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J Vázquez-Herrero, M C Negreira-Rey, X Pereira-Fariña (2017): “Interactive documentary contributions to the renewal of journalistic narratives: realities and challenges”. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 72, pp. 397 to 414.

<http://www.revistalatinacs.org/072paper/1171/21en.html>

DOI: [10.4185/RLCS-2017-1171](https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2017-1171)

Interactive documentary contributions to the renewal of journalistic narratives: realities and challenges

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Abstract

Introduction: Online journalism finds in interactive nonfiction an appropriate place for the development of stories. The media adopt new interactive and hybrid forms to face the challenge of the Internet and to respond to the needs of more active and permanently connected audiences.

Methodology: In this article, the results of the qualitative analysis of ten interactive documentaries published by international media between the years 2010 and 2016 are presented. At the same time, renewal trends in journalism are identified along with the proposal of parameters based on the characterization of this narrative form. **Results and conclusions:** Interactive documentary is in a diversification phase, already consolidated in countries like France, the United States and Canada. With reference to the features of the genre, a notable development and an outstanding potential have been perceived, in contrast to the challenge that represents a changing context.

Keywords

Interactive documentary; interactive nonfiction; webdoc; digital storytelling; online journalism; multimedia.

Content

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1. Introduction

In this article, the renovation of journalistic narratives is approached through interactive documentary. This genre of interactive nonfiction has a brief story and an especially prosperous trajectory in the net. Its exploration, in a moment of convergence and, at the same time, transition for journalism, provides interesting questions about the possibilities for cybermedia. From a global perspective towards the role of interactive documentary in the media, an examination of its characterization and the main applications will be carried out. Lastly, a summary of the current state of development and the challenges that the genre needs to face in a journalistic context will be elaborated.

2. Theoretical framework

The context in which the object of this study is set is framed by the evolution of the Internet and its impact on the media. Convergence (Jenkins, 2006; Gershon, 2016) has caused numerous changes and hybridizations, giving way to a new media ecosystem (Canavilhas, 2011, 2015). It also involved a new dimension for software as a tool of cultural creation (Manovich, 2013). In this frame, the so-called “network society” (Castells, 2001) is placed, built from the communication nets of the Internet and, with it, new concepts of active audience, online media and narrative proposals emerge. Among them, interactive nonfiction is presented as a macro genre (Gifreu, 2015) which covers the forms of the real adapted to the interactive media, mainly the Internet. Although, at first, they were considered derivations of the original format, currently they are understood as different forms, adapted but singular.

With the arrival of Web 2.0, the users have at their disposal new resources for creation and diffusion. The user becomes a prosumer (Toffler, 1980), prepared to participate and contribute. When the traditional unidirectionality spread in the media is overcome, new doors are opened to collaborative creation, conversation and socialization in relation to cultural products. These active audiences (Aston & Gaudenzi, 2012; Rodríguez & Molpeceres, 2013) are indispensable for the success of interactive productions and they have to establish a relationship between text, represented reality and spectator (Bruzzi, 2006).

2.1. An approximation to interactive documentary

In this scenario, interactive documentary emerges, within the encounter of documental cinematography and interactive media. From the first offline works, its evolution has been divided into four phases (Gifreu, 2013): appearance (1980-1990), experimentation (1990-2000), constitution (2000-2010) and consolidation (2010-present times). Currently, it can be situated in the phase of consolidation and diversification, due to the wide hybridization present in the genre.

There are diverse denominations related to the platform, the collaborative creation or the concept of living organism –webdoc or web documentary (Nash, 2012), multimedia interactive documentary (Rodríguez & Molpeceres, 2013), transmedia documentary (Porto Renó, 2013), i-doc (Aston & Gaudenzi, 2012; Gantier & Labour, 2015), living documentary (Gaudenzi, 2013) or collab docs (Dovey & Rose, 2012). However, the designation was established by the most open and spread terminology both in investigation and production: interactive documentary (Almeida & Alvelos, 2010; Gifreu, 2013; Miles, 2014; Nash, 2014; Liuzzi, 2015).

It is defined as a form of interactive nonfiction genre characterized by the representation of reality through an interactive medium. Gifreu (2013) distinguishes three aspects: an open and complex concept, ambivalence between cinematographic and interactive field and identification as a discourse related to reality. It stands out for the development of interactivity, which sets out a new relation author-text-user, which represents a loss of control of the creator or a shared authorship (Gifreu, 2013; Nash, 2012; Favero, 2013), decision-making (O'Flynn, 2012) and the user's active role (Aston & Gaudenzi, 2012). From this relation, new commitments of the audience arise (Nash, 2012), a fundamental piece for the development of interactive story and its expansion.

The two main taxonomies of interactive documentary were stated by the researchers Sandra Gaudenzi (2013) and Arnau Gifreu (2013), in their respective thesis. The former is based on the user's experience to build four modes: conversational, hypertext, participatory and experiential. Gifreu establishes different modes of navigation which, combined, result in complex products: fragmented, timeline, spatial, testimonial, ramificated, hypertextual, preferential, audiovisual, sound and simulated-immersive; and three of interaction: social or 2.0, generative-contributive and physical-experienced. The same author develops a classification according to the modes of documentary proposed by Nichols (2001) to describe how reality is represented in interactive documentary: poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive and performative.

The complexity that can occur in interactive documentary allows it to be used in very diverse contexts. The webdoc format is the most widespread, although it coexists with mobile applications and live performances. The advancements on the Web facilitate the creation of audiovisual interactive contents and their standardization for a more global consumption.

2.2. Interactive nonfiction in media context

Interactive nonfiction is a macro genre (Gifreu, 2015) which encompasses forms based on reality using resources from the digital media –hypertextuality, multimediality and interactivity– with the purpose of transmitting some knowledge and a truthful image of this framing, which the user builds in a narrative open to immersion and personal experience. Within this field, forms such as interactive documentary, interactive essay and multimedia feature can be included. The latter is the most developed genre of interactive nonfiction in online journalism, notwithstanding, hybridization complicates the classification. The adaptation of journalism to the digital media has involved a wide investigation on online genres and their characterization (Díaz Noci & Salaverría, 2003; Deuze, 2003; Salaverría, 2005; Larrondo, 2015) which is now open to spheres like immersive journalism (De la Peña et al., 2010; Domínguez, 2013) and transmedia journalism (Moloney, 2011; Porto Renó & Flores, 2012). These fields consider new conceptions of the computer activity which try to implicate the users to a greater extent and take into account their contributions.

Since the appearance of modern journalism in the middle of the nineteenth century, the feature has been one of the most complex genres in its elaboration but at the same time richer to tell non-fiction stories with their nuances, perspectives and dimensions that enrich the story. Although research on reporting and narrative journalism has a long tradition (Luther Mott, 1968; Bernal & Chillón, 1985; Chillón, 1993, 1994; Casals, 2001; Garza Acuña, 2003; Fernández Parratt, 2003), in recent years this interest has been maintained with the development in cybermedia (Palau, 2007; Marrero, 2008; Larrondo, 2007, 2009, 2015; Domínguez, 2013; Vázquez-Herrero & López-García, 2017).

Interactive documentary has already been subject of study in the confluence of journalism as it is established in the report directed by William Uricchio (2015) from MIT Open Documentary Lab. In that investigation, an exploration is made on the new factors that determine journalism in its current process of redefinition. Among them, the necessity to focus on the user, to let the story determine the way in which it should be developed, experimentation and collaboration can be highlighted.

The media are committed to innovation and a tendency to the creation of laboratories of innovation in multimedia languages and formats (Salaverría, 2015) can be identified. A paradigmatic example in the renovation of narratives was the feature *Snow Fall. The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek* (2012) by The New York Times, awarded a Pulitzer. Subsequently, the same media collaborated in the transmedia project *Highrise* (2013) by the National Film Board of Canada. Nonetheless, as Domínguez (2013) points out, the greater innovation in this field is taking place outside the industry of traditional media.

Transmedia narratives (Jenkins, 2003; Scolari, 2013) also play an interesting role in the field of information, beyond fiction. They are proposals which get involved in documentary projects (Porto Renó, 2013; Irigaray & Lovato, 2015), connected with the construction of open and complex products in multiple platforms, also in convergence with journalism (Larrondo, 2016). Their main objective is the expansion of the story through the user's action. The same principle is applied to the process of gamification identified in interactive documentary, as well as to virtual reality. These strategies connected to the world of fiction are adopted by the media for the renovation of the journalistic narratives.

3. Methodology

The aim of this article is to find guidelines about interactive documentary and journalism, so we develop an overview of this genre before the analysis and synthesis of ideas which concern online journalism, or which could contribute to it in a few years. Trying to establish the context where this investigation is set, three objectives are proposed:

1. To know the current status of interactive documentary, as an interactive nonfiction form. It is relevant to discover how the production was distributed around the world in the last years, which production models are identified and where a debate about this genre is taking place.
2. To identify the main characteristics of interactive documentary: such as significant development of hypertext, multimedia and interactivity; format issues, navigation strategies, author-user relationship and participation.
3. To extrapolate those characteristics and suggest trends and observations about interactive documentary in online journalism: realities and challenges. The focus is on the current relationship between digital storytelling and journalism, nowadays and its potential growth, contributing to the development of new strategies for online media considering convergence and new audiences.

In order to achieve these objectives, a wide exploration is needed owing to the significant hybridization of forms in the interactive medium. Another expected difficulty is the categorization of interactive documentary because of the lack of definition of the genre. Due to this, a definition is proposed in the theoretical framework, as well as we take into consideration the suggestions made in different events and forums concerning this field.

At the beginning of this research, we also want to establish some hypothesis that we will try to test later, in relation with interactive documentary and online journalism:

1. Interactive documentary is appropriate as a journalistic format, based on the use of multimedia and the hypertext that bring the user an enriched experience and new ways to be informed.
2. The use of interactive features can offer new possibilities for user participation and immersion, which have an impact on journalism and its social role.

For this investigation, an interpretative focus is chosen to understand the phenomena under study. To tackle our research problem, a qualitative approach is used, that allows the observation, evaluation and reaching of conclusions in a diverse and emergent area, as we explained before. With reference to the limited universe we had to develop, an analysis sample was delimited. It was composed by ten referential interactive documentaries from the period 2010-2016 and eight different countries, as it is shown in Table 1. The method of data collection was qualitative content analysis, based on product observation and experimentation transferred to an analysis sheet and the model proposal of Arnau Gifreu (2013). This author has contributed to interactive documentary research with a taxonomic study that considers the whole process and sets out a categorization from navigation and interaction modalities, as well as modes of representing reality based on Bill Nichols categories.

Table 1. Analysis sample

Title	Year	Country	Production
<i>Prison Valley</i>	2010	France	Arte, Upian
<i>Goa Hippy Tribe</i>	2011	Australia	Freehand TV, Sbs
<i>Alma, A Tale of Violence</i>	2012	France	Arte, Upian, Vu
<i>Highrise. A Short History of the Highrise</i>	2013	Canada	National Film Board of Canada, The New York Times
<i>Pirate Fishing</i>	2014	Catar, Italy	Al Jazeera, Altera Studio
<i>Montelab</i>	2014	Spain	Rtve
<i>Réfugiés</i>	2014	France	Arte
<i>After the Storm</i>	2015	United States	Independent Lens (Pbs), The Washington Post
<i>Life on Hold</i>	2015	Catar, Canada	Al Jazeera, Kngfu
<i>6x9</i>	2016	United Kingdom	The Guardian

Source: prepared by the authors.

Within our objectives, we have considered the design of a list of parameters that must be evaluated as independent variables for the configuration of indicators in the future. According to the interactive documentaries we analyzed, a series of categories are proposed in order to systematize the analysis hereafter. These aspects might be measured and controlled to understand, in a quantitative way, how the characteristics of interactive documentary affect the user experience according to generalized linear models (Hayes, 2013), which will open new ways of research in this area.

4. Results

A multimedia and interactive genre for a global environment

The interactive documentary has been consolidated as a type of interactive nonfiction characterized by its international production. A great diversity of countries come into play, as has been observed in the broad exploration accomplished. France and the United States are the nations which carried out the greatest contribution to the production of interactive documentaries. Canada is also a reference, together with a long list in which countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain and Holland can be found. Regarding production terms, coproduction is common among different countries and specially significant between France and Canada. In media, coproduction can appear in several simultaneous ways. Thus, there are media projects coproduced in a multimedia studio or production company, with organizations and institutions, with other media or university institutions.

In connection with those entities that produce interactive documentary in a global framework, it is necessary to highlight the work of the French-German channel Arte and the National Film Board. Notwithstanding, the list of producers is getting broader; among them, we can emphasize the work of: RTVE, National Public Radio, SBS, France TV and The Guardian; the multimedia studios Upian, Prospektor and Submarine Channel; together with independent producers, organizations and academic institutions.

The great diversity of countries which contribute to this universe with their projects reflects the impact of the interactive documentary around the world. The global character in the geographical context goes hand in hand with the level of the actors involved in the genre production and the different detected models, where coproduction among entities of differing natures is common. The interactive documentary, in its consolidation and diversification phases, is introduced in a transversal manner in numerous areas and, among them, in the media.

A favorable climate for interactive documentary

The development of the genre arises in an environment associated with a progressive institutionalization and has the special support of the main producer countries –France, United States and Canada–. The new narrative interactive formats are promoted from public institutions, such as National Film Board of Canada. Its strong commitment to the webdoc results in an important collection of work available in its website; among them, the project *Highrise* (2010-2015), *Bear 71* (2012) or *Do Not Track* (2015). Regarding production, companies with different origins that work in the creation of narrative interactive products can be identified: Honkytonk Films and Upian in France, Submarine Channel and Prospektor in Holland, and Helios Design Labs in Canada.

Another relevant element in the environment of the interactive documentary are the laboratories, halfway between production and investigation: IFlab is a project supported by European funds and directed by Sandra Gaudenzi for the development of *interactive factual narratives*; from the MIT, the Open Documentary Lab is more oriented to investigation; the Laboratorio Audiovisual Interactivo is developed in Cali (Colombia) as an extension of the activities from InterDOC; among others, the group Documedia works in the field of social multimedia journalism, with a research tendency through the Cátedra Latinoamericana de Narrativas Transmedia (National University of Rosario, Argentina). This phenomenon of the laboratories of innovation can also be observed in the media:

RTVE Lab (Spain), The Guardian Labs (United Kingdom), The New York Times Labs (United States) or BBC Taster (United Kingdom).

In this sense, the festivals and awards that acknowledge the best interactive documentaries are both a means of exposure and a way of promoting the genre. From these actual events, new specific sections are being opened as it occurs in IDFA, Sheffield Doc/Fest, FIGRA, Sundance, Tribeca, World Press Photo, Visa pour l'image, Prix Europa and Emmy Awards.

Finally, in this review of the context of the interactive documentary, the events, congresses and forums of this field need special attention. The main European reference is located in Bristol, where the I-Docs Symposium is celebrated every two years in the University of the West of England, directed by Judith Aston, Sandra Gaudenzi and Mandy Rose. In Barcelona, the InterDocsBarcelona is coordinated by Arnau Gifreu; the WebDox is held in Lovaina; and, in Amsterdam, the IDFA offers a forum called DocLab Interactive Conference. Other meetings such as the ICIDS, with a more international character, also deal with interactive documentary.

Within this context, new institutions, organizations, events and spaces for debate are being progressively incorporated, creating a favorable atmosphere for the development of interactive documentary concerning aspects such as production, distribution and investigation.

To new audiences from a transmedia world

Transmedia narratives (Jenkins, 2003; Scolari, 2013) are built over multiple media and a new user profile. According to Carlos Scolari (2013), they are a kind of story developed through different media and communication platforms, within them some users are actively expanding the narrative. This definition is represented in numerous spheres, which adopt the transmedia to broaden through new scopes clearly differentiated beforehand.

The development of these proposals is related to the interactive documentary, since they take into account the demands of a permanently connected audience. The content is received through the web, mainly as a webdoc. Nonetheless, new means to access to this content are established with the use of mobile devices, through apps and social networks, or in conjunction with the traditional media.

The interactive documentary is not only a format which includes different media and platforms; it also requires the user's attention and their proactivity during the whole experience. Although not all the products involve the user in the same manner, documentaries such as *Prison Valley* (2010) and *Réfugiés* (2014) can be defined as demanding the contribution of the *prosumers* (Toffler, 1980) to expand the story.

Another aspect of the transmediality of the interactive documentary appears in contents derived from the television broadcast. Examples such as *Alma, A Tale of Violence* (2012) or *Montelab* (2014) can be highlighted since they complement the TV documentary, expanding the content and offering added values. In the concrete case of *Alma, A Tale of Violence*, together with the web documentary, a mobile application, a book and an itinerant exposition are offered. The expansion and diversification of the distribution channels present, at the same time, new opportunities for business.

The media, which have not widely contributed to the development of transmedia contents, especially in relation to information, are now given the opportunity to enrich their offer and to attract new types

of audience. The possibility of experimenting through games or virtual reality from a news event represents a commitment to active audiences, which go beyond the conventional unidirectionality of the media.

Reality seen from multiple ways

In interactive documentary, the real is represented in diverse forms. Using the classification of documentary modes of representation formulated by Bill Nichols (2001), the results shown in Table 2 are obtained. There, the significant or non-significant presence of each mode is indicated. The stress is put on the expository and the reflexive modes, which show a point of view defined by the narrator and a more introspective and consciousness-raising approach, respectively.

The participatory mode, in which the user is more active and has an investigator profile, together with the observational are also present in projects more open to the user's action. Consequently, the docugame shows a tendency towards the participative and observational mode; whereas 6x9 virtual reality experience makes use of the performative mode in a higher degree, as a consequence of its subjectivity.

As can be observed, the combination of multiple modes of representation gives rise to more complex products. The proposal of navigation and interaction alternatives also favors the different approaches about reality.

Table 2. Modes of representation.

Title	Poetic	Expository	Observational	Participatory	Reflexive	Performative
<i>Prison Valley</i>			★	★	☆	☆
<i>Goa Hippy Tribe</i>		★	☆		☆	
<i>Alma, A Tale of Violence</i>		★	☆		★	
<i>A Short History of the Highrise</i>	☆	★		★	☆	☆
<i>Pirate Fishing</i>		☆	★	★	☆	
<i>Montelab</i>		★	☆	★	☆	
<i>Réfugiés</i>		☆	★	★	☆	
<i>After the Storm</i>		★	☆		☆	
<i>Life on Hold</i>		★		☆	☆	
<i>6x9</i>		★		☆	☆	★

★ = significant

☆ = non significant

Source: prepared by the authors.

An approximation to the characterization of interactive documentary

On the evidence of the analysis of the sample and of the model previously proposed by Gifreu (2013), a series of parameters can be distinguished. With reference to the hypertextuality, multimodality and interactivity which characterize the cultural web products, a connection of the characteristics grouped according to different parameters has been elaborated. In the future, this connection may prove extremely useful to obtain information about the impact in the user's perception.

Hypertextuality (Table 3) presents an advanced development and articulates the interactive stories allowing the rupture of linearity, delving into content and participation. Concerning structure, the author defines the type of experience of the interactive documentary. For instance, in *Prison Valley* simultaneous navigation systems are displayed, allowing greater freedom to the user.

The use of multimedia results in varied proposals, with a great visual power. The combination of elements on a functional and aesthetic interface is a key question for immersion and usability. In *Pirate Fishing*, the video is combined with other digital environments in which the user explores different contents; whereas the simple proposal in *Alma, A Tale of Violence* consists of two lines of video arranged in parallel. The characterization of multimodality and its relation with the user's experience indicators is shown below in Table 4.

Interactivity (Table 5) is the most singular feature of the genre and it opens the possibilities of documentary. The transference of control from author to user, the immersion or participation are here at stake. This can occur at different levels, from social networks to the creation of content. If regarding immersion and gamification *Réfugiés* can stand out, among others, in *Highrise: A Short History of the Highrise* the user's contributions enjoy special relevance.

Interactivity with narrative coherence covers new roles of the users as directors of their own story, as part of a community, as part of the represented reality, as producers or physically immersed –as occurs in the *6x9* experience–.

Table 3. Hypertextuality in interactive documentaries: parameters and characterization.

Parameter	Characteristics	Indicating
Navigational hypertextuality	menu fragmentation of content and independent access non linearity or optional linearity elements: buttons, controls, etc.	Freedom of movement from the hypertextual construction
Relational hypertextuality	internal, external and intrinsic links links to sources and datasets links to related content	Freedom of deepening from the hypertextual construction
Participatory hypertextuality	links to social network sites links to chat rooms, forums, surveys, etc.	Opportunity to participate through connected mechanisms

Structural hypertextuality	type of structure reason of the structure simultaneous, alternative and changeable structures cascading structures	Experience customization and narrative coherence
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Source: prepared by the authors.

Table 4. Multimedia in interactive documentaries: parameters and characterization.

Parameter	Characteristics	Indicating
Use of multimedia	elements: text, image, graphics, maps, cgi purpose	Immersion in reality through multimedia
Design and interface	multimedia integration gui as an intermediary user-text digital environments	Visual communication and user integration
Archive and databases	repositories structure	Freedom of exploration
External media	devices user-generated content management syndication and feeders	Open and updated work

Source: prepared by the authors.

Table 5. Interactivity in interactive documentaries: parameters and characterization.

Parameter	Characteristics	Indicating
Selective interactivity	call to action for decisions, choosing paths, options, etc. free exploration non linearity unestablished end	Personal consumption and user control over the story
Immersive interactivity	user role implication, engagement simulation, gamification immersive environment user control; user action - text reaction	User feeling of being part of the story
Social interactivity	conversation social sharing login and use of personal data	Giving voice to the user and the feeling of belonging to a community
Generative interactivity	user contributions user-generated content results from user experience	User as a producer
Physical interactivity	user physical immersion virtual reality, augmented reality geolocation live performance	Personal experience and embodiment

Source: prepared by the authors.

Definitely, we observe the hybridization present in interactive documentary in an intrinsic way and the heterogeneity that offer the current projects. In the analyzed sample, the ten cases come from the media, so it is considered an adequate way to inform. One of the keys is placed on the strategic design of each of these parameters to favor, above all, the development of the story without losing sight of the user's experience.

Deepening, connecting and establishing relations

The development of hypertextuality corresponds to a first step in the relation author-text-user. The progression goes from a linear and rigid story to a non-linear one, expanded and with a liquid structure. The implicated user can delve into those aspects that he or she considers more attractive, accessing to extra contents or taking paths derived from the principal narrative thread. This is the case of *Montelab*, where it is possible to access to brief features linked in each phase of the docugame. Another way of facilitating the trajectory through the story is the fragmentation of the content. For example, in *After the Storm*, 16 independent chapters are displayed. This type of proposal is usual and can be also observed in *Life on Hold* and *Highrise: A Short History of the Highrise*. The use of hyperlinks also favors the relation with similar content, from the same media or from other. Notwithstanding, it is a less developed function.

From a journalistic point of view, the interrelation of the contents allows the offer of wider perspectives and the direction of traffic to other news in the media. The integration of those links represents a challenge to avoid the deviation of the user's attention and the difficulties associated with the experience. For this, the common practice consists of the insertion of extendable areas in the documentary itself and integrated in the structure. In this sense, the positional reference is not lost and it is possible to pick up the principal thread easily.

Regarding the idea of selective interactivity, the user has the capacity to choose his or her way towards their own end. Thus, the message built during the journey gets closer to the personalization of consumption. The control that now enjoys the user has been transferred by the author, who designs and defines the user's possibilities. In conclusion, it is a kind of story more open to personal interpretation and that requires the user's action for its own advancement. To capture their attention, to answer to their necessities and to keep their interest: are both challenge and chance at the same time.

The role of social media

With the appearance of Web 2.0, numerous social resources were developed: social bookmarking sites, aggregators, platforms for the distribution of contents, social networks, etc. The implementation of the latter in the media has been usually limited to login in order to make comments or to accede to reserved areas. However, interactive documentary sets out new uses for this popular social phenomenon.

Examples like *Prison Valley*, *Réfugiés* or *Goa Hippy Tribe* use social media to personalize the user's experience. When they log in with the LDAP protocol of Facebook or Twitter, it allows them to keep the progress or to pick up the viewing where they had stopped. Moreover, the documentary takes basic data from the user's profile in order to present a more personal interface, adding their names

and photo on some narrative element. Once the user is in, it is easy to make recommendations about the work in their social profile and, thus, increase its visibility.

Participation is another objective which gets favored with the integration of social networks in interactive documentary. In the studied cases, the connections with social networks, and other mechanisms, such as surveys or forums, do not present a wide development. The media face the challenge of promoting and managing participation, beyond conventional solutions, since the current user presents more complex necessities.

Finally, social networks can be used as a platform for interactive documentary. Although it is not a common practice, there are projects such as *Malvinas30* that develop their story establishing connections among several social profiles. Furthermore, it is important to manage the presence of interactive documentary in social networks because, due to its characteristics as a digital product and usually online, it can attract those audiences.

A space for multimedia and prosumers

Interactive documentary is a genre of multimedia language, built with the integration of diverse textual and audiovisual elements, graphics, maps and computer-generated environments. The evolution of the Web standards results in the development of audiovisual content, especially, at the same time that the limits of the traditional media are overcome. In the net, any media possesses the capacity to display multimedia content, regardless of its nature.

This characteristic allows the creation of heterogeneous products which stand out for their visual character. Video and photography are usually the most prominent. With them, the information gains in proximity and immersion, the users can know better the reality that is presented through their own observation. The presence of text is reduced, although it is maintained in introductory, contextualization and guiding functions. To this extent, the advancements have allowed the integration of media alien to the documentary itself, for example, the user's webcam. This is the case of projects such as *Bear 71*. Notwithstanding, the elements integrated are sometimes contents created by the user. The figure of the prosumer finds in this genre an adequate place to contribute to the expansion of the story with his or her own contents. In the analyzed sample, the following cases are identified: in *Highrise: A Short History of the Highrise* the New York Times' users sent their photographs for the elaboration of a chapter, while in *Réfugiés* the user creates a feature along the trajectory and, afterward, the resulting product can be shared. Although in media-related documentaries it appears with certain limitations, other cases like *Insitu* prove the strength of the inclusion of the user-generated content.

The design of the interface plays a fundamental role when it comes to articulate all the elements of interactive documentary; for this, it is common to present them in websites outside the conventional structure of the media. The interface becomes the intermediary in the relation between user and content, the design facilitates the experience at the same time that represents one of the keys to success of a project like this. Examples such as *Prison Valley*, *Montelab* or *Réfugiés* stand out since they present different proposals which set the user in a space and they also represent the user's advancement favoring immersion. The advanced use of multimedia makes each interactive documentary a singular project with its own character and represents, again, a differential aspect of the informative offer of the media.

The arrival of embodiment

Virtual reality experiences are revolutionizing both information and entertainment. Hybrid proposals between the ambits are bringing the user's physical immersion closer to the represented reality. Like the most common functions in videogames, the user's location in a simulated space allows a greater and more complete rapprochement in interactive nonfiction too. The use of glasses and headphones is enough to arouse new first-person sensations and to implicate the user in a higher degree.

Augmented reality and geolocation represent the first level of physical interactivity; nonetheless, virtual reality means a step forward. In the sample, we find *6x9* an innovative idea of The Guardian which situates the user as an observer in a prison cell. The possibility of moving in a three-dimensional environment and the use of surround sound complete this interactive documentary with a relevant sensorial stimulation.

Other media throw themselves into the development of virtual reality apps and implement 360° video in their contents, since apart from the technological innovation, they are highly immersive forms. Although their evolution advances quickly, the representation of a real three-dimensional space entails some technical difficulties, such as the spatial location of sound or the interaction in space, as well as other ethical questions. Taking as a reference the use of representations of reality where the user is located as an observer, it can be concluded that they are significant narrative innovations for the media.

The user's immersion in the journalistic story

The principal aim of journalism is the narration of stories and, at the same time, it represents an important force in social changes. Interactive documentary allows a wide display of hypertextual, multimedia and interactive characteristics, and it also adds a concept: immersion, the result of the adequate combination of all the elements. Immersion arrives to the journalistic story as a combination of little contributions, from the structural approach to the multimedia integration and the different types of interactivity. It is focused on making the user feel in the depths of the represented reality, near and with capacity of action. The implication of new audiences in this type of products facilitates their empathy with the realities and, consequently, their potential response to the problems and injustices that journalism deals with every day.

The feeling of belonging is a key question in relation with immersion. For this, gamification turns documentary into docugame: *Pirate Fishing*, *Réfugiés*. The principles of the game mean a greater engagement of the public in this represented fragment. The application of entertainment logic, such as the assumption of a role, the game or the spatial simulation does not represent a discredit of the informative purpose. It is another mechanism to promote the users' empathy towards the reality shown.

The social networks, apart from the aforementioned functions, allow the creation of products adjusted to the user. The system uploads the information in the profiles and personalizes the story like in *Do Not Track* or *In Limbo*, including user's real content in the narrative development. Another way of directly implicating the user is by suggesting the contribution to the story: with reflections, with self-created contents or in decision making, as can be observed in *Montelab*, *Pirate Fishing* or *Life on Hold*.

The media discover the potential of making the users feel that they belong to the story, their experience gets more personal and the transmission of information, deeper; in contrast to the distancing rhetoric which journalism had instituted (Domínguez, 2013).

5. Conclusions

Convergence in the digital media causes the adoption of this genre as a narrative solution in very differing areas, journalism among them. In the media, experimental laboratories promote innovation and investigation. They facilitate the production of transversal projects involving multiple professional profiles. Within their activity, the production of interactive documentary can be observed, generally in the webdoc format, which enriches its informative offer about special topics. The use of this genre is especially adequate for a deep treatment of special coverage or long-form works with varied points of view or first-person testimonies. The different ways of presenting reality that documentary can adopt allow their combination and involve an opening of the informative story.

From the combination of the net functions with the application that the author makes of them and the utilization by the user, a series of parameters that show the different stages of user experience can be set. As one of the big challenges of journalism in its narrative innovation, the study of reception can open new ways and business models focusing on the audience. The use of multimedia and hypertextuality results in audiovisual works, more open to the user and with greater freedom. Interactivity leads to a qualitative advance towards personalization, narrative expansion through user-generated content and participation, where social media promote communication within these projects. Although they are observed applications, in the media a decisive commitment to all the resources at their disposal has not been identified. Moreover, difficulties can be noticed in the integration of prosumers inside the informative product. Usually, interactive documentaries in cybermedia take a characteristic as the main one, at the same time as an element to attract attention, to develop the story. In the complex and diverse construction shown over an usable design and interface, rich, entertaining and distinctive experiences are located. Hence, transmedia narratives are moving to nonfiction for proposals through multiple platforms and thought for active users.

At this point, it is indispensable to mention immersive journalism, since the capacity of the contents to involve the user is a differential aspect. The media discover original resources in the net to attain immersion, which apart from showing a difference, represent a driving force towards social change. The user's grade of implication increases due to decision-making, implementation of a role and the possibility of acting in the scenario, together with other conditions. Notwithstanding, investigation on the reception in this type of experiences deserves a deeper development in further research.

Online journalism finds in interactive documentary a new way to explore the renovation of its narratives with added value to the informative offer. Against the increasing development of interactive documentary as a journalistic narrative proposal and with an outstanding hybridization, overcoming the challenges that cybermedia face will mean the consolidation of the genre in them. Thinking about the audience, favoring the story and its narrative coherence, and remaining attentive to the environment seem fundamental conditions for the success of interactive documentary and other renewing proposals in the media.

*** Funded research.** [This article has been developed within the research project *Uses and informative preferences in the new media map in Spain: journalism models for mobile devices* \(Reference: CSO2015-64662-C4-4-R\) funded by Ministry of Economy and](#)

[Competitiveness \(Government of Spain\) and co-funded by the ERDF structural fund, as well as it is part of the activities promoted through the International Research Network of Communication Management – XESCOM \(Reference: ED341D R2016/019\), supported by Consellería de Cultura, Educación e Ordenación Universitaria of Xunta de Galicia.](#)

The author Jorge Vázquez-Herrero is a beneficiary of the Faculty Training Program funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (Government of Spain).

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How to cite this article in bibliographies / References

J Vázquez-Herrero, MC Negreira-Rey, X Pereira-Fariña (2017): "Interactive documentary contributions to the renewal of journalistic narratives: realities and challenges". *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 72, pp. 397 to 414.

<http://www.revistalatinacs.org/072paper/1171/21en.html>

DOI: [10.4185/RLCS-2017-1171](https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2017-1171)

Article received on 12 on January 2017. Accepted on 22 March.
Published on 27 March 2017.