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ABSTRACT

In this Perspective paper we propose a rethink on how we should approach digital and analog news. Although there are literatures that continue to focus on the many and varied characteristics of digital and analog news, we should not consider these as separate, oppos- ing entities. In fact, the intertwining between the digital and the analog of news makes it difficult, if not impossible, to define separately what they are, even if this often is the practice in scholarly debate on news and journalism in new media. What we argue in this paper is that today, in opposition to binary definitions, it would be much more revealing, and also connected to actual media practices, to try to understand how much digital there is in the analog news and, vice versa, how much analog there is in digital news. This approach recognizes three dimensions in media platforms: digital, analog, and, between them, a crossevolved, digitalized analog present in television, radio, and online newspapers. Recognizing
these three dimensions enables us to explore more clearly the implications that the hybridization of digital and analog news has on the overall media system and on the state of news itself.

KEYWORDS analog; convergence; digital; Facebook; hybridization; print newspapers; television; Twitter

Introduction

Here we propose to change radically how we approach digital and analog news. Although there are literatures that continue to focus on the different features of digital (online) and analog (print newspaper) news, we argue that we should not consider these as distinct entities.
In fact, as a consequence of the intertwining between the analog and the digital of news, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to define separately what they are.
There is no straightforward leap of news from analog to digital and vice versa.
What we argue here is that there is much digital in analog news and, vice versa, that there is much analog in digital news. Moreover, we argue that there is another dimension, which is constituted by online newspapers, digital television and radio, and smartphones and that has a specific hybridization: it is what we term "the digitalized analogue".

This dimension, so far largely neglected by scholars, functions as the connecting link, the bridge, between analog and digital, and forms the primary space in which news media operates. It is clear from these few observations we attribute to news a character of fluidity, permeability, and hybridization that allows it easily to pass from the analog to the digital and in the reverse direction. An approach recognizing this helps us explore and better
appreciate the implications that the hybridization of digital and analog news has on the overall media system and on the condition of news itself.
We are accustomed to structuring knowledge by separating different spheres and categories, which in our case are organized as the digital, the analog, and, more specifically for example, print platforms, visual platforms, and social media. This provides us with the illusion and the claim that we are able to produce deeper analysis of the single platform or content. However, we know that the separation between these categories is an expedient to facilitate our process of analysis.

If subsequently we do not problematize this separation we risk creating a simplistic
and stereotyped thinking and not recognizing, for example, not only what is shared between analog and digital, but also the existence of the specific category of the digitalized analog. Even when we recognize generically the validity of approaching news in its intertwined
unity of analog and digital, we often are unable to see the implications of this hybridization and to reach conclusions based on that understanding. Beyond tacit acceptance by journalism scholars, the evolving complexity of the hybridization of analog and digital confronts us with a need to adapt existing conceptual approaches and to originate new, less rigid theories, along with adapted and new empirical methods appropriate to the study of news media. What is

the meaning of continuing to analyze print or online newspapers, television or radio news, or content carried on social media, when we already are aware that such pragmatic divisions render us data that does not match reality?

Even if news, as opposed to other forms of communication, is particularly flexible across platforms (O'Sullivan et al. 2017), what is the most suitable approach toward research that can accommodate such complexity? So far, few attempts have been made in this direction. Where hybridization has been addressed systematically, as in the influential work of Andrew Chadwick (2013), the primary focus of analysis has been on the political features emerging from such processes. Here, we are concerned more proximately and more directly with essential media formats and their associated logics.

This Perspective paper is structured straightforwardly. In the next section we will focus on exploring how much of what is considered analog is carried into the digital sphere, and in the following section we will highlight how much that is labeled digital has entered the analog.

In both sections, we will explore the powerful significance of the digitalized analog. We will conclude by highlighting the implications of the hybridization between digital and analog, representing the most significant category of news.

The digital in the analog

Here we argue that what we are habituated as thinking of digital news comprises much that is analog. It is not especially difficult to find examples of "pure digital" news as well as "pure analogue" news, or, more precisely, news that is characterized in such terms, such as those broadly indicated by the often normatively loaded labels "net-native" or "legacy," but such sweeping characterizations are decreasingly relevant. The digital-only and analog-only news forms that continue to be identified as such remain confined to particular settings, even if they potentially serve large audiences or networks of people.

A more likely scenario for most news media is one of hybridization, as we will see in this section. For example, often traditional mass media, which represent the analog (print newspapers) and the digitalized analog (TV and radio as well as online newspapers), opt to include politicians' social media content, such as tweets, Facebook messages, or YouTube videos, and remediate them in news content.

In fact, just as news does not become news until it actually is propagated as such, so digital social media messages become true news only when media such as print newspapers or television or their evolved online formats decide to treat them as news and give them the wider resonance that otherwise these could not have. Would Trump's tweets have become so widespread and discussed everywhere if they had not been defined as news by print newspapers (an analog old media) or their associated online outlets, and television (a digitalized old media)? Not only do these messages achieve greater prominence, but their nature is fundamentally changed. From a seemingly disintermediated message (Hermida 2010; Trench and Quinn 2003) sent by a single individual, however powerful or significant, or transmitted by his/her communication agency to the network, however large, of followers or friends, or in any case to people specifically interested in the message and its sender, it is transformed into a news story, produced by a collective, organized source, which is the editorial office of a print newspaper or a broadcaster, and that is addressed to a classic audience.

The online message enters a journalistic process that conforms to conventional news-making, subject to gatekeeping and agenda-setting processes. Thus filtered and refracted, it becomes a story addressed to an audience or audiences more widely diverse than concentrated audiences online, in a more open and inclusive system that, nevertheless, is governed by its own strict rituals and temporalities. In this situation, traditional media function as the sounding board of digital conversations, videos, and tweets, arguably attenuating the echo chambers (Barbera et al. 2015) and "cultural tribalism" (Wegerif 2018) of the online sphere. In the case of a Trump tweet, its provocation, extremism and aggression in its raw digital form is mitigated in a news story, as it becomes material for a journalistically-constructed narrative. The role of digitalized analog media in this context is to change the identity and meaning of digital messages, transforming them as true news, according to its orthodox meaning.

Print and TV journalists often use social media not only to elaborate news but also to represent public opinion (McGregor 2019). In addition to news media reporting individual social media posts, the general mood of messages itself becomes a news story carried in traditional platforms, arguably forming a specific new digital-analog genre, as professional media, agnostic as to the participatory novelty of such content, are content to instrumentalize it as a fresh, easily accessible, stream of raw material. The presence of digital communication in analog and in digitalized analog media is, of course, not limited to politics. Just as all aspects of society now are mediatized, all domains represented in social media are additionally re-represented in analog media. Most prominent here are entertainment, celebrity, and sport, where social media has become a primary source of material for newsrooms. Witness, for example, the social media outputs of celebrities, including those seen largely as the product of social media, such as the Kardashians, or the recently emerged discussion online of racism in football, in which prominent players campaign against offensive fan chants. Added to these by now stock news tropes are outputs and doings of the new category of celebrities, the influencers and micro-influencers inhabiting social media spaces. Similarly, developments and debates around science, health, technology, economics and business occurring on social networks, blogs and message boards are reported and interpreted in newspapers.

Further, phenomena that seem essentially digital, such as viral memes, however trivial, or games, offer fertile ground for stories, since novelty is itself an old-established news value.
Practices in the selection and treatment of news stories with digital online origins or elements do not represent a radical departure. Rather, one can argue that, for journalists, social media represents a highly effective source to achieve new content and to innovate,
in the same way as they innovated prior to the advent of digital media. For example, newspapers historically responded to the advent of television by leveraging
its mass appeal through show business coverage of screen stars – replicated in the current stage by the attention paid to social media figures – extensive reporting on the industry, and voluminous writing in reviewing and critiquing programing, along with TV listings and supplements, themselves part of an extensive convergence of analog media preceding
any digital convergence (Fortunati and O'Sullivan 2019).

What appears on the surface as disintermediated communication in turn is remediated. This is not a unidirectional process: public communication specialists in particular are aware that social media outputs ultimately will be represented in mass news media, and therefore are likely to tailor their content accordingly. And, as the perception of a distinction between
digital online life and "real life" recedes, the digital becomes news, and newspapers inevitably report on the culture, politics and economics of that sphere.
As to print newspapers, it is clear that, even in their "pure" print form, they also can be viewed as carrying elements of the digital, even beyond the use of stories from that domain. Just as social media communicators seek audience reach through the searchfriendliness and virality of their content, so news publishers have adopted digital measures of success associated
with traffic and sharing.

Considerations around "most read" and "most shared" feedback in turn inform editorial decisions in integrated newsrooms, so that the content of ink on paper pages is subjected to the values and disciplines of online publishing. Even where the print edition appears dominant in setting the agenda and tone of coverage, other than through the deliberate enforcement of a wall between print and online, it is inevitable that the news list and story treatment in the former is inflected with the hard metrics of its sister websites and social channels, typically,
if not always, driven by the logic of advertising. In organizations, and in professional terms, this process is reinforced and accelerated through the campaigns launched by managements to convert news workers to digital ways, through encouragement and training, and by the active insertion and promotion of digital evangelists to positions of authority within editorial
structures.

Hence, the trade, professional and scholarly literature around newsroom convergence is
replete with exhortations to transform practices, cultures and "mind-sets." Commonly, one of the first actions of a journalist starting work each day in their newsroom is to scope online to update their current knowledge of events. Other signals of the digital are the email addresses and Twitter handles associated with bylines, along with online sister editions and the

targeted advertising that they host. Finally, the outputs of "pure" digital news media also are likely to fall within the domain of legacy media. Once in the public sphere, a news story broken or promoted by Vox or Huffington Post is assessed by newspapers according to their own criteria, just as they would evaluate stories emanating from any other competing entity within the now hybrid news sphere.

Analog in the digital

In parallel, digital news is replete with content of which little is essentially digital in character. This is true both of online news publishing, whether as an extension of existing news entities, or so-called "net native" sites. Where the latter frequently have been accused of copying, plagiarizing, or, in digital parlance, curating or aggregating stories from traditional media, often there is little prospect of enforcing ownership of such content.

Digital news media's analog dependence was perhaps most emphatically and materially demonstrated by the late, famous New York Times print and multimedia reporter David Carr, when he publicly shredded a printout of the front page of newser.com, in the presence of its publisher, holding up a sheet comprising mostly holes which had contained content curated from mainstream media.1 What, from a dualist perspective, might be considered "the ghost in the machine" in digital media was demonstrated in the most concrete terms as being at the heart of this new media enterprise.

In addition to core content, online interactivity often is freighted with analog, since many conversations are centered on news originating in traditional media, especially established news brands (Hindman 2018; Su and Porismita 2019).

Similar to traditional intermedia processes wherein content is re-used and refashioned, print and broadcast news incorporated online is changed in nature. Analog news, discussed and commented upon virally in social media, assumes another state. For example, news, and individual news items, notoriously perishable in analog media, can acquire an extended, long tail life online. While the news of yesterday becomes social memory, online it acquires a dimension that transcends pure actuality as it enters the realm of collective or public discussion, revealing the active role of the audience with sometimes negative outcomes in the form of extremization and polarization of debate, which now has become the focus of a large part of digital journalism studies but which also feeds back as a stock item in conventional news.

A specific case in point is that of the crosshead, an element of print typography with relatively little relevance in a screen setting. It is not uncommon for online stories to betray their print origins by the unwitting or careless inclusion of these artifacts. In a recent story on social attitudes, published on the website of Irish Times, for example, the crosshead "Breastfeeding" is present in the middle of the main text, shown with (crosshead) markup, an out-of-place relic from print (see O'Morain 2016). Such common lapses, even if trivial and incidental in their specific occurrences, graphically represent the powerful analog legacy, dating from the era of hot metal production, embedded in the digital (while also reflecting the editing cutbacks that have accompanied digitalization). An inverted instance, by omission rather than inclusion, of print logic in the digital is the presence of full URLs in occasional stories online, but without effort to make them into active, clickable hyperlinks. Lying deeper beneath such incidental apparent lapses is the reality that, in spite of the heavy promotion of multimedia, much of the news online remains textual, with its origins in print and with its typographical conventions, from relative point (not pixel) sizes and styles to screen width (a vertical smart-screen text column bearing a close resemblance to a column of type on newsprint), extending in continuity from the evolved practices of its newspaper progenitors.

Another way in which digital news, perhaps unconsciously, pays homage to its print origins is found in the curious but common and well-established practice of marking major events through, along with primary reporting and commentary, secondary coverage of print front pages from around the world or Europe. This frequently deployed "From the Front Pages" representational device sees, for example, the UK's wellregarded digital-first pioneer, The Guardian, directly reproducing online the print layouts of major newspaper titles from around the EU, in order to mark the significance of a particular Brexit development and to

give the flavor of reaction to the latest British political maneuvers. This echoes the practice, common in the digitalized analog where television and radio programs review the first pages of the most important print newspapers, to give audiences a sense of the news of the day. Here additionally, talk shows' ability to discuss relevant topics depends print journalists. It is a strong statement of the perceived hierarchy of news platforms, in which web-based media eschew the primary digital instrument of reference, the simply effective and elegant hyperlink, opting instead to present the more vividly meaningful images of physical news pages.

This choice, and its regularity of use, speaks to profound cultural evaluations around permanence and ephemerality, and editorial judgement and commitment to the news of the day. Shifting from observing the materialites of news media to the structure of stories they support, it is clear that practically all of the formats of print articles – inverted pyramid news, features, opinion, commentary, reviews – have migrated relatively unscathed and form the principal component of online outputs, this in spite of the considerable volume of training manuals trumpeting innovative techniques on how to write for digital media.

A reading of a "digital first" online news outlet presents a mix, alongside multimedia and interactive elements and affordances, of story genres, formats, sections, lengths and styles that is remarkably faithful to the newspaper's constructed bundle, even if it is unlikely to be consumed and compartmentalized by the reader in the same way. Such "plain vanilla" journalism, claims to be nothing more, standing or falling instead primarily on predigital criteria of worth. As such, it does not fit with the visions of thrusting digital innovation that many news entities are now anxious to promote, and is unlikely to excite those dedicated to moving fast and breaking things, but it arguably remains the analog backbone of news, or most news, in the digital realm.

Implications and conclusion

We have tried to illustrate and delineate in the previous sections how we can approach news in a way that recognizes its cross-embedded, analog-digital hybridization, and how this perspective can enable us to anticipate better the present state of the news. To complete our analysis, we now focus on the implications of this hybridization. We define the concept of hybridized media as the prevalent system of news platforms, formats, production, and consumption that are neither purely digital nor analog, but are a dynamic cross-convergence of the two. In opposition to commonly-deployed binary conceptualisations, a perspective that tries to understand how much digital is in analog news and, vice versa, how much analog remains in the digital, as well as a third dimension, the digitalized analog, is more solidly grounded in observable media practices.

The reality of this blend of interdependent spheres means that news media must be considered not only as post-analog but also as post-digital. While there are exceptions to this understanding that are primarily one or the other, the bulk of news media, mainstream and otherwise, operates on the basis of this complex embeddedness and inter-dependency, in which neither analog nor digital is its defining characteristic. A first important implication of hybridization is that it has become more difficult to measure the influence on audiences of a single medium or its content. While new metrics of attention and time spent reading have superseded cruder digital standards, such as counts hits or unique users, audience measurement remains problematic, not least in that digital consumers tend to bring far less revenue in subscription, cover price or advertising than their print counterparts.

The investigation of audiences, even via sophisticated quantitative analysis, has become aleatory, as their deeper characteristics and features elude capture, as now demonstrated in the shift in focus to audience engagement, which brings its own conundrums and puzzles around boundaries (Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2018; Nelson 2019).

Faced with the rich choice of channels, audiences have become fluid and nomadic, abandoning their pre-Internet loyalty to outlets. They do not care to define themselves as analog or digital. Measures of comparison between analog and digital are difficult to establish, as mixed patterns of consumption, and their ultimate rationales, become more slippery and out of the reach of standard metrics.

A key factor contributing to this uncertainty is that no single medium has exclusive control over content. Each item migrates between platforms and is shaped and reshaped with different modes by different subjects, who may be professionals or prosumers or, for example politicians. In this new landscape, as we have argued, news become fluid, crossing the boundaries of analog and digital, and being reshaped and reworded by a variety of actors, often including many thousands of people. Even as its role frequently is neglected by commentators, scholars and by news outlets themselves, print news, or news originating in print, inescapably forms a vital and still essential component in this evolved system.

We can fully understand this, if we capture the true business model driving news.
The longstanding, fervid search for a viable economic basis for news has been revealed not only as futile but as missing the point as, publishers, characterized by multiple media properties, have begun to apply an economic strategy to their overall assets, by considering them in a sort of osmotic whole. Money, in news, does not smell of either analog or digital other than, arguably, from the new platform giants benefitting most from advertising (Bell 2016).

In this framework, the print newspaper and its brand underwrites the prestige and trust leveraged toward assets such as television, radio, magazines and online newspaper that consequently are transformed in economic terms. Readers lost by print are recovered by other outlets in the media system. Money formerly spent to buy print newspapers is not simply saved by ex-readers. People pay it in another way: when they buy TV or radio licenses and cable subscriptions or when they subscribe to online newspapers or when they buy magazines. The cost of print news is now spread over the entire information chain. Often, media groups' scaffolding rests on the print newspaper, without which they otherwise could not exist.

As with audiences' sizes, compositions and activities, publishers pursuing commercial aims do not form business plans on the basis of artificial boundaries between analog and digital. While their rhetoric lately privileges the digital, since no one wants to be seen to be left behind, analog properties, in particular newspapers, are considered critical to the underpinning of the digital, a complex mix of platforms, sometimes including broadcast.
The intertwined news hybrid means that attention needs to be paid to the sometimes clearly apparent but more often subtle links and inter-dependencies, operating at professional and cultural levels, between digital and analog news.
This demands more than investigating the analog traces in digital media, as a dualist analysis might have it, but instead recognizing the deep, symbiotic integration of both in a hybridized system where one element cannot be disposed of without impacting on the whole. In this, we arrive, albeit via a different route, at a similar conclusion to that of Zelizer (2019), in her lucidly expressed caution against defining journalism according to its technologies.

Digital news is news, as is analog news, and it is not possible and probably not desirable to separate them in the interests of an imagined platform purity or on the basis of a false understanding of linear historical progress. Digital journalism studies, then, must be a part of journalism studies more generally, and share its breadth and theoretical depth (Steensen and Laura 2015), rather than be tempted to defend a silo that remains comfortable only for disrupters, purveyors of novelty, and digital revolutionaries. Their identity could instead be based on a particular attention toward the digital but understood in an open and fluid way, as we have tried to show here. What is needed, in short, is a mature, broader post-digital understanding of news (Ludovico 2012), which is one where we have worked through and past our initial exhilaration at the "bright, shiny things" (Posetti 2018) – and where the focus no longer is on our being digital, or not.

This should be undertaken not, pendulum-style, as part of some sort of "techlash" driven by fashionable outrage at the excesses of the digital realm, but as a considered approach to fully understanding and apprehending the evolving processes at play in news. The implication of this discussion for future research is clear: there is the need to investigate the journey that news makes from the analog to the digital and vice versa, in order to understand all of the challenges and opportunities raised in a hybridized media system. Empirical research recognizing this reality of enmeshed analog and digital media is required to realize such a broader understanding.

Notes

1. See Page One: Inside the New York Times, available on YouTube, Amazon Prime Video, and other streaming services.

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