Colombian journalism on Twitter: use of the tool in the professional practice

Periodismo colombiano en Twitter: usos de la herramienta en el ejercicio de la profesión

Jornalismo colombiano no Twitter: usos da ferramenta no exercício profissional

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ABSTRACT | Based on a mixed methodology, which triangulates the data obtained in a survey of 300 journalists, 20 interviews and a content analysis, this research seeks to establish how Colombian journalists use Twitter to search for information, build messages, and create communities. The results allow us to establish that, despite the various possibilities that this platform allows for the construction of innovative and multimedia messages, most of the Colombian journalists surveyed do not use them nor do they seek to generate interactivity and two-way communication with their audiences.

KEYWORDS: Twitter; journalist; newsmaking; interactivity; Colombia.

RESUMEN | *Esta investigación busca establecer cómo utilizan los periodistas colombianos Twitter para buscar información, construir mensajes y crear comunidades. En el estudio, 300 periodistas de 120 medios participaron en una encuesta, se realizaron 20 entrevistas a profesionales y un análisis de contenido de publicaciones en Twitter durante 2018 y 2019. Los resultados permiten establecer que, pese a las variadas posibilidades que ofrece esta plataforma para elaborar mensajes informativos innovadores y multimediales, la mayoría de los periodistas participantes en el estudio no las utiliza ni busca generar interactividad y comunicación bidireccional con sus audiencias.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Twitter; periodista; newsmaking; interactividad; Colombia.*

RESUMO | Este artigo busca estabelecer como os jornalistas colombianos usam o Twitter para procurar informação, construir a mensagem e criar comunidades virtuais. No estudo participaram 300 jornalistas de 120 meios de comunicação em um inquérito, foram realizadas 20 entrevistas a profissionais e uma análise de conteúdo a publicações no Twitter durante 2018 e 2019. Os resultados obtidos revelam que, apesar de ter várias possibilidades na construção de mensagens inovadores e multimídia, a maioria dos jornalistas colombianos não estão usando nem gerando interatividade e comunicação bidirecional com seu público-alvo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Twitter; jornalista; newsmaking; interatividade; Colômbia.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of Internet access in the world has been a constant. In January 2020 there were 4,540 million active users, 5,190 million unique mobile phone users, and 3,800 million social networks users (Kemp, 2020). This accelerated expansion has brought important changes in journalism, both in the field of professional practice and in the operation of communication companies, which have had to adapt to this new reality and, especially, to social networks, indispensable tools for the journalists' daily work.

Social networks are platforms that have changed the behaviors of those who consume them, generating new habits in journalistic work; Twitter and Facebook are the main social networks that influence professional practices and identities in relation to verification, the construction of loyal audiences, and the self-regulation of the profession (Posetti, 2018). As Hermida (2013) points out, social networks have become spaces where news are filtered, debated, verified in a collaborative manner, thus giving audiences a previously unthinkable protagonism.

Adapting to this new ecosystem implied for traditional media, and even for digital natives, the need to learn about the functioning of social networks and their languages, since only by understanding the logic of each network was it possible to viralize content. Distribution began to be a function that had to be fulfilled from the newsrooms, something new for the media and their journalists, at the same time that audiences have more facilities to read news, collaborate, share, and discuss information (Gobbi, 2017; Lasorsa et al., 2012).

Likewise, the arrival of social networks modified aspects such as contact with sources and reporting, since many journalists began to use the information present in this network as their products' primary source (Cela et al., 2019; García-Borrego & Campos, 2016). In short, there was a change in professional routines, understood as those habitual procedures accepted as appropriate by those who perform a job and that allow them to elucidate, in a typical situation, what should and should not be done (Lecaros & Greene, 2012).

All of the above has generated in journalists the need to establish an effective connection with the audience through an empathetic and collaborative attitude (Sánchez-Gonzales & Méndez-Muros, 2015; López-Hermida & Claro-Montes, 2011), aware that social networks are tools to obtain information, create communities, attract new audiences, and distribute and viralize content (Carrera et al., 2012).

Graphic representations	Visual support that shows the current news in a clear way. Example: pictures and cartoons
Infographics	Represent data graphically and symbolically.
Videos	Support for clarity, succinctness, and narrative effectiveness.
GIFs	Popular element with a humorous touch.

Table 1. Image formats on Twitter

Source: Own elaboration based on García-Avilés and Arias (2016).

Within the broad spectrum of social networks, Twitter is the most appropriate tool to perform journalistic work, gather and report news (Hanusch & Bruns, 2017; Powers & Vera-Zambrano, 2018; Tandoc & Vos, 2016), as well as to maintain and strengthen close relationships with the audience (Marta-Lazo & García- Idiakez, 2014) or as a resource to communicate news in a simple way (Crucianelli, 2010). The limitation of characters implies a substantial change in the journalistic narrative structure (Hermida, 2013), and the practice of embedding tweets in the news has become common to support or illustrate an argument given in the text (Oschatz et al., 2021).

The First Great ICT Survey (Ministerio de Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicaciones, 2017) highlighted that 97% of the Colombian population that uses the Internet does so to communicate and 79% are active on social networks. Twitter is the fifth most used social network (20%) in the country, after Facebook (88%), WhatsApp (87%), Instagram (34%) and Google+ (29%).

Several authors have studied from different angles the way in which Twitter has penetrated the journalists' work routines, the motivations and uses of the platform, the exploration of narratives and interactive elements to strengthen communication links (Pérez-Soler & Micó-Sanz, 2015; Burton & Soboleva, 2011; Pentina et al., 2016).

Of the variety of elements that Twitter allows to accompany the message, García-Avilés and Arias (2016) considered four basic visual formats to distribute content on this network: graphic representations, infographics, videos, and GIFs, as seen in table 1.

On the other hand, social networks have promoted interactivity as a way of generating engagement with audiences, understood as the users' psychological state that brings them closer to the emitter of the messages and is manifested in actions of different intensity, such as reading, commenting, or contributing

new information, liking or sharing a publication (Bonsón et al., 2013; Barger & Labrecque, 2013; Paine, 2011). Thus, engagement implies a two-way interaction between the emitter and the recipient of the information, and is highly desirable, since audiences create value by contributing to complete, recommend, or distribute content (Dolan et al., 2016; Ballesteros, 2019).

Twitter has provided different ways for journalists to engage their audience and establish a bidirectional contact with them, shortening geographical and temporal boundaries, which for authors such as Rost (2012), Ure (2017), Carrera and colleagues (2012), Noguera (2013) and López-Meri (2016) is the essence of this social network. All this, in a context in which the one-to-many communication model changed to one where many people can participate, even conversationally with each other (McQuail, 2013). However, in some cases the distance that remains between the journalist and his/her audience it is still evident, a phenomenon prior to Twitter, raised some time ago by McQuail and colleagues (1997), which remains today for three reasons: the physical concentration that keeps rural areas marginalized from major cities, the unidirectional use of technologies and a low level of feedback, and the ideological and cultural distances between the journalist and his/her audience.

Thus, McQuail and colleagues (1997) assert that there are three types of journalist-audience relationships:

1. Dominant: the information professional defines his/her role in a respectful manner vis-à-vis his/her audience, and his/her main objective is to dominate the communication, imposing opinions and purposes on the receivers.

2. Autistic: the journalist focuses on his/her skills and abilities, professional judgments of colleagues, and the work environment.

3. Balance/change: there is a desire to create a communicative link with the audience, there are responses and exchange of ideas on specific topics, and an affinity between the ways of thinking between the journalist and his/her receivers.

Considering the importance of interactivity in digital media, it is crucial to understand to what extent journalists interact with their audience on Twitter, are interested in strengthening the communicative bond with those who follow them and to involve them into their profession. Marta-Lazo and García-Idiakez (2014) suggest that there are two types of journalist profiles on Twitter: the informant journalist, who understands that his/her main role in the informative and communicative work is to disseminate news, and a second role as opinion generator, which adds value to the professional.

Applause	Conversation	Amplification
Actions that indicate agreement, interest, or empathy with the publication, such as 'likes'.	Direct or indirect responses to content (comments, mentions, and replies).	Actions by which a publication is shared and spread to a wider audience (retweeting or quoting tweets).

Table 2. Interactivity's three characteristics

Source: Own elaboration based on Kaushik (2011

Moreover, it cannot be overlooked that Twitter as a social network has personal and leisure purposes (Rodríguez- Ruibal & García-López, 2013) and, precisely, this is the third type of use most employed by communicators, because it involves several facets of the human being, contributes in the configuration of a social identity and leaves aside the *other* to strengthen the *us*.

In the context of engagement forms or commitment degree that followers have with an account, the information published by journalists is evaluated by users in various ways, such as commenting, retweeting, or rating, among other actions (Díaz Soloaga, 2018).

Ure (2017) states that there is an effect of content valuation and acceptance of the communicative proposal by users, which contains an emotional charge and can be classified as interactivity rating. On Twitter, this is manifested in mentions, replies, likes, and retweets. However, he also recognizes that these interaction forms are of a unidirectional type, rather than constituting an arena for conversational encounters. Kaushik (2011), on the other hand, characterizes three user interaction behaviors with publications (table 2).

In addition, Ure (2017) mentions two types of engagement: the first, strategic action, focused on the interests of the publisher and the expected reactions of users and the second, more difficult to fulfill, of communicative action. This attempts to create collaborative environments, in which they can participate with their own resources, ideas, experiences, and knowledge.

Given this scenario, we posit the following research questions, applied to the context of journalism in Colombia:

Q1. How do journalists use Twitter to get information?

Q2. To what extent do journalists use the possibilities provided by Twitter when producing information for this platform?

Q3. What are the forms of interaction between journalists and their followers, as a result of the tweets published in their Twitter accounts?

METHODOLOGY

We used a mixed was used, based on quantitative and qualitative techniques.

The first step was to develop a survey in Likert scale format, where 1 was never and 5 was always. The survey consisted of five items on the use of Twitter to obtain information (Cronbach's alpha = 0.890), 15 items that inquired about newsmaking practices (Cronbach's alpha = 0.919), and 11 items on the forms of journalist interaction with the audience (Cronbach's alpha = 0.902).

To select the sample, we used the media map prepared by the Consejo de Redacción & Poderopedia (http://poderopedia.org/mapademedios/ index/), which shows the existence of 220 media outlets in the country, since there is no reliable census on the number of journalists in Colombia. The survey was sent by email and Twitter to 500 journalists and 300 working in 123 media outlets in 24 cities responded, in the period between February 2018 and February 2019.

The second technique used was the content analysis of the profiles of 20 professionals deemed influential, to obtain an x-ray of their practices in the use of Twitter as a tool for their professional activity. The selection criteria were: daily use of the platform, the journalist –and not a digital team– manages his/her account, and that the account is public (not necessarily verified).

The sample's influence criterion was determined by the SparkScore measurement index, which assesses the impact of an account according to the average number of retweets, likes, number of followers, lists in which it is included, and interaction engagement. The range of the journalists chosen was between 30 and 75 out of 100, a criterion that 20 professionals met during the period under study.

This instrument's support was a codebook with seven sociodemographic variables, 22 variables related to the published message and the resources used in the message's construction, and nine variables on interactivity. The two daily tweets with the most impact of each journalist were taken as the analysis unit, for a total of 1,200 per month, during 30 days, in September 2018. Some journalists did not tweet more than once a day. Finally, 1,008 tweets were analyzed manually.

In addition, we conducted interviews with 20 practicing journalists linked to public and private media in eight Colombian cities to learn about the experience of different professionals, revealing fragments and trends of their professional routines. The conversations were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Each journalist signed an informed consent form about the study and approved his/her participation, although some asked to keep their names confidential.

RESULTS

Most of the survey respondents are in the age range between 26 and 30 years old (22.3%) and between 31 and 35 years old (19.3%). They are followed by those between 36 and 40 (14.7%) and those under 25 years (14%). We can speak of a population of young journalists, who would be expected to be more familiar with the Twitter management. Sixty-nine percent of the journalists who answered the survey are men, 58.3% have only a university degree, 13.7%, a specialization, and 22%, a master's degree.

Twitter, effective for obtaining information

Of the 300 journalists participating in the survey, 75.4% use Twitter to research journalistic content; in addition, 73.7% said they use it to identify trends, current issues, and news that set the news agenda in Colombia.

48.7% stated that they have used Twitter to contact citizens, public entities, private institutions, and experts to prepare their journalistic content. In fact, there is a statistically significant relationship, which shows that 37.7% of those who use this tool to contact sources also do so to identify trends and topics that set the news agenda, which give them ideas for their journalistic work (Contingency coefficient = 0.759; p=0.000).

54.4% stated that to contact sources on Twitter they use direct messages and 51.4% said they have accessed testimonials and information from sources by searching their accounts.

It is also worth noting that 39% of journalists who have contacted their sources through direct messages or tweets have received a response through that same medium, resulting in a valid communication channel generated due to the constant monitoring of personalities or institutions on social networks, which significantly shortens the geographical and time barriers for the news production process. In the interviews conducted, journalists agreed that social networks such as Twitter are used to gather information, but clarified that going out to the street to look for stories is still essential. "Social networks are a tool, but not the only valid one. Although nowadays journalism is more office-based, I like the contact with the community and for me it is essential to go out to the street to look for stories" (*Telepacífico* interviewee).

Regarding the time to be invested, one interviewee mentions that "social networks have changed the way we look for information, since they are tools that cross borders. On several occasions I have contacted different soccer players through Facebook and Twitter for reports or journalistic advances" (journalist, *Caracol Radio* sports section).

Poor multimedia messages on Twitter

Regarding the elements used in the tweet, it can be said that images or photo galleries are the most used by journalists. In the survey, 134 journalists (44.7%) said that they always (18%) and almost always (26.7%) usually attach a photograph to the published message; 28% said they do it sometimes, 13% do it almost never and 14.3%, never. In the content analysis, 234 (23.8%) tweets included at least one of the four possible images.

"I use a lot of pictures, especially figures, complete tables related to Colombian football. There are people who follow me just for that and I take advantage of it to show the information better, because I know that they are usually shown in a superficial way" (journalist, *El Tiempo* newspaper).

Another journalist considers that "Twitter has facilitated the search for images for different journalistic content, which means that there is no excuse for publishing a story with low quality images" (journalist, *Telecafé*).

The second most used resource was video. This category included unedited videos, edited videos (with watermarks, bumpers or banners, among others) and Playground-style videos (those with brief and precise texts). In the survey, 61 people said that they sometimes (20.3%) and in the same proportion almost never (20.3%) posted videos, compared to 36.3% who never did so, 14.7% who almost always posted videos and 8.3% who always posted a video. In the content analysis, only 3.4% of the tweets reviewed posted a video.

There are those who take advantage of visual communication effects: "I love to upload tweets with photos and retouch them with a special filter to give prominence to the image. I also usually retweet messages that include videos" (journalist, *ESPN* and *RCN Radio*).

The next most used resource was the GIF. In the observation of tweets published by influential journalists, only six out of 1,008 messages analyzed had a graphic animation, none based on data journalism or infographics. In the survey, 36.7% of the participants stated that they never used them and 23.3% answered that they almost never used them.

The least used components in the observed sample were polls, since only four journalists (0.4%) used this instrument to conduct opinion surveys for their followers and only once did a journalist broadcast via Periscope (0.01%).

Regarding other components of the tweet, 156 journalists stated in the survey that they never (26.3%) and almost never (20.3%) make threads to connect several related tweets. Twenty-two percent (22%) said they do it sometimes, almost always

(19.3%), and always (12%). In the content analysis, only 3.2% (32 tweets) of the messages observed had this feature that allows linking messages.

Among the factors evaluated was the use of hashtags and tags of accounts directly involved in their published messages. Respondents answered that they almost always (29.3%) and always (39%) used a numeral to contextualize and group conversations on a given topic, and 63% tagged the people or public and private institutions that served as sources. However, the analysis of the tweets shows that 15.4% (155 tweets out of 1,008) included a numeral (#) for personal, journalistic, promotional, and opinion messages. Regarding the message, the results of the survey show that 61.7% of the participants prefer to quote specific phrases from their interviewed sources. Within the architecture of the tweet, other factors of the message related to the communicative objective to be transmitted were also examined: the use of hyperlinks, emojis, and the theme developed. Of the 1,008 tweets, 129 included at least one emoticon, while 87.1% (878) did not. It is noteworthy to mention that 104 messages were published by journalists working in the so-called soft news sections, mainly for publications of a personal, opinion, and informative nature, and those who used them the least worked in hard news sections (only 23 messages).

Another component considered was whether journalists put a hyperlink in their messages. Only 17% (171 tweets) included a link. 87.71% (contingency coefficient= 0.301; p= 0.000) of journalists who included a hyperlink work in hard news sections. Although the findings show a low inclusion of hyperlinks in the messages (only 171 out of 1,008), 91.8% correspond to news published by Colombian and international media, in which the main purpose is to attract traffic to the websites of the journalistic companies in which they work. The remaining 8.2% redirected to YouTube, the Gabriel García Márquez Foundation, UEFA, *Fayerwayer* (technology site), FLIP (League Against Silence, by its Spanish acronym), Spotify, and Shazam.

Journalists working in hard news sections (10 interviewees) use Twitter mainly to give opinions (23.01%), talk about personal issues (13.39%), and inform (13.19%), while those working in soft sections tend to use it mainly to inform (11.11%), give opinions (10.61%) and talk about personal issues (8.24%) (contingency coefficient= 0.356; p= 0.000). Table 3 shows the communicative objectives of journalists in their tweets.

Of the messages analyzed, 27.8% were journalistic (mostly about sports news), 26.09% were related to personal aspects of the journalists, 0.59% dealt with an institutional topic, 10.21% were promotional (mostly about the media outlet in which they work), 35.21% were mainly opinions on politics, sports, and social topics, and in 0.79% it was not possible to determine the typology. Likewise, the crossover between the type of message and the tweet's communicative objective (contingency coefficient= 0.846; p=0.000) showed that 86.44% of the journalistic type messages were published with the objective of informing, rather than describing, clarifying, or analyzing.

Communicative objective	Journalists working in hard news sections	Journalists working in soft news sections
Inform	13.19%	11.11%
Describe	0.00%	0.69%
Ask	1.78%	1.38%
Discuss	0.79%	0.25%
Clarify	1.38%	2.48%
Analyze	0.19%	0.39%
Comment	23.01%	10.61%
Promote	8.23%	2.58%
Talk about personal issues	13.39%	8.24%
Cannot be determined	0.09%	0.22%
Total	62.05%	37.95

Table 3. Communicative objectives of journalists according to the section they work for

Source: Own elaboration.

Twitter: one-way or two-way interactivity platform?

The crossing of the Twitter contribution variable in the journalist's research also shows that in 46.33% of the cases (contingency coefficient= 0.352; p=0.000) they never and almost never request the collaboration of Twitter followers to send videos, photographs, or other material to elaborate their journalistic content.

Regarding the results of the tweets' content analysis, it is pertinent to begin with generalities. Of the three most popular forms of interactivity offered by Twitter (reply, retweet, and like), less than 36% of the journalists whose profiles were studied tend to use them continuously. The most frequent action was to give a direct response in another tweet (35.4%, 357 out of 1,008 tweets). The second most frequently used (19.1%, 193 out of 1,008 tweets) was to like the comments of their followers on their tweets. In 15.1% of the cases (152 out of 1,008 tweets), professionals retweeted with comments and the lowest participation was through retweets (rt), with 0.7% of the total number of messages collected. In this research, the tweet of the content analysis with more likes and retweets was the one published by the journalist of the magazine *Semana* María Jimena Duzán, with approximately 17,200 likes and 5,300 retweets, in which she thanked the support after Judge Daniel Hernández posed a complaint against her two days before for the opinion column she published in the media in which she works and in which she expresses her desire for freedom of the press in Colombia. On the other hand, the message

that registered more responses was the one from journalist Yolanda Ruiz of *RCN Radio*, with more than 1,200, who asked people's opinion about the entrance of animals to restaurants.

Journalists tend to respond, retweet, and like messages related to journalistic-informative content (27.08%) and identify more with those containing opinion, a point of view, or a judgment on an event (35.21%) (contingency coefficient= 0.763; *p*=0.001) (table 4).

The messages in which journalists give their opinion on a topic are also those in which they are most likely to generate conversation with their followers, thus establishing the two-way communication relationship that would be expected from the use of Twitter. In this same vein, journalists do not promote a hashtag (#) to create communities, group conversations, or have it as a priority in the tweet with the aim of monitoring conversations with other people on specific topics, since 84.6% (853) of the messages analyzed did not contain any numeral. Likewise, only four messages out of the 1,008 tweets contained a survey; three of them were designed by journalists working in radio media and the other, by one who works in television, reflecting that the use of polls is not a frequent practice to know the opinion of people on Twitter. Nor is it a habit of the journalists analyzed to request photos, videos, and other resources to their followers, since 99.9% did not make this request: only one tweet with this type of request was recorded.

In this process of establishing communication with other people and knowing in what type of publications there is an intention to interact, we included a cross-check related to the communicative objective variable, in which different purposes that journalists have when publishing a message were considered, among them: to inform, describe, analyze, question, debate, clarify, give an opinion, promote, and tell aspects of a personal nature.

Of the 339 tweets categorized as opinion (comment), journalists responded to 136 (40%) interventions from their followers. Of these 136 cases, 41% of the responses were given to messages that were related to the journalists' personal lives (affinities, experiences, motivations, acknowledgments, etc.); likewise, when they posted messages of journalistic-informative interest, to clarify, question, and analyze (contingency coefficient= 0.319; *p*= 0.000), as shown in figure 1.

During the interviews, the journalists said they were attentive to the comments they received and expressed their pleasure in engaging in conversations with their followers. For example, a communicator from *Canal Tro* said that "when one integrates the conventional with new technologies, one manages to have a direct interaction with the viewer. These tools do Colombian journalism a lot of good".

Type of message	Percentage of journalist's reaction in RT, likes, and response
Journalistic	27.08%
Personal	26.09%
Institutional	0.6%
Promotional	10.22%
Opinion	35.21%
Cannot be determined	0.8%

Table 4. Interactivity of journalists according to the type of message on Twitter
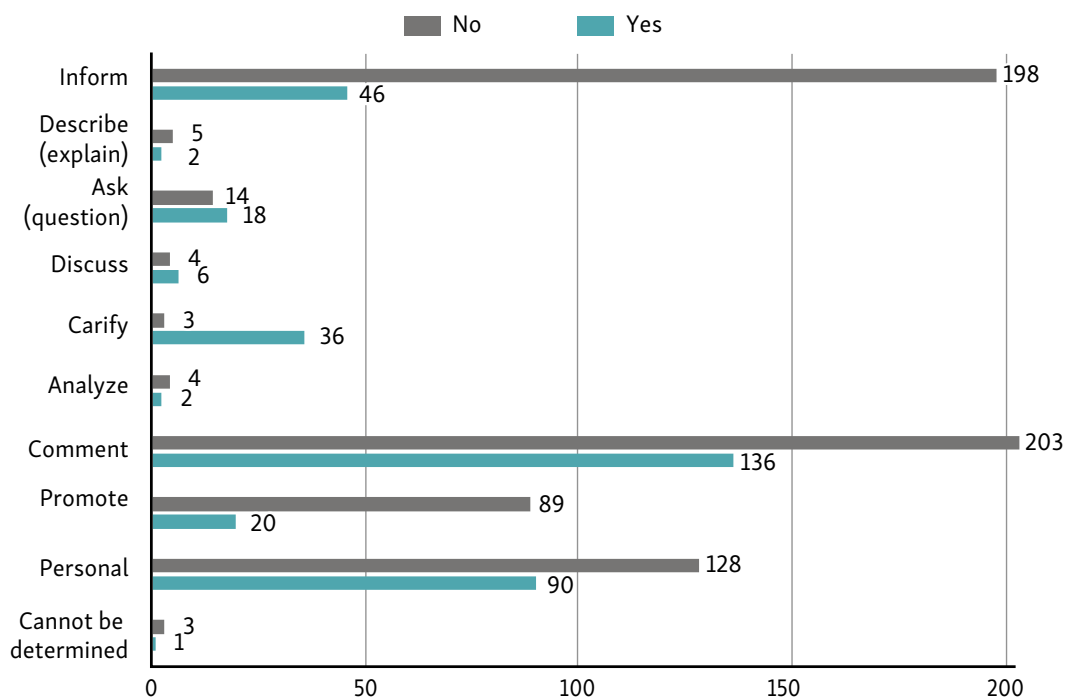
Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 1. Journalists' responses to their followers, according to the tweets' communicative objective

Source: Own elaboration.

In the case of *El Colombiano*, the general editor said that, although she does not have a Twitter account because she does not like controversy and feels exposed by her job, the newspaper has different spaces on social networks to interact with people and specifically on Twitter there is the *Twittercrónica*, a news and chronicles section shared live with Twitter followers, in which there is "an exercise of reporting in real time" on topics of the newsroom (Medellín, fashion, lifestyle, social networks, among others). In the case of *Diario El Otún*, the journalist said that

in the newsroom they usually respond from time to time to comments, especially to clarify a situation to users, while the professional of the newspaper *La Libertad*, from Barranquilla, said that he takes into account the comments, good and bad, because everything serves to improve and that he constantly interacts on social networks because he receives complaints from the community to cover in the media.

The content analysis showed that the collaboration processes of users in journalistic content are almost nonexistent. Of the 1,008 tweets analyzed, journalist Vanessa De La Torre, from *Blu Radio*, was the only one who asked a follower for evidence on the issue of tree felling that she was developing in her program and subsequently published in another tweet. De La Torre received a message from a follower, who told her that he had a letter in which the Botanical Garden assured that through Plan T it would replant trees in different sectors of the city. She asked him for a photo of such proof.

Two types of opposing relationships between the journalist and his/her audience proposed by McQuail and colleagues (1997) can also be seen: first, a clear dominant relationship on the part of the journalist, who is the subject that controls communication, proposes topics, imposes opinions and purposes on the recipients, and uses Twitter as an alternative support for the production and distribution of content, thus complementing the journalistic labor. However, there are also some tweets in which a position of balance/change is evident, in which the journalist has the desire to create communicative ties with the audience, to exchange thoughts, and to know the plurality of ideas on specific topics of interest to both parties (McQuail et al., 1997).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained show that journalists see Twitter as a tool with great potential for researching information about the informational content they are preparing, as well as for identifying trends, circumstantial topics according to geographic location, and the main news of the moment. Thus, Twitter fulfills one of its service promises, facilitating the search process and trends for information professionals.

The findings also confirm the notion that García-Borrego & Campos (2016) present about the search for sources through social networks. For the researchers, the use of tools such as Twitter and Facebook for work purposes is a renewed relationship experience of journalists with their sources through digital platforms. Most of the participating journalists contact sources with different characteristics (public, private, citizen) through Twitter, especially by direct message, because it allows a private, reliable, and immediate dialogue with the source, becoming a

valid channel to access the testimony of a determinant subject in the process of content construction. However, it should be noted that it was not the only method to obtain testimonies from their sources, nor did it replace the reporting work.

Although Pérez-Soler and Micó-Sanz (2015) state that contacting sources through Twitter is a secondary practice, as well as interaction with audiences and as a discussion space, and that the only context for connecting with sources through social networks is when an unplanned event occurs, in this work it was found that the search for sources is one of the main uses that Colombian journalists make of Twitter, since it is a direct, fast, and unmediated channel, in which sources express themselves and in which journalists can do constant monitoring.

The results of this work coincide with Rost (2012), who shows the lack of a narrative that takes advantage of the characteristics of Twitter and the lack of creativity at the time of elaborating the message. For example, in this research it was found that journalists make very little use of emojis, do not use hashtags to create a virtual community and, in the differentiate content that can be attached to the message in image formats, professionals bet almost exclusively on photography. There is minimal use of Periscope transmissions for real-time events, while GIFs with data journalism and infographics are the elements that are definitely not used in the daily practice of the profession on this platform.

This scarce diversity in the type of resources used to elaborate messages on Twitter may be due to a lack of time on the part of journalists, since creating these resources may require more dedication, although it may also be due to a lack of training to handle these tools.

Photographs and videos (edited or not) are the resources most used by journalists when constructing the message on Twitter, two of the three resources that coincide with the point of view of Lasorsa and colleagues (2012), since for the researchers, visual and digital formats have contributed to the way in which journalists exercise their profession. Although the authors also mention the audio category, in this work not a tweet used it and neither was this resource questioned, since at the end of this research it was not a primary function of Twitter and it was necessary to resort to applications such as AudioBoo, Chirbit, Shoutomatic and Audiolip. In this research it could be observed that journalists use Twitter with some visual element with the objective of informing, sharing an experience or personal affinity, promoting a product, service or content, and to give their opinion. This fits with what was stated by García-Avilés and Arias (2016), since the authors highlight the news as the main informative genre and photography as the main accompaniment since it allows contextualizing, and presenting data in a concise and forceful manner. Colombian journalists should reinforce the use of images, because, as the authors

state, this element is becoming increasingly important in digital communication, forcing them to be in constant search of new narrative formats, without losing sight of the quality and rigor demanded by the profession.

The main uses that the journalists in this sample gave to Twitter are related to opinion and journalistic information, as opposed to the study case by López-Hermida and Claro-Montes (2011), whose results showed that Chilean communicators used Twitter to connect with their followers, not to inform or have a close relationship with the media in which they work. In Colombia, several studies that observed the behavior of media accounts agree that they use Twitter as a disseminator of information content of various kinds (Santiesteban & Rodríguez, 2013; Cobos, 2015; Espinosa & Rincón, 2013; Hernández, 2016).

When determining the interaction forms between journalists and their audience through their Twitter accounts, this research evidences Kaushik's (2011) three interaction characteristics, not from the journalist's action but from the audience, which reacts superlatively with what the author calls applause, an action that indicates agreement or empathy and that can be understood as the likes; it also meets the category of conversation, because there are direct and indirect responses to the content, and there is also amplification of the journalists' messages through retweets. These actions can be the representation of what Mariano Ure (2017) calls interactivity rating, which is represented in different ways and involves an emotional charge, or also what McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2016) define as a user experience with technologies that allow interacting, creating, and sharing in their social networks, and that are grouped by an ideological affinity.

This, in addition to ratifying that the sample journalists use Twitter mainly to inform, give opinions, and share personal experiences, also corroborates that this type of publications are the ones that generate the most interaction from their users, corresponding with what Carmen Díaz-Soloaga (2018) stated when assuring that the commitment acquired by the followers is the result of the sensitivity and impact of the published message and, at the same time, manifests an acceptance *effect* and valuation that can be classified as a one-way interactivity *rating* because it does not build a dialogue between the parties (Ure, 2017).

Nevertheless, Rost (2012), Noguera (2013), and López-Meri (2016) mention that interactivity is the most important characteristic that defines digital media and web language, because it expands interconnection, participation, and immersion environments. In the research it can be seen that communicators do not interact with their followers with replies, likes, or retweets, so it is difficult to value Twitter as a bidirectional communicative environment in the case of Colombian journalism.

Our results contradict those authors who raised the importance of creating virtual communities with numerals, with the aim of increasing dialogue and direct and continuous interaction with users until they become loyal (Manfredi et al., 2015), because in the findings it is seen that journalists do not aim to create union spaces, relationships, or conversations through a specific hashtag.

These experiences reinforce the lines of thought put forward by McQuail and colleagues (1997), because despite the fact that the essence of social networks is to strengthen bidirectionality in an ideal environment with subjects, devices, and interfaces in between, there is really a unidirectional communication between the journalist and his/her audience because feedback is low, as well as the active flow of participation; supporting the same idea, Arrabal and De-Aguilera (2016) state that, although Twitter is a social network that has tried to reinforce the power of interactivity, multiple forms of interpersonal communication are missed and it is forgotten that actions should revolve around the user.

Likewise, in the practices observed, journalists like to propose topics or questions to discuss with other users, but there are no spaces for participation in the construction of content, since they do not encourage sending questions to ask an interviewee, nor do they ask for photos or videos when a news event occurs, or use hashtags to form communities, with one-way communication predominating and not taking advantage of the bidirectionality offered by the tool.

Based on the results, the biggest challenge for Colombian journalists on Twitter is to generate greater engagement with the audience by taking advantage of all the possibilities that the platform offers, both for the construction of messages and for interaction with users.

It is important to note that Colombian journalists miss out on several features that Twitter has to create creative content and boost their discourse on the platform, which may happen because the media have superficially defined the use of Twitter in their editorial manuals, giving implementation recommendations and guidelines, but not with concepts and a detailed breakdown of how to get the most out of the platform, something that must be addressed urgently.

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