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HOW TO CREATE VIDEO NEWS THAT ROCKS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

**An analysis of how eight British and Spanish newsrooms
tackle video production for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
and YouTube – and what kind of videos have made them
successful**

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Hilary and Trinity Terms
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Dudes, where are we...? The rise of platforms as publishers

It is said that a research problem must be a beacon that draws attention to a focus of tension. And in the news industry, tension is now focused on the digital distribution landscape, especially in the case of video news.

For the last two years, we have experienced what is been called the *media's shift to platforms*, or the *battle of platforms against publishers*, depending on the degree of optimism expressed. This phenomenon reflects the growing presence and influence of platforms like *Facebook*, *YouTube* or *Instagram* in the chain of news consumption. Their success in attracting audiences is leading outlets to use them as news distributors, with a *content everywhere* approach that disseminates their media production far beyond their own websites and apps (and of course, beyond television channels, radio stations or print media). Shyly or with excitement, outlets have left the comfort zone of their own *territories* to delegate part of their distribution to the hands of a third party.

Reasons for this shift of business strategy include a mix of changes in audiences' news consumption habits, technological innovations, and a strong investment and determination on the side of those new platforms to become non-negotiable actors in the new era of content distribution.

1.2. Social media platforms want to be your next TV

In the specific case of online video, according to a recent report from the Reuters Institute entitled *The Future of Television News*, traditional broadcast viewing has recently declined by 3 to 4% per year on average in countries like the United Kingdom or the United States. *"These declines are directly comparable to the declines in print newspaper circulation in the 2000s and if compounded over ten years will result in an overall decline in viewing of 25 to 50%"* (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016).

At the same time, we have been seeing a steady though slow growth of online video viewing, powered by better bandwidth, bigger screens, lower data costs, and the increasing options of video-sharing sites, video-on-demand services, and the integration of video into social media platforms. Data shows that online video news consumption has increased particularly since 2014 in United Kingdom (from 16% to 22%) and Spain (from 17% to 27%). In Spain, moreover, the consumption of online news video on social media platforms has surpassed the consumption of video on the media's own websites (Kalogeropoulos, Cherubini & Newman, 2016).

This rise of video consumption on social media platforms has been strongly induced by the platforms themselves. In the last three years, Twitter has integrated Periscope live streams in tweets, Snapchat has unfolded its 24-hour Live Stories, Instagram has introduced live streaming and video, YouTube has designed new services such as YouTube Red and YouTube TV, and Facebook has released live streams, creation of video playlists, cross-posting features and its own TV app for video consumption. All the major platforms have turned their attention towards video and are heavily

investing in offering a richer, wider, catchier video consumption experience – modifying their algorithms accordingly, of course, to float this tsunami of video content into everybody’s feed.

Facebook’s relentless focus on video has been of critical importance. The arrival of Facebook autoplay videos in 2014 marked a huge change in video consumption; in December of that year, Facebook surpassed YouTube for the first time in video uploads to their platform (Marshall, 2014). Moreover, the fact that videos were played muted by default made producers stop publishing television-style cuts and start thinking in a specific, native format that fitted into the new user’s experience. When Facebook Live was released, in April 2016, the company signed nearly 140 contracts with video creators and publishers to produce content, including CNN, The Guardian, Sky News and The New York Times, among others (Perlberg & Seetharaman, 2016). By 2016, Facebook’s video consumption had increased by 75%, reaching 8 billion daily video views (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016).

Emily Bell summed up the feelings of many when she wrote a piece entitled “*Facebook is eating the world*” (Bell, 2016). Or at least, it is eating the media world as we know it.

1.3. Publishers take positions (but are you sure we have to do a video?)

For most media outlets, these astronomical figures are at the same time scary and a siren song that is hard to resist. According to data from the latest *Journalism, Media and Technology Predictions*, among the 143 editors, CEOs and digital leaders who were interviewed, 46% said they were more worried about platforms than in the previous year (with only 9% saying they were less worried), and 73% of them said that their “overall digital strategies for 2017 aimed to strike an equal balance between their own websites/properties and distributing content via third parties”. When asked about their video initiatives for 2017, 89% of interviewees were considering the production of short social videos, and 80% were considering live streaming on social platforms (Newman, 2017).

And yet, when it comes to news, audiences seem reluctant to blindly follow this video explosion. According to recent data from the Digital News Report 2017 (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Kleis Nielsen, 2017), “across all markets, over two-thirds (71%) still prefer text over video for news consumption in a digital environment.” That percentage has, however, been decreasing slightly since 2014. The data seems to show a distant promise that has not yet been fulfilled. As Kalogeropoulos points out, “online video news provides a powerful and popular way of covering compelling stories, but not all everyday news coverage is equally compelling” (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016).

Newsrooms that dare to ride this wave and look for a successful formula are therefore facing a series of challenges: first, they must reorganize their production teams and routines; second, they must rethink their distribution strategy in terms of social media logic; and third, they must create new video storytelling approaches and formats that fit audience appetites on those platforms. Nielsen and Sambrook state this clearly: “Television news as we know it, from evening bulletins to 24-hour news channels, increasingly serves the past, not the future, and television news producers have to experiment with new

formats and forms of distribution if they wish to remain relevant” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016).

In this scenario, a study that helps identify the characteristics of successful video news pieces for each platform may be useful for media companies in their current challenging position, helping them to drop irrelevant production practices, focus efforts, and thus reach audiences with a natural, relevant user experience. This study will try to shed some light on how different types of media outlets are facing the production of video news for social media platforms; explore their objectives, visions and techniques; and analyse what kind of video news works better in terms of topics and formal features for every platform.

2. METHODS

2.1. Aim of study: social video

For the purposes of this research, social video news is considered to be any video that (a) aims to communicate a news event, and (b) is played directly on the proprietary player of the social media platform. In some cases, this will mean that the video has been filmed and packaged with the sole purpose of being published on social media; in other cases, the video will be offered also on the company's website or app, and finally, especially in the case of broadcasters, the video published on social media might be a version of footage that has previously been aired on a television channel.

When it comes to defining the range of social media platforms to be considered, one of the interests of this research was to offer a wider, comparative view of native video production for platforms beyond Facebook and YouTube, including more recent actors in video distribution such as Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. We have considered the two main video formats allowed by those platforms: on-demand video clips and live streams.

2.2. A case study approach

To gain insight into the current trends and challenges in bespoke video news production and off-site distribution, we have opted for a case study approach. As Lucy Küng points out, *"in terms of innovation in digital news, industry is ahead of theory. (...) Organizations are changing permanently. New entrants are emerging. New initiatives are being launched. Leading individuals are changing roles (...) Such a degree of change predicates an exploratory approach, based around case studies"* (Küng, 2015). The case study approach allows us to offer a rich, wide panorama of approaches from organizations with different backgrounds, targets and profiles that, however, often face the same challenges and visions.

We selected eight media outlets: The Guardian, Sky News, Financial Times, HuffPost UK, El País, A3Noticias, El Confidencial and PlayGround. Four of them are based in the United Kingdom and four in Spain, and all of them produce videos at least in either English or Spanish, giving them access to both domestic and global markets.

This selection corresponds to three criteria: interest, representativeness and accessibility. The essential requirement was to find outlets that were producing video for a number of different social media platforms, so they could offer a wide range of examples and case studies to look at, and share their internal views about this industry shift.

Our selection also attempted to balance different types of outlets, from legacy and well-established newspapers like The Guardian and El País, to digital-born players such as HuffPost UK and PlayGround, as well as private broadcasting companies such as Sky News and A3Noticias. The underlying premise was that the nature of the outlet might somehow define its internal organization and dynamics, and therefore could have an

influence on how the outlet approaches the production of content for social media platforms.

The willingness to share insights and experience through this research was also an undeniable factor in the final choice of cases to be included.

2.3. Research questions

To help lead the course of this research, we have posed the following research questions and sub-questions:

1. How do media companies approach the production of native video formats for the different off-site platforms?
 - a. What is their publishing strategy in all the social platform?
 - b. What is the main purpose of creating off-site videos?
 - c. How do they evaluate the success of the video?
 - d. How are they organized internally to produce these videos?
2. What kind of video news works better on off-site platforms, in terms of quantitative audience?
 - a. What metrics are analytics companies are using to measure success in off-site video consumption?
 - b. What were the top five most successful videos for every media outlet, in every platform, in February 2017?
 - c. Can we identify common factors in the top five most successful videos for every media outlet, in every platform, in February 2017?

2.4. Methodology

This research uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and primary and secondary sources to gather the necessary data, analyse it, and present it in a meaningful context.

To answer the first question, *how do media companies approach the production of native video formats for the different off-site platforms?*, we carried out semi-structured interviews with 11 employees from the 8 selected outlets, looking for the people within the organizations that could offer both strategic and practical information about video production, as well as their own vision of this tectonic shift in the industry. The fact that they hold different job titles (from Head of Video or Head of Multimedia to Head of Business or Head of Social Media), and that they relate to other teams in so many different organizational structures, only proves the extent to which these new journalism and management profiles have still to find their place and their limits within media outlets. The interviews were conducted between February 2017 and May 2017.

To answer the second question, *what kind of video news works better in off-site platforms, in terms of quantitative audience?*, we wanted to identify patterns among the video news items produced by the different outlets that obtained better results in terms of

quantitative metrics. However, every platform offers different metrics, and, more importantly, they may use different formulas to calculate the same metric.

The discussion about the definition of success is, in fact, open, shaky, tricky and passionate – and could constitute a research topic in its own right. For the purposes of this content analysis, and considering that we are analysing videos separately on the different platforms, without comparing their outputs, we finally opted to apply different criteria according to the data available for each platform:

- For videos published on Facebook, we opted to rely on quantitative data offered by a professional social media analytic company, Ezy Insights. Ezy's ratings are based on a mixed engagement metric that combines reactions to posts, comments and shares – but not views. Therefore, success in Facebook is measured in terms of engagement, not in terms of passive audience.
- For videos published on YouTube and Instagram, we gathered the data directly from the platform's own publicly available data. In this case, we use the metric "view" as the measure of success.
- For videos published on Twitter, we asked publishers to share their data, as Twitter does not offer public data for videos. In this case, we also used the metric "view" as the measure of success.

Based on this information, we selected the top five most successful videos for each platform and media outlet for the period 1–28 February 2017, making a total of 134 videos (in a few cases, some outlets did not publish five videos on some platforms or were unable to provide data).

A note about social media metrics: unlike television share or the sale of newspapers, the lifespan of digital content tends to be endless, so audiences may grow every day. Therefore, a video published at the beginning of the month will naturally have more chances to get higher scores by the end of the month than a video published on the 28th. However, we have assumed that the peak of consumption occurs within the first 48 hours after publication, so we opted to check the data 48 hours after the last day of the study period – that is, 2 March.

Once the sample was obtained, we applied a quantitative content analysis that considered the following variables:

- Time of publication: hour, date, day of the week.
- Topic: For this factor, we decided to keep the categories used by Kalogeropoulos et al. in 2016: Sport, Business, Politics, Science & Tech, Crime & Security, Health & Education, Environment, Lifestyle & Celebrities.
- Video type: For this factor, we defined the possible values *after* the content analysis was performed, looking for patterns and trying to identify formal elements that allow us to distinguish new types of video news specific for the digital scene. Our proposal, which might be adapted in further research, is as follows:
 - a. TV news: a clip cut from television news broadcasting.
 - b. Documentary: a usually longer video (from 3 to 30 minutes) combining testimonies, experts and images with a journalistic narrative voice to

- explain a certain issue in depth.
- c. JournoStar: a specialized journalist with a public profile and charismatic personality offering information about a topic in an informal, humorous way.
 - d. Analysis: one or more specialized journalists offering their vision and analysis about a specific topic in a rigorous, formal way, combining data.
 - e. Testimony: one main character offering statements or testimony about an issue, without no added text or voice narration.
 - f. Short-texted: a video less than 4 minutes long where text is used over a sequence of images, the main characteristic being that the audience can follow the narrative without turning the audio on.
 - g. Fictionalized short film: a fictionalized playscript where actors and storytelling are used to explain a topic.
 - h. Raw: showing images as recorded, without adding graphics or text or voice narration; it might include ambient sound or music.
 - i. GIF: an extreme short video that plays as a loop, focused on a concrete scene, with no graphic, text or voice narrative.
- Live: Yes/No
 - Inclusion of hashtags: Yes/No.
 - Inclusion of mentions: Yes/No.
 - Aspect ratio: Square, Vertical, Horizontal, 360 degrees.
 - Presence of a journalistic voice: Yes/No.
 - Music: Yes/No.
 - Duration
 - Text presence: Yes/No.
 - Subtitle presence: Yes/No.
 - Brand presence: Yes/No.
 - Call to action: Yes/No.

Screenshots of short-texted video type, by The Guardian and PlayGround:



3. RESULTS: FORMATTING ISSUES

3.1. This is a Facebook world

There is no doubt about it: when it comes to distribution platforms in the news industry, this is still a Facebook world. Facebook not only remains the only platform where *all* the interviewed outlets are publishing bespoke video, it is also the first platform to be mentioned, the one that triggers more memories of campaigns and anecdotes, and the one for which the clearest strategy has been designed. Whatever the profile age of the media outlet, Facebook is still at the heart of their social media landscape. Other younger and more modern platforms such as Instagram or Snapchat may have seen a quick rise in users or visibility in the industry, but the truth is that their position is clearly secondary for media outlets when compared with the blue giant.

In terms of video news presence, the complete list of platforms where outlets are publishing video news includes Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, Snapchat, LinkedIn and MSN. When it comes to publication strategy and packaging features of successful video news published on those different platforms, however, differences arise.

3.2. Are formatting issues relevant?

Our content analysis has tried to identify the importance of formatting and packaging issues in the spread and success of video news on social media platforms, with mixed results: according to the data, formal features such as aspect ratio, use of hashtags in descriptions or the use of music appear not to determine success.

Aspect ratio

Should videos be vertical, horizontal, square or shot in 360 degrees? Some publishers, like Sky News, are trying to produce more square videos, especially for Facebook and Instagram, as they consider that this format provides a better video experience for people viewing on mobile phones in the portrait position. Others, like HuffPost, stick to 16:9, as they consider this factor to be less relevant than the presence of text to suit audience lifestyles. The data suggest that it does not matter very much: 60% of the most successful videos were horizontal, 38% were square, 1% vertical and 1% immersive. The traditional aspect ratio may not be the easiest or most comfortable for audiences to watch, but it does not prevent video news going viral.

Hashtags and mentions

The inclusion of public hashtags and mentions in post descriptions is considered to be a tactic to increase the reach of content in social media. However, among the 134 successful video news items in our analysis, 75% include no hashtag at all in their descriptions, and 87% include no mentions. Therefore, at least these do not seem to be an essential element for the virality of content.

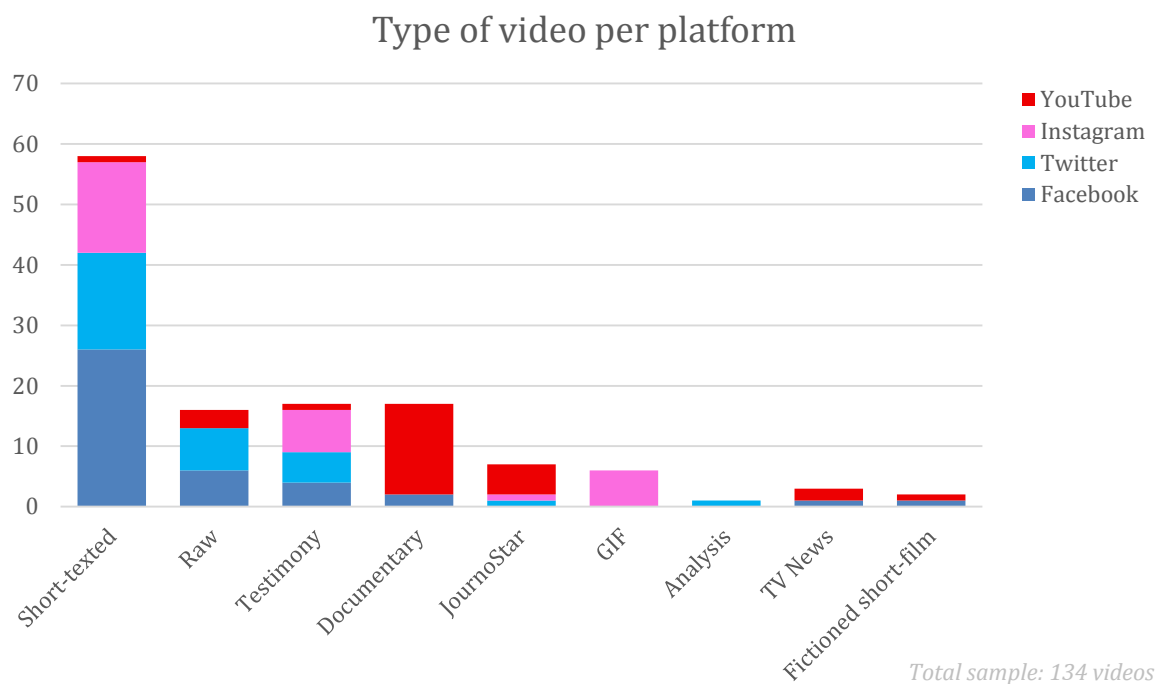
Music

Data shows that 50% of the successful video news include music; again, this does not look like a *sine qua non* for virality.

However, we observe clear patterns when it comes to successful video news types and duration.

Video type and duration

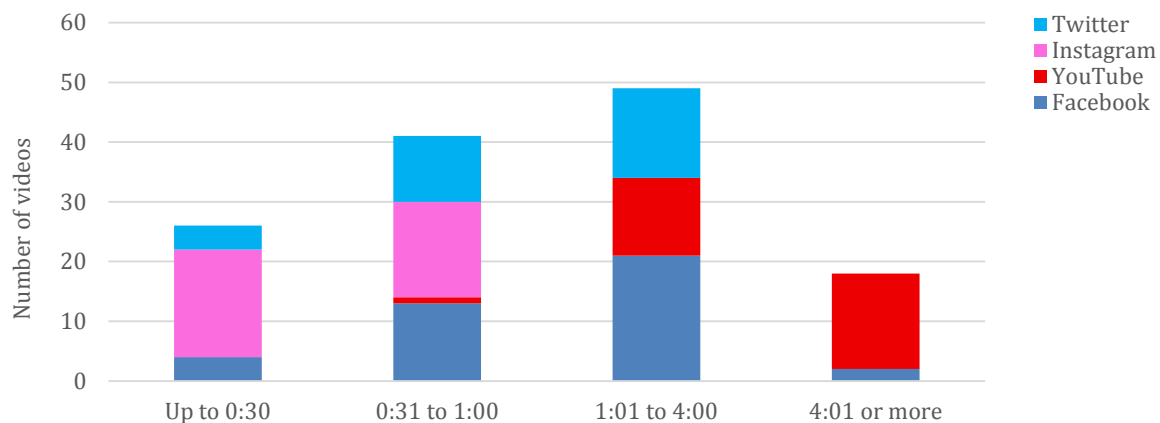
The most common video type, accounting for more than 40% of the successful cases, is what we defined as “short-texted videos”: a video less than 4 minutes long where graphics and/or text narration is used over a sequence of images, without a voice narration. This format, with subtle differences, is shared by all the news organizations we talked to and is becoming almost a standard. Other video types include raw content (16%), posted with little or no post production, clips that show exclusively a first-person testimonial (13%) and documentaries (13%), that despite being sometimes shorter than their television equivalents might be considered the first “classic” video type to be shared between digital video news and television. The use of clips from broadcast television news, which might have been a common practice in the past, tends not to be successful in viral terms, representing only 2% of the successful videos.



In the case of video length, data analysis reveals that, although there seems to be no restrictions for specific duration when it comes to success in social media, there is actually a certain relation between the success of videos on each platform and their duration. In general terms, we have found that the majority of videos (87%) are less than 4 minutes in duration.

Both video type and duration present interesting and significant differences between platforms: we will take a closer look at them in the following sections.

Duration of videos per platform



Total sample: 134 videos

3.3. Facebook: the birth of explanatories

The most common Facebook video type is what we might call the explanatory video (65%): a short piece that aims to explain a particular aspect of a news story in depth. This matches the length analysis: only 5% of the successful video news items in Facebook are 4 minutes or longer in duration; 53% are from 1 to 4 minutes long, and 43% are less than 1 minute.

Publishers assume (because analytic tools corroborate it) that most of their Facebook videos are going to be played muted, so the addition of captions and subtitles to those pieces has become a common practice. *“And if the sound is really important to the story, we will add a caption asking: ‘Turn your sound on’”,* says Peter Diapre, from Sky News.

The Guardian has created one of those explanatory bespoke video formats: they call it “Dab” and it has become their flagship format when it comes to social media video. They have created over 100 of these and their audiences have reached up to 17 million views. The dabs are short pieces, under 2 minutes, that include a readable text and are visually interesting at the same time. They normally use music but do not require the audio to be turned on to be understood. *“It is all about taking core Guardian stories and using the codes and conventions that make them work in a news feed”* (Christian Bennett, The Guardian).

All publishers agree that in Facebook it is important to focus on the **first 3 seconds** of the video: this is the segment that is going to be autoplayed in the feed and will serve as an introduction for the user. PlayGround faces them with a wide range of strategies:

The Facebook feed is consumed in a very anxious way ... Those 3 seconds are all-important. It is like popping up to grab somebody by the lapels and make him stand still. There are several ways to achieve this effect, depending on the nature of the video we are dealing with: it might be a

mobile but shocking breaking news image, or a visually appealing shot ... Or we can work with the script, using text or graphics (Josune Imízcoz, PlayGround).

Sakhr Al-Makhadhi, executive producer from AJ+, an outlet that is very well known for its success in social media news innovative formats, also focuses on those first 3 seconds as a key to retain audience. He explains that at the beginning, they tried to film for Facebook the way they used to film for television: starting with a wide shot to set the scene. But they soon realized that this kind of wide perspective does not work as a proper hook on a mobile newsfeed. So they decided always to use a powerful shot to begin with, adding text to make it more expressive if necessary.

This tactic also applies to the use of logos and branding. In 2015, El País created “El País Video”, its own brand for videos that used to appear over a black background as the initial frame of all videos. After the explosion of Facebook video, they decided to get rid of the black background and print the branding directly over the first shot of the footage, without any preamble.

3.4. Instagram: testimonies and GIFs

When it comes to Instagram video, publishers are still in test mode. Some consider it a platform that is more suitable for photography, animation and infographic purposes rather than a place for video news.

We only occasionally produce specific videos for Instagram, because they do not get massive views ... Mainly we produce graphical videos for a specific topic, things like GIFs, or very short animations about budgets, or election results ... Stats, basically. The graphical content seems to do quite well on Instagram in a way it does not on Facebook, from what I can tell. (Peter Diapre, Sky News)

In terms of video type, however, explanatory videos are also the most common (44%), although Instagram is the platform where testimonies (21%) have a higher presence. As Christian Bennett, from The Guardian, points out, “*We like to play with the idea of social subjects, but used for core stories that we care about editorially*”. The personal story that illustrates a wider social trend is a common format for all interviewees. When asked about what kind of off-platform videos their clients demand most, Jon Pullman, Head of Video at Thomson Reuters, answers that it is usually videos about “*individual stories, filmed close, offering testimonies*”. It usually consists of a single, clear shot of the subject speaking to camera, and its simplicity seems to fit Instagram’s short video trend.

Instagram is, indeed, the platform with a higher rate of short videos among the most successful, and the only platform with video GIFs (18%). Although Instagram allows videos up to 1 minute long, half of the successful videos in the sample were less than 30 seconds in duration.

From a media company perspective, one of the problems of Instagram is the technical difficulty of adding a link to the video that might drive traffic back to the company’s core platforms, website or app. Instagram Stories now offers that possibility, but

previously the only linkable position of an Instagram profile was its biographical description – so some publishers used to use that space to publish updating links to other featured articles.

Others argue that, although Instagram might not be a good traffic driver, it is an interesting platform to get brand awareness, especially for certain audiences that might be more interested in aesthetics. That is the reason why HuffPost UK have decided to use it for showcasing a selection of their blog contents: *“Our vlogs are colourful; they have bolder branding. Visually we wanted them to pop on Instagram”* (Dawn Kelly).

3.5. Twitter: tweet it raw but tweet it now

The position changes when creating content for Twitter. Although texted videos are in first place (53%), publishers consider that emotional video content or testimonies do not work as well here as in Facebook. Twitter is seen as a place for breaking news, particularly political news (*“Over 90% of the UK’s MPs are on Twitter!”*, Dawn Kelly from HuffPost says).

Translated into video dynamics, that explains why Twitter is the platform with a higher percentage of raw video news (23%). Some outlets explain that when a news story breaks, as soon as they have images available, they roll them on Twitter – without adding captions, graphics or anything.

Data shows that all successful news videos on Twitter are less than 4 minutes in duration.

3.6. YouTube: the long-form experience

In recent years Facebook and YouTube have competed to be the platform publishing most videos each day. But when it comes to video news strategy, while Facebook is the place for bespoke, short, emotional videos, YouTube is positioned as a repository for selected, longer, audio-on video content. It is the only platform where the predominant type is not explanatory videos but Documentaries (50%), followed by what we have called JournoStar series (17%), a show where a specialized journalist with a public profile and charismatic personality offers information about a topic in an informal, humorous way. This genre generally favours longer videos. In our analysis, more than half of the videos in YouTube had a duration of 4 minutes or longer

Sky News uses YouTube to showcase its best television content, as well as a collection of the documentaries they have made for Sky News, Sky One and Sky Atlantic. The Guardian series *“Anywhere but Westminster”* is also a wonderful example of digital documentaries, while the HuffPost series *“Fernie on Fashion”* and the El País series *“El Comidista”* are great examples of JournoStar pieces.

The differences between YouTube and Facebook are especially interesting in terms of attitudes towards video consumption. YouTube is considered as a platform where audiences go actively looking for specific content, with a higher disposition to have a long-form experience, whereas Facebook users are “surfing” content and skipping

almost randomly from piece to piece. Publishers know that, and take decisions about where a video fits better depending on its genre.

If we have invested in a documentary or a long-form report, we will often look at that and take elements out of it, and publish them on Facebook with a promotional post that points to where or when you can see the full experience. Facebook is not like YouTube, people are snacking, not looking for a long-form experience, so we would use it as a promotional tool in this case. (Peter Diapre, Sky News)

These impressions are not wrong. According to Sherrill Mane, researcher for the Google/Ipsos Connect YouTube Cross Screen Survey carried out in July 2016, “more than 90% of viewers tell us they watch YouTube on a mobile device at home – sometimes in the living room, often in the bedroom. And the most popular time to watch YouTube on the TV and on a mobile device is primetime” (Think with Google, 2017). YouTube is becoming more and more a personalized television experience, and the type of content that succeeds there reflect that approach. In fact, only two of the interviewed outlets create bespoke content for YouTube: PlayGround, which is planning to create a specific production team for that platform, and The Guardian, which has promoted a journalist channel for Owen Jones – presenting him as a “YouTuber” figure who creates a regular bond with the audience.

3.7. Snapchat: to be in Discovery or not to be

Snapchat is commonly seen as a promising new platform, an interesting option in terms of both younger audience profiles and new narratives, but most publishers agree that if they cannot have an official presence in the Discovery section, they would rather not be there (PlayGround, The Guardian, El País).

Snapchat is interesting, but it is a lot less interesting if you are not in Discover. I think you can't do everything, you have to focus ... And if you do Snapchat badly, especially if you are a legacy organization, you look like your dad dancing in the disco, and you do not want to look like your dad dancing in a disco, so ... (Christian Bennett, The Guardian)

Although the Discovery section is a closed enclave that only Snapchat’s pre-approved brands may inhabit, some outlets have opted to create user profiles and use the app with the same communication features that are available for individual users. Some of them, like HuffPost and El País, have opened profile accounts “to test the environment” (El País). Although those profiles necessary imply restrictions in the format in which contents are displayed, as well as less access to analytical information and monetization opportunities, they are a good platform to test content for younger audiences.

Sky News is the only news organization interviewed for this research to have an official presence in Snapchat Discovery. Their team includes one producer and one graphic designer working full time to create videos with a specific editorial and visual approach for that platform:

It is not only the story selection [that is particular], but also the treatment that we use. Snapchat is much more fun and informal: we will use animal videos or things like that which are very appealing to that audience ... it is part of building an audience that will experience your product and see what else you have to offer (Peter Diapre, Sky News)

The remaining outlets have been “holding conversations” with the company, trying to negotiate their position in Discovery. However, the common feeling is that Snapchat has not been especially keen on closing the deals, and outlets now consider they have more important battles to fight. In the Spanish case, moreover, there is an additional aggravating factor: while the UK has its own version of Discovery, there is not yet a Spanish edition, and Snapchat penetration figures in UK and Spain are not as high as those of other social media platforms, at least for news targets, so outlets tend to limit their efforts there if they do not see a clear advantage in terms of brand awareness.

3.8. Socializing the web video news experience

In the publishers’ strategies and efforts for off-platform presence one can soon identify a certain tension between the willingness to offer a *prêt-à-porter* experience in each of the social platforms, producing bespoke videos adapted to the language and requirements of each platform, and the need to save time and resources by reusing material from one platform to another.

Faced with these dilemmas, some outlets like A3Noticias or Playground are making an effort to create different versions for their website and each social media platform, adapting not only the length of the video but also the narrative, the visual treatment, the use of sound, etc. Others, like El Confidencial, explain that after some time experimenting with specific formats, they currently produce their video news with their own website in mind, and then republish the same material in Facebook, YouTube and Twitter – with or without adjustments (they produce videos in 16:9 because it is the most standard format, the one that enables cross-platform publication). Only in the case of live off-platform content do they begin production from scratch.

In this sense, an interesting trend that has arisen from the interviews is the creation of video news for core platforms with a social media approach in mind. In other words, the creation of videos for the web using the language and formats of social media, in response to two different criteria: production efficiency and convergence of the user experience on core platforms and off-platform.

We are consciously getting away from the pure web format video to create videos that are more and more social, that can work both on our website and social platforms. Our main consumption is from mobile devices, so no matter you are in our website: you are likely going to behave like a social media user (not turning audio on, viewing on a small screen ...). We are trying to unify. (Carlos de Vega, El País)

The videos for our app and website have become more like a social feed ... They are less formal than they used to be, maybe because we have grown more confident with mobile video storytelling. The grammar of the internet and the social media world is shaping the way we tell stories in video format on the app and the browser. So not just informality in the captions, but

we might also use emojis, for example, or tweets ... While YouTube remains more like a television experience, our web and app are getting closer to a social media video experience.
(Peter Diapre, Sky News)

4. RESULTS: CONTENT

4.1. Common topics

In spite of what viral memes and public opinion may indicate, data and testimonies reveal that the formula for a successful video in social media does not involve a cat – or at least, not necessarily.

In the field of news, media outlets are being successful in placing very hard topics among the most viral videos. The content analysis of the 134 most successful videos in February 2017 from our case studies shows surprising consistency in terms of repeated topics and subtopics, with two main categories sweeping the board: Politics (24%) and Lifestyle & Celebrities (22%). That might reaffirm the common impression that glamour and soft topics are, indeed, common subjects in viral videos – but not more common than hard political news. The fact that show business and politics feature almost equally well is certainly an interesting line of research for those studying populism and the rise of personalism in politics.

At the other extreme, the Science & Tech and Sports categories each make up 5% or less of the sample. This may be due to the general nature of the sample: these categories are usually covered by specialized outlets that target long-tail audiences, whereas generalist media such as those in our sample might cover them less frequently than other topics. The difficulty of getting images (or at least licensed images) for those topics might also explain their lower presence in off-media platforms.

The complete results are as follows:

Politics	24%
Lifestyle & Celebrities	22%
Health & Education	17%
Business	11%
Art & Culture	7%
Environment	6%
Crime & Security	6%
Science & Tech	5%
Sports	2%

These findings seem to be consistent with editors' opinions that strongly defend the ability of hard news to catch people's attention:

It is not true that cat and dog videos are the only ones that work in Facebook. We are a good example that there is audience in Facebook for more serious topics: we have hit high numbers in international affairs, social issues, environmentalism, feminism, uncovered conflicts in the field

... Our most successful stories are hard news stories. People are really interested in news – they were just asking for a different approach. (Josune Imízcoz, *Playground*)

4.2. Social media thematic territories

If we split the categories of data by platform, the map reveals slightly different contours: we can now appreciate how, although Politics and Lifestyle & Celebrities always remain close to the top, some other categories scale strongly depending on whether the video was published in Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube, creating what we could define as thematic *territories* for each social platform.

For instance, we can see how Health & Education videos come top on Facebook, reflecting a more social/emotional content in video virality. Arts & Culture, a generally less common category, are in third position on Instagram. Politics is by far the most common topic on Twitter, 10 points ahead of the second most important subject, Lifestyle & Celebrities. And finally, YouTube shows an equal mix of Business, Politics and Health & Education.

Facebook:

Health & Education	23%
Lifestyle & Celebrities	18%
Politics	18%
Business	18%

Instagram:

Lifestyle & Celebrities	26%
Politics	24%
Art & Culture	18%

Twitter:

Politics	37%
Lifestyle & Celebrities	27%
Health & Education	17%

YouTube:

Politics	20%
Health & Education	20%
Business	20%

4.3. Women, kids and minorities first

The most interesting insights appear when the specific subtopics of the videos are analysed, in an attempt to identify concrete issues beyond the category. A closer look at the specific news reveals the predominance of videos related to topics that are socially sensitive rather than time sensitive (women, kids, minorities, poverty, social collectives at risk), music, celebrities, and news related to trending topics in February 2017 (Trump, the Oscars). The top 10 most repeated subtopics are as follows:

Trump	14%
Kids	10%
Food	7%
Fashion	7%
Women	5%
Employment	4%
Music	4%
Oscars	4%
LGBT	4%
Animals	3%

Surprisingly, the first ten specific topics account for more than 60% of the videos in the sample, with two topics (Donald Trump and kids) covering almost a quarter of them.

Trump's presidency formally began on 20 January 2017, so his prominent presence in video news in February 2017 could be attributed to a temporal phenomenon, related to breaking stories about his early decisions. The same is true of the coverage of the Oscars. It is a fact that big stories and breaking news do well in terms of virality; that is why we consider it more interesting to focus on subtopics that are not so closely related to concrete breaking stories and could more accurately be considered as real trends in off-platform video news.

If we analyse the top ten subtopics, we realize that three of them explain all kind of stories related to very specific social subjects: kids, women and LGBT topics. Those **social collectives** have something in common: they have usually lacked a voice in traditional media and they have suffered from discrimination and vulnerability. Their stories tend to be stories of oppression, injustice, inspiration: personal stories, explained and filmed close to the subject, trying to show their reality and generate a human connection.

Dawn Kelly, from HuffPost UK, explains that her video team has worked with HuffPost editors in chief to set the topics they want to cover with video news, and they include LGBT, mental health, environment and new activism. These are what they call "Heart videos", and the terminology is accurate: these are the kind of topics we see connecting with people's emotions. HuffPost's best audience results generally come from one of those videos.

Many publishers have argued, in fact, that they find success not exactly when they address a specific topic, but when they can raise one of the following three emotions: **inspiration, indignation, or humour.**

We put real emphasis on trying to provoke an emotion with our content on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, so that people really feel they have lived the experience, it resonates with them, and they will go on and share it with their friends and family (Sky News, Richard Evans)

But is it a coincidence that stories about minorities are the ones that succeed the most in social media? Wouldn't those stories be also suitable for the front pages of newspapers or television news summaries? Why does it seem that they perform better off-platform than on core platforms? It might all be related to the logic of social media visibility: successful contents in social media are, by algorithmic definition, not those that people might be most interested in or that they consider most important, but those that get more visibility because they are *being shared*. And the reasons that lead us to share are not the same reasons that lead us to read an article or to watch a documentary: we share because we think our social network will be interested or sensitive to the topic, and we share because we want to define ourselves somehow through the content we are sharing. This is the point where inspiring, emotional stories of oppressed minorities become much more appropriate for sharing than other types of content (such as sports results) that might be eagerly consumed on core platforms but make little headway when it comes to social media.

4.4. Life's little pleasures

The second type of content that seems to perform specially well with video news is what we could call "life pleasures": food, fashion and music. These categories are often not related to so-called hard news, but are more timeless topics that catch people's attention and can easily generate attractive visual material.

5. RESULTS: LIVE STREAMING

The boom of live streaming in platforms like Periscope, Facebook and YouTube has been an undeniable phenomenon in the last year; however, whether this trend is going to consolidate still remains to be seen. As Newman points out in a recent technical report (Newman, 2017), after Facebook paid 140 publishers to engage with live streaming *“disillusion sets in with Facebook Live (...). Live streaming is an inherently inefficient way of conveying information at a time when attention is increasingly at a premium”*. Although some of the publishers in our case studies, like HuffPost, are planning to expand their live streams to other platforms, the majority declare that once the agreement with Facebook is over, they are likely to invest less time in it – while on February 2017, *“Zuckerberg declared the company is going to focus on on-demand videos, seeing ‘a big future for premium video on Facebook’ ”* (McAlone, 2017).

That might not mean the end of live streaming, but after a period of wild and intense experimentation, the chances are that publishers will begin to settle down to a more specific (and more contained) strategy for live broadcasts. The following sections present some impressions from news organizations about their experiments with live streaming.

5.1. Be on the ground when the news breaks

Almost all outlets, including Sky News, El País and Antena 3, report high audiences when they have offered live streams on the ground of a breaking news situation, with images and coverage in real time. Whether they offered their television signal or created a live stream *ad hoc* for social media, the experience was successful, from the UK general election to the coup d'état in Tunisia, terrorist raids in Paris or Fidel Castro's death.

Public demonstrations are an interesting example of how live coverage works on the ground. HuffPost reports impressive success simply offering the live signal from a camera operator standing in the middle of the crowd, with no journalistic narration: the audience congregated in the live feed and kept it open, commenting continuously, as a way of taking part in an event that would otherwise have been inaccessible to them.

5.2. Debates, Q and As, and films

On the other hand, there is a certain consensus that other television-like formats, such as analytical debates or magazines, do not work in social media live streaming. El País used to work with a weekly schedule of live “shows” where a specialist talked about specific topics, but after analysing audience results, they are gradually moving away from this kind of indoor studio production to prioritize outside coverage and more interactive formats. Question and answer sessions (Q and As) seem to be a better recipe, whether they cover cinema, economics, health or romantic issues, as long as they integrate audience questions in real time.

PlayGround, however, reports good audiences and positive feedback with live streaming of films and documentaries – an interesting television-format experience that could have a second life when it becomes a community experience in social media.

5.3. Interactive social games

If there is something that differentiates social media broadcasting from television broadcasting, it is the possibility of building a show on the basis of audience interaction. This has been a more playful area for the outlets, especially for Verne, the young tech brand of El País, and for PlayGround, which has made live innovation one of its distinctive treatments. Some of those ideas include:

- Solving a puzzle, moving the pieces according to audience suggestions.
- Guessing a movie, with actors miming scenes that the audience must identify.
- Asking people how they would explain the world to an alien in one word.
- Improvisation, where the story unfolds following audience reactions.
- “Fill in the gap”, using Facebook API to let people’s comments appear on the screen.

5.4. Live music

Both El País and PlayGround have offered live music with good results. PlayGround offered parallel music shows at the Sonar Festival, and El País has created a regular space called “En vivo”, where new bands and musicians who do not yet have a distributor play in the middle of their newsroom.

5.5. The effectiveness of an empty lectern

El País reports that when they show live events on Facebook such as press conferences, parliamentary sessions or official presidential visits, they usually begin to broadcast as soon as they receive the first signal, even though that means showing an empty space, whereas on their websites they would never begin to broadcast until the action begins. The reason? These empty moments create high expectation, engagement and conversation.

The most surprising thing is the effect of empty lecterns. Suddenly, half an hour of the White House façade, waiting for a Donald Trump press conference, gets 300,000 people watching. And it is enriching, because in spite of being a visually unappealing fixed shot, it creates lot of social discussion about what is about to happen. (Carlos de Vega, El País)

5.6. Technical considerations

When asked about differences between Facebook and YouTube for live streams, Sky News has a clear position. In recent years they have been offering non-stop live streaming on YouTube, and their experience is that in general terms it worked much better than Facebook Live both for user experience and for technical reasons:

The difference between Facebook and YouTube, and the reason why I think Facebook is not yet set up for a live stream of TV output, is that Facebook operates by surfacing-content directly into people’s timelines based on the subject matter and that user’s habits and interests; in a live stream of news output there’s a huge variety of content so it wouldn’t work. Whereas on YouTube you’re much more likely to watch something based on a trusted provider and will know where to look. And there are also some really kind of boring practical reasons: when you

go live on Facebook, if it's going to be longer than 4 hours, it won't send a notification to your audience – therefore it won't perform as well. We have also noticed that after 10 or 15 hours of live stream, Facebook kind of fell over a couple of times, so we had to restart the feed. (Richard Evans, Sky News)

6. RESULTS: PRODUCTION

6.1. New teams on the block

One of the difficulties we had here, when we started doing things for off-platform, was getting respect for it. Inside the company they were just saying “Oh, those are just these silly videos people publish on there, a cat falling off a table ...”. It is like criticizing an iPhone by saying that it has just one button ... To get to the point where you can tell the story in one minute, and efficiently, and millions of people look at it ... that is a very difficult process. It is a different skill. It is the difference between running a marathon and being Usain Bolt.

For me, being able to build that culture – of being important, of being respected, and people giving equal respect to our 5 minute film, has been super important in my department. And it is happening now, after six months of “oh, this silly video”. The team has done well; it has been a huge success. (Christian Bennett, The Guardian)

It's been a common experience: at some point in 2015, digital outlets and legacy newspapers found themselves thinking about creating some kind of “video team”, while broadcasters started to considering the creation of special video divisions for their digital presences. When these teams were finally created they were given different names and hierarchical positions in the network of their organizations, but they have all been focused on one thing: creating video in all kind of formats for digital platforms, generally for both core platforms and social media.

In our case studies, those teams are part of today's newsrooms. They are made up of between 3 and 18 people, bringing together a mix of different skills: journalism, video production, product expertise and design. Sometimes these skills are embodied in the same people, sometimes they are covered by a mix of different profiles. In most cases, team members have occupied previous positions in the newsrooms, mainly as writers, and have then been trained to develop filming, editing and graphic skills. In a few cases, they have been hired to fit a specific new profile.

Among all the interviewees, El País is the outlet with the biggest video digital team, which is significant coming from a legacy newspaper: 18 people work daily to produce videos both for core and off-platforms. The team includes 7 graphic editors (camera operators), 2 post-producers, 4 writers and 3 managers, who provide coverage all day throughout the week.

Sky News has opted for a video team of 5 journalist-video producers who are focused on creating video exclusively for mobile platforms, including Sky's own app, website and social media channels. Those journalists have been trained to edit videos with FinalCutPro and use AfterEffects to add a graphical layer when necessary. Sky considers them a hybrid between a journalist, a designer and a video editor – an interesting profile that is not so easy to find.

To find people with that mixture of skills might be a challenge for media companies. Alejandro Laso, from El Confidencial, complains about how difficult it is to find those hybrid profiles in the market.

There is a huge gap between what universities are offering and what we are asking for ... Some kids are told 'you won't get a job in journalism', but that is not true: there are jobs in the industry, but people are finishing their degrees thinking they are going to write and it is not about that any more ... You should add some technical skills. Those are the profiles we need to hire.

This is the case of the Audience and Innovation team, the engine room of bespoke video production for off-platforms at The Guardian. It is a self-defined “punk team” inside the Multimedia Hub where 3 people spend their days creating the next social success.

We have told them: “go away and do things”. (...) And it took a little time at the beginning but they are brilliant now: they are just a real success for the company, everyone is kind of proud of it ... That area is the area where you can be a little bit punk, a little bit young, have a different tone. It is quite an exciting place to be. (Christian Bennett, The Guardian)

6.2. Let the children play

This pinch of innovation is a common framework in the thinking process of most video teams: they have been given autonomy to suggest, to play, to try.

The people producing the videos are younger journalists, they are in their 20s and they have kind of grown up with it, it is a natural environment for them in many ways, so we actually look for their views and creativity, because it makes sense. They are partly the audience they are trying to serve in many ways, so we don't want them just to be passive waiting for a commission; we want them to be proactive. (Sky News, Peter Diapre)

That creative and open spirit is not only an incentive for the teams, but also a necessary muscle training in the quest for success in social media. Dawn Kelly leads a 10-person video team in the HuffPost's UK bureau and has created a video strategy that tries to balance that requirement for innovation with the production of less risky pieces, with rotating shifts that allow all video producers to devote at least part of their time to the more creative projects.

In summary, the HuffPost video strategy considers the creation of three kind of videos – what they call Hero, Heart and Help. Hero videos are television-style big-budget productions that will take months to produce and are often associated with a branded campaign. Help are reactive videos that the team produces on a daily basis to illustrate written coverage and articles that are already working well in terms of website audience and that might benefit in off-platforms with an extra video push. Heart, finally, are the creative videos the team longs for.

We are constantly trying to push boundaries, be creative and use innovative technology. We have a multifaceted video strategy – we keep our audience engaged with a stream of quick

turnaround, social videos – this keeps our views high, which in turn gives us the freedom to be more creative with our brand-defining videos – that for us is super important. (Dawn Kelly, HuffPost UK)

6.3. Video and Social: a dynamo relation

Video teams maintain a wide network of relationships with other departments in the newsroom, three of which are of vital importance for their success: their relation with the editorial board, with reporters, and with the social media team.

Heads of video are usually members of all editorial boards to assure brand alignment in the production of video, although they maintain editorial control to cover stories in different ways for social media. The video team also works closely with vertical divisions and independent reporters to gather suggestions and requests or to ask for specific material when they need it. But their most active relationship is with the social media team, who can observe topics that are starting to trend and might be interesting to explore in video format.

The social media–video bond is so tight that some outlets have a bridging role within the video team helping to strengthen that connection: the “social media clips editor” or “social video coordinator”. Basically, this is a role that makes sense in those video teams that are producing for both core and off-platforms, and that focus specifically on social media video production. At both the Financial Times and El País, this person identifies the news with the greatest potential for social media distribution and creates bespoke videos or clips for it – most often prioritizing Facebook requirements.

But once the video is done, who publishes it on social media platforms? The trend is that the social media team will be in charge of disseminating the videos when, where and how they see fit, in order to keep an overview and maintain the consistency of the brand’s communication in social media platforms. The only exception is HuffPost, where video teams publish directly, in close coordination with sections and with the advice of their social media editor.

6.4. Timing was crucial (from the very first step)

In the era of the algorithm, the control of *when exactly* audiences receive the news is no longer in the hands of broadcasters, newspapers or digital outlets. That is certainly true, but people still have consumption habits, meaning that they tend to keep to more or less regular routines, even in social media. Media outlets are aware of this and have tried not to become obsessed with algorithms, which are always suddenly changing. Instead, they use some common sense criteria to decide when they should publish their video news. Some of their strategies are as follows.

Breaking news should break the schedule

When a big story is breaking, publishers have no doubts: they publish it right away, especially in Facebook and Twitter, even if it comes at an inconvenient time of the day. Some outlets, such as El Confidencial, will not hesitate about recovering the content later to republish it, if necessary, at a more propitious time to reach wider audiences.

Most breaking news, unfortunately, does not have a related video piece when it breaks. That is a lost opportunity in most cases, as some studies have shown (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016) that audiences specially appreciate the video format for news in social media in the first 24 hours of a big breaking news story. A3Noticias' strategy in those cases consists of offering the first version of the breaking news with plain text, if necessary, and updating the information over time with newer versions including images and, finally, a video piece.

The three peaks: commuting, lunch, and evening

Beyond breaking news, there seems to be an agreement about the existence of a *digital prime time* for news on social media. This takes the form of three separate rush hours in the course of the day, coinciding with situations and environments where audiences have typically more freedom of time and space to check the news: early in the morning, while commuting to work; lunchtime; and in the evening, after dinner.

While publishers keep these three rush hours in mind in their publishing strategies, they usually do not consider distinctions in terms of age, gender or occupation. However, that digital prime time might show some variations for outlets with a well-defined demographic audience, such as the Financial Times:

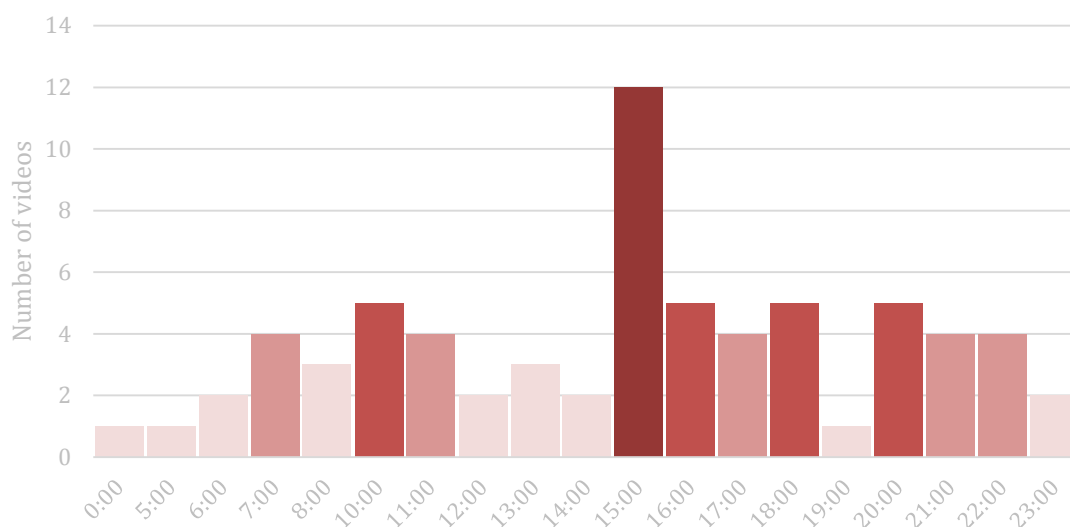
We are studying how different customers and especially business decision-makers consume content, and one of the interesting things we've seen is that they also consume content in their downtime, for example in the evenings. Currently we publish most of the video content early in the morning to make sure it is available as soon as possible but we actually have more flexibility here and can begin testing the optimum moments to publish. (Kayode Josiah, Financial Times)

The Guardian has a similar approach and tries to publish all relevant pieces early in the morning, so people have them available during their journeys to work or at lunch time. However, if they have a long-form video, they will tend to re-promote it in the evenings, when people will have probably more time (and better conditions) to watch it.

Content analysis reasserts what publishers have said: we can identify a clear peak hour, from 15.00h to 15.59h, and three major waves of consumption:

- from 7.00 to 11.59 (commuting and first hours in the office)
- from 15.00 to 18.59h (post-lunch / teabreak time and afternoon)
- from 20.00 to 22.59h (dinner and prime time)

Hours of publication



Total sample: 134 videos

It must be pointed out that this data reflects the part of the sample relating to Facebook and Twitter news videos, as the time of publication could not be retrieved from YouTube and Instagram.

Half of the audience is having breakfast while the other half is having dinner

At first sight, running an outlet that publishes video news in English or Spanish looks like a nice scenario for audience expansion: language, far from restricting you to the borders of your original country, becomes an opportunity to reach overseas audiences. But when you are trying to schedule content on the basis of your audience's daily routines, the opportunity suddenly becomes a challenge. How do outlets face that scenario?

El Confidencial right now is focused on increasing its readership in Spain, although they know they also have an audience in Latin America. Bearing in mind that the Facebook algorithm tends to give more visibility to those video pieces that attract greater engagement from their early viewers, sometimes El Confidencial publishes its news in the early hours of the morning, aiming to reach late-night viewers in Latin America who will begin to react and engage with the video, catapulting it to a better position in Facebook's timeline by the time Spanish audiences begin to wake up. *"The wave of morning consumption is very short. If you are not there at the very first moment, chances are you will lose it"* (Alejandro Laso, El Confidencial).

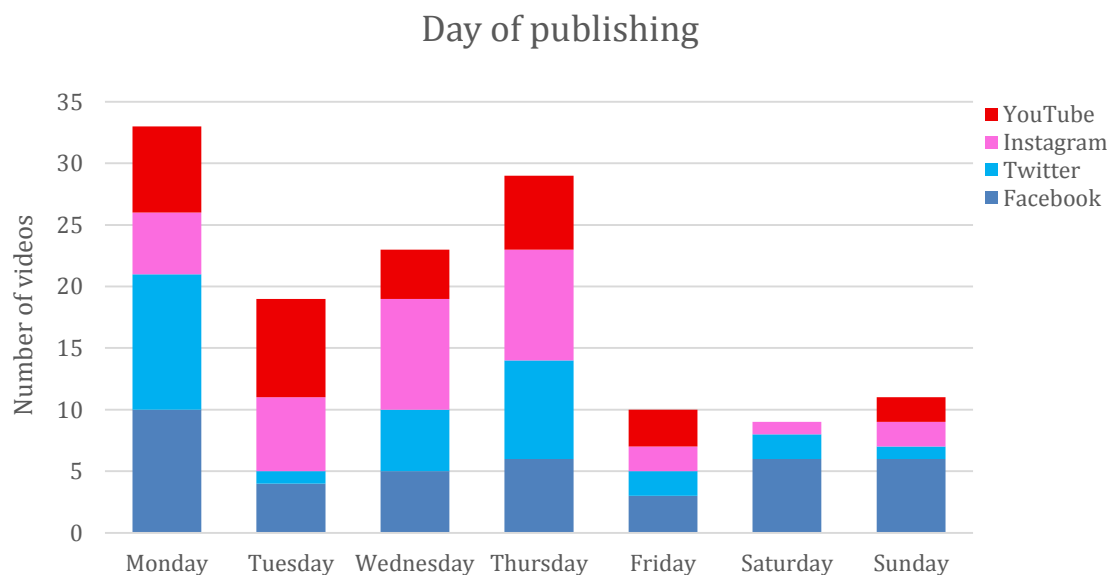
Playing from a different perspective, El País's publication strategy is conceived to serve consumption hours in both Spain and Latin America, as they consider that the potential growth of their audience, in general terms, is coming or will come from that region. Others, like PlayGround, prefer not to work for segmented audiences, but rather create stories that might interest their cross-country watchers:

What we try to do is to universalize the stories, even if they are local stories. If we report them it is because we believe they have a universal component: they might be taking place in a specific country, but we will look for an aspect that could interest and connect with everyone and we try to exploit it (Josune Imízcoz, Playground)

Outlets that rely on regional offices in other countries also mention close coordination between them to share video materials among the different editions.

The weekend's silence

When it comes to timing, content analysis also reveals an interesting pattern: 25% of the successful videos were published on a Monday. The beginning of the work week seems to offer a push of virality to new stories. The opposite effect can be observed at the weekends, when cases drop down to 7–8% from Friday to Saturday.



Total sample: 134 videos

The pattern differs considerably between platforms, however: if we look only at Facebook videos, Saturday becomes the second most successful day of the week. We can also observe that some platforms have a wider variation between weekdays and weekends, such as Twitter, and others remain at more stable levels, such as YouTube. However, the current sample is too small to demonstrate these differences clearly and further research is needed in this area.

7. RESULTS: BUSINESS STRATEGY

7.1. The purpose behind it all

Social media platforms: the twenty-first century's front pages where news gains or loses visibility depending on someone else's criteria. Where audiences are not being audited. Where media outlets compete for attention not only with other companies, but with literally everyone on the network. Those markets where monetization is barely a shared utopia. Why would a media company ever decide to publish its videos there?

"Brand awareness" is the most common answer, although not the only one. There is an agreement that especially younger audiences are consuming news in social media environments, and that it would be naive to pretend that is not happening and just wait for them to come to the traditional channels. A presence in social media allow outlets to gain visibility "where the non-news junkies are" (Peter Diapre, Sky News), and at the same time to gain knowledge about how to distribute news for the generation who are going to become their main consumers in one or two decades.

I think it is probably fair to say that a young person 20 years ago would have first seen The Guardian by picking up a newspaper; now if you are a young person, the first way you are going to see The Guardian anywhere is off-platform, and it will probably be a video (Christian Bennett, The Guardian)

However, while explanations unfold, for most outlets brand awareness ends up being a first step towards a more company-related goal. In the case of HuffPost, that is to get traffic back to its core platform; in the case of the Financial Times, the end of the journey is when the reader becomes a subscriber.

Our ultimate goal is to reach new audiences with our content and grow our subscribers. Generating brand awareness is a part of doing that. We are a subscription business, but our video content is free to access: it is our showroom to the FT brand, our way to get people thinking about the FT – and then we optimize the user journey as much as possible for them to come back to FT and become subscribers. (Kayode Josiah, Financial Times)

Audience is at the heart of our video strategy – we want to cover topics that are important to them, topics that they may not see from other mainstream publishers. We want to become known for these topics and see people come back to us to see more. As well as our own website, we reach viewers on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube: we know the audiences here are huge – by distributing our videos to a number of places, we are seeing more people coming back to the website – which ultimately is our most important platform. (Dawn Kelly, HuffPost)

In this scene, is interesting to note that only the 58% of the successful videos analysed in the content analysis included a call to action (CTA) for the user to follow, mainly driving them to core platforms. That means that there is still a high percentage of the publications that will indeed be unable to create anything other than brand awareness – although native videos help position all that brand's content in the feed, including link posts that drive direct traffic.

This also connects with the more philanthropic approach of other outlets, who defend their presence in social media as a journalistic responsibility: telling the important stories and making sure that they reach society is part of the role journalism must play as a public service. And offering audiences the best user experience in every environment is part of it.

We want the optimal consumption experience for our audience. Users have different dispositions on the different platforms ... It is unlikely that I will consume YouTube in the underground, but I could certainly check Facebook – although I'll probably be in a hurry and paying less attention ... We try to adapt the format of our contents to those circumstances. As a media company, we have a service vocation, and therefore, the duty to make our messages available. (Josune Imízcoz, Playground)

7.2. Analytics (do not trust the one million views, baby)

Brand awareness, core-platform traffic, subscribers, user experience. If these are the purposes of off-platform media distribution, how can outlets measure if they are achieving them? What are the specific indicators that companies should track to have a realistic idea of the success of their distribution strategy?

Outlets mention a bunch of metrics when it comes to tracking: traffic drive, video views, engagement, completion rates, time watch, qualitative feedback ... However, we can identify mainly two broad approaches: that from outlets who care about video consumption as a goal *per se*, no matter on what platform it is taking place, and those who consider video consumption only as a mean to catch audiences for their own platforms, where they can audit them and monetize them.

Cross-platform video views

The most common metric used by the outlets we interviewed to measure the success of a video is **video views** – data that is offered by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. El País has a powerful analytical department which consolidates the data provided by different platforms and tools, including their own core platforms, and aggregates it to create a unique ranking of video consumption, whether these views take place on its website or app or on social media platforms. Although the report does provide information about where viewing has taken place, the mere fact of aggregating the data to create a unified ranking shows a clear focus on promoting video consumption, no matter the environment in which it happens. That information is not only delivered in digital reports, but is also physically present in the newsroom: every section has its own monitor screen that shows in real time what percentage of the monthly objectives for unique users, page views and video views has been achieved. This is a simple, clear and focused reminder of the company's goals and direction.

However, although “video views” might be the easiest and most common metric to track, a serious problem arises when it comes to comparing audiences across different social media platforms. In October 2016 Pressboard published a comparison of how different social platforms use different criteria to define what they consider a “view”.

The definitions involve factors such as how many seconds of the video have been watched, whether the user clicked “play” or the video autoplayed, or what percentage of the video player was visible in the user’s screen at the moment of watching. These inconsistencies mean, for example, that Facebook and Instagram count a view after 3 seconds, while YouTube counts views after a certain percentage of the total video has been watched (Grimm, 2016). As Christian Bennett, from The Guardian, points out:

We have a video with one million views on Facebook: what does that mean? Does anyone really know at the moment? It is a nice number to tell people, but ... it is the same as a million views on our platform, or a million views on YouTube? Deep down, we probably know it isn't – but it sounds good. We aren't comparing apples to apples at the moment.

In that scenario, one alternative option might be considering time-watched instead of video views: when measured in seconds, time-watched provides a common standard that might help to compare not only video consumption across social media platforms, websites and apps – but also even with television consumption.

Traffic to core platforms

When the goal of the company is to get traffic back to core, the picture changes considerably: a long time spent watching a bespoke video is not necessarily an indicator of higher traffic back to the company’s website or app. In fact, some outlets are reporting very low rates of traffic coming from bespoke off-platform video to core platforms, giving them the disappointing impression that they are working for social media companies (specially Facebook), rather than for their own media outlets. This has led some outlets to adopt a more conservative strategy when it comes to bespoke content.

Other outlets have decided to persist but to try different kind of videos and track the numbers very closely. The Financial Times is one of those publishers who takes numbers seriously, especially when it comes to audience tracking. To analyse their success in reaching new audiences, they shun the use of the social media platforms’ own proprietary analytics and instead use an internal key performance indicator called “*quality visit*”, which is defined as a reader who come back to Financial Times core platforms twice in one week. Identifying this segment of the audience is the starting point of the analysis; then, they check whether these quality visitors have come to Financial Times from a social media link, or via an internet search or other sources. The final step includes determining whether those quality visitors increase or decrease when the Financial Times uses bespoke video on social media platforms.

7.3. The awakening of the monetization age

In discussions of off-platform business strategy, it is unusual for the term “monetization” not to come up at some point in the conversation. After all, media outlets are mostly private companies that need to orient their efforts towards a sustainable business model. For the time being, however, publishers recognize that they get hardly any direct incomes from their video publications on social media sites.

YouTube is the main social platform that has been offering a consistent business model for video monetization in recent years, although Twitter also has a branded programme called “Amplify” for monetizing bespoke video. However, publishers are mostly waiting for Facebook to make public its own commercialization programme for bespoke video, which has already been announced and is being tested with some partnered media. Meanwhile, their strategy is to create a loyal audience that will continue to consume their content when the ads arrive.

With the analytics information about audiences that we have right now, we know that the day Facebook opens its platform to ad-video commercialization, creating bespoke videos is going to be cost-effective for media companies. (...) When that day comes, with the experience we have learnt by now, we are going to be prepared to scale production – if we need to do so. (Alejandro Laso, El Confidencial)

Some media outlets report that Facebook has already started recommending them to create videos longer than 90 seconds. The reason? Zuckerberg’s company is trying to avoid the inclusion of pre-rolls that annoy audiences, and go instead for mid-rolls that play once the user has watched a considerable part of the video. For that to happen, however, the video needs to be at least 90 seconds long.

In this current phase of content distribution with unclear business models, outlets are still exploring the advantages and disadvantages of various strategies. Some of them talk about launching initiatives in recent months that are now being reconsidered or directly rejected. This is the case for Instant Articles, a Facebook product that allows companies to publish not only videos but whole articles in a native, fast-loading Facebook format, which was adopted early on by outlets such as El País or El Confidencial, but has been strongly opposed in other newsrooms:

Sky News does not do Instant Articles: we prefer to drive people back to the Sky News platform, because at the end of the day we are a business, we do need to make sure that we are promoting the longevity of this business ... We need to make sure that you need to come to Sky News (Richard Evans, Sky News).

7.4. Your brand’s soul for a bunch of clicks

Although business and data-driven decisions are becoming more and more common every day in digital newsrooms, virtually all the interviewees at some point invoke editorial principles that will always prevail above cold numerical analysis:

I only want a big audience if it is a big audience for the right thing. It is an important thing that we try to do here: it is not a big reach at all cost, we are not in that game anymore, digital advertising is not working like that anymore ... It is about the most people watching the things you care about, the things that you think are important. I call it “responsible reach” (Christian Bennett, The Guardian)

Coherence with the editorial line of the company is one of the values that heads of video and social media protect when facing decisions about what videos to publish on off-platforms. A3Noticias, Sky News and The Guardian particularly put emphasis on

this aspect: off-platform publication is a division of the same media outlet and they want to make sure that the stories they publish are their big stories, their exclusive stories, stories that add value and benefit their brands.

Some outlets confess that in earlier times they might have followed a more aggressive strategy, prioritizing contents with a strong emotional appeal and greater viral potential, as a reflection of what other types of content providers were publishing successfully. Nowadays, however, they defend the social value of hard news – and specially, the value of keeping their representative and particular brand voice.

I do not even think we have to look for the magic formula – this is something that has never existed even for TV channels. What we need to find is our own voice, a voice that represents us in an audiovisual way, so people know that when they want to watch something with that particular treatment, they can come to us (Ernesto Torrico, El Confidencial)

You can go very cheap with that and just go for emotional gifts, but we don't do just that: it has to fulfil those things and still be a Guardian thing (Christian Bennett, The Guardian).

In PlayGround, they claim that their editorial approach when creating videos is not forced to fit any specific target age expectations, but rather to reflect their vision of the world and what they consider relevant.

If you try to produce specifically for young people you can have conditioners or prejudices, "young people won't be interested in that" ... We have published topics that initially might look not attractive for young audiences – "A piece about Kandinsky? Edward Munch? People don't care for that!" – and have become very successful ... It all depends on how you tell the story. Reality has proven that people are interested in very different stuff. (Josune Imízcoz, PlayGround)

The Guardian makes a similar point:

Shakespeare solos were for our website, but they actually worked really, really well in Facebook ... For me is amazing that a series of people reading Shakespeare can do 20 million views ... Again, if you can get the story right, and the production right, you can find a young audience for these things ... (Christian Bennett, The Guardian)

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1. So – when does video news make sense in off-platforms?

Since I worked here it has been quite difficult to reach conclusions about what will work (Julián Nieto, A3Noticias)

I think there is still no magic formula about how a video should be (...) And probably there won't be a single formula: there are going to be thousands (Ernesto Torrico, El Confidencial)

The absolute certainty that something is about to work ... honestly, we never have it (Carlos de Vega, El País)

All interviewees agree: there is no magic formula that will ensure a video's success. The main aim of this research was to help identify why sometimes video works for news distribution on off-platforms and sometimes it does not. Based on our content analysis and qualitative research, these are the key findings:

- **Texted short videos**, defined as less than 4 minutes where text narration is used over a sequence of images, without a voice narration, is the most successful type of video in Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
- **Testimonies** with personal stories that reflect a social trend perform particularly well in Instagram, while **raw video** associated with breaking news is more popular in Twitter.
- YouTube is the place for a more television-style experience, succeeding with long-form pieces, such as **documentaries** and series. Video news is 16:9, played with sound, and does not require special graphic elements.
- **It's not all about the packaging**. Although they might help in creating a better user experience, formatting elements like aspect ratio, inclusion of mentions or hashtags, or use of text or music are not essential elements for video virality.
- **Virality asks for virality**. Breaking news can make a huge impact in what videos became successful. Video is especially appreciated in the first hours of a story.
- **Minorities and pleasures matter in social**. The most successful videos are those covering stories about social groups under special pressure (kids, women, ill people, racial minorities, LGTB) and lifestyle (music, food, celebrities, fashion).
- **Live works on the ground, in real time**. Live streams work especially well for covering stories on the ground in a breaking news situation. Other formats like debates, magazines or QAs perform well only when they incorporate audience engagement.
- **Platforms have thematic territories**. Certain topics perform better in some platforms than in others: Health & Education in Facebook, Art & Culture in Instagram, Politics in Twitter, Business in YouTube.
- **Emotions lead to virality**. Outlets consider that video news items that create inspiration, indignation or humour are the key trigger to sharing.
- **Take advantage of the three daily peaks and skip the weekend**. Commuting, lunch and prime time are the hours with higher social exposure for video news,

as well as Mondays and Thursdays.

Having said that, we must still be aware of the limitations of the sample of videos that were used for this research:

- Video views has been used as the most important metric to select the successful videos, even when there are understandable doubts about how real a video view is in platforms where videos autoplay.
- Our sample only analyses successful videos, not the unsuccessful ones. To check whether the patterns we have found are specific to successful videos or not, the sample should be enlarged to include the total production.
- Our analysis has not considered the possible dissuasive effects of pre-roll ads in video consumption – so far this only affects videos in YouTube.
- Finally, this research showcased the characteristics of the most successful video news of eight specific producers, and might not represent the most successful video news of the whole industry.

Further studies that address these limitations will certainly improve our results and add value to current knowledge.

Beyond off-platform video news features, this research also aimed to shed some light on outlets' business strategies and internal organization and production. From interviews, we can observe that:

- **Facebook remains the core** of all video news strategies and is still the main platform for which publishers are creating bespoke videos, focusing on short, explanatory or testimonial texted pieces. YouTube is seen as an experience closer to television, with a predominance of documentaries, but with users choosing what they want to watch. Twitter is devoted to breaking news images and politics clip stories, while Instagram hosts content with a stronger visual appearance. Snapchat will be an option for publishers when they can obtain a place in the Discovery section.
- **Brand awareness is the main purpose** for video off-platform publication. Outlets consider that high video visibility will let their audiences know what topics they cover and what their approach is – and that will lead to further proactive traffic on core platforms. Only half of the most successful video news items actually included a CTA leading to core platform material.
- **The most monitored metric for success is video views**, although most outlets also watch traffic referrals and engagement. However, there is concern about reaching quality audiences with core newsroom coverage rather than getting views at all costs. The industry still needs a common and audited cross-platform metric, perhaps the number of minutes watched.
- **Monetization is not a reality**, but outlets trust it will come sooner or later, probably associated with more brand formulas and mid-roll in Facebook videos.
- **Outlets have created specific video teams within their newsrooms** to produce content for digital platforms, including web, app and social media. Their main focuses are web pieces and Facebook formats, with some outlets shifting towards platform-specific teams and others covering formats to create unique contents that work equally well in core platforms and in social media sites.

- **A moment of transition/innovation.** “We are just changing the teams right now ...” All outlets explained they are in a period of transition that is changing production routines, job titles, goals and relationships inside the newsroom. This break-up of old structures might be painful and costly but is also providing opportunities for innovation in formats and professional profiles.

8.2. Don’t stop thinking about tomorrow

We wanted the newsrooms to share with us their plans and visions for the immediate future of off-platform video. Here are some of the things we heard.

- **Scaling back live video.** Publishers are rethinking their strategies to produce fewer but more effective live streams once the agreement with Facebook and the experimental phase is over.
- **360 and VR videos.** HuffPost wants to tell interesting and appropriate stories that make sense in 360 and virtual reality (VR) experiences, both for core and off-platforms – including live videos in Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.
- **Experiment with longer formats.** Whether following platform requirements or from self-conviction, publishers will move away from short “pill” videos to experiment more with narratives and characters in longer format videos.
- **Expanding video teams.** PlayGround is planning to enlarge its video production, creating different teams specializing in different platforms: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and website. El Confidencial is planning to redesign its team so that every section of the newspaper could have the basic competences to produce video if necessary.
- **Adapting the YouTube player as their own.** That a legacy newspaper like El País has decided to adapt the YouTube player as the main player for its core platforms in preference to its own tells us a lot about the intricate current relationship between media and platforms. They value the functionalities of the YouTube player, as well as the savings in hosting it will provide.
- **Watching Facebook movements carefully.** Some recent announcements from Facebook make Sky News think its hunger for original video content is going to be stronger. Facebook is going to pay more attention to video length consumption, many more videos will play with sound in the timeline, and it has launched a television app for video only. That promises to be a game-changer for what kind of content publishers post in Facebook, and its role as the main driver for core platforms.

And we would add an extra one:

- **Experimenting with video formats for stories.** Stories, understood as the collection of ephemeral photo/video slideshows, were the most copied product feature in early 2017: from Snapchat they expanded to Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. They have altered the newsfeed publishing logic, which was related to desktops and the use of keyboards, but is now evolving towards a more mobile, camera-related logic. As Josh Constine wrote in Techcrunch, *“if the camera is the new keyboard, then the future of social media will look more like a slideshow than a Word document”* (Constine, 2017). The Guardian, El País and

PlayGround are already working with interesting formats in this environment, and chances are that the trend will explode in the coming months.

8.3. **Serving *persona*. A last thought.**

This research has showcased a wide range of video news becoming successful in social media platforms, with new video types, visual languages and distribution strategies taking shape and redefining the business of journalism. However, there are indications that despite more video offerings or connectivity improvements, video news will not kill the text star – rather, the two will coexist. The reason for this is that video is not a value in absolute terms: it is only valuable when it embodies what audiences need at a certain moment, in a certain situation.

A **persona**, in user-centred design, is “a fictional character created to represent a user type that might use a site, brand, or product in a similar way” (Wikipedia). Newsrooms are beginning to think of their audiences in terms of *users* of their information – users who might have different lifestyles, interests and levels of technological literacy. Understanding those audiences is the necessary step in defining new journalistic narratives and products that satisfy their needs.

The study of these *personas*, their motivation and circumstances, thus provides an imperative focus for further research in media industry. The more we know who we work for, the more we will be able to serve them properly.

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*Environments are not just containers,
but are processes that change the content totally.*

Marshall McLuhan

APPENDIX

Interviewees

- Christian Bennett, Executive Editor of Visual Journalism, The Guardian.
- Guillermo Carreras-Candi, Head of Video and Executive Producer, PlayGround.
- Carlos de Vega, Subdirector de Vídeo y Fotografía en El País.
- Peter Diapre, Assistant Editor [Mobile], Sky News.
- Richard Evans, Head of Social Media and Audience Development, Sky News.
- Josune Imízcoz, Head of Editorial Video, PlayGround.
- Kayode Josiah, Director of Commercial Development Digital Video and Audio, Financial Times.
- Dawn Kelly, Head of Video and Multimedia Production, HuffPost UK.
- Alejandro Laso, Director of Innovation and Strategy, El Confidencial.
- Julián Nieto, Responsible of Multimedia Content, A3Noticias.
- Ernesto Torrico, Head of Video department, El Confidencial.