



Transformation of Informative Content in Peruvian News During COVID-19

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Abstract. The emergence of COVID-19 in the world affected the production of television news, as they were limited in their search for news. Reporters, cameramen, producers, and directors had to adapt their routines and work dynamics to the existing distancing situation. This work presents the transformation of informative content in Peruvian television news during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to describe its new characteristics and modifications imposed by the situation. A qualitative approach was applied, which was a basic and descriptive research in which the analytical method was executed, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with television journalists. The results allowed the recognition of changes in the creation of informative pieces (live dispatches, news reports, interviews, among others), in which the application of journalistic values was reconfigured, especially during the first wave of the health emergency.

Keywords: COVID-19 · news programs · television journalism

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 health crisis highlighted the same crisis that journalism was already going through, but also revealed its importance in the social construction of reality [1]. Faced with uncertainty, the population turned to traditional media for information, because they trusted their professional procedures [2]. But this is not the first time that this has happened, as in other contingencies of this type, journalism has played an essential informative and social role [3]. In this context, television has repositioned itself, regained its media centrality, and recaptured the interest of citizens [4]. And in this process, two genres stood out in the preference of audiences, especially during periods of confinement: informative and entertainment [5]. This has represented the biggest journalistic challenge of recent times [6]. To continue informing, journalists implemented a series of remote work strategies that were called *remote journalism* [7]. In the case of television journalism, due to the application of social distancing because of the health risk, there were changes in the use of audiovisual language that modified the way in which images and sounds of news content were created [8]. Therefore, this research aims to study the informative content developed by Peruvian news programs during COVID-19.

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1.1 Journalistic Content

For an event to be news, it must meet certain journalistic values, which are a set of criteria that allow journalists to know what is newsworthy and what is not [9]. Some of these values that determine the newsworthiness of an event are: timeliness, proximity, personal relevance, conflict, and suspense [10, 11].

According to the mentioned criteria and the actions of people in the real world, they become characters in the news or its protagonists. Additionally, according to Herrscher [14], other people who are sources of information, and even the reporter themselves, are constitutive characters of the journalistic story. These characters perform actions that have newsworthy conditions. Pérez [15] affirms that news can be ordered and narrated, following the three acts of the dramatic structure. For this, it is important to understand that every story “is a chain of cause-and-effect events that occur over time and in space.” [16]. Time refers to the progression and order in which events are narrated, told in the present tense and able to jump back to the past or forward to the future of that story; and space is the place where these events occur, [17] and both have an important referential function for understanding audiovisual narratives [18]. It should be noted that in the specific aspect of newscasts, the pieces of information presented in these programs are also referred to as content. Some of these are informative notes, interviews, and live reports [19, 20].

The general objective of this research was to describe the transformation of informational content in Peruvian newscasts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 Methodology

The research work on this paper is of a basic and descriptive type, because it analyzes the transformations that were applied in the creation of journalistic contents in Peruvian television news during the COVID-19 pandemic. For its development, the analytical method was applied, because the different types of content and changes in programming related to the selected news programs were studied. This research is of a qualitative

Table 1. Journalistic values or criteria.

Journalistic values or criteria	Topicality, proximity, personal relevance, rarity, conflict, suspense, emotion or consequences, progress [11]
	Timeliness, impact, source of the news, human interest, cost of coverage, quality of sound and image, ease or difficulty of understanding the news, and availability of technical and human resources [12]
	Current interest, anticipation, feat, humor, magnitude, progress, prominence, proximity, rarity, transcendence [10]
	Novelty, relevance, interest, proximity, audiovisual nature [13]

Source: own elaboration

Table 2. Contents produced and broadcasted on news programs

Contents of television newscasts	The headline segment, the block, the section, and the news piece [19]
	News with images, news briefs block, read news, live reporting, news without images, fake news, report [20]
	News stories, intros and commentaries, live dispatches, recorded dispatches, interviews, phone-in, off, on/off, special reports, program and block bugs, brief news stories, editorials [21]

Source: own elaboration

approach, since it allows to collect varied points of view, perceptions, and opinions of the subjects involved in the research [22, 23]. The following questions were posed for the development of the research:

General Question

How was the construction of journalistic contents in Peruvian television news modified during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Specific Questions

How were journalistic values applied in the thematic agenda of Peruvian television news during the COVID-19 pandemic?

How were journalistic contents constructed in Peruvian television news during the COVID-19 pandemic?

How were technological devices used to continue producing content on Peruvian television newscasts during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The empirical information was obtained using the semi-structured interview technique. According to Corbetta [24], this technique allows the interviewees to answer the questions related to the research topic under a strategic plan that responds to the research objectives. In line with this, an intentional sample was structured, which, as Vasilachis [25] states, helps to recognize the specific interests and themes revealed by the object of study. To achieve this, a validated questionnaire was structured and developed by experts who are both journalists and university professors. The selection of interviewees was carried out using the snowball technique, in which the interviewees recommend the next participants based on the qualities required by the research [23]. Based on these premises, journalists were selected who met the following conditions:

- The interviewees worked during the pandemic in one of these three channels: Latina, América Televisión, or TV Perú. The first two are privately owned and have higher ratings; the latter is publicly owned and has the highest number of stations in Peru [26].
- The journalists were selected according to their respective positions, choosing participants among producers, reporters, cameramen, or post-producers, so that they can provide their professional perspectives on news construction during the COVID-19 era.

Based on these criteria, the sample consisted of 12 interviewees, and the selected journalists were:

- Rosario Sumarriva, executive general producer of *Noticias en Latina* (RS/Latina), with 29 years of professional experience.
- Fernando Velásquez, producer of *América Noticias Edición Central* (FV/América), with 40 years of professional experience.
- Guillermo Noriega, producer of *TV Perú Noticias* (GN/TV Perú), with 18 years of professional experience.
- Lourdes Túpac Yupanqui, reporter and host on *Latina* (LT/Latina), with 13 years of professional experience.
- Roberto Wong, reporter and host on *TV Perú* (RW/TV Perú), with 20 years of professional experience.
- Fernando Llanos, reporter and host on *América Noticias Edición Central* (FL/América), with 27 years of professional experience.
- Javier Manrique, cameraman on *América Noticias Edición Central* (JM/América), with 11 years of professional experience.
- Luis García, cameraman and camera director on *TV Perú* (LG/TV Perú), with 22 years of professional experience.
- Miguel Albites, cameraman on *Latina* (MA/Latina), with 22 years of professional experience.
- Samuel Sifuentes, chief editor of *Servicio Local de Noticias de América TV-Canal N* (SS/América), with 31 years of professional experience.
- Jorge Ipanaqué, post-producer of the *90 Segundos* newscast on *Latina* (JI/Latina), with seven years of professional experience.
- Renato Romero, post-producer of *TV Perú* (RR/TV Perú), with 22 years of professional experience.

The interviews were conducted using the Zoom application between January and May 2022. After transcription, the data were analyzed and interpreted, and then coded and organized in response to the research questions [27]. The interviewees were asked basic questions that were adapted according to their specialty, and follow-up questions were asked during the conversation to obtain more specific information on the topics discussed. The questionnaire and follow-up questions were established based on the conceptual categories detailed in Tables 1 and 2.

3 Results

Below, we describe how three types of typical news content were transformed: live reporting, news briefs, and interviews.

3.1 The Predominance of Live Reporting

The pandemic brought about drastic changes in the production of television news. One of them was the replacement of a usual content, news reports, with another that could be produced in a context marked by danger and health restrictions: live reporting. Therefore,

news programs increased the presence of this format in all their broadcasts and extended the duration of each report on air. The average time increased from three minutes to 10, 15, 20 or even 30 min (LT/Latina).

By extending their time on the air, reporters developed more journalistic skills to carry out dispatches; For this reason, the events had to be looked at from a narrative perspective that would allow them to be told from other angles. (RW/TV Peru). They also had to develop their descriptive ability to report on the difficulties that the population faced in terms of transportation or work during the pandemic, as well as cover activities carried out by the military or police to enforce lockdown and curfew measures (RS/Latina, GN/TV Peru). “Live reporting is information; if you don’t have information, you can try anything live, and it won’t work... The ability to tell and break down events is an important quality of a live reporter” (FL/America). This was a phase where live reports made up the entire news program or a significant part of it. LiveU backpacks were intensively used to transmit the signal using internet bandwidth, requiring fewer personnel compared to other systems such as microwave or fly away (JM/America, MA/Latina). The COVID-19 theme was also incorporated into live reporting by on-the-scene reporters, who were provided with equipment such as LiveU backpacks or cell phones (FV/America, GN/TV Peru). In some cases, and depending on the possibility of production and the implements to be used, live dispatches were planned, either combining the channel’s camera plus the drone or adding the use of the reporter’s cell phone (FL/America). Most of the interviewees agree that it was an intense period of live broadcasts covering various aspects related to COVID-19 that lasted approximately four months. These live reports were done because lockdown measures reduced the production of news reports. With the population confined, there were fewer police reports and political activities. There was also a pragmatic reason for production because the limited number of people due to health regulations or illness reduced the flow of production. Live reports gave editors time to complete the news reports they had planned (GN/TV Peru). In some cases, reporters looked at how news was covered in other countries where the pandemic had already manifested itself before Peru and took references to produce their live reports. “Personally, I watched a lot of what was happening in Italy and Spain, which was quite impactful, and that helped us a lot” (RW/TV Peru).

3.2 The News Reports

The news report is the predominant content in the news program’s informative schedule; however, most of the interviewees agree that their presence decreased during the first four or five months of the pandemic in the context of the first wave. This is because all people were confined and many usual activities were suspended, such as shows, sports, and politics, among others. Therefore, other resources such as live dispatches or video call interviews had to be used to continue informing. Two criteria were applied for the construction of the news: one deontological - to maintain calmness in the population - and the other procedural - to respect distance. Before the pandemic, there were already networks that, within their informative treatment, specified not to exacerbate sensationalism, so this was applied with greater intensity in this critical stage (RR/TV Peru). In others, precise indications were given so that the informative treatment appeals to calmness in such an adverse situation for the population (LT/Latina, RS/Latina). “We

fulfilled a very important function at that time, which was to guide the population and maintain a bit of calmness, so that people do not despair” (RW/TV Peru). In other television networks, journalistic treatment procedures established in their style manual were applied. “We had had a meeting at the network, I remembered it was online, where they explicitly asked us to send a message of calmness to Peruvian families” (LT/Latina). “The style manual was truthfully applied because it was a circumstance where people’s sensitivity or emotionality was very extreme; therefore, it was necessary to take care of the audiovisual management” (SS/America).

As a guideline and self-regulatory sense, instructions were also given to reporters not to assume inquisitive and morally superior positions in relation to certain behaviors of the population, such as when they were incriminated for not wearing masks and breaking other rules, “we are not judges or controllers; we just inform. There was an indication to have special care with people. Our mission is informative, we are not police forces” (RS/Latina). To this, we must add a criterion that directed the audiovisual construction of the news: the distancing, the health restrictions, and the same danger of the virus forced the commissions to be covered from a distance. This also caused a change in the way live reports, interviews, reporter stand-ups, and news notes were narrated (LT/Latina, GN/TV Peru, RS/Latina). “You had to record everything, but without getting close to anyone” (FL/America); “it was constructed from a distance, and many support shots were made with a wide angle” (RR/TV Peru); “we did not know much about the virus, it was unknown, and since it was unknown, we tried to tell from afar what was happening, and doing so from afar, is like informing by watching television, it’s like telling without being there” (LT/Latina).

A format that became common was the daily press conferences of President Vizcarra, from there various derivative contents were produced for the realization of various informative notes, various contents could be produced. The interviewees averaged that between three and six daily notes derived from these conferences could be made, which were incorporated into the information offer of the newscasts at a stage in which the usual topics of these had declined due to the confinement (RW/TV Perú, LT/Latina, SS/América). However, these reports had a different production process: the conference was recorded, then a writer or reporter created the script, and finally the report could be enhanced with interviews that supplemented the topic. Additionally, in post-production, support footage was added, which was not always easy due to the lack of available images. “Regarding the Vizcarra reports, we had to search for support footage that was related to the measures he was announcing” (RR/TV Perú). Due to this lack of support shots that sometimes occurred in the production of some informative notes, the post-producers appealed to the use of live links, which had already been recorded and archived. From there, image fragments were extracted, which were used as support shots, (RR/TV Perú). This situation occurred a lot in political notes, since there were no face-to-face activities of this type. So, you had to resort to the archive to be able to obtain support shots that would make it possible to make up for that deficiency.

3.3 The Hybrid Interviews

Another common content in news programs is the interview. This is incorporated into the news programs’ offerings depending on their programming. They are more frequent

in morning and midday programs because they have a longer duration and, therefore, allow the use of this format to expand information on a trending topic in the news cycle. Like news briefs and live reports, during the first wave of COVID-19, interviews were predominant, which is further evidence of what was happening. However, their change is not only appreciated thematically but also formally. This is because they began to be conducted using devices and technologies that allowed them to be conducted remotely.

Most of the interviewees agree that the use of video call applications was essential to continue conducting interviews, and that at first, the main question was the audiovisual quality of these calls. However, with time, the interviewees themselves learned to improve the composition of their shots, or they received instructions from the reporters or cameramen who were going to interview them. Despite their advantages in terms of time and distance, some questioned the video call interview because “in person, you can get more information from your interviewee; in video calls, you had fewer resources to do so” (FL/America). However, it cannot be denied that it was an innovation in the face of the impossibility of conducting interviews as before the pandemic. “The agenda did change; everything was COVID, and the novelty was that all interviews were online. I had never experienced that before; interviews were always conducted in a studio or an office, and they were always in person” (RR/TV Peru).

4 Discussion and Conclusions

To understand how the narrative contents of newscasts were modified, it is pertinent to define that journalistic values or criteria are a set of conditions that intrinsically meet some facts and make them worthy of being newsworthy [10–13, 28]. These criteria also serve as reference frameworks and guides used by journalists to construct news stories.

Regarding the criteria or journalistic values, it is concluded that those of actuality and proximity were very relevant during the first months, in the first wave, when live broadcasts prevailed in newscasts and news was transmitted live, as current as possible, a situation never seen with such permanence for months. It should be noted that newscasts use the criterion of actuality in their predominant content, which is the news story; however, even so, these already have a temporal distance between the coverage of the event and its broadcast, while live broadcasts offer current news in real-time. Another journalistic criterion that was very valid in the first months of the pandemic is that of personal relevance, which was manifested, above all, in the media presence of President Martín Vizcarra, who appeared at the midday press conferences or in informative notes. Derived from these.

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President Martín Vizcarra, who appeared at the midday press conferences or in informative notes. Derived from these. Regarding the contents - such as news pieces - they underwent modifications in terms of their form, that is, in regards to the language used in their construction according to the use of images, sound, and post-production [8]. It is necessary to indicate that all were influenced by the COVID-19 theme, although they had different variations: live reports extended their duration - which required more narrative qualities from the journalists to sustain their presence on the air while news pieces reduced their presence on the schedule due to the lack of topics and sanitary risks; and interviews underwent morphological modifications in their realization, as they were produced under hybrid modalities that combined video calls with television. Being that non-television technological devices such as cell phones or video calls allowed to continue producing content despite the difficulties of the context. Regarding the contents - such as news pieces - they underwent modifications in terms of their form, that is, in regards to the language used in their construction according to the use of images, sound, and post-production [8]. It is necessary to indicate that all were influenced by the COVID-19 theme, although they had different variations: live reports extended their duration - which required more narrative qualities from the journalists to sustain their presence on the air while news pieces reduced their presence on the schedule due to the lack of topics and sanitary risks; and interviews underwent morphological modifications in their realization, as they were produced under hybrid modalities that combined video calls with television. Being that non-television technological devices such as cell phones or video calls allowed to continue producing content despite the difficulties of the context. Finally, it should be noted that there were some limitations, but the most prominent one was due to the difficulty of interviewing general interest or specialist journalists from other free-to-air channels or cable television. Based on this, it is proposed to develop other lines of research that address topics related to the pandemic, but focused on other television genres such as fiction, entertainment, advertising, or docudrama. Other journalistic formats, such as investigative magazines or thematic news programs, could also be addressed. It is also proposed that, based on the information presented in this paper, other qualitative research be carried out that applies techniques for content or discourse analysis, or that these findings be extrapolated to apply quantitative research that allows for data to reveal more generalizable results and conclusions about this topic, which still has much to be researched. Finally, it should be noted that there were some limitations, but the most prominent one was due to the difficulty of interviewing general interest or specialist journalists from other free-to-air channels or cable television. Based on this, it is proposed to develop other lines of research that address topics related to the pandemic, but focused on other television genres such as fiction, entertainment, advertising, or docudrama. Other journalistic formats, such as investigative magazines or thematic news programs, could also be addressed. It is also proposed that, based on the information presented in this paper, other qualitative research be carried out that applies techniques for content or discourse analysis, or that these findings be extrapolated to apply quantitative research that allows for data to reveal more generalizable results and conclusions about this topic, which still has much to be researched.

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