

Coverage of murders of social leaders in Colombia: content of analysis based on the Journalistic Added Value Model

Cobertura del asesinato de líderes sociales en Colombia: análisis de contenido a la luz del Valor Agregado Periodístico

Cobertura de assassinatos de líderes sociais na Colômbia: conteúdo de análise à luz do Valor Agregado Jornalístico

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the final results of the application of a content of analysis in a corpus of news about murders of social leaders in Colombia aiming to measure and analyze the journalistic quality, according to the premises of the Journalistic Added Value Model (JAV). The study focused on the contents produced by three Colombian native digital media, *La Silla Vacía*, *Razón Pública* and *Verdad Abierta*, analyzed between August 2016 and August 2017. The results showed that the coverage of the social phenomenon made by those media outlets was of high quality, according to the four variables selected.

Keywords: murders of social leaders in Colombia; Journalistic Added Value; JAV; native digital media; journalism and social justice.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta los resultados finales de la aplicación de un análisis de contenido a un corpus noticioso sobre asesinatos de líderes sociales en Colombia para medir y analizar su calidad periodística de acuerdo a los postulados del Valor Agregado Periodístico (VAP). El estudio se centró en el contenido de tres medios nativos digitales colombianos, La Silla Vacía, Razón Pública y Verdad Abierta, y contempló como periodo desde agosto de 2016 hasta agosto de 2017. Los resultados arrojaron que los tres medios de comunicación seleccionados hicieron una cobertura del fenómeno social de alta calidad de acuerdo a las cuatro variables de estudio seleccionadas.

Palabras clave: asesinato de líderes sociales en Colombia; Valor Agregado Periodístico; VAP; medios nativos digitales; periodismo y justicia social.

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta os resultados finais da aplicação de uma análise de conteúdo a um corpus de notícias sobre assassinatos de líderes sociais na Colômbia para medir e analisar sua qualidade jornalística, de acordo com os postulados do Valor Agregado Jornalístico (VAP). O estudo centrou-se no conteúdo de três mídias nativas digitais colombianas, *La Silla Vacía*, *Razão Pública* e *Verdade Aberta* entre agosto de 2016 até agosto de 2017. Os resultados mostraram que os três meios selecionados cobriram o fenômeno social com alta qualidade de acordo com as quatro variáveis selecionadas do estudo.

Palavras-chave: assassinato de líderes sociais na Colômbia; Valor Agregado Jornalístico; VAP; mídia nativa digital; jornalismo e justiça social.

How to cite:

Osorio Matorel, E. P. (2018). Cobertura del asesinato de líderes sociales en Colombia: análisis de contenido a la luz del Valor Agregado Periodístico. *Cuadernos.info*, (43), 221-237. <https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.43.1367>

INTRODUCTION

The media are producers and disseminators of information about the actors and social phenomena that have been permeated by power relations within a society; this information influences the way they are approached and discussed. In other words, the language used by a media allows to know these relationships within a society (Vélez López, 2006). Therefore, as suggested by Osorio Matorel (2017) these are scenarios that should be studied to answer questions such as: Which way of doing journalism contributes to the construction of a post-conflict society? The media outlets play a crucial role in the search for social justice, particularly in a politically and socially polarized country like Colombia. A recent case, for instance, was that at the end of the armed combat between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla a new discourse was set in the country: the construction of a post-conflict society and the claim for social justice (Osorio Matorel, 2017).

In the Colombian case, specifically from all the processes that seek the end of the internal armed conflict, the media outlets are important insofar as they convey ideas or represent realities, as well as discourses around issues such as the media interests or principles and even the public agenda. These interests and principles can be seen in aspects such as the quality of journalistic content.

After a little more than half a century of confrontation, Colombia moves from a society whose main concern was the internal armed conflict to one in which the focus is on other forms of direct violence (gangs, homicides, etc.), structural (State abandonment and corruption) and symbolic (gender-based violence, ethnic-racial discrimination, among others)¹. While some of the traditional forms of direct violence, such as massacres, forced and mass displacements and selective homicides, decreased noticeably, other – such as threats against social leaders (Álvarez Vanegas, 2016a)– have increased in recent years.

From the creation of the Political Constitution of 1991, which gave legal validity to the struggle of minority groups, many citizens –in their roles as individuals and as members of collectivities– turned their attention to sociopolitical activism. However, as interest grew in defending collective and individual rights, opposition to it also increased. In the dawn of 2016, reports began to circulate about a worrying increase in the number of social leaders threatened or killed².

Since the conclusion of the dialogues in Havana, Cuba, and the signing of the agreement by the delegations of the national government and the FARC, more than 23 social leaders have been assassinated. For some, this fact highlights a new wave of political violence like that of the beginning of 1990, which left as a result the political genocide of the *Unión Patriótica* (Galanova, 2017). For others, the review of the origins of this phenomenon cannot not be deterministic because even though there is a pattern of assassination of leaders due to their work, the perpetrators vary according to the type of leadership (Álvarez Vanegas, 2016b). In this work, the author subscribes the last position, since it presents a holistic view of the phenomenon, which, although it has political implications, transcends scenarios such as economic, social and cultural.

The truth is that systematic murders with political motivations are worrisome, among other things, because they jeopardize the satisfactory implementation of what is subscribed in the 2016 General Agreement for the end of the conflict and the construction of a stable and lasting peace (In Spanish, *Acuerdo General para el fin del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y duradera*), hindering the attempts to build a post-conflict society. In addition, historically, the struggle of activists of minority groups, unions, and associations has been stigmatized for defending certain ideals or interests contrary to those of certain power groups (INDEPAZ, 2016).

Despite being a recent and controversial issue both domestically and internationally, the research related to the murder of social leaders is scarce to date. The number decreases even more if the study focuses on digital media or on models of news quality measurement. In this regard, the growth of this social problem requires its approach from the compiled news corpus and from the postulates of the JAV –Journalistic Added Value (VAP, the Spanish acronymism for *Valor Agregado Periodístico*), to analyze how it was covered from the selected digital-native media.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

MEDIA: FROM THE TRADITIONAL TO THE MIGRATED AND DIGITAL-NATIVES

The mass media play a crucial role in countries with intricate contexts such as Colombia, inasmuch as they are “intimately linked to who we are, individually and

socially (...) The media not only report and circulate knowledge; they are involved in its production” (Fiske, cited by Rincón, 2008). According to the Media Monitoring Project (www.monitoreodemedios.co), conducted by Reporters Without Borders and Fecolper, the concentration of the media in Colombia has two sides: on the one hand are the individuals who control media, such as Felipe López Caballero, owner of *Publicaciones SEMANA S.A.*, or Luis Carlos Sarmiento Angulo, owner of *Casa Editorial El Tiempo (CEET S.A. – CEETTV S.A.)*, who also participates in the energy-gas, financial, and industry and mining sectors. On the other hand are the traditional business and media groups, such as the *Grupo Empresarial Santo Domingo-Valorem*, owner of *Caracol Televisión* and *El Espectador* –that also participates in sectors such as finance, industry and transport– and the *Organización Ardila Lulle*, owner of *RCN* radio and television, which controls sectors such as sports, entertainment, soft drinks and alcoholic beverages.

The problem of the phenomenon of structural concentration of media, not only in Colombia, but in other countries of the Latin American region, is that it entails the exclusion of diverse voices and points of view, as well as of topics of general interest, from the media agenda, and even the loss of informational autonomy, as a consequence of the “conflict of interests between the news agenda and the broad and diverse economic interests of the media owners” (GFMD, 2008, p. 171).

In these scenarios, the arrival of the Internet allowed that, in a progressive way, some traditional media migrated or turned to a platform of lower cost and free access, but also that new actors arrived seeking to deliver quality information, guarantee the right to communication and fight for freedom of expression (Rincón, 2010, pp. 5-13). According to Rey and Novoa (2012), until 2012 Colombian digital media were 75% native and 25% migrated. Of the latter, 50% comes from the press, 22% from radio, 14% from television, 7% from magazines and another 7% from community television and radios. Rey and Novoa (2012) argue that one of the advantages of both native-digital and migrated media is that they are no longer subject to the information of the newsrooms of traditional media. Digital media are born on online platforms, adapt to changes and produce content from experiments.

Thus, creativity governs native media and to create relationships with audiences they mix genres and even rethink their strategies.

However, the digital-native media also face a limitation: the commitment or engagement with their audiences, since they do not have a fixed base of listeners and subscribers willing to follow them, unlike the migrated media that do have one, regardless of if they work in a platform additional to the traditional ones –i.e., radio, press or television. This is key for digital media in terms of sustainability and community building (Martínez & Zuluaga, 2016).

THE PROBLEM OF QUALITY IN THE MEDIA

According to Ramírez De La Piscina, Zabalondo, Agirre and Aiestaran (2015), the debate regarding the quality of information is almost intrinsic to the origin of the debate on journalism. Discussions and academic theories have been broad and varied according to geographical locations, authors, and periods (Ramírez de la Piscina et al., 2015). For instance, the North American school, has a more commercial orientation; the Scandinavian, one more related to the concept of informativity; the Latin American is more focused on the method of Journalistic Added Value of the School of Journalism of the *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile*, and Germans prioritize the term professionalism (Ramírez de la Piscina et al., 2015). The truth is that there is no consensus or agreement on what journalistic quality means (Gutiérrez Coba, 2006, cited by Ramírez de la Piscina et al., 2015).

In that regard, when studying quality in the media, the first drawback is the difficulty in defining the category. Schulz (2000) explains that there are three criteria linking journalistic quality with the foundations of democracy: independence, diversity and objectivity. The first is understood from two perspectives: first, as absence of pressure from economic and political groups, and second, as how the media serves as watchdog of society’s interests to promote a democratic environment for freedom and protection of journalism.

On the other hand, diversity refers to the variety of contents that includes different points of view, thematic plurality, and access to various media. The definition of the term objectivity is the one with least consensus. Schulz (2000) calls it the difference

between the truth and the relevance of the event, as well as the impartiality of the journalist as the author of the information. In this sense, the author speaks of journalistic quality as an appreciation to define criteria and standards. Picard (2004) addresses journalistic quality as the absence or opposition of what is expected from the information present in news publications. He even ensures that the authorship of the information implies a higher level of quality if it is typical of a media. Likewise, he states that the coherence of the contents is crucial in the concept of journalistic quality, to the extent that the construction of texts and coherent graphic elements implies a high journalistic quality.

Another approach is proposed by De la Torre and Téramo (2015), who understand journalistic quality as the presence of certain newsworthiness criteria or values that “constitute the substance of news events” (p. 143). In that same vein, they emphasize that it is

The courage to publish everything that is important; the discernment to distinguish the significant from the superfluous, the sensitivity to consider the impact of what is communicated, the perseverance to find the sources and get the news, the knowledge of causes in order to not forget the context, background and consequences, justice to present the other side of the information, the tenacity to get to the bottom, the vision to help the public to see further, and the freedom to overcome the pressures, even more if they are political or ideological, knowing that the veracity does not need to detach itself from the opportunity and the moral good of information (De la Torre & Téramo, 2015, p. 143).

In this context, the study of journalistic quality is important because “the journalistic discourse has as its axis the person and, more precisely, human actions” (De la Torre & Téramo, 2015, p. 136). Everything is the result of human actions: the facts or events, the construction of news, its interpretation and other consequential actions such as what film is seen, which candidate is voted or how security is perceived in a location. Therefore, it is crucial to study the journalistic quality in the media, particularly in the context of the emergence of digital-native media.

From Latin America, Pellegrini, Puente, Porath, Mujica and Grassau (2011) state that the academic literature that studies journalistic quality has found two problems: on the one hand, “finding a widely

accepted foundation, from which they can deduce values, norms and parameters against which to compare the action of the media” (p. 19); on the other, “finding an adequate way to quantify compliance with the deduced parameters” (p. 19).

Pellegrini et al. (2011) cite Held and Russ-Mohl (2002) to separate existing procedures for quality measurements into four groups: a) those that work from the public’s perspective and their considerations about what quality is; b) those that take as a reference the opinion of experts and authorities on the subject, which judge the work of the media; c) those that use indirect indicators, such as certain preconditions that the media must comply with in order to carry out their work correctly (e.g., macro or structural conditions, inputs of the social communication process or certain business features), and d) those that resort to direct measurement of what has been decided as quality indicators.

The concept of quality in journalism is usually understood as an elite press, i.e., “the treatment of topics of high intellectual level or as a denser structure of content” (Pellegrini et al., 2011, p. 20). Instead, the VAP-UC team relates quality to the presence of “essential elements so that the product receiver adequately understands it and, also, of the event reported” (Pellegrini et al., 2011, p. 20).

As stated, measuring the quality of intangible goods such as journalistic products is complex because, according to Pellegrini and Mujica (2006), evaluation is usually linked to values and norms that are not universally accepted as elements of judgment. That is why media administrators tend to analyze the work of their journalists through their own elements by measuring tangible assets, such as the number of stories a journalist publishes per month or the space of the newspaper or magazine in which they were published (Stoll, 2005, cited by Pellegrini and Mujica, 2006).

However, these criteria are not very convenient for measuring journalistic work, since they do not measure their own features –that is to say, if what is reported is relevant to the audience, if all relevant sources are consulted, if the information is correctly structured and if the data are verifiable (Pellegrini & Mujica, 2006). In the era of Internet and new technologies, the clamor for quality journalism remains, considering that digital journalism should have as good quality as traditional journalism, on

Selection process	Creation process
Variables: - Type of news, which aims to measure the current issues aspect - Origin of information, which describes the ability of the media to have its own themes. - Information agenda profile, referred to the thematic scope. - Determination of sources, organized by type and affiliation. - Informative weight of the fact, elements that allow to determine the magnitude of the social consequences of the events that motivate the story.	Variables: - Narrative structure and level. - Verifiable data. - Context: delivery of information and consequences of the reported event. - Graphic or audiovisual elements. - Focus.

Figure 1. JAV variables in the selection and creation processes

Source: Pellegrini & Mujica (2006) and Pellegrini et al. (2011).

the one hand because it is journalism and, on the other, because of the possibilities provided by new technologies (Restrepo, 2016).

JOURNALISTIC ADDED VALUE: A WAY TO MEASURE THE QUALITY OF NEWS

The theoretical focus that guided this investigation was the journalistic quality from the Journalistic Added Value (JAV) model proposed by professors of the *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile* over a decade ago (Alessandri et al., 2001; Pellegrini & Mujica, 2006; Pellegrini et al., 2011).

Journalistic Added Value was created by professors of the Journalism School of the *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile*, journalists from some of the main media of Latin America and interested citizens who understood the need to suggest journalistic parameters “for the necessary changes in the selection and presentation of information (...) with the aim of achieving a higher quality” in the news information provided (Pellegrini & Mujica, 2006, p. 15). In that regard, the model should be understood as “what professional work provides to information and that (...) the public cannot obtain in direct contact with the informable universe” (Pellegrini et al., 2011, p. 41).

JAV was born as a search for answers on how to measure the journalistic quality: the team of professors researched this and decided to create tools that would

allow to evaluate the media's work quality (Pellegrini et al., 2011). The group determined a series of key standards for the proper transmission of facts from the reality perceived by journalists to an audience that needs to have access to them in order to act and express their opinions with significant degrees of freedom (Pellegrini et al., 2011). As pointed out by Alessandri et al. (2001), “the JAV formula is the result of indicators obtained by observing and evaluating the presence of variables attributed to two moments of the informative process: selection and creation” (p. 119).

That being said, Journalistic Added Value “studies the work of the media exclusively from the product, without considering the performance of the prior production process (inputs, infrastructure and person) nor of the variables of distribution, advertising and circulation” (Pellegrini & Mujica, 2006, p. 15). In that regard, it is a quality measurement method based on the fact that there are two irreplaceable professional elements in the information process: the notarial function of the media, which is the development of a process of verification of the information, and the meaning assignment function, which is the ordering and hierarchical organization of the possessed information.

In the same vein, as indicated by Pellegrini et al. (2011), these two elements are produced in two stages: the view on the informative universe –the process of selecting information– and the forms of processing that

journalists use to account for it or the elaboration of the selected material –process of creation. These two stages are measured through the so-called JAV Code Sheet, which analyzes 35 variables for the press and 33 for television.

Considering that this project focused exclusively on digital-native media, only the variables of the creation process were considered (figure 1), with the exception of the Focus variable, because the researcher's interest was to analyze the use of narrative resources that reflect the participation of the media and that, consequently, "come from the use of unique sources and with a preponderant news initiative" (Pellegrini et al., 2011, p. 31). The selection of variables is explained in more detail in the Methodology section. This work also focuses on the function of meaning assignment because, in the first instance, the variables selected in this research were grouped by the creators of the model under that function, and, second, because the author of this research wants to know specifically the capacity that journalists and the media have to organize and give meaning to the selected information.

The application of this model to measure the quality of the selected news was crucial to jointly analyze the journalistic publications, not from aspects of the newsroom or from the distribution on any platform, but from the elements that constitute the news. Although the creators of the model warn that its scope in the first instance is exploratory, during this investigation it was descriptive, since the model itself allowed it, by working with a convenient method and theoretical approach, which in this case was content analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Since the main objective of this work was to analyze the journalistic quality of news publications in three digital-native media, an analysis tool was needed that would gather the methodological characteristics of JAV postulates to address the phenomenon of study. In this way, it became possible to subtract the story prepared during a period by the selected media.

The research was quantitative, because it systematized and characterized the journalistic publications of three Colombian digital-native media, measured the quality of each publication and finally analyzed the findings. Therefore, it is a project that recognized the benefits and limitations of both types

of research, so they were used complementarily. The work complied with the characteristics of this type of research because, following what Fernandez and Díaz (2002, cited by Del Canto & Silva, 2013) state, it is objective, confirmatory, inferential, deductive, result-oriented, has solid and repeatable data and is generalizable.

As for the focus of this work, its characteristics – measurement of journalistic publications quality– inscribed it within the constructivist paradigm insofar as it seeks to analyze the way in which the media in study construct realities. The scope of this research was exploratory-descriptive due to the characteristics of the research. I explored a research subject or problem never addressed before from the proposed approach to become familiar with a little studied phenomenon, in order to identify its characteristics, and I selected a series of variables to describe them in order to achieve a measurement and conceptualize the phenomenon of study (Cazau, 1991).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions that guided this research were:

- **RQ1.** What are the characteristics of the publications of the digital-native media *La Silla Vacía*, *Razón Pública* and *Verdad Abierta* about the assassinations of social leaders between August 2016 and August 2017?
- **RQ2.** What level of journalistic quality, according to the JAV model, have the publications about the assassinations of social leaders between August 2016 and August 2017 of the digital-native media *La Silla Vacía*, *Razón Pública*, and *Verdad Abierta*?

HYPOTHESIS

To develop this research, the following hypothesis was proposed:

- **H1.** The journalistic publications in the three digital-native media on the social problematic of study are few, but of high journalistic quality –according to JAV.

METHOD

The method selected to develop this research was the quantitative content analysis because, as pointed out by Andréu Abela (2000), it is a method that feeds

Variables	Subvariables of analysis	Operational definition	Descriptors
Characterization		Identification and location of information (Marín Agudelo, 2016).	- Code.
			- Name of the media.
			- Date.
			- Section of the page or website.
			- Genres and journalistic formats.

Table 1. Table of variables for the characterization

Source: Own elaboration.

on any type of material that has content that allows accessing aspects of phenomena within a given context.

Researchers interested in doing content analysis are conditioned by the time and space qualities of the selected media sample. In regards to digital media, it should be considered that they do not follow pre-planned patterns -as press or cable television. That is why new media require new forms of analysis, which can come from the conjunction of techniques applied in traditional media and others created from web-based communication (Herring, 2004); these also require greater flexibility when developing the instruments for gathering and analyzing information.

The content analysis developed was quantitative, since it allowed to collect and classify the sample data in an objective and accurate way to measure the journalistic quality according to the Journalistic Added Value model proposed by Pellegrini and her colleagues (2011). The application of this type of methodological design was crucial to triangulate the quantifiable information and thus analyze the journalistic quality of the news publications (Andréu Abela, 2000). Therefore, the analysis not only interpreted the content identified in the research corpus but, as Andréu Abela (2000) states, delved into its content and the socio-political context in which the message is constructed. One of the limitations of this method was that it did not allow analyzing the effect of the news when

consumed by the receivers. However, this limitation did not represent a problem insofar as this work was not intended to study the effects on consumers, but the construction of the news per se.

TECHNIQUES FOR COLLECTING INFORMATION, VARIABLES AND/OR ANALYSIS CATEGORIES

To conduct this research through content analysis, I used two information-gathering techniques:

Information characterization

It consisted in the identification and location of the information to proceed to analyze it through the stipulated variables and categories. To do so, the author searched Google for news with the keywords “murders of social leaders” or “murders of social leaders in Colombia” along with the name of the media. Likewise, the author applied that same search on the website of each of the media. Then, the news were stored in a folder to be analyzed. It is necessary to highlight that in this work the category “social leaders” was used to refer to all types of social movements, regardless of whether they are environmental leaders, human rights defenders, LGBT activists or others. This was done in order to unify a category of analysis.

The characterization was made in Microsoft Excel through a characterization code sheet. This step was crucial for the collection of information and facilitated the subsequent analysis.

Variables	Operational definition	Dimension	Subvariable	Definition	Descriptors
Verifiable data	Information potentially verifiable by the public	Content	Verifiable background data	Events chronologically prior to that reported, necessary for its understanding.	Percentage of each type of news compiled in the selected media.
			Verifiable consequences data	Expected results or supposed effects of the news necessary for its adequate understanding.	
			Verifiable data of the fact itself	Regarding the fact from which the news come from.	
Narrative structure	Narrative model chosen by the author of the informative text.	Style	Inverted pyramid	Accounts for the main event and then follows the order of hierarchy data. The causal and temporal order of events do not have importance.	Percentage of each type of news compiled in the selected media.
			Chronological	Causal and temporal relationships govern the structure of these texts: the story is told from the beginning to the end, passing through its development.	
			Mixed	Privileges the chronological structure, but it starts with an orthodox inverted pyramid, i.e., it highlights the main news factor of the event.	
			Interview		
Narrative level	Degree of presence of the narrator's voice in the informative delivery	Style	Transcription	Limits to say what is stated by one or several sources, either in direct or indirect style, without an evident elaboration by the journalist who tells the story.	Percentage of each type of news compiled in the selected media.
			Processing	Provides background and explanations that result in more complete and elaborated information.	
Graphic and visual resources		Style	Photographs		0: No hay
			Videos		1: Bajo
			Others (maps, applications, audios, infographics, tables, etc.)	Elementos gráficos y audiovisuales con potencial informativo.	2: Medio bajo 3: Medio alto 4: Alto

Table 2. Table of variables selected from the creation process of VAP-UC

Source: Alessandri et al., 2001; Pellegrini & Mujica, 2006; Pellegrini et al., 2011.

Textual analysis

This technique consisted in conducting a careful reading of the information already characterized, considering a series of variables and/or categories of analysis. It was crucial in order to measure journalistic quality and finally analyze the results along with the characterization.

The journalistic quality was measured and analyzed through four variables of the creation process of the Journalistic Added Value (table 2).

SAMPLE

The media selected for the research were digital-natives: *La Silla Vacía*, an informative and interactive media for people interested in the current affairs of Colombian politics (SembraMedia, 2016a); *Razón Pública*, an instrument of analysis for the expression of Colombian intellectuals with a focus on the permanent analysis of the current affairs and prospective thinking, through a relationship between academia and journalism (SembraMedia, 2017), and *Verdad Abierta*, a project of *Fundación Ideas para la Paz* (FIP) and *Semana* magazine that seeks to unveil the truth about the armed conflict in Colombia through the union between academic research and journalism (SembraMedia, 2016b).

The three media outlets were selected due to their great acceptance among opinion leaders, according to the Annual Opinion Role Survey conducted by *Cifras & Conceptos* (2016), which revealed that some of the most read digital-natives are *La Silla Vacía* with 17%, *Razón Pública* with 3% and *Verdad Abierta* with 1%.

The journalistic publications, regardless of their genre and format, were used as documents of a documentary historical nature insofar as they allow access to media records of the studied phenomenon during the established period. The sample consisted of the news publications that addressed the assassination of social leaders in the websites of *La Silla Vacía*, *Razón Pública* and *Verdad Abierta*. The corpus consisted of 37 news items (n=37), of which *La Silla Vacía* produced 7 (n=7), *Razón Pública*, 5 (n=5) and *Verdad Abierta*, 25 (n=25).

The period established was from August 2016 to August 2017 because of the interest to review the treatment made by digital-native media on the systematic murder of social leaders since the announcement of the successful completion of peace

negotiations between the government of Juan Manuel Santos Calderón and the guerrilla group FARC-EP (first date) until a year later, considering phenomena such as the triumph of the No alternative in the plebiscite for peace, the role of international organizations in the country, the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Santos Calderón, the concern for violations of human rights within the national territory and the global geopolitical crisis (second date). All this to understand the news representation from an intricate domestic and global context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CHARACTERIZATION

When reviewing the results by months (figure 1) it is observed that, on the one hand, *La Silla Vacía* and *Razón Pública* made their first publications within the period established in this study in November 2016, and *Verdad Abierta* did so since August of the same year. This may be due to the fact that the first two media focused on covering other current affairs, such as the peace process between the government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC, while *Verdad Abierta*, being a platform focused on issues related to the Colombian armed conflict as the study problem, began the coverage in the midst of the other current affairs.

As for the rhythms of publication (figure 1), the fact that the focus of *La Silla Vacía* and *Razón Abierta* is, broadly speaking, the analysis of national news explains why their stories on the murders of social leaders are rather sporadic and not constant like those of *Verdad Abierta*, a platform specialized in the coverage of internal armed conflicts in Colombia.

Regarding the genres used, there is a greater interest in reporting from the interpretive genres than from the informative and opinionative ones. The genres most used by the three digital media were reports, articles and opinion columns. However, these cannot be seen in a deterministic way, as if they were a traditional media, since the features provided by the Internet in terms of space allow the writer to take certain liberties or transgress the already known styles.

In the case of *Razón Pública*, the most used genre was the opinion column, but not like in the traditional format, in which opinion is expressed without exceeding an established number of characters or focuses on the opinion of the writer, who is usually

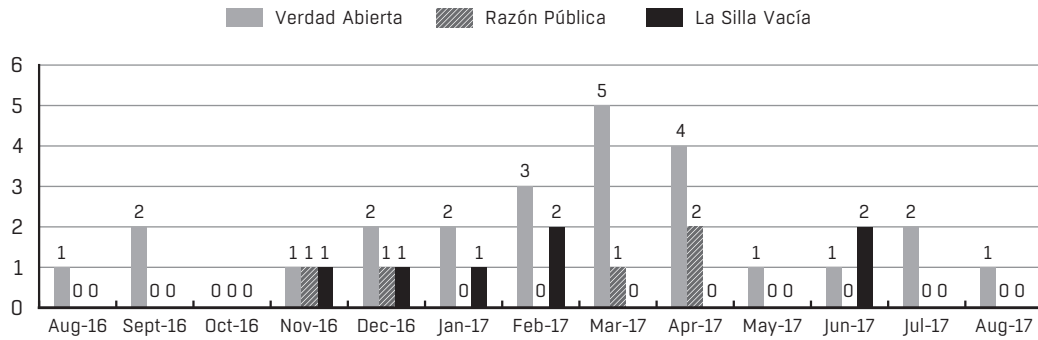


Figure 1. Total journalistic publications by media and by month

Source: Own elaboration.

an expert, without consulting other sources with different points of view. This media outlet presents a hybrid between the benefits of the column and the rigorousness of informative articles.

As for the formats, in the studied news no one resorts to the text alone. One of the reasons may be that, given the need to catch the reader on the Internet, the media appeals to various formats so that the information is easy to consume. Some, such as *La Silla Vacía*, opted for text and images, sometimes accompanied by short videos, extensive videos for their televised program *La Pepa* and even a podcast to share the opinions of experts on a topic. *Razón Pública*, which is characterized by being a media with a more academic tone, dynamized its information with the help of static figures and images of the places or people of which it talked about.

Finally, the complex work of investigative journalism of *Verdad Abierta* became easy to understand for the consumer thanks to the help of interactive texts (maps to locate the victims and to visualize the figures of murders by months), texts and images and in smaller scale of texts, images, and other resources such as videos inserted to the page from YouTube or podcasts inserted from SoundCloud.

One positive aspect in the three media outlets is that there was contextualization in the news. The three media were in the line of interpretive journalism, so beyond reporting or commenting on the facts, there was a rigorous investigation and an analysis in most of the stories. There was not a single news without contextualization.

JOURNALISTIC ADDED VALUE

Verifiable data

This variable refers to information potentially verifiable by the public, either in terms of background, consequences or the fact itself. According to the information gathered, as shown in figure 2, the three selected media stood out for showing in their stories both the facts of the event itself and the background and consequences. This favored the understanding of the social phenomenon of study, either from very specific cases to more global approaches, so the reader would understand the problem from its causes to its consequences. However, it should be noted that in a story by *Razón Pública* there was no presence of the three types of verifiable data, but only two. The absence of the subvariable verifiable background data in that story is due to the fact that it was a video interview of just over two minutes to a political leader and defender of human rights. The interviewee carefully explained the fact –increase of the assassinations of leaders in Colombia since the signing of the Peace Agreement– and the consequences of that fact –the murders– but did not address the causes with precision.

Narrative structure

This indicator shows that the preferred writing technique by the studied media outlets is mixed, used in two of the seven texts of *La Silla Vacía*, four of the five of *Razón Pública* and twelve of the twenty-one of *Verdad Abierta*. This commitment to the mixed structure should not be surprising if we consider that they are digital-native media, that is to say, that were born on the web

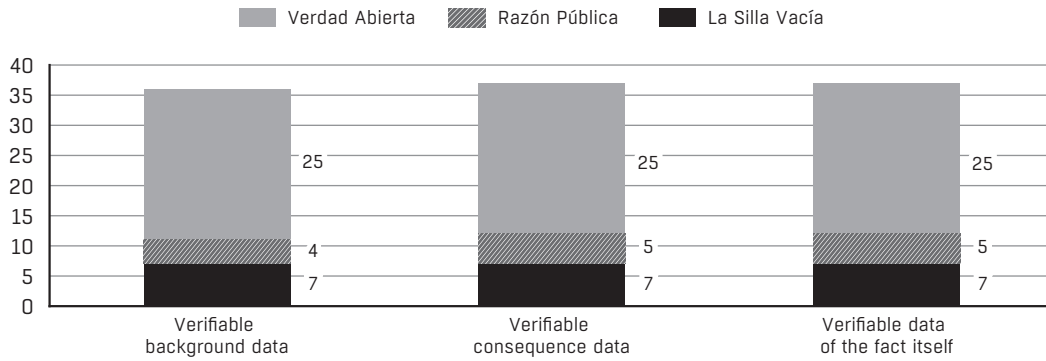


Figure 2. Average of verifiable data per story by media

Source: Own elaboration.

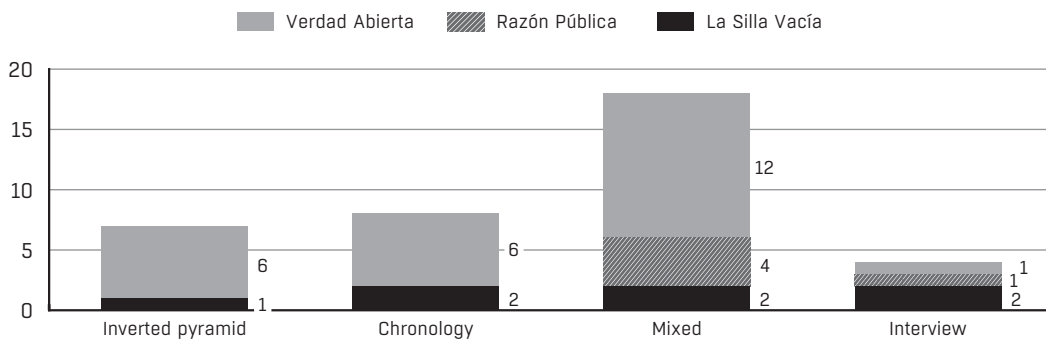


Figure 3. Narrative structure by media (N)

Source: Own elaboration.

and are governed by its hybridization and transformation features to attract the reader (Camus, 2009).

The inverted pyramid, a format classic of printed media, was used only once by *La Silla Vacía* and in six times by *Verdad Abierta*. These journalistic texts talked about a murder or a series of murders with emphasis on what should be known about the phenomenon; thus, the priority was to inform and tell the facts, maintaining the careful explanation proper to the interpretive journalism that characterizes the selected media. Likewise, chronology was used only twice by *La Silla Vacía* and six times by *Verdad Abierta*. Interestingly, *Razón Pública* did not use any of the two structures mentioned previously.

The interview was the least used format (figure 3). *Verdad Abierta* used it in a written text about an indigenous leader and defender of human rights; *Razón Pública*, once in a video conversation with a political leader, and *La Silla Vacía* twice: in a video-discussion

between a human rights defender and an expert on government protection schemes for social leaders, and in an audio-discussion between a social researcher and a regional leader on what is needed to avoid more murders.

Narrative level

This style indicator is determined by the level of presence of the narrator’s voice in the informative delivery; so that, the author of this research paper analyzed if the story repeated what the consulted sources had said or if it said something new. The coverage of *La Silla Vacía* stands out because the journalists narrated according to the language of the media and quoted directly only when necessary. In fact, as can be seen in figure 4, all the texts in this media were processed by the narrators, who elaborated the texts on the studied phenomenon to make them more complete and comprehensible.

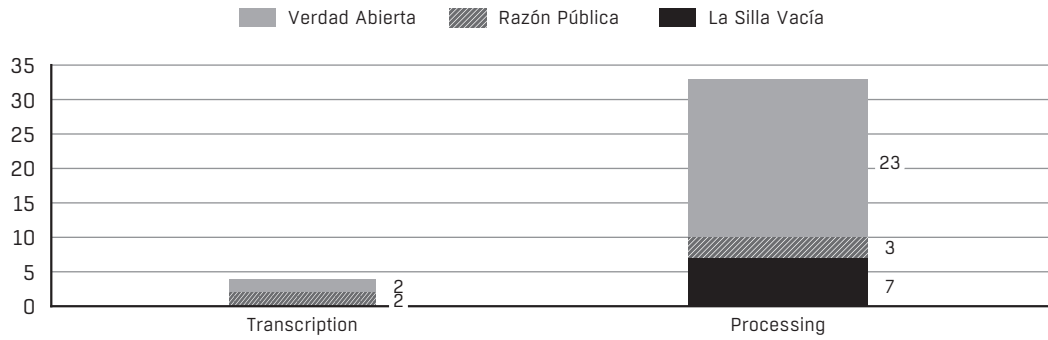


Figure 4. Narrative level by media (N)

Source: Own elaboration.

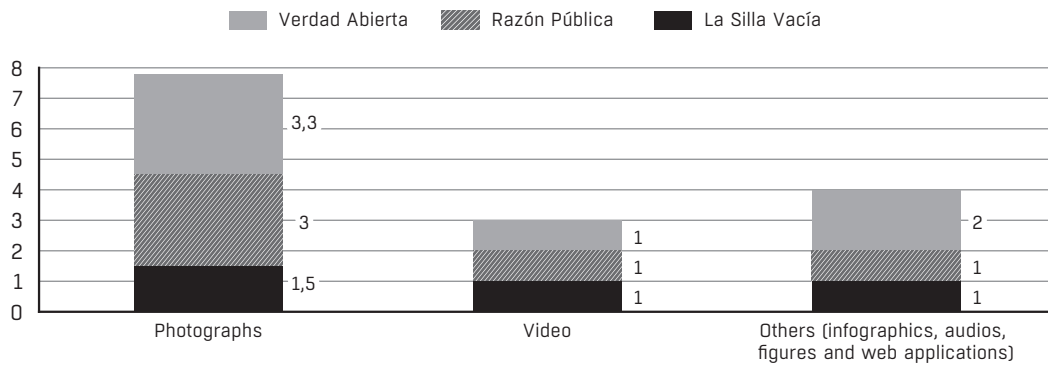


Figure 5. Average of graphic resources per story by media

Source: Own elaboration.

However, two of the five stories of *Razón Pública* and two of the twenty-five of *Verdad Abierta* were rather transcripts. On the one hand, the texts repeated what was said by the same journalist or media in a previous story –not regarding the meaning of what is said, but the form itself -since they were not even paraphrased to play with the style of the text. On the other hand, some of these texts had blocks of extensive and followed quotations, which gave more the sensation of a collection of press releases and reports than of a journalistic investigation. Nevertheless, considering the general panorama of the whole body of study, as shown in figure 4, there is a prominence of information processing over transcription in the three media studied.

Graphic resources

In order to measure the graphic resources, those that did not have were classified as null (0); those that had one graphic piece, as low (1); those that had at least two graphic pieces of the same type or different, medium low (2); those who had three, medium high (3), and those who had four or more photographs, videos and other audiovisual formats (infographics, web applications, tables, sound formats, among others), high (4). According to the results, photography was the most used resource. However, in the case of *La Silla Vacía*, it was observed that the stories use only one graphic piece per note or mix at least three formats. In *Razón Pública* it was found that many images are

used, or images are mixed with statistical figures and videos. Finally, *Verdad Abierta* used most of the time more than four images and constantly mixed formats such as images with videos, tables, figures and web applications.

Considering the findings shown in figure 5, photography is the most used graphic element in the selected digital-native media, followed by other formats, and video is the least used. The prominence of photography can have as a cause that almost all the analyzed texts are interpretive journalism, as explained in the characterization, so the extensive narrative is usually accompanied, by editorial decision, with images rather than videos or other resources. The latter, respectively, are presented as an individual product or as a tool to explain a very technical idea such as figures.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was to analyze the journalistic quality, according to JAV, of a group of journalistic publications of the digital-native media *La Silla Vacía*, *Razón Pública* and *Verdad Abierta* between August 2016 and August 2017. The study focused on the news coverage of a current affairs issue in Colombia, related to social justice. Therefore, the collected pieces were characterized, and the quality of the news was measured in order to conduct an analysis.

From this exercise, it was concluded that since the end of the peace negotiations between the government and the FARC, the stories on the studied subject have increased, perhaps because it is a problem linked to the end of the confrontation with an armed group. On the other hand, the news was not the genre most frequently used by the media selected to cover the problem, but others related to interpretive journalism, such as in-depth reports or extensive opinion columns with features of news articles.

There is also a hybridization between journalistic genres: opinion columns with characteristics of news articles or news reports with chronicle elements. This phenomenon was precisely the result of the features of digital media platforms, which require constant experiments and transformations to attract users, as well as the use of new platforms and formats.

Similarly, the mixture of formats was key in the dissemination of content. None of the publications had

only text. The mixture of medium and extensive texts with visual (images and figures), audiovisual (videos and audios) and interactive (maps and applications) resources is worth noting. This element was crucial to size the magnitude of the problem beyond the figures and humanize the victims.

Despite the fact that on occasions the panorama was generalized to have a thorough investigation instead of informing in a superficial and constant way each murder, the publications showed the human face of the murders. The contents indicated their work, sometimes their names and origins, and their contribution to the construction of a democratic society. This is particularly valuable because, on the one hand, it is found that in the world of digital immediacy there are media that prioritize factual and contextualized information, and on the other, the social phenomenon is not normalized or naturalized.

Regarding journalistic quality in the compiled corpus, it is concluded that the three media produced high-quality information, according to the selected variables of Journalistic Added Value.

The four variables analyzed in the creation process show that the average in each of the media outlets had high-quality standards. This means that the selected media chose mostly to talk about the phenomenon of study with verifiable data of the fact itself, as well as its background and consequences; with a narrative structure characterized by the prominent use of the mixed element (and little use of inverted pyramid, chronology and interview); with a narrative level noteworthy by its processing of information in order to make it more elaborate, and with different graphic resources to enhance the information delivered.

However, the use of these resources must be improved because, despite being digital and innovative platforms, they continue to prioritize the use of photography exclusively and in small quantities. Digital platforms offer endless possibilities to experiment with formats and mix them, so there could be an effort to include galleries in long reports or testimonies from audios with images, to give some examples. In other words, better measures can be taken to diversify and favor consumption and understanding of information.

Finally, it is concluded that the proposed hypothesis (H1) was proven, since the journalistic publications in the three digital-native media on the social problem

studied are few, but of high quality according to the four variables of JAV selected in this study.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research was limited to the study of journalistic quality in three digital-native media, so it did not consider migrated media. For future research, I suggest comparing the coverage of this social problem between Colombian native digital-media and migrated media. This project also did not contemplate the JAV analysis from the selection process, i.e., the process prior to creation, which addresses variables such as points of view, types of sources, thematic diversity,

type of news, among others (Pellegrini & Mujica, 2006; Pellegrini et al., 2011).

Based on these recommendations, the study of a similar phenomenon should be considered for the sake of a comparative approach, e.g., the news coverage of attacks on social activist land leaders after the demobilization of the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (In Spanish, *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*) at the dawn of 2000. It is also convenient to compare the coverage of this phenomenon in digital-native media versus migrated media or traditional media. Finally, it is crucial to study the Journalistic Added Value (JAV) from the selection process, which was not contemplated in this work, as well as from the Focus variable, not included in this study.

FOOTNOTES

1. Understanding the three types of violence from the triad proposed by Galtung (1989).
2. For example, the Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner in Colombia (HCHR, 2017): as of December 2016, there were a total of 389 attacks. Likewise, the Ombudsman's Office (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2017) presented a report which shows that between January 2016 and March 1, 2017 there were 156 homicides, five forced disappearances and 33 cases of attacks against social leaders in Colombia.

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