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Digital native magazines in the field of sports in Spain: The case of MARCA

Revistas nativas digitales en el ámbito del deporte en España: el caso de MARCA Plus

Abstract

Since its appearance in the summer of 2014, *MARCA Plus* has become a benchmark for digital native publications. Evidence of this is its recognition by Apple as one of the best apps for iPad and the Digital Magazine Awards it won in 2015 and 2016. This article aims to address the characteristics of this new format in the current media landscape of digital native magazines. The magazine under study is one of the new technology initiatives of the Unidad Editorial media group, and in three years it has achieved an exceptional position in the digital market. *MARCA Plus* stands out for its design, creativity, innovative character, interactivity and new audiovisual narratives, in addition to being an ideal platform for new trends in advertising.

Keywords

MARCA Plus, digital magazine, interactivity, advertising, new media, design

Resumen

Desde su aparición en el verano de 2014, MARCA Plus se ha convertido en un referente para las publicaciones nativas digitales. Prueba de ello es el reconocimiento por parte de Apple como una de las mejores 'apps' para iPad y ganar los 'Digital Magazine Awards' en 2015 y 2016. Este artículo pretende abordar las características de este nuevo formato en el panorama actual de los medios: el de las revistas nativas digitales. La revista objeto de estudio es una de las apuestas de Unidad Editorial por las nuevas tecnologías, habiendo conseguido en tres años un posicionamiento excepcional en el mercado digital. MARCA Plus destaca por su diseño, creatividad, carácter innovador, interactividad y nuevas narrativas audiovisuales, a lo que se suma el ser un soporte ideal para las nuevas tendencias en publicidad.

Palabras clave

MARCA Plus; revista digital; interactividad; publicidad: nuevos soportes; diseño

1. Introduction

Journalism today has entered a new stage in its historical evolution since technological development has changed the paradigm of information production and distribution, just as it is changing society as a whole. In their role as writers, journalists are now faced with a world of possibilities; a world that is growing thanks to access to a more interactive and personalized medium.

> Journalism is currently undergoing a period of transition between the crisis in the old business model that is still shaking up traditional media, consisting mainly of print media corporations, and a new era in which technology is giving rise to profound changes in traditional processes of production, distribution and consumption of journalistic content (González Alba, 2016: 365).

The Internet has emerged not just as a new medium of communication, but as a catalyst for a historic change that is still under way. The new access it offers to news and information production has created a more two-way relationship with the consumer, who no longer waits to receive informational messages, but seeks out, demands and even creates content.

Already in 2015, as Méndez (2015: 451) points out:

> The Annual Professional Journalism Report for 2014, prepared by the Madrid Press Association (APM, 2014) identified sports (10,4%) as one of the most important areas for journalists in the creation of new media platforms, along with the areas of general information, art and culture. The digital format (93,3%) is, furthermore, the preferred format for implementing them.

In Spain, the first digital native publications that sought to exploit the immense possibilities offered by tablets and mobile devices appeared in 2013: the magazines *Don* (published by The Gang Tab), *Vis a Vis* and *Mine* (published by Ploi Media), all of which belonged to the "lifestyle" category. 2014 saw the launch of the first digital native production available on all devices: *MARCA Plus*, which took over the baton from *Quality Sport*, a publication created solely for Apple devices in December 2012. After these came the launch of the magazine *Élite Sport* (September 2015), while the *Sport* daily newspaper launched *Sport Magazine*[1] (October 2014) and the *AS* daily introduced *AS Color* (since April 2014 in interactive format, which is what interests us here; in the 1970s it was already a color print publication). In the last few years, other digital native magazines specializing in sport have appeared: *Maillot Magazine* and *Motor Pro* in May 2016, and *Maracaná* in March 2017. All of these are available on *Extra,* by Kiosko y Más, an exclusively interactive kiosk created in early 2017 that offers a total of 23 publications: six lifestyle magazines (*El País Semanal, Babelia, Tentaciones, Cultura Inquieta* and *Room*), three men's magazines (*Icon, Èvoque* and *DSS Magazine*), three women's magazines (*Woman, S Moda* and *Dozza*), three on sports (*As Color, Élite Sport and Maracaná*), two on cars (*Car and Driver* and *EVO Selección*), two on cooking (*Gourmet* and *Kobe*), two on travel (*Bixby* and *El Viajero*), one for children (*Sapos y Princesas*), one on health and wellness (*Buenavida*) and one on technology (*MeriStation*). There is another free exclusive kiosk of interactive digital publications called *Magview*, which contains magazines published using its technology, but of the ten magazines it offers (*Èvoque, Maracaná, Dozza, Elite Sport, Cultura Inquieta, Room, Bixby, Kobe, DSS* and *Sevilla Selecta*) only the last one is not already available on Kiosko y Más's *Extra*.

In this context, the new sports media "base their appeal on the possibilities offered by the web to develop this super-specialization or hybridization of content and services, and to pursue innovation" (Manfredi, Rojas and Herranz, 2015: 85). Moreover, in today's society, immersed as it is in the world of the Internet, tablets, smartphones and other electronic gadgets, consumers are looking for

> a multimedia package that includes audio, graphics and videos; the current and future challenge for journalistic media lies in taking full advantage of the possibilities of multimedia, hypertext and interactivity offered by the 2.0 environment and the new devices for adapting production methods and formulas for narration and presentation of informational content to the needs of a public that not only consumes, but also produces and disseminates information (Rojas, 2015: 30).

It is under this new communications paradigm that sports journalism is focused on innovation. The premise is clear: not everything has been invented yet. Channels and devices, as well as personalization of information and interactivity open up new opportunities in the media world to satisfy this growing and increasingly demanding market. Regardless of the time or the place, ensuring satisfaction is the key to every opportunity that arises. The power of multimedia and the wide range of tools and resources available allow journalists to tell new stories and to tell them differently: to bring knowledge to consumers and invite them to interact, to be part of the information and of its creation, rather than merely sitting on the sidelines. In short, to "find a way of offering consumers a great and hitherto unknown informational experience" (Favaretto, 2014: 222).

In this new scenario, sports journalism represents one of the most innovative and trendsetting fields in terms of the presentation of information through an increasing use of social networks and new tools that enrich the digital narrative genres and formats (Rojas, 2014: 179).

In addition, the new sports media platforms aim for super-specialization or hybridization of content and services, as well as the pursuit of innovation through the use of a 2.0-based communicative reality (Manfredi, Rojas and Herranz, 2015). The result of all this is a context of unlimited growth in which sports journalism is based on new digital sports projects (although there are exceptions, such as the magazines *Líbero* and *Panenka*) that push beyond the narrative familiar to consumers up to now. The approach is geared toward depth of information, valuing difference and offering readers what they wouldn't be able to find easily elsewhere. To do this, priority is given to reports, interviews and profiles in large formats, interactive infographics and information based on data journalism, in order to tell stories and even reinvent journalistic formats, genres and languages. And this is precisely where the magazine under study here is positioned.

2. Overview of *MARCA Plus*

Having been recognized by Apple as one of the best apps for iPad and winning the Digital Magazine Awards in 2015, 2016 and 2017 (in the category of "best sports magazine"), *MARCA Plus* has become a benchmark for digital native publications. Added to these achievements are its nomination for the García Márquez Journalism Awards (category: "innovation") and its shortlisting for the European Digital Media Awards (best lifestyle, sports or entertainment mobile services). This magazine is one of the big new technology initiatives of the Unidad Editorial media group, and with 83 issues in its first three years it has achieved an exceptional position in the digital market, with an average of 225,000 downloads per issue and more than 14 million downloads since it was launched (figure 1).

Figure 1.
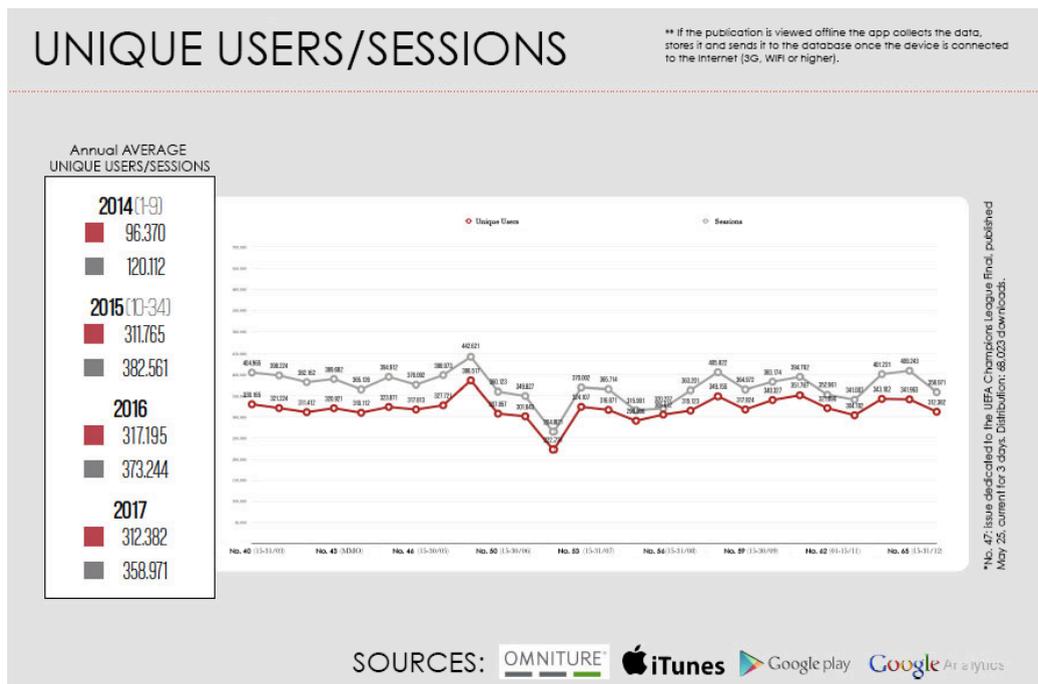
Source: *MARCA Plus*

MARCA Plus is a biweekly multisport publication that first appeared in the summer of 2014, which since then has been available for iPads and other mobile devices. It is notable for the priority it gives to audiovisual content and for the quality of its reports and interviews, as well as its focus on photojournalism and data journalism. It is a 100% interactive publication that brings together the best features of print press, radio, television and the Internet on a single platform.

It is a high-impact magazine that completes the "*MARCA* universe", being positioned as the last of its four pillars: The *MARCA* paper, marca.com, *MARCA* radio, and *MARCA Plus*. According to the most recent data from the OJD,[2] *MARCA* is the biggest selling and most widely read daily newspaper in Spain (an average of 206,259 printed copies per issue and a net circulation of 138,983). The creation of a magazine like *MARCA Plus* was proposed as a "strategic move to demonstrate its pioneering capacity and leadership role, which always imposes an obligation to innovate and set the trend" (Labarga [E2], 2017). At the time, there was a gap in the market in Spain for digital native magazines and, thanks to a partnership with another digital publication, *Quality Sport, MARCA Plus* was able to hit the market first, ahead of the competition, thereby delivering a "moral blow" to its rivals.

MARCA Plus is a digital native magazine that stands out for its design, creativity, innovative character, interactivity, use of new audiovisual narratives, and the importance it gives to images, as well as its content. Added to all this is the fact that it is an ideal platform for new trends in advertising, making it an interesting business model on the current digital media scene.

It is a magazine with premium content (international personalities, lifestyle, interactive advertising and entertainment), whose four basic pillars are: depth, creativity, interaction and innovation. In the words of E2 (2017):

> we offer a unique user experience where readers can choose the content they want to read. Enjoying the magazine to the full (reading all the articles and viewing all the images, infographics and videos) could take up to three hours. In terms of sports content, there are always around five interviews with major personalities (from all sports), infographics, reports, interactive games and video reports. Unique and exclusive content designed specifically to make the most of the resources offered by this type of platform.

The profile of the magazine's typical reader is a middle-middle-class male aged between 25 and 34. The data shows that 92% of its readers are male compared to only 8% female; 21% belong to the upper class; 31% are upper-middle class; 39% middle-middle class; 8% lower-middle class and 1% lower class. The predominant age groups are 25-34 year-olds (30.7%) and 35-44 year-olds (28,5%).

With just over three years as an online presence, *MARCA Plus* has become one of the most important applications on Google Play, but also on iTunes, achieving a position as the most downloaded publication in Spain for more than 100 consecutive days since its launch, having recently reached nearly 225,000 downloads per issue. Since then, the magazine has garnered numerous prizes and awards (as detailed at the beginning of this section) and has increased its figures for unique users and viewing sessions, surpassing ten minutes per session, with even longer times on weekends.

For the directors of this magazine, their success in "hooking" more than 300,000 unique visitors per month is the result of making a product designed specifically for mobiles; a product that is fully compatible with the *MARCA* paper, website and radio. And serving to complement this:

> Success lies in finding a balance between all types of sports in order to reach the widest possible audience. This magazine is able to do things that the paper, for example, cannot do, such as putting a cyclist, basketball player or tennis player on the cover when the newspaper would perhaps have to feature something related to soccer. Moreover, there is a carefully conceived strategy behind this in order to keep the product current for those two weeks of its "life" until the next issue (it comes out on the 1st and 15th of each month). This includes, for example, launching a different appeal every day on the MARCA.com website that ties in with the content of *MARCA Plus*, posting a different tweet or a Facebook every workday, mentions on radio etc. (E2, 2017).

There is thus a very clearly defined plan to keep the magazine current every day and not lose momentum shortly after the launch.

MARCA Plus is also a multi-device magazine, as it is available on all of Apple's IOS devices (iPad and iPhone) as well as Android devices (tablet and smartphone). And it also has a web version for computer browsers.

With respect to the business model, its directors explain that because the magazine is free, revenues come solely from the advertising it features, using a hybrid model. This has been the most common model for online media since 1995: a model based on advertising revenues, derived from ads, banners, etc., that allows free access to online media content (García Avilés and González Esteban, 2012). At the same time, it is our view that

> media platforms have to act fast to develop new sustainable business models before the old order collapses, and success requires taking a chance by creating different products that are

worth paying for and building an articulated community of readers with shared interests (Franco and Pellicer, 2014: 87).

And it is along these lines of innovation and quality that *MARCA Plus* is positioned, with *ad hoc* creative solutions developed by the magazine's own team that are not marketed as would be the case on a website, but through sponsorship or "branded content", always taking into account the number of downloads. For E2 (2017),

> as it is a free magazine, our model is based exclusively on advertising revenues. Success, according to our criteria, requires an effort to market the publication on the basis of sponsorships, branded content, infomercials and other formulas distinct from the famous CPC (cost per click), CPM (cost per thousand impressions) or CPA (cost per action) models that are so widely used on the Internet. Our magazine is an online-offline hybrid, given that you need Wi-Fi or data to download it to your device (it generally takes less than a minute and within a few seconds you can begin reading), but afterwards, once downloaded, you don't need to be online to be able to enjoy most of the content.

The dwell time per user for the publication is generally around ten minutes, given that its nature in this respect and in terms of distribution (with around half a million users per month) could be considered similar to figures for a print magazine. It is for these characteristics that the magazine's directors have rejected the standard website financing model in favor of a qualitative model of their own which, at least for now, is making the project viable.

This is a digital native magazine created specifically for iPads that has moved beyond its chosen format. This is reflected in various data, such as the metric for the most recent issue analyzed (No. 83), which shows that user dwell time per session on smartphones was around ten minutes, compared to a maximum of two minutes on computers. Put another way, users view an average of 29 screens per session on a smartphone and only three on a computer, as computer users often arrive accidentally while smartphone users access the site consciously and voluntarily.

Finally, with reference to the classification of "cybermedia" proposed by Salaverría, *MARCA Plus* is, in terms of platform, a multiplatform publication, as it is published simultaneously for web browsers, tablets and mobiles; in terms of temporality it is periodic, since it has a fixed interval between editions; in terms of topic it is a specialist news publication, since it focuses on a single subject or field (sport) on which it offers the broadest and most detailed information possible; in terms of reach it is national; in terms of ownership it is privately-owned; in terms of authorship it is collectively authored; in terms of focus it is a news publication, since it observes the modes and principles of journalistic activity; in terms of economic purpose it is a for-profit publication, and finally, in terms of dynamism, it is a dynamic publication, because it is notable for its use of hypertextual, interactive and multimedia resources (Salaverría, 2017: 25-28).

3. Objectives and hypotheses

The main objective of this article is to verify the effectiveness of this new format on the contemporary media scene in Spain, particularly in the context of digital native magazines. To this end, we will focus our research on the specific case of *MARCA Plus*, which was launched in the summer of 2014 and which since then has been published for iPads and other mobile devices on a biweekly basis.

Our initial hypothesis is that *MARCA Plus* is a pioneering digital native magazine that stands out for its design, creativity, innovative character, interactivity, new audiovisual narratives, and the importance it gives to images, but also for its content and the way that content is offered to the reader. Added to all this is the fact that it is an ideal platform for new trends in advertising, making it an innovative business model in the contemporary digital media context.

In order to demonstrate our hypothesis, we have established three basic objectives: first, to detail the elements that make up the internal structure of the magazine, i.e. the type of content it features (sections or thematic blocks, number of screens, etc.) and the type of advertising insertions it includes, as well as how it presents them; second, to analyze the design of this digital native publication (use of font, images, color, and multimedia elements). Finally, the third objective will involve the identification of the innovations offered by this digital native magazine.

4. Methodology

In view of the fact that this is descriptive research involving a case study, we will use qualitative techniques, mainly including participant observation (given that Ignacio Labarga is an editor for the publication, working on the product's day-to-day strategy since its launch in August 2014) and in-depth interviews. These interviews have been conducted with personnel directly responsible for the product in the "MARCA universe" and with pioneers in the publication of a digital native magazine in Spain, the editors of the publication *Vis-a-Vis*. Although we will also apply quantitative techniques like content analysis based on the design of an *ad hoc* file that has allowed us to record information on the use that the magazine under study makes of images, color, fonts and the on-screen presentation of information and advertising through the use of new narratives.

To conduct this content analysis, our universe will be the issues published during the first three years of the magazine's existence, representing a total of 83 issues, published between August 20, 2014 and August 15, 2017. The sample will consist of 30 issues: 15 from the first stage and 15 from the second, which began with the first redesign of the publication. For convenience, we will include the first issue (August 20, 2014), Issue 45 (May 1, 2015), which was the first issue of the redesigned publication, and Issue 83, which was the last issue at the time this research was conducted and coincided with the third anniversary of the magazine. We have randomly chosen 14 other issues between No. 2 and No. 44 inclusive, and another 14 between No. 46 and No. 82 inclusive. Thus, the sample consists of the following cases: No. 1, No. 4, No. 7, No. 10, No. 13, No. 16, No. 19, No. 22, No. 25, No. 28, No. 31, No. 34, No. 37, No. 40, No. 43, No. 45, No. 47, No. 50, No. 53, No. 56, No. 59, No. 60, No. 63, No. 66, No. 69, No. 72, No. 75, No. 78, No. 81 and No. 83.

4.1. Analytical file

For the content analysis of the issues of *MARCA Plus* included in the sample, we have observed and studied the information on the one hand and the advertising on the other. In relation to the information, we recorded, first of all, the number of sections or thematic blocks per issue and, secondly, the number of pages/screens in each issue. We also tabulated the sports topics in each section.

For our analysis of the advertising, we first identified the number of ads inserted, and then determined the type of each ad, based on three categories: static, standard (static with video integrated) and premium (enabling user interaction). Next, we determined the type of advertiser according to the content and, finally, we identified the position of the ad.

The variables considered in relation to multimedia effects and the presence of interactivity refer to the type of multimedia element present on the magazine's screens and the interactivity model concerned. For the first variable, the following categories were established: picture gallery (a series of photos related to a particular topic where, to pass from one photo to the next, user interaction is required by sliding the finger [for mobiles and tablets] or moving the mouse [for PCs]); autoplay animation (moving images created using digital technology that appear on the screen automatically and are intended to give the publication a more dynamic look); button (a specific icon that calls on the user to click it, producing some kind of effect on the publication), audio (sound files that play a specific sound) and video (a series of moving images played within the publication).

The following interactivity models were identified: scrolling (an action requiring user interaction to move text or an image, serving to enlarge content); brushing (an action that has the effect of erasing content to reveal something else beneath it as a result of a movement made by the user with his/her finger [for mobiles and tablets] or the mouse [for PC version]); painting (an action that has the effect of coloring in or changing content as a result of the movement made by the user with his/her finger [for mobiles and tablets] or the mouse [for PC version]); clicking (an action that activates content by touching it with the finger or mouse. This is the most commonly used resource in the publication); sliding (an action that moves content slowly across the screen in order to view other content); dragging (moving one element toward another in order to unblock content) and, finally, no interactivity (content like illustrations or infographics that appear static and do not offer the possibility of user interaction to make other content or details appear).

For the analysis of the advertising insertions in *MARCA Plus*, the analytical file established the following variables: number of ads; ad type (static: a simple graphic with no animation or interactivity of any kind; standard: a graphic with a video or animation that may also contain a link; premium: a graphic designed *ad-hoc* for the publication where the user can interact with the brand. This may contain a mix of various multimedia elements such as videos, photo galleries and buttons with which the user is invited to interact; branded content*:* when the advertising content is integrated into an informational piece; or full

sponsorship: when the brand or advertiser has sponsored the whole issue); advertiser type; ad position in the magazine (screen number where it is located), whether it incorporates any multimedia elements and what it is about.

5. Results

Our qualitative and quantitative analysis yielded the following results.

5.1. From the perspective of informational content

Its nature as a biweekly magazine distinguishes *MARCA Plus* slightly from the up-to-the-minute approach of many news publications. It focuses on content like interviews, reports (and video reports), opinion columns, photo galleries, infographics, surveys and interactive games. In each issue, which has an average of 100 screens in total (averaging 93 of information and 7 of advertising) and around 45 articles, there are generally four or five interviews (an effort is made to ensure that the interviewees are from different sports), around ten reports, at least one opinion column, a historical topic, two or three infographics, one video report and interactive games that aim to hook users or test their sports knowledge. All of this is presented with a focus on visuals and cutting-edge design. The content is grouped into 12 sections (Cover, Editorial, "Flash", "FotoShots", Interviews, the four "*Cuartos*" sections, Video Survey, Flashback, quiz section, the "*Rincón del modesto*" opinion column, a section of features heard on Radio *MARCA*, and "Staff"). In terms of topics, *Marca Plus* offers information on sports and minority specialty activities such as archery, surfing, mountaineering, badminton, etc.

Pablo Berraondo [E3] (2017) comments that:

> With the content we offer on *MARCA Plus* we aim for things to happen in the publication, but always respecting certain limits that keep us from making our audience "dizzy". Logically, within the content special care is also taken so that the advertising is as enriching as possible and in keeping with our customers' interests. By the last part of the publication, the topics open up to more commercial issues that lighten the weight of the publication with sport serving as an excuse to mix in films, music, books or even video games.

In this respect, it is worth noting that *MARCA Plus* also makes use of its position as a voice or meeting point for other products or followers of the "MARCA universe" so that they can use their other devices to continue enjoying the *MARCA* experience on other products such as radio, the web, *MARCA Quiz* questionnaires or the challenges on the *MARCA Apuestas* betting site.

It is important to highlight that the content on *Marca Plus* is predominantly interactive, always offering the reader/user different options for navigating around the screen. The content also has a multimedia design, often including picture galleries and the integration of videos and sound.

In terms of genres, there is a clear focus on interviews and reports, although these are mixed with more bite-size pieces of information (infographics, databoxes, photo stories, etc.) and other components closer to entertainment, such as interactive elements offering different types of games, representing a use of gamification that is even observable in certain advertising insertions.

This would be what some authors identify as infotainment, designating a quite well-established trend involving a media element that combines information and entertainment (Demers, 2005), which, by offering consumers the same universe structured and created using different media,

> reinforces the narrative and requires user participation. Thus, users become actors in the story itself, taking part in communities and social networks [...], blogs and web platforms, on which the product as a whole is developed. Viewers are transformed into *prosumers* or co-authors of the work itself (Martínez Cano, 2016: 288).

5.2. From the perspective of advertising content

Advertising, as the main source of revenues for digital journalism (and particularly for *MARCA Plus*), has been developed using types of inclusion of insertions which, without abandoning the use of banners, enhance the business strategies, including those that combine paper and digital versions (Fondevila, 2013).

Our application of the analytical file to the sample has found the following: the average number of ads per issue is seven; the most commonly used ad type is the standard (38.9%), followed by the premium (33.4%) and then the static (22.2%). The type of advertising least used to date is branded content (5.5%), although as Ortiz and Montemayor note, "the advertising system is being adapted to the technological environment and made to meet the new needs of the consumer" (2014: 7). For these authors, "branded content is increasingly being called on to perform a more active and decisive role, in which business will be combined with creativity" (Ortiz and Montemayor, 2014: 8).

With respect to the type of advertiser, self-promotion is the most common (66,7%), followed by ads for automobiles (16,7%), travel and leisure (11,1%) and, finally, phone services (5,5%). Regarding the relationship established between the magazine and advertisers, E3 (2017) remarks that:

> logically, there is an engagement with the advertiser on our part. There is always an initial meeting to discuss the advertiser's objectives and the materials they are using in their campaigns in other formats and, based on that, we make them a proposal to adapt it to the nature of the publication.

> The results offered by our metrics tools show that users spend more time on content where they have something to say, move or choose. If it is flat content, where there is no interaction, the dwell time will tend to be lower. To increase user engagement, we make use of all the plugins offered by our tool, such as surveys, puzzles, scratch games, sudokus, etc. When you combine these elements with interesting sports topics, such as putting in a screen where you have to match the top goal scorers in history to the club they played for, you'll be on track for success.

The dwell time on each ad is 1'03" while on the magazine in general it is 10'00". [3] Depending on the creativity involved and the interactive components offered, dwell times may be higher or lower. According to E3 (2017), there are cases of dwell times of two minutes on an ad like the Kia ad, which contains videos.

5.3. From the perspective of design

5.3.1. Font

The *MARCA Plus* style manual specifies that the fonts used throughout the publication are Bebas Neue, Bromello, ITC Caslon, Netto and Chalet (figure 2). According to the magazine's art director, Bebas Neue (in its "bold", "book" and "light" variants) and Bromello are the ones used for headlines due to the contrast and legibility of the first, compared to the drama and character of the second.

ITC Caslon 224 (in its "bold" and "book" variants) is used for interviews and reports. ITC Caslon is a good font for reading long texts, as it isn't tiring on the eyes. Netto is a more modern sans-serif typeface, which gives it a more relaxed quality.

For special issues, a font with more character is used: Chalet Comprime, very similar to Bebas, although its "Seventy" variant offers a rounded style that evokes the world of cycling. Finally, for articles it was decided to use the same typefaces that are used in normal issues of *MARCA Plus:* ITC Caslon and Netto OT Regular.

Figure 2. Fonts used on *MARCA Plus*

Source: *MARCA Plus.*

5.3.2. Presentation of images

For Estela Parrado [E1] (2017), Art Director for *MARCA Plus*, an effort is always made to achieve a meticulous visual presentation. This means ensuring that the images selected are attractive, with good color and good quality, and especially combining them so that they have similar lighting or trying to make them similar so that none stand out too much. Personally, she prefers them to have less saturation with more marked shadows, as she believes this makes them more eye-catching.

The ideal is for the images to be as large as possible to have them either fill the whole screen or to be able to play with some detail that stands out in the photo. E1 remarks that "I always try not to cut them but, for sizes, sometimes you've got to leave some part out. Silhouettes are the technique we use most when we don't have pictures that are large or that can fill enough of the screen."

The use of images in *MARCA Plus* has become fundamental, especially, as E1 says, "since we changed the size to enhance visibility on mobile devices. We try to fill the screen with photos that contribute something and, if we don't have pictures, to make some background or some illustration that shows what the text is about."

In short, the key to design in *MARCA Plus* is a clear prioritizing of the visuals above the text, with special attention to multimedia elements, especially videos, dynamic infographics and picture galleries.

5.3.3. Color

The predominant colors in *MARCA Plus*, which could be considered its corporate colors, are red and yellow. The use of red follows the habitual use of this color in the nameplate of the newspaper, while yellow is used "to give it an even more modern look, an eye-catching effect and a kind of rejuvenation," according to E1 (2017). However, other bright colors are also used, combined with black, white and gray, to give the publication a youthful, casual look (figure 3): Elegant, but not boring.

In this respect, it is worth noting that for the "Giro d'Italia" special issues that have been produced each year since its foundation are based on the color palette of *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and combined with black, white and gray.

Figure 3. Color palette used in *MARCA Plus*
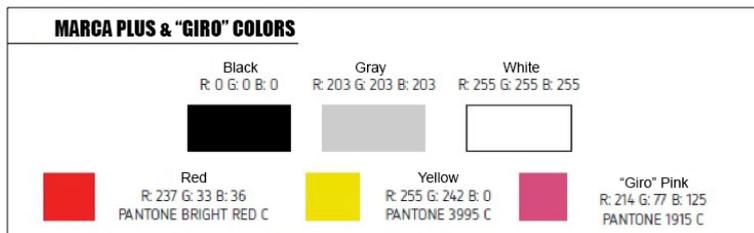
Source: *MARCA Plus.*

5.3.4. Multimedia elements

Multimedia elements are prominent in the design of *MARCA Plus*. Our application of the file designed for the content analysis found that the average number of multimedia elements appearing in each issue is 34. The types of multimedia elements break down as follows: 9.5% are "image galleries"; 5.2% are "illustrations"; 5.9% are "infographics"; 35.3% are "autoplay animations"; 28% are "buttons"; 5.9% are "audios"; and 10.2% are "videos". These figures show that the most commonly used multimedia resources are autoplay animations, followed closely by buttons, while illustrations, infographics and audios are the least common.

The breakdown of the interactivity models used in these multimedia elements present in the magazine under study is as follows: 15.4% use "scrolling"; 1.4% use "brushing"; 0.8% use "painting"; 55.9% use "clicking"; 8.9% use "sliding"; 2.9% use "dragging"; and 14.7% of the multimedia elements have no interactivity. These percentages reflect the fact that the most commonly used interactivity model is the "clicking" model, which is more than 40% ahead of the second most commonly used model, the "scrolling" model. The least used are the "painting" model, which is practically nonexistent, followed by

the "brushing" and "dragging" models, neither of which account for even 3% of the multimedia elements present in the magazine.

Table 1. Results of *MARCA Plus* content analysis

Table 1. Results of *MARCA Plus*

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INFORMATIONAL CONTENT	
No. of sections	12
No. of screens	93
No. of articles	45
No. of infographics	3
No. of video reports	1
No. of interactive games	2
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ADVERTISING CONTENT	
No. of screens	7
AD TYPE	
Standard	38,9 %
Premium	33,4 %
Static	22,2 %
Branded content	5,5 %
AD TOPIC	
Self-promotion	66,7 %
Automobiles	16,7 %
Travel & leisure	11,1 %
Phone services	5,5 %

Source: *Own research.*

Table 2. Results of *MARCA Plus* design analysis

Table 2. Results of *MARCA Plus* design analysis

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FONT	
Bebas Neue, Bromello, ITC Caslon, Netto and Chalet	
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COLOR	
Black, gray, white, red (Pantone bright red C), yellow (Pantone 3995 C) and 'Giro' pink (Pantone 1915 C)	
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES	
AVERAGE NO. OF MULTIMEDIA ELEMENTS PER ISSUE	34
ELEMENT TYPE	
Picture gallery	9,5 %
Illustration	5,2 %
Infographics	5,9 %
Autoplay animation	35,3 %
Button	28 %
Audio	5,9 %
Video	10,2 %
INTERACTIVITY MODEL	
Scrolling	15,4 %
Brushing	1,4 %
Painting	0,8 %
Clicking	55,9 %
Sliding	8,9 %
Dragging	2,9 %
No interactivity	14,7 %

Source: *Own research.*

6. Conclusions

The results obtained in our research point to the conclusion that the magazine under study is characterized by a very meticulous design, as well as for offering high-quality informational content for detailed reading distinct from a "breaking news" model, which clearly differentiates it from other similar products. Orihuela underscores this point by suggesting that "the quality of journalistic production is the factor that will enable media platforms to differentiate themselves in an environment with an overabundance of free offers" (Orihuela, 2012: 82).

MARCA Plus is an example of a successful sports media platform offering soccer news as well as other content. This is a product specifically designed for smartphones and tablets that complements the content already offered by the parent media platform, in both its print and web versions, focusing on less common topics and sports than those offered in these versions, with the result being more detailed, pluralistic and varied journalism.

Moreover, *MARCA Plus* is not merely an adaptation to the digital environment of an existing print publication; proof of this is the fact that the content is designed interactively from the outset, using resources like videos, sound, infographics, photographs and, of course, text. This is a native experience for mobile hand devices of the most widely read sports paper in the country.

On the other hand, *MARCA Plus* is conceived as a digital journalism project that incorporates its content based on a new narrative characterized above all by the presence of reports, long-form interviews, data journalism, the use of infographics (many of them interactive) and the inclusion of multimedia elements. All of this results in a new digital narrative characterized by the incorporation of an increasing number of interactive and multimedia components that prioritize the visual over the textual.

We would also like to highlight the fact that *MARCA Plus* constitutes an adaptation of journalism not only to new devices but also to new reader habits, with an interest not only in information but also in entertainment, which is offered mainly in the form of gamification of both informational and advertising content.

Through the new digital platforms, traditional media outlets are able to establish a new relationship with readers based on innovation, with a clear focus on data journalism, interactivity and the use of multimedia narratives, all of which is supported by close attention to the design and page/screen arrangement of information as part of the journalistic message.

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7. Interviews

[E1] Interview with Estela Parrado, Art Director for *MARCA Plus*, April 4, 2017.

[E2] Interview with Ignacio Labarga, coeditor of *MARCA Plus,* February 14, 2017.

[E3] Interview with Pablo Berraondo, coeditor of *MARCA Plus,* February 14, 2017.

Gratitudes

Notes

1. Currently available at Google Play and Apple Store, but without updating of content since 2015, which means it can be classified as no longer active.

2. OJD = Oficina de la Justificación de la Difusión (Spain's newspaper statistics office). June 2017 wave.

3. Data for August 2017, provided by *MARCA Plus*.

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