

Women columnists, opinion leaders in a Colombian online media

Mujeres columnistas, liderazgos de opinión en un medio en línea colombiano

Mulheres colunistas, líderes de opinião em um meio on-line colombiano

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ABSTRACT | The aim of this article is to study which are the main topics that female columnists address in a Colombian regional newspaper, explore the intention and style of their opinion columns, and establish if female columnists can be classified as opinion leaders. To do so, we conducted a content analysis of 36 opinion columns, of the total of 95 written by women in 2015 and published in the online medium Vanguardia.com, from Bucaramanga, which allowed the identification of themes, styles and intentions of these publications. We concluded that their columns are analytical, preserving the informative style and interpretive attitude, and that the interaction of their readers on Facebook with their arguments would allow them to be considered as public opinion leaders. According to our findings, their position is the product of the deep and critical approach they have on current issues related to the environment, public management and gender violence, abandoning female stereotypes related exclusively to sex, beauty and fashion. These data support the evidence that shows that women are advancing in their position in the public eye, both politically and in the media, thus overcoming the habit of being only installed in private and discreet spaces, and increasingly reaching an open and explicit insertion in society and in decision-making.

KEYWORDS: women; public opinion; online media; journalism; female columnists.

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RESUMEN | El objetivo de este artículo es estudiar cuáles son los principales temas sobre los que hablan las mujeres columnistas en un diario regional colombiano, explorar cuál es la intención y estilo de sus columnas de opinión, y establecer si las mujeres columnistas pueden llegar a ser catalogadas como líderes de opinión. Para ello, se llevó a cabo un análisis de contenido de 36 columnas de opinión, del total de 95 escritas por mujeres en 2015 y publicadas en el medio en línea Vanguardia.com, de Bucaramanga, lo que permitió identificar temas, estilos e intenciones de estas publicaciones. Se concluyó que sus columnas son de análisis, conservando el estilo informativo y la actitud interpretativa, y que la interacción de sus lectores en Facebook con sus argumentaciones permitiría considerarlas líderes de opinión pública. Su posicionamiento, de acuerdo con lo hallado, es producto del abordaje profundo y crítico que realizan sobre temas de actualidad relacionados con lo ambiental, la gestión pública y la violencia de género, abandonando estereotipos femeninos relacionados exclusivamente con sexo, belleza y moda. Estos datos apoyan la evidencia que muestra que las mujeres avanzan en su posicionamiento en la esfera pública, tanto en lo político como en los medios de comunicación, lo que supone la superación del hábito de reservarse para los espacios privados y discretos a cambio de alcanzar crecientemente una inserción abierta y explícita en la sociedad y en la toma de decisiones.

PALABRAS CLAVE: mujeres; opinión pública; medios en línea; periodismo; columnistas.

RESUMO | O objetivo deste artigo é estudar quais são os principais temas mencionados pelas colunistas em um jornal regional colombiano, explorar qual é a intenção e o estilo de suas colunas de opinião e determinar se as colunistas podem ser classificadas como líderes de opinião. Para isso, foi realizada uma análise de conteúdo de 36 colunas de opinião, do total de 95 escritas por mulheres em 2015 e publicadas no meio online Vanguardia.com, de Bucaramanga, que permitiu a identificação de temas, estilos e intenções dessas publicações. Concluiu-se que suas colunas são analíticas, preservando o estilo informativo e a atitude interpretativa, e que a interação de seus leitores no Facebook com seus argumentos permitiria que fossem consideradas líderes da opinião pública. Sua posição, de acordo com o que foi encontrado, é o produto da abordagem profunda e crítica que realizam sobre questões atuais relacionadas ao meio ambiente, gestão pública e violência de gênero, eliminando os estereótipos femininos relacionados exclusivamente a sexo, beleza e moda. Esses dados corroboram as evidências que mostram que as mulheres avançam em sua posição de esfera pública, politicamente e na mídia, o que significa superar o hábito de reservar espaços privados e discretos em troca de atingir cada vez mais uma inserção aberta e explícita na sociedade e na tomada de decisões.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: mulheres; opinião pública; mídia online; jornalismo; colunistas.

INTRODUCTION

Although we cannot speak of a *feminization* of journalism (Rivero, Meso, & Peña, 2015), the proportion of women in newsrooms has increased in the last ten years. In Spain, in 2005, 34% of journalists were women (Soriano, Cantón, & Díez, 2005), the same percentage as in the United States; the figure was lower in the United Kingdom (25%) and almost proportional in Finland (49%).

In Latin America, women represent 47% of press reporters, 36% on radio and 50% on television, according to the report by the Global Media Monitoring Project (Macharia & Lee, 2017). However, the data on men versus women in opinion genres are limited.

The reasons for the lower number of women in newsrooms may be associated with the fact that “the positions of women in the sector are mainly concentrated in those of little responsibility, and also that there are more women in the fields defined as ‘other presses’” (Rivero et al., p. 570).

Mellado, Simón, Barría and Enríquez (2007) corroborate the above by pointing out that female journalists do not work in the media, but mostly in other areas, such as organizational communication and academic training.

According to Rivero et al. (2015), the main problems with the profession change regarding gender. Women face low pay and intrusion, while men are worried about content politicization and unemployment, which would explain the greater presence of women in less visible spaces of journalism.

When analyzing beliefs about the exercise of the journalistic profession and perceptions about gender roles, De Miguel-Pascual, Parratt-Fernández and Berganza (2019) verified that there are some subtle forms of discrimination. Spanish female journalists, for example, consider that their work “is constrained by business decisions, censorship, politicians, and pressure groups” (p. 9).

From this situation, questions arise such as: What do female columnists talk about in a Colombian regional newspaper? What is the intention and style of their opinion columns? Can female columnists be classified as opinion leaders? These were answered thanks to the information collected by the project *Columnistas de opinión y tema ambiental: posiciones y limitaciones al momento de orientar a la esfera pública* (Opinion columnists and environmental issues: positions and limitations when guiding the public sphere), from the U'wa Werjayá Research Group of the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Bucaramanga campus, and the work done by Campos (2018).

STATE OF THE ART AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Female journalists in the media

The IV World Conference on Women in Beijing, in 1995, set a guideline for the global agenda regarding gender equality, and –from there– strategic objectives were designed, represented in twelve spheres established in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; however, there are still gender gaps in the practice of journalism, as well as in the management of news agendas. There are still strong stereotypes (submission, sexist language, advertising, violence, among others), both in the media content and in the participation of women in decision-making in the media industries.

This imbalance has a long history. In 1904, while the University of Illinois in the United States began offering a four-year academic program for Journalism training, the directors of Columbia University, in that same country, refused to have women in the classrooms. Finally, after reversing the decision, they allowed the enrollment of a minimum group of women, 10% of the total number of men registered, a quota that remained until 1968. “Until this point masculine pronouns described better than ever the reality of journalism students, beyond the grammatical habit of generic masculine terms” (Chambers, Steiner, & Fleming, 2004, p. 21). The authors add that the gender gap was strengthened in such a way that the academic manuals for training journalists were written by men and the women produced their own materials.

On the other hand, with Joseph Pulitzer came along the newspaper *World*, the first North American printed media to include a page for women; the same was done in the United Kingdom by Alfred Harmsworth, who launched the *Daily Mail* in 1896, aimed at the female audience, and that with the punchline *get me a murder a day* became that country’s most important media, with 989,000 male and female readers (Chambers et al., 2004).

In 19th century Colombia, the relationship between the press and women was defined by the creation of newspapers for the fair sex (as the feminine was called), due to the emergence of poetesses, female writers and, of course, of publishers willing to publish them (Melo, 2017). These newspapers, in addition to providing a space for the visibility of these women, also had the intention of forming an educated and pleasant companion for men (Gil, 2016; Alzate, 2003). Although there was not a development of a feminist struggle in the actual sense of the word, these media had a decisive contribution to raising awareness of the condition of women, “...all of them were propagandists and activists in favor of political tolerance, peace and coexistence, and worthy representatives of culture and national sovereignty” (Vidales, n.d., par. 38).

Londoño (1990) adds to this chronology:

The first (publication) was *Biblioteca de Señoritas*, which appeared in 1858 in Bogotá, with 67 issues published before disappearing the following year. Thereafter, the number of these publications began to grow, reaching their peak between 1870 and 1890. Then, around the 1910s, they decreased somewhat, slowly increasing again during the 1920s and 1930s, and augmenting in the 1940s. Their number serves as an indicator of the fluctuations that the interest in women in the country has had during those years (p. 7).

Mexican women lived a similar situation after the revolution (1910-1917), since a good number participated in the press before it, “confirming the inception of a rupture of myths and female stereotypes, such as that of being destined to be wives and mothers, which by 1910 was still the ‘feminine ideal’” (Lever, 2013, p. 3). However, after having published in various newspapers of their own or those of others, they began to face obstacles in connecting with the national media; the women of that generation had left their homes to insert themselves in the profession of writing and publishing, and although they took the household to the newspaper, from the kitchen, fashion and beauty sections, they also gave their opinion and questioned their context (Lever, 2013).

The multimedia initiative *Pasado Impreso*, from the Universidad de Los Andes, reveals that in Colombia, between the 30s and 40s, women working in the press went to private companies to finance their media, taking advantage of the growth of the domestic market. With the printed medium *Mireya*, Josefina Canal de Reyes was one of the first to seek financing through alliances; *Agitación Femenina*, which closed in 1944, was maintained with the funds of Ofelia Uribe de Acosta, its director, in addition to donations, sponsors and alliances with organizations such as the Women’s Union of Colombia and the Women’s Alliance.

In 1946, the Colegio Mayor de Antioquia inaugurated, with twelve students, one of the first programs with a journalism curriculum exclusively for female students; although the curriculum was frequently modified and there were tensions in public opinion to know what would be the tasks that women would perform, the program promoted in students the possibility of being authors of chronicles and reports, supervisors of women’s pages in the traditional media, or to assume managerial positions in the newspapers’ advertising, circulation or graphic design sections, as well as in their archive sections. The school closed four years later, but a step had been taken for the professionalization of female journalists, since the Universidad Javeriana continued the training in this area.

In the 60s and 70s, *Mujer*, a medium created by Flor Romero de Nhora, who served as editor at *El Espectador*, was the protagonist of innovation in narratives and photojournalism, establishing a visual reference for the middle class and the political roles that it should assume. Likewise, the photo-reports and illustrated articles had an editorial angle that highlighted the need for social action (<http://pasadoimpreso.uniandes.edu.co/>).

This type of journalism, according to Rivero et al. (2015):

On the first place, promoted women's access to the journalistic profession; second, allowed them to begin to become news subjects, and third, it represented a political advance for women, because despite being treated using sensational formulas, they were able to incorporate issues such as the right to vote for women (p. 567).

Other works such as those by Carreño & Guarín (2008) describe women's position, origin, and journalistic practices in Colombia from the second half of the 20th century to the first decade of the 21st century. The study revealed that the female journalists of the 1950s felt respected by their colleagues, who did not see them as competition, since they were assigned to cover *soft* topics, such as social, cultural and women's pages; in the 1980s, women in newsrooms did report discrimination based on their gender. The article highlights a tension in the relationship between gender, journalist and source, since "the seduction strategy, understood as a way to captivate and gain trust, is a weapon that, depending on the male or female journalist, can help in the search for information" (Carreño & Guarín, 2008, p. 84).

According to a FLIP study conducted on journalists in various Colombian regions, 40% of the women consulted expressed they had felt a differential treatment in their journalistic practice and regarding gender issues; for example, the coverage of sources of public order, as stated by journalist Yamile Arango, was assigned to her for her qualities, but not precisely as a reporter (Jules, 2017).

On the other hand, Barrios & Arroyave (2007) point out that female journalists noticed a great difference in the exercise of their profession according to their marital status. All of them emphasized the personal sacrifice they make to comply with the roles of journalist, mother, and wife. They also highlighted the need to find a sympathetic partner, who is most of the time a journalist too, and the role their families play in caring for their children. In conclusion, complying with the work and family scenario creates tensions affecting their mental and physical health.

However, the Internet and social networks have allowed female journalists to find new contexts and audiences. Mojica, Espinel and Botero (2019) state that female media directors or national media correspondents, “recognize that the media in which they work have taken a stand that allows them to be consulted and followed by their audiences due to the information treatment they conduct in their professional practice” (p. 365). The Internet has given them greater independence and invites them to look out for their places in the already established social media:

They also state that there are other mediums that have allowed them to provide information in a more agile way and from their personal stand, as social networks, which, being personal, give way to debate, to convene audiences to participate in specific topics in equity and gender (Mojica et al., 2019, p. 365).

This is in line with Ganzabal (2018), who in his study on old and new conversational spaces of the female press highlights that “conversation channels are mobile and on social networks: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram mainly. This is where female readers’ feedback comes from and one of the biggest sources of traffic along with SEO” (p. 1284).

The other side of the same story corresponds to studies on the presence of women in the media as sources; these are broad and diverse, but they all point to an underrepresentation. For example, Mateos (2007) describes in an extensive investigation the way in which the Spanish digital media represent women in their news, the number of times and the form of talking about them. It was confirmed that the largest female representation is registered in the People, Society and Culture sections, in that order, which is replicated in digital newspapers:

The informative interest of women as a person linked to recreational activities and entertainment, to aspects of intervention and social commitment, or as a professional in the world of culture and art, which is present in conventional media (Mateos, 2007, p. 123)

Women are also less likely to appear in the Sports section; this inequality between gender and sections evidences the presence of stereotypes that condition the greater appearance of women in the soft news sections, concludes Mateos (2007).

In Latin America, the study of Torres and Silva of three Chilean newspapers (2010) determined that there is an underrepresentation of women, given the logic that the media maintain about what is news, defined as what occurs mainly in the public and political world, and in the events seen as impasses or out of the established order, which limits the registration and the appearance of women as protagonists of current media news. Fernández (2010) states that:

The female voice, projected through the media, probably has, indeed, different nuances from that of men, but the space given to women to speak about them and for them, to comment on what is happening every day, or to make decisions, leaves much to be desired (pp. 36-37).

In this regard, the CIMAC study (2009) determined that women's voices and points of view are present in a residual way in the media and in information, as they are only 10% of the news generated in the world.

Female opinion leaders in the press

When characterizing a leader, we take the proposal of Rivadeneira (2005), who describes it as one who maintains its own position; lives according to the norms of its group (it is important to note that the norms are the real norms of the group, and not those that the leader believes should be); directs; does not give orders that will not be obeyed; when giving orders, uses the established procedures; does not impose itself on its followers at social events; does not censure or praise a member of its group in the presence of other members; considers the whole situation, i.e., is not guided by partial facts; it is less concerned with inflicting punishment than with creating the conditions in which groups will discipline themselves; listens and knows himself/herself, and therefore has great self-control.

In turn, Katz & Lazarsfeld opinion leaders model (1979) starts from the identification of certain characteristics by which leaders are perceived because they have an interest in a subject; being informed, they exercise power over the mass; their tendency is gregarious (interrelation); they have charisma and convening power; they have a place in society; they share their opinion and interests publicly and are firm in their opinion.

The study *Líderes de opinión en la prensa colombiana: una metodología para el análisis sistemático de encuadramientos* (Leaders of opinion in the Colombian press: a methodology for the systematic analysis of frames) shows that 78.6% of men generate positions and opinion in the media, while the activity of women in them is reduced to 21.4% due to the lack of opportunity and the *masculinizing* media environment (Giraldo & Montealegre, 2013).

On the other hand, the survey company Cifras y Conceptos (2018) showed similar data in its opinion panel. In the national study, only three of 17 columnists are recognized women: María Jimena Duzán (12%), María Isabel Rueda (6%), and Salud Hernández (3%). Regarding the eastern region of Colombia, the data is not satisfactory; for example, in Norte de Santander Elisa Montoya (3%) is the only female columnist out of nine, and in Santander, Diana Giraldo¹ (8%) and María Juliana Acevedo (4%) were the only women recognized by respondents among 17 columnists.

1. Diana Giraldo's columns are part of the corpus of this research.

After analyzing 169 whole days of the newspaper *El País* in its digital version, Suárez and Ortega (2019) concluded that, between 2012 and 2016, women signed 400 opinion pieces out of the total of 2,621 that make up the sample, i.e., only 15.26%. This figure is surpassed by their male colleagues, who signed 66.35% of the corpus of the investigation.

Therefore, their impact on the formation of public opinion faces obstacles, if we consider the general concept of public space, which “includes the public domain, collective social use and multi-functionality. It includes a sociocultural dimension, of community expression and decision-making; a space where there are information and opinions. It means, for women, to be seen and heard” (Arendt, 1995, p. 32).

Thus, there are few women guiding and shaping an opinion for informed decision-making as a pillar of democracy; this affects women’s empowerment in journalistic work, which begins with their entry into the media and progresses with the incursion of women in the opinion pages, until reaching management or the media direction (Fernández, 2010).

Opinion columns in journalism

After these initial approaches, it is necessary to expose the principles of opinion journalism. First, it should be noted that the division of journalistic genres into Informational, Interpretive and Opinion, is still not resolved. With the rise of new media, transmedia and multimedia, it is increasingly difficult to think of pure journalistic genres.

For Grijelmo (2014), opinion texts “usually reflect the true spirit of a newspaper” (p.122). From these we can infer the way in which they face reality and social transformations. Although this task can also be seen in chronicles and headlines, ultimately, the opinion articles must show more clearly the newspaper’s ideology.

The author defines the opinion piece as the genre in which there is the greatest freedom, and includes within its formats the column, the editorial and the comment. Regarding the column, which he surnames brief, he states that it is used to address “trivial questions or at least questions addressed trivially” (Grijelmo, 2014, p. 131).

Martínez (2004) develops more broadly the definitions of article or comment and not that of column; the author, following Martín Vivaldi, defines them as “pieces of a very varied and wide content, of various and very diverse forms, in which a current fact or idea, of special significance, is interpreted, valued or explained, according to the conviction of the columnist” (p.66); this definition applies to both opinion and argumentative texts, which in turn he includes in the subgenre of editorial style, and makes it clear that *fair play* is essential in the article or comment so that there is no “dishonest manipulation of the intelligence of the citizens who receive the messages” (Martínez, 2004, p. 69). Regarding the columns, he states

that there are three modalities: analysis, opinion, and personal. The first, with an informative style and interpretive attitude, and the second, with an editorial style and a judgmental or persuasive attitude. In the Style Book of the newspaper *El País*, Galán (2018) refers to opinion columns as *author pieces*, clarifying that when the author quotes other people in his/her text, it is considered that he/she assumes this position as his/her own, unless he/she directly contradicts the arguments.

Nowadays, opinion columns are published frequently thanks to new digital platforms. For a long time, in traditional journalism opinion columns were exclusive to the Sunday newspaper, and intended to provide information, make comments, or assess a fact or event of great social repercussion. According to González (1991), the column has three fundamental characteristics that shape its essence: periodicity, a fixed name with a specific and recognizable font, and its eminent personal and emotional character. Likewise, its content is judgmental, editorializing, direct and persuasive. Other authors, such as Moreno (2000), specify that:

The column is an example of personal journalistic language, a communication instrument that pursues the defense of certain ideas, the creation of a state of opinion and the adoption of a determined position regarding a current and relevant fact. It is an evaluative, analytical, and reasoning comment with a purpose identical to that of the editorial: to create an opinion from one's own. Its difference lies in the individual identity of the signature. It is a vehicle of personal communication that flees from the anonymity and solemnity of the editorial; of the density and depth of the journalistic article, and of the simplicity and asepsis of the news piece (p. 1).

The column as a genre of opinion analyzes, interprets, values, and guides the public regarding news events. Columnists take a stand on a certain topic, in order to have credibility with their readers and the attentive audience that waits for their columns. Writing them is not an easy job, it requires knowledge and skill, they must be designed to attract the audience and always maintain the same attention.

The pedagogical text *El artículo y la columna. Proyecto Mediascopio Prensa. Lectura de la prensa escrita en el aula, publicado en España* (The article and the column. Mediascopio Prensa Project. Reading the press in the classroom), published in Spain by the Ministry of Education (2009), proposes the following types of opinion columns regarding their content:

- Information: there is a predominance of informative content over opinion content.
- Opinion: there is a judgment regarding an event, generally current.

- Personal: it is reserved for a prestigious writer to comment on matters that interest him or her.
- Humoristic: seeks to entertain and amuse, as its name implies, using humorous resources.
- Written by personalities: intended for authors who may be of interest to the audience, such as politicians and artists.
- Miscellaneous: addresses several topics separately. Its style is flexible, informal, and creative. In these, in addition to changing the subject, the columnist can change the tone or font.
- Literary: all those that do not aim to make a comment on current affairs.
- Society: related to the social chronicle and almost always reports on worldly events. Also included here are those with facts covered in jokes, details, and even uncomfortable comments regarding celebrities.

The same work classifies the style and intention of the columns in:

- Analytical column: complies with the reporting style and interpretive attitude; this type of column interrelates facts, offers historical perspectives for contextualization, and gives perspective to the positions that the news has provoked.
- Opinion column: characterized by having an editorial style and a judgmental or persuasive attitude. In this type of column, the author, in addition to analyzing and arguing, subjectively judges events and explicitly expresses his/her opinion, trying to get the reader to assume and endorse it.
- Personal column: it is characterized by its pleasant style and creative literary style. It appears with a certain regularity, in the same space of the newspaper. Its subject is free and is always signed by a prestigious writer or journalist.

METHOD

This article took as reference for its analyzes the information collected in the *Columnistas de Opinión y tema ambiental: posiciones y limitaciones al momento de orientar a la esfera pública en dos periódicos versión web de Colombia* project (Opinion columnists and environmental issues: positions and limitations when guiding the public sphere in two online Colombian newspapers) developed between 2010 and 2016 by the research U'wa Werjayá Training Research Group of the Universidad

Pontificia Bolivariana, campus Bucaramanga; in addition, it uses the the work conducted by Campos (2018).

The study has qualitative and quantitative scopes, with a mixed approach; it is descriptive and focuses on the online media Vanguardia.com². The technique was content analysis, used with great success for the objective, systematic, quantitative, and qualitative description of the explicit communication content in the analyzed texts. Its main purpose is to provide knowledge, new insights, representations of facts and practical guides for action in research, based on the scientific requirement of this tool: to be reproducible (Wimmer & Dominik, 2001).

It is important to clarify that content analysis, as a research technique, uses measurement and evaluation parameters of a quantitative and qualitative order. The former are related to the counting of thematic frequencies, i.e., statistics based on the count of units, while the latter are evidenced in the research exercise based on theories, i.e., logics based on the combination of categories. Therefore, establishing hierarchical analysis criteria allows us to respond to the validity or non-validity of the hypotheses raised and to the fulfillment of the objectives, which in the case of this work are:

- Objective 1. Study the main topics addressed by female columnists in the Colombian regional newspaper Vanguardia.com
- Objective 2. Through content analysis, explore the intention and style of their opinion columns.
- Objective 3. Establish whether female columnists can be classified as opinion leaders.

From the qualitative approach, the investigation is conducted from an analytical and hermeneutical perspective that, based on Piñuel's (2002) postulates, focuses on the interpretation of messages, texts or discourses; in this case, opinion columns published by women.

2. Vanguardia.com is the online extension of the printed newspaper *Vanguardia Liberal*, created in 1919 by Alejandro Galvis Galvis, a liberal leader. The Galvis Ramírez family owned five other regional newspapers in Colombia, some of which have already disappeared, such as *El Liberal*, from Popayán, Cauca, in the south of the country. Today, they are an economic outlet diversified in some other sectors; it should be noted that in March 2019, the name was changed to *Vanguardia*, to suppress the relationship to the political party that gave rise to it 100 years ago.

The project collected the opinion columns published by women in Vanguardia.com in 2015, the year of the period studied (2010-2016) in which there was a highest number of publications. Then, the contents were organized and described using descriptive and analytical memoranda (Álvarez, 2012), to meet the aforementioned objectives.

Information gathering instrument

For the process of gathering and subsequent analysis of information, we prepared an analysis matrix, which allowed determining the categories: topic developed in the column, type of column, as well as its style and orientation, in line with the concepts of the Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación, 2009).

The descriptive memorandum (DM) category was located in another space of the matrix, in which a fragment of each of the texts to be analyzed is taken and is then located in the corresponding subcategory. The columnist's call to action and/or argument was recorded in the memorandum of analysis (AM) box. Based on the matrix, we identified the topics, and the style and intention of the female columnists were determined.

Sample

The sample corresponds to the non-probability convenience model, considering the number of columnists and the period of the publications, following the guidelines of *Líderes de opinión en la prensa colombiana: una metodología para el análisis sistemático de encadenamientos* (Opinion leaders in Colombian press: a methodology for the systematic analysis of linkages). In this study, the authors refer to the sample as a framing model, understood as a perspective of public opinion formation based on the frequency and intensity of publication of opinion columns (Giraldo & Montealegre, 2013).

Regarding columnists, we identified ten women, but of that number only four were active and had frequent posts in 2015. These four women published 95 columns during that year.

In the framing model proposed by Giraldo & Montealegre (2013), the selected sample starts from the universe of published columns, in this case, all the columns from 2015; then, those published in the month with the highest number of publications by each of the columnists are selected for analysis. Therefore, the analysis selection criterion corresponds to the publications made in the month in which it was more frequent to find columns by the same author.

Finally, to verify the traffic and interaction of the publications on the newspaper's Facebook fanpage, we selected one publication per columnist, considering the number of reactions and the characteristics of the comments.

Column title			
Author			
Publication date			
ANALYSIS CATEGORY			
Subject			
Type of column (content)	Information		
	Opinion		
	Personal		
	Humoristic		
	Personalities		
	Miscellaneous		
	Literary		
	Society		
Style and intention	<th>Analytical column</th> <td>Informs</td>	Analytical column	Informs
		Interprets	
		Interrelate facts	
	Opinion column	Editorializing	
		Judgmental	
		Persuasive	
	Personal column	Entertaining style	
	Literary		
Descriptive memorandum (DM)	Analysis memorandum (AM)		

Table 1. Content analysis matrix

Source: Campos (2018).

NUMBER OF COLUMNS IN VANGUARDIA.COM

Name	Years in the media	Number of columns 2015	Observations
Laura Cuesta	2013-2015	8	Stopped writing in 2015
Isabel Ortiz Pérez	2010-2016	19	Active, continues to write
Christiane Lelievre	2010-2016	25	Active, continues to write
Diana Giraldo	2011-2016	43	Active, continues to write
	TOTAL	95	

Table 2. Vanguardia.com female columnists from 2010 to 2015

Source: Campos (2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 lists the female opinion columnists from Vanguardia.com between 2010 and 2016, showing a decrease of 60%.

Of the ten opinion columnists identified on Vanguardia.com between 2010 and 2016, only four remained active in 2015, and one of those selected for the study (Laura Cuesta) stopped writing there the following year; the above reinforces the findings of Giraldo & Montealegre (2013) locally.

When looking at the data on female journalists, columnists or women who want to give their point of view in the media, the number is not high; the studied online media Vanguardia.com has 106 columnists and only 10 are women, and only four of them published in the reference year. The reasons may be related to the fact that they have been oriented to have other types of activities or professions away from the public.

The female columnists in this media are always the same; however, contrary to what was found by Suárez and Ortega (2019) in the newspaper El País.com, in Vanguardia.com they are not relegated to the background, since their columns are published in the space intended for opinion, they have a similar length and, in addition, they are replicated on the media's Facebook page, augmenting the possibility of being read from another platform.

Regarding their careers, we identified that the majority of columnists have professions such as political scientists, writers, intellectuals, human rights defenders or women who have participated in public office but are not journalists or university-educated social communicators. Laura Cuesta is a researcher; Christiane Lelievre is a clinical psychologist; Isabel Ortíz Pérez is an educational psychologist, and Diana Giraldo is a lawyer. In this regard, we found that, as in the first decade of the 21st century in Mexico, female columnists in this online media often have other professions and become columnists only at conjunctural moments or while holding public office.

Themes, intention, and style

Regarding the form, it was evident that the columnists do not have a unified opinion among their columns and that they are not constant in the parameters they use to write the journalistic texts. Of the 36 columns analyzed, according to intention and style, 29 are analytical and seven are opinion, reflecting the women's decision to offer an informed version of events, without dismissing their point of view.

The central themes are environment, corruption and gender equity, contrary to what was exposed by Mojica et al. (2019), who found that there is no training

VANGUARDIA'S FEMALE COLUMNISTS

Name	Years in the media	Number of columns 2015	Observations
Carolina Leal Pinzón	2010-2012	0	Stopped writing in 2012, with a single column
Christiane Lelievre	2010-2016	25	Active, continues to write
Claudia López	2016	0	Active, started writing in 2016
Consuelo Ordoñez	2011-2012	0	Stopped writing in 2012, with a single column
Diana Giraldo	2011-2016	43	Active, continues to write
Isabel Ortiz Pérez	2010-2016	19	Active, continues to write
Juliana Martínez	2016	0	Active, started writing for the media in February 2016
Laura Cuesta	2013-2015	8	Stopped writing in 2015
Lucrecia Ángel	2014	0	Published a single column
Martha Flórez	2010-2011	0	Stopped publishing in 2011
TOTAL			95

Table 3. Female columnists in Vanguardia.com between 2010-2016

Source: Campos (2018).

on gender issues by the journalists interviewed for their study. It is possible that this is due to the distribution of work in the newsrooms and the evident differences between reporters and opinion columnists. While the former focus on the recording of events under the criteria of objectivity and balance, the latter have the license to present their point of view and, even, to defend it vehemently as they are considered experts, even part of the elite, as stated by Elsa Elver, quoted by Fernández (2010).

In the analyzed columns of Cuesta (2015a, 2015b, 2015c) the topics are: public resources and employment opportunities; reigns and culture; public power and money management for students, adoption by same-sex couples, and free union.

Cuesta, in the typology of opinion columns by content, orients her columns towards information and opinion. As an example, we use the text entitled "Which

traditional family?": "As with other discussions on family well-being in Colombia, opinions on scientific evidence have predominated in the debate on adoption by same-sex couples. In that sea of sterile discussions, some..." (Cuesta, 2015b, par. 1).

The main function is to argue; an example is the following paragraph taken from the Tragedy and Opportunity column:

Some have focused on discussing aviation safety protocols, pilot training and mental health, and flight deck design. Others have tried to find some connection to the incident with terrorist organizations. With anguish, we look for an explanation of what happened and the form (Cuesta, 2015c, par. 1).

In Cuesta's six analyzed columns, we concluded that three of the texts correspond to the opinion type, i.e., the author makes judgments about some type of event in general, and the remaining three to the informative type, in which the data that support the document prevail more.

Following the analysis with Lelievre (2015a, 2015b, 2015c), her topics are: safety and air accidents; violence against women; social commitment to the environment; positive education to achieve happiness, and women and their role in climate change. As for the typology of her columns, those of an opinion type are privileged. The excerpt taken from the column Positive Education and Happiness accounts for this:

Happiness would not be tied to the favorable luck or privilege of frivolous, selfish, and carefree people. Happiness is learned; the disposition to happiness is built and cultivated from an early age. Education, as in life, is more pleasant and efficient to build emotions (Lelievre, 2015c, par. 2).

On the other hand, the informative way of Lelievre is determined in the following column entitled What an old Bumanguesa woman tells:

It was 1944 and the students, amid the happiness of opening a new modern campus, planted trees to decorate and offer a beneficial shade to future generations, those that little matter to the current mayor. They did not know about... (Lelievre, 2015b, par. 2).

The analysis of Giraldo's columns (2015) showed that the priority themes are: brave and powerful moms; social culture in public spaces; sexual abuse and social justice in Colombia, and political campaigns and violence in the country. Four were found to belong to the opinion type, in which value judgments prevail in the text, and six to the information type. Serpa's Bad Memory is clearly an opinion column:

Columnist name	Publication date	Column title
Laura Cuesta	January 12, 2015	<i>Hidrosogamoso ¿Oportunidad o reto?</i> (Hidrosogamoso: Opportunity or Challenge?)
Laura Cuesta	January 26, 2015	<i>El problema somos todos</i> (We are all parto of the problem)
Laura Cuesta	February 9, 2015	<i>¿Deje así?</i> (Stay like this?)
Laura Cuesta	February 23, 2015	<i>¿Cuál familia "tradicional"?</i> (Which "traditional" family?)
Laura Cuesta	March 16, 2015	<i>El riesgo es que quieras creer</i> (The risk is that you want to believe)
Laura Cuesta	March 30, 2015	<i>Tragedia y oportunidad</i> (Tragedy and opportunity)
Christiane Lelievre	March 5, 2015	<i>¡Basta!</i> (Enough!)
Christiane Lelievre	March 19, 2015	<i>Si el Alcalde fuera normalista...</i> (If the mayor was a normal-school teacher)
Christiane Lelievre	March 26, 2015	<i>Lo que cuenta una anciana bumanguesa</i> (What an old bumanguesa woman tells)
Christiane Lelievre	December 3, 2015	<i>Educación positiva y felicidad</i> (Positive education and happiness)
Christiane Lelievre	December 17, 2015	<i>Mujeres y cambio climático</i> (Women and climate change)
Christiane Lelievre	December 31, 2015	<i>Año nuevo, vida nueva</i> (New year, new life)
Diana Giraldo	May 3, 2015	<i>La mala memoria de Serpa</i> (Serpa's bad memory)
Diana Giraldo	May 10, 2015	<i>A esas mamás</i> (For those mums)
Diana Giraldo	May 17, 2015	<i>¡Provincianos!</i> (Country people!)
Diana Giraldo	May 24, 2015	<i>Víctimas de la justicia</i> (Justice victims)
Diana Giraldo	May 31, 2015	<i>Entre ángeles y demonios</i> (Between angels and demons)
Diana Giraldo	August 2, 2015	<i>¡Ay hombre!</i> (Oh, man!)
Diana Giraldo	August 9, 2015	<i>El Holguercito mentiroso</i> (The lying Holguercito)
Diana Giraldo	August 16, 2015	<i>¡Ya no más!</i> (No more!)
Diana Giraldo	August 23, 2015	<i>Donde nace la violencia</i> (Where violence starts)
Isabel Ortiz Pérez	August 20, 2015	<i>Lo invisible de la violencia hacia las mujeres</i> (The invisible violence towards women)
Isabel Ortiz Pérez	September 3, 2015	<i>Una causa invisible</i> (An invisible cause)
Isabel Ortiz Pérez	September 17, 2015	<i>No a preacuerdos en casos contra las mujeres</i> (No to pre-agreements in cases against women)
Isabel Ortiz Pérez	October 1, 2015	<i>Agenda 2030 para el desarrollo sostenible</i> (Agenda 2030 for sustainable development)
Isabel Ortiz Pérez	October 15, 2015	<i>Una agenda pendiente que reclama cumplimiento</i> (A pending agenda that demands compliance)
Isabel Ortiz Pérez	December 10, 2015	<i>Gracias a la vida, Carmencita</i> (Thanks to life, Carmencita)
Isabel Ortiz Pérez	December 24, 2015	<i>Noticias que hacen sonreír</i> (News that make us smile)

Table 4. Opinion columns analyzed

Source: Campos (2018).

It is true that time passes and memory becomes its first victim. Over the years, the facts are often forgotten, and the memories, diluted. And it seems that the “liberal patriarch” from Santander, Horacio Serpa, is experiencing one of these episodes. It could almost be said that he is suffering from amnesia (Giraldo, 2015, par. 1).

Finally, Ortiz’s (2015) themes are: political reports and the importance of women; evolution of public policies for women; environmental defense; social stereotypes (machismo and feminism); politics made by women, and sustainability plans. Her columns belong to the range of information. In the case of the type of column by content, we consider the one titled Women in the Governor’s report:

(...) in color in 8 pages of this newspaper. And specifically, I question and ask questions, seeing concern that of all that has been exposed as great achievements, there is not a single report in relation to the women of Santander. Not even once are they named. I recommend doing a careful reading and... (Ortiz, 2015, par. 1).

All of the above shows that between Vanguardia.com columnists an analytical style and intention prevails, in which they report, interpret and interrelate events to generate public opinion and tend to handle information in an editorializing, judgmental and persuasive way.

Opinion leaders?

The authors of opinion columns are frequently called opinion leaders; their function is to ensure, from their texts, the development of critical thinking. The public opinion process derives from a product, from a communicative act that occurs in the transformation of information; in the broad sense of the word, recipients/communicators are components of the open system within which the transformation process is established with some regularity. The attribute that stands out the most in the recipients of public opinion is respect and its communicative properties.

The female columnists studied remain firm in their opinion, but do not impose personal issues; on the contrary, they write on topics of social and daily interest or that are present on the national and local news agenda. Another characteristic that makes them leaders is that they are not censoring the opinion that readers have about the publications they make, since in the final part of the column, in the Facebook publications of the same newspaper, audiences have the possibility of making comments about their journalistic texts and also to connect with them by email.

At the time of the analysis, it was possible to identify that the columnists broadly describe the topic they are dealing with; at the same time that they present their



Figure 1. Fragment of Facebook comments, Laura Cuesta column

Source: Vanguardia.com's Facebook page.

point of view, they support the information with different sources. Our analysis coincides with that of Rivadeneira (2005), in which the columnists fulfill the principle of considering the whole situation: not to be guided by partial facts.

To carry out a verification process on the readability that users make of the columns published in the online medium and replicated in the social networks (Facebook) of the same newspaper, we chose one opinion column for each columnist and reviewed the comments the people made regarding the theme, identifying the tendencies they assumed, what opinions the column encouraged and the audience's feedback.

The traffic generated by the columns in the social networks of the online media showed the interest that readers gave to their points of view, especially in the interactions on Facebook. That is, the columnists have created a community based on their opinions, allowing readers to interact with them and with other members.

In the comments to Cuesta's column: Hidrosogamoso: Opportunity or Challenge? (2015a), the approval received from her readers is evident. Of the five selected



Figure 2. Fragment of Facebook comments, Christiane Lelievre column

Source: Vanguardia.com's Facebook page.

comments, three have between one and four likes, especially those that are in tune with the columnist's argument. Another relevant aspect has to do with the origin of the comments: higher education institutions, which reveals the social and cultural level of the readers.

In the comments to the column *Enough!* by Lelievre (2015a), in which she denounces a case of gender-based violence, the comments –in addition to supporting her stand– are extensive and include notes of verbal violence against the victimizer and victim, with exhortations to the author. In one, familiarity is evident when starting with the phrase "My dear Christiane"; it is probably an assiduous reading, which feels close to the columnist.

In the comments in the column *Serpa's Bad Memory*, written by Giraldo (2015), what was previously identified is confirmed: they come from readers of universities and State agencies; they are in full agreement with the arguments presented and feel close to the author.

 **Frank Louls** · Colegio de Santander
Diana Giraldo,excelente comentario; Cuando fue alcalde de Barrancabermeja apoyo las convivir que luego fueron las autodefensas para el Magdalena medio,viejo descarado y desmemorizado
Me gusta · Responder · 1 año

 **Fernando Fuentes Frago** · Universidad De La Paz - UNIPAZ
Que mala memoria la de los patriarcas del partido liberal.... Dejan mucho que pensar
Me gusta · Responder · 2 años

 **Alfonso Torres Velasquez** · Miami Beach High School
No si no examinen la calidad de "proceres" que tiene el liberalismo!! Piedad Cordoba, Ernesto Samper y su espadachin Horacio Serpa ambos investigados por el proceso 8000, unas changuitas!! Alberto Santofimio Botero autor intelectual del asesinato de Galán, Cesar Perez Garcia condenado por la masacre de Segovia Antioquia, es decir el prontuario de los "proceres" del liberalismo es muy amplio, por eso reparten avales sin preguntar a quien se lo dan!!
Me gusta · Responder · 2 años

 **Jaime Galvis**
El alzheimer de Serpa es muy selectivo
Me gusta · Responder · 2 años

 **Carlos Pinilla** · Trabaja en Consejo Superior de la Judicatura
La corrupción, el olvido de las cosas que se dicen, la falta de respeto y l falta de coherencia en lo que se dice, es lo que tiene a la clase política donde la tiene, en el concepto mas bajo de todas las clases, porque no se tiene respeto cuando se busca algo, se dicen muchas verdades a medias y solo con el fin de lograr los objetivos deseados. Y Serpa siempre ha sido un politico mafioso y con un rabo de paja se le puede prender en cualquier momento.
Me gusta · Responder · 3 años

Figure 3. Fragment of Facebook comments, Diana Giraldo column

Source: Vanguardia.com's Facebook page.

 **Ismael Fernandez** ·
Gran parte de la formación de los hombres esta en manos de las mujeres, ya sea como madres, tías, hermanas etc, parece paradójico pero buena parte de ese machismo a sido inculcado por ellas.
Me gusta · Responder · 3 años

 **Ivan Fernando Serrano Arango** · Universidad Industrial de Santander
la participación no se debe establecer por sexo, sino por capacidad, si las capaces son todas mujeres pues bienvenidas, pero no a ultranza o solo por ser mujeres, ya se ganaron el puesto.
Me gusta · Responder · 3 años · Editado

 **Daniel Hernández Rey** · Floridablanca
¿Cómo que no hubo actividades para las mujeres?, acaso se le olvida la "noche del toque de queda para los hombres"? Actividad esta tan dignificante del sexo débil y que resalta la participación de la mujer en la sociedad y promueve la integración y el respeto por la pareja.
Me gusta · Responder · 2 · 3 años

Figure 4. Fragment of Facebook comments, Isabel Ortiz column

Source: Vanguardia.com's Facebook page.

Finally, in the comments to the column *Women in the Governor's Report*, by Ortiz (2015), there is a counter-argument to the author, being the only column in which this happens; here there is no closeness in the use of language, nor direct messages of approval.

After conducting the review, it is clear that these columnists set out to propose controversial issues, such as same-sex marriage or the corruption of the regional political class, putting their status quo at risk. They lead the way to a different form of female presence in the online mass media, although their presence in the media, especially in the written ones and on the opinion pages, continues to be scarce. Of 106 columnists that *Vanguardia.com* had in 2015, only four were women and published 95 columns; on average, 23 each, which mean they had a presence in the media twice every month during that year.

In the same vein as Lippman (2003), we can affirm that the columnists are not the base of the institutions, but a reflecting light that moves permanently on one side, making visible episodes that, if not, would remain outside the public sphere.

Guide readers to focus their attention on what happens with public administration, record and analyze events related to gender violence, draw attention to behavior with the environment, propose solutions to what is happening in the region and the country, is a sample of the particular interest of this group of women in bringing to the public sphere what happens in their close context, without thereby overcoming the social difficulties or problems exposed, but moving away from the stereotypes that place them exclusively on issues related to sex, fashion and beauty.

CONCLUSIONS

The opinion columns published by four women in the online media *Vanguardia.com* in Bucaramanga, Colombia, are informative in style and interpretive in attitude, demonstrating their ability to share a point of view and to guide public opinion. In this regard, they reinforce the perspective of Colombian journalism as one of the greatest defenders of democracy in Latin America, safeguarding the interests of the majority. This study confirms this, by highlighting the position and themes of the columnists of *Vanguardia.com*. Separating themselves from the economic and political interests of the media or from the traditional vision of the family, they made visible, for example, environmental problems, such as energy megaprojects, or criticized the actions of governors of the media's same political line.

However, female opinion leaders are still few, in number and in publications; of the 106 columnists that *Vanguardia.com* had in 2015, only four were women

and published 95 columns; on average, 23 each, which means they had a presence in the media twice every month during that year.

Although feminization of journalism is now a theme and the numbers of women in newsrooms and in decision-making positions in the media have increased, the time spent in these positions is short and intermittent, as shown by this study: of ten women columnists tracked between 2010 and 2016, only four remained active; this makes it impossible to sufficiently develop issues such as discrimination, inequality or gender violence from a feminist perspective, or with a gender perspective, which would contribute to form a more inclusive or sensitive citizenry on these issues.

The need for women to own the public sphere, either politically or in the media, implies overcoming the habit of keeping them in the private space, discreetly, allowing them to openly and explicitly insert themselves into society for joint decision-making.

Discriminatory phrases such as “quiet girls look prettier” begin to be re-evaluated when the active participation of women in these areas is achieved. Despite this type of discrimination and the bullying to which women have been subjected in the journalistic practice, they have gained spaces in the coverage and development of political, economic and opinion issues, assuming positions from their perception and knowledge on the issues of the public agenda, as well as the reality of the country. In the analysis of the readers’ interactions with the columns through Facebook, we verified that the columnists have created a community in which expressions of familiarity and approval of their opinions are found through the publication of comments with similar stands. Likewise, it was found that the followers come from relevant sociocultural spaces, such as universities or State entities, and that they read the columns from their places of work or study.

It is necessary to maintain the interest from the academia in studying the news media, particularly those related to the press, which have migrated to virtual platforms and offer greater possibilities for the expression of ideas and arguments, especially when the first analyses of local and regional media show that traffic is higher and user interaction, broader. In other words, the new journalistic narratives offer interactivity as a new research option, both for journalism and for public opinion, as a field of study.

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