



## Food in journalistic narratives: A methodological design for the study of food-based contents in daily newspapers

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### ABSTRACT

The study of food is crucial since food is part of daily life of people. Also, food and gastronomy are a very important leisure and travel issue. This is reflected through the huge attention that media pay to food stories. Food journalism has become a field of increasing interest, and the study of journalistic narratives allows to understand concrete cultural and social realities. Within this context, the current paper analyses food in journalistic storytelling. The objective of the research is to define a methodological proposal of topics in order to study the food-based contents found in legacy media, particularly, in daily newspapers. To achieve it, the food contents of *The New York Times*, the world's food journalism referent, are revisited.

### Researching food journalism

As the editor of *The New York Times'* Food section states, “food writing is culture writing, same as writing about dance or theater, art, music, architecture or books” (Sifton, 2017). The study of food in journalistic storytelling helps building an understanding of the gastronomy field within the media landscape. The objective of this paper is to define a methodological proposal of content distribution for the study of food in journalistic storytelling, especially with regards to the discourse found in printed press. In this sense, the proposal shows how deep and diverse gastronomy contents have reached into daily press' audiences as a crucial corner of people's culture of leisure. Examples of the food discourse of *The New York Times* are used to illustrate the range of topics.

The current proposal is focused on gastronomy contents found in printed media, particularly, daily print press. The different possibilities of topics that comprise the categories reflected in this proposal were obtained from previous readings, literature and newspapers-based research, and also based on Fusté-Forné and Masip (2013, 2017). Within this context, the final version of topics was also the result of the thematic verification through the analysis of a prior sample. After the elaboration of the primary set of categories, it was applied to a preliminary sample – pre-test – which was formed by the month of January of the year 2000 corresponding to the newspaper *La Vanguardia*, edited in Barcelona, and the month of December of the same year of the newspaper *El Correo*, daily press in the Basque Country. Therefore, the

pre-test was used to double-check and finally define the topics and subtopics, and from which the ultimately analysis table was produced.

### Content analysis in legacy media studies: the case of food and gastronomy

According to Jensen and Jankowski (1993), the study of press news is one of the most important duties of analytical and discursive research about media. Knowing what news says is important in our daily lives, and consequently “most of our social and political knowledge and our views of the world come from the dozens of reports and information we read or see every day” (Jensen and Jankowski, 1993, p.137). Nowadays, in an age of digital news media, print media still remains as an important social driver, and newspapers still perform as major agenda setters (Mccombs, 2004). In this context, content analysis has traditionally been a crucial methodological approach within the field of mass communication research (Riffe, Aust, and Lacy, 1993; Yale and Gilly, 1988), being one of the methodologies that are most frequently used in the study of journalism. Many examples of recent content analysis can be retrieved from most communication journals, as it is mentioned below.

Krippendorff said that content analysis is an empirical-oriented method, tied to real phenomena but, at the same time, closely linked to ideas about symbolic phenomena (1980, p.10). This therefore acknowledges its social role, its effects and its meaning. It also helps recognize that “the concept of mass communication is understood as a

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cultural practice that produces and circulates meaning in social contexts” (Jensen and Jankowski, 1993, p.165). Similarly, Neuendorf affirmed that “some applications of content analysis may be highly practical. Rather than attempting to answer questions of theoretical importance, some analyses are aimed at building predictive power within a certain message arena” (2002, p.22). Neuendorf added that content analysis methods “are integral to a full understanding of human behaviour and hence essential to social and behavioral science” (2002, p.53). In addition, content analysis is applicable to all contexts, but specifically to mass messaging, which is understood as the creation of messages that tend to target large undifferentiated audiences. These messages are most commonly mediated via television, newspaper, radio (Riffe and Freitag, 1997, Neuendorf, 2002), and, recently, Internet.

Berelson (1952) defined content analysis as a technique that pursues the “objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”. In addition, Bardin (1977, p.32) says that content analysis is “a set of techniques of communications analysis aiming to obtain, by systematic and objective procedures of description of the contents of the messages, indicators (quantitative or otherwise) that allow the inference of knowledge relating to the conditions of production/reception (inferred variables) of these messages”. Among the different types of content analysis, Bardin (1977) highlighted the importance of thematic content analysis. In this sense, while most authors supported that content analysis is mainly quantitative, there is also evidence on the literature that shows the importance of non-quantitative approaches in content analysis research. This consists of integrating quantitative methods with qualitative methods (Moon, 2016, p.2385). Consequently, the application of both quantitative and qualitative techniques “strengthens the researcher’s claims for the validity of the conclusions drawn where mutual confirmation of results can be demonstrated” (Gray and Densten, 1998, p.420). Content analysis includes techniques that enable qualitative approaches in order to study connotative and interpretative aspects of information; for example, rhetorical analysis of content, discourse analysis, media narratives, framing theory, or the journalistic storytelling. Examples were found in the work conducted by Yusuf et al. (2016), who studied the agriculture coverage in South African newspapers, or the article carried out by Zhang and Müller (2017) on how tourism industry is represented in Swedish newspapers.

In defining the types of potential approaches to content analysis, based on messages analytics methods described by Hijmans (1996) and Gunter (2000), Neuendorf defined discourse, critical and interpretative analysis. Particularly, the discourse analysis is the process that this paper supports. It is understood as a pathway which “engages in characteristics of manifest language and word use, description of topics in media texts, through consistency and connection of words to theme analysis of content and the establishment of central terms. The technique aims at typifying media representations” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 5); that is, categorizing a field within the media landscape. While applications of content analysis were found in a huge amount of studies, few of them were focused on food.

In this sense, Bell and Valentine (1997) affirm that food journalism emerged from the women’s page in newspapers. From their side, Jones and Taylor (2012) state that opportunities for food journalists came from the growth in trade publications, magazines pointed at food consumers, and newspaper-based articles. This fact made the contents on gastronomy evolved from the cookery column, the restaurant review and the feature article about food (Matthews, 2014; Turner and Orange, 2012). A first example of this is found in David, who, from 1955 until 1961, wrote regular articles for the *Sunday Times*, *Vogue* and *House and Garden* – aimed at a female audience –, where she was expected to provide recipes for the domestic cook (David, 1986; Grigson, 1992). “It was not until David went to work for the *Spectator* in 1961 that she was able to indulge her interests fully, writing pieces on food issues and food histories where the provision of recipes was not necessarily a requirement” (Jones and Taylor, 2001, p.176).

According to Voss (2012), these culinary sections, however, do not have a well-documented history beyond these brief mentions in women-based publications. Therefore, “the newspaper few options for women before the 1970s were pages for women. These sections were known by the four F’s: family, fashion, food, and furniture” (Voss, 2012, p.67). Regarding the press article on gastronomic content, according to Hanke (1989), it was not until the decade of the seventies of the twentieth century when it began to grow in popularity, appearing regularly in the lifestyle section, or placed in weekend national newspapers. Wood (1996) highlighted the heterogeneity of these articles that dealt with issues as they ranged from exotic ingredients to renowned chefs.

There are not many studies that analyze food content and its evolution in the printed mass media. For example, a Naulin’s (2014) research analyzed how food is represented in *Cuisine et Vins de France* along the second half of the twentieth century. Also, Ferguson (1998) heavily studied the French culinary discourses during the nineteenth century, which were previously acknowledged. In this sense, Opazo (2012) affirmed that “Ferguson argues that the formalization of a discourse into written texts made it possible to turn *culinary products* (such as food or taste, which are material and ephemeral in nature) into *intellectual products* that could be removed from their immediate context of use and are durable in time” (Opazo, 2012, p.83). This reinforces the treatment given to communication about food until today, as a form of leisure that is essential in the social order, driven by an uncountable amount of gastronomic content which has been progressively increasing in importance and media impact, as for example the case of *El Bulli*. Within the context of Catalan and Spanish legacy media, while several authors had started to write about food in press from the beginning of the twentieth century, it was from Néstor Luján’s columns when Spanish and extensively Catalan media began to regularly include gastronomic information (Hidalgo-Marí and Segarra-Saavedra, 2014, p.325).

Moreover, within the Spanish literature, some examples of food narratives’ studies were found in Aguirregoitia and Fernández (2015), who analyzed gastronomy in Spanish press during the nineteenth century. Later, they carried out another study that dealt with the journalistic communication of gastronomy in Spain during the first third of the twentieth century (Fernández Poyatos and Aguirregoitia Martínez, 2017). At the same time, research conducted by Sánchez Gómez (2011) was also important. He discussed the educational function of food journalism in Internet, a platform also analyzed by Acosta et al. (2011) with the focus placed on the dissemination of information after the announcement of the closing of *El Bulli*. Segarra-Saavedra et al. (2015) also analyzed content on websites and social networks; in this case dealing with Michelin-starred Spanish restaurants within the framework of a creative industry in the digital context. Moreover, in line with the present research, there were found publications like that published by Acosta (2011) – on the role of food contents in Isabel Allende’s novels – or Blanco Hernández (2015) – about the gastronomic notes inside custom articles, as an earlier predecessor of food columns –. Also, the symbiosis between gastronomy and television gathered attention of recent research. Examples include historical analysis of television programs on food, conducted by Hidalgo-Marí and Segarra-Saavedra (2014), or the study authored by Peris Blanes (2015) about the relationship between culinary television programs and the construction of national identity.

Regarding the case of the United States, also some references highlighted the importance of American food writing (O’neill, 2007) or the role of women in food journalism (Voss, 2014). With this regards, Voss (2012) stated the importance of Jane Nickerson as the first *The New York Times* food writer, or the crucial role of Jeanne Voltz as food editor at the *Los Angeles Times* in the 1960s. Some years earlier, *Gourmet* was the first magazine focused on food and wine in the United States. It appeared in 1941. The newspapers also added to the fashion of food. An article published in *Time* in 1953 stated their importance: “in US dailies,

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