Up for a challenge?
Digital practices of 24-hour news channels[1]

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Abstract

Nearly 35 years ago 24-hour global news channels proved to be the fast, efficient and popular way of news production and delivery. They re-defined television news and used to sell this product successfully until the spawn of digital era. However, today younger audience prefers to get their news mainly from digital sources. 24-hour news channels are facing the tough challenge, having to conquer the new ways of packaging and delivering the news. This study uses quantitative content analysis to explore the different practices some of the biggest global news channels are using on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. The findings suggest that TV news powerhouses are abandoning video as their main specialty on digital platforms and mostly use traditional production formats to create the digital news product. We also come to conclusion that each platform is being used for different purposes: YouTube offers mainly the same content viewers would find on traditional TV; Facebook mainly drives traffic to the company web-site; and Instagram so far is the platform lacking clear content strategy, used for strengthening the brand rather than distributing news. The quality of some video materials offered by 24-hour news channels often does not meet conventional professional standards.

Keywords

24-hour global news channels, digital platforms, digital news, audience activity, social networks, traditional TV news.

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Introduction

In 1985, the world saw its first global satellite news channel, CNN International. By 2005 the format of non-stop television news spawned worldwide. It has been thirteen years since the explosion of 24-hour global news channels was academically researched, documented and mapped for the first time (Rai & Cottle, 2007). Back then the format was considered successful, as there were over one hundred noteworthy 24/7 satellite news channels around the world (Rai & Cottle, 2007), although the phenomenon of 24-hour TV news led to some academic discussion. Some researchers viewed these channels as processes of globalization (Chalaby, 2003; Held & McGrew, 2003; Johnston, 2003; Volkmer, 2003), while others argued, calling 24-hour satellite channels another evidence of Western domination in the attempt to direct world news flows (Cottle, 2003; Thussu & Freedman, 2003).

However, today a lot has changed in the environment traditional TV news is facing. Digital news is posing new challenges to traditional news and urging global news channels to look for new formats and strategies.

Television news in general has traditionally been named the most popular source of information for most consumers (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016). Later studies, however, show that younger audience has different preferences. Internet is the preferred source of news for eighteen- to forty-four-year-olds, while TV still remains popular for the viewers over forty-five (Newman, 2017).

The evidence here is overwhelming. In the United States alone, the number of adults watching TV news has dropped to 50 percent in 2017 (7 percent decrease compared to 2016). Most of these people are over sixty-five years old (Matsa, 2018). Studies also show that 93 percent of adults turn to Internet to get their news (Stocking, 2019). In Western Europe eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds prefer Internet as the main source of news and are more critical of traditional news media (Matsa et al., 2018).

Finally, there are new popular platforms like Snapchat Discover and Apple News designed to spread the news, and their popularity among young adults (18-24) is soaring (Newman, 2017).

Thus, the process of digitalization is gradually stealing the main asset of 24-hour news channels – the news – and making it more attractive for younger audience in the new media rather than on a traditional TV screen. The global news channels and TV news in general are faced with the tough challenge of re-packaging their specialty for digital platforms and learning to sell it successfully there.

Another option is significant makeover of traditional 24-hour news, and

we already see some examples in America. The main cable news channels have shifted their coverage mainly to partisan political talk and are showing some audience gains (Gottfried et al., 2016; Grieco, 2019; Jones, 2012).

However, this cannot solve the problem of attracting key demo, which is important for most of the serious players in this industry. They have already started conquering digital platforms: all the major global news channels have their accounts on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. One of the recent studies shows the importance of examining these platforms to understand the new capabilities of traditional media (Shomron & Schejter, 2019). Other recent findings suggest that TV news networks' 'production and dissemination behaviors have not changed in a significant way' (Cárdenas et al., 2020). This research further confirms that this statement is true for most of the channels.

Literature review

The process of adaptation of traditional media to new digital environment has been the subject of several research papers and reports of the past decade (Bullard, 2015; Dyachenko, 2014; Küng, 2015; Martens et al., 2018; Nel & Westland, 2012; Newman, 2009; Sehl et al., 2016; Shchepilova & Kruglova, 2018; Stefanone et al., 2010; Vartanova, 2016). However, only part of this research deals with television and there is a limited number of studies devoted solely to 24-hour global news channels.

Some of the latest and profound data on digital news can be found in Reuters Digital News Project. It is clearly outlining the threat for 24-hour news channels to remain in the past and calling on TV news producers 'to experiment with new formats and forms of distribution if they wish to remain relevant' (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016). It is also stressing the importance of experimenting with on-demand, distributed and mobile video news as the way to get the young audience. The researchers see the main challenge in moving beyond traditional television news rather than replacing it (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016).

The new challenges and directions of 24-hour news are also outlined by Cushion & Sambrook (2016). Among the most crucial problems the news channels need to solve the authors name the ability of traditional channels to compete with social networks in being first (especially when it comes to breaking news); the ability to communicate with the audience on multiple levels through IPTV (currently barely used); the high cost of operating a 24-hour news channel (which eventually may lead to abandoning news presenters); and the urgent need to re-assess editorial values, putting quality and professional analysis above the need to deliver news at greater speed (Cushion & Sambrook, 2016).

Some of the factors that might help TV news successfully conquer digital platforms are found in clear understanding of company mission, strategic focus, strong leadership and integration of editorial and digital staff (Küng, 2015).

We should also mention some other directions of current digital news research. For example, studying the risks of affecting the content of news posed by corporations like Google and Facebook which provide tools and audience for digital news (Nechushtai, 2017). Or looking at the ways digital news is using sentiment to attract audience focusing on all types of media, not just TV (Kumar et al., 2018). Or understanding the specifics of universal channels' behavior on social networks. This particular study was carried out in Russia and showed poor strategies of the main national TV channels on social digital platforms. Overall, they 'communicate with the audience in an analog way – from broadcaster to the masses', barely using the interactive functions of social networks (Shchepilova & Kruglova, 2018).

Another noteworthy study carried out in Denmark shows the ability of social media, like Facebook and Twitter, to transform 'into user-friendly news feeds', especially for laid-back and nationally-oriented news use (Swart et al., 2017).

However, so far there has been no research examining the niche of global 24-hour news in the context of their activity on digital platforms.

The goal of this research is to find out what kind of practices global news channels are using to adapt their content to the main visual online platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram), how successful they are and what kind of product they offer.

The main research questions are:

1) Does channel activity match audience activity on digital platforms? Are channels putting most effort into the platform with the highest audience response?

2) What kind of product are news channels offering for digital audience? How does it differ from traditional TV product?

3) How much of the digital content is news?

Hypothesis

24-hour global news channels are learning their way on digital platforms. They are using diverse practices – from blind dubbing of air segments to creating a new digital product for different audience. However, most of these practices are still the subject of trial and error, and there seems to be no clear recipe for success. We expect to find that TV news channels are abandoning their specialty – video – on digital platforms and offering more items as text supported by photos.

We also expect to find a gap between the quality standards of on-air and online video product.

Methods

This research was conducted from January through June 2019. We compiled a sample of seven main global 24-hour English-language news channels, trying to ensure geographical diversity, as well as the mix of ownership models: CNN International (USA), BBC World News (UK), Sky News (UK), France 24 (France), CGTN (China), Al Jazeera English (Qatar), RT (Russia). Three of the channels (France 24, RT and CGTN) are state-owned, the rest have private or corporate sources of finance.

We decided to include two UK-based channels in this sample for several reasons, even though the audience of Sky News (102 million households worldwide[3]) is much smaller than BBC's (440 million households worldwide[4]). First of all, Sky News has been getting the Best news channel award from the Royal Television Society for several years in a row, with twelve awards overall (Mee, 2019). Secondly, it has its own accounts on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, while BBC World News shares all three accounts with BBC News. We did not think it would be appropriate to compare those (much more impressive numbers) with the rest of the channels we picked, but at the same time we could not leave BBC World News out of our sample, as it is obviously one of the main trendsetters in global news television. That is why Sky News, as an additional British channel in the sample, should ensure more objective results of our research.

CNN International is another example of shared digital accounts. Its YouTube and Instagram pages are shared with CNN/U.S., while Facebook account is separate. And again, despite this fact, we could not leave this giant (and pioneer of global news format) out of the picture.

All of the channels we picked are the examples of quality TV journalism. Content-wise they are quite similar: they adopted the format of 24-hour news pioneered by CNN in the United States in 1980, and globally in 1985. They often cover same world news; however, each provides more perspective on the news from the home region. Besides geography, differences lie in the audience size and ownership (state-owned channels can be influenced by propaganda, while commercial channels reflect corporate or personal interests). However, these differences are negligible when it comes to producing digital products.

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[3] Source: Sky International web-site accessed in June 2019.
[4] Source: BBC World News web-site accessed in June 2019.

We studied the activity of seven global news channels on the main digital platforms over six months. For our sample we complied a week of randomly chosen dates from January through June 2019. The dates we picked are the following: January 21st (Monday), February 12th (Tuesday), March 20th (Wednesday), April 4th (Thursday), April 26th (Friday), May 18th (Saturday), June 2nd (Sunday). If for some reason the records for some of the chosen dates were no longer available[5], we replaced it with the next available day of the week (for example, this was the case with RT, where we had to use Facebook posts from May 25th instead of May 18th).

Some of the main methods used in this research include quantitative content analysis and comparative analysis.

The research was conducted in several stages. The first stage included the analysis of the main digital platforms for the channels in the sample. We looked at the number of subscribers and followers, as well as their activity (the cumulative number of likes, dislikes, comments, shares, and views). To evaluate the share of active audience we calculated the average number of reactions and views per post (based on the amount of posts in the sample) and compared it to the overall number of subscribers. Spoiler: the numbers we got are surprisingly low.

At this stage we also calculated channels' activity on each of the platforms, by which we mean the average amount of daily posts. We wanted to see whether the channels are directing their main efforts to the platform with the highest audience activity.

The second stage of our research consisted of quantitative content analysis. We looked closely at the format, topics and production level of posts. Specifically, we wanted to see how much content is dubbed online directly from the air and how much of it is specially produced and adapted for online and mobile viewing (which usually means heavy fonting to tell the story, assuming that people usually watch videos with sound off).

Finally, here is a brief explanation on the platforms we chose for this study (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram). Obviously, the news channels' digital presence is not limited to these three networks. Most of the channels are heavily represented on Twitter, some are starting to explore TikTok and Snapchat. We decided to focus on:
- YouTube as the oldest (and closest to traditional TV) online video platform;

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[5] This was never the case with Instagram and YouTube but occurred with Facebook.

- Facebook as the platform with the highest number of followers for all the channels in our sample;
- and Instagram as relatively new, but highly popular visual network.

Results

Our research partly confirmed the hypothesis of 24-hour news channels having no unified strategy to sell digital news so far. Some of the key and universal trends we discovered are:

- YouTube is being used mostly for re-running on-air content;
- Facebook is barely using any video content and functioning as online wire agency directing traffic to channels' web-sites;
- Instagram is the new territory with the highest audience response and mostly original content, however the networks so far do not quite understand their purpose there.

RQ1: Channel activity vs audience activity

The first stage of research involved gathering statistical information on the number of subscribers and followers global channels have on different platforms. These numbers will be later used to determine the share of active audience for each account. At this early stage we could already tell that Facebook is the leader in terms of the audience it presumably brings (at least, according to the followers' stats). *Table 1* reflects the numbers of presumed audience, documented in June 2019. By 'presumed audience' we mean the total number of subscribers (assuming all of them are real), although it includes active subscribers, passive subscribers and (possibly) some bots.

Table 1

Digital platforms of global news channels
(by number of subscribers, *mln*)

Channel	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram
CNNI	7*	**17,6**	7,7*
BBC World News	4,7*	**49***	8,8*
Sky News	1,1	**8,3**	0,6
France 24	0,8	**1,3**	0,06
Al Jazeera English	3,4	**12,2**	0,9
CGTN	0,8	**81**	1,7
RT	3,6	**5,6**	0,4

These accounts are shared with the national channels (CNN/U.S. and BBC News accordingly)

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Our next step involved calculating channels' activity on their main visual platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram). We counted the total number of posts within our compiled week and estimated the average number of daily posts on each platform (*Table 2*).

**Global news channels' activity on digital platforms
(average number of daily posts)**

Channel	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram
CNNI	11	**26**	4
BBC World News	3	**22**	4
Sky News	4	**30**	2
France 24	**22**	17	1
Al Jazeera English	19	**23**	2
CGTN	**33**	31	3
RT	13	**30**	8
Average	**15**	**25**	**3**

Here again we see that most channels have their highest activity on Facebook (up to thirty posts per day). France 24 and CGTN are the only exceptions, as they seem to put slightly more effort into YouTube accounts (at least by the number of posts). The difference with Instagram for all channels is drastic: on average it is just one-fifth of YouTube volume and one-eighth of Facebook.

However, the indicator we are mostly interested in is the audience activity, which we estimated by calculating the cumulative reactions and views. Specifically, we summed:

a) Likes, dislikes, comments and views on YouTube

b) Likes, shares and comments on Facebook (as views are not visible there)

c) Likes, views and comments on Instagram

We estimated the average number of audience activity per post by dividing the cumulative reactions by the number of posts in the sample. This let us calculate the share of active audience from the total amount of subscribers (percentage shown in *Table 3*). Our formula is close to the standard Engagement Rate calculation algorithm used in SMM[6], however, unlike the conventional

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[6] Source: https://popsters.com/blog/post/er-how-to-calculate-engagement-rate

ER by reach or ER by views, our methodology accounts for views and reactions and thus makes it possible to compare the three platforms. For instance, views on YouTube are by far more important than likes or dislikes. Same is true for views on Instagram video posts. We were interested in finding the way to measure any kind of audience activity, whether it is simple viewing or deeper engagement with likes, comments and shares.

Table 3

Audience activity on global news channels' digital platforms
(N = average number of reactions and views per post, *thousands*)

Channel	YouTube		Facebook		Instagram	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
CNNI	203	2,9	1,8	0,01	285,2	**3,7**
BBC World News	82,4	1,8	11,4	0,02	399,9	**4,5**
Sky News	31,2	**2,8**	0,8	0,01	2,8	0,5
France 24	4,8	0,6	0,1	0,01	0,8	**1,4**
Al Jazeera English	18	0,5	2,2	0,02	89,8	**9,4**
CGTN	4,6	0,6	6,2	0,008	13,4	**0,8**
RT	24,7	0,7	1,8	0,03	15,1	**3,5**
Average	**52,7**	**1,4**	**3,5**	**0,02**	**115**	**3,4**

As we can see, the most active audience for global news channels (six out of seven in our sample) is found on Instagram. The activity indicators on Facebook are not even close to what Instagram is currently offering. Percentage wise, it is nearly two-and-a-half times higher than YouTube and Facebook taken together.

Thus, the answer to RQ1 shows the dissonance between channel activity and audience activity. While most channels seem to concentrate their effort and produce more posts on the platforms with the highest number of subscribers, they underuse the platform with the most active audience (Instagram). Meanwhile, on Facebook (which seems to be the platform of choice for most channels), the audience activity is under 0.1 percent.

RQ2: Global news channels' digital product

Analyzing the product global news channels are offering on their digital platforms, we wanted to find out:

1) Is it different from TV programming or the same (offered in smaller chunks)?

2) What kind of format is being used (i.e. is it mainly video or photo and text as well)? Is there any special production involved?

The answer to the first question depends on the platform. YouTube is the main destination of re-packaged air segments, which are downloaded without any special production or editing. They vary from short anchor texts to reporter packages, long guest interviews and debates. In case of CNNI, France 24 and Sky News, 100 percent of YouTube content is duplicated directly from air programming. It is 95 percent with Al Jazeera, 70 percent with BBC World News and just about half with CGTN and RT. On average, 82 percent of YouTube content repeats global channels' air.

Instagram shows opposite results. None of the posts in our sample were taken from air. With Facebook, less than 5 percent of posts offered videos from air programming (Table 4).

Table 4

**Digital content repeating air programming
(ratio to the total number of posts in the sample, %)**

Channel	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram
CNNI	100	5,4	0
BBC World News	70	2	0
Sky News	100	3,5	0
France 24	100	7	0
Al Jazeera English	95	5,3	0
CGTN	57	1,1	0
RT	48	7,3	0
Average	**82**	**4,5**	**0**

Let's go deeper here on the YouTube video variety with the two channels that fill half of their content with non-air material: CGTN and RT. Their content strategies are quite different. Table 5 shows the variety of formats we found on their YouTube accounts.

Table 5

**CGTN and RT YouTube video formats
(ratio to the total number of posts in the sample, %)**

Video format	CGTN	RT
Air	57	45
Mobile video	34	3
Live stream	8	3
Live event	1	-
Raw video	--	26
Edited natural sound video	--	16
Amateur video	--	5
Security camera video	--	1

Some of these categories need detailed description:

Mobile video – clips that are produced for online and mobile platforms, can be watched with sound off, deliver main information in fonts, sometimes use special graphics. Usually they have background music, which is not essential for understanding the story. Sometimes there are soundbites in native language, with fonted translation. There is no professional voiceover. This format is widely used in news channels' mobile apps. Basically, this format takes sound as one of the essential components of the moving image on screen out of the classical television formula and lets the picture and the fonts tell the whole story. *Table 6* spells out one example of such a video titled: 'Man runs 50 km in wilderness of Siberia in -60°C'[7].

Headline: 'Man runs 50 km in wilderness of Siberia in -60°C'

Total running time: 1:03.

Background music throughout the whole clip.

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[7] Video can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6zEauR6hc0

Table 6

Clip structure

Timecode	Video	Fonts
0:00-0:05	Natural sound (in Russian): 'Odin, dva, tri. Start!' Wide shot with 3 men: two are counting down, the third one starts running	ONE. TWO. THREE. START!
0:06-0:13	Close up of the main hero, snow on his face	THIS IS MOLDOVAN ATHLETE DMITRI VOLOSHIN
0:14–0:16	Slow motion, wide shot, the man is running in the dark with snow all around him	HE RAN 50 KM IN -60 C°
0:17–0:18	Slow motion, close up of his face turning toward the camera	Background music
0:19–0:21	Close up, temperature scale in the runner's hands shows '-67,8°' (Celsius)	BUT NOT TO SET A RECORD
0:22–0:23	Aerial daytime shot, we see the runner's back; snow wilderness all around him	HE DID IT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO CEREBRAL PALSY
0:24–0:25	Zooming in on the runner's picture at the finish line	Same font
0:26–0:28	Zooming in on the picture of a girl (her face is blurred)	AND RAISE MONEY FOR A 4-YEAR-OLD GIRL
0:29–0:31	Video, side shot of the man running in Siberia	THE RUN TOOK PLACE IN OYMYAKON, RUSSIA
0:32–0:35	Video, aerial wide shot from the runner's back as he is running in Siberia	THE COLDEST INHABITED PLACE ON EARTH
0:36–0:37	Aerial beauty show (drone footage)	AND VOLOSHIN BECAME THE FIRST ATHLETE
0:38–0:42	Same shot	TO COMPLETE THE RUN WITHOUT MEDICAL HELP
0:43–0:45	Medium shot of the man running	Same font
0:46–0:55	Voloshin's soundbite in Russian	Soundbite translation: 'It's like going into space – it's freezing and there is no oxygen at all. Terrible. Do not try to repeat it'.
0:56–1:03	Video of Voloshin finishing and falling on his knees (wide shot) Natural sound: 'Bravo!'	MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

No portion of this video remains unfonted, thus keeping the viewer engaged throughout the clip. Another thing that distinguishes it from conventional TV is the edit: most of the shots are only one or two seconds long, which keeps the story moving at rather high pace.

Live stream – real-time video streamed from different events and reported live by a correspondent. Most of live streams (highly popular with CGTN) feature cultural events, new technologies or lifestyle events (for example, street food festival in Singapore, Chinese national holidays, Shanghai's first 5G experience center). However, some carry hard news tags, like search and rescue mission after an earthquake in China. Total running time here varies depending on the event. The channel sometimes labels these streams as 'CGTN live coverage on the new media'. Live streams always feature a reporter, helping the viewer understand the story. In some ways, this format is close to a regular reporter live shot in a newscast, however there are some major differences (at least in CGTN's practice) between traditional television and live stream on YouTube:

1) Reporter skills are much lower on YouTube than on traditional TV. Most of the reporters doing live streams stumble a lot, do not seem to know where to go next and how to cover the airtime, which usually exceeds thirty minutes. Some do not seem to keep their composure on air, with trembling voice and unpolished on-camera skills.

2) There are cases of questionable equipment usage (for example, holding wireless microphone with receiver in place of handheld mic).

3) There are no fonts throughout the long stream, which would help the viewer understand the story better or even watch it with sound off.

4) The visuals and the quality of camera work sometimes are much poorer than on traditional TV. There is no dynamics.

These could be the reasons why live streams on CGTN's YouTube are not very popular in terms of views and audience reaction (some of the streams in our sample have less than 1,000 views).

Live event – usually a news presser or a speech by a public figure carried out live in its entirety without reporter presence or comments.

Raw video – unedited agency material (in case of RT, raw video is provided by its sister-company Ruptly). These clips carry the element of reality-TV, as they show the viewer unedited, raw footage of various world events (like 'Yellow Vests' protests in Paris). There are no fonts or any production involved.

Edited natural sound video – edited version of raw video, usually under two minutes. The only production involves video montage. There are no

fonts, reporter voiceovers or background music. Natural sound may include soundbites. The story is told in a headline and brief video description.

Here is another example from RT:

Headline: *Putin's Russian-made Aurus limo turn heads of German automakers at Mercedes plant.* Total running time: 0:30[8].

The video clip shows Vladimir Putin exiting the black limo and greeting the crowd (10 seconds), close up shots of the plant (5 seconds), the Russian president approaching the limo and signing the hood of the car with a white marker (12 seconds). There is no additional information apart from the headline and brief video description[9].

Overall, we can see that YouTube is close or almost identical to traditional TV for most of the channels. On the one hand, this may indicate the fact that they found the ideal mission for this platform and are happy with it. On the other, this might speak of the channels' overall unwillingness to experiment with other formats. Those that do, however, sometimes present unpolished products, with quality far from conventional TV standards.

As for the formats used on other digital platforms, we were surprised to find out that with platforms allowing variety of choices (Facebook and Instagram) it is mostly still pictures and text (YouTube, being mainly a video hosting service, is being used strictly for video by all the channels we analyzed). Global news channels use video clips only in 20 percent of their Facebook posts and a quarter of Instagram content (*Table 7*). The rest of the content is illustrated by photographs (on Instagram), and/or directs traffic to channels' web-sites (on Facebook).

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[8] Video can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6UkHuAJYrE

[9] Video description states: 'When President Vladimir #Putin rolled into a new #MercedesPlant near Moscow in his eye-catching #Aurus Senat, the Russian-made ride turned the heads of the legendary German automakers, who even offered some words of praise. READ MORE: https://on.rt.com/9ria'

Table 7

**Video posts on Facebook and Instagram
(ratio to the total number of posts in the sample, %)**

Channel	Facebook	Instagram
CNNI	5	37
BBC World News	31	65,5
Sky News	5	8
France 24	13	0 (11)*
Al Jazeera English	16	14
CGTN	35	25
RT	43	41
Average	**21**	**27 (29)***

*Our sample of France 24 Instagram posts contained no video materials on the dates we randomly picked. However, looking at the account it is easy to spot some video posts. We counted on average 11 out 100 (11%). That is why the average percentage indicator in the last graph contains two numbers to reflect this discrepancy.

Among the examined video posts, we found several formats the channels are using on Instagram and Facebook, particularly: live streaming, clips produced specifically for online and mobile platforms (mobile videos), air segments, raw agency material, etc.

With Instagram all video content can be divided into three main categories: mobile videos (50 percent), unfonted natural sound videos (32 percent) and IGTV videos (18 percent). While mobile videos format here is same as on YouTube, unfonted natural sound videos vary from edited soundbites to raw footage (of severe weather, emotional rescue, protests, etc). To understand the story the viewer needs to read the text in the post and/or to turn sound on. IGTV (Instagram TV) can use both formats, fonted and unfonted, but presumes that the clip is longer than one minute and those who choose to continue watching it, will automatically get the sound on.

There is one important thing with Instagram videos in global news channels' accounts that makes them stand out. While video editing is usually dynamic and done exactly to match the fonts and tell the story, most of these clips are not shot for this platform. The clips in our sample often lack proper framing: the application square-frames the shot automatically, cutting essential details out of the picture (for example, sometimes in close-up shots faces of speakers are only partially visible). This 'roughness', however, can also be a factor of viewer

attraction: the video stands out and catches the eye because it looks amateurish rather than professional.

So, on Instagram, just like on YouTube, we find a mix of professional and sub-professional quality of video material.

With Facebook there is more variety of video formats. The most popular are: unfonted natural sound videos (37 percent), air segments (18 percent), live streams (used only by CGTN, 17 percent), raw agency material (used only by RT, 14 percent), mobile videos (11 percent). Other 3 percent includes promo clips, live events and special formats (like, for example, RT Play). We also found out that channels use different practices here, and there is no universal recipe for filling video content on Facebook.

Some (like CNNI) post only air segments (thus duplicating some of their YouTube content), some put more effort into producing mobile video content (Al Jazeera). RT and CGTN seem to experiment with the widest variety of video formats. RT, which owns Ruptly news agency, likes to post its raw footage of world events. CGTN here too is experimenting with live streaming format which covers different cultural events in China and airs across main digital platforms (however, despite its popularity with the channel, it does not get high viewer response).

Overall, we can say that only 25 percent of video content on Facebook and Instagram (18 percent on Instagram and 7 percent on Facebook) goes through special production and adaptation for online viewing. This number seems quite low for broadcast news powerhouses which are supposed to set high standards in video production. One of the reasons could be the shortage of human resources needed to repack these items for online consumption. Another – the traditional way of news production meant to be delivered to consumer's living-room via TV screen with anchor commentary and sound on.

RQ3: Is it news?

Do news channels offer news on their online platforms or delve into other territories in order to attract the audience? Part of our content-analysis was devoted to finding news items (hard news and soft news) and estimating their ratio in the total volume of our sample.

Overall, as we found out, it is digital news product. However, it varies for each platform. Here again YouTube and Facebook seem to have similar strategies, while Instagram stands aside.

The average share of news, both hard and soft, on YouTube is about 95 percent, for Facebook it is 93 percent. Most of this product consists of hard

news (76 percent for YouTube and 67 percent for Facebook)[10]. As for the remaining items, which we categorized as 'not news', they consisted of commentary, promos, fun animal video or beauty shots of nature, as well as various best/worst lists with no particular news tag.

With Instagram things are different. The ratio of news is the lowest here – 83 percent, and the amount of 'not news' is the highest. We can also note that the amount of hard news and soft news is almost even, making Instagram the leading platform in terms of soft news (*Table 8*).

Table 8

News vs not news
(ratio to the total number of posts in the sample, %)

Platform	Hard news	Soft news	Not news
YouTube	76	19	5
Facebook	67	26	7
Instagram	44	39	17

Here are some of the examples of Instagram posts we put in the 'not news' category: squirrel is playing with a kitten (BBC News, April 26th), Oscar ceremony coverage promo (Al Jazeera, February 12th), viral video of a gorilla standing like a human (CGTN, April 26th), promo of guest interview (France 24, February 12th), etc.

Overall, though it is quite obvious that most of the product global news channels are offering online falls into the news category. While YouTube and Facebook prove to be the destinations mostly for hard news, Instagram is offering more features, human stories and various soft news than other platforms. It also has a lot more items that we could not place in any of the news categories.

Conclusions

To sum up, we can state that our hypothesis was mostly verified, as there is no universal strategy that global news channels are using to sell their product. However, the fact that they are not blindly dubbing air shows to YouTube, Facebook and Instagram and are trying different approaches to supply content to their digital platforms leads us to argue that they are in the game to gain online audience.

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[10] In categorizing hard and soft news we followed the approaches of E. J. Whetmore, as well as Y. Limor and R. Mann, reviewed by Sam N. Lehman-Wilsig & Michal Seletzky (2010).

While some of the practices are still the result of trial and error, there are some accepted 'missions' for each digital platform: YouTube is being used by the channels mostly as on-demand, online TV screen (which mainly duplicates segments taken from air), Facebook – as wire agency to drive traffic to the channels' sites, and Instagram so far for most channels is the unconquered territory, seen as the place for mostly soft news items. While YouTube remains video-only platform, Facebook is shifting away from the moving image essence of television product towards print format of still images and text. Almost 80 percent of its content is text-based, and it offers little to none original video content.

Instagram stands out as the only platform which does not duplicate any of the air programming and offers the most original content in different formats. Video content here is usually targeted for online audience: it tells the story in fonts, showcases only the best emotional moments in available footage, presents strong soundbites and appealing photos. It is obvious though that channels are still learning to communicate with the viewer on this platform, as the quality of footage in some cases looks amateurish.

Another reason to believe that Instagram is still a trial territory for the global news channels is the fact that video posts get high audience reaction while making up only 20 percent of the content. The diversity of topics here leads us to suggest that the channels are not fully understanding their aims and scope with this social network.

Our research shows that Instagram, currently underused and underestimated, has the potential to attract the most active audience. Furthermore, a quick check of Instagram subscriber rates in January 2020 shows (on average) 30 percent growth. Same check of Facebook subscriber rates growth showed growth under 6 percent.

The findings show that most of the product offered on digital platforms is still news, with strong prevalence of hard news on YouTube and Facebook and mild on Instagram. However, when it comes to video, TV-powerhouses surprisingly show either lack of quality (as in CGTN's live streams) or lack of understanding of how video is consumed online (less than half of posts are fully adapted for online viewing and use special production techniques). Although, we can suggest that this can be partly due to lack of financial or human resources.

These results should be viewed as the start of a wider research effort, involving other significant platforms and in-depth analysis of audience preferences.

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https://www.youtube.com/user/france24

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