

Content curation in independent and media newsletters. Good practices and recommendations

Pere Franch

Universitat Ramon Llull, Spain

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4180-1168>

Javier Guallar

Universitat de Barcelona, Spain

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8601-3990>

Franch, P., & Guallar, J. (2025). Content curation in independent and media newsletters. Good practices and recommendations. In J. Guallar, M. Vázquez, & A. Ventura-Cisquella (Coords). *Digital communication. Trends and good practices* (pp. 25-36). Ediciones Profesionales de la Información. <https://doi.org/10.3145/cuvicecom.03.eng>

Abstract

The recent surge in newsletters confirms their effectiveness as digital information products. Through content curation, newsletters enable journalists to connect with individual users specifically interested in their subject area. In this chapter, we present the main conclusions of six studies on newsletter curation from legacy and digital media outlets, as well as from independent journalists. We also provide a compendium of best practices and recommendations for improving the quality of journalistic newsletters. Offering quality newsletters compensates users for the overwhelming amount of information on the internet. At the same time, newsletters allow media outlets to strengthen their ties with their audience, increase user loyalty, and, eventually, increase their subscriber base. To improve quality, we recommend that newsletters have an identified author and abundant, curated content from varied sources in terms of origin (internal and external), time range, and morphology. There should also be variation in the use of curation techniques and link functions.

Keywords

Content curation; Newsletters; Digital journalism; Media; Information sources; COVID-19; coronavirus; Independent editors.

1. Introduction

The newsletter is an old yet new communication channel that has experienced a significant boom in recent years. It is probably the most widespread and recognized means of curating digital content and has been the focus of several recent research studies.

This chapter summarizes the main conclusions of the CUVICOM research project (<https://www.ub.edu/cuvicom/>) on curated newsletters from media outlets and independent publishers. It also proposes recommendations and best practices for newsletters and content curation.

Since 2021, our research on curated newsletter content has primarily resulted in six articles, which focus on:

- Spanish legacy and digital native media newsletters (Guallar et al., 2021a).
- Spanish independent newsletters (Cascón-Katchadourian et al., 2022).
- Newsletters specializing in coverage of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (Guallar et al., 2022).
- Latin American independent newsletters (Lopezosa et al., 2023).
- The views of independent editors (Lopezosa et al., 2024).
- *The New York Times'* offer (Guallar et al., 2025).

These papers combine two methodologies: semi-structured interviews and analysis of newsletter samples using the CAS (Curation Analysis System) (Table 1). This method, initially described in Guallar et al. (2021b), observes two dimensions — content and curation — and studies the following parameters: for the first dimension, quantity, time range, origin (own or external) and sources (according to organization and morphology); for the second one, authorship, sense-making technique and link function.

2. Main research conclusions

2.1. Newsletters from Spanish newspapers

The first study, which focused on newsletters published by Spanish legacy and native digital media (Guallar et al., 2021a), concluded that, at the time the data was collected (in 2020), all media continued to prioritise links to their own content over external content. This consequently results in a limited variety of information sources and a surprisingly low presence of social media content, despite social media being considered a conducive channel for news curation.

In examining the characteristics of curation, the initial research established two major types of newsletter curation: intellectual and automated.

Intellectual curation is carried out by a professional whose authorship is identified. It uses one or more sense-making techniques and incorporates links for various informational purposes. In contrast, automated curation does not offer a journalistic contribution, nor is its authorship identified. It is based on a series of links to which no sense-making technique is applied, and there is no variety in the informational use of the links. This dual concept relates to Andringa's later contribution (2022), which distinguishes two types of newsletters: functional and relational. The functional model focuses on providing the audience with useful and relevant information. This model usually has a very specific audience and does not encourage a direct relationship between the author and subscribers. Most automated newsletters follow this model. The relational model, on the other hand, focuses on building relationships with the audience through personal content and engagement practices. These newsletters seek higher levels of interaction with their audience. For this model, it is indispensable that the authors leave their intellectual imprint.

The study also found that most newsletters publish a moderate amount of content, often around ten pieces per newsletter. The curated content is primarily current information published within the last few hours, almost exclusively from media outlets, mainly digital. Other sources, such as social media or official websites, have a limited presence.

2.2. Spanish independent newsletters

The study of Spanish independent newsletters (Cascón-Katchadourian et al., 2022) yielded the following conclusions: The main characteristics of these newsletters are that they are free, created by identified authors, and usually published weekly or more frequently. They cover a wide range of topics, from general current affairs to specialized information in specific areas and niches. They maintain a high level of audience loyalty, with open rates above 50% in many cases. Some have related products, such as podcasts.

In terms of the quality of their content curation, all of the studied newsletters use intellectual or professional curation, rather than automated curation. This is one of the main differences from the previous study.

It is also worth noting that there is diversity of temporal ranges in curated content, with a predominance of recent content (last few days), which is clearly related to the abundance of weekly periodicity among the analyzed newsletters, as well as a regular presence of retrospective and current content (last few hours).

Spanish independent newsletters also present a varied use of sense-making techniques, mostly combining two or three of them per bulletin. The “summarize” technique is present in all cases, and “quote” and “comment” are used frequently. Among the variety of link uses, the functions “describe”, “unchanged”, and “cite source of content”, in that order, stand out.

In terms of sources, independent newsletters mostly cite external content, revealing two emerging trends in their usage. First, some newsletters predominantly cite media websites, leaving little room for other sources. Second, others cite social media (social networks and blogs) more frequently.

This study included semi-structured interviews with the editors of the ten analyzed newsletters. Based on their responses, it was concluded that their primary concern is increasing the number of subscribers. They are reluctant to offer a paid product and state that the boom period of newsletters could lead to saturation and subsequent readjustment. The editors also believe that the future of content curation involves greater specialization and expanding products to different formats.

2.3. Coronavirus newsletters from newspapers in five countries

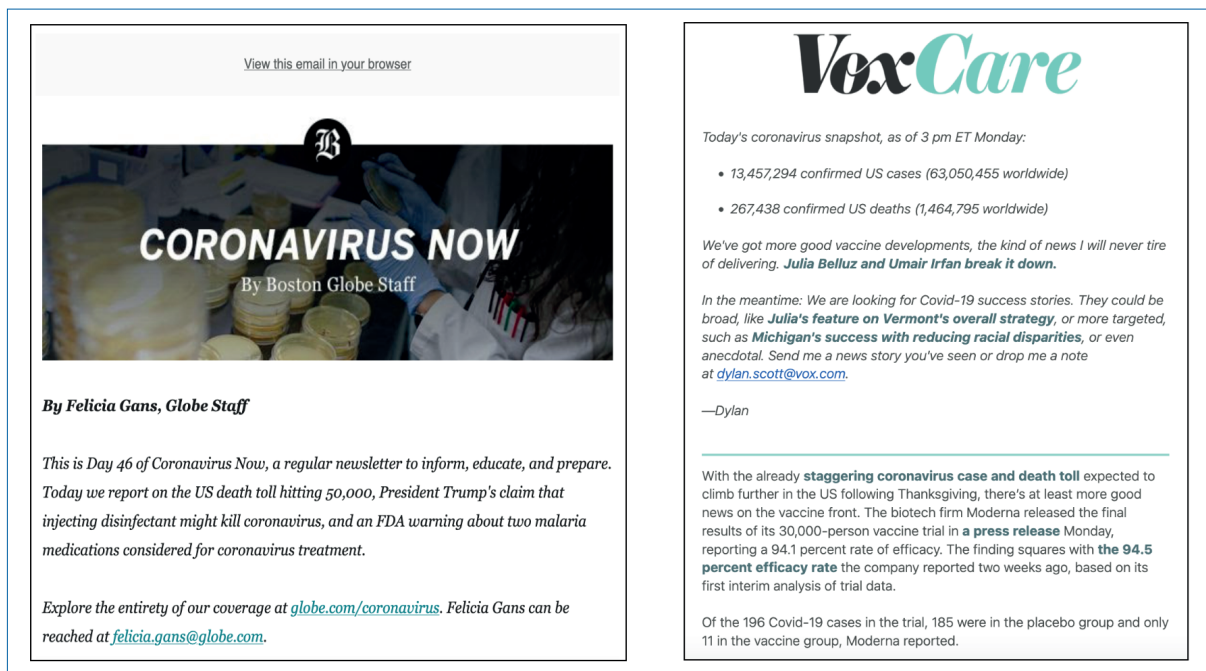
The paper on newsletters specialising in Covid-19 news from the mass media of France, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the USA, concluded that these newsletters share most of the characteristics observed in previous studies on general newsletters (Rojas-Torrijos & González-Alba, 2018; Guallar et al., 2021a). However, there was a slight improvement in all the observed indicators compared to general newsletters. There was a greater presence of authorship, different time ranges, a greater variety of sources, and a broader range of sense-making techniques.

Legacy media outlets were found to offer little content from external sources. In contrast, pure digital media outlets offered the most external content, sometimes providing more links to external websites than to their own. It is also worth noting that all of the analyzed media outlets provided links to media websites and, to a much lesser extent, to official and corporate sources (often associated with health) and citizen sources. The origin of the content and format was most diverse in pure digital media such as elDiario.es, Politico, Vox, and BuzzFeed, which included not only websites, but also blogs and social media. When they offered content from other media outlets, it was usually from major international benchmark companies, including newspapers, television networks, and news agencies. Links to specialized content were, in most cases, to organizations such as the UN or WHO, or to expert medical websites. These results lead us to conclude that legacy media outlets that have transitioned to the digital environment primarily use this technology to increase webpage traffic. In contrast, pure digital media use hyperlinks and the web to provide users with access to a variety of opportunities, including social media.

Newsletters with automated content and a huge amount of links to their own website aim to increase traffic without personalizing the newsletter’s content. This trend has been observed more in legacy media than in pure digital media. While their purpose is informative, they also encourage subscriptions, website visits, micropayments, and content downloads to win and retain users (Silva-Rodríguez, 2021).

Figure 1

These are examples of newsletters about the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic from legacy and pure digital media outlets: The Boston Globe and Vox, respectively.



2.4. Latin American independent newsletters

This research provided an analysis of the main characteristics and quality of content curation in 12 independent newsletters in Latin America. It confirmed the effective use of content and curation dimensions by all the studied newsletters and identified interesting patterns. These include a significant amount of curated content per newsletter (between 11 and 47 elements), a greater use of timeless content together with recent or current content, a greater presence of content from external sources, and a predominance of sense-making techniques such as "comment" and "summarize".

All of the analyzed newsletters offer a high level of quality, as evidenced by their favorable position compared to other newsletters analyzed in previous studies. In all cases, the curation is elaborate, "intellectual," or authored, not automated.

The study reveals also three main groups of sources in the curation of Latin American independent newsletters: social networks (mainly Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn); media outlets from around the world or the Latin American region (e.g., *The Guardian*, *El País*, *O Globo*, *Folha*, *El Universal*, and *The New York Times*); and the newsletters themselves.

Figure 2

Examples of curation in two independent newsletters, from Latin America and Spain: *Lunes*, and *Africa Mundi*.



2.5. Interviews with editors

This paper, based on interviews with independent newsletter editors, reveals several key points: Editors draw inspiration from online content, organizational tools, and curation methods, all of which influence the structure and design of newsletters. This aligns with other studies highlighting the importance of effective content curation and storytelling skills.

Editors perceive a positive rise in newsletters, attributing it to strategic aspects such as niche communities, original content, diverse monetization models, multimedia integration, and continuous improvement and expansion. Editors also emphasize the appeal of newsletters in providing personalized information and facilitating user-friendly production, as well as their ability to escape algorithmic control.

Newsletters are also highlighted for their ability to build brand image, specifically for their strategic importance in establishing direct connections, attracting subscribers, and complementing traditional media. While some interviewees anticipate that newsletters will remain niche products, their unique ability to offer close, even 'intimate' communication fosters loyalty to the editor's personal brand. Editors also recognize newsletters as effective tools for acquiring subscribers and as potential competitors to traditional media.

Finally, the interviewees acknowledge the crucial role of content curation in the face of information overload. They recognize the impact of technological evolution and support collaborative efforts among media entities to provide comprehensive content recommendations and establish a trustworthy digital identity.

2.6. The New York Times' newsletters

The study of *The New York Times'* newsletters concludes that most of them (73%) are open access. This reinforces the idea that the newsletters aim to expand NYT content, increase impact, and grow the audience and, consequently, paid subscriptions. High frequency and

regularity of publication are key to audience loyalty, as noted in relevant literature (Isaac, 2019; Kim et al., 2023; Mondéjar, 2024; Santos-Silva & Granado, 2019; Seely & Spillman, 2021).

Most newsletters feature authors' opinions or news, segmented by time, geography, language, or topic. Few follow a relational or hybrid model, as most are functional and limited to providing information without direct interaction with the user. While newsletter authors vary, subscriber-only newsletters typically have a more personal style, with journalists providing expert content directly and interactively.

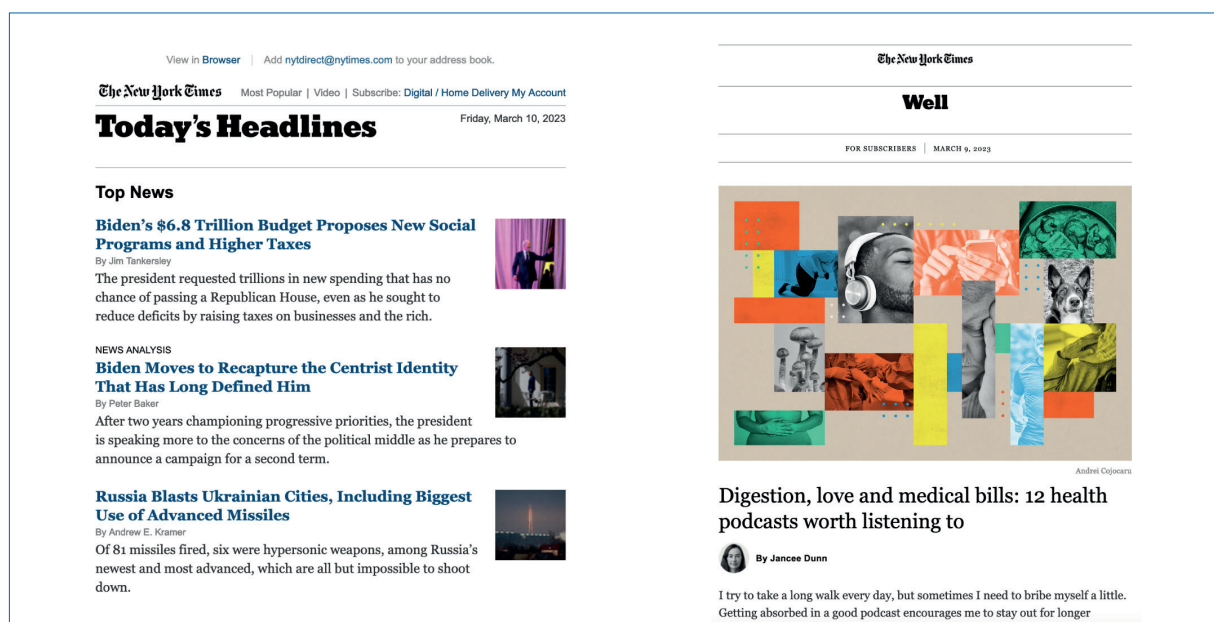
The amount of curated content is lower than in previous studies, especially in independent newsletters. There is more timeless and retrospective content, consistent with the informative and contextual nature of the NYT newsletters. Very little real-time content is present, reserved for following important and unexpected events. Most newsletters only offer content from *The New York Times*, which leads to increased traffic and better rankings. This raises the question of whether there is an endogamic tendency or corporatist impulse within mainstream media. In fact, media content is predominant in the links published. Newsletters with a specific author generally offer more external sources and are almost all subscriber-only. This external content is assumed to provide greater value to users.

In terms of the morphology of the curated content, websites predominate. There is also low variation in curation techniques, with "summarize" being the most frequent. "Unmodified" and "describe" are the two most used link functions, followed by "call to action".

The overall quality of NYT newsletters is lower than that found in other areas. Independent newsletters from Latin America received the highest scores (Lopezosa et al., 2023), and similar results were found in a study of Spanish newspaper newsletters (Guallar et al., 2021a). On the other hand, NYT newsletters with identified authorship received higher scores, corroborating previous studies on independent newsletters (Cascón-Katchadourian et al., 2022; Lopezosa et al., 2023). Finally, it can be assessed that the content curation of the NYT newsletters would be of average quality.

Figure 3

Examples of NYT newsletters. On the left is an automated, non-authored, functional model newsletter. On the right is an authored, relational model newsletter with specific content, in this case, health and wellness.



3. Best practices

The studies presented above confirm that newsletters are consolidating as a means of facilitating content curation, which can lead to an improvement in the quality of journalism. As a product personalized according to the user's specific interests, newsletters with quality curated content are an effective alternative to the saturated supply of material offered on the Web. Most of the studied newsletters contain specific content, thematically fixed, with hierarchical and time-limited information presented in a concrete format following the subscriber's preferences, who receives it in the privacy of his/her email (Carr, 2014; Pell, 2021; Rourke, 2021; Suárez, 2020).

Quality newsletters are a resource used by traditional media to strengthen ties with their audience, increase user loyalty, and, eventually, increase the number of subscribers (Isaac, 2019; Mondéjar, 2024; Santos-Silva & Granado, 2019). Their goal is to offer added value to pure and simple information — hard news — with which the author of the newsletter becomes a personal agent to the users, establishes a close (Andringa, 2022) or intimate (Mondéjar, 2024) relationship with them, and becomes a manager, coproducer and distributor of information, and at the same time adopts the role of networking creator (Upmanyu, 2024; Weder et al., 2023).

The following are some of the best practices for creating high-quality newsletters:

The CAS method (Table 1) evaluates newsletter quality based on the presence or absence of specific characteristics, so a more varied newsletter is considered higher quality. It is good practice to offer as much variety as possible across the parameters in all categories. This includes a generous amount of curated content, variety in time range, and balance between original and external content. Links to quality-curated content from diverse sources outside the medium are also valued. Source variety is valued when sources are not only media but also official, corporate, and citizen sources. Source type is valued when not only websites are offered but also blogs or social network content.

In terms of curation, an identified author is a sign of newsletter quality. The studies collected here establish a double dichotomy closely related to each other. First, a distinction is made between authored — intellectual — newsletters and automated newsletters. The value of the content and curation is generally considered higher in the former since it includes the added value of the author's intellectual work. Automated content curation, on the other hand, only provides links (usually from media outlets or the organization itself) to readers. Along these lines, Andringa (2022) introduces a similar taxonomy and distinguishes two types of newsletters. The relational type fosters a direct relationship between the author and the consumer, while the functional type can be the result of a good author's work and can provide valuable links, but without establishing this proximity or complicity.

A recommended practice for creating high-quality newsletters is to offer authored newsletters that follow the relational model, with content specifically aligned with the concrete interests of the target audience's niche.

The variety of sense-making techniques is valued among the other two curation categories, although the most commonly used technique is "summarize". Therefore, it is a good practice to present the newsletter content in a clear, concise summary so the reader knows what the product offers. And finally, variety in the functions is also a sign of quality in the text of the links. It should be noted that the most common function in most of the analyzed products

is “describe”. Consequently, a recommended practice is to present the text of the links in a manner that enables the reader to readily identify the content they will find on the linked website.

Table 1
Dimensions, parameters and indicators observed by the CAS method

Dimension	Parameter	Indicator
A. Content	A1. Number of contents	Quantity
		Retrospective or timeless information
	A2. Time range	Recent information
		Current information
		Real-time information
	A3. Origin	Own content
		External content
	A4. Source by type of organization	Official sources
		Corporate sources
		Media sources
		Citizens
		Websites
	A5. Source according to morphology	Blogs
		Social networks
		Secondary sources
B. Curation	B1. Authorship	Authorship
		Summarize
	B2. Sense-making technique	Comment
		Quote
		Storyboarding
	B3. Link function	Unmodified
		Describe
		Contextualize
		Interpret
		Call to action

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on Guallar et al. (2021b)

The use of internal or external sources merits further discussion. Previous studies have shown that legacy media generally offer more of their own content than external content and offer fewer links to external content than pure digital media.

In some cases, it was observed that legacy media outlets offered a high number of links to their own content. The Boston Globe Coronavirus newsletters are paradigmatic in this regard. This suggests that their objective may be to generate web traffic rather than to provide quality service to readers. In any case, this shows a self-referential attitude typical of the echo chamber effect denounced in the proliferation of social networks (Terren & Borge, 2021).

In contrast, digital native media outlets and independent newsletters offer more external content. Some even have no problem providing links to competing media, which we view positively because it enables users to broaden their knowledge and sources of information on topics that interest them.

4. Recommendations

Some practical implications in the form of recommendations for media, newsletter editors and content curation managers are presented in the following paragraphs:

4.1. Digital media outlets

- (a) Focus on quality content curation: Media outlets could improve their quality by offering newsletters with high-quality, curated content and more valuable external links.
- (b) Authored newsletters for connection: Newsletters with identified authorship and a personal style score higher in curation quality, so media outlets could promote these to connect better with the audience.
- (c) Thematic focus and segmentation: Publishing a range of newsletters with varied thematic segmentation can reach specific audiences; therefore, it is recommended that media outlets follow this strategy.
- (d) Web traffic strategy: The high presence of internal links, mainly in legacy media, suggests a strategy to boost web traffic, so media outlets could use newsletters to direct users to their websites and increase the number of paid subscribers.

4.2. Newsletters

- (a) The importance of curated content with added value: Successful newsletters offer curated content that provides context and analysis, in most cases using the “summarize” technique.
- (b) Include external links: While internal links are important for web traffic, external links from reliable sources add value and increase credibility.
- (c) Diversity of curation techniques: Most of the newsletters studied (except some of the independent ones) rely on a single technique, so using a variety of techniques, such as “comment”, “quote” or “storyboarding”, could enrich the user experience.
- (d) Hybrid model for greater connection: Combining the functional model of providing highly credited information with a relational approach that encourages audience interaction could improve newsletter quality and strengthen user relationships.

4.3. Regarding the use of content curation in journalism

- (a) Curation can be a tool to improve journalistic quality: Newsletters that effectively use content curation offer users a more comprehensive and enriching informative experience.
- (b) The journalist curator emerges as a manager and coproducer of information: The practice of content curation transforms the role of the journalist, who becomes a manager, co-producer, distributor of information, and also a network creator.
- (c) An alternative opportunity for freelance journalists: to create a personality as an expert in a niche topic, to publish alternative texts to traditional media, and to find an interim solution in the absence of other opportunities (Zilberstein, 2022).

5. Funding

This work is part of the Project “Parameters and strategies to increase the relevance of media and digital communication in society: curation, visualisation and visibility (CUVICOM)”. Grant PID2021-123579OB-I00 funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by ERDF, EU.

6. References

Andringa, P. (2022). *Email newsletters and the changing journalist-audience relationship*. PhD diss., The Oxford Internet Institute at the University of Oxford. <https://peterandringa.com/oii-thesis.pdf>

Carr, D. (2014, June 29). For email newsletters, A death greatly exaggerated. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/30/business/media/for-email-a-death-greatly-exaggerated.html>

Cascón-Katchadourian, J.-D., Boté-Vericad, J.-J., & Guallar, J. (2022). Curación de información con marca de autor: análisis de newsletters independientes. *Ibersid: Revista de Sistemas de información y documentación*, 16(1), 41-53. <https://doi.org/10.54886/ibersid.v16i1.4799>

Guallar, J., Anton, L., Pedraza-Jiménez, R., & Pérez-Montoro, M. (2021a). News curation by email: Analysis of the Spanish journalistic newsletters. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, (79), 47-64. <https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2020-1488>

Guallar, J., Franch, P., Boté-Vericad, J.-J., & Anton, L. (2022). How do legacy and digital media curate coronavirus content. An assessment of newsletters from the USA and four European countries. *Profesional de la Información*, 31(3), e310318. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2022.may.18>

Guallar, J., Franch, P., Cascón-Katchadourian, J., & Boté-Vericad, J. J. (2025). The rise of curated newsletters in media: A case study of The New York Times. *Journalism Practice*, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2025.2457332>

Guallar, J., Pedraza-Jiménez, R., Pérez-Montoro, M., & Anton, L. (2021b). Curación de contenidos en periodismo. Indicadores y buenas prácticas. *Revista Española de Documentación Científica*, 44(2). <https://doi.org/10.3989/redc.2021.2.1742>

Isaac, M. (2019, March 19). The new social network that isn't new at all. *The New York Times*. <https://nyti.ms/2AsoNcn>

Kim, S. J., Kim, H., Choi, J. R., & Malthouse, E. C. (2023). Newly subscribed! Effects of e-mail newsletters on news-reading habit and subscriber retention during onboarding: Evidence from clickstream and subscription data. *Journal of Media Economics*, 35(3-4), 87-107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08997764.2024.2333368>

Lopezosa, C., Cascón-Katchadourian, J., & Guallar, J. (2023). Newsletters latinoamericanas de curación: estudio de casos y visión experta. *TransInformação*, 35. <https://periodicos.puc-campinas.edu.br/transinfo/article/view/10190>

Lopezosa, C., Guallar, J., & Franch, P. (2024). Independent newsletters and content curation: The editors' view. *Tripodos*, (56), 167-182. <https://doi.org/10.51698/tripodos.2024.56.02>

Mondéjar, D. (2024). "Newsletters. The renaissance of a valuable product to reach the audience." In *Innovations in Journalism*, edited by Klaus Meier, 241-248. London: Routledge. <http://doi.org/10.4324/9781032630410-30>

Pell, D. (2021, November 10). The Internet's unkillable App. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/11/internet-newsletters-dave-pell/620664>

Rojas-Torrijos, J.L. & González-Alba, J. A. (2018). La newsletter como producto periodístico en la búsqueda de nuevos lectores. Estudio de Boletines de Noticias de El País, El Español y El Independiente. *adComunica*, 15, 165–195. <https://doi.org/10.6035/2174-0992.2018.15.9>

Rourke, M. (2021). The newsletter boom: capitalizing on the intimacy of the inbox. In: *Digital Content Next*. <https://digitalcontentnext.org/blog/2021/10/21/the-newsletter-boom-capitalizing-on-the-intimacy-of-the-inbox>

Santos-Silva, D., & Granado, A. (2019). Old formats, new combinations: How newsletters represent innovation and blurring boundaries in digital journalism". In *ECREA Journalism Studies Conference 2019*, Vienna. <https://novaresearch.unl.pt/en/publications/old-formats-new-combinations-how-newsletters-represent-innovation>

Seely, N., & Spillman, M. (2021). Email newsletters: An analysis of content from nine top news organizations. *Electronic News*, 15 (3-4), 123–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19312431211037681>

Silva-Rodríguez, A. (2021). Emergencia de newsletters especializadas en Covid-19: Información curada y actualizada en el email. *Profesional de la Información*, 30(4), e300410. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2021.jul.10>

Suárez, E. (2020). How to build a successful subscription news business: lessons from Britain and Spain. *Journalist Fellowship paper*, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://bit.ly/3feaoPH>

Terren, L. & Borge, R. (2021). Echo chambers on social media: A systematic review of the literature. *Review of Communication Research*, 9, 99-118. <https://doi.org/10.12840/issn.2255-4165.028>

Upmanyu, K. (2024). Re-humanising news: Delineating the trends and research scope for curatorial journalism. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 12(1), 33–41. <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v12i1.6255>

Weder, F., Weaver, C. K., & Rademacher, L. (2023). Curating conversations in times of transformation: Convergence in how public relations and journalism are "Doing" communication. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 12(2), 163-182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X231154550>

Zilberstein, S. (2022). Digital platforms and journalistic careers: A case study of substack newsletters. *Columbia Journalism Review*. The Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/digital-platforms-and-journalistic-careers-a-case-study-of-substack-newsletters.php