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The first one hundred days of *El Español*. Analysis of the structure and contents of an online newspaper during its beginnings

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Abstract

El Español is the latest digital newspaper to be launched in Spain, thanks to crowdfunding campaign that surpassed all the past attempts made by other news media companies. The achievement of its goals and the success of its journalistic and technological proposals are yet to be seen. This article analyses the first one hundred days of this news website. The analysis involves the description of its origins and its underlying structure, its quantitative and qualitative impacts on the journalistic world, as well as its main deficiencies derived from its short existence. In addition, the article evaluates the changes the online newspaper has experienced during its first three months of life. The article concludes that *El Español* has adopted an interpretative style based on service journalism, and a layout that is not typical of the born-digital news media that have emerged in the context of technological effervescence, which involves the massive use of computers, smartphones and social networks.

Keywords

Journalism, technology, crowdfunding, digital, multimedia

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

1. Introduction

On 14 October, 2015, the first official issue of the online newspaper *El Español* (“The Spaniard”) was officially launched in Spain. Until then, the newspaper had only released tweets, statements, news, announcement, previews, ads and a blog (*El Blog de El Español*). The project was conceived one year and a half before its launch, and since then it carried out a campaign to find partners and generate buzz.

El Español was conceived as an ambitious project in the midst of the crisis of journalism and the media. With an investment of 18 million euros and a staff of almost 100 people, *El Español* bet on a mixed business model, based on traditional advertising and subscription fees. Before its launch, the newspaper already had a team of 5,500 shareholders, gathered through a record-breaking crowdfunding campaign, and 10,000 subscribers; which constituted an unprecedented success given that the previous collaborative journalistic initiatives that had obtained funding were specialised in investigative journalism with strong social commitment (Cabrera: 2014). The goals of its business strategy were to double the number of users (García Santamaría: 2016) and increase its value to 100 million Euros by the fifth year.

The true birth of the newspaper could be traced to 1 January 2015 to a tweet in which Pedro J. Ramírez announced his intentions to found *El Español*. At 00:15 hours on the first day of that year, he wrote: “Our newspaper will be universal in its scope and sensitivity, but it will be called *El Español*, like the paper directed by Luis Bonafoux, the viper of Asnières, when he advocated for a revolution from below”. In its presentation, it chose as a model one of the best Spanish journalists (Del Arco: 2013). In just 24 hours the Twitter account of the new medium got 50,000 followers.

Its crowdfunding campaign began ten days later and its results marked a double milestone because of the amount it raised and because of its purpose: the creation of a newspaper. At the beginning of March 2015, 5,624 shareholders had contributed 3.6 million euros, which were added to the 5.3 million euros Pedro J. Ramírez received as compensation from *El Mundo* (“The World”) newspaper after being sacked as editor. Two dates are important in the development of the project: 28 January, when this collaborative experience reached a new record number of shareholders in Spain, which together collected 680,000 euros; and 14 February, when it broke the world record held by *De Correspondent* Dutch newspaper in crowdfunding in journalism, with 1,300,000 euros.

On 27 June 2015, after the first general meeting of shareholders was held, *El Español* began its campaign to gain the founding subscribers with 40% discounts, 7-euro monthly subscriptions and 84-

euro yearly subscriptions (this promotion ended on 1 October). On 7 October the beta version of the news website was launched for subscribers. On 14 October the official version of *El Español* website became available for free during the first fifteen days. The system to charge online reader was implemented on 1 November, fifteen days after its launch.

The origins of this news media outlet, however, can be dated further back. In April 2014, journalists María Ramírez and Eduardo Suárez, correspondents for *El Mundo*, in New York, created the blog and the *Twitter* account #Nohacefaltapapel (#Paperisnotnecessary). Today, these two journalists are co-founders and directors of *El Español*, while *Nohacefaltapapel* is the publishing company.

El Español is the third newspaper founded by its editor, Pedro J. Ramírez, who previously founded *Diario 16* and *El Mundo*. During the launch, Pedro J. Ramírez described the DNA of the new medium: “it will be an indomitable newspaper” that will not succumb “to harassment nor praise”; “that is why it will contribute to the strengthening of the Spanish society”. On its birthday, its reporter and founder, Eduardo Suárez, announced the plan and project to develop the newspaper, and highlighted that profile feature articles, data analysis and explanatory articles would be the foundations of the new medium. Suárez, the Deputy Director and Chief of feature reports, abandoned the project at the beginning of April 2016 due to disagreements with the director over the newspaper’s business model.

El Español joined the group of over one hundred general-information online newspapers that were launched since 1988, when *La Estrella Digital* was first published. The newspaper crisis (Yunquera: 2016) forced the closure of print media outlets, but also prompted the emergence of online newspapers. And, although most of these new online news media outlets were copies of their print counterparts, this trend (Salaverría: 2016) shifted radically with the emergence of the new “pure players”, *i.e.* news media that are independent and unrelated to the print press.

At first sight, *El Español* emerged well equipped, both from the business and professional points of view, in the midst of the crisis of journalism. It was launched to demonstrate that, with a viable business model and a team of trained journalists, it was possible not only to survive the crisis but to become an important source of reference. The daily monitoring of the first one hundred days of *El Español*, a newspaper that was launched in the digital environment with the aspiration of occupying a central position in the journalistic landscape of Spain, reveals innovations and certainties, beyond the intentions and aspirations of its founders. It is a new medium with its own personality, with different strategies than the print media, and with a layout that includes the fundamental elements of digital media: portability, participation and customisation (Guallar and Masip: 2012).

The business model of *El Español* is classified as a hybrid funding model, based on subscription and advertising. Casero-Ripollés (2010) establishes, in this sense, two typologies: *metered model* and *freemium*. The first model provides access to a certain number of news items (between 10 and 25) for a month, while the second combines free access to some items and pay-walls to more elaborate pieces. *El Español* uses the *metered model* and gives visitors access to 25 information pieces per month.

2. Methods and objectives

This objective of this study is to analyse the first one hundred days of the online newspaper. The study is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods that aim to describe the

whole project, its development and identify its contributions, deficiencies and structure. The study follows the method of analysis proposed by Blanco Leal for the critical study of the press, which underlines two important aspects for any research of this type: “the complexity of the proposal” and the need for understanding the business aspect of the medium (Blanco Leal, 2008: 96-99). The purpose is to carry out a study that covers content, structure, design and multimedia contributions.

Table 1

Fieldwork	
Variables	Measurements
Period of study	14 October 2015
	21 January 2016
News items analysed	3,239
Contents	Genres
	Themes
	News production
Form	Multimedia elements
	Interaction

Source: Authors' own creation

For this study, we selected at least 30 news items every day, including items from the first section of the newspaper, which features the main theme of the day, and primary and secondary news that complement or explain it, and adding the main proposals according to the own ranking of *El Español*.

We collected the main proposals of each day (with screenshots, not less than five). Two main tables were created in Excel: one for contents (genres, themes and news production) and one for the measurement of the multimedia elements (photos, videos, graphics and infographics, audio, illustrations, documents and graphic resources like screenshots and images from Twitter) and the interaction, with the comments posted in blogs and the contributions and presence in social networks.

At the end of the one hundred days of study, we collected 3,239 news items for analysis, both in terms of content and form. The sample is large enough to establish percentages about the themes/issues addressed, the types of news production (in-house or outsourced), genres and media elements. News about courts trials, detentions, police investigations, and cases of corruption were assigned to the macro-section of “Society”, to distinguish them from news from the purely political sphere (government, elections, parliament, actions of the prime minister) and ethical positions.

Investigations on corruption, which have to do with justice, hearings and accusations, also appear in the “society” section (for instance, cases such as Noos, Pujol, and the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia and Gürtel).

Texts of analysis, comments and explanations of situations, mostly political, were considered as “interpretive”, when they did not offer any novelty in terms of journalistic work and only illustrated events. At first sight, there is an air of interpretation in most texts, even in the most informative ones, just like Suárez had stated that these type of journalistic work would be one of the foundations of the newspaper. At first glance, such pedagogical aspiration reflects a style that is more characteristic of magazines than of newspapers, as if the explanation of what happens, i.e. service journalism, is privileged over the description of today’s events. Another more intentional disquisition could respond to the possibility that, in the absence of relevant news the newspaper opted to find a difference in a different angle, in another way of telling what is already known.

From 29 November, the analysis incorporated another variable: the links included in the different news stories, which is interesting if we consider that it is a digital medium. However, as it will be shown later, the results are not high or significant, given that in average only 15 to 20 links were included for each thirty texts.

The objective is to offer a complete analysis of both the digital forms and the journalistic content of *El Español*.

3. Description of the object of study

El Español is edited every day and is available on computers, tablets and smartphones with exclusive information, reports and opinion columns for subscribers only. Its structure reflects a flexible appearance, but responds to an order that changes slightly. Its main section, the homepage, usually deals with matters related to Spain, elections and corruption, which can go from five to three columns, depending on the scope and importance of the piece. This main news is often supplemented or further developed by other two or three news stories.

The initial grid is distributed in three columns, of which the first two form the body of information with two-column headlines, intros and pictures in vertical scroll in linear layout. This is interrupted only by some information pieces that use the space delimited by the two columns by inserting a small photo in the first column followed by the information in the following column, justified to the size of the photo.

These one-column information pieces are made up of three-line headlines, their corresponding three-line summary lead and finally the name of the author. This part of the site has two information hierarchy levels: a main one with two-column pictures, headlines and summary leads and a secondary level with one-column information pieces and photos. The third column is used for “El Río” section. Just five days after its launch, the newspaper tried to break with limitations established by the rigid design architecture that only allowed two levels of reading. This involved moving the three columns downwards and inserting a band/row from side to side and establishing a third level to address exclusive news and scoops. The design of the “homepage” of any site carries the same tension than the design of the front-page in printed media. The homepage is what all visitors see, the one with the heaviest traffic, the most desirable for advertisement placement. However, for Steve

Krug (2001), the homepage cannot do it all. For the author, the homepage involves commitment and there is always pressure to include something else in it, but inevitably something is lost, even the identity that the site wants to reflect.

This formula, with minor modifications, was used 30 times over the one hundred days of analysis and was applied for exclusive news in the case of the Pujol family's assets, the involvement of Matas with Genoa, the terrorist massacre in Paris, the "Menina Operation" of Soraya Sáez de Santamaría, the death of two Spanish policemen in terrorist attack in Kabul and the forced relation of the winning numbers in the Spanish Christmas lottery. The most important deployment was carried out on 14 November with the news about the terrorist attacks in Paris.

After the homepage, the following section is *Enfoques* ("Perspectives"), which deals with the most rabid events, although, in fact, it addresses almost without exception events taking place in Spain and the world. The following section, particularly at the beginning of this analysis, is the opinion section, called *Coliseo* ("Colosseum"), with a fixed distribution: six short articles. The first one is an editorial, four are regular contributions by commenters that examine current affairs, and one is a piece written by a guest commenter, usually an analyst. Next is the *Economía* ("Economics") section, followed by *Prodigios* ("Prodigies"), which deals with science news; then, *Pódium* ("Podium"), which presents sports news; then *Miradas* ("Looks"), focused on culture; *Jaleos* ("Commotion"), focused on celebrity gossip; and *Ocio* ("Leisure"). In the last days of the monitoring period, *Coliseo* was moved to the end of the sections.

As a novelty, the column called *El Río*, to the right of the page, has its own content and it is updated every few minutes. The section is signed and controlled by an editor, and acts as a live thicker. It features very short news of all types, previews of coming news and sometimes summaries of investigative news that appear in the corresponding section. Sometimes, this column presents the news of the selected section, which creates a double and paradoxical perception: agility, on the one hand, and repetition, on the other.

Two elements have remained unchanged since the launch of the online publication, and have become important points of reference: *El folletón* ("Feuilleton") written by José Ángel Mañas, about the everyday life of 1936, and "30 obsessions of *El Español*", which is a sort of manual for journalists that also promotes certain ideological and ethical positions. Sometimes cartoons are used to illustrate the main news on the homepage; these resources are not produced *ex professo* for such news but are taken, when there is similitude with the issue, from the political cartoon section called *El zarpazo* ("The swipe"), which is reminiscent of the print newspapers, and is a nod to the *Nohacefaltapapel* company. In this sense *El Español* is of the few newspapers that uses an illustration for a section of its own. This resource is sometimes used to boost news placed inside the newspaper.

Since the first Sunday edition, of 18 October, some changes were introduced to the original structure. *Coliseo* disappears, which markedly decreases the presence of opinion pieces, which ends up limited to a letter from the director: *Hazte león* ("Become a lion"). In the following days there is a process of alignment, which involves changes in the order of the sections. At first, it might seem that this re-ordering responds to a ranking based on the newness of the information and the importance of the investigation. However, these changes sometimes seem to respond to arbitrary variations that seek to achieve a sense of richness and variability. The new section names actually correspond to the classic themes, Spanish politics, international affairs, economy, society, culture, celebrity gossip,

entertainment, sports and technology (included in *Prodigios*). The profile feature articles and interviews seem to be resources used to ensure the contents of the day.

On 27 October, the newspaper increases considerably the number of graphics and infographics because it presents an assessment of the government of Rajoy and its results. In contrast, it is surprising that the newspapers decided not to publish the video that had been on the news on the same day: “The ten key moments of the RTVE infomercial about Rajoy”, referring to the interview made to Rajoy in Spanish Television.

Most media have thematic or general blogs written by their own editors with eminently journalistic character (Esteve and Moreno, 2010). *El Español* opts for the reader’s blog and a sequence of blogs about its sections, although it is not unique in its genre since *La Vanguardia* also had a readers’ blog. The subscriber’s blog hardly has any comments and the ones that exist are about past entries. The comments from bloggers are posted mainly in the sections *España*, *Mundo*, *Economía* and *Pódium* and rarely in *Jaleos*.

The number of pictures increases remarkably on specific dates: for example, when on several days the newspaper repeats the names of the 21 senior members of the Government that the Constitutional Court had on its watch. On 14 November, following the attacks in France, there is also an increase in graphic resources in the form of *tweets* of reaction from top leaders, and of course the news in the International section. For example, on 17 November there is a significant increase in the use of photographs because the newspaper presents a study of the Deputies who already have a seat in the Parliament according to the position assigned by each of the parties, and it incorporates their pictures. On 24 October, on the occasion of the Princess of Asturias Awards, the number of photos soars because it makes a review of the costumes and accessories, designers and brands worn by the Queen and the many guests.

On 10 December the *Enfoques* section disappears definitively and the newspaper faces its first crisis: the team responsible for technology, new formats and design resigns after just two months. Sources from *El Español* recognised “some technological problems with the video platform and the subscription payment system”. While the staff that resigned stated that it was “the interference of the direction in the technical development” of *El Español* what endangered “the viability of the project”.

Unusual attention is paid to cultural news, as we will see in the analysis, although we must bear in mind that this increase coincides with such events as the presentation of the film 'Star Wars', as it happened on 18 December and the following days. The *Coliseo* section, hitherto dominant and always present in the homepage loses presence, the size of its headline is reduced and its hierarchical representation is lowered, losing its traditional position in the sections menu.

4. Innovations, hypotheses

El Español was founded with the aim of differentiating itself from previous journalistic proposals. To do so it incorporated, in addition to giving new names to the traditional sections, new sections that reflected its commitment to digital innovation: *El Río* (“The River”), *La Edición* (“The Edition”), *El despertador* (“The alarm clock”), *El Periscopio* (“The Periscope”), *En Vivo* (“Live”), *Zona Ñ* (“Ñ zone”), *El blog del suscriptor* (“The subscriber’s blog”). *La Edición* was marketed as the star product, as a newspaper within the newspaper, designed for tablet and mobile-phone apps,

published every day at 10 PM, with the date of the next day, and anticipating about thirty selected stories.

El Río is another section that aims to be a symbol of originality. It is on the last column and uses a black background that includes blocks of short news, of 60 to 100 words, printed in negative over dark grey. Acting as an old-fashioned teletype, it gives an idea of continuous updating, even though its use and handling is different on the web than in tablets. In the web it provides an air of repetition because the news appearing in *El Río* are often developed in their corresponding section and occasionally share the same page, therefore it makes little sense, beyond the typographic contribution. Its use, therefore, is best suited for smartphones. Conceived as a way to deliver the latest news (Costa: 2102), to take a look to the headlines and summary leads in mobile phones and tablets, although as Nozal and González (2012) point out, the apps developed for the iPad are still in a state of development in relation to the functionality of this mobile device.

El Despertador is a morning newsletter with previews sent via email by the server-provider. In order to activate it and get more visibility on mobile devices on 7 December information pieces start to include mini-banners of this section with a preview of news and the option of registering to receive it for free every day. This is a press summary of the website. It offers around 15 news of no more than seven lines long, well differentiated through sections such as *El tema* (“The theme”), *Mientras dormías* (“While you were sleeping”), *El dato* (“The fact”) -which integrates infographics- *Te interesa leer* (“Are you interested in reading?”), *El día según Pedro J* (“The day according to Pedro J”), *El trivial* (“The trivial”) and *Danos pistas* (“Give us clues”). Only the sections *El tema* and *El día según Pedro J* include long news stories, of two paragraphs. The design is clear, clean and easy to read; three colours are used: red for the sections, bold for headlines than always use one line, and blue for hyperlinks.

In addition to the emails sent by *El Despertador*, the newspaper uses reminders or push notifications via mobile devices. This service is used by most newspapers and allows customised contact and proximity which, in this case, turns out to be persistent, since shortly afterwards, at around 8 AM, subscribers can receive *El Periscopio*, which is another newsletter similar to *El Despertador* in terms of editorial line and design. The only thing that is different between the two newsletters is the name of the sections: *El Periscopio* offers *La historia de la semana* (“The story of the week”), *Por si te lo perdiste* (“In case you missed it”), *La imagen* (“The image”), *Lo que estamos leyendo* (“What we are reading”), *Periodismo de datos* (“Data journalism”) (with infographics), *El baúl de los prodigios* (“The trunk of wonders”), *Los placeres del espíritu* (“The joys of the spirit”) and *Danos Pistas*, which is the only section included in both newsletters. This new resource was advertised on 12 December 2015, one week after the launch of *El Despertador*. The selling line was: “The best stories selected by the best reporters”. To receive both newsletters, it is necessary register and subscribe.

On 12 November, the newspaper incorporates a new element, *En Vivo*. From the Catalan Parliament, reporter Ana Gracia describes the interventions of the members of parliament in small paragraphs, as if they were *tweets*. The tone is interpretive, critical, up-to-the-minute, and illustrated precisely with tweets of those who intervene or infographics. It is a sort of on-site, real-time, novel chronicle, one of the contributions and a clear example of the journalistic use of the possibilities of the internet.

One contribution of the newspaper is the abundance of interpretive work it offers as part of what we call service journalism, which seems to be adopted by *El Español* as a brand. This proposal reflects explanations, reasons to understand. For example, “The keys to understand Hollande’s speech”,

“How is ISIS funded”, and “15 moving messages from Republic Square”, “The thousand groups that will be in Congress,” “Why is it difficult to say whether C’s is right-wing or left-wing”, “‘Cyber-jihadism’ in eight key questions” and “The branches of jihadism one by one”.

On 19 November other contributions appeared: *Te recomendamos* (“We recommend you”), which tends to contain three stories published in recent days; *Contenido patrocinado* (“Sponsored content”), which are stories published by other media. The incorporation of sponsorships does not end there, since two days later the newspaper published “15-year-old Mathematician”, a feature article written by *Jobandtalent* (a job-matching social network). This section is usually included at the end of the daily scroll in a section called *Contenido patrocinado*, which includes news written not only other media but also by companies. On the other hand, the news stories include paid-for information pieces like the logo of a company or organisation with the legend “sponsored by”. These contents are offered by the company Outbrain, specialist in recommendations, while the links to third-party sites are funded by clients of this company and the news tend to be of curiosities and entertainment.

Published on 21 November, “Sleeping in limbo: an in-depth analysis of Airbnb” is a complete analysis of this accommodation formula. It can be considered to be the first truly multimedia story of *El Español*, as it includes infographics, videos, graphics, links, legislation, testimonials and photographs. It is perhaps the most complete work, as it employs a method to analyse and compare performance. Another truly multimedia delivery is “Suicide, an invisible evil”, which includes a 41-minute long video produced for *El Español*.

Sometimes the same video is used on two news stories on the same day. For example, on 12 December there were two news stories about the attack on Kabul where two Spanish policemen were killed. The main homepage news only includes headline, summary lead and the signature of the author, but when clicked on it, it offers the option of watching a video. One of the video’s still images is used as a graphic resource for the second news story, which can be accessed directly.

The newspaper begins to include a box titled “More information” within the body of the news story. It presents three news stories with a very small headline in small caps and a hyperlink. So there are three hypertextual possibilities: a “related news” button one on the right margins of the news, which includes the news story with headline, name of the author and photo; the aforementioned box, which includes three news (without photos nor subtitles) in small caps and small body; and finally the hyperlinks that are inserted within the text itself and can turn blue when selected.

On 30 December the first “exclusive” news story was published: “The accounts of Pujol in Andorra to the full”, which offers the possibility of browsing all the accounts, records and movements from 1991 to 2012. It included an interactive contribution titled: “See the accounts of the Pujol family in Andorra”.

The newspaper used as graphic resources the images of the tweets posted by participants in the campaign titled “Who do you think won the debate at UC3M?”, where the candidates to the Presidency, Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera participated in a debate in the Carlos III University of Madrid, moderated by journalist Carlos Alsina. It is in this type of actions in which the newspaper requests feedback from readers and it tends to be successful due to the active participation that characterises its readers. In this case, the newspaper received around 900 responses in the form of tweets and retweets. The newspaper exploits the story graphically as it presents an almost endless list

of screenshots /tweets with the comments and links of participants and the politicians themselves. For Quevedo et al. (2016), the candidates present their best profile, get closer to the public and appear friendly, committed and available.

5. Review of deficiencies: discussion

It is surprising, given the tendency of *El Español* to explain news stories and even to repeat them, that on 24 November the main homepage news story is not understood: “The stolen papers also involve the Minister of the Interior”. There's barely a reference to Operation Kitchen III. It assumes a prior follow-up and there is no reference to remind readers about the topic.

By contrast in *Cultura, Miradas*, the newspaper repeats three news from the previous day (Is Star Wars racist?”, “The Force Awakens in 20 tweets”, and “Does the Vatican like Star Wars?”) and there is a repetition of several stories from previous days (“The people of Amancio Ortega”, “This is how I lost my savings”, “The crisis left Moscow empty”, “The hitman was the dermatologist”).

There are numerous examples of repeated stories, which generates a sense of impoverishment, since the same news story can appear in the same section for several days. This occurs with “The powerful tongue of small chameleons”, “The number of libraries is growing”, “When technology gifts end up in the garbage”, “Cultural industry doubles benefits over the world”, “The Venezuelan Parliament defies Maduro’s Government”, “Liquid light to illuminate cancer”, the videos of the Noos case, “The recipe of happiness”, “The secrets of the snowman”, and the “Profile feature of Patxi López, the negotiator of agreements, “Tourists return to Spain but under the shadow of the low-cost” and “I survived Ulises”.

In some cases, the repetition occurs for a third time. The never-seen-before video of the celebration in the Madrid Arena, which was released during the trial and was shown on television news programmes on 13 December, is repeated it in two news articles: one about the statement of the main accused and one about the release of such video. This does not reflect an aspiration to provide complete information but poverty in the contents offer. The analysis of a main news event, such as the capture of Chapo Guzmán, has showed that the same materials, videos, photos, and graphics in the form of tweets are used in the different related news stories. In other words, the same resources are used in the main news story and the profile feature article, and the interpretive box.

With regards to the “More information” box placed within the news, we detected that in an interview with Errejón, (“It would be a mistake to let liberals alone in Spain”) it included three allegedly related news that are actually diametrically opposed: “25 bargains and 5 tips to take advantage of Black Friday”, “The 10 least-consuming cars” and “It would be sad if eight Basque surnames were to be politicised -says Rivera-”. It neither makes sense that the column of related news includes news that have no connection with the main news story. On 1 November, for the body of the news titled “How could ISIS bring down a plane flying at 30,000 feet?”, the related news were “Corinna, accused of fraud for the sale of a duplex in Switzerland” and “Churches: Date more? I am committed to my country”. One can understand that there is a certain lack of organisation and correlation between news-making, design and technological processes,

Errors or oversights led to the disappearance from the website, on 27 November, of the video of Rajoy’s famous slap on the back of the neck of his son in the Cope sports show. Other malfunctions,

perhaps circumstantial, occurred on 22 December 22, when *El Español* devoted large coverage to the elections and much of its effort to the results, with two transmissions the place of the elections, the fragmented Congress and the Senate with the PP majority. The newspaper offered direct coverage from each municipality, but the connection was not possible in many computers.

The news stories, on the other hand, are all short in terms of the length of the written content. In some cases, they are mere short notes, although they are titled and highlighted as important news. For example, 'El Chapo', the Mexican drug trafficker who was put behind bars once again, became the inspiration for two of the novels by Don Winslow. The development of is minimal and includes remarks made by the writer in the past months.

On 11 January we detected some sort of fraud in the contents that are presented and this occurs several times. For example, the newspaper published the news of the death of David Bowie as a main news, after the trial of the Noos case, but the link to the news opened a page with a photo and a 10-line long text produced by other medium. In the case of the Golden Globes, there are two articles with different headlines but with the same exact content (information about the winners and 12 photos).

El Español excessively follows a trend generated by online journalism, whose main objective is to make users click and information in itself does not really matter. We are talking about *clickbait* or *linkbait* and *listclick*. Both options seek to get visits, users and traffic measured through SEO. Curiously, on 6 November, Enrique Dans, a columnist on the payroll of *El Español*, wrote an article titled "Clickbait, a sensationalist element to avoid", for his *Fósforo verde* ("Green phosphor") section. This article highlights the perversion of this technique and laments *El Español* itself uses this un-journalistic technique: "the temptation is so clear that even this medium, in which due to its short life culture has not yet had time to consolidate itself around certain criteria, this has happen on a couple of occasions, not so much with the headlines, as with the way they are advertised on social networks. Let hope this does not happen again." The author shares a devastating example of the form in which the newspaper advertises itself on *Twitter*: "This brothel of Aranda was announced on a radio station. You can imagine what happened after". The excess of information, infoxication, (Cornellá: 1996) makes search engines, most of the time, unable to provide the desired information and instead flood searchers with useless references; so you need the help of journalists (Edo: 2009) to search, select and interpret the information, and audiences capable of understanding today's reality.

6. Measurements: the object of study

6.1. Genres

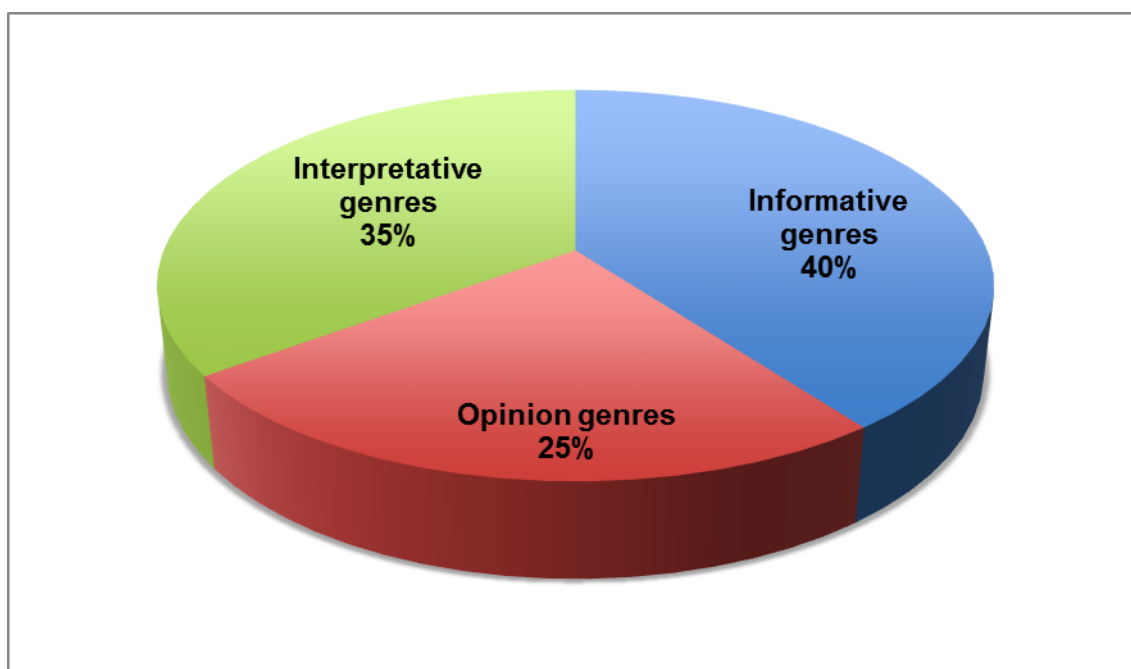
The 3,239 news collected for analysis, both in terms of content and presentation, provide a still picture of the newspaper. This picture confirms some of the expectations created with the emergence of a new digital medium and reflects an unclear view of the motives and feelings, such as indignation and enthusiasm, that prompted the creation of this new newspaper, in the words of its editor. We can say that enthusiasm is behind the birth of a project, while indignation can be a force that moves or paralyzes.

Enthusiasm to search, to offer a service, to find the truth, to grow, to find a place in the delicate landscape of the Spanish press. And indignation to denounce, to ask what nobody wants to say, to prevent excesses. But these are qualities and moral skills and cannot be revealed in a quantitative analysis.

A qualitative analysis can only give us a glimpse, a hint. It is with this observation that we can identify some qualities, positions, aspirations and goals. The quantitative measurement provided a vivid picture of the achievements and deficiencies and results that can be tested. The qualitative approach allowed us to identify the intentions and to classify trends.

The first table shows the genres used by the new newspaper. In this case, the quantitative analysis shows us the way for the qualitative analysis. 40% of the newspaper's content is news, 35% is interpretative texts and 25% is opinion pieces. This distribution seems quite balanced, but we are yet to see whether this is a proposal or a drift.

Table 1. Genres



Source: Authors' own creation

It could be argued that such equitable distribution is typical of media inclined to more reflection and explanation than to pure information, or the search for news. That it is more typical of a weekly than a newspaper, more characteristic of the analogue than digital media. This is because most of the news have an interpretive bias, not because they conform to the demands of quality of the chronicle or the profile feature article or interview, but because a good part of the texts have the aspiration of analysing, contextualising, and explaining.

If we have put them in that category it is because at times this is how the project has been presented, with texts of service, and others because they are not news and reflect certain bias and approach,

aiming to help readers understand today's reality. So there it is clear that *El Español* has adopted journalism of service as a sort of brand. In fact, they offer explanations for this phenomenon or trend, the keys to understand the discourse of, for example, Hollande, to know how ISIS is financed, and to provide 15 moving messages delivered in Republic Square, or the layout of the thousand groups that will occupy the Congress.

In more than three thousand news items, the difference between opinion and informative texts does not seem significant, and in any case to the detriment of the latter, which is always more expensive than the former genre. It is easy to hire an expert to explain an issue, and it is more difficult to have experienced professionals capable of unveiling exclusive stories. It is here where some of the characteristics, qualities, and conditions of the new medium appear: a bet or a solution to the lack of media. As side note, few exclusive news stories were published in the first one hundred days of the newspaper.

The study focused more on identifying more the tendencies than the casuistry, more the intentions of stories than their adaptation to one or another gender. Thus, we considered as interpretative genres all the news that tried to explain or help to understand what is happening, and classified as informative genres the news that focus on the what and the who. Meanwhile, texts of persuasion and judgment were considered to belong to the opinion genres. For Azcuitia and Polo (2011), the opinion genre enjoys greater prestige than any other genre because it is a space in which scholars, professors and researchers discuss current issues, as we can see in *El País* and *El Mundo*, which are the second most important sections, although in *El Español* this genre is sent, with these changes, to the last position.

6.2. Themes

The offer of the first days has changed in the three months under analysis. Not in terms of the issues included in the agenda of the medium, but in terms of names, hierarchy and position in the page. From the point of view of design and structure, sometimes the order of appearance seems to aim to generate the feeling of abundance more than a sense of order according to a thematic agenda or a journalistic criterion.

The method of analysis consisted in classifying the news in the classic groups: political, international, economy, sports, social and cultural information. We considered, with some reservations, that this classification would give us a clearer picture of the preferred issues of the medium. We note that as the days passed some of the most daring nominations were developing a surname, with the apparent intention of making them more recognisable and measurable. Thus, for example, *Prodigios* became *Prodigios de la ciencia* ("Science prodigies"), and *Miradas* became *Miradas de la cultura* ("Cultural views"). *Ecoin* became *Economía*, while *Jaleos*, for celebrity gossip, and *Ocio*, are the sections whose names did not change.

6.3. Changing sections

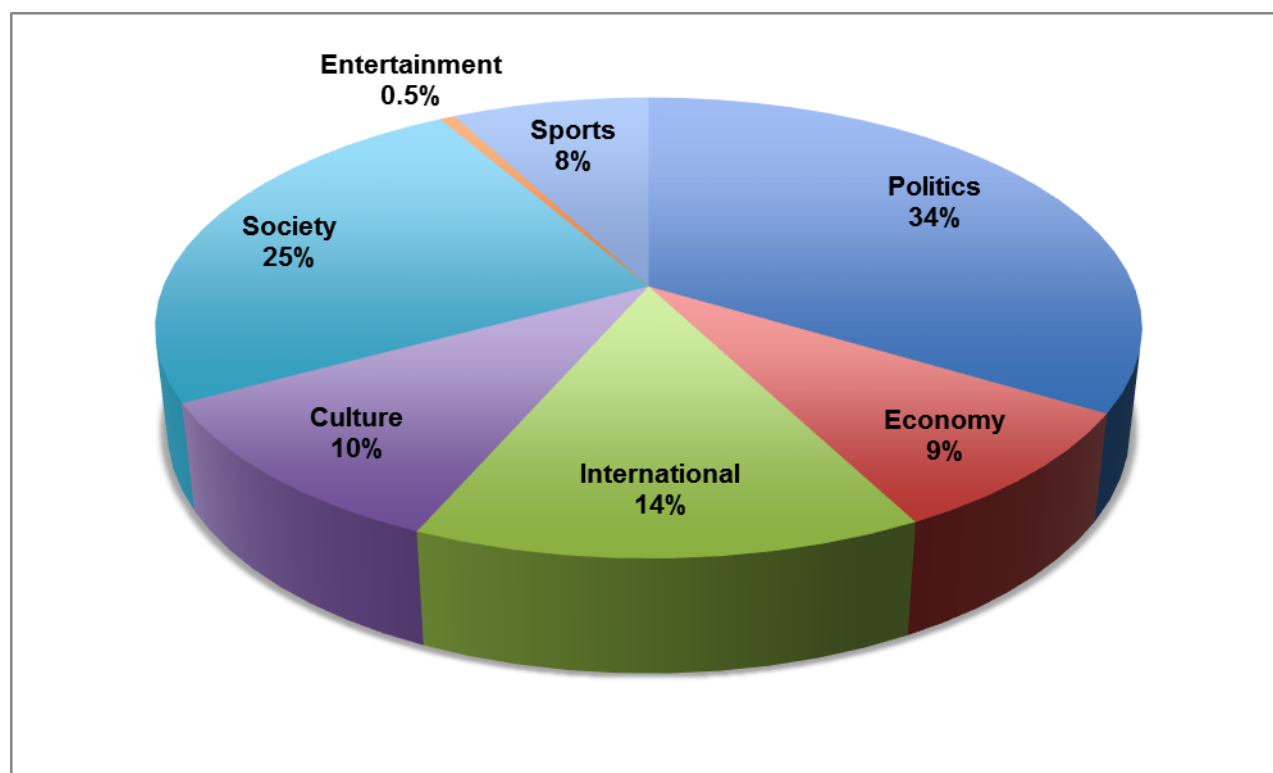
The sections have suffered transformations, based on the number of visits they attracted. *El Español* initially started with 7 sections: *Enfoques*, *Coliseo*, *Ecoin*, *Prodigios*, *Pódium*, *Miradas* and *Jaleos*,

in addition to the weekend section *S&D* (“Saturday & Sunday”). On 13 November, *Ecoín* disappeared and was replaced by *Economía*. On 22 November *Ocio* was added immediately after *Jaleos*. On 3 December, the *Elecciones generales* section is introduced and placed on the second position, after *Enfoques*. Then, on the following day, *Elecciones generales* is replaced by *Elecciones 2015*, *Enfoques* is replaced by *España*, and the *Mundo* section is added. It should be noted that *La Edición* section, which is represented with the logo of the lion and was not integrated into the sections menu, is incorporate with the rest of the sections. On 7 December, *Elecciones 2015* is transformed into just *Elecciones*.

After all these changes in the sections, by the time the analysis ended the number of sections stood at 12. It is funny how at the end of this journey in search of different sections there is return to the traditional ones, i.e. the ones that are more used, simple and understandable for readers: *España* (“Spain”), *Mundo* (“World”) and *Economía* (“Economy”), the three informative pillars of any digital or printed news outlet. Information-news, is therefore still the hard core, the backbone (Albornoz: 2006) of online news media, where information is constantly renewed.

In terms of the most common themes, politics occupies the first position, closely followed by the large umbrella term that is “society”. We must bear in mind that society involves, according to our analysis, from trends to science prodigies, accidents and legal issues. So that politics is the topic of the largest number of news, even if we do not take into account the cases of Puyol, Púnica and Noos, which have received much attention during the 3-month period of analysis.

Table 2. Themes



Source: Authors' own creation

We must also take into account that this period of analysis has coincided with the elections campaign, so that the news, statements and candidate profiles were recurring topics every day. So it is logical that politics, regardless of the mainstream character of the newspaper and therefore of its predominant coverage of political events, became the most common theme.

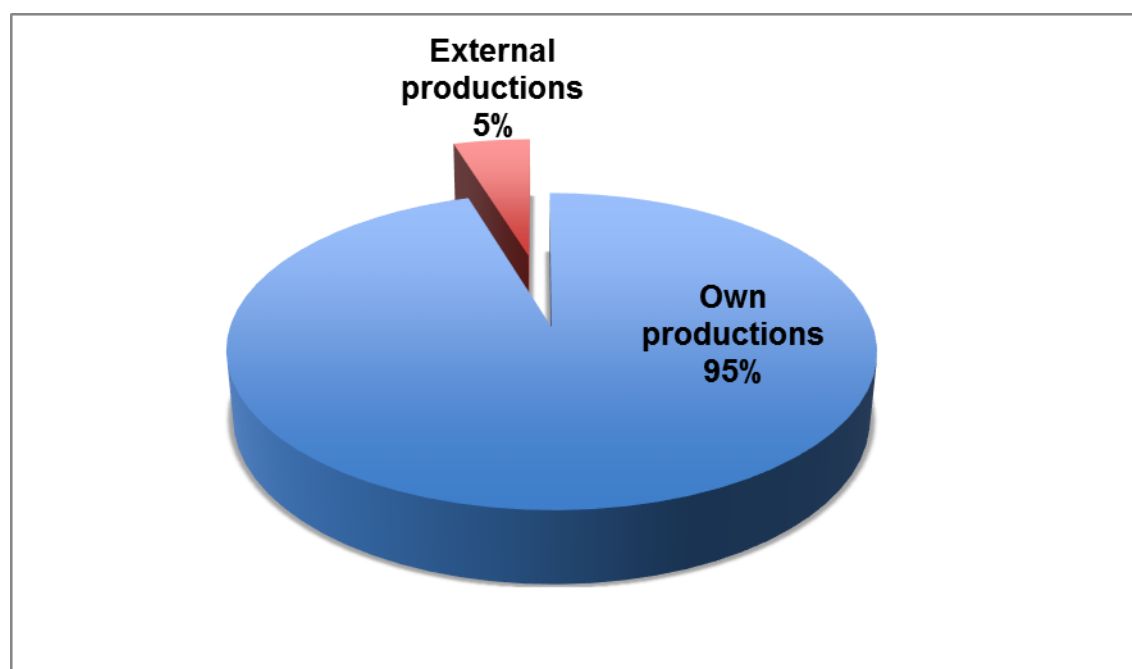
What is surprising is that in these months, and during this time in which the economy had so much presence, in *El Español* this section always appeared in at least the third place, behind culture and international news. It is true that in the case of the culture the percentages increase mostly around movie premieres, such as the latest instalment of Star Wars, which have increased the presence of news or interpretations around the project of George Lucas.

The international news section has significant presence, although the focus is on three preferred locations, which suggests that either the newspapers has an ideological preference or has a small budget to cover more countries. The European Union, Russia and Venezuela have been the protagonist scenarios during these One hundred days. The first seems to correspond to the logical sphere of influence, the second, perhaps.

6.4. Production

We considered it was important to identify the producer of the news to establish the degree of independence and capabilities of the new medium. The identification of whether the news had been produced by the team of *El Español* or by more or less regular contributors can reflect the present and future possibilities of the newspaper.

Table 3. News production



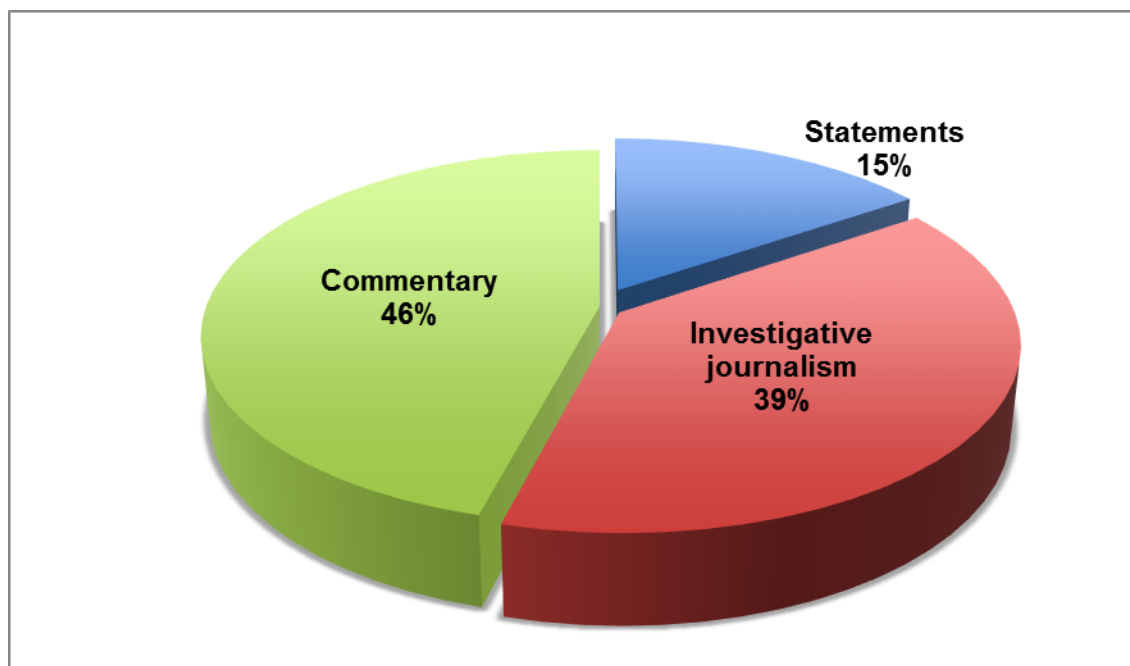
Source: Authors' own creation

We labelled as outsourced production those news stories that were not signed or clearly showed they came from an external source (a ministry, a press release or a news agency). The analysis showed that many of the news had a relatively short development; a textual description limited to contextualise the news event or just added some inquiry, but if they were signed by a journalist they were labelled as in-house production.

The results, perhaps with some nuances, clearly show a commitment to news produced by the reporters and writers of *El Español*. Only 5% of the news were outsourced. At a time of insecurity in the newspaper market, *El Español* has invested in professional (Pérez Bahón: 2015). It should be noted that *El Español* is the *pure player* with the largest number of employees in Spain.

In this analysis of the production of news, which is important to determine the capabilities and possibilities of survival of the medium, we introduced another measurement in order to adjust and enrich the understanding of this section. What do we mean when we speak of in-house news production? Commentary about news events, investigative articles developed by journalists from *El Español*, news based on statements by a public figure? Since the journalism produced in recent times in the Spanish press is based virtually on statements by politicians, we considered that it would be appropriate to apply this bias to our work. Thus, we concluded that research-based stories occupy the first place, with 46%, followed closely by comment-based texts, with 39%. In this section we included opinion articles, pieces by analysts, and editorials as well as texts that contextualise and provide no news. The purely declarative works represent 15%, which is significantly lower than the parameters observed in most print and audiovisual media.

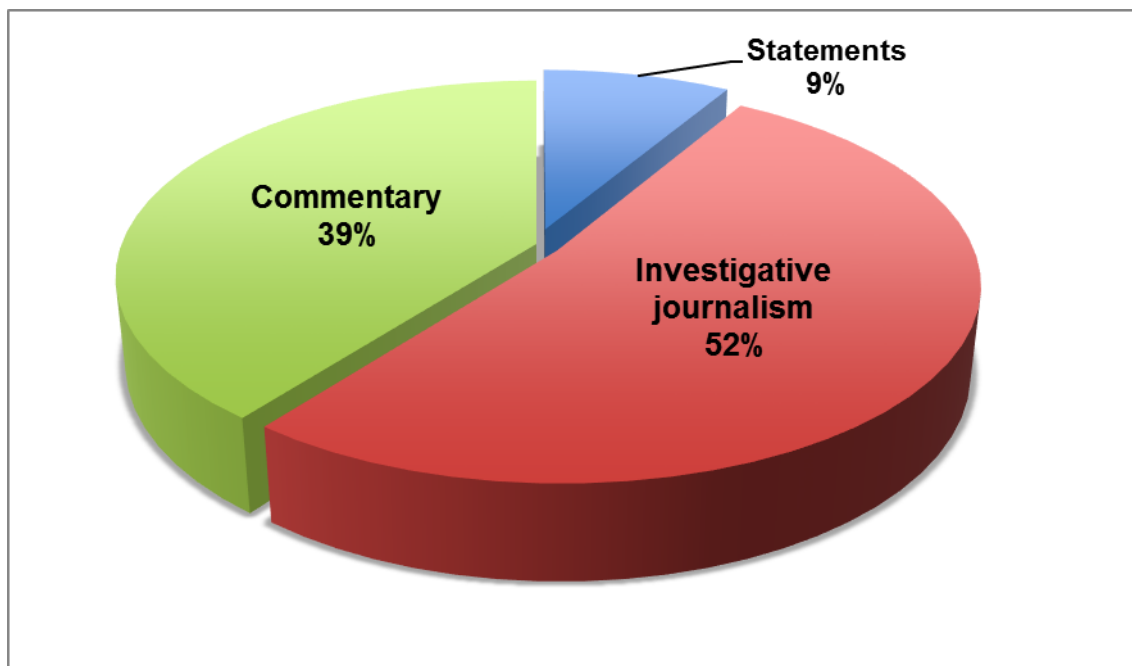
Table 4. In-house produced news



Source: Authors' own creation

In the case of externally-produced news, there are similar proportions: news based on statements constitute only 9%, news based on commentary 39%, and news based on research carried out by *El Español* 52%.

Table 5. Externally-produced news



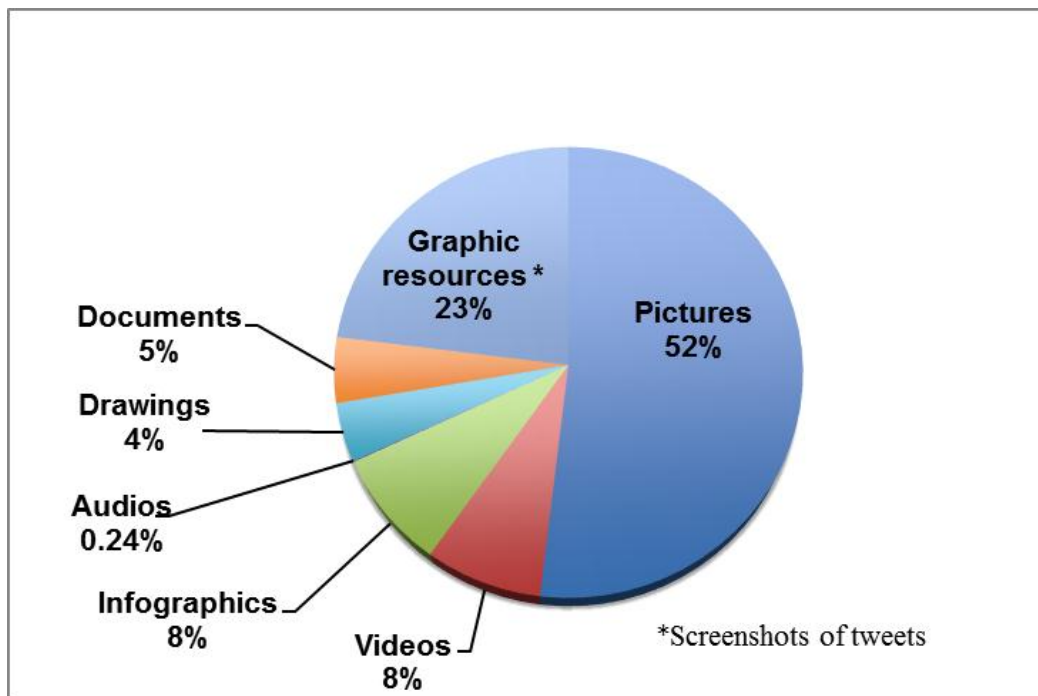
Source: Authors' own creation

6.5. Forms

As mentioned in the methods section, the analysis was divided in two large aspects: contents and forms. The latter includes everything implemented by the medium in the production of news, from photographs to documents, including illustrations, videos, audios and links.

One might think that the multimedia elements would be essential and abundant in a digital medium. However, the analysis indicates that this is not the case and that *El Español* has not been able to invest in lab resources or capabilities in this section. The analysis also suggests that the online news media are not interactive enough (Raimondo: 2012), and are missing out the possibilities offered by the Internet and its technological tools. Of the 9,474 audiovisual resources included in the news items collected for this study, 52% were pictures.

Table 6. Multimedia elements



Source: Authors' own creation

The second most-used elements were videos and infographics, both with 8%. This percentage is little significant if we take into account, on the one hand, the digital orientation of the newspaper and, on the other, the fact that most of these journalistic products are not interactive. This trend coincides with the results of the study of other general-interest media (Odrizola: 2012) where the percentage of pictures is also overwhelming.

Of these resources, only 5% are documents that illustrate the research and 4% are illustrations/drawings. Meanwhile, audio files only constitute 0.2% of all the multimedia elements. However, the existence of drawings is remarkable as it is an uncommon element in other media. *El Español* features daily at least two drawings, one for humorous purposes and another for the diary chronicles of the year 1936 written by Ángel Mañas. In addition, many of the opinion articles, especially the one written by the director and some famous analysts include an illustration.

6.6. Visits

According to information published in early February 2016 by *El Español*, its editor believes that the quality of readers is more important than their quantity: “It is obvious that we have positioned ourselves from the outset in the high end of the digital universe”. According to the newspaper’s

reports, the number of monthly visits in January increased 20.6% with respect to the previous month, going from 12,359,156, in December 2015, to 14,915,861 in January 2016.

The analysis highlighted another important issue: the difficulty to obtain reliable figures due to several factors: the difficulty to actually measure this variable and the intentionality of editors to publish data partially. ComScore and OJD Interactiva are the two most important companies in the measurement of unique visitors, visits and page views. OJD uses cookies that are activated when users visit a website. ComScore, in addition to cookies, uses a system based on panels that are actually surveys among users. In terms of metrics, one can say that OJD is more accurate in the measurement of page views and ComScore in the measurement of page views.

All involved players aim to find a way to control audiences and to establish a reliable system that is accepted by both publishers and advertisers (Caminos Marcel et al: 2006). The difficulty to measure audiences also involves the consumption of online newspapers and magazines via tablets and smartphones. The editors argue that users who consume these products on mobile devices should be counted as part of the audience of the publication. The benchmark of a printed, tangible and countable medium that supports the culture of ownership gives way to the culture of access (Díaz Noci: 2010) provided primarily by tablets and mobile phones, whose audience is more complex to measure.

On 1 February, the newspaper announced with fanfare the results provided by Google Analytics, which highlight the significant growth, of 33.9%, of unique monthly users in January with respect to December 2015, reaching 3,455,079 users who made 7,721,587 visits and viewed 14,915,861 pages. Time spent in the website exceeded six minutes per session. The number of monthly visits in January represented a growth of 20.6% with respect to the previous month, December, going from 12.359.156 to 14,915,861 page views.

In early April the newspaper also provided an audience report based on Google Analytics. In March the newspaper reached 4.2 million users with an increase of 14.66% with respect to February. According to Alexa, one of the most important web metrics companies, in 1 April, *El Español* occupied the 226th position in the ranking of most-viewed websites in Spain, and was still far behind *El País*, *Marca* and *El Mundo*, which occupy the 12, 13 and 14 positions, respectively. It is important to highlight the position of *Okdiario* in the Alexa ranking: 253rd despite it was launched with little media buzz and less investment few weeks before *El Español*. According to ComScore, in November 2015, the newspaper of Eduardo Inda reached 469,000 unique visitors vs. the 423,000 paying subscribers of *El Español*.

The growth of *El Español* is due in part to the informational impulse prompted by the development of the general elections on 20 December and the post-election period. During this time, graphics, acquire great importance especially in pre and post-election days, since the arithmetic of the Congress lent itself to many interpretations. Most of these graphics were static. *El Español* has been used very few interactive graphics, neglecting an important part of the functionality of online newspapers in both computers and mobile devices. It should be noted that in the days leading up to the launch of *El Español*, its blog was already investigating the Catalan elections with interactive graphics based on data journalism, offering very visual descriptions, but addressing more the sociological than the journalism aspect of the data. For Teruel and Blanco (2015), although graphics provide a differential value to the medium, they subtract journalistic analysis. In essence, this trend

has been maintained in other news stories based on big data, as it occurred during the pre and post-election period of 20 December.

In this regard, in late January, the direction of *El Español* asked ComScore to measure its consumption in computers and mobile devices, including smartphones. Two and a half months after its launch, the first month measured by ComScore, January, registered 3,037,000 million unique users. Comparing the audience at this time is extremely difficult and always inaccurate, because for the first months *El Español* only had data from Google Analytics. In addition, traffic was not measured during the first three days of January because the newspaper's technical team forgot to include the script tag [1] provided by the auditing company for the measurement. According to *El Español*, in early February, "some media, moved by malice or ignorance, published partial PC traffic data of *El Español*, collected by ComScore in December, and presented them as if these data corresponded to the total audience and were comparable to the total audience data of the rest of the media".

6.7. Social networks and interaction

The way to display contacts in Facebook and Twitter has also undergone changes. At the beginning each news story reflected the metrics pertaining to the activity of both networks. Measurements were performed the day after the news was published, noting the number of users who had participated from both networks. On 19 November, these data were no longer shown in *Facebook* and the same thing happened on *Twitter* five days later. In these 43 days, the activity in these networks exceeded 35,000 actions. Since then, users can interact in both networks but the metrics of their activity is not shown. The audience ceased to be passive since long time ago and is now co-creator of news (Pavlik: 2001), and uses social networks and their own means to disseminate the content they generate.

7. Conclusions

One hundred days are not enough to determine the development, and much less the future, of a journalistic medium that was born with the aim of staying. However, one hundred days are enough to establish what the medium is, what it has, what it provides and what it is missing. In other words, this period of study is enough to carry out an analysis of its innovations, achievements, strengths and mistakes.

The detailed, qualitative and quantitative, monitoring has not confirmed what its advertising says and its intentions. It is defined as a "Your digital, plural, free, indomitable newspaper" and in the words of its founder and editor, Pedro J. Ramírez, this news outlet is "a challenge to a press suffocated by economic problems and pressed by the abuse of power". Its founder has also used the following adjectives to describe *El Español* from the very beginning: "Universal, independent, combative, plural, innovative, balanced, intelligent and Twitter-enthusiast".

The main assertion is met on the first day. It is a digital news media outlet. To this one can add that it is structured in a simple way and provides several levels of reading, in addition to complying with the aspiration of all digital media: to be able to be consulted in all the existing technological platforms (tablet, computer, mobile phone, smart TV), which implies the adaptation of the journalistic content as well as the development of new uses and languages (García de Madariaga:

2007). Moreover, *El Español* includes in its news stories blocks that promote sponsored news, more information and related news, although sometimes these suggestions have seemingly nothing to do with the story they aim to complement.

Probably, the editor aimed to do a manageable online newspaper for regular consumers of the analogue press, because *El Español* offers a simple and very manageable and identifiable structure. Although it proposes various readings, as it should in order to exploit its multimedia and technological possibilities, the first observation indicates that there is an appropriate distribution that allows the identification of news by sections. The physical aspect of the page of the newspaper is the most analogue of the digital media: ordered, and with a headline and photo for each story.

Digital and innovative names were tested for its well-identified sections but after a few days there was a return to the traditional names. However, regardless of the name or surname of the sections, a quality of *El Español* is the clarity of its structure. The reader knows exactly where the different types of information are and how to go directly to their favourite sections. A sections menu identifies all of them: *España, Mundo, Economía, Prodigios, Pódium, Miradas, Jaleos, Ocio, Coliseo, el Blog* and *S&D*. The only thing that changes is their hierarchy, when one of the stories is considered worthy of being in the homepage, otherwise the news stories are where they belong with no surprises.

The whole newspaper smells of interpretative journalism rather than fact-based journalism. It is yet to be confirmed whether the newspaper has the latter inclination which is the natural tendency of a director of a printed newspaper. It is important to remember that one of its founders, Suárez, pointed out that data analysis and explanatory articles would be the foundations of the new medium. What has been proven is that there are many interpretative pieces and many examples of service journalism. That is an obvious achievement, technology and multimedia provide many possibilities to include tables, infographics and videos, to highlight elements, and therefore to offer really complete information.

However, while this is an advantage, the analysis highlights an inconvenience. An obvious achievement is to provide the service, but an equally important deficiency is to not respond to all the multimedia possibilities. In the first one hundred days of the newspaper almost 10,000 audiovisual resources were used and 52% of them were photographs. The rest were graphic resources, infographics, videos and audios. Of the audiovisual resources, videos only represent 8% and documents 5%. Finally, the documented testimonies or the evidence provided to back up the stories neither reflect richness or strength.

The use of many photos, few videos and fewer non-interactive graphics does not seem to respond to the digital and multimedia promise of the newspaper. Moreover, the graphic resources are neither abundant and their use only increases significantly in outsourced news stories, such as “25 bargains and 5 tips to take advantage of Black Friday”.

The newspaper uses few graphic resources, the stories seem to be based on comments and are short in length, which, together with the interpretative approach of each proposal, leaves the feeling of little effort, limited content, limited informative offer and a basic production. Infographics can and should reach their full expression when the online platform allows interactivity, even more so when there are plenty of tools (many of them free) to manage and visualise big data such as Google Fusion, Tables and Tableau.

As digital media researchers, this is one of the most disappointing parts of *El Español*, especially taking into account the investment made. We expected more, based on the predisposition continually manifested by its founders, on the announcement of the use of “latest generation” interactive elements, and on the magnitude of the human resources team with the capacity to deal with these activities. The production of graphics in their different levels of representation should culminate in non-linear interactivity, which is the essence of graphic representation, but this hardly occurs in *El Español*. The leading online news media outlets have teams dedicated to develop infographics and data visualisation. In this sense, there are few opportunities of interaction for users.

It can be argued that most of the infographics seem to be intended for publication in a print medium. Graphics that are hardly visible, that users (mainly digital natives) are determined to activate to make them larger, animated and interactive. The only way to visualise them is to zoom in, which is an archaic method. Graphics, in short, are (print) static and no (web) smart.

El Español has used very few interactive graphics, thus neglecting an important part of the functionality that allows online newspapers to be displayed on computers and mobile devices. The first interactive graphic appeared on 22 November 2015, 40 days after the launch of the newspaper, in the feature article about Airbnb in Spain.

When they demonstrate to be present everywhere, from the information point of view, nothing seems to be oblivious, either in particular news, opinion articles or short news, or *El Río*. However, at the same time there seems to be a lack of depth.

This apparent poor use of graphics, together with the repeated use of specific themes decreases the level of interest and any qualification. Already on the first Sunday of the analysis three news stories that had been published the previous day were repeated: the profile feature of Minister Margallo; a story of prostitution in the Marconi district; and the testimony of Claudia Medina, abused by the American Navy, “They tortured me”. Given that the sections are so well structured, each news story that is promoted repeatedly is not perceived as a library resource but as a *déjà vu*.

As mentioned, it is too common to find feature articles and news that appear repeated, occasionally even two times, in the same section with similar assessment on the next day. Moreover, some pieces, mostly opinion texts, appear both in *Coliseo* and in their corresponding sections. The feeling is one of duplication, not of clarity or contribution.

On the other hand, there is an excessive use of screenshots of Twitter comments, or Tweets, as graphics resources. For example, in mid-December, in the midst of the elections campaign and for several days, this information (“This is how we are narrating the campaign”) included access to more than 100 links, photos and videos from *Twitter*, represented with a screenshots. In this case, quantity does not mean quality or information. This is what social networks are for: their essence is the constant flow of information where users choose what news to follow-up. Online or print newspapers must have their own agenda that “helps” the reader to contextualise the news and understand the information. In *El Español*, sometimes, this does not occur.

Maybe three months is not long enough to carry out an in-depth analysis, but the study indicates that *El Español* arrived with force, provoked excitement, attracted a great deal of attention and left certain taste of disappointment. The personality of its editor attracted investment and partners and users. And that same temperament seemed to promise exclusive investigations that could be

problematic for some political or business groups. The crowdfunding campaign appeared to be a success and the journalistic team promised good journalism.

Good journalism has been offered, but not the exclusive news nor the multimedia possibilities; and some competing media with smaller budgets and preparation have occasionally obtained greater visibility. Indignation and enthusiasm is allegedly what encouraged some journalists to found the first born-digital newspaper in the new technological environment with adequate human resources to influence the development of the Spanish society. However, enthusiasm has been more noticeable than indignation.

It is too soon to notice the influence of *El Español* on today's Spain and to analyse its true dimension. Any new media continues to be a challenge for a press industry suffocated by economic problems and the lack of future.

8. Notes

The script tag is a code provided by the auditing company. It is inserted into the source code of the site to records data from desktop computers, tablets and smartphones.

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