

The informative speech of newsgames: the “Bárceñas case” on games developed for mobile devices¹

El discurso informativo de los newsgames: el caso Bárceñas en los juegos para dispositivos móviles

O discurso informativo dos Newsgames: O caso Barceñas nos jogos para dispositivos móveis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to analyze the impact of a political corruption scandal in Spain (the Bárceñas case) in the production of games developed for mobile devices across all major platforms for content distribution. The data were obtained with questionnaires to developers, content coding sheets and the feedback given by the users of the games. The results indicate a growing influence of viral aspects, their role of strengthening of opinion and the growing role of these platforms as distributors of information contents.

Keywords: Newsgames, Bárceñas affair, online journalism, serious games, active audiences.

RESUMEN

El propósito de esta investigación es analizar el impacto de un escándalo de corrupción política en España (el caso Bárceñas) en la producción de juegos desarrollados para dispositivos móviles a través de las principales plataformas de distribución de contenidos. Los datos se obtuvieron mediante cuestionarios a los desarrolladores, fichas de codificación de los contenidos y la recepción de estas aplicaciones por parte de los usuarios. Los resultados indican la creciente influencia de los aspectos virales frente a los informativos, su rol de reforzamiento de la opinión y el creciente papel de estas plataformas como distribuidores de contenidos informativos.

Palabras clave: Newsgames, caso Bárceñas, periodismo online, serious games, infotainment, audiencias activas.

RESUMO

O objetivo desta pesquisa é analisar o impacto de um escândalo de corrupção política em Espanha (no caso Bárceñas) na produção de jogos para dispositivos móveis durante esse ano através das principais plataformas de distribuição de conteúdo. A coleta de dados foi realizada a partir de questionários para os desenvolvedores, fichas de codificação dos conteúdos, como da recepção desses aplicativos por usuários. Os resultados indicam a crescente influência de aspectos virais contra informativos, reforçando o seu papel de opinião e o papel crescente destas plataformas como distribuidores de conteúdo de notícias.

Palavras-chave: Newsgames, caso Bárceñas, jornalismo online, jogos sérios, infotainment, audiências ativas.

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INTRODUCTION: INFOTAINMENT AND NEWSGAMES ON MOBILE DEVICES

One of the Spanish political news with greater impact on the Spanish and international media during 2013 was the so-called 'Bárceñas case'. This is the name given to the lawsuit opened against Luis Bárceñas, former treasurer of the *Partido Popular* (PP) because of his relationship with the Gürtel plot, an alleged network of political corruption linked to said party and whose instruction had begun in 2009. On January 16, 2013 the fact that Luis Bárceñas owned various hidden accounts in Switzerland, by a quantity of approximate 22 million of euros, was made public. Two days later, the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* published in its front page, that "Bárceñas paid illegal bonuses for years to part of the dome of the PP". In addition, it said that Luis Bárceñas, as former treasurer of the PP, could have managed a system of donations not controlled by the Accounts Court that allowed an illegal financing of some activities of the Party (*El Mundo*, 2013). On January 31, another Spanish newspaper, *El País*, published the so-called "Bárceñas papers". This allegedly showed the PP's non-declared accounting and the payments to political figures of first order, Ministers in office and to the own Prime Minister of Spain and of the PP, Mariano Rajoy, that had won the general elections held on November 20, 2011, by absolute majority (*El País*, 2013).

All these information on the Bárceñas case appeared in a context of economic crisis and social unrest to other political scandals that place, in January 2013, the corruption as the fourth cause of concern of Spaniards after unemployment, the economy and political parties, according to the barometer of the Sociological Research Center (CIS). In February, corruption has reached the second position and stood between a second and third place (along with economic problems) throughout 2013. Only unemployment worried more the Spanish during this time (CIS, 2013).

The aim of this work is to identify, beyond the open judicial processes and the political communication strategies of the different parties, which messages about the Bárceñas case have been offered to the Spanish society through some simple entertainment, free and of rapid expansion, such as mobile games (Frasca, 2013, pp. 260-261). The choice of the object of study responds on the one hand, to the penetration and

consolidation of mobile technology in Spain both as a source of information for everyday life (Aranda & Sánchez-Navarro, 2011) as for recreational uses (Feijóo, Gómez-Barroso, Aguado & Ramos, 2012); and, secondly, to its uniqueness in the field of Spanish newsgames. No other political figure or news in the Spanish arena has generated such a large number of applications the platforms of distribution for mobile content. The Bárceñas case starred 23 games for these devices in 2013, surpassing by far any other character or news of the Spanish politics during that year¹.

The above define the three main objectives of this research. First, to establish the origin of these games and their creator's motivations to check, as exposed by Aayasha (2012), the role of ideology in the creation of content in a genre such as newsgames (journalistic videogames). This have been defined as games "for informational purposes, which are usually linked to current news" (Gómez & Navarro, 2013, p. 38) or "with the intend to participate in the public debate" (Sicart, 2008, p. 27). On the other hand, we conduct an analysis of the representation of the Bárceñas case through the implicit message of the games available in the two main platforms of distribution of mobile content (Apple Store and Play Store) for tablets and smartphones. Finally, it aims to identify (to the extent permitted by the data) the ways of reception of such content by users, in an attempt to approach the construction of their social discourse.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research combines qualitative and quantitative techniques applied to the newsgames of the Bárceñas case located in the Apple Store and the Play Store. The applied methodology responds to the need to address the different elements that could have a significant effect on the construction of meaning of the final product. These elements have been identified as "the agent that creates such content –whether they are politicians, citizens, opinion leaders, etc.–, the content itself – form and substance– and the impact on the audience" (Berrocal, Redondo & Campos, 2013, p. 75).

First, we proceeded to the selection of the sample, i.e., the games that make direct reference to Luis Bárceñas and were capable of transmitting some kind of discourse. We did a search using keywords and logical

search engines (Bárceñas, Rajoy, Spain and politics) in the platforms of distribution of content. From there we did a snowball sampling through suggestions made by the platforms from the first results (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). Thus, we obtained the set of applications related to the Bárceñas case published during 2013, although 100% of the content is located between February and September. The final sample comprises 23 results. We ruled out some games linked to the Spanish political reality that did not offer a particular prominence of the Bárceñas case, but pointed to the problems of political corruption in Spain, such as *Mariano Ninja* (JanduSoft, 2012) or the application *Corruptos de España* (Corrupts of Spain) (Icisddev, 2013). We also dismissed the analysis of three apps related to the Bárceñas case for not being games: *Los papeles de Bárceñas* (Bárceñas papers) (Chorra Soft, 2013), an application that reveals the entire contents of the accounting books employed by the treasurer that had been disseminated by the media; *Mi contabilidad en B* (My hidden accounting) (juanm8, 2013), a rudimentary application which allows registering informal loans copying the aesthetics of the notebooks that Luis Bárceñas would have used to bring the alleged illegal accounting of the PP; and *Chistes sobre Bárceñas* (Jokes about Bárceñas) (SR, 2013).

The triple object under study (creators, messages and audiences) involves a heterogeneous approach to provide an overview of the phenomenon. We start from the limitation of not having a consolidated methodology to analyze the infotainment on the Internet (Berrocal et al., 2013, p. 70), although there is research that have been used transversely, for example, on the impact of YouTube in disseminating political contents (Towner & Dulio, 2011); the construction of political leaders through social networks (Segado-Boj, Díaz-Campo & Lloves-Sobrado, 2015; Quevedo, Portalés-Oliva & Berrocal, 2015); the image of lobbyists and public opinion in commercial games through the prism of possible worlds (Planells, 2015); or analysis of communicative efficiency in applications from the health point of view (Abrams, Westmaas, Bontemps-Jones, Ramani & Mellerson, 2013).

The construction of the profile and motivations of the content creators was conducted through a closed questionnaire sent to developers of all newsgames analyzed through the contact details available on the

distribution platforms. The questionnaire had questions regarding the number of people involved in the project, the development infrastructure, its production times, the groundings for a game of that nature and, finally, specific questions on the informative speech adapted to this interactive media. Sixteen of the 23 developers answered the questionnaire.

Secondly, we proceeded to the content analysis of the sample, based on the relationship between simulation and the political caricature of newsgames, to underline its editorialist character and persuasive potential. The further development of this process comes from the study *Newsgames: Journalism at play*, which develops a classification in which the category current event information games highlights. This is a subgenre characterized by its relationship to the present, the speed of its production, its broad dissemination through the Internet and the use of programs that create such content that allow speediness and quality for the final product (Bogost, Ferrari & Schweizer, 2010, p. 15). From this theoretical basis, we created a coding sheet for each game that analyzed the classical narrative elements and those related to gameplay, understood as the interaction of the rules and properties of the game world with the goal of the player (Pérez, 2012, pp. 122-123). Two coders analyzed each coding sheet independently and the results linked to its speech were divided into two large groups. First, the narrative, which are synthesized in the characterization of characters and the relationship between the narrative context and present; and secondly, the game mechanics (objectives, rules, interactivity and player choices, etc.) that serve to complete the construction of social discourse of these games by the user (Pérez, 2015, pp. 6-13).

Finally, we analyzed the reception and popularity of these contents through a series of indicators associated with each game. It has been assumed that the main indication of the popularity of an application is the number of downloads it gets and, from there, it can be considered that more popularity offers greater possibilities for success from the communication point of view. Another item of interest to assess the reception of mobile games comes from the comments of the players. This component arises from the rating system of the distribution platform that, in both cases, is set by

a score of one to five stars (five being the best possible rating) and comments from users of the contents. The relationship between the numbers of downloads and greater number of opinions seems obvious. The most downloaded applications should receive more feedback than those that are less popular. The coding of the reviews was conducted through a quantitative content analysis undertaken from the selection of qualitative variables drawn from literature review (Sicart, 2008; Gómez & Navarro, 2013; França, 2015; Domínguez-Martín, 2015). It should be noted that the analysis of the reception has also faced limitations imposed by the data provided by both platforms, which are of an incomplete nature. For example, the only date indicated in the Play Store is of the latest update of the application, not of its original publication; on the other hand, it is impossible to know the number of total downloads of applications in the Apple Store, which leads to depend on the data that the developers can provide.

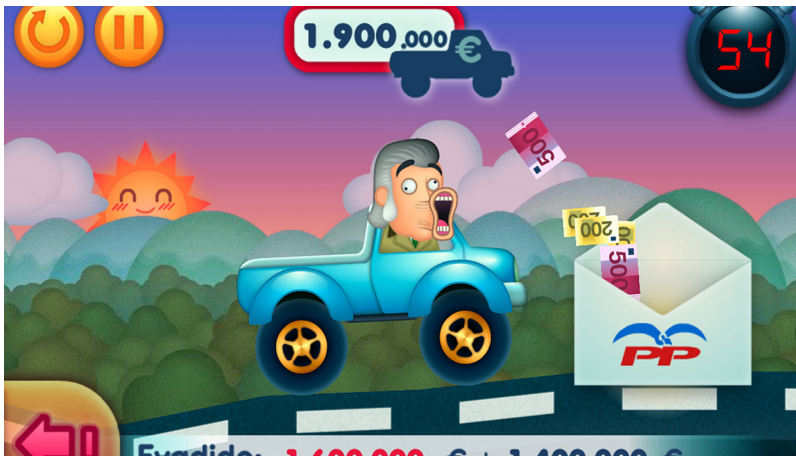
The relationship between the three dimensions of this research serves a dual purpose. First, it is the first step to build a methodological and theoretical framework for future research on contents distributed through mobile devices. Second, the same approach can offer a joint interpretation of the results to establish the informative and persuasive role of these contents, halfway between information and entertainment.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

CREATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE NEWSGAMES ABOUT BÁRCENAS

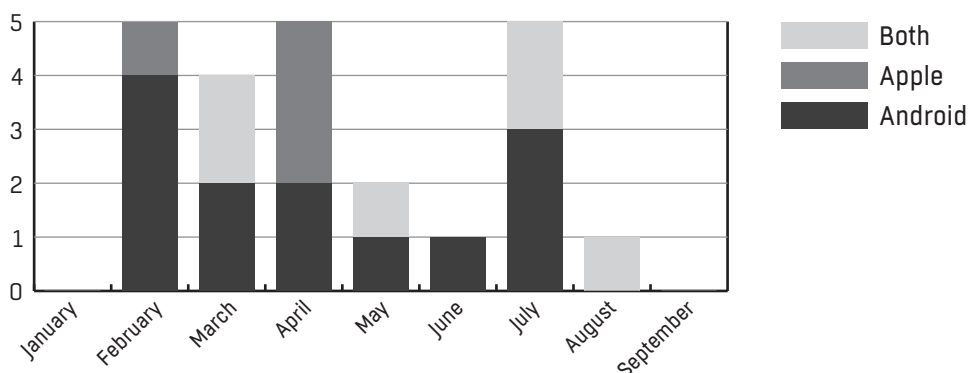
The motivations of developers to create a mobile application of these features have concentrated in two large groups. The first (81.25% of respondents) responds to the interest in transmitting an opinion through a media that is familiar for them, from ideas that emerged on informal talks on the Bárcenas case. Some of the developers highlight the fact of being able to move the atmosphere of outrage at corruption to a dimension of everyday life, to promote citizen anger against this reality. None of the respondents indicated an ideological position that would lead their actions; rather, they reflected the need to transmit their opinion through a media part of their daily activity. For example, the author of *Barcener* noted that “overall, the game is a very basic caricature of what I believe citizens have understood of what has been published in relation to Bárcenas and the PP.” Secondly, 62.5% recognizes the fact of exploring the possibilities of self-promotion through the treatment of current affairs in an unconventional format. In that sense, *Cárcenas*’ developers indicated: “other from bringing humor to the current situation, we want to show that we are able to develop applications that can succeed.” Very few dared to say whether this formula had the expected results, except Ravelmatic, which pointed to the viral

Image 1. *Chorizos de España*



Source: Ravelmatic, 2013.

Figure 1. newsgame published by distribution platform (January-December 2013)



Source: own elaboration from data from the Play Store and the Apple Store. Ppdated as of January 9, 2014.

component as a crucial element of the popularity of *Chorizos de España*. A very small number (18.75%) looked for another aspect of interest to choose from one platform to another, noting that the Play Store was the quickest and easiest way to distribute the game between mobile devices in their personal circle.

The development of applications takes, generally, around four weeks. The final quality of the various products has depended on the size of the team, their dedication to the project, their specializations or experience in the sector. The diffusion of these applications has opted for its gratuity (84%), compared to a small number who asked for payments lower than a euro. In that sense, gratuity is greater in applications for Android than for iOS, Apple's operating system. This bet is linked, according to data of the survey answered by developers, with interest in self-promotion, as developers do not perceive a willingness to pay for such content.

The most active months of appearance of newsgames on the Bárcenas case (Figure 1) are those immediately consecutive to the publication of the first news; namely February, March and April. This time segment accumulates 64% of the applications. A significant rise is also seen in July, possibly because of the renewed interest that public opinion had in the case after Bárcenas was admitted in prison on June 28, 2013.

Finally, the Google Play Store for Android devices appears as the most popular platform, clearly surpassing the Apple Store. The data indicate that 60% of

applications are unique to Android, compared to 16% of unique applications of iOS. The remaining 24% comprises applications common to both platforms. This raises an issue of concern: the most popular distribution platform, with more content and higher profits (Schröger, 2013, p. 3) –the Apple Store– offers fewer newsgames than the Play Store. The reason pointed out by some of the developers is the clauses for publishing on both platforms. The Apple Store has a meticulous control over the content published on its platform and sometimes rejects applications on politically engaged topics such as *Joyful Executions*, *Phone Story* or *Endgame: Syria* (Dredge, 2013). Instead, the Play Store does not have such limitations, with a much more lax control over the content it publishes. The most significant example of this situation is in the game of Ravalmatic, who had to change the name of the application *Chorizos de España* (in the Play Store) to *Presuntos de España*, to circumvent the filter from the Apple Store².

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: NARRATIVE AND MECHANICS

The most important figures of the analyzed contents are Luis Bárcenas and Mariano Rajoy. Bárcenas appears in 21 newsgames (91%), while the Spanish Prime Minister does it in 9 out of 23 (39%). In some cases, the reference is not explicit (the character Bárcenas does not appear), but the influence of his actions is, as in *Mariano, el ninja de los sobres* (Milk Cow, 2013), where the Prime Minister, must destroy with a katana

all the envelopes representing corruption suspicions about his party. The actual construction of the figure of Bárcenas has features derived from its representation in the media: broad face, white hair and dressed in suit and tie. The games add an element that is not part of the usual journalistic characterization: a wide smile. This factor could be associated with the perception of impunity that citizens associate with the illegal activities allegedly committed by Luis Bárcenas.

On the one hand, a large group of applications represents the former treasurer as the character played by the user and establishes a clear set of objectives under an ironic perspective. Thus, in some cases, such as *Chorizos de España* (Ravalmatic, 2013), the player must take as much money as possible to Switzerland; others point out his role of distributor of envelopes with money, as in *Dársenas, tesorero corrupto* (ET SC

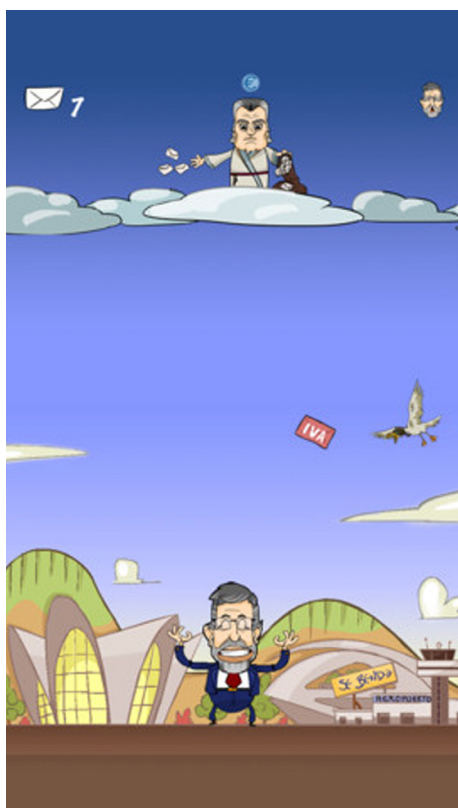
de Tenerife, 2013) or *Bárcenas! Coge tu sobre* (GeoTap Games, 2013); finally, some show both activities, as *Barcener* (Cabrera, 2013) and *Running Bárcenas* (AtunSoft, 2013). Another group of games reverses this role and places Bárcenas as the main antagonist of the player, which is represented by Mariano Rajoy, as in *Mariano, el ninja de los sobres* (Milk Cow, 2013), *Bárcenas versus PP* (Romero, 2013) or *SobraDos* (Quintia, 2013). These games suggest the interest of the Prime Minister to silence everything about this scandal and its aftermath. For example, in *Mariano, el ninja de los sobres* or *SobraDos*, a platform game where the player (Mariano Rajoy) must avoid or destroy all Bárcenas he finds and face the final boss, a Bárcenas of gigantic proportions that throws feces and that is –according to his developer– “a clear metaphore of all the rot that Bárcenas is throwing on the PP”.

Image 2. *Fruit Ninja* and *Bárcenas, la venganza*



Source: Halfbrick, 2010 and MINDsomnia, 2013.

Image 3. ¿Dónde está mi sobre?



Source: Dolores Entertainment, 2013.

Finally, the other characters of Spanish politics have a much less significant presence. The most prominent are María Dolores de Cospedal (four appearances), Inaki Urdangarín (two appearances) and the anecdotal appearance of other politicians, like Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, Javier Arenas, Soraya Saenz de Santamaría or Cristobal Montoro, among others. Their presence in the newsgames is oriented to designate them as participants in the corruption schemes denounced by these games. For example, *Los Sobre-cogedores* (App in Advance, 2013) shows Bárcenas skiing in the sky and dropping envelopes that Mariano Rajoy, Dolores de Cospedal and Francisco Álvarez Cascos collect so, at the end of the game, the scores show the different amounts obtained. In any case, the appearance of other politicians is almost anecdotal, so the focus is, clearly,

on the relationship between Bárcenas and Rajoy, the two main characters.

The evolution of the Bárcenas case has been reflected in the narrative plots of the newsgames, which have adapted their narrative axes to the informative present. The applications published between February and April focused their discourse on political corruption, bribery, and the role of Bárcenas as the architect of an alleged system of illegal financing through envelopes, which are configured as the iconic element repeated in most of these games. The withdrawal of the passport of Luis Bárcenas, on February 25, 2013, because of the risk of flight, and his possible imprisonment (which ended up occurring on June 27, 2013), influenced the discourse of subsequent applications. From April, newsgames focus their speech on three main aspects: 1) the flight of Bárcenas (of which the user is the protagonist) under very similar titles: *Bárcenas Escape*, *Running Bárcenas* and *Bárcenas Runner*; 2) his imprisonment in *Bárcenas extesorero* and *Cárcenas*; 3) and finally, the impact that his imprisonment would have for the PP in *Bárcenas, la venganza* and *Bárcenas vs PP*. The latter two aspects raise a matter of interest: the games relate his entering in prison with the process of parallel accounting in the PP that, at the time, was being investigated by Judge Pablo Ruz. Reality was very different, since the imprisonment of Bárcenas was due to forgery, attempted scam and money laundering, charges strictly related to personal actions and accounts found in Switzerland (Rtve.es, 2013).

The integration of the game logics in these speeches reveals, in most cases, a relatively simple logic, associated with the most popular video games genres. For example, platform games are imitated, but with a slight aesthetic variation, in *Bárcenas Escape*, *Running Bárcenas*, *BAPPcenas* and *Cia or SobreDos*. It is not an isolated case. *Bárcenas vs PP* has the logics of Tic Tac Toe, replacing circles and Xs by the faces of Bárcenas and Rajoy and in the same line, *Bárcenas, la venganza* recovers a skill that has become popular on mobile devices through *Fruit Ninja* (Halfbrick, 2010). The mechanics of this game is to slide a finger (or stylus or mouse) on the screen to slice the fruits, avoiding the bombs that occasionally accompany the fruit. *Bárcenas, la venganza* adds a narrative element of humor: the fruits are replaced by clones of political leaders (who have been created by an alien race to subjugate the

human race). Bárcenas (the player) is the only one who can defeat them. The goal is to eliminate these clones avoiding to cut receipts (*Fruit Ninja* bombs), which also appear on the screen.

Of all the newsgames analyzed, the four that stand out for their number of downloads and, therefore, by their popularity, summarize the most significant aspects of this case of political corruption. In the first, *¿Dónde está mi sobre?*, the player (characterized as Mariano Rajoy) must collect envelopes from the sky, thrown by Luis Bárcenas. The player must avoid that the envelopes fall down and not pick those that include the word VAT or tax. At the end of the game, the player's score is reflected in a hand-written notebook reminiscent of the controversial accounting books attributed to the former treasurer of the PP. The second, *Chorizos de España*, allows the player (characterized as Luis Bárcenas) to drive a truck through different roads (game levels) with uphill and potholes, which transports different amounts of money towards Switzerland; at the end of the way, the money is introduced into an envelope with a logo that simulates the one of PP. Therefore, the participation of the player is to use its ability to optimize the amount of money evaded. In *Dársenas*, *tesorero corrupto*, the player (again characterized as Bárcenas) must "throw" envelopes of different color (indicating the amount of money they contain) with the "right" strength to be collected by the different visitors he receives. Subsequently, it must click on the empty space where the "beneficiary", when leaving, has left a receipt. The last one, *Cárcenas*, is not, strictly speaking, a game, but uses the logic of entertainment of the popular application *Talking Tom Cat* (Outfit7, 2010), which uses voice recognition to repeat distortedly what the user says. It also adds some phrases and attitudes (as gags) that, apocryphally, are attributed to a Bárcenas characterized as a prisoner. This last application is the only that distances the player of the various protagonists, since it is a mere spectator that interacts with Bárcenas through the interface.

CONTENTS RECEPTION

The most important aspect of the 23 games on Bárcenas is that four of them account for about 98.45% of total downloads (out of approximately 340,250). That is, the interest lays around *¿Dónde está mi sobre?* (around

270,000, according to the developers, only at the Apple Store), *Chorizos de España* (over 50,000 downloads in the Play Store), *Bárcenas, tesorero corrupto* (with more than 10,000 in the Play Store) and, finally, *Cárcenas* (with more than 5000 in the Play Store). The last three games are also available through the Apple Store, but as it has already been pointed out, the platform does not provide data on the number of download of applications. It should be noted that the percentages of downloading are conditioned to the fact that the most downloaded application (*¿Dónde está mi sobre?*) has a non-testable data which obviously conditions the sample. However, these percentages attest to the growing popularity of these applications from the rest (just 1.5% of discharges), which meant that different general media echo them (*ElMundo.es*, 2013; *El Periódico*, 2013). In any case, we have not located a pattern within the discourse analysis, associated with greater or lesser popularity of a content over another. On the contrary, the production, quality and development time of the games seem to be directly related to the number of downloads they receive. The games that dominate the highest positions come from professional studios, that are much more accomplished than other initiatives. In other words, it does not seem that a concrete vision on the Bárcena case translates into a greater or lesser popularity of the application.

The relationship between the number of downloads and the number of opinions is obvious and logical and is fulfilled in *Chorizos de España*, which had, in early January 2014, 660 user reviews (634 on the Play Store and 26 on the Apple Store) and *Dársenas, tesorero corrupto*, with a total of 104 comments (86 on the Play Store and 18 on the Apple Store). Finally, *¿Dónde está mi sobre?* has only 26 reviews for its exclusivity on the Apple Store, a platform that—according to these data—receives less feedback from users. The rest of the applications, with fewer downloads, ranges between 10 and 25 comments (on the Play Store) for those that exceed 1000 downloads and an average of four comments for those that are below this number. The reviews can be classified into two main groups: references to the quality or interest of the playfulness of the product, and recognizing the wittiness of developers for their linkage with current news. There are also comments that criticize, extensively, the whole political class, for

example, in *Chorizos de España*, when they point out that “we need more politicians!”, “great fun!” or “real as life in Spain”. The assessment of the game as entertainment properly elaborated in its aesthetic and logics seems to indicate the source of its success or failure with users.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The popularity of the Bárcenas case on mobile devices versus other current political news (which had little impact) on 2013 comes from the combination of scattered factors: the search for self-promotion by the developers, the opportunity to participate in a new logic of discourse in the line of creative audience (Castells, 2010, pp. 175-185), the social and media relevance in public opinion of this issue and, finally, the ease of creation and use of contents of these features nowadays. However, these elements have an uneven presence in explaining the success of the phenomenon. The most decisive factor is that the game is associated with a strategy of viral content self-promotion.

The potential popularity of this mobile content is related to distribution platforms (Apple Store and Play Store). The role of these intermediaries marks the importance that these platforms will have in the future, when deciding on its ability to spread and for visibility (Aguado, Martínez & Cañete-Sanz, 2015). Finally, we can point gratuity as a significant factor, since users do not seem to be willing to pay for a product that is not perceived as serious information or as an elaborated entertainment. Therefore, and within the logic of self-promotion, the most downloaded games have been offered free and have a more elaborate production.

Discourse analysis presents two issues of interest. First, the bet of games on Bárcenas for a cartoonish logic (in aesthetics) and humorous (in shaping the message). These contents are heirs of the graphic humor of print media, since its graphical representation includes significant elements of humor, whose purpose is to collect and disseminate existing visions in a society on a specific event (El Refaie, 2009, pp. 184-185). In that sense, the characterization of the Bárcenas case and its protagonists responds to “the amplification of the meaning of discourse through its simplification” (McCloud, 1993, p. 30). In other words, the recurring presence in the newsgames of items anchored in the

popular imagination strengthens their existence, due to the links establishes with users by that resource. This applies, for example, to the iconic hegemony of the envelope that, on the three most downloaded applications, appears linked to the PP, either through a simulated logo or Bárcenas himself distributing envelopes that in some cases are collected by Mariano Rajoy. The highly significant presence of the Prime Minister in all these games does not seem justified because he was more benefited than others with the alleged bonuses, but for his symbolic character as president of the PP. Thus, developers want to promote the idea that accounting irregularities were structural and affected the whole party, or at least its most relevant components.

Secondly, this logic is accentuated by the role of interactivity that characterizes videogames, also present in newsgames. The user not only reads the message, but participates in it in different ways: distributing cash envelopes in *Dársenas*, tesorero corrupto; escaping from prison in *Running Bárcenas* (thus reinforcing his guiltiness and the possibility of an impending flight from Spain), or, in the case of Mariano Rajoy, as a participant in a system of bonuses which, in turn, tries to avoid the political scandal. It is circumstance underlined by *Rajoy y los sobres perdidos* (Smart Project, 2013), in which the player, represented by Mariano Rajoy must collect the envelopes Bárcenas throws from the sky, while dodging the bombs that fall with them. The sense of interactivity in this context comes from the elections that the player can make or not, part of the process of immersion, and therefore the message he receives. However, the games on Bárcenas have a number of discourse limitations, coming from a low level of interactivity: they only allow a selective participation, without offering possibilities for transforming or constructively participating of the discourse (Súarez & Martín, 2013, pp 51-54). In other words, the player cannot choose to punish Bárcenas, denounce the system of illegal financing or imprison those responsible (at least within the logic that each of these games poses as correct). These limitations indicate the testimonial and humorous sense of the games on Bárcenas, over other proposals developed by other media. For example, *Cutthroat Capitalism* (Wired, 2009) to report on piracy in Somalia, or *Rock-*

Paper-Scissors (New York Times, 2012) to illustrate the reasoning processes of artificial intelligences.

The reception of this content also raises some issues of interest. First, that the greater or lesser popularity of the newsgames in these distribution platforms lays on the quality of the game and its election as genre against the ideological positioning. Of course, in the long term, the views or sense creations offered by the most popular content will be those able to influence more the users who consume them. Here we can see a collision between purely informative and recreational interests. The heterogeneity of messages and profiles of the creators of the analyzed newsgames shows the absence of a quest to create an opinion; rather, it points to an attempt to detect which is the opinion of the majority, and promoting it. In that sense, they are more followers of trends than opinion makers, which introduces a significant risk of untruthfulness: there is not a search for truth but to please many people and impacting them. Like the cartoons of the daily press, these newsgames collect existing prejudices in a particular sector of society (Alhabash & Wise, 2015). If it accomplishes this task, the product will have more

downloads and that –not their proximity or distance with the truth– would measure its success. Thus, the four newsgames that concentrate more than 98% of total downloads belie the reason for the presence of Bárcenas in jail: he is accused by his economic activities, not those of the PP. However, that falsehood is needed to connect with the main idea to propagate: the corruption of the PP and, by extension, of much of the Spanish political system. Second, and in the same vein, users' comments about the different newsgames are also significant, because they denounce the corruption of the Spanish political class and leave the Bárcenas case in the background.

Definitively, the newsgames about the Bárcenas case have participated in the public discourse from their limitations as entertainment and their popularity demands, which certainly distorted their informative discourse. Even so, given their impact on public opinion through mobile devices, newsgames in general may have a growing influence and they represent another element of the digital impact on the information ecosystem, in a scenario that mixes old and new elements of the journalism of information and entertainment.

FOOTNOTES

1. In that sense, Luis Bárcenas widely surpasses other leading figures of Spanish politics, as Mariano Rajoy, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, among others. In similar searches conducted between February and September 2013, the Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy had four parodic games in the Play Store and three in the Apple Store.
2. Translator note: "Chorizos", other than being a traditional sausage, is used in Spain as a way to refer to thieves. Therefore, the newsgame name could be translated as "Thieves of Spain". On the App Store, it was changed to "Alleged of Spain".

RECOGNITION

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