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Double-click Rhetoric: Rhetorical Strategies of Communication in the Digital Context
Retoryka klikalności: Strategie retoryczne w komunikacji cyfrowej

Abstract

This article analyzes the rhetorical strategies involved in the spread of texts created in a digital context. The Internet has initiated a new communicative environment which seeks to shape the contents and circumstances of dissemination of online news and electronic literature. The digital medium affects journalism and literature with a series of rhetorical strategies aimed at persuading the audience to double click (automated interactions, clickbait, trending). These rhetorical strategies are not accepted as valid in conventional media and publishing, however they promote rapid dissemination of digital news, as well as reconfigure the existing relationships between authors and readers in literary works. Our aim is to explain how the dissemination of these texts can be understood from a rhetorical viewpoint, no matter how much the spread of fake news or the radical change in the electronic literary works can be criticized. We point to the consequences of a communicative context that prioritizes immediacy, anonymity and content democratization. Analyzing selected examples from the Spanish (social) media context will demonstrate how double-click rhetoric relates to fictionalization and backgrounding of ethos.

Artykuł analizuje strategie retoryczne wykorzystywane do rozprzestrzeniania tekstów cyfrowych. Internet umożliwił tworzenie nowych przestrzeni komunikacyjnych, których celem jest kształtowanie treści i warunkowanie ich rozprzestrzeniania, szczególnie w odniesieniu do informacji (newsów) i literatury. Media cyfrowe wpływają na praktyki dziennikarskie i literaturę w ten sposób, że tworzone są teksty, które mają przekonać odbiorcę do klikania i remediacji (interakcje zautomatyzowane, clickbait, trending). Choć nie jest to jeszcze akceptowane w mediach głównego nurtu, klikalność i popularność idą ze sobą w parze w obszarze mediów informacyjnych, a także rekonfigurują relacje miedzy twórcami i odbiorcami elektronicznych utworów literackich. Niniejszy tekst ma na celu wyjaśnić rozprzestrzenianie się tekstów z perspektywy retorycznej, bez względu na krytykę takich zjawisk jak fake news i radykalna zmiana w obszarze tworzenia literatury cyfrowej. Zwraca się uwagę na konsekwencje faworyzowania szybkości, anonimowości i demokratyzacji treści. Analizowane przykłady z hiszpańskiego kontekstu mediów (społecznościowych) ukazują, jak retoryka klikalności oddziałuje na fikcjonalizację i odsuwa etos.

Key words

License

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1. Introduction

Digital communication has rapidly developed new ways of channelling information that affect not only usage habits, but also the creation of persuasive strategies aimed at promoting the spread of discourses accepted by readers as valid. Perhaps one of the most conspicuous facts is how the dynamics of the Internet creates fictionalization processes. The concealment of the speaker, the credible construction of false content, and the articulation of sociability models based on virtuality are examples of how the Internet may generate new realities.

The tremendous success of digital media makes it necessary to analyze their effects on a society highly influenced by the contents virally shared on the Internet. In fact, the urgency of addressing the problems caused by the rise of fake news in social networks such as Facebook or Twitter seems proven after the recent *Cambridge Analytica* data scandal[1], which shows the frailty of the current communicative context. Social networks permit the circulation of contents spread by any source, even those of dubious credibility, so the dangers of the interested circulation of fake news are evident. Moreover, the battle for the control of information in the digital space is still being waged and social media are no longer marginal since they are keeping the majority of the audiences and their advertising revenues (Gobbi 2017, 35).

The rules governing conventional and digital communication are not the same. Consequently, distinctive discursive tools are used online. The traditional model of knowledge that includes notions such as validation, regulation and hierarchy seems to clash head-on with the apparently chaotic new medium[2] (Fernández

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1. This scandal was caused by the use of personal information stored by Facebook in order to position false news in the social media so that they could influence the vote of certain users who, according to its own algorithms, were considered indecisive in matters such as Brexit or the US presidential elections (Persily 2017, 66).
2. "el modelo tradicional de conocimiento que incluye nociones como la validación, regulación y jerarquía parece chocar de frente con el nuevo medio en apariencia caótico" (This translation and all the following are ours).

Rodríguez 2005, 1). This is a space in which the reader becomes both a *lectoespectador*[3] [reader and spectator] and a *wreader*[4] since the digital medium communicates a message that is not only read, but also seen, heard and reproduced, while also requiring interaction with readers. Hence, the skills audiences need to understand the message are different and the rhetorical mechanisms involved in persuading the public have also changed.

The new digital framework has generated new dynamics in the cultural discourse. Rhetoric proves itself useful as a methodology that helps to define how these changes affect daily and artistic discourses. The primary purpose of this study is to analyze from this point of view how digital rhetorical strategies affect journalism and literature, two particularly sensitive areas to the influence of these cultural changes[5]. In the following sections we will show how digital media and electronic literature are affected by similar changes in the communicative context which triggers a different relationship between producers and receivers of texts. In the same way, the mechanisms of persuasion implied in digital communication are studied in order to understand how they are used in selected examples from Spanish journalism and literature.

2. Fake news, bots and social media

From a rhetorical point of view, the choice of the channel necessarily conditions the message[6] (Fernández Rodríguez 2005, 1), as well as its persuasive resources[7]. Therefore, messages are more effective when adapted to the channel in which they are broadcast. This is the reason why traditional media that publish news digitally are not as effective as digital native media. Digital media achieve their communicative objectives despite failing to meet conventionally established journalistic standards. However, they still pursue the same persuasive aim:

> Every communicative activity tries to influence in one way or another the person who receives the linguistic message. The person who generates the communication, who acts as producer of the linguistic message, constructs it and emits it activates all the mechanisms within his or her

3. This notion was introduced by Vicente Luis Mora (2012) to refer to the recipients of complex texts formed by words, images and sounds.
4. This term was coined by George P. Landow in order to refer to readers and their ability to immediately replicate the text in the digital medium, so that their interactions are part of the message communicated. Similarly, works dealing with the analysis of the role of the reader in digital text communication, whether it is literary or not, are a key to understand the way in which the reader is entangled given that their reading experience is entirely conditioned by the hypertextuality of the digital text (Morales Sánchez and Cantos Casenave 2015).
5. Electronic literature and digital journalism form part of the same system from two different points of view. On the one hand, both of them are digitally created, so they are affected by the rules of digital communication. On the other, they are cultural discourses in dialogue, if the tenets of Cultural Rhetoric are to be taken into account (Albaladejo, 2016).
6. "la elección del canal condiciona necesariamente el mensaje".
7. This rhetorical idea was popularized by Marshall McLuhan in his definition of media ecology (1964), in which he stated that "the medium is the message".

reach so that the message is perlocutionarily effective, and affects the person who receives and interprets it (Albaladejo 2009a, 39)[8].

Thus, digitizing information implies a change of contents. For example, the digital medium obliges information to be immediate, an exigency that collides head-on with the need for verified information in conventional journalism. In digital communication, the information that arrives first is the best. Moreover, recipients do not merely take on a passive role, but they become informers who share opinions, images and videos about news (Gutiérrez-Coba, Salgado-Cardona, Gómez-Díaz 2015, 168): they disseminate news items and their opinions, assuming authoritative roles in doing so.

The legitimation of testimonies coming from social networks as reliable sources is an example of how digital media do not show an interest in verifying information, as it becomes evident in the use of tweets as valid evidence in digital newspapers[9]. On the Internet, the users' reception of news directly influences users' appreciation of the validity of the information, which translates into another rule of digital communication: the most shared information is often taken to be the most valid. Moreover, amongst the sea of information online, breaking news guarantees effectiveness in the public eye. Standing out from the rest of information providers becomes a synonym of being read by more people, so generating buzz on social media ensures effective communication. Traditional journalism, on the contrary, relies on highly localized media that publish contrasted content.

The effect of fake news in the shaping of the American public opinion is now clear, while in Spain the proliferation of digital newspapers, specialized in false or distorted news, is greater every year. Notably, the most shared pieces of news on Facebook about politicians or political parties in Spain during 2016 were false[10]. Among these emerging digital newscasts, a distinction should be made between those that underline their humorous interest and those whose main goal is to deceive and manipulate the public opinion. *El Mundo Today*, *Rokambol* or *Cerebrother* are examples of the first, not representing a problem for disinformation due to their satirical and parodic interest (although they sometimes misinform

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8. "Toda actividad comunicativa se intenta influir de un modo u otro en quien recibe el mensaje lingüístico, para lo cual quien genera la comunicación, quien actúa como productor o productora del mensaje lingüístico, lo construye y lo emite activando todos los mecanismos que tiene a su alcance para que sea eficaz perlocutivamente, para que actúe en la comunicación sobre quien lo recibe e interpreta".

9. The use of tweets as a source of information is not only common in digital media such as *El Confidencial or Okdiario*, but also in El País, a referent in Spanish journalism, that starts to accept the rules of digital communication in its digital conversion.

10. Specifically, the piece of news "Albert Rivera propone la vuelta del servicio militar obligatorio para ninis" [Albert Rivera proposes the return of compulsory military service for ninis (young people who neither study nor work)], published by the newspaper *cerebrother.com* generated 269,000 interactions, while the one titled "Podemos prohibirá la Semana Santa" [Podemos will prohibit Holy Week], by *Mediterráneo Digital*, generated 120.000 interactions, as Llaneras and Pérez Colomé informed in their report in El País (28/01/2017).

due to the way in which information is shared in social media[11]). However, the rise of digital newspapers with dubious journalistic quality is worrisome, since they intentionally spread disinformation among their users. As their main source of income comes from advertising, they find their greatest ally in the diffusion of news through social media.

The dissemination of fake news is quite a simple process. A series of digital portals, specialized in the generation of false or misrepresented information, write pieces of news that are launched via Facebook and Twitter. Later, these pieces of news are retweeted or massively shared by bots[12] in order to place them in prominent positions and turn them into "trending topics", so that (dis)information reaches more people. People share these pieces of news without considering its falsity. In fact, the spread of fake news is much wider and faster due to the fact that it is mostly shared by real users (Vosoughi, Roy, Aral 2018). This means, on the one hand, that false information is legitimized and communicated through rhetorical strategies that are very effective. On the other hand, it shows that the interaction between the automatic language of bots and real users is effective at a perlocutionary level, since a message produced by a robot persuades Internet users to share certain pieces of news.

Digital rhetoric becomes a mechanism for analyzing how the rhetorical strategies of persuasion are reconfigured in the digital space (Zappen 2005, 119). A complex communicative system is created when Twitter users share these discourses on their feeds. In this case, two entities producing discourse overlap and a decontextualization of the piece of news occurs when it is embedded in the digital discourse of the user, which uses a plurisemiotic code and a multimedia channel. A validation of the content is produced when fake news pieces are clicked, shared or liked by users, while the author is concealed behind the discourse of other users' feeds. If Twitter users' discourses are to be analyzed, argumentation strategies coming from the theories proposed by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2009) are still present, but they happen to be reshaped. Traditional loci of quantity are measured in the social network by the number of retweets, loci of quality are related to the influence of the digital ethos, while loci of order point directly to the positioning of the tweet within a trending topic. Loci of the existent, that value positively what exists above the possible, prioritize the reference to other pieces of news or photos by means of hypertextuality, and loci of essence are also related to

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11. An example of a satirical fake report that became viral and was believed to be true by many of the users who responded to it was published by the newspaper *Rokambol* on October 11, 2012. Its headline said "Wert se plantea erradicar el acento andaluz" [Wert seeks to eradicate the Andalusian accent]. This fact is indicative of the way news circulates through social networks, as the headline is the only content that is accessed in most cases.
12. A bot can be defined as an automated robot that, in the field of social networks, behaves like a user of any social media and automatically shares information.

the existence of especially influential users, known as influencers. In this fragmentary discourse, the news item and its argumentation are relegated to a secondary place in its hypertextual inclusion in the social network.

2.1. Rhetorical Strategies of Fake News in Digital Media

The analysis of the mechanisms involved in the dissemination of fake news in digital media shows the key role played by rhetoric. The persuasion techniques used, although adapted to the digital medium, are similar to the ones traditionally established by this method for discourse analysis. This section will deal with the rhetorical strategies used for spreading fake news within the Spanish journalistic sphere, as well as with an explanation of the way in which these discourses are constructed in order to be persuasive in a digital context. We believe that their wider dissemination among social media users is not only due to the contribution of bots, but because of the effect of these digital rhetoric strategies on audiences. In order to do so, two specific news items will be analyzed[13]:

a. Albert Rivera se compra un chalet valorado en más de 1 millón de euros al tiempo que Ciudadanos bloquea una subida del salario mínimo a 800€ [Albert Rivera buys a 1 million euros villa while blocking a rise in the minimum wage to 800€], *Diario independiente* (loquenotequierencontar.com), December 6, 2017.
b. Alfred lució un lazo amarillo en el festival de Eurovisión [Alfred wore a yellow ribbon[14] in Eurovision], *El Municipio* (elmunicipio.es), May 13, 2018.

The examples analyzed are part of the epidictic genre, since the receivers of the discourse do not have to decide on the facts that are presented. However, their purpose is not to inform: this is a type of rhetorical discourse that directly attacks *veritas placeat*, one of the concepts consistent with the *vir bonus* model established by Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (XII, 1, 1). This principle is based on the fact that every speaker must clearly stand in the truth. None of these reports have the objective of constructing a discourse that proves the veracity of the information, but they are aimed at promoting its diffusion in the shortest time possible. Thus, persuasion mechanisms are focused on the immediate propagation of the reports by the double click of audiences. The use of pathetic arguments (such as personal attacks) are focused on triggering a series of emotions in the audience that force their interaction.

13. These examples have been selected because they are indicative of the way fake news are spread in the Spanish journalistic sphere. Both of them address current topics and have been published by not very well-known digital media in which authors are not identified. Despite that, they were massively shared on social networks.
14. Yellow is a color with a clear political meaning in the Spanish context, as it is the color used for the ones that are for the independence of Catalonia.

The very name of the digital media (loquenotequierencontar/el municipio) orients receivers towards positive feelings of curiosity and trust while also acting as a *captatio benevolentiae* that triggers the reader's interest in what is published there[15]. Verification is not a concern for the media or for the audiences, and the *autoritas* of the speaker is also not taken into account. On the contrary, these news items are forwarded immediately by an audience that identifies with the information and that uses it to attack the people and the political parties involved.

As Guy Durandin points out, in the absence of the time needed to verify information during crisis situations, pieces of news spread, regardless of truth or falsity, without knowing too well where or from whom they arise[16] (Durandin 1995, 193). Both fragmentation and the immediacy inherent to the digital channel are used by these digital media in order to disseminate hoaxes in the shortest time possible, so that they can influence the public before the information is verified. In doing so, the use of headlines that act as clickbait is essential in order to guarantee the rapid dissemination of pieces of news.

It should also be noted that the sender of the message is generally anonymous and offers generic and imprecise information, without evidence or verifiable facts. Anonymity interferes with the definition of the *ethos*[17] (the orator's image in classical rhetoric), so this essential element in the validation of any discourse is not present here. It is easy to assume that many readers do not get to know who is behind fake news since anonymity is a constant on the Internet and it is not understood as a disorienting practice. In the digital medium the *ethos* goes unnoticed, helped by the superposition of different digital rhetorical personas[18]. However, if it is to be analyzed, the credibility of the sender is called into question. The success of fake news stories depends directly on their circulation in social networks and the interactions they generate. Therefore, these news items seek the acceptance of certain audiences and the repulse of others in the way they are constructed, given that their main goal is to emotionally involve recipients and to cause their

15. *Diario Independiente* defines itself as a medium "al servicio de la verdad" [at the service of truth] that tells what "los medios de comunicación al servicio de las empresas estratégicas no se atreven a contarte" [media at the service of strategic companies do not dare to tell]. On the other hand, the newspaper *El Municipio* signifies its ideological relationship with right-wing extremism and once again points to its interest in the truth, defining itself as a "periódico digital de información general que aboga por una sociedad de hombres libres; por el pan, la patria y la Justicia; difundiendo y proponiendo el pensamiento joseantoniano, su actualidad y su auténtica memoria histórica" [a digital newspaper that advocates for a society of free men; for bread, justice and the homeland by means of spreading the thinking of José Antonio Primo de Rivera and its authentic historical memory].

16. "en ausencia del tiempo necesario para verificar las informaciones durante situaciones de crisis, las noticias se propagan, con independencia de su verdad o falsedad, sin saber demasiado bien de dónde ni de quién emanan".

17. Aristotle defined *ethos* as the orator's "moral character when his speech is delivered in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence" (B1, 1356a). The concept of *ethos* has been one of the rhetoric terms most studied by philosophers, particularly by post-structuralists such as Barthes or Foucault, due to its importance on the discursive construction of the self. In this respect, Foucault's notion of *ethos* (2011) is relevant because it actualizes the debate and relates it to the construction of the self through discourse and its relationship with the concept of truth.

18. A digital rhetorical persona (Pujante 2003; Gutiérrez Sanz 2016) is an image of the speaker in which social and discursive ethos come together affecting the way in which information is shared, as users determine the influence information can have, as they can also be leaders of opinion.

interaction, no matter positive or negative (Gobbi 2015, 33). This polyacroasis (Albaladejo 2009b) becomes especially useful to increase information traffic.

Furthermore, the message is characterized by the use of a very poor argumentation, devoid of sources able to check facts and resorting to affirmations that are not even attempted to be proved. As Amelia Fernández suggests, the argumentation is transformed into a simple and effective message with two or three main ideas as it happens with advertising texts[19] (Fernández 2005, 5), so in some cases texts only extend the same ideas expressed in the headline[20]. For example, in the first case, the headline links two elements that are not related to each other and one of them is a supposition whose veracity is not even argued. The link established in order to show the incongruity of moving to a house valued at one million euros while blocking the rise of the minimum wage is a very basic form of incomplete syllogism. The body of the news, on the other hand, is barely developed, as it is very brief and does not offer arguments to prove the information, focusing on giving an opinion on the role of the political party led by Albert Rivera in blocking certain government measures.

In the second case, we find that the false news item is proved by means of a decontextualized image. It constitutes an artificial argument provided that a sign is shown as proof to affirm the singer is a Catalonian separatist: a photograph in which the representatives of Spain in Eurovision 2018 can be seen singing wearing a yellow ribbon. Besides, the report introduces a link to a news item from the same digital newspaper which is also imprecise and plagued with accusations. Therefore, the whole argument is built on a misinterpretation of an image. When compared with representatives from other countries, it can be seen that the second microphone has a yellow stripe in order to be differentiated.

These examples are representative of how the spread of fake news mainly depends on an attractive, provocative, current and shocking headline[21], which is the content that reaches readers directly. Readers share, retweet and comment without reading, let alone checking, the news, hence helping the proliferation of a hoax constructed by means of a defamatory discourse. Although it is easy to note these pieces of news have not received the correct journalistic treatment, that is not an impediment to their online dissemination. Indeed, monitoring fake news circulation in social media proves itself very effective as bots not only manage to increase the impact of false news, but they also increase real interactions by people who seem to be unable to distinguish between automated and real profiles.

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19. "la argumentación (…) se transforma en un mensaje sencillo y efectivo con dos o tres ideas principales a la manera de los textos publicitarios".

20. Headlines, for their part, are especially sensationalist and are packaged in order to be easily shared without being read (Molek-Kozakowska 2013).

21. Again, constructing a clickbait becomes a rhetorical strategy of digital communication related to the sensationalization of news headlines (Molek-Kozakowska 2013,175).

In addition, it is proven that, although rudimentary, the rhetorical mechanisms involved in the dissemination of these false news statements are effective. The selection of a topic that generates controversy and divides public opinion by means of an incendiary headline favors the spread of fake news. Once positioned as a trending topic, it is legitimized as truthful information by the number of profiles that have expressed their opinion about the news. At this point, the information, however implausible it may be, has affected the opinion of audiences. This opinion will not easily change since the public debate has begun by taking for granted the veracity of this information, so that the premise of the Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels seems to be fulfilled more than ever: "a lie repeated a thousand times becomes a truth".

3. Bots and literature. Digital creativity.

In this context of fictionalization of contents and identities, literature stands out as a cultural discourse historically dedicated to develop discursive strategies for fictionalizing reality. The literary field has not been oblivious to the changes brought by new digital parameters, which have transformed the dynamics of literary communication. Indeed, not only has the current digital context completely changed commercial and editorial relations, but also the status of writers and readers as creators and audiences.

The Internet allows persuasive and aesthetic strategies that were improbable and even controversial in traditional publishing such as throwing online a preview of a novel to check the effect it has on the audience or letting readers change the fate of some characters. Fragmentation, immediacy and anonymity are three factors in digital communication that, when transferred to the literary sphere, offer a truly interesting area of study for rhetoric, since at times they perpetuate the dynamics present in traditional writing while at others they open the door to new reflections that jeopardize the very approach of what is understood by literature.

Two simultaneous changes arise from the influence of digital communication in the literary field. On the one hand, the existing relationship between the agents of the literary context have been transformed allowing new digital strategies that permit interactions between readers and authors: reading texts online in digital textual formats and in reading supports, or sharing reading sessions on blogs with the consequent publication of readers' comments (Gómez Díaz *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, the new aesthetic proposals derived from the application of the technologies that change readers' habits and the whole experience of reading are our main interest. Closely linked to digital communicative dynamics, these literary innovations reproduce identical communicative schemes, as it is evidenced by blognovels, webnovels or Twitter novels.

We will focus on the analysis of three aspects of electronic literature that have modified every literary communicational strategy, while also evidencing its plural and interdiscursive character. Indeed, the debate around authorship has been altered, as has the complexity of the act of reading in the digital era[22]. Once again, rhetoric as a broad framework for discourse analysis allows to review how digital communication affects these new textual approaches in the construction of an aesthetic and persuasive literary discourse.

3.1. *Auctoritas* and canon

Electronic literature is such a young literature that one cannot speak about the classical dichotomy between established authors and the new ones (nor between ancient and modern). Many authors have involved themselves in the production of this kind of experimental writing recently. In fact, electronic literature is not always carried out by professional writers, but by ones related to fields such as information technology or audiovisual media. Furthermore, the hybrid nature of texts is a result of the hybrid nature of authorship, which does not have to be individual. Consequently, it is difficult to establish a sort of *auctoritas* in the conventional sense, given that authors become referents for reasons that transcend their literary tradition. At times, it is the work's dynamics or its software that determines the impact of its reading since persuasion strategies linked to the accessibility and the technical design or development of the site are established.

Even in cases in which electronic works of literature make use of models of our literary tradition as a starting point, as it happens with María Mencía's *Transient Self Portrait* (2012), which classical texts such as Garcilaso de la Vega's *En tanto que de rosa y Azucena* and Luis de Góngora's *Mientras por competir con su cabello*. The work does not underscore the reproduced text or its transcendence in the canon, but the reading experience, which results in an audiovisual reconstruction in which the importance of the voice as a way of bestowing sonority on the text is evident as well as its lexical complexity. In this case, persuasion is not channeled by the importance of the classical text itself, but by the promise of offering readers a prominent role in the literary work. This is made, for example, by projecting their image in the text while they recite a poem.

Moreover, the need to provide readers with a joint access to these works, dispersed in a myriad of links that, in many cases, are only accidentally discovered given that the authors are not well-known, has triggered the creation of digital repositories.

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22. For a revision of the changes in the reading act in digital literature, see Morales Sánchez (2018).

Projects such as the Electronic Literature Collection[23] may involve the establishment of a canon of acceptance and revision in electronic literature since these repositories select them guaranteeing the quality and interest of the works collected. According to Virgilio Tortosa, these webpages have conferred credibility to this kind of literature with its diffusing action[24] (2015, 35) while also guaranteeing their conservation. The fugacity of the digital medium and the obsolescence of software programs bring back ancestral concerns already present in Horace's *Epistle to the Pisos* about our ways of "perpetuating" ourselves through creative writing.

The interest in creating a history of electronic literature implies the need for enabling access to the first electronic literary works in order to speak about precursors. However, electronic literature must decide whether or not to imitate the dynamics of traditional literature, in which a preferential status is given to authors by preserving their works. On the contrary, authors and readers may also accept that the constant changes that affect digital spaces make these literary manifestations a type of ephemeral art, as it happens with other artistic manifestations such as land art, performances, graffiti or body art. This last option would mean accepting that digital aesthetic is characterized by its discontinuity, interactivity, dynamism and the creation of ethereal and ephemeral worlds (Rodríguez 2009, 24-25).

3.2. Authorial Communication Strategies: From Evidenced Authorship to Automatic Writing.

Our approach presumes that there is an authorial concern in digital texts. However, readers do not have to be interested in knowing the author's identity; they may rather be interested on the artefact itself. Electronic literature has placed readers in a central position, considering them to be a pivot of a creative process that transcends the intellectual creativity and imagination of traditional reading: the agency of the reader is not mental anymore, it is tangible and real. Interactivity has such a relevance that readers, acting as *wreaders*, are far more important than authors. Indeed, authorship is not always evidenced in electronic works of literature, hence offering a wide spectrum of possibilities.

There are electronic literary works in which authorship is perfectly identified. Sometimes it is a single author who is responsible for the idea and the software, but usually there is a polyphony of authorial voices (graphic designers, artists, computer scientists, publicists, cartoonists) that are made explicit. In any case, the rhetorical literary strategies for persuading readers are focused on the readers' relations with the text. For instance, Christine Wilks' *Fitting the Pattern* invites

23. https://collection.eliterature.org/
24. "han ido confiriendo a esta literatura sesgos de credibilidad con su acción difusora".

readers to become dressmakers in order to lead the narration. This roleplay means that readers are forced to create while reading, hence becoming a sort of discursive *ethos*[25], since they create an image of themselves. Other authors such as Félix Remírez tests the readers' digital skills and plays with their reading experience. In *La hermandad de los escribanos*, time is against readers because the reconstruction of the story is limited by the fact that the software is destroyed within due time.

María Mencía offers readers two possibilities as a *captatio benevolentiae* in *El poema que cruzó el Atlántico* by establishing a complex discursive framework. The first consists of reading the poem in an isolated way; the second means navigating through a wider portal that includes all the texts, speeches, documents and information that make up the creative context of the work. From a rhetorical point of view, what María Mencía offers is the reader's immersion in the processes of artistic creation and documentation. Thence, it is possible to identify not only the classical parts of discourse, but also the process of *intellectio*, which was defined by Chico Rico as a rhetorical operation of pragmatic and extensional nature (1989, 53).

Other collaborative works recover certain features of orality (Ong 2006) in the way they are collected (as collages). Whether at the service of the same thematic thread, the collective sense of creation reduces the importance of creative individuality once again, giving rise to a sort of authorial polyacroasis. These products are created in a context that allows a multimodal discourse that requires an immediate response on the reader's part (Olaizola 2018, 248). However, it is also interesting to pay attention to those works in which authorship disappears intentionally, since the main discursive strategy is the concealment and negation of the author. The fictionalization understood as a game of simulacrum and deception now becomes a virtual strategy, made possible, evidently, by the very character of the medium. This is where automatic writing, social networks and bots come into play as they problematize the author's identity in electronic literature.

3.3. Discursive Strategies at the Service of Technology

The interest in exploring the limits of technology is not new. In some way, this concern is the motive under the artistic use of the creative possibilities offered by machines. Experimentation is the genesis of electronic literature, so it is not surprising that one of its trends implements the creation of software able to emulate

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25. When readers are put in the place of the creator they construct an image of themselves only by reference to the discourse created within the piece of electronic literature. Therefore, their choices shape their own image while constructing the work itself. It must be noted that the *ethos* for Aristotle is always a discursive *ethos* since, as he pointed out, "this confidence must be due to the speech itself, not to any preconceived idea of the speaker's character" (B1, 2,1356a, 9-11).

human inventiveness by means of algorithms. Eugenio Tiselli published in 2005 his first version of "la Mareadora", a blog that was described as "a foul-mouthed machine", since it was able to generate rhymes from words taken from the Internet. A year later he published a manifesto for the poetry written by machines, in which he affirmed that much of what people destroy when they "create" can be saved if the tasks of creation are entrusted to machines[26]. In *El drama del lavaplatos* (2010) he proposed readers to exchange words by using an app able to create rhymes.

All of those works oblige readers to ask if bots are able to produce an automatic writing that constitutes an empathetic, thrilling and persuasive discourse: in other words, whether or not literature can do without human subjectivity. Therefore, the introduction of bots as a figure of literary authority can turn the concept of art upside down. As an example of this, Belén Gache suggests when describing the poems generated by Halim X9009, a poet and robot created by herself, that the sense of the poems ranges from the complete absence of meaning to amplified meaning conferred by the readers, and, in this sense, it is a kind of writing with no subject in which the origin of meanings resides in words themselves[27] (Gache 2015, 30). In this regard, the lack of intentionality or emotion on the part of the writer would resolve the question of the interpretation of the electronic work, since subjectivity resides (only) in the reader.

Moreover, blogs and social networks have also become a particularly fertile space for the dissemination of apparently real stories written by literary bots that simulate authors. As is the case of fake news, these digital spaces offer an exceptional framework for the generation of literary texts where the stress is on the multiplying effect the medium has over the message. The success of Hernán Casciari's blogging novels or the recent Twitter novels by Manuel Bartual and Modesto García, with his character Nela García, evidence how the virtual community accepts them as characters performing the role of a real person. The users' empathy with familiar daily personal vicissitudes becomes the only motor of the discourse. In fact, it is not a question of fictionalizing the author or creating a projection of the author in the text as a literary category. Actually, the reverse process occurs when an illusion of realness is created by materializing a fictional character in the social network. The character is validated by the interaction with readers, as it is the only identifiable element in the plane of authorship in relation to the message (Escandell-Montiel 2016).

In the case of bots, their growth in the literary sphere has been so remarkable that the third volume of the Electronic Literature Collection (2016) is entirely

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26. "mucho de lo que el ser humano destruye cuando 'crea', puede salvarse si las tareas de creación son confiadas a las máquinas".
27. "van desde la ausencia de significado hasta el significado amplificado por el sujeto lector, en este sentido, es una escritura sin sujeto, donde el origen de los sentidos reside en las propias palabras".

devoted to them. In fact, bots are accepted as a creative force that encourages reflections on the relationship between art and humanity, as Andrea Muriel (@andreamuriel) proves when she points out that she likes to think that bots question the possibility of artistic creation as a human-only characteristic.

Once again, the Aristotelian concept of *ethos*[28] becomes relevant when applied to the digital rhetoric persona, a suggestive element for the study of fictionalization processes in which social and discursive *ethos* are intermingled. The interweaving of different rhetorical personas obliges us to think if the ethos present in the text is reflected by a machine or a person who, in any case, does not coincide with the textual image projected by a creative agent. Besides, readers do not know if the poet is a person, and, in the case they know it is not, they accept the challenge of searching meaning and emotion in a poetic text, even if it is automatically created. Instances such as the one of Nela García prove how phising is not seen by readers as a fraud, given that in the dynamics of digital communication the use of avatars is recurrent in the construction of the *ethos*.

In the literary context, these creative exercises permit rethinking the very concept of literature as an empathetic, emotional, persuasive and intentional discourse. Actually, these creations will only be understood as literary if readers interpret them in this way inasmuch as they are the only emotional agents set in the real plane. Therefore, these reflections permit re-considering fake news creations, as Marie-Laure Ryan (2006) suggests, since they make use of the rhetorical fictionalization strategies already present in the literary text. Persuasion to double click, therefore, becomes a dominant strategy dependent on the medium, on the repetition of the message and its capability of engaging readers.

4. Conclusion

Digital communication has generated new circumstances that profoundly affect the way in which we produce and receive discourses. The consequences of the communicative dynamics in the digital context affect reading habits, sociability spaces and our own attitude. As it has been evidenced, digital communicative strategies of persuading the public to remediate equally permeate daily and artistic discourses: the digital medium imposes the rules over journalism and literature with different effects. Therefore, the establishment of a double-click rhetoric aimed at persuading us either to engage in the literary work or to participate in the business of diffusing digital news is a consequence of a new communicative context in which the Internet user is the main agent.

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28. For a revision of the evolution of the concept of *ethos* in the critical studies of rhetoric, see Bermúdez (2007).

The rhetoricity of every discourse obliges us to analyze the way false news items are constructed and spread from the perspective of communicative rhetoric, while it also becomes a tool for analyzing the innovations presented in electronic literature. Whether we encounter false information spread by bots or an artistic content generated by a non-existing author, both phenomena seem to be caused by a process of fictionalization triggered by the possibilities the digital context offers for concealment, fragmentation and play by simulacrum. Therefore, the communicative changes brought by the Internet cannot be considered negative by themselves: they can be understood as ways of artistic experimentation in the literary realm but also as threats to journalism since they can be used to bias public opinion.

On the one hand, the strategies of persuasion in digital journalism are aimed at accomplishing an intended perlocutionary effect: they do not seek to convince about the veracity of the information, but they seek to provoke a reaction (a click: be it a like, a share or a comment), hence triggering the expansion of the piece of news. On the other, literature is still exploring the limits of fiction by exploiting the creative possibilities offered by the digital space, so electronic literature becomes an arena for artistic experimentation in which authorship is called into question.

In any of the cases, the need for being proficient readers able to understand the processes of digital communication and differentiate between fake and real contents with artistic or non-artistic interest, either generated by humans or by bots, is a responsibility for us as citizens. By getting to know the rhetorical mechanisms implied in the process, we will be able to value these changes in the artistic sphere and to be ready for a journalism that is not anymore governed by the same rules.

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