

Profile of digital slow journalism audiences in Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico

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Abstract

The aim of this work is to study slow journalism audiences, with a particular interest in Latin America, specifically Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico. Five case studies were carried out, covering *Anfibia* (Argentina), *Arcadia* (Colombia), *Gatopardo* (Mexico), *La silla vacía* (Colombia), and *Letras libres* (Mexico), along with a Delphi study (double round with 27 participants) and a structured questionnaire (of 1,500 people between the ages of 18 and 65 years). The results indicate that 75% of the surveyed population obtain their information from all kinds of digital media, among whom 84% use social media for this purpose. Slow journalism is still mainly unknown to a large fraction (17%) of the population, although once given its definition and some named examples, 40% of those surveyed claimed to have read the slow press at some time. Quality is the main reason for its consumption (62%), followed by searching for specific subjects (46%), especially for young people (65%) and in Colombia (52%). Experts in slow journalism agree that the key to consolidating an audience involves listening to and interacting with its members, together with their active participation in the media.

Keywords

Audience studies; Digital audience; Journalism; Slow journalism; Digital journalism; Digital media; Printed media; Digital press; Slow reader; *Anfibia*; *Arcadia*; *Gatopardo*; *La silla vacía*; *Letras libres*; Latin America.

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1. Introduction

Slow journalism is a journalistic practice that is unhurried, offering its readers context and in-depth analysis of the information provided. It represents an alternative to traditional, rapidly consumed journalism and is in direct opposition to *fake news*. According to **Le-Masurier** (2016), slow journalism provides a critique of fast news through its own processes and methods. Currently, different terms are used to refer to this kind of journalism, including *long-form journalism*, *literary journalism*, *narrative journalism*, and *new journalism*. However, there is no clear differentiation between or acceptance of these concepts (**Giles; Roberts**, 2014; **Van-Krieken**, 2019), and certain studies reveal a need to specify a definition to facilitate future empirical research (**Van-Krieken; Sanders**, 2021). However, various research studies that have used such terms highlight the similar characteristics and functions of this journalistic genre: directed at society, participative, high quality, in-depth information, independence, narrative style, and providing the time and distance needed for analysis (**Neveu**, 2016, pp. 448-460; **Ball**, 2016; **Belt; South**, 2015; **Lassila-Merisalo**, 2014). The connection or similarity among this wide range of concepts is thus a reality that should be considered.

It is also worth pointing out the ongoing academic debate regarding when and where this type of journalism was born. While some authors suggest that the historical roots of *slow journalism* can be found in the New Journalism of the 1960s (**Wolfe; Johnson**, 1973), others point out that its origins and roots in Spanish can be found even earlier (in both Spain and Latin America), in the second half of the nineteenth century (**Chillón**, 2014; **Rodríguez-Rodríguez; Albalad-Aiguabella**, 2012, pp. 293-294), albeit with different experiences and results (**Palau-Sempio; Cuartero-Naranjo**, 2018). Writers contributing to this journalistic practice include Octavio Paz, Tomás Eloy Martínez, Alma Guillermoprieto, Mariah Pabón, Alberto Salcedo, Miguel Otero, Truman Capote, Gay Talese, Tom Wolfe, and Norman Mailer, among others. However, Gabriel García Márquez and his foundation (created in 1994) played the most important role in the consolidation of this type of journalism, especially in the Latin American countries analyzed herein. Indeed,

“[i]t is inconceivable to consider the strength of superior journalistic prose without the existence of FNPI (Fundación Gabriel García Márquez para el Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano), the UN of old-new Hispanic journalism” (**Rodríguez-Rodríguez; Albalad-Aiguabella**, 2012, pp. 295-296).

These writers and journalists practiced their profession in different forms but always with the same end: to tell stories with a more creative and literary language that allowed a description of the scenes, atmosphere, and emotions of the protagonists.

Regarding the geographic region studied here, **Hoyos** (2009) explains that this style developed primarily with the successful Latin American feature article in the period 1960–1980, followed by the interview, before reaching its peak in the modern-day news report. News reports enable different overlapping viewpoints, semantic activity of the reader, a space–time rupture in the narrative, and lexical richness, among other features. Thus, journalists who promote slow journalism in Latin America today draw on the work of that movement, leading to its consideration as a variant (**Puerta**, 2011). There is currently talk of a “new Latin American feature article” as “heir” to the previous one (**Rosique-Cedillo; Barranquero-Carretero**, 2015, pp. 454), a rising phenomenon (**Bonano**, 2014) that helps to explain complex stories and that is published in both printed and digital form (**Sierra-Caballero; López-Hidalgo**, 2016). Its aim is to promote a formal renovation of the novel (**López-Hidalgo**, 2018).

Colombia and Argentina stand out as two of the territories with the most slow media within Latin America. Some of these are *Gatopardo* (paper and digital), *La silla vacía* (native digital), *Anfibia* (local digital), and *Letras libres* (paper and digital). The following common characteristics can be highlighted in Latin American slow journalism: a digital strategy (due to the high cost of paper publication), an innovative design adapted to consumption on small electronic devices, the participation of independent (freelance) journalists, a synergy with similar slow projects, and stories that are relevant to a minority but active audience.

However, while some have faith in this “segmented offering” that “contributes to audience loyalty” (**Rosique-Cedillo; Barranquero-Carretero**, 2015, p. 460), few studies have addressed the opinions of its reader community in Latin America (**Gurrutxaga-Rekondo; Álvarez-Berastegi; Agirre-Maiora**, 2021; **Agirre-Maiora; Murua-Uria; Zabalondo-Loidi**, 2020). For example, what do readers demand of them? What is the relationship between the media outlet and its audience? How do they connect with it? Have studies been carried out to define their audiences? Faced with this sparsity of information, it is difficult to determine the current state and future challenges of slow journalism, both in general as well as in Latin America in particular.

1.1. Slow journalism and the digital audience

Slow journalism uses genres that have been abandoned by fast journalism (**Herrscher**, 2012; **Boynton**, 2005; **Greenberg**, 2007), including in-depth or investigative reports, feature articles or essay, and long interviews. The focus is placed on stories and their protagonists in an attempt to reflect the environment, atmosphere, opinions, and sentiments of their protagonists. Such stories invite the reader to pause and reflect, rather than merely providing entertainment. Slow journalism is also considered to represent cultural resistance or a counterhegemonic movement (**Rauch**, 2011; **Peñafiel-Saiz; Zabalondo; Aiestaran**, 2020). New and interesting ways of practicing slow journalism are now emerging, especially in the digital field (**Jacobsons; Marino; Gutsche**, 2016). However, the inclusion of multimedia content in such pieces re-

mains weak (**Zabalondo; Aiestaran; Peñafiel-Saiz, 2021; Sabaté, 2020; Sabaté-Gauxachs; Micó-Sanz; Díez-Bosch, 2019**), and slow media companies have not found it easy to consolidate their business models (**Dowling, 2016; Agirre-Maiora; Murua-Uria; Zabalondo-Loidi, 2020**).

Consumer habits have changed drastically during the last decade, and it has become increasingly more difficult to attract and retain audience attention (**Siapera, 2015**), especially among the younger population. At the same time, (traditional and digital) journalism has been submerged in a general crisis for over a decade (International Federation of Journalists, 2020), resulting in a journalistic product with reduced quality (**Bauer et al., 2013**).

Faced with this situation, one can ask whether we really need more media outlets, or more journalistic quality? According to **Ramírez-De-la-Piscina et al. (2015)**,

“quality journalism must be the main concern, the guide and the ultimate goal” of the profession” (p. 294).

In this sense, slow media outlets play a fundamental role, since they offer high-quality journalism, avoiding fast or headline reading to promote pause, explanation, reflection, the construction of pragmatic audiences, and action aimed at change or the eradication of social inequality (**Barranquero-Carretero, 2013; Benaissa-Pedriza, 2017**). However, slow journalism practice requires time, as well as higher production costs to investigate and offer alternative information. It is only recently that the perspective and role of the audience in the future of digital journalism has started to be taken seriously, along with

“the implications of their decisions” in the creation of “democratic citizens” (**Schröder, 2019, p. 7**).

One research gap in the academic field is to investigate whether the audience shares the perception that digital slow journalism functions as an alternative to headline or fast journalism, offers high-quality information, and is adapted to the demands and expectations of the digital generation (**Drok; Hermans, 2015**). According to the results, the young audience believes that news should be

“available anytime, anywhere and free of charge” (p. 5).

Therefore, the researchers concluded that slow readers are at the same time fast, and it is not known whether their interest in slow journalism is related to a specific subject. It was also discovered that a considerable proportion of the analyzed population would preferably choose a type of journalism that is

“more investigative, inclusive, co-operative and constructive” (**Drok; Hermans, 2015, p. 5**).

In this research, the (physical and digital) audience is first considered to be a fundamental source of information about journalistic practice in general (**Benton, 2020**) and slow journalism in particular, in order to determine their needs and propose solutions that improve and guarantee a sustainable future for digital slow journalism. Secondly, considering the lack of studies about the slow audience in Latin America (**Meléndez-Yúdice, 2016; Martínez; Zuluaga, 2016; Zuluaga-Trujillo; Gómez-Montero, 2019**) and considering the trajectory and success of narrative journalism in this region (**Rosique-Cedillo; Barranquero-Carretero, 2015; Gurrutxaga-Rekondo; Álvarez-Berastegi; Agirre-Maiora, 2021**), this work focuses on three countries: Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico. More precisely, it aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the target audience of the analyzed slow media, and what perception do these media entities have of their audience? What strategies have they developed to consolidate their reader community?

RQ2: How do experts define the reader of slow journalism?

RQ3: What are the general news-reading habits and routines of the analyzed population? What level of knowledge does the analyzed population have of slow journalism, and what is their perception of it?

2. Methodology

The data collection techniques used were case studies (in-depth interviews and nonparticipant direct observation), a Delphi study, and a structured questionnaire. This three-pronged methodology enabled greater control over quality during the research process.

It is worth highlighting that, in a short period of time, various studies into this journalistic current have been carried out. Considering that the most important ability in state-of-the-art communication research is the development of methodological skills independent of the research topic, one should consider both completed works that have appeared as well as those currently emerging when attempting to construct theories and practices in the area of slow journalism from different research viewpoints.

Albalad-Aiguabella (2015, p. 11) analyzed the case of *longform.org* and is

“a representative example of how the online news media goes beyond the sensationalist headline and a few paragraphs.”

This work was based on a mixed methodology, applying website content analysis to obtain data, as well as an in-depth interview with its founder. The conclusions state that narrative journalism in English is currently enjoying a moment of

splendor on the digital continent, with an audience eager to consume well-told stories, that the digital format is no obstacle to reading at length, and that the use of technology as a reading medium is increasing relentlessly.

On the other hand, **Barranquero and Jaurrieta** (2016) carried out a case study of *Jot Down*, a Spanish startup magazine, based on interviews with its directors and online interviews with its contributors. Their conclusions address the problems and sustainability of this business model and its financing. Barranquero and Jaurrieta state that, in less than 5 years, Spanish journalism has managed to put into practice a new way of producing information and that

“in specialising in specific topic areas, each publication has been able to provide a more meticulous and committed coverage of current problems and, in the end, this shows the viability of the slow journalism philosophy” (2016, p. 13).

In work about some experiences of slow journalism in Latin America, **Rosique and Barranquero** (2015) use, among other techniques, direct observations and in-depth interviews to conclude that there is not a single, closed, and definitive model of slow journalism initiatives in the Spanish or Latin American digital field.

Benaissa-Pedriza (2017), author of the essay entitled “Slow journalism in the infoxication era,” compiles the results of exploratory research based on qualitative and direct observation methodologies. The subjective reflection of that study considers informed and documented opinions on the basis of an unstructured case study, the results of scientific research carried out by experts, and the reading of journalistic articles that reflect the standpoints of information professionals about the subject. That case study was carried out in three phases, including the selection of cases relevant to the research topic, their analysis, and a subsequent interpretation/discussion. The sources consulted were primary in nature, comprising a selective sample of information published in the media during the months prior to the writing of the essay. The sources included articles, news items, reports, and interviews, published both digitally and in print. The sample selection criteria were based on the relevance of the subject matter, topical media, and their informative function.

The work entitled “*El periodismo slow digital de Jot Down y Gatopardo*” [“The digital slow journalism of *Jot Down* and *Gatopardo*”] (**Sabaté-Gauxachs; Micó-Sanz; Díez-Bosch**, 2018) also studies content, techniques, and formats, and examines how journalism centered in essence on print is also enjoying a consolidated presence and audience in the digital world. The work aims to investigate the situation and recognition of journalists in this kind of media, as well as their routines, processes, and working conditions, using a methodology based on in-depth interviews, content analysis, nonparticipative observation, and a review of relevant literature. The main conclusions show that, given the current situation facing journalism and the media, prioritizing quality over immediacy and hybridizing tradition with innovation could be key to guaranteeing its future.

Palau-Sampio, in one of her research works in the area of Spanish and Latin American narrative journalism (**Palau-Sampio; Cuartero-Naranjo**, 2018), states that there has been an important growth of narrative journalism in Latin America, in light of the boom in Latin American feature articles, and to a lesser extent in the Spanish ambit, with a particular impulse being provided by specialized publishers. That study draws on in-depth interviews with prominent representatives from narrative journalism in Spain, Argentina, and Chile, with the aim of discovering the contrasting points of view, subject matter, influences, and publications among Spanish and Latin American journalists.

2.1. Case studies

A bibliographical review of the *Scopus* database guided the research team in the initial selection of the news media analyzed herein, applying the key words “*slow journalism*”, “*periodismo reposado*”, “*periodismo narrativo*”, “*periodismo de investigación*”, “*periodismo de lenta cocción*” or “*slow media*” in the *Google* platform. Firstly, after reading the extant relevant literature, a preselection was carried out. Subsequently, from among the 30 magazines most often mentioned in the articles, the top 10 digital narrative news media in Spanish were selected using the following criteria: up-to-date content, presence of context in the published texts (about facts and/or protagonists), presence of narrative texts, plurality of genres used (features, interviews, reports, profiles, critiques, essays, opinions, etc.), level of reference and/or influence of the website, whether in its own country or in terms of the subject matter (confirmed audience, followers on social media, etc.), and lastly, the quality of the web design. To select the media entities, each of these criteria was given a score between 0 and 5. Finally, the research team judged that the sample reflected a broad balance in terms of both geography and subject matter. The news media from the Latin American geographical area selected in this way were *Letras libres* (Mexico), *Arcadia* (Colombia), *Anfibia* (Argentina), *La silla vacía* (Colombia), and *Gatopardo* (Mexico).

The strategy applied in the case studies was to carry out a heuristic and empirical investigation using multiple variables, sources of knowledge, and information. As pointed out by **Yin** (1992), the aim of the case study is to investigate a specific phenomenon within its real-life

“The analysed publications arise from different circumstances, but are all motivated by the search for news quality, by their innovative role in the way of telling stories and by confronting the profound crisis in journalism affecting both the media and the work situation of many journalists”

context. Thus, within the framework of the five case studies, 12 in-depth interviews were carried out with those responsible for these slow media, both journalistically and economically, along with those in charge of new technology (social media). The people interviewed for each of the media entities were: Sara Malagón (General Editor of the magazine), Camilo Jiménez (magazine Director and Head of Finance), and Felipe Sánchez (Digital Editor, Technological and Social Media Director) from *Arcadia*; Juanita León (Director of the magazine and Head of Content) and Pablo Isaza (magazine Sales Coordinator and Head of Finance) from *La silla vacía*; Cristian Alarcón (Journalistic Director and Head of Content), Ana Sol García Dinerstein (Executive Producer and Head of Finance), and Tomás Pérez Vizzón (Digital Editor, Technological and Social Media Director) from *Anfibia*; Eduardo Huchin (magazine Editor), Leticia Gaona (Administrative Director and Head of Finance), and Pablo Majluf (Journalist, Technological and Social Media Director) from *Letras libres*; and Felipe Restrepo (magazine Director) from *Gatopardo*.

“ Narrative journalism is mainly valued because it offers critique, reflection, and capacity for analysis ”

All interviews were carried out face-to-face and recorded for later analysis. Furthermore, the investigation was completed with an analysis of the content of the digital magazines and nonparticipant observation of each of the selected media. It is worth highlighting that all the data obtained during 2018 were verified and updated in the autumn of 2020.

2.2. Delphi study

The Delphi panel is prospective in nature and is used to compile the consensual opinion of a group of experts about a specific subject. It is useful for research diagnostics, forecasts, guiding future activities or research, or generating agreement about emerging topics (Linstone; Turoff, 2002). Twenty-five international professionals and academics who were experts in slow journalism (from Australia, Europe, North America, and South America) participated in the Delphi panel. Ten qualitative questions were drawn up, focused on answering the research questions of the project during two consecutive rounds. Data collection from the first round began in May 2018 via the *Survey Monkey* platform. The results were summarized and compiled into a report that formed the basis of the questions in the second round. The second round validated the findings of the first round, then the opinions of the experts were organized into a measurable format to determine the consensus achieved. Therefore, the second questionnaire (completed in June 2019) included the same ten open questions as the first, but this time each was accompanied by various key results, together with a Likert scale that assessed the degree of consensus among the experts. Before answering the second and final questionnaire, the participants were told to read the report from the first round. The final panel of experts ($n = 25$) was made up of 48% women and 52% men in the following age groups: 30–39 years (35.71%), 40–49 years (39.28%), and 50 years or above (25%).

2.3. Questionnaires

The questionnaires used in this study combined a descriptive and analytical focus. The questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data about the readers of printed and slow journalism in Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico. The surveys were carried out in 2019 by a company specialized in audience measurement, contracted for this purpose. Firstly, a list of preestablished questions was drawn up to be put to the research subjects via the Internet. Secondly, during the validation phase, this draft was shaped and completed with the guidance of experienced professionals from the company in charge of disseminating the instrument and compiling the data. The distribution of the questionnaires and the data compilation were carried out in Spanish.

The confidence interval was 95%, and the error margin for computation of the answers was 2.53%. The questionnaire was completed anonymously by 1,500 subjects between the ages of 18 and 65 years, resident in Argentina ($N = 500$), Colombia ($N = 500$), or Mexico ($N = 500$), with access to the Internet. The final sample was made up of 48% males, 47% females, and 5% who considered themselves nonbinary, distributed among the following age groups: 18–34 years (47%), 35–49 years (26%), and 50–65 years (27%). According to the data published by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (Indec, National Institute of Statistics and Census)* in Argentina (2019), the *Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda* (National Census of Population and Housing) in Colombia, and the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (Inegi, National Institute of Statistics and Geography)* in Mexico, the total universe of the selected population (subjects between the ages of 18 and 65 years with Internet access) comprises 107,898,786 prospects from the three countries combined. The 1,500 completed questionnaires thus represent an acceptable number for an analysis of differences between countries. Given that it is not possible to study the whole population, the obtained data are proportionally supported by a sample in accordance with the variables (age, gender, type of residential area, etc.) of the population they come from. Therefore, the generalization of the results of this study should be understood as a descriptive process that allows us to compare different variables and formulate new hypotheses (Rothman *et al.*, 2013).

The questionnaire was made up of 40 semistructured questions, of which 3 were open, 9 were multiple choice (including 2 filter questions), and 28 were closed. The questionnaire was structured into four blocks:

- (1) General news-reading habits and routines;
- (2) Perception, knowledge, and habits of readers of slow journalism in Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico;
- (3) General questions;
- (4) Sociodemographic data.

3. Results

3.1. Case studies

During the last two decades, mainly in Latin America and Europe, there has been an exploration of a narrative journalism that uses literary techniques, has a long format and creative style, is new, and is of good quality. This has led to interest in discovering the perspective of the audience of certain reference magazines that incorporate such slow journalism, viz. *Arcadia* (Colombia), *La silla vacía* (Colombia), *Gatopardo* (Mexico), *Letras libres* (Mexico), and *Anfibia* (Argentina), in their digital versions.

Arcadia was a different, adventurous cultural magazine whose aim was to reach a varied, young audience through the slow philosophy, taking advantage of the resources of the major communication group *Semana* under whose auspices it was created. In the words of Camilo Jiménez, director of the magazine from 2018 to 2020,

“the magazine covers culture in its widest, freshest and most pioneering with a quality design.”

Arcadia stopped publishing in February 2020.

La silla vacía is an informative and interactive media for people interested in Colombian current affairs. It came into being in 2009 as an initiative of its current director and main shareholder, Juanita León. She says that

“the aim of *La silla vacía* is not to report the news but to look at what is behind the news, and it is becoming a laboratory of journalism for the future, which will allow it to continue defending its independence as a mark of identity.”

La silla vacía is a digital-native media whose content can be accessed free of charge.

The magazine *Gatopardo* began in 2000 in Colombia within the media group *Publicaciones Semana*. It was set up as a magazine dedicated mainly to narrative journalism. According to Felipe Restrepo, director of the magazine between 2014 and 2019,

“the editors became aware of the large number of Latin American writers who were rethinking their profession of telling stories and narrating regional reality through their texts. The magazine also wanted to recuperate the tradition of the North American weeklies in the style of *Vanity Fair* and *New Yorker*.”

It is a product with a luxurious image and design. It usually offers detailed, time-rich investigative reports about diverse subjects, particularly politics or the film industry. Its business model is based on advertising. In an interview carried out in July 2018, its director, Felipe Restrepo, indicated that

“This magazine grew considerably in Colombia and so it soon separated from the group *Semana* and has been independent since then; that is, it doesn't belong to a large media group with political or economic interests.”

It is currently produced in Mexico City.

Letras libres is a monthly magazine created in 1999. It has an international distribution and is currently undergoing a renovation without losing sight of long-format journalism. It is the successor of the magazine *Vuelta*, founded by Octavio Paz in 1976, with which prestigious Latin American writers from the 1970s and 1980s collaborated. *Letras libres* produces two editions: one in Mexico and another in Spain. The magazine's editor, Eduardo Huchín, argues that

“[i]t still has the same editorial line as in the beginning, but seeks to capture a new generation of readers linked to digital platforms and multimedia.”

Anfibia (Argentina) is a digital magazine that cultivates high-quality narrative journalism. On its website, the magazine defines itself as a media offering feature articles, essays, and nonfiction stories with the rigor of investigative journalism and literary tools. Cristian Alarcón, Journalistic Director and Head of Content at the magazine, explains that

“[i]t has always stood out for the special attention paid to its texts, becoming a reference of the progressive vanguard in Argentina, being especially popular among young women in university fields.”

All of its content is free of charge, and the most prominent genres are feature articles and essays.

3.2. Profiling slow audiences

The following results were obtained from the qualitative analysis of the interviews carried out by the research team in 2018 and updated in 2021.

***Anfibia* (Argentina)**

The online version of *Anfibia* is very visual and catches the reader's attention right from the start. The genre that is currently most demanded by its audience is the narrative essay. Two features of central importance to the *Anfibia* project are journalism workshops and performance journalism (investigative journalism that takes the form of street performance, straddling the fields of journalism and art, story, and action). The predominant audience of *Anfibia* is female, young, and at university. According to data

“The Latin American audience of digital slow media is unaware of the term slow journalism. Specifically, less than a quarter of those surveyed had heard of it”



Anfibia
<https://www.revistaanfibia.com>



provided by the magazine itself and endorsed by *Google Analytics*, 56.71% are women and 69.61% of the audience is in the 18–44-year age group. The digital audience has grown, albeit with some fluctuations during recent years. In 2019, the numbers fell to 165,435, while in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic provoked a spectacular increase, as also seen for the vast majority of digital news media around the world, with 265,855 individual users per month. *Anfibia* is considered to be an elite magazine aimed at the political, social, economic, and academic field.

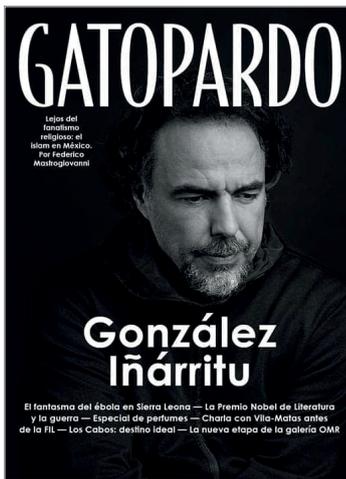
Arcadia (Colombia)

In a search for its own identity, the digital edition of *Arcadia* seeks to take advantage of tools that allow audience interaction. Its digital versions furnish data about how each content item works and the response elicited among readers. In addition to the direct interaction route, another channel to understand the audience is the information provided by social media. Information about audience profiles that comes from social media membership enables employees to better understand the age, tastes, and even ideological profiles of the audience. A priori, this enables the design of content that is more appropriate for such profiles.

In 2018, *Arcadia's* income from subscriptions was only 10% of the total. A key decision to increase subscriptions and reduce its dependence on advertising was to establish a paywall and close the website that had previously been free of charge. In 2020, each news piece offered only one paragraph free of charge, with three or four complete content items visible.



Arcadia
<https://www.semana.com/cultura>



Gatopardo
<https://gatopardo.com>

La silla vacía (Colombia)

This magazine has undergone something of a transformation since its beginnings. Originally a project offering interactive games related to politics, it was soon realized that its audience wanted in-depth, investigative journalism, which led to a more sober design of the magazine, while its narrative evolved towards information designed for mobile devices. In fact, 60% of its audience reads the content on a smartphone. It is a highly visual magazine, offering graphical accounts based on data and with a large podcast presence, which is of great interest to young people. This media outlet opts for subjects related to the consequences of the peace process in Colombia, as well as gender and environmental issues.

La silla vacía has also incorporated a series of regional editions, a political decision in line with the current historical moment in Colombia. The spirit of the magazine includes the aim of reaching a wider audience throughout the country beyond the capital Bogota, where 90% of its readers were originally located. This figure has now reached 50%, with the rest being distributed throughout different regions. Another of the strengths highlighted by its director is the concept of “community” that this media has generated, which was a feature since its creation.

Gatopardo (Mexico)

Gatopardo was not created with a specific audience in mind. Rather, the stories are constructed and published for a wide audience, including both experts and those who do not know anything about the subject. Its audience profile is a well-traveled, educated person with experience of the most exclusive pleasures and a plural, original, and independent vision. It is worth noting that 65% of its readers are men, which may explain its masculine design. The average age of its readers is 35 years. It is situated among the classical luxury and style magazines that are irreverent and intellectual. Its audience tends to be within the high or upper-middle socioeconomic range, for whom sophisticated and personalized experiences are designed (*Similarweb*, 2020).

The digital version of *Gatopardo* received over 198,000 visits in the second half of 2020, half of which were from Mexico, 12% from Spain, and the rest from other Latin American countries. The remaining 15% came from social media (*Similarweb*, 2020).

Letras libres (Mexico)

According to a survey carried out in 2020 among the readers of *Letras libres*, a large fraction (46%) fall within the 46–54-year age range, followed by 22% between the ages of 35 and 44 years, and 20% from 25 to 34 years. In terms of formal education, 59% of the readers of *Letras libres* claim to have a university degree, while 36% hold a postgraduate qualification. They are readers who are interested in the subjects covered by the magazine and are linked to the following sectors of the population: news and the media, literature, and education. In November 2020, according to *Similarweb*, the website received 770,000 visits, with 21% from Mexico, 10.9% from Spain, and 9.84% from Colombia.



Letras libres
<https://letraslibres.com>

3.3. Key results of the Delphi study on slow journalism

To provide a clearer and more global picture, the Delphi technique was applied to discover the classic profile of the reader of this kind of content and news media. Academic experts and information professionals were asked whether they thought there were significant differences between these readers and those of traditional media, whether printed or audiovisual, and what level of importance they gave to interactivity between the readers and producers of this type of digital magazine.

The results obtained do not reveal a well-defined profile to categorize readers of slow journalism. However, they do agree that it is a minority audience with a particular capacity to establish itself as a user community. However, some experts consider that readers of narrative journalism differ from those of standard journalism, since their profile reflects a high level of formal education, they are more committed to social issues, and moreover they are much more demanding in terms of content than readers of traditional media.

One can thus state that such readers are more interested in quality than in fast consumption of news, that is, a reader who is more cultured, with greater sensitivity and curiosity, along with an active cultural conscience, one who has time to read and analyze the nuances and depth of the stories.

Regarding interaction, maintaining feedback with the reader is very important for these news media. It helps to establish a conversation with the audience and is useful for creating a community, improving results, and keeping projects open to the public. The higher the intellectual level of the reader, the greater the interest in this kind of journalism, given that

“it isn’t a journalism for the majority” (participant 16).

Other participants refer to a plurality of audience rather than one type of reader, since

“a large part of the readership comes from the traditional media with interest in a particular subject, a greater depth or a style” (participant 3).

Similarly, some commented that, in general, we are faced with

“an audience that is not up to a journalism of more than 5,000 words or two minutes on the same page” (participant 22).

Some of the surveyed experts underlined the concept of “community”:

“Looking after the reader community is key to survival” (participant 25).

Others highlighted that media that opt for slow journalism must capitalize on this implication

“in order to maintain a constant communication with the audience—either in person or electronically—that goes back to ideas, input and contributions that help to improve the publication” (participant 10).

3.4. Digital press reading habits in Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico

3.4.1. Use and consumption of the media in general

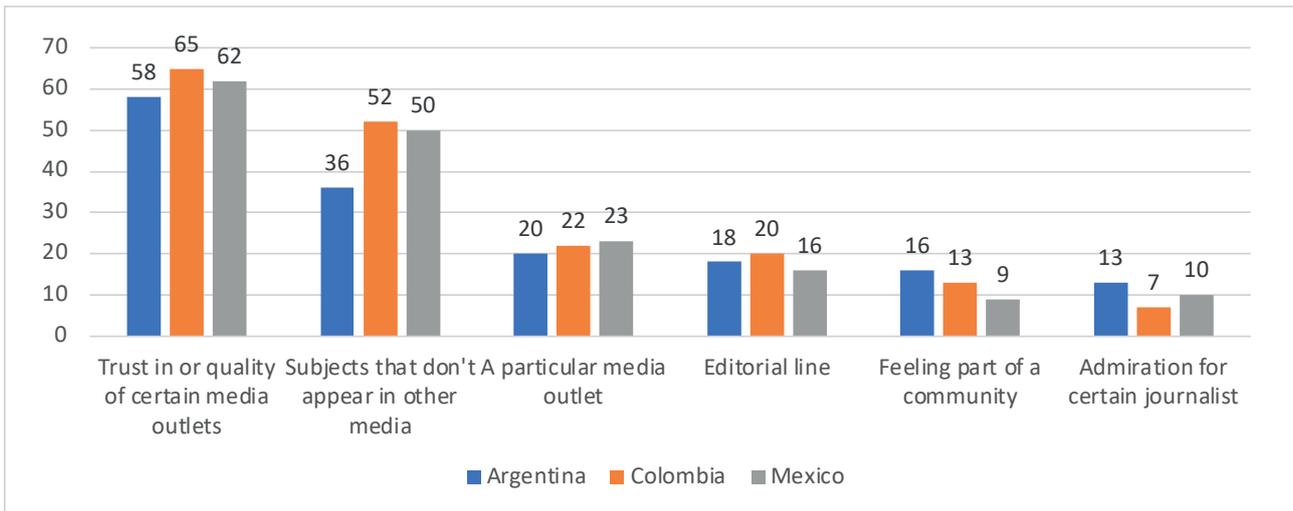
The study analyzed the perception of those surveyed concerning the habits of readers of the digital press in Latin America. Some 84% of the surveyed population in Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico habitually use social media to obtain information about current events. To a slightly lesser extent, they access the digital press (75%) and television (72%) to stay informed. The radio is consumed habitually as a news source by almost half of those surveyed (49%), and the printed press by less than a quarter of the studied population (23%).

Significant differences can be seen by gender, age, type of residential area, and level of education. The digital press is the most important information medium for 38% of men, while social media is the priority for 45% of women. The 18–34-year age group obtains information mainly via social media (57%, with as many as 93% in this age range using it habitually), while a minority of the 50–65-year age range prioritize this medium. Consumption of radio and the printed press drops among the youngest age group. In large cities with over a million inhabitants, more information is consumed in general and particularly via the press (both printed and digital) and the radio than in smaller population centers. The digital press is significantly more of a priority for people with postgraduate university qualifications. Television stands out as a priority medium for 38% of those with only a compulsory education level, in a larger proportion than for the rest of the population, followed by social media (30%), the digital press (24%), radio (7%), and the printed press (2%).

Most of those who obtain their information from the digital press do so because it is easy, comfortable, and quick to access (50%).

Among those who prioritize the printed press, almost a third do so out of habit. Radio is prioritized because it allows other activities to be carried out at the same time (29%), or out of habit (27%).

Graph 1 shows that trust in, or the quality of, the media outlet is the main reason for its consumption (62%); this occurs to a greater extent among young people (65%). Secondly, consumers seek specific subjects (46%), which happens to a greater degree in Colombia (52%) and Mexico (50%), and among those under the age of 35 years (50%).



Graph 1. What do you look for in the media? (multiple answers) (percentages)

Considering that the number of people who have various subscriptions is much lower than those who have some kind of subscription (yes, 28%; no, 72%), we can see that the proportion of people who have had or maintain a subscription to a printed media is 39%, versus 28% for digital media. Colombia stands out in both cases, followed by Mexico (28%) and Argentina (23%), as having the greatest number of subscribers and in the 50–65-year age range (32%). On the other hand, subscriptions to both the print and digital press are related to having a higher level of formal education, living in a larger population center, and being active in the job market.

3.4.2. Perception, knowledge, and consumer habits of readers of the slow press

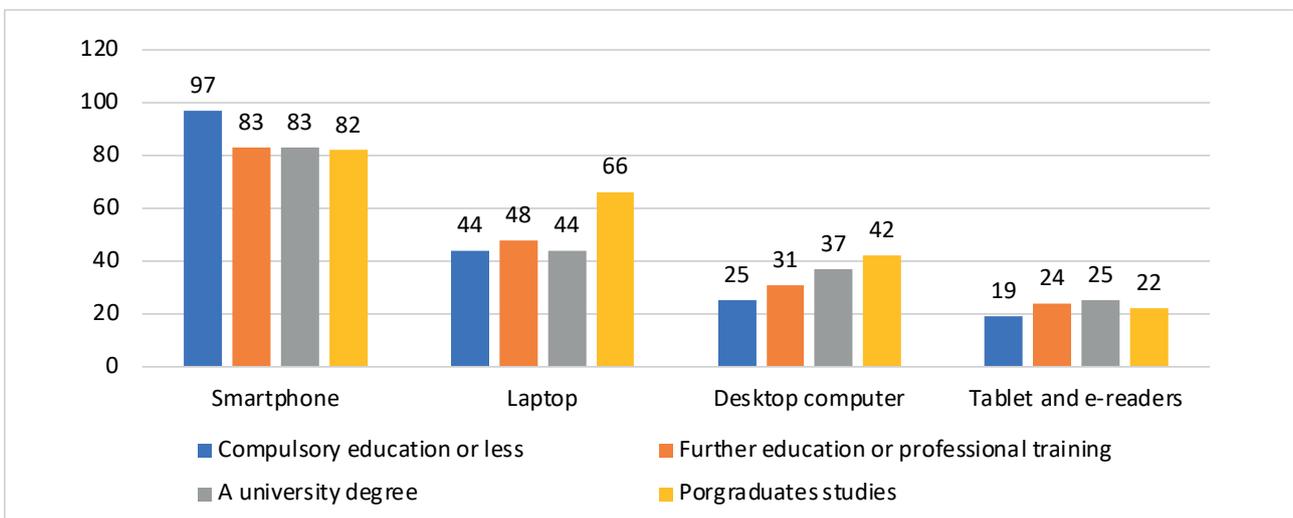
Just 17% of those surveyed had heard of the terms “narrative journalism,” “unhurried journalism,” or “slow journalism,” with a higher probability of having heard of it in Colombia and in the 18–34-year age group.

After being informed of the definition and provided with some examples of brand names, some 40% of those surveyed claim to have read the slow press at some time. This proportion was significantly higher in Colombia, among people with a university degree or postgraduate qualifications, the active population, and those living in large cities with a population of over a million.

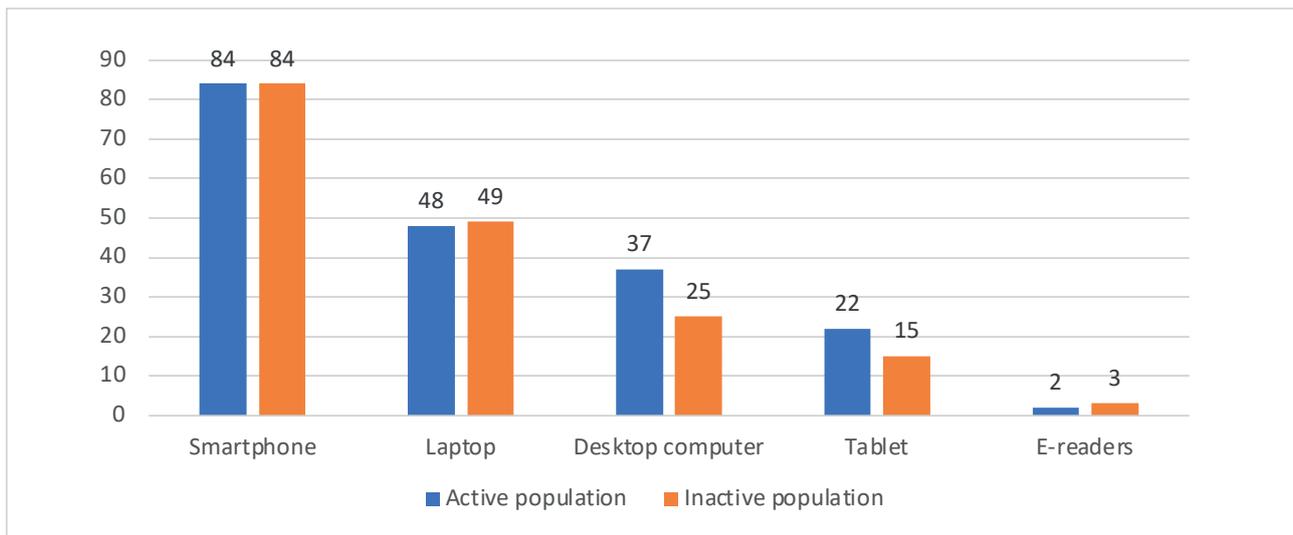
Among those who have read the digital slow press (N = 596), the brands consumed varied by country of residence. The most widely read titles were *La silla vacía* (66%), *Soho* (52%), *Gatopardo* (40%), and *Malpensante* (43%) in Colombia; *Orsai* (31%), *Anfibia* (25%), and *Etiqueta negra* (25%) in Argentina; and *Gatopardo* (38%), *La silla vacía* (31%), and *Contexto* (25%) in Mexico. Other names came up in the study and are included in Table 1.

Table 1. Other slow media read by the surveyed participants (in order of number of times mentioned)

<i>Verdad abierta</i>	<i>Revista crítica</i>	<i>Universo centro</i>
<i>Animal político</i>	<i>Tiempo</i>	<i>Vice</i>
<i>Brozo</i>	<i>Socompa</i>	<i>Gonzalo Oliveros</i>
<i>Cosecha roja</i>	<i>Proceso</i>	<i>Ledudette</i>
<i>El asombrario</i>	<i>El tiempo</i>	<i>Le monde diplomatique</i>
<i>El pasquín</i>	<i>Informe. Digital</i>	<i>La vaca</i>
<i>Malpensante</i>	<i>La pulla</i>	<i>Las2orillas</i>
<i>Milenio</i>	<i>La garganta poderosa</i>	<i>Latfem</i>
<i>Oreja roja</i>	<i>La silla rota</i>	



Graph 2. Devices used by people who read the digital slow press. Multiple answers possible. By qualification level and activity (N = 547) (percentages)



Graph 3. Devices used by the active and inactive population (percentages)

Over half of the people who read the slow press did so at least once a week (52%). A slight majority (53%) spent between 15 and 30 minutes on the slow press each time. Some 42% read it both during the week and at weekends, while 30% did so only at weekends. Most consumers of slow journalism read it in their usual residence (81%), while the younger population used public spaces with free WiFi to a greater extent. As many as 92% used a digital device, mainly a smartphone with data access (84%). The use of this type of device to read digital slow media was proportionally higher among the youngest members of the surveyed groups (92%). A negative relationship was found between age and mobile phone use for reading the slow press. The main medium for accessing this kind of press is social media (73%). This percentage was significantly higher among the younger population (77%). These results can be complemented by the information shown in Graphs 2 and 3.

The majority of consumers of the slow press seek information about politics (57%), culture (54%), and science and technology (51%). Among those with postgraduate university qualifications (74%) and in Colombia (58%), opinions are sought, whereas young people also look for subjects relating to society (50%). More men than women look for information about politics, science and technology, the economy, and sport.

Slow journalism is mainly valued because it offers critical opinion (62%), a capacity for analysis (53%), and a thoughtful attitude (52%). The preferred genres are analysis (31%) and feature articles (25%). In Colombia, feature articles stand out, being preferred by 34%. Some 16% of those who consume slow journalism subscribed to a media outlet of this kind. This proportion is significantly higher among young people (20%). Slow journalism is highly valued among its consumers (4 out of 5). Both its quality and future possibilities are valued equally (3.9), while its quality gets a slightly lower score compared with other, hegemonic media (3.5).

“The majority of slow press consumers seek information about politics (57%), culture (54%), and science and technology (51%)”

4. Conclusions

RQ1

The five magazines analyzed herein have created a space for reflection and debate in their countries, with an international vision, and seek strategies that strengthen their influence and social audience. They are currently working to attract a younger audience, in some cases aiming at a specific sector, as in the case of *Arcadia*, while in others, such as *Gatopardo* and *Letras libres*, the target is a varied and wide audience that is looking for plural and diverse subjects and content.

To achieve this, they take full advantage of tools that allow them to interact with their audience. The main one is the digital version of the media, since these editions provide information about the functioning of each content item and the responses elicited, including the type of information most and least demanded, the format in which it is consumed, reading times, the route used by users to access the pieces, the geographical origin of the readers, etc. This is followed by social media, particularly to understand the reader profile (age, education, ideology, hobbies, etc.). All this enables the analyzed slow media to design their content more precisely and accurately.

The analyzed media are aware that their audience is, in general, a cultured community, with higher education qualifications, an open-minded and independent viewpoint, aged between 35 and 46 years, with the majority living in large towns or cities. Even so, the slow media in this study have a commitment to a wide audience, notwithstanding whether they are experts in a particular subject.

Editorial changes have also been linked to changes in their business models. Content aimed at a younger, more diverse audience goes hand in hand with a search for new niches in the advertising market, looking to build new, fresher, younger projects that are long-lasting, yet always within the framework of the slow philosophy. According to what can be gleaned from the results, the challenge facing these media lies in consolidating a long-term audience, a difficult task in these times of fickle, unfaithful consumerism, an aspect that merits further study.

“ The proportion of people who have had or maintain a subscription to a printed media is 39% against 28% for a digital media. Colombia stands out in both cases, followed by Mexico (28%) and Argentina (23%) as having the greatest number of subscribers and in the 50-65 age bracket (32%) ”

RQ2

In terms of what the experts think about slow media, this kind of journalism is interesting both for a global audience and for others grouped into user communities. The experts agree that slow audiences are more familiar with new technology and maintain an interest in subjects outside the media agenda. However, some experts also warn that this is a minority, niche audience. In this sense, the experts in slow journalism agree that the key to audience consolidation lies in listening to and interacting with readers, along with active audience participation in the media, i.e., taking it into account and taking it seriously. A reciprocal influence between the two actors (emitter and receiver) takes place when (1) the audience feels that they play an active role in the consumption of information (via interactive 3D data graphics, etc.), and (2) the media perceives this. A close relationship (with feedback) between the emitter and consumer of this kind of journalism is thus considered to be fundamental. Slow media must sensitize, raise awareness, and arouse curiosity among their readers, which are essential attributes to achieve a solid product.

RQ3

Regarding news-reading habits and routines, the current results reveal that a large majority of the analyzed population usually turns to social media to find out about current affairs, above all the young population. Furthermore, as also found in various other recent studies, this information is accessed via a digital medium, while the printed media hardly feature for readers in this age range. The most relevant reasons given by those surveyed for using digital media is comfort, along with easy and quick access. In general, this audience looks for specific subjects; i.e., they do not use the digital press without a prior fixed idea. Readers want to expand their knowledge about a specific issue. Therefore, within the analyzed population, it is surprising that the proportion of people who have had or maintain a subscription to the printed media is higher than for the digital media. From this result, one can deduce that the audience still sees digital information as a product that is free of charge, as though its production did not entail a human and economic effort. However, what is not surprising is that all the subscriptions are related to a highly educated audience that is active in the labor market. Therefore, slow media should take this factor into account if it wants to free itself of, or depend less on, private funding.

Unfortunately, the Latin American audience of digital slow media is unaware of the term “slow journalism.” Indeed, less than a quarter of those surveyed had heard of it. In this sense, it is worth pointing out that, when we talk about the success of slow journalism or the importance of its social base, we need to qualify this, since this ignorance reflects a lack of pedagogy by the slow media. From an academic viewpoint, the results of this study also reveal a lack of specific research into the audiences of slow journalism, something that would enable this kind of journalism to establish its own seal of identity within its own audience and others.

Finally, contrary to its philosophy, the time that those surveyed spent reading slow content is between 15 and 30 minutes. These data support the coexistence of two types of audience in the same niche, further complicating the task of consolidating a project with this audience.

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6. Annex

Slow journalism study questionnaire

PRESS READING HABITS

Q1. Which news media do you normally use to get informed about current affairs? (Multiple answers possible).

Digital press	1
Printed press	2
Radio	3
TV	4
Social media	5
Other/s, Which? _____	6

Q2. From the previously selected media, which has priority? (Show only the answers from Q1 and if there is more than 1 answer)

Digital press	1
Printed press	2
Radio	3
TV	4
Social media	5
Other/s	6

Q3. Why is this media your priority?

Q4. How often do you read the printed press?

Q5. How often do you read the digital press?

	Q4	Q5
Every/Almost every day	1	1
3-5 days a week	2	2
1-2 days a week	3	3
1-3 days a month	4	4
Less than once a month	5	5
Almost never/Never	6	6

Q6. What do you look for in the news media you usually read? (Multiple answers possible) ROTATE

A specific media	1
Trust in or quality of certain media	2
Specific subjects that don't appear in other media	3
Feeling part of a community	4
Admiration for the journalists who work there	5
Editorial line	6
Others, Which? _____	7

Q7A. Do you have or have you ever had a subscription to a digital media?

Yes	1
No	2

Q7B. Do you have or have you ever had a subscription to any printed media?

Yes	1
No	2

Q8. Have you heard of narrative/slow journalism?

Yes	1
No	2

NARRATIVE/SLOW JOURNALISM

Narrative or slow journalism refers to a kind of journalism that is disinterested in immediacy and instead produces texts that aid reflection and analysis; they can sometimes use literary figures, but they are not fictional texts, and they offer rigorous, quality information. Such publications are: Frontera D, Jot Down, Orsai, La Marea, Yorokobu, 5W, Contexto, Panenka, Periodista de a pie, Anfibia, Puercoespín, Gatopardo, Malpensante, La Silla Vacía, Coroto, Etiqueta Negra or other publications of a similar style.

Q9. Have you ever read the narrative press?

Yes	1
No	2

Go to Q26

Q10. Have you ever read any of the following narrative press brands? (Rotate answers) (Multiple answers possible).

Frontera D	1
Jot Down	2
La Marea	3
Yorokobu	4
5W	5
Contexto	6
Panenka	7
Periodista de a pie	8
Orsai	9
Anfibia	10
Puercoespín	11
Gatopardo	12
Malpensante	13
Soho	14
La Silla Vacía	15
Etiqueta Negra	16
Coroto	17
Other/s, Which? _____	18

Q11. In what medium do you usually read the slow press?

Digital	1
Paper	2
Both	3

Q12. How often do you read the slow press?

Every/almost every day	1
3-5 days a week	2
1-2 days a week	3
1-3 days a month	4
Less than once a month	5
Almost never/Never	6

Q13. Each time you read an example of the slow press, how much time do you spend on it?

Less than 5 minutes	1
Between 15 and 30 minutes	2
Between 31 and 60 minutes	3
Between 1 and 2 hours	4
Over 2 hours	5

Q14. When do you mainly read slow journalism?

During the week	1
At weekends	2
Indifferently	3

Q15. From where do you usually access this slow journalism? (Multiple answers possible)

Usual residence	1
Workplace	2
A place with free WiFi	3
Libraries	4
Public transport	5
Other/s, Which? _____	6

(If you chose answers 1 or 3 in Q11, please answer questions Q16 and Q17)

Q16. Which device/s do you use to access these slow journalism media? (Multiple answers possible)

Mobile phone or smartphone	1
Desktop computer	2
Laptop	3
Tablet	4
E-readers	5
Other/s, Which? _____	6

Q17. Through which platform/s to you access slow journalism media? (Multiple answers possible)

Via blogs	1
Via social media	2
Via journalists' social media accounts	3
Via the website of the media itself	4

Q18. What kind of content or subject matter do you usually read about in slow journalism? (Rotate answers) (Multiple answers possible)

Politics	1
Economics	2
Culture	3
Sport	4
Science and technology	5
Opinion	6
Society	7
International	8
Free time	9
Other/s, Which? _____	10

Q19. In your opinion, which of the following elements does slow journalism offer you? (Multiple answers possible) ROTATE

Information quality/ clarity	1
Contextualised information	2
Transparency	3
A reflexive attitude	4
A capacity for analysis	5
Creativity	6
Dynamic narration	7
Critical opinion	8
Information about forgotten stories	9
Specialisation	10
Editorial independence	11
Other/s, Which? _____	12

Q20. Which genre do you prefer in the slow press?

Interview	1
Report	2
Feature	3
Analysis	4
Opinion	5
A text that doesn't belong to any specific genre	6
Another type of genre. Which? _____	7

Q21. Do you have or have you ever had a subscription to a digital slow media?

Yes	1
No	2

Q22. Please evaluate slow journalism in general from 0 to 5, with 0 being the lowest score and 5 the highest.

0	1	2	3	4	5	&
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Q23. How would you evaluate the credibility/independence/quality of slow journalism in comparison with the hegemonic media (be it press, radio or television)?

On a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 being the lowest score and 5 the highest.

0	1	2	3	4	5	&
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Q24. How would you evaluate the quality of slow journalism you know?

On a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 being the lowest score and 5 the highest.

0	1	2	3	4	5	&
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Q25. How would you evaluate the future possibilities for slow journalism (irrespective of whether they are digital or not)?

On a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 being the lowest score and 5 the highest.

0	1	2	3	4	5	&
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FOR EVERYONE

Q26. Do you usually share any content socially, or interact critically with the media about prioritisation or rigour?

Yes	1
No	2
Sometimes	3

Q27. Are you interested in the comments people make in the digital press?

Yes	1
No	2

Q28. Would you be prepared to pay more for the quality offered by slow journalism?

Yes	1
No	2

Q29. Do you think that audiovisual/ multimedia resources aid understanding of the news?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3

Q30. Do you think the news media uses these resources appropriately?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3

Q31. Do you think there are any classical news media that fit within "digital slow journalism"?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3

Go to Q33

Q32. Which classical news media would this be?

Q33. Should journalism redirect itself towards online slow journalism?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3

Q34. If 'Yes', why do you think journalism should redirect itself towards online slow journalism?

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Q35. COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE

Argentina	1
Colombia	2
Spain	3
Mexico	4

Q36. GENDER

Male	1
Female	2
Non binary	3
No answer	4

Q37. AGE

18-34	1
35-49	2
50-65	3

Q38. What is your level of education?

None	1
Compulsory education	2
Professional training	3
Further education	4
University degree	5
Postgrad university degree	6

Q39. What is your employment situation?

Self employed	1
Employed	2
Unemployed	3
Homemaker	4
Student	5
Retired	6

Q40. Please indicate the population size of where you live

Less than 50.000 inhabitants	1
Between 50,000 and 99,000 inhabitants	2
Over 100,000	3

THANK YOU