications that catch the attention of users, while incorporating autonomous contents (WAN, 2015: 28). Minimalism in the presentation of contents is reduced to the presence of the headline, in the cases of updated news, or in the case of latest results, in the case of sports section (Image 2).

It is also interesting the fact that this newspaper incorporates a functionality that allows customizing the application depending on the needs and requirements of the audience.

Image 2. iWatch App of *The Guardian* newspaper



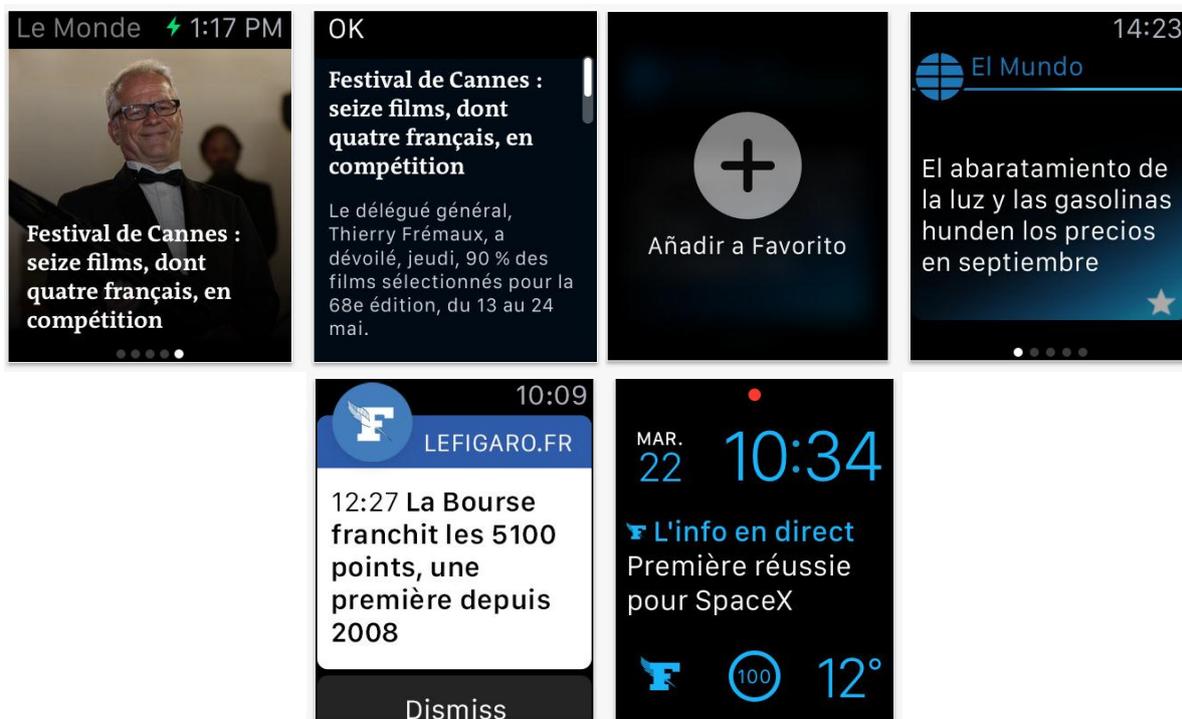
The application of *El País* also sums up to the trend of fast reading of headlines in the wrist. Its diffusion strategy is focused on selecting the five more outstanding pieces of the moment on the web. To read them deeply, the user can save them as favorites or open them directly on the iPhone for its detailed reading though smartphone's screen. Since it is synchronized with the phone, the watch automatically shows the notifications and informative alerts the mobile phone regularly receives. The newspaper *El País* incorporates *glances* to offer informative pills that are included in the main part of the watch for a quick review.

Image 3. iWatch App of *El País* newspaper



El Mundo, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*, thinking about the characteristics of this new screen, decide for exclusively offering headlines and subheads. They include the option to continue reading on the iPhone or saving the information for later review.

Image 4. iWatch App of *El Mundo*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* newspapers



5. Discussion and conclusions

For years, there has been the feeling that two worlds coexisted in a parallel manner, the online or virtual and offline or real. However, the growth of the digital universe has done nothing but to increase and, today, said evolutive process has led to a convergence process between both environments.

The year 2015 has been another year of transformation of mass media. While the media landscape is often described as a growth, each time more and more fragmented, it should be also described in terms of interconnectivity, through a context where users have access to contents from more screens than ever. The lines between computers, mobiles, television and cinema are starting to blur as the different platforms become more often differentiated by the differences in use and consumption rather than technology itself. Because of this changing landscape, there is a new series of problems and solutions editors face, such as the way of promoting in an effective manner through those platforms and the purchase behavior of consumers.

Analyzed newspapers are shyly making incursions in the smallest and most intimate screen. The platform demands a new narrative that meets the needs of a user who requires late or immediate news. The exploratory study we have carried out, with a monitoring of products, makes us conclude that the iWatch is another screen more, a complement, in a multiplatform scenario where each one fulfils a goal in the project of total diffusion (a message in all channels, formats and expressive modalities adjusted to the access device).

The iWatch places the journalism in a new era where the emergence of microformats predominate. The challenge of media will be determined by the search of balance between offering a duly, direct, simple and updated information and avoid the possible saturation of the user through annoying notifications. For the moment, by the hand of experimentation, cybermedia preparing products for the iWatch we have analyzed, evaluate the best system to achieve a balance and get the maximum communicative efficiency contributing with added value in its business model and to its informative project.

The Apple watch opens new possibilities to the news industry, try to connect with the public in the digital era. It is a device with personality, that is trying to define its space and purpose in a field, the “Internet of things”, marked by the changes dynamics, innovation, redefinition of spaces. For the moment, we can only say that we notice the beginning of something new, but not well defined, at least in the informative field.

Based on the recommendations mentioned on the report of the World Association of Newspapers, about the territories journalism can explore with these new technologies, we can conclude that, even though the transformation in the narrative is evident – with adapted microformats- on the new screen, there is still a long road to walk through. We notice that we are at the beginning of something new, but still not well defined (in the sense of stablishing standardized formats for a new informative model). Exploiting personalization, audios or customizations are some of the challenges editors and journalists face in the current journalistic context.

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6. Note

1 Kavin Asthon is the person considered responsible for using the term Internet of things in 1999, when he worked in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and made a presentation for Procter&Gamble.

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