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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Innovation in Local Digital Media: The Case of Sevilla Directo

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Abstract

The journalistic industry is undergoing a process of continuous transformation in response to an ongoing crisis. In this scenario, marked by disruptive technological changes and shifts in audience and advertiser behaviour, a new communication ecosystem is emerging that facilitates the rise of novel media outlets. Community social media, data journalism, and specialisation are some of the key features present in these emerging business models. This research aims to identify and understand the role of innovation in media adaptation to the current communication paradigm.

Methodology: We employ a case study approach, analysing Sevilla Directo, a native digital medium in a city of approximately 700,000 inhabitants. Data collection techniques include observation, website analysis, in-depth interviews, focus groups with journalists, and analysis of sector reports and databases. **Results and Discussion:** Our findings indicate that technological advancements and the reach of social networks are fundamental to the growth of local media. However, we observe that adaptive changes predominate with little disruption and minimal focus on R&D&I. The organisation under study lacks a business model that guarantees its long-term sustainability and relies primarily on traditional income streams. Concurrently, social capital emerges as a key element in financing.

Keywords: Innovation, journalistic enterprise, digital media, local journalism, entrepreneurship.

Introduction

The media industry is grappling with a profound crisis, precipitated by rapid environmental changes and the struggle of media organisations to develop sustainable strategies. To fulfil its crucial social function, journalism urgently requires a new business model that reinforces two fundamental pillars: economic stability and public trust (Benson, 2019; Newman et al., 2023).

The path to stability has been fraught with numerous setbacks, manifested in media closures, layoffs, resource reductions, and a diminishing plurality of information sources. Between mid-2008 and October 2015, Spain witnessed the

closure of 375 media outlets, resulting in 12,200 professionals losing their jobs (APM, 2015). More recently, according to data from the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE, 2024), the unemployment rate in the sector stood at 12.29% in the first quarter of 2024. Although this represents a decrease compared to previous quarters, it still indicates a significant challenge in the journalism labour market.

In Seville, the geographical focus of our research, there is tangible evidence of the crisis affecting journalism. A significant milestone was the cessation of operations of the Andalusian edition of *El Mundo* in April 2016. Subsequently, during the summer of the same year, *El Correo de Andalucía* dismissed seven members of its editorial team. The situation reached a critical point in summer 2018 with the closure of both its local television channel and its print version. Concurrently, *ABC Sevilla* began 2017 with a six-person labor reduction, having previously dispensed with 37 workers from its printing plant in 2015. These actions reflect more than isolated incidents; they represent a continuous trend toward labour precariousness within the journalism sector (Valera, 2017).

This situation can be primarily attributed to two factors. First, the impact of the 2008 financial crisis had a clear effect on the media revenue model based on advertising and sales (Jawadi, 2016; Kudlyak & Sánchez, 2017; Kaya, 2018). Second, there has been a growing social detachment from traditional media, rooted in years of malpractice and deontological deficits. This has created an informational context marked by the rise of fake news and disinformation, driven by the proliferation of nonprofessional information sources on the Web. This trend has been socially accepted due to a lack of trust in traditional media and low media literacy among the general public (Quint & Tristani, 2018; Shoham & Pelzman, 2011).

Our research advances the current state of knowledge by providing a detailed analysis of the journalism crisis in a local context. We combine quantitative data with qualitative insights and concrete business actions. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on the national press, this research delves into local specifics, revealing how global phenomena manifest in regional contexts. Additionally, we propose practical strategies tailored to local media companies, aiming to foster business resilience and regain audience trust. These strategies include diversifying revenue streams, improving journalistic standards, and developing community-oriented practices to reestablish journalism as a public good.

This article offers a replicable model for other media facing similar challenges. Our localised approach underscores the need for change strategies to address the multifaceted crisis facing journalism today. By examining the case of *Sevilla Directo*, we aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the future of local journalism and its role in maintaining informed and engaged communities.

This paper is structured as follows: First, we present a comprehensive theoretical framework that explores the concepts of technological convergence, changes in production and distribution, business models in digital media, and the rise of local journalism in the digital age. Next, we outline our research objectives and methodology, detailing our case study approach focused on *Sevilla Directo*. The results section then presents our findings, organized into three key areas: business organization, production and distribution, and business model innovation. Following this, we discuss our findings in the context of broader trends in local digital media, drawing implications for the future of local journalism. Finally, we conclude

by summarizing our key findings, acknowledging limitations, and suggesting avenues for future research in this rapidly evolving field.

Theoretical Framework

Technological Convergence and Journalistic Enterprise

Technological advancement, particularly in the digital realm, plays a pivotal role in shaping the current journalistic landscape. The process of technological convergence has fundamentally transformed media operations across all aspects, impacting the organizational structure of journalistic enterprises, the professional profiles of their workers, as well as content production, distribution methods, and financing models (Mukti, 2023; Jamil, 2022).

This convergence has required journalists to adapt to new tools and platforms, integrating various forms of multimedia, and fostering closer collaboration between different departments within news organisations (Pérez-Seijo & Silva-Rodríguez, 2024; Jamil, 2023). As a result, production costs have decreased, and cybermedia newsrooms are now made up of smaller, more flexible, and multidisciplinary teams (Orihuela, 2011). Journalists are assuming new roles (Parra Valcarce & Álvarez Marcos, 2004), with flatter organisational hierarchies where writers often take on editorial responsibilities (Wu, 2023).

Newsrooms have evolved into spaces where content processing often outweighs content creation (Parra Valcarce, García de Diego & Rojo Villada, 2007), driven by the need for continuous information updates in a 24/7 news cycle. This shift has led to an increase in telework and a growing influence of audience preferences on news agendas, narratives, and distribution strategies. New professional profiles have emerged to address this evolving relationship with the audience (Yuste & Cabrera, 2014; Pérez-Seijo & Silva-Rodríguez, 2024).

The concept of journalistic convergence, as outlined by Salaverría and Negredo (2008), refers to a process of technology implementation that affects the business, professional, and editorial aspects of media. This process promotes the integration of tools, spaces, methods, and language, going beyond the simple concentration of editorial resources. It is characterized by immediacy, multimedia presentation, interactivity, audience participation, non-linear message structures, and the possibility of content personalization (Salaverría, García Avilés & Masip, 2010).

Convergence is therefore both the cause and effect of the current informative ecosystem, fostering a more innovative scenario open to user communities and necessitating new strategies to achieve sustainability (Carvajal, Arias, Negredo & Amoedo, 2015; Singh & Sehgal, 2024). As Orihuela (2015, p. 130) aptly synthesises, "the Internet is simultaneously a shredder of intermediaries and a generator of new intermediations."

The Digital News Report 2023 highlights that most news editors are now active on platforms like TikTok and YouTube, leveraging their ability to attract younger users (Amoedo-Casais, Vara-Miguel, Negredo, Moreno-Moreno & Kaufmann-Argueta, 2023). This shift underscores how technological convergence has led to an environment where multimedia

content and audience participation are essential (Gutiérrez-Caneda, Pérez-Seijo, & López-García, 2020).

Despite the pressing need for innovation to find new ways to engage society and gain its support, the media environment in Spain has not embraced innovation decisively. García Avilés, Carvajal Prieto, and Arias Robles (2018) note that innovation in media is primarily driven by technology companies, highly specialised media outlets, and media labs, with incremental changes predominating over disruptive ones.

García-Avilés et al. (2016) define innovation in the media as "the ability to react to changes in products, processes, and services through the use of creative skills that allow identifying a problem or need and solving it by introducing something new that adds value to customers and the organisation." In other words, innovation implies a change that generates added value to the product or service offered by the journalistic enterprise, either through differentiation or cost reduction.

Although Bleyen et al. (2014) propose classifying media innovations into five categories (business model, production and distribution, media consumption, internal structure of information, and content), it is more practical to use the typology established by the OECD (2005), which distinguishes between product, process, marketing, or organisational innovations. This classification facilitates comparison with other sectors and can encompass the categories proposed by Bleyen et al.

Lewis, Hermida, and Lorenzo (2024) highlight the difficulty of developing successful innovations in journalism, especially for small media outlets with limited resources. In the local context, innovation can serve as a tool for both renewal and preservation in journalism (García, Fernández, Bran & Fariña, 2012).

Changes in Production and Distribution

In the realm of digital journalism, the strategic use of visual elements—including design, infographics, photography, and video—is crucial for offering a differentiated product and capturing visitor attention (López García, 2015). The use of video has become particularly noteworthy, with services offered by tools such as Periscope, Facebook Live, and YouTube gaining prominence. According to a Cisco report, by 2020 there were projected to be 5.5 billion mobile users worldwide, with 75% of online content being videos for mobile devices.

The nature of Internet-based journalism requires a significant effort to maintain visibility. As Jarvis (2010) aptly states, "If you are not indexable, they will not find you." Most users discover cyber-media content through search engines like Google after making a query. This reality means that content creators must write not only for human readers, but also for algorithms, seeking a balance between both audiences (Cobo, 2012). The digital environment allows for a process of generic hybridisation where innovative tools such as fact checking, data visualisation, infographics, and big data analysis are employed to capture and retain reader attention (Manfredi, 2015).

This process of generic hybridisation has intensified in recent years (López-García & Gutiérrez-Caneda, 2023). In the first decade of the 21st century, digital newspapers largely transferred the print format without significant changes in journalistic genres, although they introduced novelties such as forums, chats, surveys, and animated infographics (Moreno Espinosa, 2011). More recently, transmedia journalism has emerged as a burgeoning narrative innovation, where a story is told and enriched on various media and platforms with the active participation of prosumers (Scolari,

2013; Tellería, 2023).

The active audience of digital media, transformed into producer consumers, increasingly influences the configuration of the news agenda (Vu, 2014). The concepts of 'mobile first'—with 91% of the Spanish population using mobile phones—and social networks enable a continuous and increasingly horizontal conversation between cyber-media and audiences (Steensen, 2014; Hill & Bradshaw, 2018). In this framework, mobile journalism refers not only to news consumption on mobile devices but also to news production on mobile devices, approaching the idea of ubiquitous journalism characterised by the availability, accessibility, and personalization of the informative service thanks to the Internet of things and big data (Westlund, 2018; Salaverría, 2016).

Changes in Financing

Historically, the press has based its income on two primary avenues: the sale of information and the sale of advertising space in a dual market targeting both the public and advertisers (Caro-González, 2007; Aguado Guadalupe, 2016). The transition to digital has presented additional challenges to this business model. The public has become accustomed to accessing information for free on the Internet, and in advertising terms, an internet reader is valued up to twenty times less than a print reader (López García, 2015, p. 48).

An optimistic data point is that the Internet achieves 31.9% of advertising investment despite capturing 26.4% of media consumption time (APM, 2018, p. 70). However, tech giants Google and Facebook control a significant portion of web advertising—only 20% of digital advertising revenue goes directly to media outlets—so the digital transition is not yet profitable for many print headlines (Sanclemente, 2017). Data on digital advertising revenue in the third quarter of 2018 showed a slowdown in growth, further conditioning the reconversion of the Spanish press.

According to Infoadex's "Study of Advertising Investment in Spain 2019" (2019), during 2018, the estimated real investment in the advertising market stood at a volume of 12,835.5 million euros, representing a growth of 2% compared to 2017. The part concerning conventional media increased by 2.9%, from 5,355.9 million in 2017 to 5,512.6 million. Conventional media obtained 42.9% of the total investment in 2018. Among them, television continues to be the leading medium by business volume, and the Internet consolidates its second position, growing by 12.6% with an advertising investment volume of 1,743.2 million euros. The percentage that the Internet represented of the total investment in 2018 in the conventional media section was 31.6%.

Technological advancements have allowed advertisers to better control their advertising insertions. The use of algorithms and the exploitation of big data are other trends in cybermedia advertising (Fuentes, 2017) that allow for programmatic contracting of time and space so that the purchased advertising formats better suit the advertiser's interests (Carrillo-Durán & Rodríguez-Silgado, 2018). However, despite the increase in control over the effectiveness of advertising investment in cybermedia, advertisers prefer textual formats to improve the effectiveness of their advertising (Abuín & Clemente, 2009, p. 259) and to avoid obstacles such as ad blockers or phenomena such as "banner blindness" (Ortiz-Chaves et al., 2014). The use of video for advertising purposes in cyber-media is also growing.

Among the successful cases of native digital media in Spain, the example of Eldiario.es stands out with a mixed income model between subscription and advertising and without a print version (García Orosa, 2016; Nafría, 2018). This medium also practices business cooperation among new cyber-media arising from entrepreneurial initiatives, which is another innovative formula in the business model to reduce costs, improve advertising marketing, or develop more extensive content.

Among the innovations in advertising are branded content and content marketing (Cornia, Sehl & Nielsen, 2020). These represent increasingly notable income avenues for cybermedia, although they pose a risk to credibility if these contents are not clearly identified as advertising (Serazio, 2019).

Other ethical issues related to advertising income arise from the need to generate traffic that attracts advertisers. We refer to practices such as clickbait, viral message containers without journalistic selection criteria, or the abuse of agency content without editing, context, or analysis, which feeds a process of homogenisation and information overload (Bazaco, Redondo, & Sánchez-García, 2019).

The future of media on the Internet and their sustainability involves gaining reader commitment. To reshape the business model of cybermedia, the strategy must be based on audience knowledge, developing the ability to anticipate their needs, and generating value (Jarvis, 2015; Heiselberg & Hopmann, 2024).

In line with this idea, it is necessary to emphasise the sense of community between a cybermedium and its audience, the importance of making it participate, members, partners, etc. Donations are another important source of income for cybermedia, whether punctual to finance specific informative projects in the form of microsponsorship (Dos Santos & Ahmad, 2019), or permanently, as is the case of nonprofit media based on philanthropy, sponsorship, and foundations (Caro-González et al., 2019; Requejo-Alemán, 2014).

This shift towards donation-based models requires a change in societal mentality, as it involves commitment to a common interest purpose (Abad Llorca, 2010). Although some citizens and media outlets have already embraced this approach, it has not yet become widespread in society. In the era of 'engagement,' some common elements in different strategies to reach users and explore new income avenues include the use of video handling hyperrelevant or real-time information (Fuentes, 2017), as well as personalising the informative service, offering exclusivity, or demonstrating direct utility. In this vein, Rojo Villada (2008, p. 152) noted that the new cyberspace environment enabled by technology opened up new revenue opportunities based on the distribution of more personalised content and emphasised that media consumers would only be willing to pay for four things: entertainment, feeling safer or healthier, enjoying a material benefit, or saving time.

In a context where citizens access information for free, the decision to charge for the content of a cybermedium implies having a loyal audience (Flores & Aguado, 2005). However, it also awakens editors' fear of losing readers and therefore influence and advertising (López García, 2005; Parra et al., 2007) or failing to fulfill the social function of informing all citizens regardless of their income (Benson, 2019). Therefore, an alternative to moving towards paywalls without a loyal community is for journalistic companies to agree on a collective migration towards payment methods (Casero Ripollés,

2010, p. 597).

Recent studies indicate that the introduction of paywalls can reduce web traffic and word-of-mouth activity, but also offers direct income and protects own payment channels, mitigating the substitute effects of demand in different channels (Aral & Dhillon, 2017; Pattabhiramaiah et al., 2019; Chiou & Tucker, 2013). Furthermore, audience loyalty and adaptation of subscription models based on user behaviour can optimise the impact of paywalls (Davoudi et al., 2018; Press Gazette, 2023; Mediamakersmeet, 2023).

Given that information is the raw material of cyber-media and content their service, another form of income related to specialisation and exclusivity in the case of local media is the sale of content to other media. This practice not only diversifies income sources, but also strengthens the position of local media in a competitive market (Kemp, 2024).

Boom of the Local in Cybermedia

Among the most prominent entrepreneurial proposals in the media ecosystem in recent years are those that bet on proximity information. Thematic specialisation and the boom of local content are two niches that stand out and often combine when focussing on new digital media. Between 2008 and 2015, the Madrid Press Association counted 440 media outlets launched by journalists. Of these media, according to the same source, 27% focus on local information (APM, 2015). Specialised niches such as culture, art, and sports represent great avenues of journalistic entrepreneurship. However, only 52% of these media remain active (APM, 2019).

Local journalism fulfils a crucial social cohesion function by recounting the closest reality where the direct audience is the protagonist (Caro-González, 2002). The informational possibilities offered by cyber-media have allowed expanding the concept of proximity beyond the geographical, incorporating social and thematic aspects (García Avilés, 2015; López García, 2008).

Social interest in proximity information and technological innovations that optimise production and distribution processes are key aspects in generating new digital media and their potential success. This context acquires special relevance within the framework of relationships with the audience, reinforced by the communicative possibilities of the 3.0 network and the opportunity to create user communities (Newman et al., 2023; Nielsen, 2021; Caro-González et al., 2020).

The rise of hyperlocal media has been particularly notable. These outlets focus on very specific geographic areas or communities, often filling the gap left by traditional local media that have scaled back their coverage due to financial pressures. Hyperlocal media often leverage digital technologies and social media platforms to engage closely with their audiences, fostering a sense of community and providing news and information that might be overlooked by larger media organisations (Harte et al., 2022).

However, the sustainability of these hyperlocal and local digital media remains a challenge. While they often enjoy strong community support and engagement, translating this into a sustainable business model can be difficult. Many are experimenting with mixed revenue models, combining traditional advertising with membership schemes, events, and other

community-focused revenue streams (Radcliffe, 2021).

As we move forward, the future of local digital media will likely depend on their ability to innovate not just in terms of content and distribution, but also in terms of business models and community engagement. Successful outlets will be those that can effectively leverage their close community connections while also taking advantage of the scalability and reach offered by digital platforms.

Goals and Methodology

Objectives

The main objective of this research is to understand the process of adaptation of emerging digital media to the communicative ecosystem in the local sphere. We aim to observe how technological advances influence various tasks of the journalistic profession and to analyse the degree of innovation within them.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are the following:

1. To identify and define changes in how innovation is part of the transformation process in local journalistic enterprises.
2. Analyse the factors that determine the economic sustainability of new local digital media.
3. Assess the viability of new local or hyperlocal digital media.
4. Establish a series of recommendations for professionals who decide to start their own local digital media.

The initial hypothesis is that the initial approaches of new local digital media are not being conducted as presumed and that the formulas to monetise audience indices are still insufficient. We will analyse the subsistence of the selected medium and whether it does so based on innovative strategies derived from classical formulas or on a hybrid model.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach based on a case study, focussing on the local digital media outlet Sevilla Directo. Case study strategy is recommended when trying to understand a complex phenomenon not clearly defined in a real context (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Sevilla Directo has been selected as the subject of study for the following reasons:

1. Complete access to information from all areas: production, distribution, commercialisation, and consumption.
2. It represents an example of professional adaptation to the new media ecosystem.
3. It is a native digital medium of the city of Seville, which emerged after the 2008 crisis during a period of economic recession, with proximity information as its main appeal.
4. The sociodemographic context is suitable for projects of this type of significance; Seville has a population in its metropolitan area that exceeds one million inhabitants.

Data collection has been carried out using the following techniques:

1. Participant observation: Weekly record of metrics and evolution of the medium from 2013 to 2020.
2. Document analysis: Internal reports, commercial presentations, meetings minutes.
3. Focus Group: Conducted in April 2018 with editors from Sevilla Directo (duration: 85 minutes).
4. Content analysis: Application of Salaverría's (2017) digital media classification.
5. Web Traffic and Influence Analysis: Data from Google Analytics, Woorank, Jetpack software, and social networks such as Twitter and Facebook.
6. Economic Analysis: Data available from the Mercantile Registry.
7. News about the company.

In addition, several in-depth interviews were conducted with promoters of other local journalistic projects to contextualise Sevilla Directo's analysis: Christopher Rivas (Sevilla Actualidad), Jesús Rodríguez (Sevilla Report), Clara Pazos (Sevilla Ciudad), among others. The interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were conducted in the first half of 2017. The interview guide used was based on Carvajal et al.'s (2015) questionnaire for analysing cases of innovation in journalism.

For the analysis of the collected data, a multiple triangulation approach has been used (Denzin, 1978; Janesick, 1994):

1. Data triangulation: Comparison of data obtained from different sources.
2. Methodological triangulation: Use of multiple methods to study the same problem.
3. Disciplinary triangulation: Incorporation of perspectives from different disciplines in the analysis.

This multiple triangulation approach helps mitigate the potential biases inherent in participant observation and provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Results

The fundamental innovation of Sevilla Directo is organisational, specifically of a strategic nature, based on how it approaches the social reality it sets out to narrate and analyse: a hyperlocal approach. It is a medium with extremely limited resources, a scenario where innovation is essential to survive (LaFontaine & Breiner, 2017).

Sevilla Directo appeared in September 2012 in a city whose press is dominated by the ABC newspaper, followed at a distance by *Diario de Sevilla* and at a lower level by *El Correo de Andalucía*. In the digital sphere, the web versions of these headlines also predominate, sharing the spectrum with a range of native portals, although none have reached a prominent position among Sevillians.

In this framework, Sevilla Directo will base itself on the possibilities of technology that works transversally to incrementally apply innovations in its business organisation and information production.

According to the cybermedia distinction proposed by Professor Ramón Salaverría (2017), Sevilla Directo is a

multiplatform, polychromous cybermedium of general information specialised in the hyperlocal sphere with a local-provincial reach, privately owned, and for-profit. Similarly, it is a medium with an independent editorial proposal, dynamic, journalistic approach, and collective authorship.

Business Organisation

With the hyperlocal label, it is born with the intention of bringing a novel perspective to the city's informational panorama, focussing on the neighbourhoods of its eleven districts with neighbours and social fabric entities as references (interview with the director and information on the website). This medium is driven by the journalist Antonio Silva de Pablos and in its germination counted on the advice of the Fundación Andalucía Emprende, dependent on the Junta de Andalucía.

The medium's motto, which defines its positioning, is 'Las noticias de tu barrio' ('The news from your neighbourhood'), and that philosophy is transferred to its way of organising content, as the information is distributed in eleven main sections corresponding to the eleven districts of Seville: Bellavista-La Palmera, Casco Antiguo, Alcosa-Este-Torreblanca, Nervión, Macarena, San Pablo-Santa Justa, Sur, Cerro Amate, Los Remedios, Norte and Triana. This information orientation focused on the street level is completed with the section 'Protagonistas del barrio' ('Neighbourhood Protagonists'), dedicated to prominent characters or collectives in their geographical area.

In this sense, Sevilla Directo is inspired by proposals such as the American newspaper DNAInfo from New York or the Andalusian Granadamedia. Following its birth, other cyber-media emerged in the Andalusian capital aiming to present news from the neighbourhoods' perspective. This is the case of Radio Alcosa (later SevillaWebRadio), Sevilla Ciudad (ABC), Nervión al Día, or Triana al Día. At the same time, new cyber-media orientated towards local information in other cities emerged. Reporteros Jerez (Jerez de la Frontera), Cordópolis (Córdoba), or El Independiente (Cádiz), the latter in print and disappeared for economic reasons only months after its birth, are examples of this.

To convey close and elaborated information, Sevilla Directo innovates in the way of presenting information and messages, betting on audiovisual content, focussing its attention outside the general agenda, and dedicating its most elaborate formats—reports, interviews, and chronicles—to hyperlocal topics highlighting relevant but unusual characters in the media, attending and reporting citizen problems from forums outside the media agenda, municipal boards, civic centres, modest sports clubs, etc., or seeking news at street level.

This informational proposal is conducted with scarce technical and human resources. Three full-time journalists with degrees in journalism, trained in SEO writing, audiovisual language, traffic analysis, CMS management, and equipped with laptops and Internet-connected mobile phones make up the resources of this project. It is a multidisciplinary newsroom that offers continuous training, especially in using social networks to improve relationships with the audience and create a community. Web design, photo and video editing, web analytics, or data use have been other aspects that have gained presence in this team's routines.

Additionally, to journalistic tasks, the newsroom has incorporated, to a greater or lesser extent depending on contracts, communication services, event organisation, and even teaching, all supported by the same journalists. Innovation in the

journalist's professional profile is reflected in a polyhedral role with multiple capabilities and roles in their workday. The offer of new services has been developed in most cases unrelated to the principle of scalability, that is, diverting or saturating the necessary resources to continue producing the original informational product (Salaverría & Negrodo, 2008). New tasks respond to short-term economic needs but move the medium away from long-term development aimed at promoting its content and quality. Multi-income business models can penalise the true mission of the media (Benson, 2019).

Sevilla Directo's newsroom has been in three different physical locations until opting for teleworking since January 2017, an innovation in work processes motivated by economic reasons. Internal communication, even in times of physical newsroom, is fundamentally based on messaging applications due to the mobile nature of their activity and, secondly, teleworking. Teleworking has influenced the philosophy of the medium. Sevilla Directo was created to tell what happens in the city of Seville from a hyperlocal perspective, from the day-to-day of its neighbourhoods in contact with the street and its people. However, over the years, it has deviated from that original model, tending towards a more local information approach with a news agenda not as close to the hyperlocal and more like media like El Correo, Diario de Sevilla, or ABC in its edition for Seville.

Teleworking influences this change and is not given as an option to save time and optimise the production process but because of precariousness (Gómez Mompert, Gutiérrez Lozano & Palau Sampio, 2015, pp. 148-149) and refuge to continue informing, but with a clear decline in proprietary content and offering a more homogenised and less personal service.

The Sevilla Directo organisational chart is simple and flat, with a director focused on commercial tasks, a chief editor who coordinates and creates content, and two editors. A network of opinion contributors of between five and ten people with weekly contributions completes the team. In the Sevilla Directo business structure, it has been possible to have up to nine people in the newsroom simultaneously, including the chief editor, hired editors, collaborators, and paid interns. At various times, the continuous participation of an external photographer and video editor was also counted.

The decision-making process is characterised by horizontality in the content area. The chief editor guides the topics to be covered, but it is a flexible hierarchy where editors often function as editors due to the 24/7 continuous workflow, having to face situations without other colleagues working. Therefore, the design of positions in the newsroom is of low horizontal and vertical specialisation. Horizontal specialisation refers to the number of different tasks performed in a position. Vertical refers to the degree of autonomy and control in that position (Caro-González, 2007).

Production and Distribution

Complementing the acquisition of new tasks and roles by the journalists mentioned above, it is noteworthy that in Sevilla Directo, it is observed how the use of digital tools allows editors to also perform and monitor the dissemination of their informational pieces, adding presentation and distribution tasks to the traditional ones of news selection and elaboration (Parra Valcarce & Álvarez Marcos, 2004, p. 14). These circumstances place these professionals between the all-terrain

journalist and the specialist in proximity content.

The Sevilla Directo newsroom continuously updates its content. Its editors organise weekly, so one of them exercises the editor role more directly each week, applying the guidelines presented by the chief editor and agreed upon by all. The editor freely distributes the day, paying particular attention to morning and last-minute events. The other two editors distribute their day by combining support tasks for the editor with producing more elaborate pieces, either based on the agenda or on their topics with a timeless nature and a hyperlocal focus.

Examples of the latter would be district event chronicles, reports on general topics from hyperlocal cases and data, or interviews with prominent local figures from the associative, sports, cultural, etc. realms. Opinion columns are written by collaborators living in Seville and are based on local or general issues, but in these cases offering a Sevillian perspective.

This medium is of local scope and generalist, so its pages contain social, political, cultural, sports, environmental, etc. But they are always presented prioritising the interest of neighbourhood entities or the effects on citizens over the institutional discourse and official sources.

Sevilla Directo has also innovated in relationships with readers. This medium enables the 'Envía tu noticia' section where users can send information about their neighbourhoods. This information is not published without a review by an editor; they are very occasional contributions and therefore do not have a specific weight in the medium's production. When these contents are published, their citizen-authorship is indicated. There is also a 'Blogueros de barrio' ('Neighbourhood Bloggers') space, a repository of external blogs linked through links.

Mobile devices are a fundamental work tool for these editors. Mobile journalism —MoJo for its acronym in English— contributes to this medium's production by informing in real-time and doing it in a multimedia way (López-García et al., 2019). Texts, photographs, and videos are made and distributed on the smartphone. Live chronicles and Twitter videos are the most used formats.

With respect to content, technological innovations such as transmedia narrative, virtual reality, or augmented reality are not exploited. There are also no basic options to personalise the informative experience, such as editing the front page or a personalised notification system. Resource limitations prevent the development of a test section for innovation or medialab. Narrative innovations are scarce and are made from daily experience through trial and error.

However, limited use of interactive formats and geolocation has been made through surveys, contests, or playful dynamics on social networks. Sevilla Directo does not have its own mobile application, although it does present a responsive design that helps improve the reader's experience. Regarding the design, in April 2014, a year and a half after its launch, Sevilla Directo completely redesigned its website, clearly betting on a more visual presentation. The image took centre stage on the front page with large formats, also in photo galleries and inside news, and streaming or new sections like 'Callejeando' for photo news. The design went from a two-column front page to a three-column one, and new interaction spaces with the audience were created, such as survey and contest sections.

Another innovation in content distribution is the weekly newsletter that collects the week's most outstanding publications

and is sent free to subscribed readers. Sevilla Directo plans to diversify the newsletter into various thematic or district newsletters, in addition to promoting WhatsApp and Telegram.

Regarding the options for personalising the informative service and improving the reader's experience, the use of social networks is crucial. Sevilla Directo is actively present on Google Plus, Facebook, and Twitter. In these three networks, it makes continuous updates. Initially, the presence of these networks was based on the need to position the medium, give it visibility, and attract new audiences. Over time, not only was this intention maintained, but the presence on networks, especially on Twitter, evolved to offer other functions derived from conversational use with its audience. Thus, bonds of complicity are established, new informative sources emerge, the agenda is configured based on readers' demands, participation is encouraged, service information is increased, and, in short, a community is created. Not in vain, the management of the Twitter account @directosevilla was awarded in 2014 as the best profile in Seville in the Current Affairs category.

Building a community to establish a trust-and-identity relationship that translates into subscriptions to change the revenue model is still a distant challenge for Sevilla Directo. However, this medium has achieved the first major objective of its presence on networks: to position itself among multiple information offerings and achieve sufficient traffic to attract advertisers. The Twitter profile has experienced the highest growth at a rate of 1,000 new followers per month since the newspaper was launched, reaching 60,000 followers at the beginning of 2018.

Almost 41% of Sevilla Directo's visits came via Facebook or Twitter initially, and in 2017 these two networks continued to attract a similar flow (37.3%). However, over the years and with better positioning, the number of readers who access this medium through search engines and directly has grown. Initially, direct traffic represented 17.7% of the total and in 2017 this had increased to 21.5%. Regarding the access of readers after making a search engine query, it increased from 29% in 2013 to 38% in 2017 (latest data corroborated by the medium of this study). In any case, the importance of social networks and Google for this cybermedium is significant. Together, they provide more than three-quarters of Sevilla Directo's traffic, approaching 80% in 2014 and 2015.

The possibility of distributing content on social networks and monitoring these actions also affects the way information is produced. In the Sevilla Directo newsroom, guidelines and recommendations are considered when writing for the Internet and publishing. When defining the CMS where the medium is managed, the importance of aspects such as accessibility, responsive design, or correct integration of audiovisual content for optimal navigation by readers was also considered.

On the other hand, the way to tell the story is influenced by the medium used and the expectation of a larger audience. According to interviews with the editors, it is observed how the same fact is narrated differently on the website and on social networks. The platform used conditions the production routines, and the information is selected and treated according to the dissemination channels. Social networks determine the medium's organisation, which is especially noticeable in the timeliness of the facts. Facebook Live and Twitter Streaming have become two relevant tools to transmit information, especially immediate, and influence the production routines of its editors. Timeliness, accompanied by the professional handling of immediacy, gains prominence. Work routines are orientated towards achieving a permanent renewal of information. This temporal immediacy also influences aspects such as the relationship between speed and

quality of information, the use of sources, fact-checking, editing and presentation, etc. Another example of an innovative use of these tools is the WhatsApp channel, opened in 2016, where Sevilla Directo's readers can receive the most valuable information of the day.

Sevilla Directo combines SEO and SEM techniques to improve its positioning, and the CMS allows monitoring traffic and audience behaviour with real-time statistics and analytics tools. This continuous monitoring of the audience is crucial to adapt content and formats to their preferences and needs. Thus, the production process integrates the analysis of the most viewed news, user retention, traffic sources, interaction in social networks, etc., to make informed editorial decisions.

Business Model

Sevilla Directo's business model is based on traditional advertising, with special attention to local advertisers. In its first year of existence, a generalist advertising marketing agency was used to obtain contracts, and from 2014, the management was managed by the medium itself. In a second phase, from 2016, Sevilla Directo has chosen a mixed model between direct advertising marketing, programmatic advertising, and commercial agreements with local businesses. These agreements seek not only to obtain advertising but also to generate synergies to promote activities and content of mutual interest.

Local advertising remains the main source of income for this medium. However, the crisis context and the decrease in local business investment in advertising have forced Sevilla Directo to diversify its revenue sources. Thus, it has been innovating with alternative models such as branded content and the organisation of events. Organisation of events has proven to be a successful strategy to generate revenue and strengthen ties with the community. Events such as debates, workshops, and cultural activities are designed to attract the local audience and promote advertiser products or services.

Regarding branded content, Sevilla Directo has created a team dedicated to generating high-quality content for advertisers. This content is integrated into the editorial context of the medium, ensuring its relevance and value to readers. However, this practice requires careful ethical management to maintain the editorial independence and the credibility of the information.

Another avenue of income is the monetisation of its presence on social networks. Although not yet fully exploited, the potential to generate income through sponsorship, collaborations, and advertising on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram is recognised.

Finally, Sevilla Directo has explored the possibility of implementing a subscription model. In 2018, a survey was conducted among its readers to gauge their willingness to pay for exclusive content or additional services. The results indicated a favourable attitude towards subscriptions, especially for content related to local events, neighbourhood issues, and exclusive reports. However, implementing this model requires careful planning and development of added value propositions that justify the cost to the user.

Discussion and Conclusions

The case of Sevilla Directo provides valuable information on the challenges and opportunities faced by new local digital media in the current communication ecosystem. This study contributes to the growing body of research on media innovation and sustainability in the digital age, particularly in the context of local journalism.

The experience of Sevilla Directo demonstrates that innovation in local digital media is not only possible, but necessary for survival. The hyperlocal approach, combined with the strategic use of digital tools and social networks, has been crucial in establishing the medium's identity and reaching its audience. This aligns with recent research that highlights the importance of community-focused journalism in building audience loyalty (Heiselberg & Hopmann, 2024; Lewis, Hermida & Lorenzo, 2024).

However, the study also reveals the limitations of innovation in resource-constrained environments. Although Sevilla Directo has shown adaptability in its organisational structure and content production, the lack of substantial investment in R&D&I limits its capacity for disruptive innovation. This reflects a broader trend in the industry, where incremental changes often predominate over radical innovations (García-Avilés et al., 2018).

The financial sustainability of Sevilla Directo remains a significant challenge, reflecting broader issues in the landscape of digital media. The dependence on traditional advertising models, combined with attempts to diversify revenue through branded content and event organisations, indicates a transitional phase in the search for a sustainable business model. This struggle is consistent with industry trends, where many digital media are experimenting with various revenue sources to achieve financial stability (Cornia, Sehl & Nielsen, 2020).

The possible implementation of a subscription model, as considered by Sevilla Directo, aligns with global trends in digital journalism. However, the success of such models depends heavily on building a loyal audience base and offering distinctive value propositions (Newman et al., 2023). The case study highlights the tension between maintaining free access to information and the need for sustainable revenue sources, a dilemma faced by many local media outlets (Benson, 2019).

A key finding of this study is the importance of community engagement and social capital in the sustainability of local digital media. Sevilla Directo's efforts to build a community through social networks and hyperlocal content reflect a growing recognition of the value of audience relationships in digital journalism. This approach resonates with recent research that emphasises the need for news organisations to be more responsive to community needs (Lewis, Hermida & Lorenzo, 2024).

The study also highlights the potential of social capital as a funding source, particularly through events and community initiatives. This approach offers a promising avenue for local media to strengthen their financial position while deepening their connection with their audience.

The case of Sevilla Directo illustrates how technological innovations are reshaping journalistic practices in local media. The adoption of mobile journalism techniques, the integration of social networks in news gathering and distribution, and

the emphasis on multimedia content reflect broader trends in digital journalism (López-García et al., 2019). However, the study also reveals the challenges of fully leveraging these technologies with limited resources, a common problem for small local media outlets.

Conclusions

The case of Sevilla Directo demonstrates that innovation in local digital media is a complex and multifaceted process that goes beyond mere technological adoption. It involves rethinking organisational structures, content strategies, audience relationships, and business models. Although challenges persist, particularly in achieving financial sustainability, the study highlights the potential for local digital media to play a vital role in their communities through innovative approaches to journalism.

As the media landscape continues to evolve, the experiences of outlets such as Sevilla Directo offer valuable lessons for the journalism industry in general. They underscore the importance of adaptability, community engagement, and various revenue strategies in navigating the digital transformation of local news. The future of local journalism likely lies in a striking balance between leveraging technological innovations and maintaining strong community connections, all while developing sustainable business models that can support independent quality journalism at the local level.

Implications for the Future of Local Journalism

This case study provides several insights into the future of local journalism.

1. **Hyperlocal Focus:** The success of Sevilla Directo's hyperlocal approach suggests that there is still a strong demand for locally focused content, even in the era of global digital media.
2. **Flexible Organisational Structures:** The adoption of teleworking and multifaceted roles for journalists indicates a trend toward more flexible and adaptable organisational structures in local media.
3. **Community-Centred Approaches:** The importance of building a strong community relationship emerges as a critical factor for the success and sustainability of local digital media.
4. **Diversified revenue model:** The need for diverse revenue sources beyond traditional advertising is clear. Future sustainability likely depends on the successful implementation of mixed models that include subscriptions, events, and community support.
5. **Technological Integration:** Although full technological integration remains a challenge for resource-limited media, the strategic use of digital tools and platforms is crucial to reaching and engaging audiences.

Limitations and future research

This study is limited by its focus on a single case in a specific geographical context. Future research could benefit from comparative studies in different local media in various regions or countries. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide information on the long-term sustainability of different innovation strategies in local digital media.

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