

The Spanish press on TikTok: analysis of their publications

*La prensa española en TikTok:
análisis de sus publicaciones*

*A imprensa espanhola no TikTok: análise
das suas publicações*

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This research analyzes the adequacy of the informative content that the Spanish press is applying in TikTok. With this objective, this research is approached from a mixed approach. On the one hand, a content analysis has been carried out on 266 videos published by eight newspapers: four traditional newspapers (*El País*, *La Vanguardia*, *ABC* and *El Mundo*) and four digital native newspapers (*20 Minutos*, *El Español*, *elDiario.es* and *El Huffpost*). These findings reached through a quantitative analysis will be complemented with semi-structured interviews with the managers of the analyzed media.

KEYWORDS: Content analysis, Tiktok, journalism, social media, video, news.

Esta investigación analiza la adecuación del contenido informativo que la prensa española está aplicando en TikTok. Con este objetivo, se aborda esta investigación desde un enfoque mixto. Por un lado, se ha llevado a cabo un análisis de contenido sobre 266 videos publicados por ocho diarios: cuatro periódicos tradicionales (El País, La Vanguardia, ABC y El Mundo) y cuatro diarios nativos digitales (20 Minutos, El Español, elDiario.es y El Huffpost). Estos hallazgos alcanzados mediante un análisis cuantitativo se complementarán con entrevistas semiestructuradas a los responsables de los medios analizados.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Análisis de contenido, Tiktok, periodismo, redes sociales, videos, noticias.

Esta pesquisa analisa a adequação do conteúdo informativo que a imprensa espanhola está aplicando no TikTok. Com esse objetivo em mente, esta pesquisa é abordada a partir de uma perspectiva mista. Por um lado, foi realizada uma análise de conteúdo de 266 videos publicados por oito jornais: quatro jornais tradicionais (El País, La Vanguardia, ABC e El Mundo) e quatro jornais nativos digitais (20 Minutos, El Español, elDiario.es e El Huffpost). Essas descobertas obtidas por meio de uma análise quantitativa serão complementadas com entrevistas semiestructuradas com os gerentes da mídia analisada.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Análise de conteúdo, Tiktok, jornalismo, redes sociais, videos, notícias.

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INTRODUCTION

It has been more than fifteen years since the media started using digital social networks as loudspeakers for their content, but also as newsrooms (Swasy, 2016). Thus began a profound reflection that was based on two axes, which are still valid: 1) the use and optimization that media can make of social networks (Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Bell et al., 2017); and 2) the way in which information should be provided in each social network, i.e., its adaptation to the medium. A focus that has generated new narrative formats for telling the news (Bernal, 2009; Mellado & Hermida, 2021) and that have been effective in connecting with a younger audience (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019).

Following the taxonomy thought up by the Pew Research Center (2021), Generation Z, are those born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019) and comprise an age group ranging from 10 to 25 years old. This collective is the most heavily weighted in TikTok (Li et al., 2019; Pellicer, 2019; Rapkin, 2017; Schmidt, 2019). A generation that finds in the smartphone its reference device (Cerezo, 2016), and where many of its users have only known broadband wireless transmission (Baysal, 2014; Seymour, 2019; Turner, 2015). Hence, they are also known as “mobile natives” for their penchant for wireless technology (Vilanova & Ortega, 2017) or generation “tethered” to the terminal. While they form the largest user group in TikTok, other groups such as Generation Y or millennials (1981 to 1996), are beginning to emerge in this digital social network (Ng & Indran, 2022).

If the audience is therefore increasingly heterogeneous, so is the type of information circulating on the platform (Garcia et al., 2022; Miao et al., 2021; Zhu, 2020), as well as the companies that settle on it (IAB, 2021; TikTok Team, 2022). In this context, news consumption on digital social networks has been experiencing progressive growth year after year, as shown by the *Pew Research Center* (Forman-Katz & Matsa, 2022) and *Digital News Report* (Reuters Institute, 2022). This habit is, therefore, increasingly widespread among all population groups, and marks a profound change in the way news is consumed (Hermida, 2016; Pavlik, 2019; Zelizer, 2019).

In addition, it should be noted that the use of mobile terminals for this purpose continues to grow, mainly due to technological innovations that have endowed cell phones with sophisticated hardware and software that facilitate the consumption and production of content (Struckmann & Karnowski, 2016). It is also worth noting the new strategies and investments that digital social networks have implemented to attract more audiovisual informative content, which have been studied and assessed in other works (Burgess & Green, 2018; Díaz-Lucena & Mora de la Torre, 2022; Hallgren & Nylund, 2018; Kalogeropoulos, 2017).

The publication in digital social networks of news videos created by the media began to be frequent from 2007 and, since then, this practice has been increasing (Ekström & Westlund, 2019) until reaching the present where there is beginning to be a significant preference of the younger audience for the viewing of news (Blanco & Palomo, 2021; Galán et al., 2019). This is an scenario that many media, especially print, interpreted and invested in expanding their audiovisual content creation teams, in order to: 1) give value to their brand with their positioning in social networks; 2) include advertising in their content and try to monetize it by adding visits; and 3) connect with the younger generations. Thus, some international newspapers have exploited the audiovisual content platform YouTube with regular publications that have reached millions of views, as has been the case of the newspapers: *Bild*, *The Guardian*, *Le Parisien* or *The Washington Post*. In Spain, too, *El País* and *El Mundo*, have revealed that today they maintain teams of 14 and 12 people just for the creation of audiovisual content.

Unlike YouTube, TikTok initially opted for shorter content (15 seconds), although, gradually, they have been opening the door to longer and longer videos, going from 60 to 180 seconds (July 2021), up to the current 10 minutes (Alley & Hanshew, 2022; Drapkin, 2022). While from TikTok they have argued that with this opportunity they expect an increase in user creativity, they also threaten a little more with this initiative the YouTube terrain (Malik, 2022), because new users will come to the platform, in the same way that it will enable the publication of more diverse content. These business strategies in TikTok highlight two main ideas: 1) its ability to adapt to market demand that has led

to its rapid growth since the consolidation of Douyin (TikTok) with the union in 2018 of ByteDance and Musical.ly, but also, 2) its global aspiration to be something more than a social network as will be seen in this research.

Thus, many media have not hesitated to adapt to the new logic proposed by TikTok where entertainment (Anderson, 2020) and simple to consume information (Ballesteros-Herencia, 2020) connects with a younger audience, because they have understood that they use social networks to inform themselves more and more (Galán et al., 2019). That figure increases annually, especially in TikTok (Liedke & Matsa, 2022). For this reason, the movement to this social network highlights a shift, which, despite the technical novelties involved in its narrative, is no longer so costly for the media, as they have been testing and adapting to most of the major social networks (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram) with greater or lesser success.

The use of audiovisual pieces by digital media has increased more than significantly (Masip et al., 2012) and more specifically in the press (Díaz-Lucena et al., 2022). With the aim of analyzing this trend and being able to elucidate its degree of implementation in the media, this field has been approached from a fourfold perspective: content analysis; production and the use of technology; from the study of the reception of the message in which the classical studies of narratology have been applied together with the implementation of the peculiarities of these pieces in the online context (Bock, 2012); and, finally, the study of audiovisual pieces created by cybermedia and related to the traditional way of making television information (Mayoral & Edo, 2015). These are a little-used perspective in which the present work is framed.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research is to analyze the type of discourse that the Spanish press is making on TikTok. Other specific objectives are: 1) to analyze the content of their publications formally; 2) to find out if their publication strategy in TikTok has been maintained or has changed during the study period; and 3) to understand the importance that the creation and distribution of audiovisual content has for their business model.

These specific objectives lead to some research questions that will guide towards the established working hypotheses: Why have the analyzed media decided to publish news pieces on TikTok? What kind of formal elements are used in the creation of their content? Do all the headers use the same strategy when creating their videos? Do they all follow the same style?

The increase in news videos created by the press and published on social networks is remarkable. TikTok, due to its constituent characteristics and the improvements that the Chinese company is implementing, has become a necessary feature with which to connect with other generations, in addition to sowing on the horizon a possible business outlet for its business. The press has not wanted to wait any longer and has started to adapt its contents to the new TikTok narrative. Based on this, the following working hypothesis is formulated:

- H1. The press is focusing on TikTok because it has accepted the challenge of mastering the new narrative of this network, which combines rhythm and synthesis taken to the extreme. A kind of micro journalism that seeks to: a) Connect with the generations furthest from its power of influence; b) position the brand in a new digital social network.

METHODOLOGY

The present research has been approached from a mixed perspective with the aim of being able to refute or confirm the hypothesis put forward. For this purpose, the content analysis of the messages disseminated by the analyzed press (Berelson, 1951; Boftsi, 2020) has been used, complemented by the application of an inductive method typical of the qualitative approach, such as the semi-structured interview.

The selection of the newspapers that make up the sample of this study has been carried out following three variables; a) general information newspapers; b) those newspapers that have activity in social networks (periodicals); and c) an active audience that interacts with the content generated. Thus, the selected newspapers are *El País*, *La Vanguardia*, *ABC*, *El Mundo*, *20 Minutos*, *El Español*, *elDiario.es* and *El Huffpost*.

The content analysis of the newspaper publications in TikTok was carried out on a sample of 266 publications corresponding to the month of October 2022, with the purpose of formulating reproducible and valid inferences. Thus, homogeneous coding units have been selected to cover all the publication content and are listed in Table 1. They refer to the type of the production of information, area and subject matter, specific formal elements of the news pieces such as the use and type of images, video effects, texts, sound resources and the presence of the journalist. Ultimately, aspects such as the length of the video and the use of subtitles have been taken into account in this analysis.

TABLE 1
CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS OF THE PHASES THAT MAKE UP THE PRODUCTION
OF AN INFORMATIVE PIECE ACCORDING TO THE MOCIAE MODEL

Production stage	Structure and editing stage	Diffusion stage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of production • Scope of coverage • Subjects/Themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of resource images: Type • Video effects • Texts or infographics • Presence of the journalist • Role and use of sound resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration of the pieces • Subtitling

Source: Own elaboration.

Audiovisual news pieces are made up of a series of elements that structure and shape the information to be presented to the public. These elements include formal aspects, such as the use of language or narrative structure, but also non-verbal aspects such as image and sound resources –categories that have been analyzed in other research works on television information by other authors (Agirreazaldegui, 2018; Marín, 2017; Serra, 1996).

Thus, Table 1 lists the main items that make up the present content analysis that follows the efficient audiovisual informative construction model MOCIAE (Morales, 2011; Pérez-Seijo et al., 2018). In this way, the analysis has been divided into the three stages that make up the process: production stage, structure and editing, and dissemination (Paz-Enrique et al., 2020). Once the content analysis was completed, the data obtained was passed to the SPSS statistical program to find the frequencies and percentages that will be presented in this study.

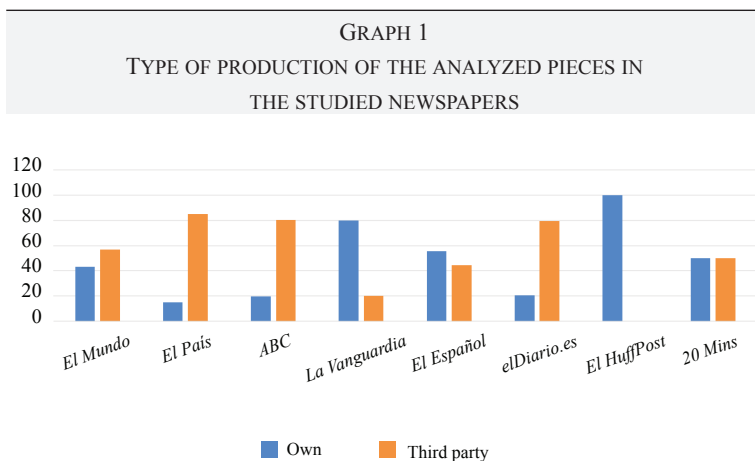
The second phase of the research is approached from a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with newspaper communication managers conducted between July and December 2022. The feedback received on this social network and the work they are doing in it, has served to validate ideas that have been emerging in the analysis. We have tried to interview all the selected media, giving all kinds of options, but not all of them have agreed to do so. Some interviews were conducted by telephone and others by email between August and October 2022. Those quoted here have given their consent to appear in this research. Those who have contributed their views to this research are listed here.

1. Guacimara Castrillo (Head of Social Media at *El Mundo*).
2. Pau Rodríguez (CMO of *La Vanguardia*).
3. Mario Díaz (Deputy Director of *El Español*).
4. Daniel Ventura (Director of *El HuffPost*).
5. Carlos Serrano (Social Media Manager of *20 Minutos*).

RESULTS

In this content analysis, a total of 266 TikTok posts published by the press selected in this research during the month of October 2022 were studied. For this purpose, the model of Efficient Audiovisual Informative Construction MOCIAE (Morales, 2011; Pérez-Seijo et al., 2018) has been followed, which allows analyzing the informative routine typical of the journalistic production process and how the main formal elements that constitute a piece are used. This process has been divided into three phases: 1) production; 2) structure and editing; and 3) dissemination (Paz-Enrique et al., 2020).

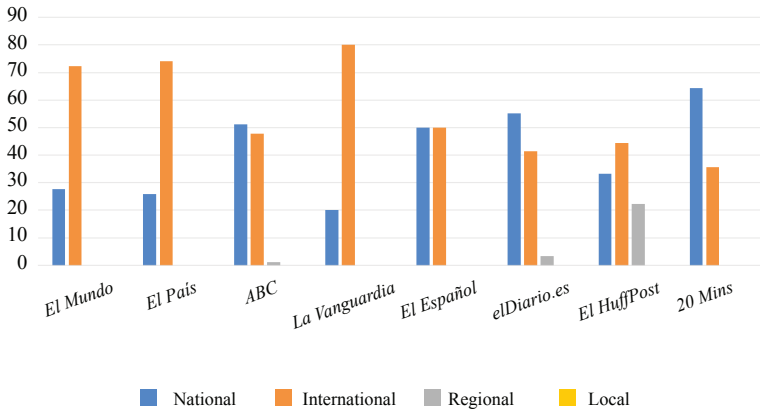
The first of the MOCIAE phases corresponds to production and, therefore, refers to the decision-making process regarding the journalistic criteria that dictate the elaboration of news pieces. In this case, the type of production, the scope or section of action and the topic covered were analyzed. The data obtained show that the vast majority of the newspapers opt for the dissemination of third-party or agency-produced coverage, as shown in Graph 1, except in the case of *El HuffPost*, which relies entirely on its own content, followed by *La Vanguardia* (80%) and *El Español* (55.6%).



Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of coverage, shown in Graphic 2, the publications analyzed have revealed an interest in international coverage, as shown by the data from *La Vanguardia* (80%), *El País* (74.1%) and *El Mundo* (72.4%), while others, such as *20 Minutos* (64.3%), *elDiario.es* (55.2%) and *ABC* (51.1%), focus more on national content. With regard to the treatment of the regional situation, the three newspapers that focus most on it are *El HuffPost* (22.2%), *elDiario.es* (3.4%) and *ABC* (1.1%).

GRAPHIC 2
SCOPE OF THE COVERAGE ANALYZED



Source: Own elaboration.

With regard to the topics most covered, it is worth noting the number of news videos that touch on politics in *El Huffpost* (100%) or *elDiario.es* (69%). The rest is evenly distributed among society, leisure and culture, politics and sports, mostly. Likewise, content such as the war in Ukraine, science, health and education are marginally covered. In this sense, *El Mundo*, Guacimara Castrillo, points out that they understand “videos for TikTok as infotainment”, although events such as the war in Ukraine or the crisis in Afghanistan, “have shown them that less playful things can be done”, which differs from most of the content circulating on TikTok.

The second phase focuses on the design of the news piece, which has been structured according to its informative value. Within the elements associated with the video image, the use of resource images and their nature has been studied, as well as the use of video effects, textual elements and labeling (baptisms, spatial, temporal or headline skirts), which are used for the syntactic articulation of the images. Most of the pieces published by the press in TikTok (95.3%) use images that act as resources for their syntactic construction. The remaining 4.7%

refer to false directs in which the journalist carries out his coverage from the scene of the events, without the use of this type of resources.

As for the nature of the supporting images used, the primacy of video over photography stands out, except in the case of *El Huffpost*, in which all of its pieces use still images. Pau Rodríguez, in *La Vanguardia*, prioritizes the importance of TikTok's new narrative, because it is the basis of its success. In TikTok, synthesis is rewarded: "Explaining things in a simple way has its rewards". He argues that it is difficult to learn how to say something important in a few seconds and be understood. Therefore, synthesis, simplicity, in its maximum expression, because that is where the dynamism that can be impressed on its content, comes from: "it is the most intense fast consumption platform that exists".

In the insertion of lettering, the headline skirts, baptisms or names of the characters, temporal and spatial locators stand out. Their presence in all the analyzed pieces shows a double functionality: they are the main thread of the piece itself or support it, that is to say, they provide an aid that facilitates its follow-up.

The physical presence or absence of the journalist in the video is a variable to be analyzed, as there are many divergences in their use. At the top of the list is *El HuffPost* with 100% of pieces, usually as false direct, and at the other extreme, there are headers where it is more difficult to find the inclusion of journalists: *El País* (11.1%) and *elDiario.es* (17.5%). This strategy can be linked to the results obtained from the analysis of the type of production seen above, insofar as it allows us to establish a correlation between the newspapers that use information from other sources and the scarce presence of journalists in the headlines. Thus, the greater the own production, the greater the direct intervention of the information professional in it.

Ultimately, the use of visual effects in the construction of the pieces was taken into account. Thus, newspapers such as *La Vanguardia* (80%), *20 Minutos* (67.9%), *El País* (66.7%) or *El Mundo* (51.7%) are not shown to be in favor of this resource. On the contrary, *El HuffPost* uses them in all its pieces, especially the chroma key (100%). Other newspapers opt for more conservative news editing resources such as transitions –dip to color or dissolve– between shots for syntactic construction.

In addition, it has been observed how headers such as *ABC* or *eDiario.es* resort to split screens and/or blurs in order to adapt the piece to the vertical transmission support of the social network TikTok. Mario Vidal, head of innovation at *El Español*, says that his impressions are very positive in terms of the possibility of viralization of the content, as they have managed in TikTok: “to have the most viewed videos in the history of the newspaper. Some of them exceed one million reproductions”.

With regard to sound resources, in general, the use of ambient sound in the images used as a resource is scarce. In most cases it is replaced by music.

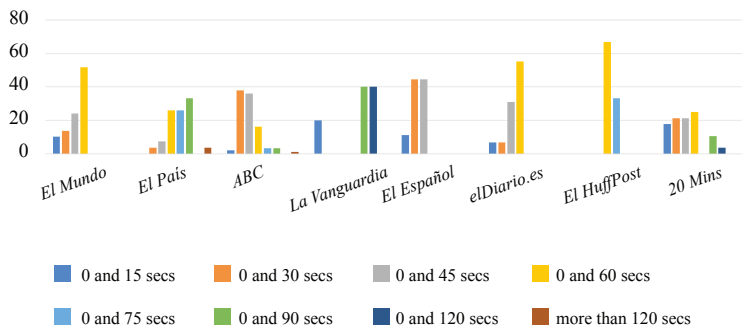
In the diffusion phase, two transcendental values have been studied for the information they provide: the duration of the pieces and the use of subtitles. The study of the duration, shown in Graph 3, shows that newspapers opt for videos shorter than 90 seconds, with the exception of *La Vanguardia*. However, there is not much consensus, as there are cases, such as *20 Minutos*, which plays with all the duration sections with a great balance between them. In other cases, such as *El País* or *El HuffPost*, long pieces between 45 and 90 seconds abound. All in all, the average length found, calculated taking into account all the publications of the eight newspapers in twelve months of this study, is 45 seconds. It is worth noting the average increase in duration in the month studied in most of the newspapers.

Finally, the uneven presence of subtitling in the publications is noteworthy. Newspapers such as *El HuffPost*, *ABC*, *El Español* or *La Vanguardia* do not use this resource (Graph 4). However, it is deeply rooted in *Diario.es* or *El País*.

All the media interviewed confirmed their interest in this new social network. Likewise, they have expressed the difficulty they are having in familiarizing themselves with this new narrative where the synthesis and speed of the content is a priority. For this reason, Guacimara Castrillo of *El Mundo* and Daniel Ventura of *El HuffPost* emphasize the experimental phase they are in. They believe that there will be a long way to go on the platform, but for now it is a matter of getting to know and learning the environment and the audience. At *ABC*, from being a newspaper that has focused almost exclusively on Facebook and Twitter, in 2022 they launched their project on TikTok,

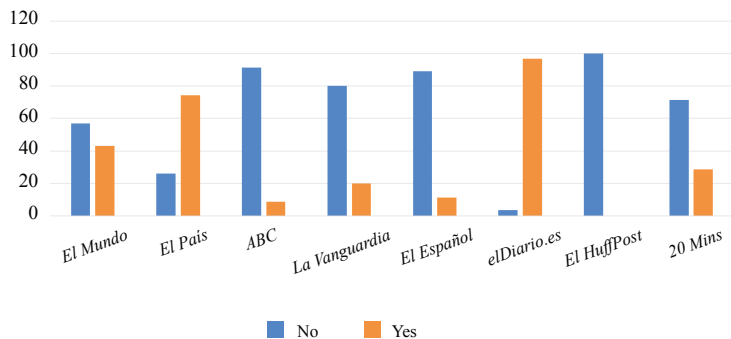
and in 2023, on YouTube. This move, which comes later than the rest of the media, especially on YouTube, stands out for its investment in the creation of audiovisual pieces to narrate its news and in the search for new audiences. Mario Vidal, from *El Español*, emphasizes the virality

GRAPH 3
TYPES OF DURATIONS OF THE ANALYZED PIECES



Source: Own elaboration.

GRAPH 4
USE OF SUBTITLES IN THE PIECES ANALYZED



Source: Own elaboration.

of TikTok, confirming that they have never had as many views of their content on another social network as on this one: “Some of them exceed one million reproductions. The previous most viewed video in our history is six years old and had around 400 000 views”.

The penetration and reach of the content, as well as the audience growth, that TikTok is offering today to these media is unmatched by other social networks, as is the growth TikTok is experiencing, which is surprising everyone, even competitors. Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, has recognized the rapid and extraordinary growth of TikTok in such a short time and the threat it poses (Ghaffary, 2022). However, TikTok’s strategy is ambitious and many, such as Carlos Serrano, Social Media Manager of *20 Minutos*, believes that: “TikTok is blatantly focusing on becoming a search engine”, and “it will work as a search engine, just as its algorithm has been successful and has changed the rules of the game”. Thus, it is clear to all the media that they have to be on TikTok and they have to learn to express themselves with these logics, because in the future it could become the most important platform for publishing audiovisual news.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TikTok uses vertical video as the main vehicle to establish communication on very diverse topics in a dynamic, fast and agile way between individuals (Wang, 2020). The main value of this application has been to manage to match the content to the user’s specific interests through the use of a proprietary algorithm (Olivares-García & Mendéz, 2020) by making available to the creators a series of very intuitive creative tools (Ankuash-Kaekat et al., 2021).

Like many other companies, the media have seen the need to adapt their content to social networks and, of course, to TikTok. This avenue of expansion has made it possible to work on more informative content produced by traditional media such as television (Chobanyan & Nikolskaya, 2021) or the press itself (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020). Information can go viral through the use of video formats acquiring multiple forms (Klug & Autenrieth, 2022). They all use their own elements and adapt them to the network, for example, the use of texts

and their different modalities within audiovisual television pieces created for TikTok (Salb, 2021).

Since its inception, the application created by Zhang Yiming has been incorporating improvements in terms of the length of the videos (Shuai et al., 2019), a proposal little used by content creators (Anderson, 2020) and, in the case of the analyzed newspapers, it has been possible to verify a clear commitment to short, dynamic and fast pieces, which allow the capturing of the user's attention as quickly as possible and thus avoid the slide. Within this adaptation of content to the target audience of the application (Patel & Binjola, 2020), the analysis of content used in the publications of the selected newspapers has confirmed that the Spanish press has adapted to the TikTok narrative in search of dynamism and agility –the main feature of this social network–. Within this adaptation of the contents, it is worth highlighting the use of a series of formal resources that contribute to speed up the consumption of information, such as music, subtitling of the pieces, the use of supporting texts or their functioning as a thread.

The latter, the supporting text, becomes a transcendental resource used to hook the audience. In the publications of these media, particularly noteworthy are the compositions with headline skirts where the theme of the main piece is included, which is usually added at the beginning. In this way, its use seems to have two clear intentions: to support the images shown, and to serve as a narrative thread of the piece itself. Even though its widespread use demonstrates its effectiveness as an informative element within the audiovisual pieces produced for TikTok, it also helps the user to understand the content without the need to listen to it. It reflects an efficient use of classical resources adapted to the specific form of TikTok, guiding a new approach to journalism closer to the new generations (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022).

Music acquires prominence in the construction of the pieces if compared to the use of other sound resources such as the journalist's voiceover or ambient sound. Likewise, the choice of graphic elements to visually support the audiovisual content, such as emojis that highlight emotions on the accompanying skirts, favor the creation of a piece with multiple focuses of attention and, therefore, reinforce the objective of increasing the rhythm of the piece. As we have been able

to appreciate in the analysis, the whole narrative of TikTok revolves around the construction and stimulation of an agile rhythm that rewards the synthesis and simplicity of the content. This is something similar to micro journalism that is beginning to be increasingly visible, in the form of nanonews (Scolari, 2020), and which has taken root in TikTok.

Finally, other resources used in the editing of the pieces that make up the sample of this study have been analyzed, such as the use of video effects, transitions or bumpers. In this sense, it has been observed how all the analyzed newspapers reframe the images to adapt them to the vertical format of the application and, in addition, use a blur effect on the background image to occupy the frame. This technique is very common in television news programs, which, in these cases, use it in order to adapt the images to the normative format to be launched by this medium.

In conclusion, the press uses the formal resources that TikTok offers to make its message more attractive and reach the greatest number of impacts. There is a lack of an informative strategy of its own to work the contents in this network. However, their actions suggest that this could change in the short and medium term, since the investment involved in creating new audiovisual content is growing annually. Thus, it can be deduced that the analyzed newspapers, with their actions, want to be prepared for the time when this social network will be truly decisive as a news medium. While at first TikTok was associated with generation Z, little by little, millennials as the third largest group after the alpha generation and followed by other more mature groups, are beginning to be visible, and with them, the diversity of content on this social network. There is no doubt that this is of interest to the press and, of course, to many other media, institutions and companies.

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