

# Narrativa Multiplataforma:

Os fotojornalistas estão se beneficiando?

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## Resumo

Com a expansão dos dispositivos conectados (tablets, smartphones, etc.), está ocorrendo um salto nas tecnologias multiplataforma, trazendo mudanças em muitas áreas das profissões de comunicação. Nesse contexto, valores baseados em um trabalho flexível, multiplataforma, cooperativo e que leve o público em consideração são cada vez mais importantes. A fotografia profissional coexiste com — e é até rivalizada por — imagens tiradas por cidadãos, que são frequentemente utilizadas pelos meios de comunicação de massa. Por isso, a necessidade é maior do que nunca para que fotógrafos e profissionais gráficos, de uma forma ou de outra, se adaptem às novas mídias. Usando um método de estudo de caso múltiplo, este artigo examina os recursos digitais utilizados por fotógrafos que ganharam o prêmio *World Press Photo*. O artigo estuda as formas como eles exploram o meio, estendendo a narrativa fotográfica para além do site, para se promoverem a si próprios e a sua marca pessoal. Os resultados mostram a preferência dos fotógrafos por modelos de comunicação unidirecional e estratégias sobrepostas que têm envolvimento e viralização limitados. A aquisição de *expertise* digital por fotojornalistas encontra-se em um estágio intermediário, uma vez que os casos analisados revelam que a atividade web 2.0 desses profissionais é limitada ou pouco explorada.

## Palavras-chave

Fotojornalismo; Website; Transmídia; Branding; Prêmio *World Press Photo*.

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# Multiplatform storytelling:

Are photojournalists taking advantage?

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## Abstract

With the expansion of connected devices (tablets, smartphones, etc.), a leap in multiplatform technologies is occurring, bringing about changes in many areas of the communications professions. In this context, values based on flexible, multiplatform, cooperative work that takes the audience into consideration are increasingly important. Professional photography coexists with — and is even rivaled by — images taken by citizens, which are often used by the mass media. For that reason the need is greater than ever for photographers and graphic professionals who, in one way or another, adapt to the new media. Using a multiple case study method, this article examines the digital resources used by photographers who have won a World Press Photo Award. It studies the ways in which they exploit the medium, extending the photographic narrative beyond the website, to promote themselves and their personal brand. The results show photographers' preference for unidirectional communication models and superimposed strategies that have limited engagement and viralisation. The acquisition of digital expertise by photojournalists is at an intermediary stage, since the cases analyzed reveal that these professionals' web 2.0 activity is limited or underexploited.

## Keywords

Photojournalism; Website; Transmedia; Branding; World Press Photo Award.

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# Introduction

The technological, economic and socio-cultural context that has arisen since the late 1990s has led photojournalism professionals to put new usages and values into practice. This has entailed a reconsideration and redefinition of the foundations of their activity and of the profession itself (RUSSIAL, 2000; KOBRE, 2006; ALLAN, 2014; KLEIN-AVRAHAM; REICH, 2016) since photojournalism has been one of those most affected by the crisis in the journalistic sector (CAMPBELL, 2010; ANDERSON, 2013; HADLAND *et al.*, 2015).

In the present digital context, or the age of “post-photojournalism” (FONTCUBERTA, 2016; LÁB; ŠTEFANIKOVÁ, 2017; GUERRERO, 2017) photojournalism appears to have arrived at a crossroad, where digital and mobile tools demonstrate both the range of possibilities and the disadvantages that technology brings to professionals (FAHMY; SMITH, 2003; PATRICK; ALLAN, 2013). In this context, values based on flexible, multiplatform, cooperative work that takes the audience into consideration (dialogue with audiences in the social media, reading and responding to comments, communicating via email, etc.) are increasingly important (BOR, 2014).

While photography has progressively adapted to and exploited the resources provided by digital platforms, those linked to communicative interactivity, innovative narratives, and transmedia usages (JENKINS, 2003; SCOLARI, 2013) show a more limited exploitation (MOLONEY, 2011).

The fall in the price of mobile telephones and tablets has generated possibilities as illustrative as so-called smartphone photography. Professional photojournalists themselves are using the new mobile devices and applications (Hipstamatic, Instagram, etc.) to carry out their work in different circumstances (LAURENT, 2012; ALBERT, 2013).

On the other hand, the professional authority of photography, and photojournalism specifically, faces multiple provenances and authorships and, therefore, challenges of credibility and trustworthiness. Professional photography coexists with – and is even rivaled by – images taken by citizens, which are often used by the mass media (SJØVAAG, 2011; MORTENSEN; KESHELASHVILI, 2013; BUEHNER, 2013; MORTENSEN, 2014; GREENWOOD; THOMAS, 2015; GRAYSON, 2015; BRENNEN; BRENNEN, 2015). For that reason the need for photographers and graphic professionals who, in one way or another, adapt to the new media is greater than ever (ALCAIDE, 2017).

Despite some negative viewpoints, reflections on the impact of technological advances on photojournalism are in general positive and indicate great possibilities for photographic language, discourses and aesthetics, due to the flexibility and multidimensionality inherent in the digital field (ARMENGOL, 2004; LAVÍN; RÖMER, 2015; KEDRA, 2016). The main digital platforms in the web environment (websites,

social media, blogs, etc.) increase the narrative possibilities of photography, thanks to their potential for extending and disseminating photographs on social media (THOMSON; GREENWOOD, 2017). In addition, the web adds a key tool: interactivity with the user.

At this time of new limits and opportunities, and in view of the growing importance of the image and photojournalism online, it is worth enquiring about the response that photography professionals and specifically photojournalists are offering in terms of web strategies. Such an enquiry involves considering these professionals as brands in themselves with multiple options for brand promotion, including transmedia storytelling (LANDA, 2013; TENDERICH, 2014).

## Materials and Methods

This study aims to discover these usages and the extent to which today's tools are being exploited, and to determine the interests of photojournalism in the short and medium term, in line with the changes that have occurred since the mid-1990s with the shift from a 1.0 scenario — characterized by the pre-eminence of the website — to another type 2.0 scenario, where interactive communication or dialogue between content producers and receivers or audiences can take place (CODINA, 2006; PALACIOS; DÍAZ-NOCI, 2009).

It starts with the premise that, apart from the website, there are other differentiating features that should be promoted in the context of developing photojournalists' personal brands, such as consistency with the usage of social media-related resources. This general and central subject is grounded in two secondary research questions that serve to evaluate non-exclusive usages.

Specifically, the study describes the characteristics of selected award-winning photographers' websites and whether these enable a unique, distinctive and memorable visual presence functioning as a starting point for the photographers' narrative(s) (RQ1). To do so, the study aims to ascertain whether photographers' works and narratives are expanded to social media, in order to evaluate the level of current digital and web effectiveness for transmedia practices in terms of audience engagement and related professional branding (transmitting an image or personal brand, improving the evaluation of the photographer's product or work, monetizing images, etc.), with these considered as opportunities by this study (RQ2).

The research was carried out between the months of January and June 2017, analyzing and testing each indicator on different dates; it was applied to a total of eight professional photojournalism websites (Table 1). The study took account of the importance of including internationally recognized photojournalists and as a criterion of prominence, the photojournalists considered were those who had won prizes at the 2016 World Press Photo Awards, one of the longest-standing and most

prestigious photojournalism competitions.

(1) A number of other criteria were considered when selecting the cases. In this respect, the winner of any of the top three prizes in any of the competition's thematic categories was considered representative. These categories are: 1) Contemporary Issues, 2) Daily Life, 3) General News, 4) Long-term Projects, 5) Nature, 6) Society, 7) Sports, 8) Spot News.

(2) Gender balance: this criterion introduces the gender perspective into investigative and professional analysis in any of the fields of journalistic communication including photojournalism, where this matter has received scant analysis. Although 86% of the prizewinners were male, the final sample presents a gender balance: female (3) and male (5).

(3) A geographical balance criterion guarantees the representation of all the continents: America (North and South), Europe, Asia, Africa and Oceania. Given that over 30% of the prizewinners at the 2016 World Press Photo Awards were from the United States, the USA maintains its majority in the final sample but all the continents are present: North America (3), South America (1), Europe (1), Asia (1), Africa (1) and Oceania (1).

(4) A balance was also sought in the selection of the two prizewinning models in each thematic category: individual (3) and photographic series (5).

**Table 1** - Description of case studies

Website	Photojournalist	Theme	Prize	Category	Country
Adrianeohanesian.com	Adriane Ohanesian	Contemp. Issues	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Singles	USA
Sebastianliste.com	Sebastian Liste	Daily Life	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Series	Spain
Mauriciolimaphoto.com	Mauricio Lima	General News	1 <sup>st</sup>	Singles	Brazil
Maryfcalvert.com	Mary F. Calvert	Long-Term Projects	1 <sup>st</sup>	Series	USA
Brentstirton.com	Brent Stirton	Nature	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Series	S. Africa
Kazumaobara.com	Kazuma Obara	Society	1 <sup>st</sup>	Series	Japan
Taratw.com	Tara Todras-Whitehill	Sports	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Series	USA
Warrenrichardson.com	Warren Richardson	Spot News	1 <sup>st</sup>	Singles	Australia

Source: Compiled by the authors (2020).

In line with the study's aims and the characteristics of the sample, a descriptive, qualitative methodology based on a content analysis of the websites of each of the photojournalists studied, as well as their 2.0 activity, was employed.

In the methodological design phase the present research adapted this proposal and evaluated items or indicators observable from the user's point of view, in a dichotomous manner (1= Yes it exists; 0= No it doesn't exist), grouped into two parameters or dimensions (Accessibility-Design and Content) (CODINA, 2006).

In the category entitled Accessibility-Design, consideration was given to aspects related to the use of hypertext, such as the organizational structure of content (SCOLARI, 2015), internal and external search engines, existence of a site map, possibility of feedback (email), reticularity and constant accessibility of the navigation menu, differentiation of links using colors, as well as the type and degree of the use of external links.

In the Content category the following were evaluated: personal elements like personal and professional biography, personal photographs or videos, information on projects, as well as general content in the form of photo-reportages and static photo galleries, slideshows or dynamic galleries, videos with professional content, audios (musical selections, narratives, etc.), and interactive graphic resources. A special evaluation of website content of a social type was made by means of the following indicators: possibility of accessing content on social media; possibility of evaluating or voting on content; possibility of commenting on photographic works and other content; possibility of sharing an individual photograph or photo-reportage; feedback to comments. The frequency or periodicity of updating (daily, weekly, monthly, etc.) was also evaluated.

With the aim of complementing knowledge of these questions and looking more deeply into the values of social photojournalism on the Internet, the study also analyzed the degree of transmedia use and the presence of photojournalists in today's most popular, general social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, and those specializing in photography, for example Instagram. This study sought to discover the degree of photojournalists' interaction on these networks by examining values indicating their interest in interacting with users and the real degree of interaction achieved between them. Specifically, the number of followers and likes was considered, as well as the average number of mentions per tweet, the answers obtained for each tweet and the number of times that each tweet was marked as a favorite. Furthermore, the themes of hashtags were examined, keeping in mind that the hashtag is one of the main resources used when participating in social conversation thus increasing the visibility of an account and its content.

## Results

The works present on the professional websites selected as case studies do not engage with or viralize on the social media and, in general, there is no advantage whatsoever taken of these networking sites (Figure 1) for different aims:

to disseminate work, respond and enter into dialogue with audiences and continue telling their photographic stories based on users' contributions via comments, other complementary or similar photographs, expansion by means of shares, etc.

Adriane Ohanesian's website includes a total of eight narratives in the form of photo-reportages or portfolios, each containing between eight and twenty photographs. None of these narratives or the images they contain are transferred directly to social media. Nor is the possibility available of interacting with this content through votes, likes or sharing options. At the time of the analysis the website contained access to ten videos hosted on YouTube, some of which had a self-promotional character and were related to the themes of her work, whether published by mass media or created for NGOs or governmental organizations. This photojournalist also presents a blog that shows limited activity in terms of feedback (there is no option for comments or sharing content) and periodicity of updating.

At the time the analysis was made, Brentstirton.com presented nearly fifty photo-reportages and four narrated slideshows that functioned as documentaries or audio-visual reportages, accompanied by brief explanations. Kazumaobara.com presented a total of five works. Kazuma Obara is the photojournalist who provides the broadest transmedia perspective, as he provides a complementary development of his photographic narratives not only on social media, but also in four books and different talks, workshops and exhibitions. He is also the most polyvalent of the photojournalists and is present in the greatest number of social media, including a blog and platform on Vimeo, where he makes documentaries based on his works. The photojournalist Mary F. Calvert stands out in this research due to her use of graphic elements, which employ colour and contribute originality to her website's design. Furthermore, she complements her work with additional content, such as a personal blog. RSS is her weak point, as it is hard to detect on her website, which does not facilitate interaction with users.

Like Kazuma Obara, Mary F. Calvert provides a clearer multimedia profile as she uses not only photographs and galleries, but also slideshows with audio and 2.0 tools, such as blogs and social media. She is also one of the photojournalists who makes the most use of textual resources to accompany and transmit the twenty or so visual projects hosted on her website. Her blog shows regular activity and it tends to be updated on a monthly basis, although there is no established criterion in this respect. The entries are brief and there is no possibility of commenting. The same can be said of the photographer Tara Todras-Whitehill, who includes a clear multiplatform section entitled "multimedia/radio/text" on her website Tara.tw, containing video pieces, narrated slideshows and audios. This photographer also makes use of a blog on Vignette Interactive.

Sebastian Limé's website provides a very simple and clear profile. In this case there is no multimedia material, but a great deal of information on complementary

projects, news and workshops instead, which give the website an obviously promotional focus with a very personal style. This photojournalistic website provides differentiating elements as it includes the option of subscribing to a distribution list through the contact section on the website.

The website Warrenrichardson.com also has a simple and clear design. It contains the usual primary information on about ten principal projects, the author's career and workshops. This website provides one particularity, which is the option of sharing content on Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr and Pinterest. He is also the only photojournalist who chooses to use the latter social network that specializes in images and photography, in contrast to the general preference for Instagram.

Within the Accessibility and Design parameter, none of the eight websites examines figures in relation to the indicators on internal search engines, external search engines, website map and differentiating links. All achieve the same percentage in this parameter (42.8%), as they include contact and feedback options, a navigation menu on all webpages with access to all the sections on the website, and the use of external links, especially access to social media.

With the Content parameter, there are also great similarities due to the presence of personal and professional biographical content, access to the main social media, as well as projects and portfolios in the form of galleries, photo-reportages or documentaries in all cases. These symbolize the central core of the photojournalists' work and, logically, are representative of the type of content offered on these websites. All the cases were regularly updated but with a wide-ranging periodicity, and none on a daily or weekly basis.

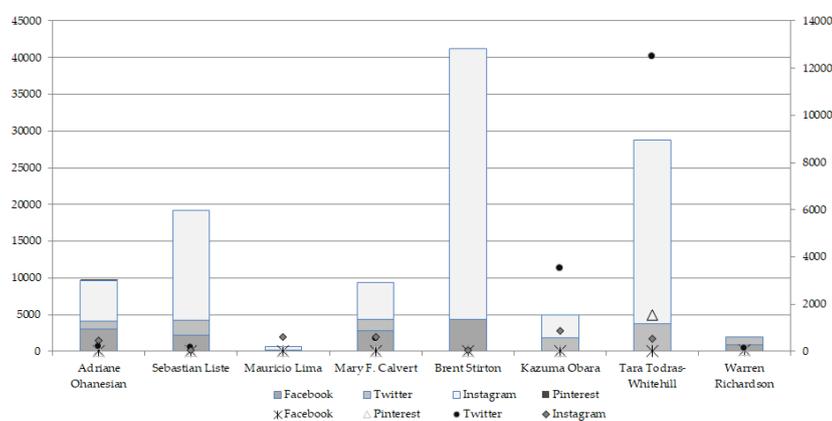
There are also some minimal differences in content. In this respect, 62.5% of the websites include personal photographs of the photojournalists and only 12.5% include personal videos or video interviews with them. There is a clear preference for providing supplementary professional information, specifically in relation to their workshops (75%). Half of the websites analyzed include dynamic digital resources like slideshows or dynamic galleries (BrentStirton, MaryFCalvert, MauricioLima, TaraTW) and 25% include professional videos in the form of documentaries or reportages. Audio is a resource that is underused on these websites, due to the greater effectiveness and communicative potential of video in the strongly visual digital environment of these photojournalistic websites. Content linked to interactivity and participation requires a separate section since, as noted, all the websites include access to social media (Table 2) and none of them offer website users the possibility of evaluating, commenting or voting on works. The possibility of sharing these works is only available in one case, on the website of Warren Richardson, that provides the option of sharing on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Tumblr. While half of the websites include a personal blog by the photojournalist (AdrianeOhaesian, KazumaObara, MaryFCalvert and TaraTW), they do not allow comments, and consequently, show zero interactivity. Apart from

the social media Twitter and Facebook, employed by all the photojournalists, nearly all of them use Instagram (87.5%) and 25% use LinkedIn (BrentStirton, MaryFCalvert). The use of Vimeo (KazumaObara) and Google+ (BrentStirton) is even less common (12.5%).

The analysis thus makes it possible to identify the photojournalistic websites' main strengths and weaknesses. They are simple websites that do not require elements to facilitate usability, such as search engines or website maps. Their styles differ according to the extent that textual and multimedia resources are used. On the one hand, some websites show a more artistic style and design, with more importance placed on the static image as opposed to text and audio-visual formats; on the other, there are websites with a more journalistic style, where text occupies a more prominent place alongside the images, apart from the greater or lesser inclusion of audio-visual elements. There is a third intermedia style, in which visual projects share prominence with the video format, including dynamic slideshows.

One strength identified by the study is the use of online possibilities to create different pieces or product typologies framed in the section of photo-reportage and documentary photography: photographic galleries, presentations of images (slideshows), images with audio (audio slideshows) and others. It is by such means that photojournalism today is exploring new online photojournalistic techniques and genres linked to the interactive visual narrative. On all the websites analyzed there was a clear primacy of the image, as opposed to the use of other multimedia resources like audio in the form of narrative or music. This can be considered one of the main weaknesses of the professional development of freelance photojournalists in the digital environment. There is a secondary presence of text, which is employed in the biographical information and in the explanatory captions that accompany each of the images.

**Figure 1** - Summary of general and photographic activity and presence on social media, according to the Social Media Worldwide Ranking



Source: Compiled by the authors (2020).

Another of the main features of these websites is their usefulness for creating universes around the photojournalistic work; in practically all cases they lack external links, with the exception of those that lead to social media, including online video platforms for accessing documentaries or professional interviews.

Websites are the main strategy for distributing these journalists' photographs, evincing a narrative structure that focuses on the product and the photojournalists themselves (biography, projects, etc.). The narratives analyzed that take the form of photographic galleries, photo-reportages and essays are trans-mediatized on social media, thus extending the content.

With respect to activity on social media (Figure 1), it is worth emphasizing that the type of interactions generated through Twitter, analyzed using Twitonomy, are especially followed by users, and also by photographic agencies, mass media, NGOs and governmental organizations. Such interaction supposes dialogue, through direct replies, but a greater percentage is through retweets.

## Discussion

This study has tried to illustrate the way in which photojournalists use social networks to disseminate their work, based on changes in work practices which are currently undergoing in the digital era (HADLAND; CAMPBELL; LAMBERT, 2015).

Although showing the limitations that characterize case studies, such as the difficulties inherent in generalizing from results, the research presented here proves to be explicative of a current circumstance affecting photography and photojournalism. The results show that the website holds a privileged place in the narrative strategy of the freelance photographers considered and in their professional brands. As Thomson and Greenwood (2017) point out, social media is a very useful tool to improve photojournalists' engagement with users. In fact, each one of the websites analyzed showed the usefulness of photographic work for developing a differentiated personal brand, which is strengthened with messages or specific content on the personal life and professional career of the photojournalists.

In line with RQ1, the analysis verifies that those aspects linked to design and photographic — and, by extension, audio-visual — content are two of the main strengths of professional photojournalists online, but strikingly this is not the case when it comes to making use of interactive resources.

At the level of website structure and content all the cases analyzed demonstrate similar patterns that confirm the existence of a characteristic and shared style for transmitting the activity of professional photojournalists on the web. In this regard, all the websites studied present a simple hypertextual structure or design and consequently a certain tendency to provide a structure for accessing content organized in multiple nodes or sections providing access to the same content: portfolios and

information on projects, personal and professional biographical information, and different ways of getting in contact, including access to personal accounts on social media. The other elements included on these websites complement the main content in different ways, whether through videos or dynamic galleries, or by means of enjoyable informal posts in blog form. In short, photojournalists like web work (YASCHUR, 2012).

This form of proceeding can be seen as a further example of the adaptation process the profession has undergone in recent years (GUERRERO, 2017), which has resulted in an enriched and multiple photojournalism thanks to the complementary use of multimedia resources. Amongst other aspects, the study confirms that photojournalists have a multifaceted and transmedia profile. They can complement their main storytelling in the form of photo-reportages and documentaries with videos, slideshows, social media content, and other communicative and narrative forms, such as talks and exhibitions.

With regard to RQ2, do the website's contents (portfolios, visual stories, etc.) have continuity with the social media? That is to say, are they taken to the social media? For the main websites looked at, the answer is basically no for all the cases considered. Although it has been demonstrated that these photographers are present in the main social media, and that new techniques — such as transmedia narratives — can help them to reach more individuals, achieve better engagement and participation from their public (Moloney, 2011), there is no sign that the use of these is specifically aimed at extending stories across platforms to enrich them with contributions that necessarily come from users and audiences, today present on all devices, anywhere, at any time.

The web usage by photojournalists mainly seek to develop their personal brand and promote their core works, in the form of projects and photographic portfolios. Evidence of this is the preference shown by some photojournalists for the LinkedIn network, as well as the fact that all of them show a basic coherence and consistency in developing a unique personal brand on social media.

To sum up, the acquisition of digital expertise by photojournalists is at an intermediary stage, since the cases analyzed reveal that these professionals' web 2.0 activity is limited or underexploited. The possibility of dialogue and feedback from audiences is a little used resource, to the extent that even those who do use markedly interactive resources, like a blog, tend to encourage unidirectionality. Nor was any interaction or dialogue perceived among photojournalists on the main social media websites of Facebook and Twitter, in spite of the fact that recent studies reveal that the concern for the relationship with the audiences has been increasing (TAIT, 2017).

In view of current tendencies advocating the adaptation and harmonious interrelation of all communicative species and forms in a constantly evolving media ecology, there is a need to attend to decisive questions like the possibility of extending

storytelling by users with a transmedia perspective (DE MELO, 2020). Questions like the development of the personal brand, which is of great importance and interest to photojournalists at the international level, do not appear to require any additional stimulus, bearing in mind that user-interaction necessarily generates transmedia extensions that in turn help to promote the brand in a non-evident way.

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