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DOSSIER

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE SAFETY OF CONFLICT JOURNALISTS:

analysis of the characteristics, structure, and resources of their virtual press rooms

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ABSTRACT – The safety of journalists who cover conflicts has been an issue that has raised concern within with the War in Ukraine (2022) and the one in Gaza (2024), which has led to international organizations to raise awareness among international organizations to develop new measures and strategies to guarantee the protection of journalists. In a context in which organizations become creators of contents and build connections with their audiences, this paper analyses the main characteristics, structure, content, and communication channels of the Virtual Press Rooms of international organizations dedicated to the safety of journalists. The use of the Press Rooms as a storage for information and the lack for of an unified criteria in their naming, the lack of a target audience corporate image strategies, opens up new research lines regarding the role of these organizations in supplying documentation to aid journalists.

Key words: Virtual press rooms. Conflict journalism. Journalist's safety. International organizations. Corporate communication.

ORGANIZAÇÕES INTERNACIONAIS E SEGURANÇA DOS PERIODISTAS DE CONFLITO: análise das características, estrutura e recursos de suas salas de imprensa virtuais

RESUMO – A segurança dos jornalistas que enfrentam conflitos foi um tema que saltou na agenda pública com a Guerra da Ucrânia (2022) e o conflito em Gaza (2023), e levou organizações internacionais a realizar petições públicas para implementar novas medidas e estratégias vinculadas à proteção dos periodistas. Em um contexto em que as organizações se convertem em criadoras de conteúdo e vínculos com seus públicos, este trabalho analisa as características, estrutura, conteúdo e recursos de interação das salas de imprensa virtuais (SPV) das organizações internacionais dedicadas à segurança dos periodistas sobre o terreno. O uso das salas de imprensa como repositório de conteúdo informativo, a desavença de critérios em sua denominação, a falta de um objetivo público definido e a presença de recursos e manuais intermitentes para os jornalistas no terreno, abrem novos horizontes de estudo sobre o papel destas organizações como administradoras de materiais especializadas em segurança durante coberturas de conflito.

Palavras-chave: Sala de imprensa virtual. Periodismo de conflito. Segurança dos periódicos. Organizações internacionais. Comunicação Corporativa.

ORGANIZACIONES INTERNACIONALES Y LA SEGURIDAD DE LOS PERIODISTAS DE CONFLICTO: análisis de las características, estructura y recursos de sus salas de prensa virtuales

RESUMEN – La seguridad de los periodistas que cubren conflictos ha sido un tema que ha saltado a la agenda pública con la Guerra de Ucrania (2022) y el conflicto en Gaza (2023), y ha llevado a organizaciones internacionales a realizar peticiones públicas para implementar nuevas medidas y estrategias vinculadas a la protección de los periodistas. En un contexto en el que las organizaciones se convierten en creadoras de contenidos y vínculos con sus públicos, este trabajo analiza las características, estructura, contenidos y recursos de interacción de las salas de prensa virtuales (SPV) de las organizaciones internacionales dedicadas a la seguridad de los periodistas sobre el terreno. El uso de las salas de prensa como almacén de contenidos informativos, la desavenencia de criterios en su denominación, la falta de un público objetivo definido y la presencia intermitente de recursos y manuales para los periodistas en el terreno, abren nuevos horizontes de estudio sobre el papel de estas organizaciones como suministradoras de materiales especializados en seguridad durante coberturas de conflicto.

Palabras clave: Sala de prensa virtual. Periodismo de conflicto. Seguridad de periodistas. Organizaciones internacionales. Comunicación corporativa.

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1 Introduction

The issue of journalists' safety when covering conflicts has been a topic that has moved up the agenda in recent years, with the creation of mechanisms such as the Unesco-UN Plan of Action in 2012 (Garrido, 2021), following the use of the embedded system in the 2003 Iraq war (Iturregui, 2011; Sanchez, 2019), and with the rise in the number of freelance journalists and the controversial kidnappings in the 2012 war in Syria (Harris & Williams, 2018), for example. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and following the recent statistics showing that at least 103 journalists have been killed in Gaza, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2024), the debate has flared up on social media: many journalists, especially on Twitter, are attempting to draw the attention of public opinion by posting content about the safety of reporters covering conflicts. This sense of emergency and concern is also reflected in academic work at the international level, with numerous recent works referring to the importance of this object of study issue (Orgeret & Tayeebwa, 2020; Carlsson & Pöyhtäri, 2017), presenting case studies (Hasan & Wadud, 2020; Harrison & Pukallus, 2021), and even beginning to propose models of analysis (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023) and specific methodologies to address them (Harrison et al., 2020).

However, although the situation of journalists concerning safety on the European continent is better than in other geographical areas such as Africa and the Middle East (Unesco, 2018), academia is highlighting the need to address different challenges related to establishing more favorable conditions for the safety of journalists (Žuffová & Carlini, 2021; Unda et al., 2022).

In response to the situation described above, organizations such as Reporters Without Borders have made public appeals to both adversaries and different international organizations on the ground, to protect journalists (APM, 2022). In addition, the Unesco initiatives include the provision of personal safety kits and safety manuals for journalists currently covering the war in Ukraine (UN, 2022).

As corporations continue to restructure their communication offices and develop new digital strategies to refine their native advertising formats, academic interest in branded content and journalism from institutional sources is also growing, especially with the emergence of a critical stance on corporate and advertising pressure in the creation of news content (Carvajal & Barinagarrementeria, 2021). Given that

journalism from institutional sources does not have a profit-making objective, but rather seeks social and cultural benefits (Carrión, 2015), it is interesting to look at how institutions whose purpose is to safeguard the work and conditions of journalists covering conflicts produce and target corporate information and content through their online portals.

Virtual press rooms have become a strategic tool to mediate new communication practices between different institutional actors and the media (Taboada et al., 2021). The scope of institutional communication and the possibilities of interaction between institutions and journalists has multiplied thanks to resources such as VPRs, with notable transformations in production routines in terms of "access to sources, the search for immediacy, and the quality of information" (Carrión, 2015, p.521), and thanks to new formulas for interaction with the target audience par excellence: journalists.

Virtual press rooms are a translation towards the digital environment from the space where the exchange between organizations and media managers traditionally took place. They are "networked spaces for communication containing the tools and activities through which organizations address the media" (Castillo, 2006, p. 2). In practice, there has been disagreement about their naming, and apart from the widely accepted "press center" or "virtual press room", names such as "news" or "current affairs" still prevail for the spaces understood as virtual press rooms (Taboada et al., 2021). Due to this lack of coherence in the very definition of these tools, for the methodological interests of this study, we have considered each of the different connotations included in the scientific literature and those mentioned above as defining virtual press rooms.

The interest in evaluating the role of virtual press rooms as providers of information on safety to conflict journalists arises from the expansion of the functions and contents of a traditional VPR. The virtual press room is, by definition, aimed at the press and media journalists (Paricio et al., 2019), to transfer information that later becomes news and positions itself on the media agenda. However, there is a growing interest in assessing the extent to which virtual press rooms aspire to transcend media relations (Cantalapiedra et al., 2020) and go on to build direct communication channels with other strategic audiences.

In the academic field, studies on virtual press rooms have focused on their corporate function as public relations tools (Almansa, 2005; Castillo, 2006, 2008; García Orosa, 2013; Marca Francés et al., 2014; Almansa & Castillo, 2015; Durántez Stolle, 2017; Costa,

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2017) and as resources for the development and management of relations with the media and providers of varied information about the institution (Xifra, 2011; Cantalapiedra et al., 2012; Herrero et al., 2017; Rodrigues et al., 2019; Paricio et al., 2019).

Diverse academic works, especially in the international arena, also deal with the issue of international organizations and security in conflicts: the measures taken by international organizations regarding the protection of culture in conflicts (Puskás, 2021), the role they play in conflict prevention (Maliqi et al., 2018), their dissemination of information on press freedom (Palmer, 2021), and the protection of women in conflict zones (Davies & True, 2018). Even so, there is little work on the role of international organizations in the safety of journalists covering war or conflict. Lisosky and Henrichsen (2009) address the issue by reviewing the measures developed and implemented by the international community aimed at protecting conflict journalists in an article that forms part of the book *War on Words: Who Should Protect Journalists?*, in which the same authors discuss which agency should be responsible for the safety of journalists and how this has evolved in the 21st century (Lisosky & Henrichsen, 2011). In Latin America, González et al. (2022) carried out a study on the conditions of journalistic practice in Mexico, including the views of conflict journalists on the work and functions of journalists' organizations in that country. Although terminological precision is a widely debated topic in the field (Unda & Iturregui, 2022; Galtung, 2003), we propose an understanding of the term conflict journalism in its most unifying sense; that is to say, applying to countries experiencing situations of armed conflict and for countries experiencing situations of structural violence, based on the scheme proposed by Galtung (2003) and aligned with the approach proposed by Hanitzsch (2007).

Although there are studies that deal with the role of international organizations in security matters, there is a clear lack of specific studies on the role of the virtual press rooms that belong to organizations dedicated to journalists' safety in the provision of information and content both to the media and to the professionals who cover conflicts. With the recent positioning of the topic on social media during the Ukraine War (2022), it is pertinent to highlight the need for these professionals to create collaboration networks with international organizations with the aim of safeguarding their work as well as their safety (Tejedor et al., 2022). This gives rise to a legitimate interest in understanding the role of these organizations in positioning the issue

of journalist safety and protection on the media agenda, as well as the use they make of their virtual press rooms to disseminate this type of specific content on the safety of journalists covering conflicts.

Therefore, taking into account the fact that virtual press rooms have been considered mediating tools for communication flows between journalists and other agencies and companies (Durántez-Stolle, 2017; Paricio et al., 2019), this study analyses the role of the VPRs belonging to organizations dedicated to journalist safety in the generation of information for reporters, their structure and contents, as well as their target audience.

2 Virtual press rooms as communication and information tools between institutions and journalists.

The "Press Agent" and "Public Information" models proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984) served for decades as a model to address the nature of media relations. Relations with the media, as well as the creation and dissemination of information both internally and externally, have also been one of the main aspects of the work of communication offices (Almansa & Castillo, 2015). Although online technologies have facilitated diversification beyond the functions of information subsidy (Xifra, 2011) and traditional public relations, it is clear that the communication office continues to be a source of accurate and up-to-date information (Almansa, 2009) that assists journalists in the exercise of their tasks and routines of producing news.

In a scenario of continuous technological and digital convergence, the relations between communication offices and the media are evolving from Baerns' "influence model" (1979, as cited in Cantalapiedra González et al., 2020) and the management of publicity (Bernays, 1936, as cited in Cutlip & Center, 2000) to a perspective more focused on relationships and centered on building valuable dialogues between journalists and corporations (Waters et al., 2010).

Parejo (2015) points out that, from the 2000s onwards, it was the use of email for sending mass mailings and the design of web portals that allowed traditional communication offices to begin to carry out part of their activity online, and this led to the rise of virtual press rooms as resources that allow fluid and direct communication with journalists.

With a clear role in the management of online public relations and institutional relations with the media (Paricio et al., 2019), virtual

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press rooms are spaces hosted on corporate websites which gather together content aimed at the media and journalists (Pettigrew & Rebber, 2010). Along the same lines, their successful role as digital spaces that propose new communication management solutions in the traditional source/journalist relationship (García Orosa, 2013) is quite remarkable. By aspiring to be "a space for communication and a work tool on the web aimed at journalists" (Parejo, 2015, p. 187), they have become spaces for dialogue and reciprocal exchange with these professionals and other audiences of interest.

Concerning the resources and contents necessary for their operability, virtual press rooms must have the same public relations resources that have a place in the traditional model of a communication office (Castillo, 2006; González-Herrero & Ruiz de Valbuena, 2006). An example of this is the press release, the most common corporate communication tool that communication offices work with and one of the resources most valued by journalists (Túñez-López et al., 2018); another is the press conference, which serves as a meeting point and place for exchange between both parties.

Paniagua et al. (2012) define a virtual press room model that includes variables such as the press release 2.0, the press dossier, an image/video archive, media monitoring, an electronic agenda, internal or external magazine, links to media, reports and corporate documentation, social networks, an identity, and a search engine. Their structure, however, will depend both on the formal characteristics of the website where they are hosted (usability and accessibility) and on the presence of informative content that encourages journalistic practice, as well as on their capacity to generate valuable contacts with the institution's world of audiences (Sánchez-Pita & Rodríguez-Gordo, 2010).

In this regard, it is worth noting that virtual press rooms are, by definition, aimed at media journalists, as transmitters or mediators between the organization's news content and the news agenda (Castillo, 2006; García Orosa, 2013; Cantalapiedra et al., 2017). However, digitalization in the production routines of most organizations today has led to a tendency to broadcast their information without it passing through the media filter (Macnamara, 2014; Cantalapiedra González et al., 2020).

While in their early days, these corporate tools were established as facilitators of information subsidies and documentary material for journalists (Xifra, 2011; Herrero-Gutiérrez et al., 2017), this recent aspiration to transcend contact with journalists and move towards

building dialogues directly with their world of audiences raises a debate on the extent to which organizations, through their virtual press rooms, are becoming the main source of information – independently from the media discourse (Cantalapiedra González et al., 2020).

Other authors echo this trend by emphasizing that VPRs can and should facilitate direct dialogue with different audiences or stakeholders from institutions, such as brand sponsors and influencers (Pettigrew & Rebber, 2010; Villena Alarcón, 2018; Paricio et al., 2019).

3 International organizations and their role in journalist safety

Over the years there have been numerous debates about the safety of journalists in today's wars, since "prominent individuals, major press associations, media companies, and international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have recognized the importance of protecting those who gather information about war" (Lisosky & Henrichsen, 2009, p. 131). Following on from this, journalist safety, considered a prerequisite for the free exercise of journalism (Chocarro, 2017) has been monitored by international organizations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Without Borders, and the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, specifically dedicated to the safety of journalists in conflict zones in the form of press releases: "In addition to these rhetorical strategies, pragmatic strategies have been proposed to protect journalists gathering information in conflict zones, which include combat training for journalists, protective equipment and identity badges" (Lisosky & Henrichsen, 2009, p. 131).

It is worth noting that in recent years progress has been made both nationally and internationally in terms of increasing the safety of journalists and in the fight against impunity for attacks on journalists, with advances being implemented by different states, the United Nations, international and regional organizations, and also the media (UN, 2018). This is a question that came to the fore with the 2012 United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which has led to the organization of different conferences on the issue and the establishment of prevention mechanisms (UN, 2018).

In addition, different non-governmental organizations together with other entities such as trade unions, international

organizations, and the media have launched various projects and processes for the protection of journalists specifically covering conflicts (Lisosky & Henrichsen, 2011). The proposals include the following initiatives:

> Advocacy groups that expose and report the mistreatment of media workers around the world;
> - Protection organizations, international initiatives, and foundations that promote training and education for journalists and media workers;
> - Protection organizations that have introduced emblems for journalists to wear as symbols of protection similar to the Red Cross; and
> - Specific journalism education tactics designed to offer media education and alternative ways to tell the stories of conflict. (Lisosky & Henrichsen, 2011, p. 73).

Even so, despite the efforts of international organizations and associations that aim to guarantee the safety of journalists in the profession, different rights violations are reported every day in war and conflict zones (European Parliament, 1993). Figures published by RSF in 2021 – with a total of 46 journalists killed while reporting from different parts of the world – actually showed the lowest number recorded in the last 20 years. Nevertheless, the number of journalists killed over the last decade stands at 942 (RSF, 2022), and "the situation continues to deteriorate alarmingly, raising legitimate questions about the effectiveness of international and regional mechanisms, or indeed mechanisms at all levels" (UN, 2018, p. 17). Undoubtedly, the war in Gaza, with 103 journalists killed in 150 days (RSF, 2024) drastically aggravates this scenario.

Responding to the situation in 1993, the European Parliament, in its Report by the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Security on the protection of the rights of journalists on dangerous missions, expressed the need to implement a global safety net that transcends the budget of organizations and becomes a governmental issue. A brief look at the existing legal framework highlights the need to regulate the safety of conflict journalists in the field. However, the issue that still concerns cooperation organizations, associations, and others is the practical implementation of relevant safety, training, prevention, and protection measures – something that can only be undertaken through cooperation between society, governments, the military, the media, journalists, and the NGOs (Düsterhöft, 2013).

Taking the review of the existing literature and the main motivation for the study formulated above as a starting point, the

following research questions are posed:

RQ1: What are the names given to and the contents and interaction resources of virtual press rooms in organizations working for the safety of journalists?

RQ2: Who are the target audiences for the content of these organizations' virtual press rooms?

This study, therefore, aims to assess the extent to which these virtual press rooms belonging to international organizations dedicated to journalist safety can function as centralized spaces for interaction and reciprocal contact where materials and content are aimed not only at media journalists as the ultimate target audience but also at conflict journalists, regarded as users in need of resources on safety. Other authors echo this trend by emphasizing that VPRs can and should facilitate direct dialogue with different audiences or stakeholders from institutions, such as brand sponsors and influencers (Pettigrew & Rebber, 2010; Villena Alarcón, 2018; Paricio et al., 2019).

4 Methodology

With the main objective of analyzing the names given to the virtual press rooms belonging to international organizations dedicated to the safety of journalists covering conflicts and the type of content they publish, as well as their target audience and the nature of the information published, a formal content analysis was carried out, focusing mainly on the characteristics of the space allocated to the media, the format and content of the resources used, and the presence of resources for interaction.

Content analysis is a research technique that enables an objective, structured, systematic, and replicable study to be carried out for the case of descriptive research on virtual press rooms (Durántez-Stolle, 2017), making it possible to evaluate their suitability as resources that provide information on organizational life. Paniagua et al. (2012), Marca-Francés et al. (2014), Paricio et al. (2019), Taboada et al. (2021), among other authors, have used quantitative content analysis with qualitative interpretation in replicable studies on virtual press rooms.

The analysis sheet has been constructed and adapted to the methodological needs of this study focused on identifying, first, the descriptive and identifying data of the virtual press rooms in the selected organizations and, second, the resources used by each of

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them. That is to say, this is a formal and structural content analysis, descriptive in nature, of the virtual press rooms belonging to the studied organizations, designed, and systematized in an operational content analysis file by the BITARTEZ Group of the Basque University System with Typology A, within the context of Project CSO2014-56196-R.

The indicators of the study systematized by Bitartez are defined and have been based on the proposals of previous studies on virtual press rooms, with particular attention to the proposal of García Orosa (2013) and Durantez-Stolle (2017) to understand VPRs in terms of 1) technical aspects and type of content (corporate content and informative content); and 2) usability, contact, and dissemination.

The operationalization of the study variables in the construction of the tool is therefore based on the following categories: 1) formal characteristics of the virtual press room (technical aspects), 2) tools and resources of the virtual press room (types of content), and 3) characteristics of the published content and interaction (usability, contact, and dissemination).

The analysis sheet used is as follows:

Table 1

Analysis Sheet. Categories and indicators

Categories	Indicators	
Formal characteristics of the virtual press room.	Type of corporation	
	Dimension	
	Existence of VPR	
	Name	
	Location	
	Target audience	Media journalists
		Conflict journalist
Virtual press room tools and resources	News	
	Press releases	
	Announcements	
	Statements	
	Press conferences	
	Safety manual/reports	
	Corporate documentation	
	Press Kit	

Characteristics of content and interaction	Integrated/centralized content
	Contact and mode of interaction
	Social media profiles
	Media list

The organizations that make up the sample are those present in the report published by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in 2018 entitled "Journalist Security Guide: Covering the News in a Dangerous and Changing World", a document specifically focused on the safety of conflict journalists. The CPJ, in addition to being an organization capable of creating platforms and spaces for journalists from any geographical area to carry out their work, stands out for its ability to act in the positioning of security discourses and issues "situated within a quite particular geo-political and institutional milieu" (Palmer, 2021, p. 1.080). Also, as stated in the "UN Plan for Action and the Issue of Impunity", it is an organization that creates content and publishes updated statistics that "testify to the staggering number of journalists and media workers killed while performing their professional duties" (UN, 2012).

The CPJ lists 54 international organizations. However, the sample has been limited to 30, including only those organizations that appear in the sections related to the safety and conditions of conflict journalism: press freedom groups, news safety & support organizations, and professional training organizations.

Also, taking into account that conditions such as press freedom can affect the information available in these press rooms vis-à-vis the conditions of journalistic practice, consideration has been given to the countries in which these organizations operate and where they are located according to the "World Press Freedom Index" calculated by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in 2023. Of these, 19 organizations are located in countries with a "Satisfactory situation", 3 are located in countries with a "Problematic situation", 1 is located in a "Difficult situation", and 3 are in countries that have a "Very serious/ critical situation". Four organizations appearing in the CPJ index did not have an accessible website or VPR at the time of the study.

5 Results

The results stemming from the quantitative content analysis and the application and tabulation of the analysis sheet, which has been processed using Excel statistical software, are presented below.

### 5.1 Structure of the virtual press room, characteristics, and information resources used

The names that international organizations which aim to address the safety of journalists give to their virtual press rooms are diverse, although as can be seen in the graph, 53.6% of them call the VPR "News". Only 14.2% of organizations call it a "Press Room" or "Press Centre". 21.4% do not have a VPR; that is to say, they do not dedicate any space to centralizing content aimed at journalists.
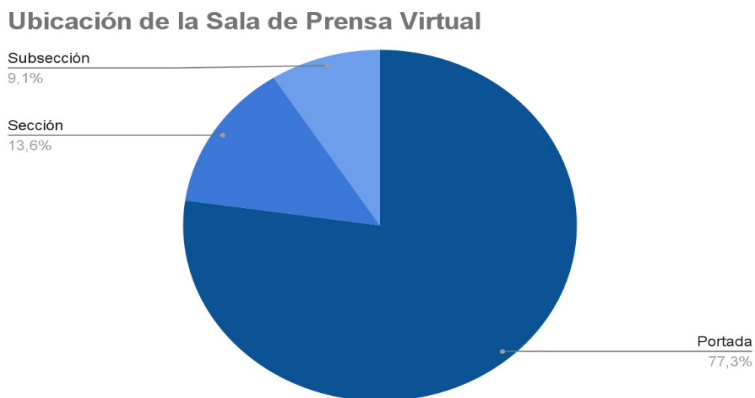
The majority of the organizations analyzed place the virtual press room on the home page of the website (77.3%), which is therefore just one click away from what the user is searching for. Nevertheless, 9.1% place it in a subsection, within a main section located on the home page. This, in addition to hindering the visibility of the virtual press room, can create confusion among the user/public, since some organizations include the VPR within other sections such as "What we do" or "Current news", in which case, the name of the VPR is "News".

Figure 1

Categories and indicators. VPR designation.


Denominación de las Salas de Prensa Virtuales

No tiene SP
21,4%

Otros
10,7%

Sala de Prensa
7,1%

Centro de Prensa
7,1%

Noticias
53,6%
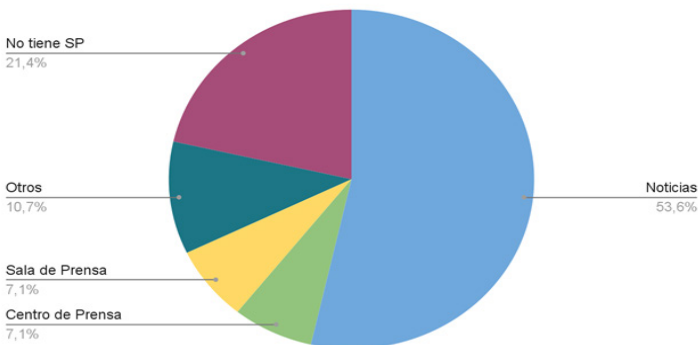
Figure 2

Location of the VPR

Ubicación de la Sala de Prensa Virtual

Subsección 9,1%

Sección 13,6%

Portada 77,3%

Regarding the content and information resources used, it is found that only 36.3% of organizations have a visible agenda which indicates the time and/or date of the upcoming events, press conferences, etc. that each organization will attend or organize – a figure that shows the absence in many cases of a centralized resource that brings together information about future events.

The majority of organizations – more than 72.7% – publish announcements on their websites, as well as statements (86.3%), while more than half of them (63.6%) also publish press releases. However, the scant presence of press conference publications stands out, since only 36.3% use this information resource. Even so, the use of news (95.45%) as the main information channel is clear since all the organizations analyzed apart from one make use of this resource. In other words, it is striking that the most traditional tools of journalistic content such as "news" (a terminological choice that clearly denotes the intention of the text), press releases, and announcements are the resources that are most used. More interactive resources typical of the new procedures of Web 2.0 communication offices and online public relations, such as electronic agendas (only 28% use them) and streaming press conferences are not included on the websites studied.

Figure 3

Type of VPR content

### Tipo de contenido de las Salas de Prensa Virtuales
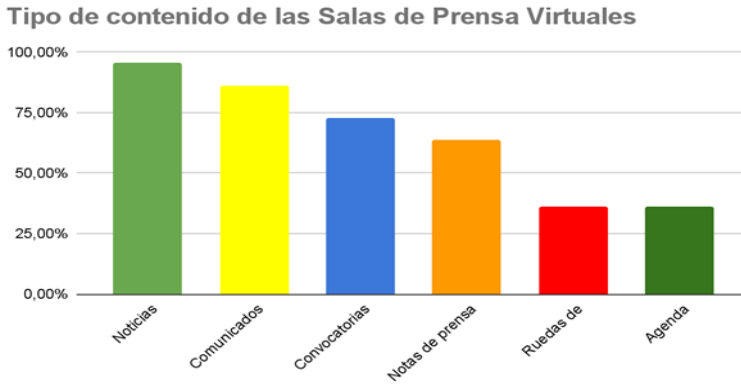
Concerning the specific task of producing content to assist journalists who cover conflicts, it is worth mentioning that 77.3% feature reports and manuals on the safety of conflict journalists, material specifically aimed at professionals who work on the ground, including protection measures, information about insurance, courses and training, etc.

In 63.6%, the information (both corporate and security-related) does not appear centralized within the virtual press rooms. That is to say, this tab only includes the traditional content of the VPR: press releases, "news" and statements. This implies that, within their VPR, only 36.4% include safety information intended for conflict journalists to assist them in their professional activities in the field.

From the above, it is clear that there is a divergence from the original objective and functions of the virtual press room, not only in terms of its name but also in the fact that it only contains "news" or information that aspires to be news, as well as other content that seeks to position both the institution's thematic lines and its brand content on the media agenda.

Figure 4

Virtual press room design

Diseño de la Sala de Prensa Virtual

Centralizado
36,4%

Disperso
63,6%
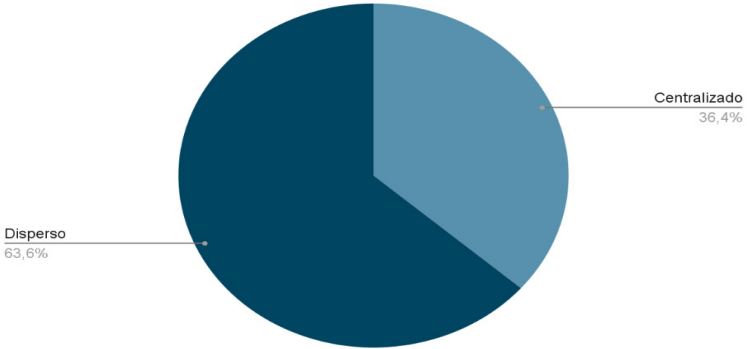
In addition, it is worth noting that the websites consulted are rich in corporate documentation although, as the results show, the presence of a press kit or dossier is a less common resource (only about 41% of the organizations offer this). However, the production of content and resources for journalists is remarkable: 77.3% of the organizations regularly publish special reports, annuals, summaries, and briefing guides on the general principles of press freedom, violence, journalists' rights, etc.

Figure 5

Resources and materials on safety for journalists

Recursos y materiales sobre seguridad para periodistas

No publican
22,7%
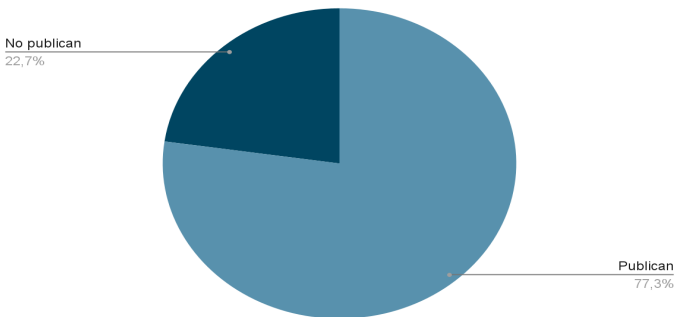
Publican
77,3%

In the cases analyzed, a majority of the publications are aimed at disseminating the good practices of the organization according to its thematic lines and interests as an institution. This is evident in the case of the Committee to Protect Journalists, which devotes a great deal of web space to documenting its statements in response to high-impact international events, or in the case of the International Federation of Journalists, which shares content mostly about its achievements, its work policy, etc.

5.2 Resources for interaction between journalists and institutions

Few resources are used by the international organizations studied to promote interactivity and relations with journalists. Analysis of their corporate websites shows that only around 32% of the organizations have a list of public and accessible media. Links to websites of interest are scarce, while lists of partners or members are published in most cases.

Despite the above, social networking platforms are a widespread resource in most of the organizations analyzed: buttons for direct access to public profiles on social media are a resource used by the vast majority (more than 90%).

Most of the organizations present on social media have public profiles on X (Twitter), the social network most used by journalists to generate opinions. 95% of them are also present on Facebook, the second of the two social networks with the greatest presence among the organizations analyzed. 52% also have their own channels on YouTube and nearly half of them (47%) have a profile on Instagram.

5.3 Target audience

With a minority presence of information aimed at conflict journalists in the virtual press room (safety manuals, reports, guides, etc.), it is clear from the study that the main target audience of the VPRs continues to be media journalists.

Although almost 36.4% of the VPRs consulted include some relevant information dedicated to conflict journalists as part of their content (annual guides, safety manuals, reports on specific topics,

etc.), most of the materials on safety – such as training, courses, and insurance policies – can be found in other tabs. The larger, international organizations with greater scope such as CPJ and RSF, for example, clearly aim to reach both media journalists and conflict journalists, and there is more heterogeneity (media PR content and safety content).

No authentication by journalists is required and there are no accessibility criteria to filter users accessing the contents of the virtual press room.

Furthermore, it is evident in the case of organizations whose specific purpose is to address the safety of freelance journalists that the focus applied to information is directly linked to their target audience: information on insurance policies, courses, manuals, etc. For example, in the case of the Rory Peck Trust, under a tab called "Resources for freelancers", assistance for freelance journalists is offered in the form of health insurance, psychological assistance, legal support, information guides, protocols, etc. In other words, this is differentiated and specialized content for the sector.

6 Discussion and conclusions

We see that the organizations analyzed have a space dedicated to the press and corporate content on their websites, where in many cases the function of generating news and documentation is their main role. According to Sánchez-Pita and Rodríguez-Gordo (2010), it is evident that the design and usability of the virtual press rooms studied still display certain technical deficiencies and the lack of a systematized theoretical corpus concerning these tools. The differences in the use of relationship/information resources for the press and the heterogeneity of their presence without any structured criteria – external news is replicated in the corporate VPR or there are only press releases as a way of generating thematic lines – indicate a failure to take advantage of the potential of virtual press rooms in the specific field of organizations dedicated to the safety of conflict journalists.

The fact that the most frequent name given to the press room is "News" reveals its use as a repository of content of an informative nature, an increasingly marked characteristic of these virtual spaces. Moreover, the widespread presence of "news" itself as the most widely used documentary resource is an indication of the reiterated practice in current corporate communication of resorting to an information genre exclusive

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to journalistic practice to generate information about the institution.

At the same time, there is little systematization of the functions of a virtual press room for this type of institution, given the heterogeneity of the contents and resources available therein. There is also a lack of centralized design and thematic coherence, a phenomenon that is common to other industries and sectors and has been highlighted in similar research, such as the press rooms in the fashion sector (Parejo et al., 2019) and in the museum sector (Marca Francés et al., 2014). The scarcity of resources for conflict journalists within VPRs, meanwhile, points to the fact that the target audience remains media journalists. As virtual press rooms serve to position institutional content on the media agenda, in the sector of international organizations whose aim is to ensure the safety and working conditions of journalists covering conflict, a more systematized approach to integrating resources and content that help to create a climate of opinion on the subject as well as foster collaborative networks in the sector is required.

Beyond this tendency to perpetuate the functions of "information repository" with the majority use of "news and corporate material", the analyzed cases provide more resources for interacting with journalists, as well as other feedback channels in addition to the contact button and social media. The existence of information request forms and safety manuals for journalists covering conflicts is an example of this. In addition, the invitations to subscribe and become members and to participate in campaigns or collective complaints through forms aimed at the general public opens up an interesting potential future area of study to investigate whether VPRs might evolve into communication portals open to civil society, given the growing disintermediation of journalists between the sources of information, in this case, the institutions, and their audiences, namely the citizens (Cantalapiedra et al., 2017).

Thus, in the analyzed institutions, we are beginning to see signs of the emergence of practices that go beyond the mere compilation of institutional documentary materials and media relations (Cantalapiedra-González et al., 2020) in order to facilitate new spaces for dialogue with journalists. The sections for newsletter subscriptions and the presence in some cases of X threads with the possibility of real-time monitoring, for example, represent an evolution in the mechanisms that allow contact and two-way communication with this audience.

Concerning the central objective of this study, the existence of resources for interaction and documentary material specifically

aimed at journalists covering conflicts was noted. As the organizations studied operate in a very specific scenario with well-differentiated thematic lines, the structure and resources of their virtual press rooms are adapted to the needs of their target audience.

Furthermore, this analysis gives rise to a debate and suggests a new line of research for future studies addressing the relationship between the content of virtual press rooms and the organization type based on its target audience. For example, to establish whether or not there are differences in specialized content for freelance journalists, a figure increasingly present in today's conflicts (Harris & Williams, 2018; Massey & Elmore, 2011).

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