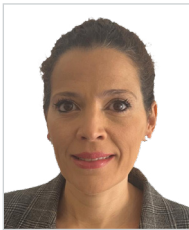


# The impact of citizen participation (UGC) on television news production

## *El impacto de la participación ciudadana (CGU) en el proceso de creación de la noticia televisiva*



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### Abstract:

This research analyses user-generated content (UGC) incorporated into news reports at Canal Sur Televisión. By using the case study methodology, the main objective is to reveal how citizen participation influences the various stages of news production carried out by audio-visual journalists. Content analysis has been used to unveil the UGC present in videos uploaded over the past decade onto the official website archives of Canal Sur Televisión. This channel is one of three regional television networks in Spain with the largest budgets, and it is known for its strong commitment to digital modernisation. This study confirms that during the coverage phase, journalists often turn to citizen resources to provide quick and immediate information to unforeseen events and, in the structural phase, the testimonial value of UGC significantly influences the narrative organization of the

### Resumen:

*Esta investigación analiza el Contenido Generado por el Usuario (CGU) incorporado en las noticias de Canal Sur Televisión con el objetivo principal de descubrir, a partir de este estudio de caso, cómo la participación ciudadana influye en las distintas etapas de la producción informativa por parte de los periodistas audiovisuales. Metodológicamente, se lleva a cabo un análisis de contenido del CGU presente en los vídeos subidos durante la última década en el sitio web oficial del archivo de Canal Sur Televisión, una de las tres televisiones autonómicas de mayor presupuesto de España y destacada por su firme apuesta por la digitalización y la modernización. El trabajo evidencia cómo durante la fase de cobertura, los periodistas suelen acudir al recurso ciudadano para ofrecer una respuesta informativa rápida e inmediata ante eventos imprevistos y cómo, en la fase estructural, el valor testimonial del CGU condiciona*

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news. An interesting fact is that two out of ten news stories that use UGC could not have been produced without the help of these users. The conclusions and recommendations of this research are not only relevant, but they can also be applied to other media outlets and contexts in audio-visual journalism.

**Keywords:**

Citizen journalism; UGC; public television; news; smartphones; social networks.

*de manera significativa la arquitectura narrativa de las noticias. Un dato interesante es que dos de cada diez informaciones que usan CGU no podrían haberse elaborado sin su aporte. Las conclusiones y recomendaciones que se desprenden de esta investigación son relevantes y pueden aplicarse a otros medios y contextos del periodismo audiovisual.*

**Palabras clave:**

*Periodismo Ciudadano; CGU; televisión pública; noticias, smartphones; redes sociales.*

## 1. Introduction

Social media offer free information that can be read and shared by everyone. The incorporation of user-generated content (UGC) in television journalism is increasingly common, driven by the digital transformation and the rise of social media platforms. This evolution has transformed conventional journalism by enabling people to actively participate in the production and distribution of news, thereby reshaping information as a collective asset. Access to information is instantaneous, offering immediacy and media interaction, yet it may have limitations (Márquez, 2017). Nevertheless, some authors point out that such access could also be an ally for quality journalism (Gil-Ramírez and Gómez de Travesedo, 2018). In this regard, the use of social media might be driven by the belief that content published on these platforms is not as prone to manipulation by certain institutions with a vested interest in this type of information. However, other researchers cast doubt on the informative credibility of social media (Rey García and Medina Contreras, 2015). At the centre of this complex and ongoing debate, traditional media are being forced to coexist with social media. Moreover, the viewpoint of professionals is that constant technological changes are forcing journalists to adapt and undergo further training in the new narratives (Sidorenko Bautista and Garrido Pintado, 2021), which is due to transformation in the creation, production, and distribution of content (Bustamante, 2011).

In a context replete with proactive consumers, the journalism industry is searching for added value (Torres-Sánchez, 2018). If we look beyond the competitive aspect, it could be argued that journalists are managing to benefit from the new media.

Firstly, audiences can provide essential audio-visual and narrative resources through social media, which are especially important for the production of certain types of news. Secondly, journalists now have instant access to visual testimonies of newsworthy events (Maldonado Pérez, 2024). Moreover, for certain types of news coverage, a significant change is taking place in journalistic routines and the way news is produced, which is precisely the aspect addressed by this study.

We now turn our attention to UGC as an active part of the news creation process. The profound impact of mobile devices on the fields of communication and journalism has become a subject of increasing academic debate, as numerous researchers strive to understand the various dimensions of this relationship, which is not only dynamic, but driven by feedback as well. Nearly three decades ago, theorists such as Castells (1996) and Fidler (1997) became pioneers in the academic discourse regarding the nonstop role of audiences in the new media ecosystem, and they laid the groundwork for future research. These early scholars had already envisioned the transforming potential of mobile technology on various types of communication, anticipating a future in which such technology might change the way information is disseminated and consumed. In recent years, especially

in the past decade, there has been a sharp increase in research addressing this topic. However, a significant part of the existing literature tends to focus primarily on technological aspects, meticulously analysing the influence and innovative capabilities offered by such devices. A more recent systematic review concludes that there is still a need for additional research that delves deeper into how mobile devices might impact journalistic and informational production (López-García et al., 2019). Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to this knowledge gap by rigorously examining the multiple variables that analyse the influence of mobile technology on journalistic practice and its implications for the dissemination of information in the field of television journalism.

Although the Internet radically changed the communication landscape, the great revolution came with the so-called Web 2.0. This term was coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2004, and it refers to online applications that allow the exchange of content among users. Improved versions of the mobile phone have placed a tool in the hands of citizens, which enables them to create, edit, and disseminate content immediately. Specifically, we are referring the growth of the so-called Mojo (Mobile Journalism). This trend has led younger generations to stay informed in a different way (Zazo-Correa and Martínez-Fresneda, 2024). Social media have become the main source of news for young Spanish people, who prefer these platforms due to the immediacy and ease of access they offer (Catalina-García et al., 2015). Young people tend to read and share news without thoroughly checking the facts, which makes them doubt the credibility of the content (Farias-Battle et al., 2023). Moreover, young adults, especially between 25 and 34 years of age, access news mainly through mobile devices, and their interest in the news increases when it directly affects them, or when they feel empathy with a certain topic (Martínez-Costa et al., 2019). The growing importance of social media as a source of news is evident, as a significant percentage of young people access news on these platforms rather than directly through media websites (Pérez-Escoda et al., 2018).

In general, while social media is a dominant channel for news consumption among young Spanish people, there is still the challenge of addressing the issues of trust and disinformation that accompany this trend. Traditional TV news prides itself on its fact-checking competence and takes advantage of UGC, thereby providing an aspect of informational validity that is typical of traditional media. In fact, some research suggests that an excess of information can even be harmful to the audience. In this regard, journalists must perform the task of not only selecting information, but also of verifying it afterward in order to ensure its objectivity (Marcos-García, Alonso-Muñoz, and López-Meri, 2021). Nowadays, information verification is highly important. It is essential to know the source of news and make sure it has not been manipulated. As for technical aspects, there are still limitations, but the contribution is significant, as affirmed by Bueno Olivera (2020, p.13) with the following statement:

Despite being of lower quality on most occasions, compared to what is produced by a communication professional, user-generated content on social media has made a significant contribution to journalistic work. Citizens are the first witnesses to events, especially those that happen without prior warning, which makes them one of the key sources of information.

On public television, there is a type of news journalism that uses social media to gather information and shape its reporting. In this process, we must also acknowledge that the pandemic established a before and after. This is reflected in the Digital News Report (2022), produced by the Reuters Institute, which shows how lockdowns and mobility restrictions prompted traditional media to take full advantage of mobile journalism. The public media, which are the main focus of our study, were affected by this reality as well. Some studies have analysed this trend in public television and confirm that the use of collaborative

tools has led to more efficient and cost-effective ways of producing news, an example of which is *Canal Sur Televisión's* incorporation of such tools in producing its news broadcasts during the lockdown. Moreover, these changes are here to stay (Olivares-García et al., 2024). On the one hand, television news production has been changed by UGC, which has become a new communication feature that coexists with original coverage and material sent by news agencies, the latter of which charges a fee, of course. Likewise, it is necessary to evaluate the quality of this audio-visual material and how journalists use it to develop their reports. Only in this way can journalism of the future be fully understood, as pointed out by García de Torres (2010). We must remember that audio-visual news production consists of various stages (Morales Morante, 2011). It all starts by covering a newsworthy event through the recording of images and sound. Secondly, the recorded material is organized by appraising the footage based on the characteristics of the format used. Thirdly, editing is performed in which the journalist selects the available material according to newsworthy criteria and, together with the editor, shapes and builds the news story.

In this regard, the research at hand is especially relevant, as it emphasises the need for more studies to focus on evaluating the quality of the content provided by users in order to better understand journalism of the future (García de Torres, 2010). We believe it is necessary to delve into citizens' ability to participate with the media and, above all, to discover the criteria of newsworthiness that journalists use to select the audio-visual material recorded and produced by citizens. This aspect has been explored in a parallel study, which is pending publication. Based on this dual reality, we propose the present research on the impact of citizen participation, which has been analysed by examining the UGC incorporated into the benchmark public television network known as *RTVA*. Specifically, we have evaluated the transformation of news production at *Canal Sur Televisión* based on the objectives set forth, the methodology, and the justification of the case study method, which are detailed in the following section.

## 2. Objectives & Methodology

The main objective of this research is to observe and evaluate UGC in the different stages of news creation at *Canal Sur Televisión*, which is a case study that can be extrapolated to the current television ecosystem. As shown in previous research (Olivares-García et al. 2023), collaborative tools have become an integral part of news production in Andalusian regional television, which has continued the practices initiated during the pandemic.

To achieve the main objective of this study, the research is structured around the following research questions:

- RQ1: Why do journalists rely on UGC during the coverage phase of a newsworthy event?
- RQ2: Which UGC resources influence the structural phase of a news story?
- RQ3: What amount of UGC is used in the final news editing phase at *Canal Sur Televisión*?

The main hypothesis (H1) of our research is that journalists rely on UGC for newsworthy events that the media outlet is not able to cover on its own. Based the foregoing, we propose a second hypothesis (H2): journalists who incorporate UGC into their news items justify its use based on its highly expressive contribution, which influences the narrative structure of a news report. Finally, H3 suggests that there are news stories that could not have been covered without the contribution of citizens.

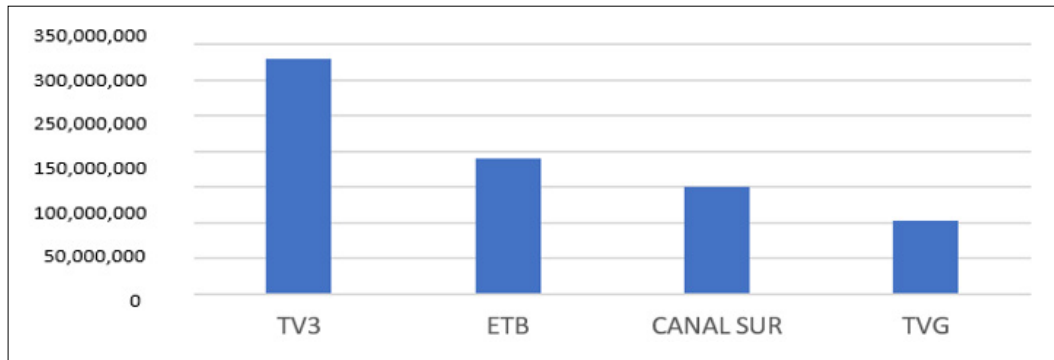
Regarding methodology, this paper is part of a broader study that aims to assess the presence of user-generated content (UGC) in the most prominent news reports broadcast by *Canal Sur TV*. As this study is representative, it can be extrapolated to other audio-visual media that use UGC in producing their news reports.

The analysis focuses on the most important news stories aired by *Canal Sur Televisión's* news services from 2014 until the present time. The interest in this public media outlet in particular was initially justified by the significant changes that have been taking place in the newsrooms of public broadcasters as they strive to recapture the young audience, which now gets its news from other sources. On this point, Azurmendi (2018, p. 927), made the following observation:

Public television stations in European countries, including regional outlets, which are especially important in the audio-visual sector in Spain, are making significant efforts to reconnect with younger audiences, given the situation in which most teenagers and young adults use the mobile phone as their main device for obtaining news through social media.

Furthermore, we have chosen to study this public broadcaster of radio and television programming due to its having the largest budget of the region (Anguera de Sojo, 2024). It ranks third in terms of allocated resources, with a budget of 151 million euros. First place is held by TV3 with a budget of more than 330 million euros, and coming in second is the Basque regional broadcaster with 190 million euros, as shown in Graph 1 below.

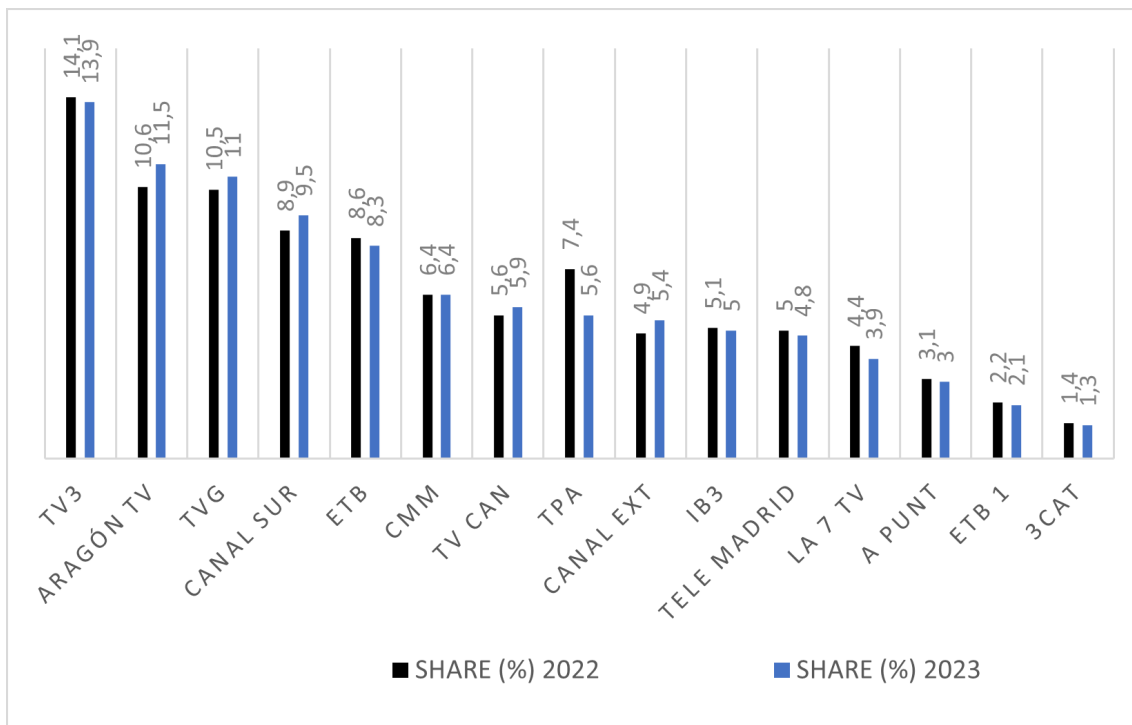
**Graph 1. Regional Television Budgets for 2024**



Source: prepared by the author based on data provided by Anguera de Sojo, 2024

In terms of audience, *Canal Sur Televisión* is the fourth most-watched public television channel (Statista, 2024). Moreover, in 2023 it increased its audience share by more than half a point, reaching 9.5% (see Graph 2).

**Graph 2. Ranking of Regional Television Stations with the Largest Audience in Spain 2022-2023**



**Source: Regional Television Channels with the Largest Audience in Spain 2022-2023. Statista (2024)**

Moreover, in the 2024-2026 RTVA Programme Contract (2023), we have observed a clear commitment by this regional entity to citizen participation. Clause 3.1 refers to information as the foundation of the audio-visual public service, and in section 30 it states the following:

Similarly, attention to the issues that concern the digital society and emerge as trends on digital social networks will continue to be a priority. A proactive position will be taken on all categories of social media, which is in line with the goal of maximum expansion of the audio-visual services across every established application in the digital market. Moreover, this is in keeping with the objective of facilitating immediacy of interaction with the audience and the effective participation of digital application users (Clause 3.1, section 30).

Given the focus of our research, the choice of this regional television network is also justified due to its commitment to interaction with citizens. Furthermore, as a result of its reach, as well as the population it serves and the importance of local news, RTVA plays a key role as a public service provider. Not only is it capable of doing so, but it also has the duty to fulfil its assigned task as a public communication outlet for Andalusian society.

To the extent that this work is applicable to a broader media situation, we emphasize that this study aims to expand the limited theoretical corpus in the existing literature regarding the impact of participatory journalism on conventional news coverage in the context of public television. The intention is to advance the academic research on UGC and its influence on journalistic production processes as well.

Moreover, the personal and professional background of the researcher who conducted this study has enabled the issue to be explored based on participant observation. This empirical approach is defined as a learning process resulting from the immersion and involvement in the everyday actions of participants in the research environment (Schensul and Le Compte, 1999).

In addition to participant observation, we have also used content analysis as the methodological framework in order to provide specific and objective responses to the research hypotheses set forth. This approach falls within the scope of descriptive and correlational analysis, where the study variables are systematically classified, and the interrelationships are outlined. The scientific methodologies selected to validate the hypotheses include the following: inductive reasoning, where general truths are derived from specific cases; deductive reasoning, where specific truths are deduced from general principles; analytical methodology, which involves analysing the situation addressed by sub-dividing it into constituent elements for thorough examination, and establishing causal relationships between the variables explored; finally, a statistical methodology was also used, which incorporates statistical tools in order to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

Consequently, this research has used a triangulated methodology to provide soundness and coherence to the study. We have relied on an exhaustive literature review related to UGC, along with the experience of the author of this work in participant observation, and the aforementioned content analysis.

To conduct the analysis, videos have been collected from *Memoranda*, which is the official web archive of Canal Sur, where the public broadcaster posts what it considers to be the most important news reports from each year. The period studied is extensive, running from January 2014 to December 2023. In total, 502 news reports covering diverse topics have been viewed and analysed. It was necessary not only to view the items, but also to calculate the duration of each news report in order to conduct a detailed study of its narrative structure and communicative features. An initial selection was made of reports that included content recorded by citizens. The news reports were then classified according to the content topic, such as complaints, attacks, conflict, accidents, social interest, natural disasters, and fires, as well as their coverage scope, which could be regional, national, or international. To analyse the way in which citizen-covered events are produced, they were classified into either unforeseen or predicted events.

The analysis is based on a series of categories organized according to the different stages of news production. As a reference, we used the framework proposed by Morales Morante (2011), which is the so-called *Modelo de Construcción Informativa Audiovisual Eficaz* [effective audio-visual news construction model], which sets the phases of coverage, structuring, writing, editing, and broadcasting. In the study at hand, we have focused on the first two stages, and on the pre-broadcast stage as well. Each news item was evaluated in its entirety to determine how many seconds were dedicated to the use of UGC. In the initial coverage phase, a set of variables were established to identify the characteristics of a newsworthy event produced by citizens (whether it was predictable or unforeseeable), as well as the timing of its coverage (before/during/immediately after/and after

the event). In analysing citizen coverage, we looked at the types of shots used, and the audio-visual features of the content provided.

In the structuring phase, the analysis was based on measurable variables that reveal the expressive value of UGC. The technical features of UGC, such as planning and stability, give it an amateur quality that can add a sense of closeness and emotion to the news story. Another benefit uncovered when analysing the material is its testimonial value, which varies depending on whether the recorded commentary was induced or spontaneous (we have made the distinction between induced and non-induced testimonies). To determine the position of UGC within the news item as a whole, we established three categories based on its placement: headline, core, and conclusion.

In the pre-broadcast stage, the news story was already complete, and the citizen recordings shared space with other content. In the editing phase, in order to evaluate the presence of UGC compared to other material produced by the media, we established the following three variables: a major, equal, or minor presence of UGC.

### 3. Results

Of the 502 news reports available in the audio-visual archive of *Canal Sur Televisión*, 40 pieces (8%) include UGC. Table 1 shows the results from the first part of the analysis, where we focus on categorizing the items according to the topic and the nature of the events covered. We also have provided findings related to the total time dedicated to UGC within the entire news piece. Its strong presence indicates that participatory journalism truly exists, along with a change in new production routines.

**Table 1. UGC identified in the entire audiovisual archive analysed, based on subject matter, and results of the duration in minutes and partial categorisation of the broadcasting context**

YEAR	COVERAGE	SUBJECT				DURATION	
		TYPE OF CONTENT	SCOPE	HOW THEY OCCUR	SOURCES	TOTAL	UGC
02/04/2014	ACOSO GIBRALTAR BARCO OCEANOGRÁFICO	COMPLAINT	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	OFFICIAL	1'	1'
04/05/2014	INCENDIO ODESA CASA PRO RUSOS	WAR-RELATED CONFLICT	INTERNATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	AGENCY	1"10	30"
19/07/2014	DERRIBO AVIÓN MILITAR	ACCIDENT	INTERNATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	AGENCY	1'30	10"
14/09/2014	MARRUECOS IMPIDE FAENAR BARCOS ANDALUZ	COMPLAINT	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	30"	30"
11/04/2015	RESCATE ESPELEÓLOGOS ESPAÑOLES	ACCIDENT	NATIONAL	PREDICTED	OFFICIAL	1'44"	1'
07/11/2015	ATENTADO MÚLTIPLE PARÍS	CONFLICT - ATTACK	INTERNATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESS	3'	2'

09/05/2015	<i>ACCIDENTE AVIÓN AIRBUS SEVILLA</i>	ACCIDENT	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	1'40"	40"
25/01/2016	<i>TERREMOTO MELILLA ANDALUCÍA</i>	CATASTROPHE	NATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	50"	30"
22/03/2016	<i>ATENTADO YIHADISTA BRUSELAS</i>	CONFLICT - ATTACK	INTERNATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	1'	50"
14/07/2016	<i>MASACRE TERRORISTA NIZA</i>	CONFLICT - ATTACK	INTERNATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	1'30"	2'50"
16/07/2016	<i>FALLIDO GOLPE ESTADO TURQUÍA</i>	CONFLICT	INTERNATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	2'25"	25"
16/07/2016	<i>INCENDIO IBARRA SEVILLA</i>	ACCIDENT	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	33"	15"
18/08/2016	<i>MENSAJE DE PABLO RÁEZ</i>	SOCIAL INTEREST	REGIONAL	PREDICTED	PROTAGONIST	3'30	1'
24/08/2016	<i>TERREMOTO ITALIA</i>	CATASTROPHE - EARTHQUAKE	INTERNATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	OFFICIAL	2'21	20"
01/12/2016	<i>TORNADO PALOS DE LA FRONTERA</i>	CATASTROPHE - TORNADO	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	20"	20"
04/12/2016	<i>MUERTOS INUNDACIONES MÁLAGA</i>	CATASTROPHE - FLOODING	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	1'29"	50"
19/02/2017	<i>TORMENTA DESTROZOS MÁLAGA</i>	CATASTROPHE - STORM	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	3'30"	50"
25/02/2017	<i>FALLECIMIENTO PABLO RÁEZ</i>	SOCIAL INTEREST	REGIONAL	PREDICTED	PROTAGONIST	1'25"	20"
14/04/2017	<i>AVALANCHAS SEMANA SANTA SEVILLA</i>	CATASTROPHE - AVALANCHE	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	1'15"	40"
29/04/2017	<i>RETENIDAS JÓVENES ESTAMBUL</i>	CONFLICT - KIDNAPPING	REGIONAL	PREDICTED	PROTAGONIST	1'57'	20"
02/05/2017	<i>INCENDIO VARIOS COCHES</i>	ACCIDENT - FIRE	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	2'35"	20"
19/06/2017	<i>INCENDIO PORTUGAL</i>	CATASTROPHE- FIRE	INTERNATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	1'25"	30"
24/06/2017	<i>MOGUER INCENDIO FORESTAL</i>	CATASTROPHE - FIRE	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	2'25"	35"
17/08/2017	<i>ATENTADO RAMBLAS BARCELONA</i>	CONFLICT - ATTACK	NATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	4'20"	25"
19/09/2017	<i>TERREMOTO MÉXICO</i>	CATASTROPHE - EARTHQUAKE	INTERNATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	4'28"	2'10"
26/10/2017	<i>GALICIA CALCINADA</i>	CATASTROPHE - FIRE	NATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	3'10"	40"

21/10/2018	<i>INUNDACIONES MÁLAGA</i>	CATASTROPHE - FLOODING	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	2'15"	20"
15/02/2019	<i>MISIONERO ANTONIO CÉSAR FERNÁNDEZ</i>	CONFLICT - ATTACK	INTERNATIONAL	PREDICTED	PROTAGONIST	1'19"	1
22/01/2020	<i>GRANIZADA ALMERÍA</i>	CATASTROPHE - ALMERÍA	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	7'33"	40"
30/01/2020	<i>PROTESTAS OLIVAREROS JAÉN</i>	CONFLICT - DEMONSTRATION	REGIONAL	PREDICTED	WITNESSES	2'46"	30"
24/03/2020	<i>CORONAVIRUS RESIDENCIA ANCIANOS</i>	SOCIAL INTEREST	REGIONAL	PREDICTED	WITNESSES	1'19"	19"
17/08/2020	<i>INCENDIO FORESTAL ALMONASTER LA REAL</i>	CATASTROPHE - FIRE	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	1'43"	1'10
16/01/2021	<i>NIEVE FILOMENA HIELA EL CAMPO</i>	CATASTROPHE - SNOW STORM	NATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	THE VICTIMS	1'26"	35"
23/01/2021	<i>TERREMOTO GRANADA</i>	CATASTROPHE - EARTHQUAKE	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	3'01"	40"
11/05/2021	<i>DISTURBIOS NARCOS LA LÍNEA</i>	CONFLICT	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	1'11'	11"
23/09/2021	<i>INUNDACIONES LEPE</i>	CATASTROPHE - FIRE	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	1'38"	20"
10/11/2021	<i>HUELGA METAL</i>	CONFLICT - STRIKE	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESSES	1'52"	20"
20/10/2022	<i>BALANCE CAMPAÑA INCENDIOS</i>	CATASTROPHE - FIRES	REGIONAL	GATHERED	INVOLVED WITNESSES	1'	18"
25/01/2023	<i>ATENTADO YIHADISTA CÁDIZ</i>	CONFLICT	NATIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESS	4'16	1'22
01/02/2023	<i>INCENDIO PISO</i>	CATASTROPHE - FIRE	REGIONAL	UNFORESEEN	WITNESS	2'33"	20"

Source: prepared by the author (2024)

Within these news stories, UGC gains informational validity due to its contribution to the different phases of news creation. In Table 2, we specifically identify the measurable variables taken into account when analysing news production in different cases. Journalists rely on UGC as soon as they are called upon to cover an event. Citizen participation in the different phases is determined by the contribution of the media's own coverage, with UGC sharing space in 79% of the cases.

**Table 2. The contribution of UGC in news creation**

News creation phases	Journalistic Activities	Contributions to the news	Variables
<b>Coverage Phase</b>	Selecting UGC based on the nature of the news item	Immediacy and ubiquity. Proximity and objectivity	Predicted and Unforeseen Events / UGC registration Previous/ Subsequent/Simultaneous/Immediate
<b>Structuring Phase</b>	Structuring of UGC	Expressive value	Resources (visual/audiovisual) Testimonial value (elicited testimony/unelicited testimony)
<b>Editing Phase</b>	Presence of UGC in the final newspiece	A complement to in-house coverage	Presence of UGC compared to in-house coverage (major/minor/equal)

Source: prepared by the author (2024)

### 3.1. Coverage phase: the nature of the news piece and its influence on citizen participation

In creating a news story, the first stage involves covering a newsworthy event. At this stage, some of the variables analysed influence the expressive content, as well as the structural phase of news creation (see Table 3). Citizen participation in the news depends on the nature of the events. In the case of unforeseen events, as *Canal Sur's* own coverage is not immediate, journalists rely on UGC to fill the gap.

A total of 85% of the UGC successfully broadcast on television has been used for unforeseen events. This audio-visual resource is considerably important due to the specific attributes that make it essential for this type of coverage. Images captured by citizens help to improve or enhance the work of the television crew by providing footage recorded at the moment events take place. The omnipresence and immediacy with which UGC contributes to journalistic efforts is a notable advantage. As seen in Table 3, we have established variables in this category related to the moment at which citizens capture images in relation to the unfolding of an event. Journalists are interested in citizen-generated footage taken at the exact moment when an event is happening (55%), or immediately afterward (40%). The remaining 5% refer to UGC created outside the news context, which is used as a complementary audio-visual resource, such as the prior testimony of a person who has since passed away.

**Table 3. Analysis variables. Coverage Phase**

COVERAGE											
NEWSWORTHY EVENT			STABILISATION		TYPE OF SHOT				AUDIO		
PREVIOUS	SIMULTANEOUS	AFTER THE EVENT	UNSTABILISED	STABILISED	WS	MS	CU	ECU	AMBIANCE	VOICE OFF	MUTE
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0

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0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0

Source: prepared by the author (2024)

We did not find UGC in any of the news pieces in the days following news events. However, it bears mentioning that even when journalists are present at the scene, they sometimes turn to recordings made by citizens from previous days, as they are capable of adding distinctive, noteworthy, and expressive features to the narratives.

### 3.2. Structuring phase. How the expressive value and technical features of the recordings influence citizen participation

The expressive value of UGC and some of its technical characteristics are variables that journalists contemplate when deciding whether to allow citizen participation in the structuring of their news reports. Citizen videos that consist of more than just a visual account have more expressive power. A total of 87.5% of UGC includes both audio and video, while silent citizen footage was found to be of less interest, representing just 12.5% of the total. The audio consists of sounds related to the event and testimonies, some of which are consciously provoked, such as a citizen narrating the scene, while others are recorded spontaneously, such as a victim's screams, or the desperate wailing of an emergency situation.

A total of 32.5% of UGC in the news has testimonial value. However, its expressive contribution depends on its level of spontaneity. The figure of 87% of the testimonies found in UGC were recorded in a way that was not provoked by citizens, while deliberate media interest was found in 23% of the footage taken by users. Content that appears to be recorded without media interest is more credible and closer to viewers, which adds to the objectivity of what is narrated by the public television journalist. The validity and importance that journalists bestow on UGC are also reflected in the placement of such content within news reports.

The structure of a news item highlights the importance of the diverse content from which it is made. When it comes to structuring information, UGC holds a strong position in 39% of news headlines, 42% of the core, and 19% of the conclusions. UGC also has a noteworthy place in the news, mostly located in the headlines and core. One of the main differences between UGC and a broadcaster's own coverage lies in the characteristics of the footage recorded by citizens. A total of 87% of user-

recorded material was shot with a “handheld camera”, from which only 13% achieve stability. These unstabilised shots are reminiscent of pure cinema in which these kinds of expressive resources, much like fiction, arouse emotion in viewers by making them feel like part of risky, suspenseful, and sometimes terrifying situations. This is also influenced by the way footage is planned. UGC mainly uses wide angle and medium shots, which are present in 92% of the videos used by journalists in their news stories. This type of shot enhances both the testimonial value and citizens’ presence at the scene.

### 3.3. Writing-editing phase. Citizen participation compared to the media’s own participation in the final news piece

When a journalist edits a news piece, both in-house and citizen-generated content share space within the story. This way, the media outlet always tries to regain its leading role as the guarantor of truthful, objective information, as seen by the fact that an outlet’s own material still dominates 71% of the news pieces that include UGC. However, at this point in the research, an interesting fact has emerged. UGC occupies the majority of space in 21% of the news stories, which could not have been produced without the participation of citizens. These dynamics are common during the first hours of a significant, large-scale news event. Therefore, certain variables influence different stages of the news creation process, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Analysis variables related to journalistic contributions in the Coverage, the Structuring, and the Editing Phase of news items**

VISUAL RESOURCE	MESSAGE			LOCATION		
	NARRATIVE RESOURCE	WITH ENUNCIATION	WITHOUT ENUNCIATION	HEADLINE	CORE	CONCLUSION
1	1	0	1	1	1	1
1	0	0	1	1	0	0
1	0	0	1	0	0	1
1	1	0	1	1	1	1
1	0	0	1	1	1	1
1	0	0	1	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	1	1	0
1	1	0	1	1	0	1
1	1	1	0	1	1	1
1	0	0	1	0	1	0
1	1	0	1	0	0	1
1	1	1	0	1	1	1
1	1	1	0	0	1	0
1	0	0	1	1	1	1
1	1	0	1	1	1	1
1	0	0	1	1	1	1

1	1	1	0	0	1	0
1	1	1	0	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	0	1	0
1	0	0	1	0	1	0
1	1	0	1	1	1	0
1	1	1	1	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	1	0	0
1	0	0	1	1	1	0
1	1	0	1	1	0	0
1	1	0	1	1	0	0
1	1	1	0	0	1	0
1	1	0	1	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	1	1	0
1	1	1	0	1	1	1
1	1	1	0	1	1	1
1	0	1	0	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	0	1	0
1	1	0	1	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Source: prepared by the author (2024)

The kind of shot taken can provide insight into citizen perspectives during coverage, and the technical features of the shots also influence the structure of each news item due to their expressive contribution. Moreover, depending on their value as an audiovisual and/or testimonial resource, their presence will be of greater or lesser significance in the final editing phase of the story.

#### 4. Discussion

The different stages of news creation in which UGC is involved is essential for understanding how this type of content influences professional journalism. Specifically, our research has shown how audience contributions are used by traditional television outlets (Cantos-García and Cumba-Castro, 2018) in all phases of the news production process. After writing and editing, the resulting flow of information can have varying degrees of linearity, narrative cohesion, and expressiveness, depending on the nature of the news and the intention of the TV reporter.

When covering certain newsworthy events in the initial phase, journalists look to social media for information that will allow them to react quickly to random, ongoing events, including information provided by individual citizens for the purpose of informing the audience immediately. UGC offers a view that can be complement to traditional sources. The viewpoint of

citizens on the scene offers added depth to news stories produced by journalists. The testimony of those who are involved, or have been victims of a newsworthy event during its unfolding, are highly important. These inadvertent testimonials can influence the narrative structuring phase of a news story, in some cases modifying the focus of the story and bringing it closer to the audience. Based on the content analysis and participant observation carried out, we believe this trend offers a genuine contribution that is uncommon in news items produced by using the media's own materials, as well as those of news agencies or official sources. The value of personal testimony recorded by citizens can lead to a deep emotional connection with the audience. Moreover, the opportunity to have these citizen testimonies available in real time enables more dynamic and relevant storytelling. In the editing phase, when a news item is assessed as a whole, the greater or lesser use of testimonies can influence the perceived credibility of the news item. If UGC is seen as authentic and relevant, it can strengthen the audience's trust in the TV broadcaster.

We are in the midst of a new paradigm of traditional television journalism where the audience plays an active role in the news creation process carried out by legacy media. The *Canal Sur Televisión* study reflects how traditional television channels have evolved in response to the digital era. Furthermore, this TV station in particular has done so by including changes in content distribution and audience participation, which are essential if broadcasters are to remain competitive in a rapidly changing media landscape (Prado and Delgado, 2010).

This study clearly shows that the communication paradigm has shifted from a one-way model to a multi-directional framework. The audience has moved away from a passive role toward becoming an engaged participant in the communicative exchange. The role of users is evolving as they become *prosumers*, making them an important source of information in television newsrooms.

UGC is emerging as a key visual resource, which journalists rely on to prepare their news stories (López de Solís and Martín López, 2018). Moreover, this development is taking place in a context of decreasing viewership figures for traditional television among younger audiences. This trend reflects a change in consumption patterns among *millennials* (Guerrero, 2018), with transformations that are forcing traditional operators to adapt to the preferences of this audience and encourage their participation, as we have seen in the case of *Canal Sur Televisión*. In this research, we have also reflected on how collaborative tools in the regional TV work setting of Andalusia have become an essential part of the news production process in the post-COVID-19 era, which has perpetuated the methodologies established during the confinement a result of the pandemic (Olivares-García et al. 2023). As pointed out by García de Torres (2010), the combined forces of internet communication and mobile devices has the potential to enhance citizen participation. Finally, the merging of different communication modes that encompass both traditional media and contemporary digital platforms poses an important challenge for the media as a journalistic structure, but also from a deeper internal facet related to the transformation taking place in the news creation process.

## 5. Conclusions

The results of this research have confirmed our objective regarding the observation and assessment of UGC in the different phases of the news creation process in television journalism, based on a case study of *Canal Sur Televisión*. The findings

answer the research questions related to why news journalists rely on UGC, by assessing its influence on the structuring of news stories, its possible contribution, and its volume of use in the final edited information.

Through content analysis, which is reinforced by the author's own experience in participant observation, we are clearly witnessing a transformation of journalistic routines with regard to the media and journalists having lost the exclusive rights to setting the agenda and producing information. Although the volume of news stories that include UGC is lower than expected, its analysis has allowed the author to discover the features of these citizen contributions and their value for television journalists, as they represent a key resource for certain types of coverage.

Likewise, the hypotheses of this study have been confirmed. In fact, as previously stated, this research is part of a larger project that can be extrapolated to similar media outlets based on the experience of *Canal Sur Televisión*.

Regarding H1, we have found that journalists turn to UGC in order to cover unexpected and unforeseen news events. Pressing news justifies the search for citizen resources for the purpose of offering news that would otherwise be unobtainable due to various production constraints. In these cases, the value of immediacy is reinforced by UGC, which mostly records images of newsworthy events either at the time of their occurrence or immediately afterward. Generally speaking, simultaneous coverage of a breaking story is nearly impossible, which highlights the ubiquitous value of UGC. Although journalists and technical teams are called on to work in specific areas to assess damage and look for possible witnesses, it is not always easy to get to the site in a timely manner. Various geographical and production factors make it nearly impossible to be there. Faced with this reality, reporters rely on UGC due to its inherent value of ubiquity and immediacy. It is impossible to compete with the speed of social media in transmitting information. The traditional media simply cannot predict an unforeseen event. Both witnesses and victims assume the role of reporters in the field when they pick up their smartphones, record what happens, and broadcast it on the Internet.

With regard to H2, it has been confirmed that UGC has specific technical features that give it more expressive value. Its textual construction and the characteristics of its language are capable of shaping the edited information and endowing it with a more or less explicit meaning. The hand-held camera and diegetic sound are highly expressive instruments for journalists. Such resources can influence the structure of a report and make a strong impact when included in the headline and core of a news story for the purpose of capturing the viewer's attention. The testimony and statements of people directly linked to a news event at the time it is happening take on a leading role in the information edited by public television reporter. UGC enriches the news production process and adds credibility to information. Unprovoked testimony is the utterance most sought-after by reporters, which is the perfect accessory for arousing emotion in the viewer and providing a news item with closeness, objectivity, and veracity. Such testimonies play a key role in the value of information, in most cases occupying the headline and core of the narrative structure of the piece.

As for H3, we have found stories that were produced from beginning to end using UGC, which occurs 21% of the time. In these cases, journalists limit themselves to structuring such third-party content by establishing an order and giving it news credibility with their own voice-overs. Nevertheless, journalists are not willing to give up their role in most cases, and although citizens participate in making the news, the contributions made by journalists are much greater. When news space is ceded, it is partial, not total. Despite the majority presence of UGC in some news items, the information professional must be responsible for

verifying the content and making it relevant. Citizen journalism rounds out and complements the information published by journalists, yet it does not replace traditional journalistic activity.

The information compiled in this study suggests that the results can be extrapolated to similar research contexts. Although the findings focus entirely on Andalusian public television, they clearly have implications for any media outlet that uses UGC. Understanding the interaction between these different approaches and how they influence each other is essential for designing and implementing effective communication strategies. Controlling the reach and quality of each media is a difficult task, and the relentless flow of information through social networks exacerbates the difficulty of such control. Once again, it is essential to call for a discerning and responsible viewpoint from the audience. The use of images taken by anonymous citizens reinforces the need to cross-check information. In the field of social science, what is needed is an innovative and multidisciplinary framework that will enable the journalistic profession to be rethought at a historical crossroads in its history, as it continually struggles to fight against a considerable number of discrediting judgments.

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## 7. Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest contained in this article.

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