

Evolution of style manuals and application of journalistic standards in Venezuelan print and digital media

Evolución de los manuales de estilo y aplicación de normas periodísticas en medios impresos y digitales venezolanos

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Abstract

This study analyzes the evolution of style guides and the application of journalistic standards in Venezuelan print and digital media. To this end, the research compares the guidelines for writing, language, ethics, and journalistic formats in traditional media outlets, such as *Panorama*, *La Verdad*, and *El Nacional*, with those of native digital media, such as *El Pitazo* and *TalCual*. Furthermore, it examines how style guides guide journalistic practice and how journalists implement these guidelines in their daily news production. The methodology combines a comprehensive documentary analysis of style guides and manuals with semi-structured interviews with journalists working in both types of media, with the aim of contrasting theory with practice in the contemporary Venezuelan media context. In this way, the study provides a comprehensive view of the adaptation of the national press to the challenges posed by digital transformation, as well as revealing changes in professional identity and journalistic writing processes. The results obtained will allow us to understand not only the evolution of regulations, but also the practical and ethical implications that arise from the coexistence of traditional and digital formats in Venezuelan news production.

Keywords: style guides, print journalism, digital journalism.

Resumen

Este trabajo analiza la evolución de los manuales de estilo y la aplicación de las normas periodísticas en medios impresos y digitales venezolanos. Para ello, la investigación compara los lineamientos de redacción, lenguaje, ética y formatos periodísticos en medios tradicionales, como *Panorama*, *La Verdad* y *El Nacional*, frente a medios digitales nativos, como *El Pitazo* y *TalCual*. Además, se estudia cómo los manuales de estilo orientan la práctica periodística y de qué manera los periodistas implementan estos lineamientos en la producción diaria de noticias. La metodología combina un análisis documental exhaustivo de manuales y guías de estilo, con entrevistas semiestructuradas a periodistas activos en ambos tipos de medios, con el propósito de contrastar la teoría con la práctica en el contexto mediático venezolano contemporáneo. De esta manera, el estudio aporta una visión integral sobre la adaptación de la prensa nacional a los retos que impone la transformación digital, además de revelar los cambios en la identidad profesional y en los procesos de redacción periodística. Los resultados obtenidos permitirán comprender no solo la evolución normativa, sino también las implicaciones prácticas y éticas que surgen en la convivencia entre formatos tradicionales y digitales en la producción informativa venezolana.

Palabras clave: manuales de estilo, periodismo impreso, periodismo digital.

Introduction

Venezuelan journalism has undergone profound transformations in recent decades, driven primarily by technological convergence, the migration from print media to digital platforms, and the emergence of native digital outlets. These changes have significantly altered the production, editing, and dissemination of news content, as well as the relationship journalists maintain with their audiences. In this context, style guides have emerged as essential tools for ensuring consistency, clarity, ethics, and uniformity in journalistic production, key aspects in preserving media credibility and ensuring the effective transmission of information.

However, despite their significance, an increasing number of media outlets in Venezuela are making style guides less accessible to the public. Consequently, the application of their guidelines is often inferred from the daily practices of editorial teams. Thus, this research focuses on analyzing the style guides of outlets such as *Panorama*, *La Verdad*, *El Nacional*, *El Pitazo*, and *TalCual* to verify how these instruments guide professional work within different media contexts.

The study seeks to answer fundamental questions regarding the influence of style guides on journalistic practice, the differences between print and digital media, the perceptions journalists have about the relevance and utility of these norms, as well as the challenges media face in the digital age. To achieve this, a combination of documentary analysis of style guides and semi-structured interviews, along with surveys administered to professional communicators, is employed.

The importance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding the evolution of editorial processes and journalistic ethics in Venezuela, providing evidence on the real application of style guides and the adaptation of media to contemporary technological challenges. Additionally, the results could serve as a valuable reference for academic training in journalism and professional practice, enhancing editorial coherence and elevating the quality of information within the country.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach that is descriptive and comparative in nature. According to Guevara, Verdesoto, and Castro (2020), "the objective of descriptive research is to understand predominant situations, customs, and attitudes through an exact description of activities, objects, processes, and people" (p. 171). In this sense, the study is descriptive as it aims to detail the characteristics, norms, and practical application of style guides in both print and digital Venezuelan media.

Moreover, it is also comparative, as it contrasts the results across different types of media to identify similarities, differences, and adaptations in journalistic practices in response to digital transformation. Complementing this perspective, Palella and Martins (2006) note that "the research design is the strategy adopted by the researcher to address the problem, difficulty, or challenge posed in the study" (p. 95).

Consequently, the present investigation is framed within a non-experimental and documentary design. It is non-experimental because it does not manipulate variables, but rather observes phenomena as they manifest in their natural context. Additionally, it is documentary in nature, focusing on analyzing the style guides and editorial guidelines of the selected media, whether publicly accessible or provided by journalists associated with those outlets.

Palella and Martins (2006) explain that "in non-experimental design, facts are observed as they present themselves in their real context, at a specified time or not, and then analyzed" (p. 96).

To this end, a comparative content analysis was conducted between the style guides of print media (*Panorama*, *La Verdad*, and *El Nacional*) and those of native digital media (*El Pitazo* and *TalCual*). This documentary analysis allowed for a contrast between traditional writing guidelines, journalistic genres, and textual structure in print formats with criteria pertinent to the digital environment, such as hypertextuality, multimedia integration, and the use of interactive links.

Results and discussion

The comparative analysis between the style guides and journalistic practices of various Venezuelan media outlets reveals a complex and diverse landscape regarding how writing norms and informative discourse are structured and exercised across different media contexts.

Comparative analysis of the style guides of *La Verdad*, *El Pitazo*, and *TalCual*

This section focuses on three Venezuelan media outlets with markedly diverse profiles: *La Verdad*, a traditional outlet with a physical location; *El Pitazo*, a native digital media outlet without a centralized physical presence; and *TalCual*, a digital medium with a clear ideological and critical orientation. The goal of comparing

these cases is to identify differences and similarities in their editorial guidelines and to understand the journalistic environment in which each operates.

Regarding their manuals and guidelines, *El Pitazo* utilizes a digital manual in PDF format that precisely stipulates that every news article must include verifiable sources, links that enrich the contextual understanding, and audiovisual materials that complement the text. Furthermore, it calls for clear, concise headlines that accurately reflect the content. The manual emphasizes adherence to essential ethical principles of journalism: accuracy, impartiality, and transparency, particularly in correcting errors.

In contrast, *La Verdad* lacks an official public manual; yet, its guidelines can be inferred from direct observation of its professional practices. In this outlet, news prioritizes the hierarchy of information based on relevance, placing strong emphasis on clarity and precision in writing. A consistent application of style criteria in titles, subtitles, and the body of texts ensures editorial uniformity. Ethical considerations are reflected in the rigorous verification of sources and the coherence of information, though there is no documented formalization of these norms.

TalCual's style manual, while having less publicly available technical content, constitutes an editorial framework that emphasizes the defense of human rights, a gender perspective, and a firm commitment to democracy. Its editorial voice is characterized by a combination of informative and argumentative discourses aimed at interrogating power and positioning itself ethically in the face of national realities. *TalCual* advocates for independence, transparency concerning conflicts of interest, and genre diversity, rejecting a static notion of objectivity in favor of recognizing the contextual nature of journalistic records.

The journalistic environment in which these media operate also reveals notable differences. *La Verdad* maintains a traditional context, with physical editorial offices, established production routines, and simultaneous operations in print and digital formats, facilitating centralized editorial control and a coherent journalistic line across its formats. Conversely, both *El Pitazo* and *TalCual* operate without formal physical offices, relying on distributed editorial teams and a strong commitment to remote work and virtuality. This model encourages flexibility, technological innovation, and interactivity with audiences, albeit imposing challenges in coordination and constant adaptation.

Discursively, *La Verdad* privileges an authoritative source-based discourse and a hierarchical message structure, where the notion of objectivity is associated with formal distance, leading to a classic, descriptive, and less dialogic communication style. In contrast, *El Pitazo* adopts a more inclusive and socially oriented discourse, prioritizing the voice and experiences of ordinary citizens, employing vivid quotes, approachable language, and narratives that aim not just to inform but to mobilize and generate collective awareness. *TalCual*, on the other hand, clearly differentiates itself through its critical, ideological, and political discourse, marked by a militant commitment that merges informative and argumentative tones to solidify a potent and positioned editorial voice.

Common limitations observed in the manuals of these media include a lack of explicit guidelines regarding multimodality, hypertextuality, and other specific standards relevant to digital language—such as the coordinated use of infographics, subtitles, and internal links—particularly evident in the cases of *La Verdad* and *TalCual*. The incorporation of practical examples and applied models could enhance the guidance available to journalists and facilitate production in increasingly complex hybrid environments.

In conclusion, *La Verdad* represents the discourse of tradition, institutional stability, and editorial continuity; *El Pitazo* offers a dynamic voice for the community with digital flexibility; and *TalCual* embodies political critique and editorial activism. This discursive plurality reflects the tensions, transformations, and various commitments of contemporary Venezuelan journalism against a backdrop marked by the challenges of digitalization and political polarization.

Comparison of news articles: *La Verdad*, *El Pitazo*, and *TalCual*

The analysis of specific news articles published by the three outlets substantiates these discursive differences. For instance, the article from *La Verdad* titled “Maduro bets on resistance against U.S. pressure, according to *El País*” showcases a traditional, formal writing style that centers on the reproduction of external information without extensive analysis or contextualization. Its structure follows the classic format: introduction, development, and conclusion, employing neutral and descriptive language.

In contrast, *El Pitazo* presents a report titled, “UN financial crisis impacts the mission investigating human rights in Venezuela,” utilizing language that is more relatable to the general public, with short paragraphs and subtitles that foster a dynamic reading experience typical of digital media. Its narrative approach seeks to connect emotionally with readers, integrating social and political context while prioritizing the voices of direct sources.

TalCual, with the article “Machado dedicates Nobel to those who do not give up: The next prize will be the freedom of Venezuela,” employs informative language rich in symbolism and interpretative tone, underscoring an

explicit commitment to human rights and democracy. Its writing combines extensive quotes, emotional appeals, and a concluding editorial note that denounces the hostile conditions for journalistic practice in Venezuela, reinforcing its critical and militant identity. The structure is fragmented, featuring brief blocks of text and the use of hyperlinks and multimedia—trends characteristic of contemporary digital journalism, but with a pronounced narrative and political bias.

From a workplace perspective, *La Verdad*—as previously mentioned—maintains a traditional, physical newsroom in Maracaibo, providing stability yet limiting flexibility in response to digital demands. In contrast, *El Pitazo* and *TalCual* function with distributed and virtual editorial teams, adapting their manuals and processes to the dynamic digital landscape and decentralized collaboration. This difference directly impacts their flexibility and production styles.

Coherence between style manuals and practice is more pronounced in *El Pitazo*, where there is a consistent application of clear, human, and ethical language. *TalCual* also upholds the alignment between its editorial principles and content, though it prioritizes discursive impact and critical stance, occasionally at the expense of informational neutrality. Finally, *La Verdad* retains a traditional line marked by tonal and formal rigidity, albeit with lesser digital innovation.

Comparative analysis of the style guides of *Panorama* and *El Nacional*

The comparative analysis between the style guides of the traditional Venezuelan media outlets *Panorama* and *El Nacional* provides valuable insights into how these two historic publications have adapted their editorial lines and writing structures following their transition to digital platforms, prompted by the closure of their physical offices in 2019 and 2021, respectively.

Panorama's physical manual indicates that the inverted pyramid structure is a useful tool for news writing, although it is not regarded as strictly mandatory. It emphasizes that the lead should present the main fact without being a comprehensive summary of all content. Additionally, it highlights that the body of the news story should provide sufficient context, explaining background information and possible consequences not mentioned in the introduction. This guidance reflects a narrative style aimed at not only informing but also providing a broader and contextual understanding to the reader, integrating social, cultural, and local elements that resonate with its regional audience.

In contrast, *El Nacional*'s digital manual sets forth clear commitments for writers and editors. It promotes an open-minded, unbiased approach that fosters impartiality. The manual demands clear, concise, precise, and agile writing designed for quick comprehension at first read, thereby capturing readers' interest promptly. It stresses the daily objective of presenting accurate, comprehensive, up-to-date, interesting, and properly prioritized information, augmented by appealing graphic designs that facilitate understanding of reality. This approach reflects a formal and structured conception of journalism, where precision and objectivity are central values.

Regarding the journalistic environment, *El Nacional* operates within a traditional framework, prioritizing a discourse that emphasizes the authority of official sources and a clear informational hierarchy. Its style is characterized by formality and objective rigor, establishing itself as an institutional reference in the Venezuelan media landscape. In contrast, *Panorama* employs a more narrative, descriptive, and contextual language, seeking to establish connections with its audience through more accessible and relatable communication that incorporates identity and cultural elements from its region of origin.

These differences reflect not only distinct communication strategies but also the inherent tensions faced by recognized media outlets in adapting to an emerging digital ecosystem where traditional and new journalistic narratives coexist. The comparison of both manuals and their editorial practices reveals that while *El Nacional* maintains an orientation toward institutional objectivity and strict clarity, *Panorama* prioritizes narrative and context, focusing on interpretation and cultural engagement.

This contrast offers a pluralistic perspective on the challenges and responses of traditional Venezuelan journalism to current technological and social transformations, enriching the understanding of how style norms and discursive structures are being reinvented to maintain relevance and credibility in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

Comparison of news articles: *Panorama* and *El Nacional*

The comparative analysis of news articles and style guides between *Panorama* and *El Nacional* reveals profound differences and nuances in their journalistic approaches, reflecting distinct editorial positions and cultural responses to the rise of digital media.

El Nacional, similar to other outlets analyzed, has a style manual that directs journalistic practice toward objectivity, precision, and clarity in information. This document specifies that journalists must maintain a neutral,

strict, and objective stance, avoiding subjective judgments or evaluations. It emphasizes sober writing, proper language usage, and absolute fidelity to sources, embodying the classical conception of journalism as a neutral public service focused on informing with rigor and accuracy.

An example encapsulating these principles is the article titled “Lula offers to mediate to ease tensions between Venezuela and the U.S.,” published on October 26, 2025. The text adheres faithfully to these guidelines, following a pyramidal structure and starting with an informative headline, supported by verified sources such as Chancellor Mauro Vieira and the EFE agency, while avoiding any evaluative judgments. Its language is formal and diplomatic in tone, lacking subjective interpretations or comments. The syntactic construction is linear and objective, privileging the narration of facts in the third person, accurately reflecting the objectivity ideal promoted in the manual, where the journalist acts as an impartial observer and mediator between reality and the audience. This institutional discourse seeks legitimacy through precision and balance, demonstrating coherence between internal norms and journalistic practice.

Comparing *El Nacional*’s style with other media reveals notable differences. *La Verdad* shares its traditional and descriptive language, though slightly more neutral and oriented toward direct reporting. In both cases, the referential function prevails; however, *El Nacional* reinforces an institutional image of credibility linked to its prestige and history. In contrast, *El Pitazo* favors a citizen-centered, dynamic, and service-oriented discourse, integrating multimedia resources and accessible language that connects with the community, distancing itself from institutional formality. *TalCual* is distinctly characterized by its interpretative and critical style, defined by an opinionated journalism that takes a firm stance on issues, explicitly advocating for editorial independence, denouncing abuses of power, and presenting a visible discursive subject.

In this context, *El Nacional* embodies the archetype of classical informative journalism within the national landscape, featuring a formal structure of traditional press, strict language control, and reliance on official sources that reinforce its institutional character. *La Verdad* maintains this line, albeit with less argumentative development; *El Pitazo* adapts this model from a digital and community-oriented perspective, while *TalCual* subverts it through political and editorial critique. Thus, each media outlet articulates its own system of relations between language, ideology, and social function, with *El Nacional* aligning most closely with the historical paradigm of objectivity, presenting news as an ordered and verifiable reflection of events.

The news article titled “Trump will not waste time meeting with Putin if there are no guarantees of an agreement on Ukraine” from *Panorama* adheres to a formal and sober style, reflecting the traditional journalism ethos of the outlet. It follows the classic inverted pyramid structure, beginning with the main statement from the U.S. president, extending through direct quotes, and concluding with relevant geopolitical context. The text maintains an objective tone, devoid of explicit judgments or evaluations, relying instead on the direct discourse of the president and verifiable references to recent sanctions and agreements. The referential function predominates, employing clear and technical language aimed at transmitting institutional credibility.

This article reinforces *Panorama*’s editorial identity as a recognized regional medium based in Maracaibo, which has historically maintained an image of informative balance and linguistic formality. Although its print edition ceased in 2019, it remains active on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, preserving essential traits of traditional Venezuelan journalism: stylistic care, prudent source selection, and an authoritative tone. Its language aligns more closely with that of *La Verdad* and *El Nacional* than with native digital outlets like *El Pitazo* or *TalCual*. The narrative centers around the presidential figure and inter-state relations, neglecting the citizen’s voice and omitting interpretative analysis.

From a semiotic perspective, the text in *Panorama* reproduces a discourse of power that legitimizes the official source as the center of informational authority. While it shares with *El Nacional* a pursuit of formal neutrality and institutional register, it distinguishes itself through a more narrative and descriptive style, with a slower pace and broader transitions between included quotes. Both media employ the third person, avoid personal judgments, and maintain a clear distance between the journalist and the narrated event. However, *El Nacional* tends to construct a more refined editorial voice aligned with its nationalist tradition, whereas *Panorama* retains a regional imprint with an emphasis on linear reporting and communicative clarity.

In relation to *La Verdad*, *Panorama* shares significant characteristics: both constitute traditional Marabina press, with a hierarchical organization of information and institutional language. However, *Panorama* exhibits greater stylistic consistency, a result of its historical trajectory and regional recognition, while *La Verdad* leans towards a more direct and straightforward style, occasionally sacrificing contextual depth for immediacy.

In contrast, the digital media outlets *El Pitazo* and *TalCual* adopt clearly differentiated discursive strategies. *El Pitazo* articulates a discourse close to the citizenry, prioritizing testimonial voices and emotional connections while integrating broad social context. On the other hand, *TalCual* stands apart from both *Panorama* and *El Nacional* by manifesting a critical and evaluative discourse, marked by explicit ideological intent and a strong interpretive

stance on national and international events. While *Panorama* and *El Nacional* ground their discourse in institutional authority and formal balance, *TalCual* bases its practice on founded opinion and political denunciation, which are core pillars of its editorial identity.

In summary, *Panorama* embodies the continuity of classic Venezuelan regional journalism, characterized by discursive prudence, linguistic formality, and reliance on official sources. It shares with *El Nacional* and *La Verdad* the paradigm of informational objectivity and preference for a denotative referential discourse, although it distinguishes itself through a more descriptive and narrative style. Compared to digital media, its language is less dialogic, and its structure is less flexible, positioning it as an intermediary between institutional and national press, faithful to a conception of journalism based on clarity, moderation, and respect for informational hierarchies.

Finally, the joint analysis of the manuals and journalistic discourses of *El Nacional*, *La Verdad*, *El Pitazo*, *TalCual*, and *Panorama* reveals that the differences among them do not simply reflect an antagonism between tradition and modernity but represent varied conceptions of the social role of journalism in Venezuela. Each medium articulates its identity through a particular relationship with power, language, and its interpretative community. *El Nacional* and *Panorama* maintain an institutional register that privileges precision, hierarchy, and neutrality as sources of discursive authority. *La Verdad*, more aligned with this model, opts for a more direct and functional tone. Meanwhile, *El Pitazo* redefines journalism through closeness to citizens and a contextualized narrative. *TalCual*, in contrast, builds its discourse around political critique and the defense of human rights, establishing its legitimacy based on a committed editorial ethics.

These differences do not imply hierarchies or devaluations of any model but reflect a plural coexistence of communicative rationalities that illustrate the complexity of the contemporary Venezuelan media landscape. In each case, journalistic style assumes a symbolic and political function that relates to the political, technological, and cultural contexts. Thus, far from being a neutral instrument, journalistic language becomes a contested space for sense-making. While traditional media preserve the semiotic stability of informational discourse, digital outlets expand their boundaries toward participation and active citizenship, indispensable elements for understanding the current state of Venezuelan journalism, which oscillates between continuity with professional roots and the constant search for new ways to narrate public truth.

This comparison does not aim to unify models or diminish the richness of their differences but to recognize that each medium, with its own limitations and aspirations, contributes to the symbolic construction of the country. In a context where informing is a civic responsibility, style manuals and discursive practices transcend the formal to become testimonies of a language ethics that defends the word as a space for truth, memory, and freedom.

Conclusions

The comparison of style guides with journalistic practices in the selected media reveals that the application of writing, ethics, and formatting norms is strongly influenced by each outlet's origins, trajectory, and political orientation.

In the case of traditional print media such as *Panorama*, *La Verdad*, and *El Nacional*, a hierarchical structure and formal writing style are maintained, with a marked emphasis on the authority of sources. This reflects a semiotics linked to power, where discourses are constructed around institutional and national actors. *Panorama*, which now primarily operates through digital platforms following the cessation of its print edition, retains a regionalized style that is close to the reader, with a narrative approach that contextualizes events for its Zulia audience. *El Nacional*, on the other hand, combines a formal, critical, and nationalist tone, focusing on political and social coverage with a watchdog posture regarding the government.

Conversely, native digital media such as *El Pitazo* and *TalCual* adopt different approaches. *El Pitazo* prioritizes immediacy and rigorous source verification, complementing its texts with multimedia elements and adopting a citizen-centric discourse that highlights participation and direct audience experience. In contrast, *TalCual* mixes information with political interpretation and places special emphasis on human rights, developing a critical language that integrates narratives of denunciation, reflective analysis, and clear ideological positions. This strategy allows *TalCual* to construct a strong and distinctive editorial identity. In both cases, the absence of a centralized physical location compels these digital media to implement flexible coordination and standardization mechanisms, reflecting the adaptability of their guides in the face of the rigidity of traditional media.

The study demonstrates that style guides serve multiple functions: they not only stabilize linguistic and ethical criteria within the newsroom but also act as instruments of legitimization before the audience, reinforcing editorial coherence and the identity of the media outlet. However, the practical application of these guidelines varies significantly based on the media's context, available resources, audience profile, and political positioning. Traditional media tend to reproduce patterns of formal objectivity and institutional neutrality, while digital outlets

incorporate greater narrative flexibility and emphasize direct interaction with readers as an essential part of their identity.

Additionally, the semiotic analysis reveals that each media outlet constructs meaning from distinct perspectives: *El Nacional* and *La Verdad* project authority, hierarchy, and political oversight; *Panorama* combines regional closeness with detailed contextualization and explanation of events; *El Pitazo* emphasizes citizen participation, clarity, and rigorous verification; and *TalCual* develops critical, interpretive discourses that are socially and politically committed. These differences highlight the plurality of Venezuelan journalism and how media outlets respond to and adapt to current technological, political, and social demands.

In conclusion, while style guides are essential tools, they do not represent an end in themselves. They must be continuously adapted to the transformations of the media ecosystem and the changing needs of the audience. The efficacy of journalistic practice depends on both adherence to internal norms and the media's ability to interpret and apply these guidelines in specific, dynamic contexts.

Thus, this study confirms that the Venezuelan press faces a persistent challenge in balancing tradition, digital innovation, and ethical commitment, underscoring the importance of strengthening professional training, continuously updating style manuals, and fostering editorial flexibility. These strategies are key to ensuring the quality, credibility, and relevance of the information provided to the public.

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