

Slow journalism in the “infoxication” era

El *Slow Journalism* en la era de la infoxicación

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Abstract:

Slow journalism appears as a response to the information overload generated by the acceleration of the news production cycle in a digital era marked by the emergence of new operators (social networks, news aggregators). Both the study of cases practiced and the reflection on the function that the so-called “slow journalism” must exert today indicate that this type of journalism is still useful to improve the quality of information products. On the other hand, the existence of an increasing demand of multimedia contents that analyze the facts in depth is confirmed. That need is being covered by companies that are independent of the mainstream media, which are more interested in developing other mass demand markets such as latest news.

Keywords:

Slow journalism; Longform journalism; “infoxication”; fake news; transmedia narratives.

Resumen:

El slow journalism surge como respuesta a la sobrecarga informativa generada por la aceleración del ciclo de producción de noticias en una era digital marcada por la aparición de nuevos operadores (redes sociales, agregadores de noticias). El estudio de casos practicado y la reflexión sobre la función que el “periodismo lento” debe ejercer en la actualidad indican que este sigue siendo útil para mejorar la calidad de los productos informativos. Por otra parte, se confirma la existencia de una demanda en alza de contenidos multimedia que analicen los hechos informativos en profundidad. Estas necesidades están siendo cubiertas por empresas informativas independientes de los grandes medios, más interesados en rentabilizar otros mercados de demanda masiva como las noticias breves de actualidad.

Palabras clave:

Slow journalism; Longform journalism; “infoxicación”; “fake news”; narrativas transmedia.

1. Introduction

Today’s digital environment is defining a new information framework with news generated by different operators that are not always of media origin. The frequency at which information is produced, distributed and consumed is reaching dizzying speeds since the hegemony of the 24-hour news cycle began in the early 2000s.

The information overload generated by this process, which is suffered by digital audiences, manifests through continuous updates, fewer sources consulted, facts not sufficiently contrasted and the standardization of journalistic narratives. For a decade, there have been constant requests from experts and career journalists to increase the time devoted to producing publishable information. This deceleration of the news production cycle would improve the quality of the information products, as well as the conditions of their reception.

It is in this context that the concept of “slow journalism” arises, as a reaction to a kind of journalism characterized by speed, superficiality and little relevance. There are so many opinions on the need to curb the spiral of “infoxication” (information intoxication) in which the current audiences are involved, that it is worthwhile to reflect on the role that this journalistic stream can play in that process.

The present essay becomes known when a decade has passed since scholars attributed a name – “slow journalism” – to a kind of deep and relaxed journalism opposed to the not always justified informative urgency. At that time, the presence of social networks as new agents involved in the process of information exchange and dissemination was not significant. Ten years later, these new operators, already transformed into new communication actors, have been able to change radically the behavioral norms, not only of the audience, but also of the rest of the actors and producers of journalistic information.

The problems alluded to by experts a decade ago -informational irrelevancy and lack of rigor - have worsened in recent times, which justifies more than ever a debate on how slow journalism can contribute to change and improve this situation.

The main purpose of this essay is to know the position that slow journalism finds itself today in order to face this challenge. For this reason, the objectives of the essay are closely related to the new internal and external challenges that “slow journalism” must address today.

In the first place will be addressed the problem of the configuration of slow journalism as an own genre in relation to others already existing. Later will be discussed its justification in an information system dominated by immediacy. Finally will be assessed the financial costs involved in carrying out this kind of journalism in the current news organizations. There will also be a reflection on the most appropriate genres and formats for slow journalism and its best ways to reach different types of audiences in a new digital era.

Throughout the essay, the following hypotheses will be tried:

- Slow journalism exerts a positive influence not only in the interpretative genres but also in the informative ones (those most affected by the effects of “infoxication”).
- It can be practiced in independent information companies that have adopted a feasible and sustainable business model over time.
- It is capable of eliciting the interest of global audiences, which express a particular consumption demand of this type of journalism.

Slow journalism is embedded in a broader thinking that advocates a more relaxed philosophy of modern life in general terms. Applied to a media scenario, it influences the conception of the type of journalism that must predominate in the era of Internet and social networks. The principles of the Slow Media movement were expressed in the Slow Media manifesto (David, Blumtritt and Khöler, 2010: web) which advocates “slow cooking” journalism and visible quality in production, content and design.

However, trying to define the concept of slow journalism is an arduous and controversial task. The empirical research developed at academic level are so scarce (Drok and Hermans, 2016: 539-554) that one can only count on the theoretical contributions made by the experts (Gess, 2012: 54-65; Greenberg, 2012: 381-393; Greenberg, 2015: 555; Le Masurier, 2015: 138-152) and on the opinions expressed by leading practitioners of information, based on practice.

The most accepted concept of slow journalism in the scientific literature refers to this as a journalistic genre in which the essayistic style and the extensive form by which facts are told are taken into account. Nevertheless, there are those who consider it rather as a way of approaching the stories based on a series of principles and methods (Drok and Hermans, 2016: 539-554).

The research problem arises when trying to define what is meant by slow journalism at a time when media information is disseminated, retrieved and exchanged not only by the usual digital channels (media websites) but also by alternative ones (search engines, news aggregators, digital platforms and, above all, social networks).

In this sense, the present essay will present a new theoretical contribution, subjective in any case, on the concept of slow journalism. The concept proposed, which is based on the observation of specific cases, will be added to the current doctrinal body and will bring a renewed meaning of the term slow journalism from the perspective of the new information ecosystem. The definition includes features present in other theoretical contributions, although it differs in some respects from the idea of slow journalism pointed out by the doctrine until now.

2. Methodology

The subjective reflections expressed in this essay are based on informed and documented opinions based on an informal study of cases, the results of scientific research practiced by the experts and the reading of press articles that express diverse journalists’ views on the subject of reflection. The case study was carried out in three phases: selection of relevant cases for the purpose of the investigation, analysis and subsequent interpretation/discussion. As it should be, in this prospective study of a clearly exploratory nature, the methodology used is qualitative and based on direct observation techniques.

The sources consulted are of a primary nature. They are formed by a selective sample of stories published in the mass media during the months prior to the writing of the essay (December 2016 to October 2017). Relevant information published in previous years (2007 to 2015), accessible through a newspaper library, has also been consulted. Sources include articles, news, reports and interviews published in both digital and print media. The selection criteria of the sample are based on thematic relevance, media coverage and the illustrative role of the stories.

3. Results

3.1. *Slow journalism, a controversial term*

“¿What is slow journalism?” The question posed by Megan Le Masurier (2015: 138-152) clearly reveals the state of the issue. First, because the allusion to the term slow journalism occurred for the first time in 2007 and a decade later there is still no academic consensus on its content. Susan Greenberg (2007: web) used the expression to refer to a set of emerging narrative genres as “essays, reportage and other nonfiction forms that takes its time to find things out, notices stories that others miss, and communicates it all to the highest standards”. In short, the author based the original concept of slow journalism on two factors: time and quality. Some years later Greenberg himself explained it in these terms:

“I first used “slow journalism” in 2007 to describe storytelling that gives equal value to narrative and factual discovery. My contribution was original in one respect: using management theory, it evaluated slow journalism as an example of high-margin journalism at the luxury end of the market, compared to high-volume news at the other, or conventional journalism in the middle.” (Greenberg, 2015: 555)

The time factor seems to be consubstantial for the majority of authors who have tackled the issue. For Megan Le Masurier (2015: 143), this type of journalism “does not need a list of essential characteristics to be rated as “slow”. The term, like the “slow movement”, means rather a criticism of the effects of haste in journalism. In Spain, Rosique-Cedillo and Barranquero-Carretero define it as the one that “emerges as a reaction to the dominant journalistic tendency to novelty, brevity

and instantaneity and that invites to rethink the necessary time to produce and consume rigorous, creative and quality information “(Rosique-Cedillo and Barranquero-Carretero, 2015: 453).

Quality and narrative style are key elements too for authors like Erik Neveu or Don Belt. Neveu opposes “slow journalism” to “pack reporting”, and defines it as “investigative and more selective in its targets”. He also calls for it to be “narrative, fair with sources and readers, participatory, community oriented and, finally, give priority to untold stories” (Neveu: 2016: 448-460). Belt, on the other hand, believes that slow journalism depends on its narrative strength, the description of details and the time spent investigating. He also links slow journalism with what characterizes “great reports, New journalism, the genres of non-fiction, explanatory journalism, immersive journalism, “gonzo” journalism, ethnographic and literary journalism”. For Belt, in slow journalism prevails depth research, accuracy, style and context over hurries and exclusives (Belt, 2015: 547-562).

Finally, other authors refer to the length of information pieces as an essential feature of slow journalism. This, in turn, has given rise to a type of journalism that has emerged from it: longform journalism or “long-term journalism”, that has been defined by the doctrine as one in which “practioners use journalistic methods to research and write independently about contemporary people, events and issues at book length in a timely manner for a broad audience” (Ricketson, 2012). At present, longform journalism, with texts of 1,500 words of minimal length, is developed in digital media with such a visual intensity (Lassila-Merisalo, 2014:1) and sometimes with so much irrelevancy (Mahler, 2014: web) that, according to some authors, it could even die from its success.

At first glance, the basic features of slow journalism (narrative quality, length, more time spent on in-depth researching) proposed by the doctrine do not seem to differ too much from other ways of doing journalism in the past. The authors themselves have no qualms about including under the umbrella of slow journalism disciplines like narrative journalism, whose origins go back to the nineteenth century, New journalism, that emerged in the United States in the 1960s by Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese and Truman Capote, or explanatory journalism, that gave rise in 1988 to a new category of Pulitzer prizes. Furthermore, one might even think that the above are just the basic requirements that every kind of journalism should meet at any time and place.

It is therefore necessary to find that X factor that unequivocally defines slow journalism in relation to other types of journalism. And that factor does not seem to depend as much on time or length as on forms or processes. On the one hand, it is admitted that slow journalism is opposed to the “rapid” slope of the digital informative system. That is to say, opposed to “ready-made” information elaborated with short texts, poor edited videos and basic information that does not surpass the data contained in a lead and a headline.

However, the length of an information piece cannot condition its narrative quality in all cases. An article of short or medium length may have required a long time of investigation, search and contrast of sources and documentation. Or it could be

perfectly well written and explained. Likewise, an in-depth report, drawn up for weeks or months may be devoid of interest if the correct approach or narrative style is not chosen. According to Joshue Benton, director of the Journalism Laboratory at Harvard University, “the length of a text only indicates that the article should be abbreviated” (in Albalad, 2015: 7-25).

As Benjamin Ball (2016: 432-444) states, multimedia journalism can be superficial or profound, fast or slow, short or extensive. Slow journalism, whose most complete development takes place in this medium, could fulfil all these characteristics except for the first one. The time factor certainly influences the making of the news (“good stories are made using more time. And now there are no good stories”, Gay Talese, La Razón, 2012: web), but it is not a matter of extending *sine die* the time to close a story, but to find the most appropriate time to prepare, edit, publish and update it.

3.2. *The 24-hour news cycle*

“We swim in a sea of information,” says Susan Greenberg (2007: web). It could be added that sometimes we even drown in it. The introduction of the cycle of continuous news 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year radically changed the rhythms of editing news information. Moreover, the consolidation of the presence of social networks in the daily lives of the receivers has contributed to give a new twist to this new way of consuming information.

Clearly, the field of growth of slow journalism is not Twitter, where the media practice a “journalism” of headlines, or Facebook, where chain reactions to short news based on sources not always reliable are the rule. Social networks, by their very nature, are appropriate to broadcast “breaking news” and promote an immediate exchange of views but are not so much suitable to accommodate information products generated by slow journalism.

Obviously, we can share informative products that exceed 140 characters and participate in a debate on social networks on relevant issues of information, but it is unlikely that this exchange of information will keep up with the times. The interaction will be possible and desirable, but - except for latest news - it will be done at a slower pace.

In recent years, the increase in the rhythm of news production and reception cycles is due in large part to changes in information consumption caused by the use of new technologies. Smartphones and tablets do not always favor a calm and reflective interpretation of the news but the reading of headlines and short stories that are consumed in the few minutes of a journey by metro or by bus.

In any case, the impression that the information wheel turns too fast is not unique to the 21st century. In the 1960s, journalist Gay Talese was already critical of “fast journalism”:

“Sometimes it seemed as if journalists had an alliance with the fast food industry, because like this one, we prepared at the moment the orders of those consumers who liked to receive information and ideas half-baked.” (Talese, 2012).

At present, authors such as Martín, Torregrosa and Serrano (2010: 5-6) have voiced their opinion against “simultaneity journalism” that forces journalists to “reduce novelty to pure data, to detail.” And as Honoré (2005) understands that the “slow” philosophy does not promote slowness but the search for an adequate pace, this essay argues the need to find an appropriate periodicity to produce digital information. Which means that the intervals of time to produce -and consequently to consume- news must be increased. Although it is true that the Internet also allows the consumption of information in the long term -news posted on cyberspace for an indefinite period of time and that are later retrieved by means of search engines-, the aim now is that fast breaking news are at all times relevant to the receivers.

To try to stop the information saturation generated by the profusion of press agency news that are reproduced with hardly any changes by mainstream media, it is necessary to invest in the human factor. It would be worthless to reduce the pace of news updating if the stories had not been previously elaborated according to the principles of quality, rigor and objectivity, which are inherent to good journalism.

The frantic pace of news updating in online media editions is due in many cases to the fact that journalists themselves have skipped some (or even several) steps in the process to find and check sources. Seized by the rush they are compelled to correct inaccurate, confused or false data. As Rosenberg and Feldman (2008) argue, “every mistake made in the newsroom, in the end is the consequence of an overwhelming ambition to be the first.”

In these cases the media risk losing their credibility. If a reader placed his trust in a particular medium to follow a news story and detected mistakes or did not obtain the information wanted for being scarce, repeated or inaccurate, he would immediately turn to another medium, taking into account that we live in an extremely competitive and atomized information system.

In addition, journalism that bets on these practices ends up being stereotyped and oversimplified (Drok and Hermans, 2016: 539-554) and the media that defend it end up becoming irrelevant. The triviality is achieved by writing news headlines and keywords aimed at indexing robots and not readers with human form. The journalistic style is affected, as well as the narrative structure and the contents, and finally, the visibility obtained by means of the search engines algorithms is lost in practice by offering information that is too simple, not at all remarkable and globally unattractive.

The application of the principles of slow journalism in the production of latest news could improve this situation. A more complete, better-informed brief or news report that includes audio-visual resources coordinated with the narration will capture the attention better and retain it for a longer period of time, as have proven the empirical results regarding audiovisual media (Benaissa, 2012: 28). It would be a matter of organizing the data in more in-depth stories that would be written with some more useful time.

Some examples of this type of informative pieces can be found in the daily reports published by the mainstream media in their online editions¹. Sometimes newspapers like *ABC* or *El País* publish news produced under the principles of slow journalism that incorporate podcasts or short stories that include data visualization graphics. Nevertheless, this practice is more common and more developed in international media like *The New York Times* or *Le monde*. The truth is that Spanish media prefer to reduce news production times by including short videos with basic information that reiterates and does not complement what is stated in the text, and practice “slow journalism” in genres that are not so close to the media spotlight (descriptive reports, in-depth reports).

As Chung and Yoo (2008: 375-397) maintain, continuous updating is a practice appreciated by the target audience of a digital medium. However, Megan Le Masurier also understands that the rush to produce information in near real time is the cause of the loss of accuracy of the stories and its lack of verification (Le Masurier, 2015: 138-152). The importance that slow journalism grants to the verification of the sources acts as a shield against the news disseminated both by prestigious media that have neglected this process and through non-media channels that have not established specific control mechanisms (social networks, platforms like Yahoo, search engines like Google and news aggregators).

The situation described occurred in a real case: when the Spanish newspaper *El País* rushed in publishing an international breaking new in the year 2013 on the then president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez. On that occasion, *El País* would not have had to suffer a loss of prestige if, by publishing on the front page an image of the former president being operated during his illness, the medium would have carried out a rigorous fast-checking process. The picture, which was seen around the world and was published as a scoop, turned out to be false. The newspaper had to apologize for not verifying its sources and find out through social networks, which was the true origin of the picture (a video of an anonymous patient published on You Tube) (*El País*, 2013: web).

Journalistic credibility is also questioned because of the false news that is published and consumed immediately in social networks. Although fake news is not something new in journalism, its speed of propagation now equals that of the rest thanks to these new information exchange platforms. The superabundance of information and the relaxation in the control of the sources favor the circulation of fake news in social networks like Facebook, who recognize that they are making efforts to control the veracity of the news: “Although we do not write the news that you read and share, we recognize that

¹ By way of illustration, read the news reports on the terrorist attacks committed in Europe and in the city of Barcelona in August 2017 published by the digital editions of the newspapers *Le monde* and *The New York Times* on 18 and 19 August 2017. The first report is on the practice of vehicle abuse as a new way of committing terrorist attacks. The report includes graphs of data visualization that contribute to explain quickly and effectively aspects that are dealt with in greater depth in the text. The second report, relating to the attack with a car collision perpetrated on the Ramblas of Barcelona, includes a brief chronological account of the facts that effectively coordinates the pictures and the text of the narration. The web references of both pieces are included in the bibliography of this essay.

we are more than a distributor of news. We are a new kind of platform for public speaking and that means we have a responsibility to enable people to have the most important conversations”, they say from Facebook (ABC, 2016: web).

Also Google and Bing are becoming aware of the importance of fighting the spread of false news indexed in their search engines. Both have incorporated a new web code (Claim Review) that identifies and highlights the news in Bing, Google and Google News that have passed a fast-checking process. Media associations such as PolitiFact or the non-profit Fast-Check.org website have already adopted this same schema.org’s code (a joint tagging initiative of Yahoo, Google and Bing created in 2011).

Although prestigious journalists such as Christine Ockrent celebrate that social networks and Internet giants are beginning to react (*Le petitjournal.com*, 2017: web), one might have to ask the question of whether this is their true purpose. Because Internet search engines and social networks are not journalistic companies or mass media even though they are present and exercise a different type of mediating function in the information universe.

The problem is aggravated when the media themselves seem to be abdicating their traditional verification functions. Mainly because non-reliable news are circulating in real time in social networks that, furthermore, do not feel the obligation to control the information that their users share in a rigorous way. Anyway, many media, including *The New York Times*, who has decided to reduce its number of publishers and hire more editors in order to accelerate the production of news and be more competitive, are adopting this trend. The newspaper, which so far now had two news verification filters, will have only one (*El País*, 2017: web).

Coddington, Molyneux, and Lawrence (2014: 391-409) warned of this recent practice: “journalists use technology to convey statements and opinions quickly rather than focusing on details.” However, fortunately, not all major media share this view. Nick Petrie, head of digital information at *The Times of London* and *The Sunday Times*, says the media have always been verifiers of news and that this service to society is now more necessary than ever. In addition, he rejects “the constant publication of news by the mere fact of being new and not better” (Petrie, 2015: web).

Checking sources, citations and declarations is part of the usual practices of slow journalism, although it is true that organizing an effective fast-checking service is not available to all newsrooms. Mainly for small and medium-sized media that cannot face its financial costs. And unfortunately, it does not always guarantee the achievement of the expected results. Even prestigious publications in the field of slow journalism like *The New Yorker* have starred embarrassing moments like the publication of a preview of the last book of Gay Talese, *The Hotel of the Voyeur*, without having sufficiently checked its sources. Virtually everything in it turned out to be false (real stories from a roadside motel in the United States, including an alleged murder that never took place) and was coming from an unreliable source.

3.3. Making good journalism is not cheap

Many of the publications devoted to slow journalism are independent of large media groups. They do not have the means to investigate everything they want or to pay for the services of a fast-checker. But they have other alternatives: good journalists, creativity and a business vision to detect a market niche that is scarcely being covered by the mainstream media, which are interested in developing other more profitable information markets such as mobile journalism. Dean Baquet, director of *The New York Times* confirms this:

“Someday, that has already arrived, almost everyone will read the news from the mobile. (...) The public still wants to read long news, great reports, keep reading the traditional, but we have to offer other things as well. The goal is to make people read us in the transformation that the world lives. And for that you have to adjust to the pace of technology”. (Baquet in *XL Semanal*, 2017: 18-19)

While large media use their human resources to investigate, verify sources, edit videos or design creative infographics with little added cost, the new information companies that specialize in slow journalism seek their funding sources in alternative markets.

The business model adopted by these new independent journalistic companies differs relatively depending on each publication, although all agree on one point: the willingness not to depend on the advertising revenue that characterizes the functioning of traditional media. On the one hand, because they intend to preserve their editorial independence, but also because they consider that the advertising model attacks the direct relationship between journalist and reader that they intended to establish (Dowling, 2015: 530-546). Income comes from sponsorship, crowdfunding, native Internet advertising and subscriptions. US companies, which share another business culture, are more likely to generate revenue from sponsorship while European media get most of their resources from crowdfunding and, especially in Spain, from subscriptions.

The cases of *Jot Down* and *CTXT* in Spain represent an alternative to the traditional business model based on the combination of advertising revenues and sales of copies. Both publications have specialized in slow journalism. The first, a digital cultural magazine born in 2011, also publishes a printed magazine in which there is no advertising but a small space (about 10%) for sponsors (Breiner, 2015: web). The magazine is distributed monthly with the printed edition of a large medium like *El País*. *Jot Down* bills at present one million euros per year.

CTXT was founded by Miguel Mora, an expert from *El País* with the motto “proud to get the latest news.” The publication is freely accessible and is funded by means of crowdfunding (it raised almost 100,000 euros from its readership over a period of two years) and a reduced percentage of classic advertising (14,000 euros in the same period of time). *CTXT* is still active three years after its launch.

Few publications can survive solely with the benefits of selling copies or subscriptions, even if that is the ultimate goal. *De Correspondent*, a Dutch medium that began its journey thanks to a crowdfunding campaign, is financed by subscriptions but accepts donations to pay for the translations of their articles, while the British *Delayed Gratification* offer their information products free of charge as a way to promote their printed pay magazine.

The Atavist, a US magazine that only publishes a new story a month, earns revenue on various multimedia platforms through an App, although its main sources of income are subscriptions, the sale of articles and the sale of rights to other formats. For its part, news aggregator *Longform* gets the bulk of its sponsorship income from the University of Pittsburgh (USA) but requests donations on its website, which also includes some advertisements.

Despite the difficulty of financing an independent media in times of crisis, the conclusion is that the digital publications specialized in slow journalism have adopted a business model that is viable and depends mainly on the acceptance of its public objective. The success of each publication will depend more on the quality of its information products and their visibility in cyberspace than on the income obtained by other concepts, as in the traditional model.

On the other hand, the reduced organizational and cost structure of these new media will allow them to have a greater capacity to innovate and experiment with new products and information formats without fear of failure.

3.4. The slow journalism genres

All these publications and a few more (*Narratively*, *Aeon*, *ProPublica*, *Long Play*, *Ricochet*, *XXI*, *The New Yorker*) are the ones that set the tone for news products and journalistic genres of slow journalism. Some put the accent in the narrative (*The New Yorker*, the French *XXI*), others in the elaboration of a multimedia story (*The Atavist*), but all strive to renew journalistic genres at a time when, thanks to technological advances, almost everything is possible.

Major digital media seem to be relegating the practice of slow journalism to the genre of in-depth reporting, not too detached from a current topic but renewed by the incorporation of a high load of visual elements (data, interactive graphs, statistical tables). The latest information trends go even further and include reports of immersive journalism (reports recorded with 360-degree cameras, in 3D or augmented reality).

Although in the beginning it could be thought that the genres that are most conducive to telling stories in depth are the interpretative ones (chronicles and reports) - and indeed, they are - in slow journalism there is also space for informative and opinion genres, and even for hybrid genres.

This essay has already discussed the possibilities offered by slow journalism to improve the quality of news and news reports released by the daily digital press, published even in a 24-hour news cycle. The genres of opinion, capable of condensing in a few paragraphs ideas and arguments that inspire reflection, are equally a good choice for readers who are

demanding information but do not have time to address stories that exceed ten minutes of reading. The work carried out by a political analyst, an editorialist or an opinion writer can be as profound, serious and rigorous as that carried out by a reporter or a chronicler. And it also requires time to read, document, contrast data and sources, analyze them quietly, find arguments and, finally, expose them in a structured, talented and creative manner.

An example of how slow journalism can work with genres of opinion is the current Pulitzer Prize for best editorial. The 2017 award was given to Art Cullen, a founding journalist of The Storm Lake Times, a local Iowa weekly (USA), for his editorials based on in-depth regional research. The surveys, carried out by this modest medium with only 3,000 copies of circulation, lasted two years and were aimed at denouncing water pollution and corporate interests in local agriculture. The jury considered that the articles published over time on the subject revealed “tenacious reporting, impressive expertise and engaging writing” (*Pulitzer.org*, 2017: web).

“Slow journalism” also operates with hybrid genres. News stories and interviews are examples of how to squeeze the talent and narrative skills of journalists bringing together the best of diverse genres². Using a novel approach, a personal style, playing with the narrative structure or doing data mining (knowing how to find hidden stories in data) are some of the manifestations of this creative way of reporting. If we also consider the possibilities offered by modern software programs to edit and design in multimedia mode, the final products generated by slow journalism are likely to achieve a more than remarkable journalistic quality. These products will then be released in the different formats available in the digital market: from mobile applications to e-books, podcasts and even video on demand or streaming.

Matthew Ricketson (2015: 507-520) analyzed the value of “longform journalism”, or “long-running journalism”, published in book format, a type of presentation that has been very little explored so far now in as much as slow journalism is concerned, but which should probably begin to be considered, at least in certain national markets.

As Erik Neveu points out, there are in France a set of digital publications dedicated to slow journalism that have invented a hybrid genre between magazine and book. The magazines, in paper version, are sold in bookstores and not in press kiosks (Neveu, 2016: 448-460). The experimentation with hybrid genres that are born from this type of journalism and that fuse with novels or essays seem to be raising the interest of major Internet companies like Amazon. Its Kindle Singles editorial allows the publication of informative pieces of up to 30,000 words, which is promoting the publication via e-book of an interesting number of books of this type written by specialized journalists.

² An example of news elaborated with a reporting approach that meets the standards of slow journalism was published in the newspaper *El País* on March 6, 2012. The story was about the intervention of the NGO Caritas in “El Gallinero”, a shanty town in Madrid: “Do you know who is the child Jesus?” “Yes, the son of Lucia.” In the same vein, the newspaper *Público* published an interview on April 8, 2015 titled “Living in full lung.” In the interview with Raquel Nieto, a woman diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis, the usual photograph of the interviewee was replaced by an illustrated portrait. In both cases the facts were narrated from an alternative point of view and with a fictional narrative style. The web references of both pieces can be consulted in the bibliographic section of this essay.

On the other hand, is known the interest that has emerged in recent times in the United States for podcasts, which have ended up colonizing the iPods and smartphones of the country's young population. Listening to long-running radio programs, in-depth interviews and weekly episodes on the most varied journalistic stories has become a new trend in the country known for being the cradle of journalism, although unfortunately this practice does not seem to have taken root equally in all countries. Maybe it is only a matter of time.

Possibly with the passing of time, other audiovisual formats such as streaming or television on demand will be more demanded by the audience for the consumption of reports and documentaries elaborated under the premises of slow journalism. These genres seem to have disappeared from the television screens of general information networks for the benefit of specialized networks.

3.5. Slow journalism's audiences

In the digital world, the value of the audience is calculated in quantitative terms: how many "clicks" have been registered in a web page, how many reactions or comments has generated a news item, how many times it has been shared in social networks.

But from a qualitative point of view it should be important to know what are the effects on the receiver of the news published on the Internet. Media that practice slow journalism are interested in having their readers understand all the information. They want them to remember it because it is useful and relevant, and that the analysis of the facts provided allows them to reflect on them and draw their own conclusions. And, if possible, that they share them. The authors of the Slow Media manifesto, David, Blumtritt and Khöler (2010: web) announce that this type of journalism is aimed at "prosumers", that is to say, active digital information consumers, which means establishing with the audiences a close listening and sharing of views relationship within user communities on social networks.

As Barranquero and Jaurrieta (2016: 521-538) point out, slow journalism addresses "a local or global audience that is interested in relevant information." This means that what characterizes the target audience of slow journalism is not their geographical location or their thematic preferences but their interest in knowing information that matters: new data not previously supplied, informational approaches that are away from the mainstream, deep analysis of the facts or informative threads that mass media have stopped following because they are not new. The scarce presence of this type of information in the most visited digital media displaces the interest of the audience towards other spaces where are published all sorts of articles, reports and informative pieces inspired by the principles of slow journalism. Specialized websites, digital magazines, blogs and news aggregators bring together these specific reader communities.

However, slow journalism does not have to address exclusively an elitist, aging audience with a higher academic background. A study by Drok and Hermans (2016: 539-554) in the Netherlands revealed that a considerable percentage of the

population between the ages of 15 and 39 would like journalistic information to be more “investigative, inclusive, cooperative and constructive”.

Another study by Lamb (2013: 10-11) on the American population indicates that 44% of tablet users use them to read investigative journal articles or in-depth reports. In addition, among the improvements proposed in the digital press the participants cited: “include more narrative journalism”, “provide a list of experts and resources consulted” and “provide ways to comment on the topics suggested in the articles.” Moreover, the provision of extra content and the inclusion of informative graphics and data visualization occupied some of the highest positions in the classification of the aspects most appreciated by digital press readers.

The results of the empirical studies practiced point towards the existence of a remarkable mass of readers interested in slow journalism. It is an audience accustomed to handling mobile devices that favor interaction between users -many of them digital natives- and who is receptive to transmedia and multimedia narratives. These types of narratives are appropriate to practice good slow journalism as they help to enrich and renew traditional genres such as reports, chronicles or in-depth interviews with features of the digital age. The information provided in layers (the background in a video, the facts in the text, the analysis in an infographic, the subjects of the information portrayed in photographs and the opinion expressed in illustrations) is thus more attractive and easy to assimilate.

Transmedia and multimedia narratives also promote the interaction between the public and the producers of news. Audiences participate in the narration, not only by visualizing graphics, photographs and videos or by listening to audio files, but now also through the new possibilities offered by virtual reality and video recording in 360 degrees. These technologies allow the reader to enjoy new narrative experiences -more direct and personalized- in the context of immersive journalism, an informative sector that is still in development, but who is very interesting for the evolution of slow journalism.

However, it is always advisable to make an intelligent use of these new technologies, who are appropriate for enriching an informative story, but which alone cannot construct a story in all its complexity. As Martin Baron, director of the Washington Post says, “no technological tools in the world can replace good journalism” (APM, 2017: web).

3.6. A new definition of slow journalism

The analysis of the context in which slow journalism is born and works generates a series of reflections on its nature, its professional practice and the type of audience to which it is directed. The performance of the current information system and the development of new technology-based information products reflect the need to revise the concept of slow journalism that most of the doctrine has been handling so far now.

Therefore, and based on what has been discussed previously in this essay, a new operational definition of slow journalism is proposed. Contrary to most doctrine, this would not be a genre but a process, understood as a set of professional practices, applicable to all journalistic genres and tending to efficiently adapt the times of production and updating of journalistic information in order to provide the readers with relevant, reliable, sufficient and added value information. Its historical relevance is justified by the particular climate of “infoxication” generated by the intense and swift exchange of information flows in the era of Internet and social networks. In that sense, slow journalism aims to be useful to fight against the misinformation propagated in these new digital spaces of information exchange.

Slow journalism is conceived as a transverse stream aimed at increasing the quality of digital information products, adding value through context, analysis and the interpretation of the facts, which are narrated rigorously. Slow journalism benefits from the technological innovations to renew journalistic genres and addresses a global audience, familiar with the use of social networks and the consumption of audiovisual and multimedia products.

The proposed definition shares with the majority of experts the “quality” factor to which they refer in a large part of their contributions (Greenberg, 2007: web: Neveu: 2016: 448-460), and that must necessarily be present in the informative products resulting from slow journalism.

However, the new definition does not exactly coincide with the theories of academics regarding the factors “time” and “length”, although it aligns with the idea of “rethinking” the information production times enunciated by Rosique-Cedillo and Barranquero-Carretero (2015: 453). As has already been stated and argued above, it is perfectly feasible to write short texts that are both profound and rigorous and have been produced in a reasonably short time (editorials, opinion articles, daily reports and news written with a reporting approach).

4. Conclusions

The pace of production and dissemination of digital information at the beginning of the 21st century presents a challenge for any actor who participates in the current information ecosystem. The 24-hour news cycle is certainly a challenge for slow journalism, but this “slow journalism” is also an incentive for those who produce instant news, poorly worded, little or not checked at all and who are increasingly disliked for its low quality information.

It is undeniable that audiences continue to demand a space for brief journalism, almost “headline journalism”, that reports the essential facts in a short time. That seems to be the trend in the future according to the experts’ forecasts, but we also should reserve spaces that report current issues with depth and slowness. And not because it is a question of professional ethics, but because there is a clear demand from the audience.

Slow journalism, a genre of its own or a set of journalistic practices, depending on the point of view, might be considered a historical evolution of that careful journalism of the sixties, but it is actually more than that. It is a new way of practicing quality journalism in different genres and technological formats, using the time necessary to guarantee the audience optimal quality standards.

It has been shown that slow journalism can also be effectively practiced in the fast-moving side of the Internet -which requires constant renewal of content- in both informational and hybrid genres as well as in genres of opinion. Nevertheless, where slow journalism develops best is in its other facet, the one dedicated to the slow and timeless consumption of information. Data that remain the longest time in cyberspace are not short news but long texts. This is how the Google algorithm works. But it takes time to produce in-depth information.

Transmedia and multimedia narratives foster the development and renewal of interpretive genres, which are the most often used by slow journalism. Now chronicles and reports explain complex facts with all details in interactive graphics, in three dimensions or recorded with 360 degree cameras. But investing in these technologies is not cheap. And it is a paradox that mass media are the least interested in allocating resources to finance this type of journalism, which continues to be demanded by the public.

The business model adopted by news organizations that have specialized in slow journalism does not differ from other media that operate outside the large media groups. Their income comes from collaborative economy, sponsorship and subscriptions. Despite not having the structure and resources of mass media, they have proven to be viable, reasonably profitable and attractive in terms of audience.

Slow journalism is therefore able to interest a general public that consume latest news produced with rigor and quality, and at the same time other communities of users gathered around specialized publications that tell stories in depth, in an original and attractive way, through multimedia content that can be shared and exported to different platforms.

Slow journalism undoubtedly plays a relevant role in the current information system as it acts as a barrage of contention against misinformation, information saturation and the uncontrolled circulation of unreliable information on the Internet and social networks. Anyway, it will be interesting to see how this journalistic trend will evolve in a future that informatively speaking was already glimpsed half a century ago but that is definitely here.

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