ONLINE JOURNALISM IN SPAIN: MODELS, BUSINESS AND FORMATS. A VISION

Xosé López, Manuel Gago, Xosé Pereira
New Media Researching Group*
University of Santiago de Compostela

1. Introduction: drawing the audience map

Internet media scene has suffered, and still does, important transformations from its beginning. In this paper we aim to draw a picture of what is happening nowadays in Spain, paying special attention to the business models, types of products and formats that characterize Spanish online communication and that are inserted in the demographic, business and communication dynamics in a day after day more convergent European Union.

Nowadays, fifteen countries of the Old Continent shape the European Union (EU). European Union is the second economic area in the world and one of the fundamental axes of the planet development from industrial, cultural and economic viewpoints. From the close to 380 million inhabitants of the EU territories, more than 168 million are Internet users. It means a penetration in the population of the 44.2%, and an increment of close to the 100% from 2000 till today[1]. There are regional differences in the UE countries. Therefore, 76.9% of Swedish have access to the Internet. The lowest percentage of EU corresponds to Greece, with only a 15.2% of users. In Europe, around 21 million of users regularly connected newspapers websites during 2002[2].

In the Internet demography, Spain occupies the third worst place of the EU ranking, with a 26.9% of users from the whole country population[3]. Spain is a State of 40 million inhabitants belonging to the European Union. Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 850.000 million dollars, which positions Spain in the 15th place of the world ranking of

---

[1] Source: Internet World Stats (http//www.internetworldstats.com/)
[2] Source: Forrester Research.
[3] Source: Estudio General de Medios (EGM) (February-November 2003)

productive capacity. It is also the fifth economy of the Union[4]. Nonetheless, its linguistic market places Spain in a global scene with better possibilities than other EU countries, the same case as the United Kingdom with the English language market. At the same time, in the Spanish State exist four co-official languages in their respective territories: Galicia, Euskera (Basque), Catalan and Valencian, which maintain their peculiarities and generate websites in these languages.

Some information allows us to take a quick picture of what the Internet is nowadays in Spain. 58.5% of the users are male, and, most of them are young people. Most part of the web demography is shaped by users between 14 and 35 years: a 66.1%. In the last years, the access to the web was less a habit for upper class users, to become democratic in its social extension. In 2003, a 42.7% of the users were placed in the 'media media' class; another 40% of the users stated that had higher incomes. In general, there is a correspondence between life quality and the individual economic standard and the access to the Internet in Spain. Regions with a higher economic development stand higher demographics in the web. This way, richness and Internet access have a direct relation in the country. Madrid, with a higher standard of living than other Spanish areas, has a 35.2% of penetration and shows a spectacular growth between 2002 and **200**. Another interior region, Castilla La Mancha, presents the opposite situation: a 19.1%[5].

Audience in the Internet is approaching audiences of another mass media. In this way, the penetration percentage of the Internet in Spain is 26.9%, and it is getting closer to the press audience, the 39.7%. Nonetheless, television, the favorite media for entertainment and information for Spanish (a 90.7% of users), is the principal injured media for the increasing of the web access: a 67.8% of the users declare that enter the Internet as a substitute to television. Nonetheless, we must also point out that the Internet defined a new leisure time, which 63.1% of the users did not spend in other spare time activities[6].

---

[4] Source: EuroStats, FMI, Cia World FactBook.
[5] Source: AIMC/EGM. October-November, 2003.
[6] Source: AIMC/"VI Encuesta AIMC a usuarios de Internet", 2003 ('6th AIMC inquiry to Internet users').

2. Methodology

There are several references of the researching activity in mass media in Spain. Some of them are made by private entities, which play the role of consultancy firms for institutions or for media companies.

Together with consultancy firms, there are associations and auditing bodies created by the media companies, which constitute a reference to shape the audience habits, consume level or advertisement rates.

In this paper, we used data offered by the most important auditing bodies in Spain.

They are the following:

OJD (Oficina de justificación) (Justification Office) [http://ojd.es]. It is a trading company which aims to obtain and offer useful and punctual information about the distribution and circulation of newspapers. It is used by advertising companies, agencies, editors and some other interested institutions. However, in the last years, OJD audits also the Internet media. This company analyzes several aspects, such as the number of visited pages and the number of users of these media.

Without any doubt, OJD is the main reference of the press in order to establish its advertisement rates. For the Internet, there are some aspects that should be considered. First of all, and the most important one, is that any media company can decide to be audited by OJD. There is no regulation that could compel any media to be controlled by OJD. This situation provokes a slight distortion of data in outstanding cases that should be studied. For instance, before than Prisa group decided to close the free version of *Elpais.es*, media managing voluntarily decided to cancel the subscription for this digital paper in the OJD. The cause of this decision, though never clarified, points to the wish that the high fall of audience after the decision to charge its contents, except the cover and some opinion articles, was not reflected in official data.

Nonetheless, though these adversities, OJD audits 50 online media daily or constantly updated, especially digital editions of printed newspapers, 9 digital media with no-diary update (most of them are digital versions of printed magazines) and 12 specialized digital media.

Even though could be noted that it is a brief amount of audited media, we should remind that these are the most influent in Spain, those which offer us the real scene of media situation in the country. We flatly settle this because OJD method does not depend on inquiries neither in representative samples. OJD analyzes log archives generated by the servers. This method guarantees precise information to generate its statistics.

EGM (Estudio General de Medios) (General Media Study). EGM is an association of advertisers and media, the same as OJD. The main difference from OJD is that EGM uses inquiries based upon a representative sample as its main auditing method.

Its principal objective is the promotion of "the research of audiences of the different media, the distribution of its reports among their associates, with non-profit interest and answering to democratic principles in its organization and behavior". From this definition, they configure the map of media audiences.

EGM data is a reference for radio audiences in Spain. Television audiences are measured by SOFRES, meanwhile OJD audits the Spanish press. EGM results are highly valuable for media and researchers, especially those referred to consume habits.

Traditionally, EGM paid attention to audiovisual media, but it also studies the web and the users consume habits in the last years.

In 1988 it is created the Asociación para la Investigacion de los Medios de Comunicación (AIMC) (Association for Communication Media Research), which works from its foundation in the elaboration of the EGM and other interesting reports of the sector. One of these reports is dedicated to the behavior of Internet users (penetration, user profile...). They are edited each quarter and can be consulted for free in its web page http://www.aimc.es.

Other sources

Those mentioned until here are the main statistic sources that analyze audiences and the use habits of digital media in Spain. There are many other reports and bibliography dedicated to the topic. There are several universities giving attention to the online journalism phenomenon and the impact of Internet in the other mass media in Spain. We want to recall here researching group named 'El impacto de internet en los medios de comunicación en España'(The impact of the Internet in mass media in Spain), made

by the universities of Basque Country, Navarre, Malaga and Santiago de Compostela[7]or the research called "Análisis de contenidos. Organizacional y formal de los medios de comunicación en línea en Galicia: experiencias y alternativas[8]..." (Content analysis. Organizational and formal analysis of the Internet media in Galicia: experiences and alternatives).

Together with these researches, there is an interesting bibliography about digital media from several perspectives, such as format, business models, working situation of the journalists, and information architecture. The last bibliographic income in this topic is the 'Manual de redacción ciberperiodística' (Manual of online journalism), edited by professors Javier Diaz Noci and Ramón Salaverría, in which are collected interesting contributions, especially those dedicated to the phenomenon of media in the Internet in Spain.

3. Literature review

Researches in digital journalism in Spanish Universities started to be systematic by 1996. In this period different universities in the State created courses related to Internet communication and, at the same time, developed the first conceptual studies about this new journalist dimension (Noci: 2003; p. 27). In this sense, researches of professors Díaz Noci and Koldo Meso are outstanding. In 1996, they edited their first reference book "El periodismo electrónico. Información y servicios en la era del ciberespacio" (Electronic journalism. Information and services in cyberspace era) and, in 1999, Professor Ignacio Armentia published "Diseño y periodismo electrónico" (Design and electronic journalism), both books edited by the University of Basque Country. The researching activity diversifies in different models, but in a general way, most of academic production deepened in concepts such as hypertextual narrative, multimedia language or the working conditions of the new professionals. Nonetheless, they did not go further in researching matters like managerial or writing organization, or the economic structure and the business models of the new digital products. The most ambitious theoretical review until today is the "Manual de Redacción Ciberperiodística" (Manual of cyber journalism writing) (2003), edited by professors Díaz Noci and

---

[7] Financed by the Spanish Minister for Science and Technology and recognized in the reference BSO2002-04206-C04-02.

[8] This research is also financed by the Minister of Science and Technology and obtained a reference BSO2002-04206-C04-02.

Salaverría, which get together the contributions of the most relevant Spanish experts in online journalism. In the area of study of the professional profile, most of researches are partial and dedicated to localized areas. Method applied by Professor Miguel Túñez is interesting: he uses questionnaires and the techniques of previous inquiries made to journalists of traditional media, and adapted them to the study of the conditions of the workers of digital media in Galicia. At the same time, a professional association, the Col.legi de Periodistas de Catalunya (Journalist Professional Association of Catalunya), organized an analysis geographically more extended, applied to the whole State. From the applied researching point of view, researchers' communities, such as the New Media Researching Group of the University of Santiago de Compostela, experimented with the development of prototypes exposed to conditions of real uses, as in the case of culturagalega.org, a website of cultural information financed and sustained by the Consello da Cultura Galega.

Besides, the Group has made several bibliographic contributions to the study and analysis of digital journalism. Its first book, edited in 2000, titled "El nuevo periodismo electrónico" (New electronic journalism) was the starting point for a series of researches on the topic, which were recognized by the university community. A year latter, professors Xosé López and Marita Otero edited "Las factorías de la sociedad de la información" (The factories of Information Society), which contributed with a new vision of electronic journalism as a tool of the content factories of the Information Society. This book analyses, from multiple perspectives, the multimediality phenomenon and media convergence.

The last edited book, in 2002, is "Nuevas tendencias del periodismo electrónico" (New tendencies of electronic journalism), where López, Gago and Pereira deepen in content production models and digital media environment analysis.

Nowadays, New Media Researching Group is working in the edition of a book exclusively dedicated to the architecture of information. It will be edited by the middle of this year by Pearson publishing.

Besides these bibliographic contributions, the Group has also exposed its researches in more than 30 national and international congresses, and edited several papers in the main Spanish scientific journals.

4. Discussion

Nowadays, there are around 900 electronic media in Spain[9]. Such a high number includes also a great diversity of formats, productive capacity, languages, interests and audiences. The 'horizontal society' referred by sociologist Manuel Castells in several occasions (CASTELLS, M., 2000) is reflected in the social communities, specialized contents and linguistic plurality of these media. We need, anyway, to place them in their right dimension in the Internet audience in Spain:

Websites audience in Spain

Website	Visitors (thousands)
Yahoo	3558
Terra	3159
Ya.com	1202
Marca	**1083**
Pág Amarillas	967
El País	**904**
Ozú	601
As	**381**
Mundo Deportivo	**355**
Sport	**288**

Source: AIMC/EGM, October-November 2003

Website	Mentions
Google	9.4
Hotmail	4.3
Terra	3.6
Yahoo	3.0
Marca	**2.0**
Elmundo.es	**1.9**
Softonic	1.4
Wanadoo	1.4
msn.es	1.3
ya.com	0.8

Source: AIMC/Navegantes en la red (Web users), 2003

If we have a look at both rankings of the most visited websites, we check the clear predominance of entertainment and services websites over news sites. Several years after its configuration, we also notice the prevalence of horizontal sites, which concentrate mail services, information of events, entertainment, etc. Inside news

---

[9] Source: Mapa de cibermedios de España. Development of the research "

websites it is also possible noticing the predominance of specialized sports information over general information.

a. Business models and companies

A good rate of the researches and reports that analyze media, point out that the only profitable model to produce contents for traditional and electronic media is the convergence of the editorial staffs. Maybe Mudia report, financed by the European Commission and dedicated to the study of the situation of 24 multimedia companies in the United Kingdom, Spain, France and Sweden, is the one which more stresses in this point. In this same report, the analyzed companies recognize their worries for the possible crisis of audience and advertisers. Besides, it is also unanimous the idea of reorganization in this new environment with a new way to attract and to distribute information.

These same thoughts reflected in Mudia are collected in the annual report of the Asociación de Editores de Diarios Españoles (Association of Spanish Newspapers Editors) (AEDA) titled *Libro blanco de la prensa diaria 2004* (White book of daily press 2004).

Spanish standard of living is certainly an interesting piece of information for audience's measure. Considering results of OJD of February 2004, only one digital media surpassed 10 million visits a month. It was *elmundo.es*, which is now a reference website with 28.776.332 visits and 193.019.003 visited pages. Quite far after *elmundo.es* comes sports newspaper *marca.es*, with 9.760.410 visits and 130.135.163 visited pages.

Regarding Spanish media scene we need to mark out a clear frontier: those websites which charge their contents and those which not. Nonetheless, there are many nuances to be mentioned in this frontier. There is a large variety of digital media which charge for their contents in Spain: there are media charging their whole contents, such as elpais.es (with punctual free access to some articles and news), and some others which charge some services (such as lavanguardia.es, which charges for consulting its archive and some of its news). This last variety is quite common between websites charging their contents. For instance, the leader of visits, elmundo.es, as OJD reports, only charges contents edited in the printed version, including archive contents.

There are also two types of free media: those which ask for a password to their readers, the case of Farodevigo.es, and those which can be read for free without password, as happens with lavozdegalicia.es, Galician audience leader website.

The generation of resources of the business patterns of the bigger digital media in Spain does not depend in charging their contents. A piece of information can be helpful to understand the situation: elpais.es charges 80 euros for the annual subscription and has 26.000 subscribers[10], following data provided by Mario Tascón in a digital interview in elpais.es, (Mario Tascón is the person in charge of the electronic editions of Prisa Group). So, economic results proof to be unprofitable if they only depend on the readers' subscriptions. In fact, only elmundo.es shows a certain economic efficiency with profits of 300.000 euros and an increasing of its sales in a 31%[11].

The success of elmundo.es, which only charges for the download of the printed edition contents, is based upon the sales to information products to exclusive clients. For instance, elmundo.es sells exclusive infographics to companies which daily demand these contents.

As we have mentioned before, almost all the reports consider that the editorial staff concentration is the future for digital media. In Spain, without any doubt, the great innovation came with Prisa. This media group edits, among many others, El Pais (general information), Cinco Dias (economic information), As (sports) and SER radio, the station with a higher audience rating and volume of business, and also national television channel Canal + Spain, local televisions net Localia, and the digital television group Digitalplus. Of course, all these companies need to spread their contents in the Internet.

The concentration of resources made by Prisa is based upon the creation of a company that manages all the Internet resources of the group. In 2000, after several frustrated experiences (they even created an ISP, sold to Tiscali before the dotcom's crisis), Prisa creates Prisacom, directed by Mario Tascón, one of the pioneers of online media managing in Spain.

Prisacom, located separately from the media offices, manages advertising, information production and human resources of the media of the group (with exception the audiovisual, which have their own company). From these elements, Prisacom

---

[10] We need to remind that Prisa group offers free subscriptions for the Internet edition to the printed newspaper's subscribers and subscribers to Digitalplus digital television group.
[11] Edited in elmundo.es in 12/03/2003.

established two or three people teams in the offices of each media: two or three people in the heart of El Pais, of Cadena Ser, Cinco Dias… These journalists have the responsibility of the contents of the edition. They are always supervised by the managing of the traditional media and Prisacom.

This model combines the concentration of human resources and the stay of the journalists in the heart of traditional media. Except in a few occasions, work is done in the media office, using the information obtained by the journalists who work in the traditional media.

Other media, as elmundo.es, tend to include the whole journalists team in the newspaper office. They work there in the electronic edition. This website is organized as another section of the printed newspaper. Digital edition person in charge assists to the meetings to establish the day agenda and, of course, the front page contents. This organization is the most usual in media companies that do not compound a companies' conglomerate.

But, as happens in all the media, advertising is the main economic mainstay, with a global investment of 72,6 million euros in 2003 in the Internet, as IAB Spain and PriceWaterhouseCopers (PWC) report maintains[12].

b. Working conditions of online journalists

The New Media Researching Group of the University of Santiago de Compostela has made an exhaustive report about the working conditions of the journalists in the Internet, trying to elucidate their professional attitudes and their working situation. This research, coordinated by professors Miguel Túñez and Xosé López in 2002, explained the working tendencies of these journalists in Galicia.

Resuming data from this vast report (Túñez, M., López, X. 2002: 130), we can settle that most electronic journalists in Galicia were men (63%), young (younger than 30) and mostly graduated in journalism (77%).

In this same report they were also clear the working conditions of these journalists:

Concept	Data
Full-time job	77%
Contract with a media	87%

---

[12] Information edited in elpais.es in 03/24/2004.

Pieces of news a day	3
Does extra work	60%
Assists to training courses	57%
Has a personal computer with Internet access	100%
Considers that his/her job has good conditions	80%

Results of the research of Professors Túñez and López was ratified in the recent book of Professor María Bella Palomo (Palomo, M., 2004) of the University of Malaga.

In her work, the author assures that in Spain women have the 36.1% of the jobs in digital media. This imbalance is even higher in regional and provincial media, where proportion is the following: 8 men of each 10 workers.

Considering training, results in Spain are worrying. The 58.9% of online media workers are journalists, meanwhile 41% are technicians, computer technicians mostly. Nonetheless, future expectations show that there will be changes in the professionals' training, thanks to the efforts of the universities in educating future journalists. As a matter of fact, University of Santiago de Compostela teaches a special course of electronic journalism since two years ago.

If we refer to the mean of age of online journalists, Galician results are completely assured: mean of age of journalists in Bella Palomo's research is 29 years old. Author affirms that the youngness of workers provokes that the Internet media staffs are composed by grant holders, without fixed time schedules, low wages, without paid holidays, etc.

The excess of grant holders in the teams, who often do the same work as a professional worker with a lower cost for the company, is one of the main protests of the Spanish Internet professionals. The Sindicato de Periodistas de Catalunya (Journalists Trade Union of Catalunya) and the Grupo de Periodistas Digitales (Digital Journalists Group), also in Catalunya, presented a report in the congress 'Periodistas digitales, precariedad en la Red. La situación laboral y profesional del periodismo digital. Alternativas y propuestas de acción' (Digital journalists, precariousness in the Web. Working and professional situation of the digital journalism. Alternatives and action proposals), celebrated by the end of 2003.

This report indicates that the ideal proposal in order to solve this problem is that students/grant holders should only edit their work as a reward for a well done job, not as

a routine of a staff member. Besides, they point out that the company should guarantee the training of the grant holder, whose work should not only cover the temporal vacant in the staff. In the same way, they demand the intervention of professionals associations and the representative institutions of the profession.

Wages are, as we can check in most companies, the higher business expenses. If we pay attention to the inquiry made by the already mentioned Sindicato de Periodistas de Catalunya and the Grupo de Periodistas Digitales, 75% of the journalists working in the Internet get paid less than 1.200 euros per month and the 35% of them do not have a contract. Situation is worst than in other media, where workers without contract are not more than the 9% of the staff (Túñez, 2000: 43).

c. Formats and the creation of new narrative genres

Multimedia and hypertext configure two of the narrative possibilities which differ from traditional media. Even considering the technologic possibilities, Spanish digital media evolve taking as a reference the answer of their audience to new technologies and formats. Therefore, exploration is reduced.

Audio and video

Digital media reduced their uses of audio and video as a channel for storytelling. In most cases web directors adduce that these contents have lower audiences than the most static ones. Nonetheless, videos uploaded in Spanish digital media were scarcely elaborated for the web, and most of them, came from traditional news agencies. The unique exception is the convergence of Prisa offices and Prisacom. The result of this convergence is that multimedia contents edited in elpais.es, cincodias.es and cadenaser.es are directly inserted from radio emissions (Cadena Ser) and television broadcasting (CNN+). There are some interesting experiences in Prisacom such as the 'Informativo en la red' (News in the web), an exclusive one-minute format generated for the Internet, which contained the most important news. iblnews.com, an electronic media which concentrates its multimedia efforts in interviews with edition limits, uses multimedia as a narrative source, too. Video is still an expensive format in the web.

Infographics

Multimedia infographics have been in direct relation with the evolution of digital media in Spain. They are easy to download and, from 2000 they can be seen without any plug-in. In Spanish digital media infography is used as a narrative source which generates additional profits and prestige for the company. Four media outstand for their infographics: elpais.es, elmundo.es, marca.es and as.com. Multimedia infographics' creators work independently from the printed edition in most of the offices. They also develop their own libraries with multi-purpose objects with complete independence from the newspaper. They generate a mean of three or four pieces each week (Pescador, 2002: 23), and their productive cycles depend on the media scheduling. Few digital media count with a multimedia infographics department. A common practice is to ask for static infographics to the printed editions or to buy infographics products elaborated in specific companies for special events.

Infographics creators have also their professional profile, different from those who work in paper: they come from the edition offices. As a matter of fact, multimedia infographics chiefs in elpais.es, Rafael Horh, and in elmundo.es, Alberto Cairo, are graduated in Communication Sciences who decided, in a second stage of their activity to evolve from written journalism to infography. Both usually coincide in their considerations of the media. As Rafael Horh remarks "we are still in our infancy. In conceptualizing, financing and designing the interface. [Infographics] are very linear, as a video" (Pescador, 2003: 81). Their work is recycled in digital media, where there is a planning to re-use infographics and to design them freely. That is to say, they developed infographics which can be amplified for future uses and act as containers of facts.

Other genres

Internet generated also other new formats which were successful in audience ratings. In this way, interviews to celebrities and sports broadcasting –written- of important football matches succeeded in an audience that still prefer conventional media for multimedia.

5. **Conclusions**

Time we live in digital media sector is directly related to the Internet evolution. After the effervescence of the first years, there are noticeable differences between the frantic technology evolution and the slow evolution of market and business and the application of technologies to narrativity. Spanish digital media are exploring and, nowadays, there is no danger of cataclysms or shutdowns in the short term. The chosen business models had different results, but none of them was entirely satisfactory. If we add the working situation in digital media, we have not the ideal for a leading sector. It can be understood as an indicator of the doubts of the companies to definitely face the huge potential of digital media.

At the same time, possibilities for journalism in digital media have already been demonstrated. Users are considerably trained in the Internet and technology uses, and interactivity infographics are one of the leading areas. Predictions say that technology evolution will be slow and conservative, al least for the user. The Latin American rising market opens new possibilities for the internationalization of Spanish electronic media, experienced and visibly in an increasingly globalized world.

6. Bibliografía

Castells, M. (2000) *Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*

Díaz Noci, J., Salaverría Aliaga, R. (2003): *Manual de redacción ciberperiodística.* Barcelona, Ariel.

Gallo, B. (2002), *Periodistas digitales.* Huesca, Asociación de la Prensa de Aragón.

López, X., Gago, M., Pereira, X. *Novas tendencias do xornalismo electrónico.* Santiago, Lea.

Palomo Torres, M. B. (2004): *El periodista on line: de la revolución a la evolución.* Sevilla, Comunicación Social.

Pescador, D. (2002). *Periodistas multimedia. Los nuevos narradores.* Huesca, Asociación de Prensa de Aragón.

Túñez, M., López, X. (eds.) (2000): Condicións laborais e actitudes profesionais nos medios de comunicación. Santiago de Compostela, Consello da Cultura Galega.

Túñez, M., López, X. (ed.) (2002): *Xornalismo en internet. Actitudes profesionais e condicións laborais dos periodistas en liña.* Santiago de Compostela, Consello da Cultura Galega.