

WhatsApp and Telegram applied to journalism practice: A constant challenge for media

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Instant messaging applications like WhatsApp and Telegram have become indispensable tools for proximal communication with audiences in today's mobile society (Schwarz & Rupp, 2016). The attentive gaze directed by the media at audience habits has justified their incorporation (Westlund, 2013) and/or influence in journalistic routines, where they are employed as punctual or complementary solutions for both internal and external communication (Dodds, 2019).

Our research employs a multiple approach in order to analyze the impact of both platforms in Spanish newsrooms (17) from 2017 to 2022. By means of a mixed methodology data was collected and analyzed on the use of these applications in political contexts (general elections), crisis situations (terrorist attack) and the fight against disinformation. At the same time, a longitudinal study based on interviews was made to determine the evolution of the penetration of these resources at the journalistic level and the perception of their utility. The research was complemented by an analysis of social media to discover how users perceived the interruption of the WhatsApp service in 2021. This audience perspective complements the professional view.

The results confirm an unstable situation, especially after the change of the terms of use, where the journalistic use of the Meta platform for communicating with the audience has fallen, in contrast with the growth experienced by Telegram. This practice differs from their internal application, which is more widespread in the case of WhatsApp, facilitating the heterogeneity of content by obtaining new ideas for news stories, accessing sources and helping in fact-checking tasks. With respect to news production in the format of breaking news alerts, it was observed that on both platforms the media replicate traditional styles and forms, undervaluing their multimedia potential. Finally, we propose a decalogue of good practices in the use of instant messaging apps in order to guide the mass media to implement their correct integration into daily routines.

Key Words

instant messaging apps, journalism practice, mobile journalism, platform, professional routines