

MAPPING DIGITAL MEDIA: **ARGENTINA**



Mapping Digital Media: Argentina

A REPORT BY THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

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Mapping Digital Media

The values that underpin good journalism, the need of citizens for reliable and abundant information, and the importance of such information for a healthy society and a robust democracy: these are perennial, and provide compass-bearings for anyone trying to make sense of current changes across the media landscape.

The standards in the profession are in the process of being set. Most of the effects on journalism imposed by new technology are shaped in the most developed societies, but these changes are equally influencing the media in less developed societies.

The **Mapping Digital Media** project, which examines the changes in-depth, aims to build bridges between researchers and policymakers, activists, academics and standard-setters across the world. It also builds policy capacity in countries where this is less developed, encouraging stakeholders to participate and influence change. At the same time, this research creates a knowledge base, laying foundations for advocacy work, building capacity and enhancing debate.

The Media Program of the Open Society Foundations has seen how changes and continuity affect the media in different places, redefining the way they can operate sustainably while staying true to values of pluralism and diversity, transparency and accountability, editorial independence, freedom of expression and information, public service, and high professional standards.

The Mapping Digital Media project assesses, in the light of these values, the global opportunities and risks that are created for media by the following developments:

- the switch-over from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting;
- growth of new media platforms as sources of news;
- convergence of traditional broadcasting with telecommunications.

Covering 60 countries, the project examines how these changes affect the core democratic service that any media system should provide—news about political, economic and social affairs.

The **Mapping Digital Media** reports are produced by local researchers and partner organizations in each country. Cumulatively, these reports will provide a much-needed resource on the democratic role of digital media.

In addition to the country reports, the Open Society Media Program has commissioned research papers on a range of topics related to digital media. These papers are published as the **MDM Reference Series**.

Mapping Digital Media: Argentina

Executive Summary

After almost three decades of democratic rule and a decade after a deep economic, social, and political crisis, Argentinean institutions have regained overall stability and, in recent years, the country has undergone a process of economic expansion, with improvement in all major economic indicators.

This stability has been muddied since 2008 due to a process of political and media polarization, the roots of which can be found in the conflict between the government and agricultural sectors sparked by an attempt to change the tax system and export regulations. The dispute gave rise to a series of confrontations between the government and opposition parties that extended to most political topics in the country. Opposition parties managed to limit the government's power in the Parliament elections of 2009, but they were clearly defeated by the incumbent Cristina Fernández in October 2011, allowing her a new four-year term in power.

The majority of media outlets portrayed this conflict in a way that clearly favored the farmers, while opposition parties received the explicit support of some private media. As a result, some small media groups have positioned themselves as allies of the Government, while larger groups—most notably Clarín, the main media group in the country and a leading force in Latin America's media landscape—have been strongly critical of the current administration. The positioning of the different groups has direct repercussions on the media outlets owned by them, generating a rather polarized media discourse.

Against this backdrop, and under the Cristina Fernández de Kirchner administration, two events that are both highly relevant to the transformation of the media system took place in 2009: the passing of the Audiovisual Communication Services Law (*Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual*), and the adoption of a digital standard for terrestrial digital TV (TDT).

The SCA Law, besides setting the regulatory framework for digitization, introduced significant changes in the media landscape. Among other issues, it reserved a portion of the spectrum for non-profit civil society organizations, imposed public service obligations on private media, specifically granted native communities the right to receive radio and TV licenses, included regulations to facilitate media access for people with visual

or hearing impairments, created an independent regulatory authority, added transparency requirements to license holders, established limits to concentration and to broadcasting cross-ownership, and prohibited telephone companies from holding media licenses. The participatory nature of the debate on the SCA law, with its public discussions and open forums, constituted an unprecedented event in the history of media policy in the country.

However, the actual impact of the SCA law has been somewhat muffled due to the opposition of large media groups to parts of the new law—which has in some cases taken the form of court litigation—the lack of cooperation in its implementation from political parties in the opposition—which have refused to appoint members to the independent authority created by the law—and the temptation on the part of the Government to use the new regulatory framework to promote media groups aligned with the administration—interestingly, the new law reserves to the Government the right to grant licenses in large urban areas, while in other areas it is the new independent authority that grants licenses. In addition, the new law says little about digitization, and is not designed for a media landscape in which the convergence of audiovisual media, telecommunications, and the internet plays an increasingly relevant role.

Since the SCA Law did not contain specific provisions on digital media, the process of digitization of broadcasting has followed a separate path. Also in 2009, the Government approved a decree that established the Argentinean Terrestrial Digital Television System (*Sistema Argentino de Televisión Digital Terrestre*, SATVD-T), adopted the Japanese-Brazilian ISDB-T TV standard and introduced a 10-year term (2019) for the analog switch-off. However, the digitization of broadcasting is still in its early stages and the media system in Argentina is still dominated by analog media. Both radio and television are close to full penetration levels, but while over 97 percent of the 14 million homes in the country own a TV set, only a small portion of those sets are digitally enabled.

Thus far, there have been few changes in media and news consumption that can be linked to digital migration. Television continues to be the medium of reference. There is only limited terrestrial TV delivery, and it is focused on the large urban centers. In parallel, Argentina is among the South American countries with the highest percentage of cable TV subscribers (almost 70 percent of Argentinean households that own a TV set have a cable subscription). The cable TV market is supported by the added value of internet service provision, a segment that in the 2005–2010 period doubled its number of subscribers. Television is the main source of news in the country, and while the ratings of the most popular newscasts in free-to-air television have eroded there has been a parallel growth, starting in 2008, in the viewership of cable news.

Even though the newspaper market has remained quite stable over the last few years, it has actually been affected by digitization on two related fronts. First, most newspapers in the country have lost circulation—in some cases, such as the leading daily, Clarín, the loss has been significant, 19% from 2008 to 2010—and, while there is no conclusive evidence on this, part of the decline can be attributed to online media and news consumption. Second, the online versions of some newspapers have managed to establish themselves as the most-visited online news sites.

Digitization and the consequent rise in the use of social networks and digital platforms on the part of Argentinean society are changing the system of social production and the circulation of information and entertainment in a country where the expansion of broadband connections has doubled over the past five years. There is a dramatically increasing number of blogs that contribute to the political debate and offer news and opinions from various fields of expertise and that feed back into the workings of mainstream media. That said, however, the most visited news sites are the online versions of mainstream offline news media.

Regarding the internet, the digital divide remains a central issue, not only in terms of social groups without the economic means and the skills to use the net, but also in terms of the uneven quality of the access provided in different parts of the country. While connectivity has increased significantly over recent years, network access growth is geographically concentrated in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA), where 70 percent of connections are located, including both broadband and dial-up.

In fact, one of the main problems of the Argentinean communication system is that content production is strongly centralized in Buenos Aires and is focused on the capital, and this is particularly noticeable in the case of TV. The concentration of the population and of most economic activities in Buenos Aires city and the AMBA region have shaped a structure in which the main newspapers, radio broadcasters of national scope, TV channels (both open terrestrial TV and pay-TV), content producers in general, and news suppliers in particular are based in the federal capital. Media in the provinces reproduce for the most part the content produced in the capital, thus also reducing diversity.

Additionally, the concentration of ownership and market domination by the leading operators is a pervasive trend extending to almost all platforms. The concentration of property in multimedia groups, such as Clarín, that have dominant positions in print, radio, and free-to-air and pay television, restricts diversity. Nonetheless, there are some print, radio, and television outlets that belong to different owners and can provide a diverse offering. But even when the provision of information is diverse and comes from different sources, consumption continues to be highly concentrated. All in all, it could be argued that the media market presents a somewhat diverse offering but a highly concentrated demand.

These different layers of concentration—around the capital, around large media groups, and around a limited set of offerings—may be counterbalanced by the process of digitization, with its technological and regulatory changes. For instance, minority groups have taken advantage of digitization to produce information, disseminate it, and do advocacy work. And even though there has been no substantive boost to their appearance in traditional media, there has undoubtedly been a positive impact on the online visibility of such groups. The current situation also offers the public service broadcaster the opportunity to become a much more relevant player in the media system in the country. But the transformative potential of digitization will no doubt be affected by the polarization of the social and political forces of Argentina that prevents rival groups from acknowledging shared goals and agreeing on a course of action to obtain all the possible benefits of this transformation.

Context

With a population of 40 million, Argentina is one of the Spanish-speaking countries with the strongest development of communication media, as a result of the extent of its educational system and conditions that have historically favored access by the population to cultural assets and services. Politically organized as a representative and federal republic, it is now in its 28th consecutive year of uninterrupted democracy, with consecutive administrations elected by citizens' votes, after the return to the constitutional system in 1983.

The country underwent an economic, social, and political crisis in December 2001, from which it managed to emerge in a framework of institutional stability, followed by a process of economic expansion including a major reduction of its foreign debt. Since 2005, Argentina has maintained sustainable GDP growth, which has positioned it 31st in the 2010 International Monetary Fund (IMF) ranking, with a GDP of US\$ 351,015 billion. The curve of recovery after the crisis was supported by a marked decline of unemployment, which persisted and strengthened in the 2004–2006 period; as a result, unemployment ceased to be a double-digit indicator. However, Argentina is still largely an inequitable country characterized by unfair wealth distribution.

Argentina has a low demographic density (14.4 inhabitants/km²), with its population mostly concentrated in metropolitan areas (92 percent urban compared with only 8 percent rural), and a high percentage of senior citizens over 60 years old (14.5 percent). Argentineans have a high life expectancy rate (75.5 years) and a high literacy rate (97.7 percent).

The population is a fusion of diverse national and ethnic groups as a result of successive waves of immigration, but with a clear preponderance of people of European ancestry (mostly Spanish and Italian), who make up 97 percent of the population. The remaining 3 percent is made up of *mestizos* (of mixed European and indigenous ancestry), indigenous people, and other smaller groups, with a significant presence of people from Syria, Lebanon, and other Middle Eastern countries (500,000–600,000 people).¹

1. See <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26516.htm> (accessed 9 January 2012).

The official language is Spanish, which is spoken by 99 percent of the population.² Other significant languages in terms of the number of speakers are Italian (1.5 million), Arabic (1 million), German (400,000), Guaraní (200,000), Yiddish (200,000), and Catalan (174,000).³

More than 600,000 people consider themselves or are direct descendants of indigenous people, and 2.8 percent of homes include at least one member of an indigenous group. Among these groups, 12 different languages have been identified, with a combined total of over 540,000 speakers.⁴

2. See <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26516.htm> (accessed 9 January 2012).

3. See http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=AR (accessed 9 January 2012).

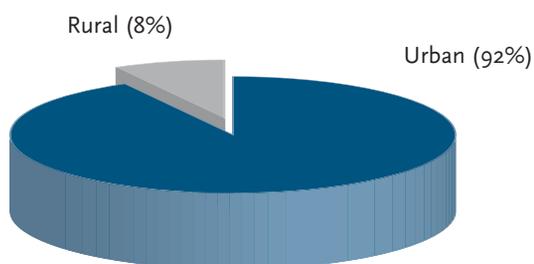
4. *Encuesta Complementaria de Pueblos Indígenas, 2004–2005* (ECPI, Complementary Survey of Indigenous Peoples), based on INDEC, *Censo Nacional de Población 2001* (National Population Census 2001), available at <http://www.indec.gov.ar> (accessed 9 January 2012).

Social Indicators

Population: 40 million (2010)

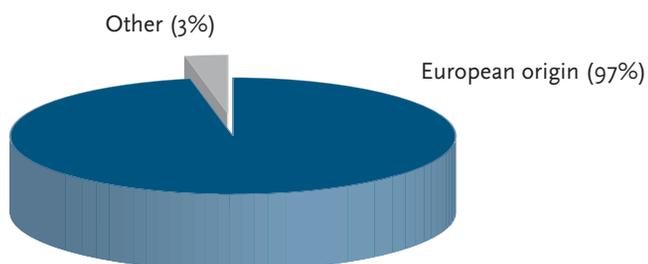
Households: 14.2 million⁵

Figure 1.
Rural–urban breakdown (% of total population), 2010



Source: National Statistics and Census Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos*, INDEC), 2010.

Figure 2.
Ethnic composition (% of total population), 2008

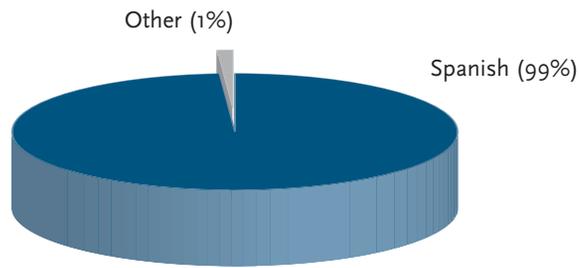


Source: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26516.htm> (accessed 9 January 2012).

5. INDEC, *Censo Nacional de Población, Hogares y Viviendas 2010* (National Population and Households Census 2010), available at <http://www.censo2010.indec.gov.ar> (accessed 9 January 2012).

Figure 3.

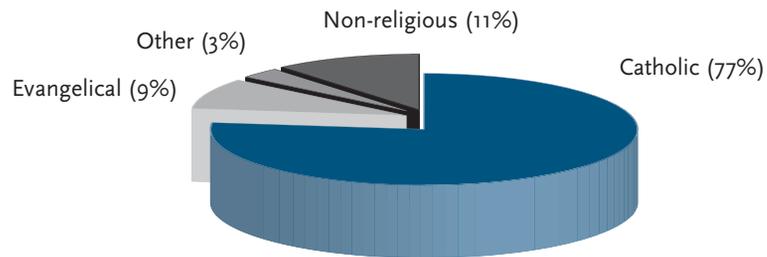
Language composition (% of total population), 2012



Source: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26516.htm> (accessed 8 January 2012).

Figure 4.

Religious composition (% of total population), 2008



Source: F. Malimacci, *Primera encuesta sobre creencias y actitudes religiosas en Argentina* (First Survey on Religious Beliefs and Attitudes in Argentina), Conicet, Buenos Aires, 2008.

Economic Indicators

Table 1.
Economic indicators

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011f	2012f
GDP (current prices), in US\$ million	183,001	214,042	262,041	328,028	310,057	351,015	362,998	371,302
GDP (in US\$ current prices), per head	4,741	5,492	6,658	8,253	7,725	8,662	8,874	8,994
Gross National Income (GNI) (current \$), per head	10,430	11,710	13,090	14,110	14,090	n/a	n/a	n/a
Unemployment (% of total labor force)	10.1	8.7	7.5	7.3	8.4	8.0	8.5	8.4
Inflation ⁶ (average annual rate in % against previous year)	9.6	10.8	8.8	8.5	6.2	10.6	10.6	10.9

Note: n/a: not available; f: forecast.

Sources: World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook Database (WEOD) for GDP and GNI, 2010; National Statistics and Census Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos*, INDEC) for inflation.

6. The validity and veracity of certain statistical indices, mainly the inflation rate and the consumer price index (CPI), have been contested since January 2007, when the government altered the data-gathering methodology at INDEC, the agency responsible for determining those indicators. This move was strongly questioned by both INDEC employees and other specialists. As a result, whenever the new (monthly) inflation rate is announced, it is compared against the indices prepared by various private consulting firms, which are usually double the official figures.

1. Media Consumption: The Digital Factor

1.1 Digital Take-up

1.1.1 Digital Equipment

Households in Argentina show a wide spectrum in the process of adoption of equipment enabled for digital media. Actual differences are subject to socioeconomic conditions. According to the 2010 national census conducted by the National Statistics and Census Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos*, INDEC), just over 40 million Argentines reside in some 14 million households, slightly over 97 percent of which own a TV set. Only a small portion of total TV sets are digitally enabled. However, both the purchases of digital media TV sets and the policy of distributing free set-top boxes for low-income households (see section 7.1.1.2) are on an upward trend. See Table 2.

Table 2.
Households owing equipment, 2005–2010

	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010	
	No. of HH (million) ⁷	% of THH ⁸	No. of HH (million)	% of THH	No. of HH (million)	% of THH	No. of HH (million)	% of THH	No. of HH (million)	% of THH	No. of HH (million)	% of THH
TV	10.4	95	10.6	95.1	10.7	95.3	10.85	97.6	10.9	96.1	14.2	97.8
Radio	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.10	93.2	10.1	93.2	11.2	93.2
PC	3.5	32	3.8	34.1	4.1	36.4	4.1	37.6	8.2	38.6	9.0	43.3

Notes: n/a: not available

HH = households owning the equipment; THH = total number of households in the country; PC = personal computer.

Sources: INDEC. *National Population and Household Census (Censo 2010 de Población, Hogares y Viviendas)*, 2011; International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2010, for PC.

7. Total number of households owning the equipment.

8. Percentage of total number of households in the country.

1.1.2 Platforms

The history of journalism in Argentina can be traced back to colonial times, with the creation in 1801 of the first newspaper, *Telégrafo Mercantil*. As the process of emancipation from Spain started in 1810, journalistic activity grew stronger, noticeably, with *El Correo de Comercio* and *La Gazeta*. Their editors were the Argentinean leaders Manuel Belgrano and Mariano Moreno, respectively.

The leading morning papers were concentrated in Buenos Aires, but gained national projection. However, throughout the 20th century, major cities in the country had their own newspapers whose sales at local level largely outperformed national papers. In 1945, *Clarín* was established. It rapidly gained positioning, and in the 1970s it became the best-selling paper in the country, followed by *La Nación* (created in 1870). Since the 1990s, *Clarín* has expanded to cover virtually every economic sector linked with the media and telecommunications. Grupo Clarín is Argentina's largest multimedia group, and a leader in the Latin American media landscape (see section 1.3.1.1).

Radio broadcasting in Argentina first appeared in 1920, and went through its golden times in the 1930s and 1940s. Even small towns have an FM radio station and it is the only platform that is truly local in nature, in terms of both reach and content generation (see also section 1.2.1.4).

Finally, television was introduced in 1951, though it did not reach critical mass audiences until the 1960s. However, open TV only has a wide offer in Buenos Aires city, with five channels. In fact, one of the main problems of the Argentinean communication system is that content production is strongly centralized in Buenos Aires and focussed on the capital, and this is particularly noticeable in the case of TV.

The main platform used by Argentineans for news and information is television. Most households pay to have a choice of TV channels; only seven cities (outside of Buenos Aires) have more than one terrestrial reception TV channel. In another 14 provinces there is only one free-to-air channel, and in various areas (like the province of Catamarca) only pay-TV is accessible because not even the main state channel reaches the entire population. For that reason, there is only limited TV terrestrial delivery, and it is focused on the large urban centers. The rest of the country receives the cable TV offer, with multichannel offerings. See Table 3.

It is perhaps not surprising then that Argentina is among the South American countries with the highest percentage of cable TV subscribers. This distribution platform was introduced in 1963, a few years after private terrestrial TV appeared between 1957 and 1961, only in Buenos Aires. The poor reception of the federal capital signals in the interior, combined with the expanded content offer facilitated by international satellite signals, the non-existence of regional broadcasters, and the need to access entertainment and news produced in Buenos Aires have driven, since the 1980s, a rapid and effective expansion of cable TV. Almost 70 percent of Argentinean households that own a TV set (which is close to 100 percent of total households) have a cable subscription.

Since 2005, after overcoming a brief regression as a result of the 2001 crisis, the cable TV system has grown steadily and has introduced digital signals, today reaching 7 percent of the subscriber base. Furthermore, satellite reception has also grown—albeit to a lesser extent—and by 2010 had more than doubled its 2005 indicators.

Table 3.
Platform for the main TV reception and digital take-up, 2005–2010⁹

	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010	
	No of HH (million) ¹⁰	% of TVHH ¹¹	No of HH (million)	% of TVHH	No of HH (million)	% of TVHH	No of HH (million)	% of TVHH	No of HH (million)	% of TVHH	No of HH (million)	% of TVHH
Terrestrial reception	n/a											
– of which digital	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cable TV reception	6.2	60	6.8	65	7.0	66	7.3	67	7.6	68	9.8	70
– of which digital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.2	2	0.35	3	0.39	5	0.51	5.6
Satellite reception	0.45	4	0.55	5	0.63	6	0.88	8	0.98	9	1.1	8
– of which digital	0.45	4	0.55	5	0.63	6	0.88	8	0.98	9	0.98	7
IPTV	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	10.4	100	10.6	100	10.7	100	10.85	100	10.9	100	14.2	100
– of which digital	n/a											

Notes: HH: Households owning the equipment; TVHH: Total number of households in the country; mn: million; n/a: not available.

Source: *Value and Symbol*, National Department of Culture, 2010.

The cable TV market is supported by the added value of internet service provision, a segment that in the 2005–2010 period doubled its number of subscribers. Network access is largely broadband-based with ADSL and cable modem driving market growth. In this regard, the specialist Ariel Barlaro said, “Broadband growth has exceeded expectations in Argentina. And the more it spreads, the less expensive it is to connect the next user, i.e., the marginal cost decreases and therefore, one can only expect that it will continue on the rise.”¹² Residential connections prevail in Argentina, representing over 90 percent of total subscriptions,¹³ and in 2010 some 9 million households had a computer. Slightly over half of that figure has internet access, as there are 5.5 million connections, meaning that 38.9 percent of the total number of households is now connected to the internet (compared with 22 percent in 2005). See Table 4.

9. The figures refer to the main home TV set for multi-TV households.

10. Total number of households owning the equipment (million).

11. Percentage of total number of TV households (TVHH) in the country.

12. Interview conducted for this report with Adrian Barlaro, director of NexTVLatam, 8 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

13. IDC Argentina, *Barómetro Cisco de Banda Ancha 2005–2010* (Cisco Broadband Barometer 2005–2010) June 2009, p. 13.

Table 4.

Internet penetration rate (total internet subscriptions as % of total population)
and mobile penetration rate (total active SIM cards as % of total population), 2005–2010

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Internet	22.0	25.0	26.0	30.0	36.0	38.9
of which broadband	10	15	15	20	25	30
Mobile telephony	60	65	90	110	115	120
of which 3G	0	0	0	1.4	6.9	9.1

Sources: INDEC; Ministry of Economy and Public Finance (MECon);¹⁴ International Data Corporation (IDC).¹⁵

However, network access growth is geographically concentrated in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA), where 70 percent of connections are located, including both broadband and dial-up. The most rapidly growing telecoms segment has been mobile telephony, which also more than doubled its subscriber base between 2005 and 2010: in 2005, there were 23 million mobile lines in Argentina, compared with 53 million in 2010 (i.e. 1.2 lines per inhabitant). According to Mr Barlaro, “Sixty-four percent of mobile phones operating in our country use prepaid cards, and as can be expected, because of their flexibility, they are more highly concentrated among youths, and the lower-income sectors.”¹⁶

1.2 Media Preferences

1.2.1 Main Shifts in News Consumption

There have been few changes in media and news consumption that can be linked to digital migration so far, because the process is still in its early stages in Argentina. In recent years, however, major shifts have occurred in media consumption. The intensity of change is more clearly in evidence in the federal capital, its metropolitan area or AMBA—where almost one-third of the population lives—and large cities in the interior, such as Cordoba, Rosario, Mendoza, and Mar del Plata. In smaller towns in the rest of the country news access is uneven, with higher costs and considerably lower quality.

14. See <http://www.mecon.gov.ar> (accessed 8 January 2012).

15. See <http://www.idcspain.com> (accessed 9 January 2012).

16. Interview conducted for this report with Adrian Barlaro, director of NexTVLatam, 8 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

Table 5.

Percentage of population (by gender, socio-economic level, and age) exposed to news media, 2008

	Population	Gender		Socio-economic level ¹⁷			Age			
	Total	Male	Female	ABC1	C2	DE	12–17	18–34	35–49	+50
TV	51.8	55.6	48.2	45.5	54.5	51.6	38.8	46.5	58.8	61.3
Radio	47.5	46.2	48.9	42.4	44.9	49.4	28.4	45.7	54.4	58.0
Newspapers	46.8	51.0	42.9	65.8	56.7	40.2	27.0	49.6	55.5	51.3
Internet	8.5	11.4	5.8	23.3	12.0	5.1	8.5	13.6	8.6	3.1
Magazines	8.2	7.0	9.5	12.3	12.9	5.9	10.5	8.3	7.9	6.9
None	11.7	11.8	11.7	12.7	12.4	14.6	28.5	13.6	6.7	9.0

Source: National System of Cultural Consumption (*Sistema Nacional de Consumos Culturales*), *Encuesta de hábitos informativos 2008* (News Habits Survey 2008).

One type of consumption continues to be high in Argentina, and that is radio, on its various support platforms: portable radio, car radio, internet, CD-player, mobile MP3-player, or cell phones.¹⁸ But TV continues to be the main platform for news and entertainment content. According to the data in Table 5, 51.8 percent of respondents say their news source is TV, and average TV viewing is 3.4 hours a day. The internet is used as a source of news by 8.5 percent of the population. In this regard, there are significant gender and class differences (11.4 percent of men compared with 5.8 percent of women; 23.3 percent for the higher classes ABC1, and only 5.1 percent for the lower DE). Only 1.2 percent of respondents cite the internet as their only news source. This group is mostly made up of males, 18–34 years of age, in the high and middle socio-economic groups, and residing in major urban centers. See Table 5.

In recent years there have been no significant changes in the ratings of free-to-air newscasts and 24-hour news channel, with the exception of the year 2008, in which the conflict between the government and the agricultural sector led to an increase in viewership. It would be safe to say that digital platforms have had a negligible impact on news consumption patterns.

The effect of the digital era is also incipient for the print media, and is compounded by the consequences of the 2001 crisis, which included a drastic drop in sales. In recent years, according to data from the Circulation Verification Institute (*Instituto Verificador de la Circulaciones*, IVC), average circulation of the main national newspapers “fell by anything between 2 and 20 percent”, depending on the newspaper considered. The decline has been steepest for the dailies, with Sunday editions proving more resilient. Importantly, in 2010 *La Nación* newspaper bucked the trend, partly due to the creation of a readers’ loyalty program called Club La Nación.¹⁹

17. The socio-economic level in Argentina is broken down into three categories or ranges, depending on the extent to which basic needs are met. The segment with the highest level is ABC1, followed by C2. The poorest one is DE.

18. There are, however, no data available on the extent of radio listening via digital platforms.

19. Through this rewards campaign, the newspaper has grown its subscriber base. Subscribers purchase the newspaper and/or magazines published by the same publishing group, and become members of a rewards system with discounts for purchasing clothes, dining at restaurants, and receiving benefits at other stores. More information is available at www.clublanacion.com.ar (accessed 8 January 2012).

1.2.2 Availability of a Diverse Range of News Platforms

Despite the emergence of new media platforms, conventional broadcasting still dominates news consumption in Argentina, particularly television, which is used by 52 percent of the population as a source of news. Radio is predominantly used by older age groups as a source of news but still attracts a significant 48 percent of consumers, while newspapers (47 percent) hold the third position on the news source list. The internet and magazines attract a relatively small proportion of news consumers (9 percent and 8 percent respectively: see Table 5). According to a recent report by Nielsen Argentina,²⁰ though the internet is mostly used across all social sectors for communication-related functions (email, instant messaging, chat), use for news is significant and growing.

The concentration of the population and of most economic activities in Buenos Aires city and the AMBA region have shaped a structure in which the main newspapers, radio broadcasters of national scope, TV channels (both open terrestrial TV and pay-TV), content producers in general, and news suppliers in particular are based in the federal capital. Additionally, the concentration of ownership and market domination by the leading operators is a pervasive trend extending to almost all platforms, rendering a landscape of biased participation and limited diversity of sources.

In general terms, the media market presents a somewhat diverse offer but a highly concentrated demand. The concentration of property in multimedia groups, such as Clarín, that have dominant positions in print, radio, and free-to-air and pay television, restricts diversity. Nonetheless, there are print, radio, and television outlets that belong to different owners and can provide a diverse offer. But there is also a high concentration of media consumption around the main outlets based in the city of Buenos Aires. In parallel, content production, both of entertainment and of news, is highly concentrated in Buenos Aires. Media in the provinces reproduce for the most part the content produced in the capital, thus also reducing diversity. The remarkably high penetration of cable in the country (more than 70 percent) provides access to a wide range of channels, including foreign ones such as CNN, the Italian RAI and the Spanish TVE. However, television consumption in cable homes revolves around free-to-air channels that are distributed through cable. As a result, and in spite of the erosion in recent years of the viewership of free-to-air channels and the increase of only-cable channels, the former remain clearly dominant.

There are no conclusive data on the impact of the internet on media consumption in Argentina. The people interviewed for this report tended to agree that the impact is relevant for print media, and is starting to be so for television, especially among younger groups. Regarding print, the most visited sites are those belonging to the major newspapers, and so there is no significant impact in terms of diversity.

20. Nielsen Argentina, *Encuesta de uso de internet 2008* (Internet Use Survey 2008), at <http://trucios.bligoo.com/content/view/757182/Las-redes-sociales-aventajan-al-correo-electronico-Nielsen.html> (accessed 8 January 2012).

1.3. News Providers

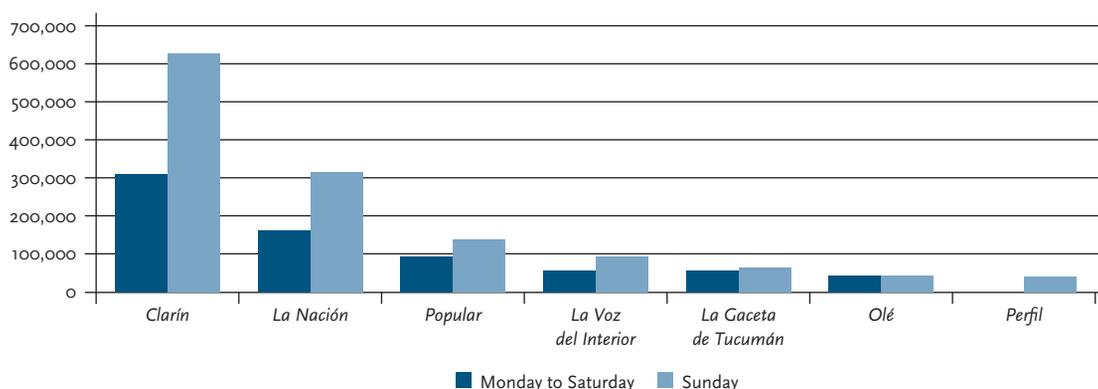
1.3.1 Leading Sources of News

1.3.1.1 Print Media

Some 180 newspapers are published in Argentina, all privately owned. Only a few of them have national circulation and they consist of publications based in Buenos Aires which, using different mechanisms (either printing national versions in different cities, or shipping printed newspapers from Buenos Aires by various means of transport), achieve national coverage, thus competing with publications originating in provincial towns. In some cases, in the main cities of the interior, these regional publications are also owned by the large national media groups.

Buenos Aires city has a wide ideological diversity in its daily press, unrivaled by other media platforms in the country, except for radio. In addition to the above-mentioned dailies *Clarín* and *La Nación*, the offer of daily newspapers includes *Página 12*, *La Prensa*, *Tiempo Argentino*, *Crónica*, and *Popular* (uniquely advertising free and showing variable sales growth in contrast to the decline characterizing the rest of the sector). The range of dailies covers a wide political spectrum, though there is strong ownership concentration and some degree of duality in the position taken towards the national government (currently in open confrontation with the large private media groups, but at the same time very close to other, smaller, groups). At one end of this duality there is a group of papers that is closest to the government's policy (the papers belonging to the Spolski group—*Tiempo Argentino*, *El Argentino*, and *Miradas al Sur*—plus *Página 12* and *Crónica*), and at the other end, a group of papers whose editorials are strongly critical of all measures taken by the current administration (the papers belonging to Grupo Clarín, *Clarín* and *La Razón*, the daily *La Nación*, and the weekly *Perfil*).

Figure 5.
Average sales of daily newspapers by number of copies, 2010



Source: Circulation Verification Institute (*Instituto Verificador de la Circulaciones*), at <http://www.ivc.org.ar/consulta/2010> (accessed 12 January 2012).

In terms of the evolution of circulation in recent years, some newspapers have remained stable, such as *La Nación* (around 150,000 copies) and *Diario Popular* (around 90,000 copies), while others have lost circulation. In the case of the leading newspaper, *Clarín*, this loss was 19 percent between the springs of 2008 and 2010 (and 50 percent between 1995 and 2010). The long-term erosion in *Clarín*'s readership may be explained by the growing competition, while the short-term decline may be linked to the conflict between the Clarín Group and the government, and the impact of the web. These different trajectories are reproduced in the main newspapers of the interior, with *La Gaceta* of Tucumán remaining stable and *La Voz del Interior* of Córdoba losing 17 percent of its circulation.²¹

On the other hand, since IVC only records the circulation of those publications that are members of the organization, there are no available data to assess the impact of other established publications (such as *El Cronista*, *Ámbito Financiero*, *Página 12*) or newcomers such as *Perfil* (published only Saturdays and Sundays), *Crítica de la Argentina*, and *Miradas al Sur*.

1.3.1.2 Television

News content has a prominent presence on Argentinean television, both on terrestrial and cable TV, as the main source of news and information for the population at large.

With regard to free-to-air terrestrial TV, the five channels established in Buenos Aires city produce a considerable amount of news content, and are the most widely used for news and information. They all are commercial channels that share a similar style, with a preference for high-impact, emotionally charged news.

Canal 13 (owned by Grupo Clarín) airs four news bulletins Monday to Friday: early in the morning (*Arriba argentinos*), at noon (*El noticiero del Trece*), at prime time (*Telenoche*), and at midnight (*En Síntesis*). It is the leading channel in terms of audience rating, and complements the news supply it carries terrestrially with a cable TV station called TodoNoticias (TN). In recent years, Canal 13 has changed its editorial line and has become, in line with the rest of the Clarín Group, highly critical of the government. Telefé (the company owned by Telefónica de España) has three newscasts per day, Monday to Friday. It trails slightly behind Canal 13 in terms of audience reach. Canal América (owned by Grupo Vila) has a similar offer, with two daily newscasts of its *América Noticias* program, in addition to scheduled newscasts on Saturdays and Sundays.

The group also operates a cable TV news station, América 24, whose structure serves as a basis for developing the news programs of the terrestrial channel (as Grupo Clarín does with *Canal 13* news programs and TN with its cable TV news station). Canal 9 (owned by the Mexican entrepreneur Ángel González) airs three daily issues of its news program *Telenueve*. It also features programs with political content, which sets it apart from the rest of the portfolio. Finally, Canal 7, the state channel, airs four daily editions of its news

21. See http://sinca.cultura.gov.ar/archivos/documentacion/investigaciones/CLICK5-19-Concentracion_Caida_Venta_Ejemplares.pdf (accessed 15 February 2012).

program, *Vision 7*, plus two editions on Saturdays and Sundays, coupled with the weekly edition of *Visión 7 Internacional*.

Table 6.
Buenos Aires TV channel ratings (% of total population), 2006–2010

Channel	Rating				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Telefé	14.4	13.0	11.4	11.5	9.9
Canal 13	11.3	12.1	11.3	9.9	10.1
Canal 9	5.8	4.7	5.5	5.5	5.1
América	4.7	4.5	4.2	4.3	4.7
Canal 7	1.0	0.9	1.1	2.1	2.8

Source: VVAA, “Anuario 2007 de la Televisión Argentina,” Buenos Aires, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, at <http://television.com.ar/?page=1&cs=anuari> (accessed 28 September 2011)

As Table 6 shows, the main free-to-air television channels in Argentina have suffered an obvious erosion of their audience ratings over the last few years (from total ratings of 37.2 percent to 32.6 percent). Canal 13 (part of Clarín Group) has overtaken Telefé (owned by Telefónica of Spain), which had previously dominated the annual average ratings. There is also a close dispute for the third position, in which Canal 9 (owned by Ángel González) has the lead over América (owned by the Vila-Manzano Group). It is worth remarking the growth of Canal 7 (state-owned) since 2009, when it started broadcasting soccer games from Argentina’s tournament.

1.3.1.3 Radio

Argentina has a very high penetration of radio sets. The country lacks a radio system of national reach, since only the public Radio Nacional covers a significant portion of the country through 40 stations. In the 1990s the creation of radio networks was allowed, but they never consolidated. The new law for audiovisual services of 2009 introduced new restrictions for the formation of networks.

According to COMFER,²² in 2008 there were 1940 private registered stations in the country, of which 24 percent were licensed commercial radio stations, 9 percent were community radio stations (belonging to religious groups, indigenous people, or universities), and 67 percent belonged to commercial enterprises with provisional permits (granted in an attempt to regulate the large numbers of unlicensed stations existing in the country).

22. COMFER is the Federal Broadcasting Committee (*Comité Federal de Radiodifusión*). See <http://www.afsca.gov.ar/web/blog/?p=3998> (accessed 19 January 2012).

Radio has low advertising revenues in Argentina, and it lacks large production budgets or even a specific news agenda (stations tend to rely on newspapers and television newscasts for news). In 2008 radio advertising revenues were less than 4 percent of total advertising expenditure. Most of these revenues were concentrated in large AM and FM stations in Buenos Aires and, to a lesser degree, in Córdoba and Rosario. The remaining stations generate little revenue, and their main source of income is the sale of programming time, a practice forbidden by law and thus of unknown actual dimensions.

In AM radio, the most popular stations belong to media groups. The most widely listened station is AM Radio 10,²³ which belongs to the Daniel Hadad group. Radio Mitre belongs to Clarín Group, and AM Continental was sold by Telefonica to Prisa, both Spanish companies which, since the law limits foreign investment to 30 percent of the capital, operate in an illegal situation consented to by the state. See Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7.

Buenos Aires AM Radio audience share (% of total population), 2006–2010

Channel	Rating				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Radio 10	35.4	33.0	39.4	36.5	39.9
Mitre	17.3	12.1	15.3	16.9	10.1
Del Plata	11.2	14.7	15.5	5.5	5.1
La Red	9.7	8.5	41.2	9.3	9.7
Continental	8.0	9.9	11.1	12.1	12.8

Sources: <http://www.enciclomedios.com/node/1530>; <http://www.ibope.com.ar/ibope/wp/> (accessed 15 February 2012).

Table 8.

Buenos Aires FM Radio audience share (% of total population), 2006–2010

Channel	Rating				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Rock & Pop	s/d	1.4	1.43		
Mega 98.3	s/d	1.2	1.4	9.9	10.1
La 100	s/d	1.0	1.1	5.5	5.1
FM Hit	s/d	0.8	0.5	4.3	4.7
Metro 95.1	s/d	0.7	0.8	2.1	2.8

Sources: <http://www.enciclomedios.com/node/1530>; <http://www.ibope.com.ar/ibope/wp/> (accessed 15 February 2012).

23. Audience measurement is only done with proper methodology in the BAMA. Since some regional stations reproduce content broadcasted from Buenos Aires, the audience numbers for stations in the capital are probably much higher than reported.

1.3.1.4 Online

According to rankings published by Alexa,²⁴ the news media website with the highest visitorship is www.clarin.com, Grupo Clarín's portal, which posts the hard-copy edition of the newspaper together with the latest news updates and other services, and is listed 13th on the overall Argentinean website ranking. The portal of the sports paper *Olé* (also owned by Grupo Clarín) is the second most highly visited website, and ranks 14th on the general list. It is followed by www.lanacion.com and www.infobae.com which are ranked 15th and 17th respectively on the general list. Finally, www.perfil.com is the fifth most visited news site but is ranked only 42nd in the general list. Online-only news sites are ranked considerably lower and outside the top 50 most visited sites in Argentina. The leading sites in this sub-category are www.primiciasya.com (ranked 53rd overall) and www.minutouno.com (ranked 58th). The online version of a provincial newspaper with the highest visitorship is www.lavozdelinterior.com from Córdoba (Grupo Clarín), listed 63⁺. Grupo Clarín's channel TN ranks 70th of online broadcasters, and the terrestrial channel with the highest visitorship is *Telefé* (www.telefe.com), which ranks 76th. Overall, 13 of the top 100 websites belong to information and news media, and most of them are the online versions of major newspapers. See Table 9.

Table 9.
Ranking of news and information website visitorship

Portal name	Overall media site ranking	Alexa ranking
Clarín	1	13
Olé	2	14
La Nación	3	15
Infobae	4	17
Perfil	5	42
Página 12	6	46
PrimiciasYa	7	53
Minuto Uno	8	58
El Argentino	9	59
La Voz del Interior	10	63
CanchaLlena	11	68
TodoNoticias	12	70
Telefé	13	76

Note: Alexa ranking includes all sites, not only media-related.

Source: Alexa, 2010, at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/AR> (accessed 7 March 2011).

24. See <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/AR> (accessed 7 March 2011).

1.3.2 Television News Programs

Table 10.

News bulletins with the highest viewership, 2006–2010

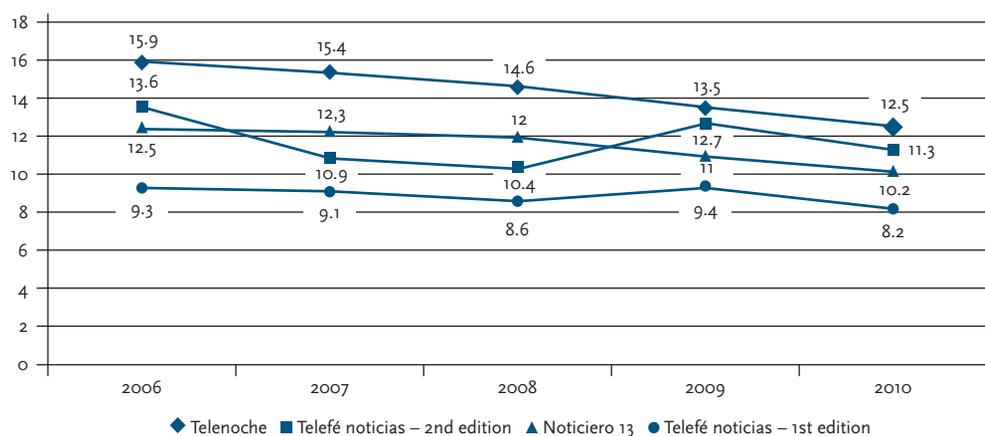
News bulletin	Channel	Rating				
		2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<i>Telenoche</i>	Canal 13	15.9	15.4	14.6	13.5	12.5
<i>Telefé noticias – 2nd edition</i>	Telefé	13.6	10.9	10.4	12.7	11.3
<i>Noticiero 13</i>	Canal 13	12.5	12.3	12.0	11.0	10.2
<i>Diario de medianoche</i>	Telefé	8.6	9.1	7.2	8.2	7.2
<i>Telenueve – 2nd edition</i>	Canal 9	9.9	7.8	8.1	8.7	8.1
<i>En Síntesis</i>	Canal 13	5.7	8.0	8.2	7.2	8.8

Source: VVAA (Television.com.ar), Anuario 2007 de la Televisión Argentina, Editorial: Television.com.ar, Buenos Aires, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, at <http://television.com.ar/?page=1&cs=anuari> (accessed 7 March 2011)

It should be noted that all but one of the 23 newscasts on terrestrial TV have at least more than one point of rating, and two of them (aired in the same hour band) exceed 10. The most popular news bulletin is Canal 13's *Telenoche*, followed by the three regular programs of its competitor Telefé (see Table 10). The first news program cast by a different channel ranks fifth (Canal 9's *Telenueve*), and the least popular ones are all transmitted by the state-run station. As Figure 6 shows, the ratings of the most popular newscasts in free-to-air television have eroded. This decline took place in parallel with a growth, starting in 2008, of the viewership of cable news. The conflict between the government and the farmers, which started in 2008, may have had an impact on this apparent migration of viewers, since cable channels offered a permanent supply of news on the dispute.

Figure 6.

Evolution of rating of most popular free-to-air newscasts, 2006–2010



Source: VVAA, “Anuario 2007 de la Televisión Argentina,” Editorial: Television.com.ar, Buenos Aires, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, at <http://television.com.ar/?page=1&cs=anuari> (accessed 7 March 2011).

The channels delivered by cable TV, the platform with the largest reach throughout the country, reaching almost 70 percent of households in 2010, offer major news coverage. And they dominate the ratings, leaving aside the figures for terrestrial TV channels that must be included in the cable TV schedule by law, as they would otherwise not reach the entire territory.

Basic supply, ranging between 70 and 80 TV stations (though higher in satellite distribution), includes seven news signals: TN (Grupo Clarín), Canal 26 (Grupo Pierrri), Crónica (Héctor Ricardo García), América 24 (Grupo Vila-Manzano), and C5N (Grupo Hadad). Additionally, in 2010, CN23²⁵ (Grupo Spolski) was introduced. In addition to the national news bulletins, there is a presence of foreign news chains, including CNN, CNN in Spanish, and Telesur (owned by various Latin American countries, including Argentina).

Table 11.
Cable TV news channels' ranking and rating, 2006–2010

Channel	Ranking / Rating				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Rock & Pop	1 / 1.41	1 / 2.25	1 / 1.89	1 / 2.61	1 / 2.48
Mega 98.3	7 / 0.68	6 / 1.00	5 / 0.84	2 / 1.56	2 / 1.69
La 100	9 / 0.57	8 / 0.86	4 / 0.91	4 / 1.19	3 / 1.31
FM Hit	n/a	28 / 0.25	9 / 0.72	6 / 0.94	6 / 1.05
Metro 95.1	36 / 0.21	25 / 0.27	25 / 0.22	21 / 0.35	16 / 0.45

Note: * Created in 2007.

Source: VVAA, "Anuario 2007 de la Televisión Argentina," Editorial: Television.com.ar, Buenos Aires, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, at <http://television.com.ar/?page=1&s=anuari> (accessed 7 March 2012).

As Table 11 shows, cable news channels' viewership significantly grew from 2006 to 2010. By the end of that period, the three most viewed cable channels were news channels. While TN (Grupo Clarín) leads the way, the growth of C5N is remarkable—from non-existent in 2006 to the 6th most widely viewed cable channel in 2010. But the growth of viewership takes place across the board: all channels increased their ratings, regardless of their editorial lines—some opposing the government (TN, América 24), some less critical (C5N, Canal 26), and some closer to sensationalism (such as Crónica).

1.3.3 Impact of Digital Media on Good-quality News

The development of digital media has not yet had a significant impact on news quality in Argentina, in terms of content diversity and professional rigor in news production. Perhaps the most remarkable development is the increasing relevance of cable news channels, which absorbed part of the viewership of free-to-air newscasts, especially at the height of the conflict between the government and the farmers (2008–2010).

25. It has not been included by all operators, though it is a requirement under the Law No. 26,522 on Audiovisual Communication Services (*Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual*, SCA). Cablevisión (owned by Grupo Clarín), the leading carrier, with more than 50 percent market share, includes neither this signal nor Telesur, and its programming schedule does not comply with the provisions of the law.

New media outlets and platforms have appeared, some of them exclusively on the web (such as news and blogs), but the trend over the 2005–2010 period does not show increased quality in that production, though there has been some impact on source diversity, particularly in terms of perspective and style, if not content. With respect to applications and websites that are run as a digital alternative to traditional analog media, Professor Fabián Rodríguez,²⁶ responsible for the Conurbanos blog (<http://conurbanos.blogspot.com>), believes that social networking in general, and blogs in particular, have come to fill the gap left by journalism in the ways of handling information, analysis, and hard data journalism had neglected, misused or abused.

Dardo Fernández,²⁷ the editor of the well-known website *Diariosobrediaros.com.ar*, which is devoted to analyzing the news published by the major Argentinean papers, has commented: “As regards diversity, the agenda is very versatile and changing, due to digitization; however, media concentration, with very few actors in a position to set the agenda, has a narrowing effect on diversity. Even though there are many small websites and media with a different agenda, technology has turned the larger media even more powerful because they can multiply their agenda on various platforms.” And this assertion is proven, among other elements, by the list of websites with the highest visitorship in the country.

According to Mr Fernández, at times the agenda in Argentina becomes too homogeneous, precisely due to the influence of the agenda set by the most highly concentrated media. In other words, the agenda is not unified in its original conception, but its reverberation and rebound on both other media and public opinion lead to a unified agenda shaped for the most part by the largest media. The digital scenario reproduces two constant characteristics of the traditional media system: the concentrated ownership of production and offer, on the one hand, and the geographic centralization of content production, on the other, neither of which show any signs of diminishing in the 2.0 era.

1.4 Assessments

Media consumption in Argentina is undergoing a process of significant change. However, the traditional media remain the major sources and have not been replaced in the incipient process of digital migration. Levels of news consumption are high. The media offering a more diverse range of options are print media (especially in Buenos Aires) and radio (both AM and FM) in the whole country. In this context, television newscasts are losing audience at a rate of one rating point per year. In turn, cable news programs have grown in popularity. On the internet, the digital divide remains a central issue, not only in terms of social groups without the economic means and the skills to use the net, but also in terms of the uneven quality of the access provided in different parts of the country. Given that the internet is not defined in Argentinean regulation as a public service, private capitals invest in networks wherever the profitable markets are, that is, in densely populated urban areas, and many provincial towns are left with limited possibilities to access the internet at reasonable connection speeds or at affordable subscription rates.

26. Interview conducted for this report, 4 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

27. Interview conducted for this report, 14 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

2. Digital Media and Public or State-Administered Broadcasters

2.1 Public Service and State Institutions

2.1.1 Overview of Public Service Media: News and Current Affairs Output

The public media system comprises the media owned and operated by the state: Canal 7 television, Radio Nacional, and Radiodifusión Argentina al Exterior (RAE). Canal 7 (with the motto, “La TV Pública”, or “The Public TV”) is based in Buenos Aires city, and broadcasts to the entire country through 295 repeater stations. It has the largest territorial coverage in terrestrial reception television, as part of an expansion process started in 2003.²⁸ Additionally, it has a presence in 99.5 percent of cable TV networks in the country, and its programming can be viewed online at www.tvpublica.com.ar. What has remained unchanged throughout its history is its strong pro-government bias.

Radio Nacional comprises 40 radio broadcasters, both AM and FM, and is accessible online at www.radionacional.com.ar. RAE provides Argentinean broadcasting abroad. Before the Audiovisual Communication Services Law No. 26522/09 (*Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual*, SCA) was adopted in 2009, the administration of public media was the responsibility of the National Public Media System (Sistema Nacional de Medios Públicos,²⁹ SNMP), established by decree in 2001 under the Fernando de la Rúa administration (1999–2001). With the new regulatory framework of 2009, a state company called the Argentinean Radio and Television State Society (*Radio y Televisión Argentina Sociedad del Estado*, RTA) was established, in charge of managing Canal 7, Radio Nacional, and RAE, and reporting to the National Executive Power (*Poder Ejecutivo Nacional*, PEN).

28. The repeal in 2009 (through the enactment of the LSCA) of the Broadcasting Law (No. 22,285 of 1980) eliminated the provision that prohibited the state-administered broadcaster from reaching locations already served by a terrestrial channel.

29. Managed by a president designated by the PEN.

The purpose and responsibility of RTA is to organize the production and distribution of content to all state media outlets.³⁰ It must ensure that 60 percent of content is produced in-house, and 20 percent is independent for each station it manages, in addition to respecting political, religious, cultural, linguistic, and social pluralism. Historically, the state-administered media in Argentina have been more responsive to the interests of the ruling administration than to the requirements of public service in the public interest. This is acutely the case in their political and news output. The channel broadcasts content produced in-house (mostly news and public interest programming, with an editorial line favorable to the government) together with content created by production companies that show affinity with the government. In prime time, fiction produced by private production companies is broadcasted. Next to soccer games, the most widely watched program is *6, 7, 8*, a political analysis show in which the coverage of the government by other media is analyzed and criticized.

The content offer of the state-administered broadcaster combines advocacy for governmental policies in their political and news programs, with extensive coverage of sports (particularly the national teams), and a broad range of programs for religious and ethnic minorities. Additionally, public TV features national and foreign movies and drama productions that constitute alternatives to blockbuster productions.³¹

Until the introduction in August 2009 of soccer game transmission on Canal 7 and the political analysis program called *6, 7, 8*,³² news output was the most viewed content on state TV. The state-administered broadcaster has eight news bulletins across the schedule. Unlike commercial TV stations, it usually covers more news from different areas of the country, which is reflective of its extensive geographical reach. The Saturday edition has the highest viewership, with a rating of around 2.9 (it should be noted that it is scheduled in between soccer matches aired by the TV station), followed by the Sunday edition, with a rating of 1.8 (also aired after a soccer match). The editorial line is clearly supportive of government interests, departing from the ideal model of public TV. Most news pieces are presented in a way that supports the government point of view. The bias is even more obvious in the popular *6, 7, 8*, which shows bits of content broadcast by the private channels opposed to the Government, and a panel of journalists comments and criticizes. The guests are usually government officials, and politicians or journalists critical of the administration are very rarely invited. As examples, in the 10 January 2010 edition, the former president, Néstor Kirchner, was invited to present in the program his view of the different conflicts the government was involved in. On 24 May 2011, the program invited Beatriz Sarlo³³ (columnist of *La Nación* daily and of Grupo Clarín media, and critical of

30. The board has seven members: the chairman and one member appointed by the PEN; three members appointed by the Bi-Chamber Commission for Promotion and Monitoring of Audiovisual Communications (*Comisión Bicameral de Promoción y Seguimiento de la Comunicación Audiovisual*) of the National Congress, one for each of the three larger minorities; and two members of the Federal Council on Audiovisual Communication (*Consejo Federal de Comunicación Audiovisual*, CFC).

31. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7R_jD5PtKtT (accessed 4 January 2011).

32. This program is broadcast Monday to Friday and includes a discussion panel on the papers that oppose the national government (see sections 5, 6, and 7). It is produced by a private company called *Pensar para Televisión* (Think for TV), and has served both as a platform for government arguments and as a vehicle for popular mobilization in support of policy (a Facebook fans group stages demonstrations in support of government actions and measures like the SCA Law, which have gathered more than 10,000 people in Buenos Aires city, and have been massive in other cities throughout the country). Additionally, it has questioned the role of mass media, though with a pro-government bias that tends to impoverish the discussion.

33. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP7FJ-hDUrTI> (accessed 4 January 2011).

the government). The situation was so exceptional that it caused a big impact and increased the rating of the program to reach 10 points, according to the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública y Estadística*, IBOPE).³⁴

Furthermore, the creation of Canal Encuentro has had a significant impact in terms of broadening factual programming on public TV. It is the first TV channel under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Established in May 2005 under Decree No. 533/05, the channel is operated by a state company called Educ.ar Sociedad del Estado.³⁵ In December 2006 it was recognized by National Education Law No. 26206, and started broadcasting on 5 March 2007. It can only be viewed by cable TV, and has a cultural and educational profile.

The national news agency, Télam, was established in 1945. It provides newswires to some 300 subscribers, including governmental institutions, and national and international media. It is currently a state company (*sociedad del estado*) whose shareholder is the Communication Media Secretariat (*Secretaría de Medios de Comunicación*), which is responsible for appointing its board. Since 2010, its chairman has been Carlos Martín García, a journalist linked to the political party in power as a militant of the governing Frente para la Victoria since its creation. The state company is supported with funds from the national budget, though it also generates its own income from advertising sources. Additionally, since 2006, it took on a rather unusual role for a news agency, that of managing state advertising and becoming the entity that determines the official advertising schedule in the media more generally. It has approximately 450 employees, a slight majority of whom are assigned to journalism and 28 correspondent offices throughout the country, as well as an international service. Since Mr García became chairman, the editorial line that defends the partisan interests of the national government has grown stronger. This has given rise to much criticism from professional and academic sectors, political leaders of the opposition, and representatives of private commercial media.³⁶ A large portion of its contents is available online at www.telam.com.ar.

2.1.2 Digitization and Services

In 2009, under the Cristina Fernández de Kirchner administration, two key events for communication policies took place: the adoption of the Audiovisual Communication Services Law (*Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual*), hereafter the SCA Law, which, among other things, set out the regulation framework for digitization (see section 5.1.1), and the adoption of a digital standard for terrestrial digital TV (DTT).

Overall, digitization has been led by the state, despite investments made in the digitization of the network by private cable TV operators. According to O. Carboni,³⁷ the DTT implementation process started in

34. See <http://www.ibope.com.ar/consultas/television.asp/24052011> (accessed 4 January 2012).

35. The Ministry of Education of the Nation has a website, www.educ.ar, designed to publicize the Ministry's policies on ICTs applied to education.

36. See http://www.clarin.com/politica/Cruce-acusaciones-Telam-papelon-cable_0_430757003.html and <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1351289-insolito-homenaje-de-la-agencia-telam> (accessed 4 January 2012).

37. O. Carboni, *Repensar los conceptos de acceso y participación a partir de la implementación de la TDT: el caso Argentino* (Rethinking the concepts of access and participation after the implementation of DTT: The Argentina case), p 12. Paper submitted at the Eighth ENACOM Congress, July 2010 (hereafter Carboni, *Repensar los conceptos*).

September 2009 after the publication of Decree No. 1148, which established the Argentinean Terrestrial Digital Television System (*Sistema Argentino de Televisión Digital Terrestre*, SATVD-T).

The structure of digital television by air is characterized by a single national platform in which the state becomes the carrier of all digital terrestrial television (DTT) signals, both public and private. In order to build this platform, frequencies that used to belong to encoded TV services (22, 23, 24, and 25 UHF) were allocated to the state company SNMP. It is estimated that each channel will broadcast six multiplexed signals in SD (Standard Definition), so the national platform would comprise 24 signals. Now, according to the latest technical trials, either four SD signals, or one SD and one HD (High Definition) signal can be transmitted, so the total of 24 signals might not be possible.³⁸

At the end of 2010, this transmission mode included the state-administered stations Canal 7, Canal Encuentro, Paka Paka (a spinoff from Encuentro, with children's contents), private stations C5N and CN23 (both with a pro-government editorial line), and Gold TV (sports content), in addition to Telesur.

Approximately 200,000 set-top boxes had been distributed to low-income sectors of the population (see section 7.1.1.2), though no survey regarding the actual use of this equipment was available, and therefore, at the start of 2011 no accurate data on the penetration of digital TV could be provided. All state-run audiovisual media have digital and HD transmission. And, as mentioned above, both public radio (<http://www.radionacional.com.ar/>) and public TV (<http://www.canal7.com.ar/>) are also accessible online. Though they are rather comprehensive and visually attractive, these two sites do not seem to appeal to a large audience, since they do not appear among the top 100 most visited sites in Argentina.

2.1.3 Government Support

As already mentioned, the state has been the key driver of digitization in television, which is expected to finalize in 2019 with the analog switch-off. Its policy includes a number of plans, programs, projects, and guidelines that can be broken down into three areas: regulation (the passing of laws and decrees); equipment and technology development (expansion of coverage, distribution of set-top boxes); and contents (funding, promotion of content creation for transmission over the new platforms). Broadly speaking, this process has not particularly influenced independence or the editorial line of public media (see section 6.2) which, as already discussed, has been compromised by pro-government bias well before the digitization process. The digitization of TV broadcasting is still in its embryonic stages, so it is too early to draw any conclusions about its impact on diversity.

The government defined, through Decree No. 1148/2009, the legal frame for DTT and adopted the Japanese-Brazilian standard. One of the main initiatives to facilitate the diffusion of digital television has been the program in which set-top boxes have been delivered free to low-income families and retirees. According to the Planning Ministry, 900,000 devices have been delivered.

38. O. Carboni, *Repensar los conceptos*, p. 15.

The Advisory Council for DTT³⁹ has designed a battery of strategies to meet the need to fill in the new white spaces in content. These include a “National Contents Base with Universal Scope for Digital TV” (*Banco Nacional de Contenidos de Alcance Universal de la TV Digital*), designed to create a database to make contents available to all regions; the “Promotion of Digital TV” (*Fomento a la TV Digital*) and of contents with a broad and general appeal, and the “Contents Contest” (*Concurso de Contenidos*), promoted by the National Audiovisual Arts Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Artes Audiovisuales*, INCAA).

2.1.4 Public Service Media and Digital Switch-over

The process of digitization of terrestrial platforms in Argentina could—provided it eventually materializes—contribute to increase the reach of state-run media and the influence of communication media in the hands of the state at the various levels of national, provincial, and municipal administration. This is particularly the case given that cable TV has been historically predominant, due in part to the poor territorial coverage of free-to-air terrestrial signals. By August 2011 the coverage of DTT reached 55 percent of the national territory, a delay over the original switch-over plan (which expected to reach that coverage by the end of 2010) but well on its way to achieving the 100 percent coverage by the proposed deadline, 2019.

Taking a critical perspective, Ariel Barlaro cast doubts on the decision of the state to implement DTT:

The Government’s stake on digital TV in the context of broadband expansion is debatable—the Government spent US\$ 200 million in digital TV but it was through Facebook, blogs, and the new networks that a very solid social advocacy of the Government was articulated. What if it had invested all that money to widen the networks? One has to consider that all these networks are creating a great deal of interactivity. I believe that digital TV could be interesting where there is no pay TV; but where there is pay TV it is very hard to break with the tradition of an audience that mostly looks for the more classic, so to speak, type of contents.⁴⁰

2.2 Public Service Provision

2.2.1 Perception of the Public Service Media

An obvious shortcoming of the available research on Argentina’s media system is the lack of studies on society’s image of public media.

Nonetheless, it could be argued that state-administered media in Argentina have historically been used to advocate on behalf of the interests of the ruling administration, and this characteristic has intensified in recent years. In a sense, they are governmental rather than public or public service media strictly speaking.

39. The development of digital terrestrial television (DTT) fell within the orbit of the Ministry for Planning, Public Investment and Services. In addition, the government created an Advisory Council for Digital Terrestrial Television made up of representatives from different ministries.

40. Interview conducted for this report with Adrian Barlaro, director of NexTVLatam, 8 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

Public policies in Argentina are crisscrossed by various elements, but one issue is pivotal and has been at the heart of the political process since 2008: the discussion between the national government and private media (mainly Grupo Clarín). This situation became clearly apparent throughout 2008 during the conflict resulting from the government's attempt to change the tax system and rates applicable to grain and oilseed export withholdings. This conflict led to a very strong political dispute between the government and most agricultural sectors (producers, exporters, etc.) with the majority of media outlets portraying the conflict in a way that clearly favored farmers. The dispute gave rise to a setting of opposing positions between the government and opposition parties that extended to most political themes in the country. Opposition parties, which had the explicit support of some private media, got to limit the government's power in the Parliament elections of 2009, but they were clearly defeated by Cristina Fernández in October 2011, allowing her a new four-year term in power.

In the context of this polarity, José Natanson, a journalist for *Página 12*, a newspaper that is favorable to the government, observed an effort by the government to strengthen state media, "especially since it started a confrontation with *Clarín*. This is not typical of Argentina. What I see is that Néstor Kirchner realized, too late, that the government had a TV channel [public Channel 7] and wondered what to do with it. And he found, too late, a way to put it at the service of a political strategy. I believe it could serve a more cultural purpose. What Canal Encuentro does is good, and so is what Canal 7 does."⁴¹ Like other people close to the government, Mr Natanson sees no problem in having a public channel at the political service of the party in power.

Others highlight the diversity of programming offered by the state broadcaster as a public value in spite of its biased news editorial. The *La Nación* journalist Pablo Sirvén comments:

Canal 7 is the station with the largest number of news bulletins in its programming ... it keeps the valuable merit of being the station with the broadest diversity of themes on Argentinean TV. Its eclectic schedule includes programs from different religious communities ... movies, quality programs for children, respected historical and scientific series, interesting documentaries, a variety of musical shows ... featuring popular celebrities, landscapes, trades and people from all over the country that are not to be found on other screens, and it does not even consider having the highest ranking among its priorities. Why ruin it, then, on the grounds of political necessities that are merely cyclical in nature? If it were real public TV, shouldn't Canal 7 cover and address national affairs, including everything having to do with the media law, with the breadth required to represent all voices and not only those of the official party?⁴²

In general terms, it is possible to recognize the quality of Canal 7's programming, save for the pro-government bias of its news and political analysis programs.

41. Interview conducted for this report with José Natanson, journalist with *Página 12* and *FM Metro*, 7 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

42. P. Sirvén, "Canal 7 es TV Pública o propaladora oficial" (Canal 7 is public TV or official dissemination), article in *La Nación*, 14 September 2009, p. 15.

The state is also in charge of Radio Nacional. This is the only radio broadcast allowed to cover the whole national territory. Nonetheless, it only covers 60 percent of the country through 40 stations. Its programming has content of both national and local reach, the latter produced by its local stations. In general, its content is aligned with government interests. Radio Nacional also has FM stations offering musical programming—classical, rock, and folk. In the 1990s it suffered from lack of investment, being on the brink of extinction. Some transmission centers have undergone recent renovations. However, radio is not a central element in the current administration's communication policy.

2.2.2 Public Service Provision in Commercial Media

In Argentina no public service provisions are imposed on commercial media, and this has not changed with the digitization process. However, the SCA Law introduced a number of obligations (see section 7) upon both state media and private media—whether for profit or not for profit—including an increase in the percentage of original production (60–70 percent, depending on media type and coverage), independent production, screen-time quotas for national movie productions, and diversity and plurality requirements. Implementation of the act took its first steps in 2010, but it is a complex process due to opposition from large conglomerates, litigation over some articles of the law that have been brought before the courts, and the rewards and punishments approach of the PEN regarding different media groups.

2.3 Assessments

The gains of public service caused by digitization include the possibility to produce and distribute more signals than in the analog spectrum, also extending coverage and therefore the reach of a channel that was previously held only in a marginal position. As the DTT deployment process is led by the state, consequences could be positive for the development of the system if it accomplishes the goals to widen territorial coverage of television, and to ensure access by most citizens who cannot afford it on their own. But there is concern, given the reputation of state broadcasters for toeing government lines, that increasing its reach through digital platforms will enable greater leverage for state propaganda.

Public service radio broadcasting has never been a priority for state policy. Reckless administration in state radio during the 1990s—even linked to corruption—created negative conditions that have been very hard to reverse. The new SCA Law and the DTT implementation policy may provide a fresh start, but the potential here is unclear since the social and political forces of Argentina are in a condition of polarization that prevents rival sections from acknowledging shared goals and agreeing on a course of action to accomplish the state media's mission of public service provision.

The programs to promote digital audiovisual production have introduced some more diversity in terms of the regional origin of the content, since the federal program provides funds to all provinces. Its relevance is less in terms of political diversity due to the influence of government interests.

3. Digital Media and Society

3.1 User-Generated Content (UGC)

3.1.1 UGC Overview

The top 11 UGC sites in Argentina are among the country's top 40 websites visited. This gives UGCs a central role, especially considering that these top 40 sites include seven additional sites that are search platforms including email and chat services, among other applications (google.com in the general, Argentinean, and Spanish versions, live.com, yahoo.com, msn.com, and bing.com). If these seven sites are added, 19 out of the 23 most popular sites of Argentina have some kind of application enabling UGC.

The 11 websites listed are defined by UGC rather than employing it as an add-on application. Four of them are social networks (Facebook, Taringa, Twitter, and Sonico), two are video platforms (YouTube and Poringa, the latter with adult content), one is a photo sharing platform (Fotolog), two are blog platforms (Blogger and Wordpress), and one is the online encyclopedia Wikipedia. Finally, there is Mercadolibre (purchase and sale of goods), and the file transfer site Megaupload.

The Blogger and Wordpress platforms include among the most visited blogs, some of which are devoted to news production and news analysis (see section 3.1.3). None of the top 11 UGC sites is managed by traditional media companies, though many of the “walls” with the highest number of visits on Facebook are produced and managed by traditional media companies, like the TN⁴³ page, which has more than 409,000 fans and a strong participation of fans in the information it delivers over the social network. See Table 12.

43. TN's page on Facebook is www.facebook.com/home.php?sfm=1#!/todonoticias and had 637,000 fans as of March 2011.

Table 12.
Top 11 UGC sites, by number of monthly visitors⁴⁴

Website	Overall ranking Argentina*	Unique monthly visitors (**)	UGC ranking	Description
Facebook.com	1	8,100,000	1	Social network
YouTube.com	4	7,296,000	2	Social network, sharing video
Blogger.com	7	460,000	3	Blog platform
Taringa.net	8	2,600,000	4	Social network of the Argentinean internet community
Mercadolibre.com.ar	9	1,000,000	5	Purchase and sale of products
Wikipedia.org	11	2,400,000	6	Web encyclopedia with UGC
Twitter.com	12	1,100,000	7	Social network with information exchange up to 140 characters
Poringa.net	16	No data	8	Social network with adult content
Wordpress.com	23	1,100,000	9	Blog platform
LinkedIn.com	24	470,000	10	Niche social network
Fotolog.com	37	560,000	11	Social network, sharing photos

Notes: * Source: Alexa.com, at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/AR> (accessed 20 February 2011).

** Source: Google Adplanner, at <https://www.google.com/adplanner/#audienceSearch> (accessed 15 March 2011).

Traditional media outlets are acutely aware of the potential opportunities and special needs presented by the rapid growth of social media. For example, Martín Etchevers, external communications manager at Grupo Clarín, explains that among the group’s media outlets, TN has worked most on the relationship with users, first with TN y la gente,⁴⁵ and then through social networks. He states that, if properly managed, it can create more visits than the large portals and mentions that, in October 2010, TN received more visits through Facebook than the Clarin.com portal. To get there, he warns, one clearly needs “social editors” who know how, when, and to what audience to address content. TN y la gente has editing and prioritization, and contents are arranged based on hit ratio and journalistic criteria.⁴⁶

3.1.2 Social Networks

The top 10 social networking sites in Argentina are among the country’s top 40 most visited websites. The top 12 websites overall include six social networking websites, which is indicative of how intensely Argentines with internet access use social networks. Of the top 10 social networking sites, seven are international and

44. Eleven rather than 10 UGC sites have been listed because Mercadolibre is a platform for the purchase and sale of all kinds of products with UGC.

45. TN y la gente is a website that allows users to upload and share videos online. These videos are usually used by the TV channel to illustrate such events as natural disasters or news where the company does not have own cameras.

46. Interview conducted for this report with Martín Etchevers, external communications manager at Grupo Clarín 20 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

three are based in Argentina, though these three are also international in the sense that their users stretch across Ibero-American countries (Latin America, Spain, and Portugal). See Table 13.

Table 13.
Top 10 social networks, by number of visitors, February and March 2011

Social network	Website ranking Argentina*	Unique visitors**	Social networks ranking Argentina	Description	National/International
Facebook	1	8,100,000	1	Social network	International
YouTube	4	7,296,000	2	Social network, sharing video	International with national location (www.youtube.com.ar)
Taringa	8	2,600,000	3	Social network	National
Mercadolibre	9	1,000,000	4	Social network, purchase and sale	National
Wikipedia	11	2,400,000	5	Open online encyclopedia	International
Twitter	12	1,100,000	6	Social network, information exchange up to 140 characters	International
Poringa	16	No data	7	Social network, adult content	National
LinkedIn	24	470,000	8	Niche social network	International
Badoo	28	680,000	9	Social network	International
Fotolog	37	560,000	10	Social network, sharing photos	International

Sources: * Alexa.com, at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/AR> (accessed 20 February 2011).

** Google Adplanner, at <https://www.google.com/adplanner/#audienceSearch> (accessed 15 March 2011).

The international sites listed above have varying degrees of localized content and pages targeting Argentinean users. The most popular social networks are international (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter), but there are also popular national networks (Taringa and Mercadolibre).

Facebook is not only the social network with the highest visitorship, but also the most popular website in Argentina. In February 2011, there were 10,860,000 Facebook accounts in Argentina, representing 27 percent of the population.⁴⁷

47. See Facebook, at <http://www.geographics.cz/socialMap/index.php> (accessed 27 February 2012).

The second most popular social network, YouTube, developed its local version (www.youtube.com.ar) in 2010, prioritizing the selection of Argentinean and Latin American videos in website searches. Google does not provide numbers on YouTube users or accounts in the country, but it is estimated that it is used by 59 percent of internet users (more than 25 million).⁴⁸

The third most popular social network is Taringa, an Argentinean website that is mostly based on local cultural and social groups in Argentina and other Ibero-American countries (Mexico, Spain, Colombia), where it also has users. Taringa has more than 6,400,000 members, of whom more than 1,500,000 live in Argentina.⁴⁹ It also has a social network with sexual content that is exclusively for adults, Poringa, also ranked among the top 10 social networks of the country in terms of visitors. MercadoLibre is a market for the purchase and sale of goods, created in Argentina, which has expanded to the rest of Latin America. It is the largest e-market portal for all kinds of products in Argentina.

YouTube, MercadoLibre, Wikipedia, and Poringa are characterized mainly by a search or consumption logic, while UGC is central to the offering of the remaining social networks on the list.

3.1.3 News in Social Media

There are no data on news consumption or news-related usage in social networks in Argentina. However, the blogosphere and social networks are very active reproducers (in the first place) and producers (to a lesser extent) of news. This is carried out through the institutional websites of the media in the social networks (many media companies have their own Facebook or Twitter accounts), through the personal accounts of alternative journalists (such as those grouped in <http://lavaca.org> and <http://plazademayo.com>), and the emergence of bloggers who are unrelated to the media system but produce or edit news, and disseminate it through blogs or social networks (such as <http://mundo-perverso.blogspot.com> or <http://www.100volando.net>).

The blog rankings⁵⁰ in Argentina are shown in Table 14, followed by an analysis of the trends.

48. Infobae newspaper, at <http://www.infobae.com/tecnologia/535632-100918-0-Que-implica-la-llegada-YouTube-Argentina> (accessed 27 February 2011).

49. Source: Alexa.com, at <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/taringa.net> (accessed 27 February 2011).

50. Buzzear is the source of reference for data on the Argentinean blogosphere. It is a blog aggregator that produces its ranking by assigning a score to each blog based on: Google backlinks (35 percent of the final score), Technorati rank (25 percent), Google page rank (20 percent), Yahoo backlinks (10 percent), and clicks in Buzzear (10 percent).

Table 14.
Weblog ranking, by Buzzear, February 2011

P	Blog	Topic	Ranking Buzzear Argentina	Backlinks in Buzzear
1	DenkenUber www.uberbin.net/	Information technologies	2.97	46,646
2	Global Voices en Español es.globalvoicesonline.org	International news	2.07	49,393
3	eBlog www.eblog.com.ar/	Media	2.01	41,520
4	Argentina Auto Blog argentinaautoblog.blogspot.com	Automobile	1.99	95,365
5	TechTear www.techtear.com	Social networks and blogs	1.82	80,888
6	bestiaria bestiaria.blogspot.com	Women readership	1.81	3,062
7	El Bazar del Espectáculo http://elbazardelespectaculo.blogspot.com	Showbiz news	1.77	212,700
8	La Propaladora lapropaladora.com.ar/	Media and technology	1.77	12,281
9	PuntoGeek www.puntogeek.com	Information technology	1.70	95,849
10	Bloc de periodista blocdeperiodista.com	Media	1.66	14,988

Source: Buzzear, at <http://ar.buzzear.net/ranking> (accessed 20 February 2011).

From the list of the top 10 social networks (see section 3.1.2), and blogs (see Table 14), it can be inferred that there is a significant presence of websites in which Argentinean web surfers participate in creating contents. While information that is disseminated in these spaces includes comments and personal stories, the most visited sites provide information. This information, though segmented (by type or news category), is not of a personal or intimate nature. This is shown on the list of Argentina's top blogs. Considering the top 50 blogs on the Buzzear ranking (<http://ar.buzzear.net/ranking>), over 15 of them are focused on analysis of the political and media reality, including direct references to national and international news; at least seven of them are focussed on information and communications technologies; another seven deal with the world of entertainment and celebrities; six are dedicated to sports (mainly, soccer); four of them are of a personal nature (life stories, mainly from women); and three focus on cars.

As mentioned above, Mr Barlaro believes that political involvement through social networks represents a significant shift in Argentina's public sphere, so much so that in the framework of political debate, he believes the social media can act as a leveller in redressing the pro-government bias of state broadcasters.

3.2 Digital Activism

3.2.1 Digital Platforms and Civil Society Activism

Digital activism in Argentina is primarily based on social media. Facebook, YouTube, Taringa and Twitter, four of the six top social networks in Argentina, are forums where civil society has an active involvement, both in broad terms and in the context of issue-specific campaigns. Also, the main blogs visited in Argentina contain examples of civic engagement and activism.

Not only are these digital platforms used for civil society activism, there is no civil society activism group in Argentina which does not have its own blog or Facebook presence to capitalize on the public sphere leverage that social media platforms provide.

The rural crisis

The social conflict with the highest repercussion in Argentina over the past five years has been the rural crisis (see sections 1.3.2 and 2.2.1). The dispute between the government and farmers' and cattle-raisers' representatives started in March 2008, included massive demonstrations and the blocking of roads throughout the country for four months, and demonstrated that the conflict had extended to encompass the new technologies, given that the two parties in dispute upheld their positions not only in the mass media but also in social media, blogs, and SMS chains on mobile phones to mobilize demonstrations. According to the journalist Pablo de León from Clarín.com,⁵¹ "the rural conflict has shown that mobile telephony is a technology with a strong presence among Argentinean people, because dates to participate in road blocking, picketing, and street demonstration activities were passed along through SMS chains."

The sectors that demonstrated against the government included the main associations of cattle-raisers and landowners, and in particular, the Argentinean Association of Direct Crop Producers (*Asociación Argentina de Productores en Siembra Directa*, AAPRESID). Although relying to some extent on the support of conventional media,⁵² the group was active in social media mobilization.⁵³ The sectors aligned with the government have also been conspicuously active on social networks and digital platforms. Thus, many "K bloggers," as bloggers that support the Kirchner administration have come to be known, have gathered in collective blogs such as *Artepolítica*⁵⁴ or *Bloggers en Acción*.⁵⁵

51. Interview conducted for this report with Pablo de León, journalist from Clarín.com, 15 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

52. For editorial support given by large media to farmers, cattle-raisers, and landowners, see M. Becerra and G. Mastrini, "Crisis, What Crisis? Argentine Media in View of the 2008 International Financial Crisis," *International Journal of Communication* 4 (2010), pp. 611–629, at <http://ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/838/437> (accessed 20 February 2011); see also <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/el-pais/1-104952-2008-05-27.html> (accessed 15 March 2011).

53. See <http://www.aapresid.org.ar>. The association has its own page at <http://www.facebook.com/search.php?q=mesa%20de%20enlace&init=quick&ctas=0.38397825526695495#!/pages/Aapresid/111814565623?sk=info> (accessed 20 February 2011).

54. See <http://artepolitica.com> (accessed 30 October 2010); Twitter: @artepolitica

55. See <http://bloggersenaccion.blogspot.com> (accessed 30 October 2010), also on Facebook, at <http://www.facebook.com/search.php?q=mesa%20de%20enlace&init=quick&ctas=0.38397825526695495#!/pages/Bloggers-en-Acci%C3%B3n/391311565568?sk=info> (accessed 30 October 2010).

No a las papeleras (Say no to paper pulp companies)

Another recent conflict with high visibility on the Argentinean public agenda has been the construction on the Uruguayan bank of Uruguay River (along the border with Argentina), of the paper pulp plant of a Finnish company, UPM-Kymmene (previously owned by Metsä-Botnia). The plant was erected in Uruguayan territory but its operation affects binational waters. Campaigners argue that this plant is a polluting agent which violates the Uruguay River Charter (*Estatuto del Río Uruguay*) signed by both countries. In 2005, the residents of Gualeguaychú, Argentina, started a series of blockades, first intermittently and then permanently, of the international bridge that links Gualeguaychú with Fray Bentos in Uruguay. This bridge is one of the few border crossings for road traffic between the two countries. The conflict ended after the signature on 30 August 2010 in Montevideo of an agreement to establish a Scientific Committee within the Uruguay River Administration Commission, though the demonstrators (known as *asambleístas*) continue to block the bridge on certain Sundays every month. The environmental demonstration by local residents was organized by the inhabitants of Gualeguaychú and neighboring towns through direct action, use of mobile phones (mainly SMS) and news broadcast on local radio,⁵⁶ but their perspective was disseminated to the rest of the country over their Facebook page, “No a las papeleras”⁵⁷ (Say no to the paper pulp companies), and activists take care to update the Wikipedia pages on the conflict.⁵⁸ Although these online tools may have a limited number of users—while, for example, in the 25 April 2010 mobilizations more than 150,000 people gathered at the Gualeguaychú bridge,⁵⁹ the Wikipedia page for the Asamblea was only visited 288 times during April—the truth is that they have become an indispensable complement of activist campaigns.

In this manner, the main issues that stand out on the public policy agenda are subject to heated debates in the blogosphere, which mirrors in its own way the polarization between the government and opposition groups. The blogs that support the administration of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner include Rambletamble,⁶⁰ by the market and trend researcher Artemio López; Artepública,⁶¹ a collective “blog of bloggers”; La República de la Soja (Soy Republic), on the conflict experienced by soy oil producers in 2008;⁶² Derek Dice (Derek Says);⁶³ and La Barbarie (Barbary).⁶⁴ Additionally, Bloggers en acción (Bloggers in Action) also follows this line, but its government advocacy has a more militant profile.⁶⁵

56. We thank Pablo de León for the comment on the use of local radios by Gualeguaychú demonstrators.

57. See <http://www.facebook.com/pages/No-a-las-PAPELERAS/63039906640> (accessed 12 February 2011).

58. See, for example, http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asamblea_Ciudadana_Ambiental_de_Gualeguaych%C3%BA; http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflicto_entre_Argentina_y_Uruguay_por_plantas_de_celulosa (accessed 26 February 2011).

59. *La Nación*, “Masiva movilización en Gualguaychú,” at <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1258325-masiva-movilizacion-en-gualeguaychu> (accessed 26 April 2011).

60. See Rambletamble.blogspot.com (accessed 21 May 2011).

61. See Artepública.com (accessed 21 May 2011).

62. See Lucascarrasco.blogspot.com (accessed 21 May 2011).

63. See Derekdice.blogspot.com (accessed 21 May 2011).

64. See <http://labarbarie.com.ar> (accessed 21 May 2011).

65. See Bloggersenaccion.blogspot.com (accessed 21 May 2011).

On the other hand, there are opposition blogs by right-wing leaders such as Jorge Asís⁶⁶ and left-wing researchers such as Roberto Gargarella⁶⁷ and Maristella Svampa.⁶⁸ There are other spaces linked with a republican but opposing vision, as is the case of the collective blog Club Político Argentino (Argentinean Political Club).⁶⁹ Finally, there is a large number of blogs specializing in current affairs from a variety of perspectives, including the economy, such as La ciencia maldita (The Damned Science);⁷⁰ law, such as Saber leyes no es saber derecho (Knowing the laws is not the same as knowing law);⁷¹ and journalism and communication, such as La propaladora (The Disseminator)⁷² and Plaza de Mayo (Mayo Square).⁷³ In terms of their relevance, the blog La Barbarie ranks 28th in aggregator Bucear's ranking, Artepública ranks 33rd, and Mide/No mide,⁷⁴ 41st. All other blogs rank lower than 50th.

In general, the editorial line of journalist blogs is consistent with the editorial line of the media organizations they represent. Thus, the blogs on Perfil.com feature a selection of opinions against the government, as do the blogs on Clarin.com. According to Professor Rodríguez, editor of *Conurbanos*, "The blogs on the portals of newspapers and traditional media have been a total failure. An example was the failure of the blog platform of *Clarín*, a project that entailed a huge investment but failed in its first year." For Rodríguez, "There is not much of a difference between the portals of *Popular* and *Clarín* newspapers, except for the investment, which is much higher for the latter. But they have the same dynamics." Rodríguez thinks that the blogs of mainstream media organizations are a failure because they have not achieved the audience reach of their amateur counterparts.⁷⁵

3.2.2 The Importance of Digital Mobilizations

The mass use of social networks in Argentina and the expansion of broadband connections in large cities (see section 1.1.2), as well as the surge in mobile connectivity through wireless telephony, have enhanced the capacity for digital activists to reach a broad spectrum of users. It is important, however, to highlight that the use of digital technologies does not necessarily imply the capacity and competences required to participate directly in social and political action online.

In the context of political polarization, there is considerable public debate conducted on social network platforms, from where it is leveraged on to traditional media platforms, and viceversa. An example of that has been the self-convening of government supporters in April 2010 on Facebook, led by the 6, 7, 8

66. See Jorgeasisdigital.com (accessed 21 May 2011).

67. See Seminariogargarella.blogspot.com (accessed 21 May 2011).

68. See Maristellasvampa.net/blog (accessed 21 May 2011).

69. See Clubpoliticoargentino.org (accessed 21 May 2011).

70. See Blogs.lanacion.com.ar/ciencia-maldita (accessed 21 May 2011).

71. See Saberderecho.com (accessed 21 May 2011).

72. See Lapropaladora.com (accessed 21 May 2011).

73. See Plazademayo.com (accessed 21 May 2011).

74. See vidabinaria.blogspot.com (accessed 21 May 2011).

75. Interview conducted for this report with Fabián Rodríguez, director of the *Conurbanos* portal, 4 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

Facebook group created to support an explicitly pro-government program that state-run Canal 7 airs Monday through Friday.

3.3 Assessments

Digitization and the consequent rise of the use of social networks and digital platforms by part of Argentinean society are changing the system of social production and circulation of information and entertainment in a country where the expansion of broadband connections has doubled over the past five years. These platforms not only offer a complementary or alternative channel to traditional media, but are themselves an opportunity for traditional media to explore new trends, while allowing constituencies with no access to traditional media to access the public sphere and ultimately interact with other stakeholders and sectors.

According to the editors of the main newspapers interviewed for this report, the creation of blogs with opinions, discussions, and thoughts on political life, contributing perspectives from political positions but also from various fields of expertise, is experiencing rapid growth and feeds back into the workings of mainstream media. Mario Wainfeld, a political columnist for *Página 12*, points out that the blogosphere provides specific content that is not present in mainstream media due to their space limitations and their need to appeal to a mass audience.⁷⁶

To a significant extent, civil society is engaged with digital platforms including blogs and social networks. Though focusing mostly on pages and websites associated with traditional institutions –including those of the media – civil society takes advantage of the possibility to access different contents, and in a sector that is not massive but influential. The activity of Argentinean web users in social networks (particularly, Facebook and Taringa) is matched by digital activism. While social networking has reached mass audiences, digital activism has not (at least not directly). Their organizational logic is interesting because it is led not only by “lone rangers” who run their blogs in a handmade manner, but also by collectives such as Artepolítica (pro-government) or Club Político Argentino (anti-government) mentioned above.

There is no civil society activism in Argentina that does not have its own blog or Facebook page to project its involvement in the public sphere. Thus, the main issues that stand out on the public agenda are the subject of heated debate on the blogosphere which replicates, in its own way, the polarization that exists between the government and the opposition.

76. Interview conducted for this report with Mario Wainfeld, columnist on *Página 12*, 2 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

4. Digital Media and Journalism

4.1 Impact on Journalists and Newsrooms

4.1.1 Journalists

Based on research by Universidad Austral (2008) on journalists' sources, it has been determined that the press release is the most common source for producing an article, to the detriment of interviews and phone calls, which explains why journalists today spend so many hours in editorial newsrooms. As a result, research indicates that 70 percent of news content comes from public relations companies, a percentage that has been confirmed by surveys analyzing the influence of sources and pressrooms in the news. In Argentina, research on journalistic quality from Universidad Católica Argentina (De la Torre, 2004) concluded that 59 percent of news analyzed has come from information delivered or produced by the source, while only 27 percent originated in initiatives by journalists themselves.

While digitization in news production has entailed remarkable changes in work methods and relationships (including the disappearance of certain trades), the emergence of online journalism has caused not only changes in the practice of the profession but also the appearance of new news platforms. At the same time, it has brought about a shift in the relationship between journalists and their audiences. Even if journalists do not interact with their readers directly, many profess to following with interest the comments posted about their articles on online platforms. Finally, the business model of traditional print media has been challenged, so far without engendering a new commercially viable model for online news, according to Luis Albornoz.⁷⁷

Dardo Fernández, director of the *Diarios sobre Diarios* portal, recalls that the inception of the digitization process in the press of Argentina coincided with the emergence and consolidation of multimedia groups.

77. L. Albornoz, *Periodismo Digital. Los Grandes Diarios en la Red* (Digital Journalism. The Main Papers on the Web), La Crujía, Buenos Aires, 2007, p. 59.

These are two parallel processes, and in our opinion, they cannot be separated from each other, though they are two different processes. This poses an enormous challenge for journalism and journalists: the form and the content change as companies transform and the media system changes. Thus, Argentina is different from other countries where the multimedia groups were set up first, and then digitization occurred.⁷⁸

As Mr Fernández points out, the concurrence of both phenomena can make it harder to distinguish the true origins of the deep transformations that journalism has undergone in the past 20 years. This paper focusses on the changes connected with the digitization process. To that end, we shall classify innovations in three categories: those relating to the journalist's professional world; those having to do with contents and formats; and finally, the new patterns in the relationship between journalists and their audiences.

The implications of professional changes range from work types to intergenerational conflicts to flexibility and lack of skills. Broadly speaking, according to Juan Mascardi,⁷⁹

Changes in the productive routines driven by the digitization of communication processes have led to new professional profiles and settings. This has transformed certain disciplines, generating new roles in day-to-day journalistic communication, such as the infographer, the interactive designer, the content designer, the TV content manager, and the e-newsletter editor. Additionally, new spaces and specialties have emerged hand in hand with changes in production and management patterns, in terms of both themes and organizational structures: Participatory Journalism, Social Journalism, Citizen Journalism, and Media Observatory.

The shift could not occur without conflict. An aspect that kept coming up in conversations with several sources interviewed for this report was the resulting competition between analog journalists and the new digital generation. Resistance to change and internal disputes are commonplace. Mr Fernández remarks that this situation has worsened over recent years due to the convergence of print and online newsrooms at *Clarín* and *La Nación*:

Journalists view the so-called “merger of editorial staff” as a trauma: there are generational differences; online and traditional newsrooms have different speeds handling diverse skills, and different working hours; remote work conditions also make a difference, and the ability to handle multiple languages at a time (e.g. editing images) is another difference. *Clarín's* editorial staff, for instance, until some years ago averaged 45 years of age. Online trends have met with strong resistance from that generation, because journalists perceived they were losing the editorial autonomy over their materials.⁸⁰

78. Interview conducted for this report with Dardo Fernández, director of the Diarios sobre Diarios portal (<http://www.diariosobrediarios.com.ar/eldsd/diario/portada.htm>), 14 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

79. J. Mascardi, “*Periodismo digital: la polivalencia profesional y los nuevos escenarios profesionales*” (Digital journalism: professional polyvalence and the new professional scenarios), in F. Irigaray et al. (eds), *Nuevos medios, nuevos modos, nuevos lenguajes* (New Media, New Ways, New Languages). Laborde, Rosario, 2008.

80. Interview conducted for this report with Dardo Fernández, director of the Diarios sobre Diarios portal, 14 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

Omar Lavieri, a journalist with *Clarín* and *Continental* radio station, adds:

There is a generational gap between the digital natives, who are 20 to 30 years old, and are notably skilled at it. On the contrary, those who are 30 and older have technical difficulties. Also contributing to the generational difference is the fact that it is much easier for a 25-year-old journalist than for a journalist aged 40 or 50 to make a multimedia production from their handheld.⁸¹

Mr Lavieri's view introduces another significant change, also mentioned by some interviewees: the fact that the new generations of journalists count on multimedia production in their skills set. In the digital environment, where the barriers between print and audiovisual formats tend to blur, the ability to integrate all formats implies a competence that has become indispensable, especially for young journalists who are eager to join the workforce.

Another significant change driven by journalists is delocation, i.e. the loss of the newsroom as the only workplace. For Mr Lavieri, "One of the main drivers is telecommuting, or the absence of workers at the workplace. On the one hand, it frees, and on the other hand it breaks with the tradition of editions run with an enormous verticalism or pyramid-like control. The ability to write anywhere using a digital or electronic device, a cell phone, etc., and to publish almost real-time has changed the system of work."⁸²

The *Página 12* journalist Washington Uranga adds, "A large number of journalists use mobile work. As a result, the editorial room as a space for debate and collective construction is lost."⁸³ The political analyst José Natanson, who works for the same newspaper, gives an account of how changes have affected his own performance:

I no longer go to the editorial room. However, I used to go during eight years, and have lived through the digitization process. The day-to-day gets much easier, the internet makes it easy to work. In the past, you needed a specific piece of information and had to go to the archive, which is a place that no longer exists in the newspaper, some sort of a catacomb, a place with people buried in paper, with very little digitization. Today Google does that for you in a moment.⁸⁴

Another aspect that should be considered is to what extent the digitization process affects the quality of news featured in the media. An element mentioned by almost all interviewees as absolutely positive is the increase and accessibility of sources. This translates into another positive aspect, which is the increase of the newsworthy base.

81. Interview conducted for this report with Omar Lavieri, journalist at *Diario Clarín* and Continental Radio, 17 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

82. Interview conducted for this report with Omar Lavieri, journalist at *Diario Clarín* and Continental Radio, 17 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

83. Interview conducted for this report with Washington Uranga, journalist at *Página 12* and professor at the Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires, 19 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

84. Interview conducted for this report with José Natanson, journalist with *Página 12* and FM Metro, 7 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

A factor that is cited as positive for most interviewees but at the same time should be qualified is the immediacy with which information spreads in the digital world. The upside is that it enables the reach of information to expand geographically (with more and better information delivery at remote locations, both nationally and internationally) and across time zones, with the extension of coverage hours. The downside is the great challenge posed by the immediacy of information delivery: serious news errors may be made if the necessary controls are not enforced. For many journalists, speed may prevent a thorough verification of information.

Darío D’Atri, editor-in-chief of Clarin.com, says:

From the journalist’s point of view, evidently the number of direct and indirect sources enabled by digitization has experienced exponential growth. It seems there are no limits to information searches, particularly when using networks becomes a work habit to access information. Obviously, the conclusion is that this element is much more positive than negative. It is good to have a wide range of information available. I think that for journalists it is no longer an option not to get connected to the networks. I don’t know if there are cases of journalists doing their job without resorting to the networks as a source of information.⁸⁵

Moreover, Mr Fernández and Mr Lavieri agree on the expansion of the newsworthy base. According to the former, “Newsworthiness criteria have been redefined by the speed of digital convergence, and multimedia concentration. Combined, the two trends cause general confusion as to how to act.” The latter is more optimistic:

What digitization has done is to expand the newsworthy base. In the past, in the paper era, one had to wait for the paper to come out to have a certain amount of news items that were worth publishing. Digitization has increased the volume of news, also increasing the irrelevance of news. Before, news sources were more limited: newspapers and traditional media were fed with news from news agencies, and their own information. Today some digital media have managed to stay at the top of the agenda, and survey situations that are later on taken up by traditional media—which is very different from the situation five years ago.

Furthermore, Gastón Roitberg, Multimedia Assistant Managing Editor at *La Nación*, confirms the positive aspects of digitization and adds that in digital formats, distinct quality criteria become relevant:

If we consider the quality criteria of traditional media before the emergence of the internet, it could be argued that there is a loss of “quality control” because certain control assurance phases are eliminated from the process that was completed before, at least in established media. But the issue of quality in digital media cannot be directly extrapolated from the criteria of traditional media. There is a quality criterion on the web that is “good enough.”

85. Interview conducted for this report with Darío D’Atri, editor-in-chief of Clarin.com, 11 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

For instance, in the print version of a traditional paper, a photograph will not be published unless it has good resolution (with certain exceptions). In the online version of the same paper, if the photograph adds value, it is inserted in a series, because it is good enough for publishing, even though it may not have the best resolution.

Digitization has strengthened the connection between journalists and their audience, particularly through social networks. According to the radio presenter and journalist Eduardo Aliverti:

The single most important change I have noticed is how you can interact with the audience on Facebook or Twitter, and the speed with which news are delivered, so much so that interaction on Facebook or Twitter may even condition the message, and shift the entire content of a program depending on what appears on the computer screen. This is also noted in production teams: approximately three years ago, we stopped taking recorded messages from the audience—now they contribute their views over the social networks.⁸⁶

The audience clearly has much to gain from digitization, being able to browse different websites, and compare and contrast information. According to Mr Wainfeld:

On the web there is the possibility for an empowered and skilled audience to take advantage of a larger diversity of contents. For instance, in the case of *Página 12*, many readers in the interior of Argentina who did not receive the paper in the morning or were unable to read it early, now are able to access contents early in the day, jointly with contents from other media that were not available in their regions or arrived late or with deficiencies. The prospective readership is thus greatly enhanced.⁸⁷

But, on the other hand, journalists do not appreciate the interaction with the audience as a contribution to improve the quality of information they produce. Most agree that the public has had more to win in this respect than journalists.

4.1.2 Ethics

In Argentina, there is no regulation on the ethical behavior of journalism, no self-regulation mechanisms implemented by media owners, in the style of the British Press Council, and no corporate professional control, such as journalist's associations.

In addition to press workers' unions, which do not have as their main purpose the upholding of collective ethical standards, we can only mention the Forum for Argentinean Journalism (*Foro de Periodismo Argentino*, FOPEA), which defines itself as a group of media professionals and journalism professors that resolved to

86. Interview conducted for this report with Eduardo Aliverti, journalist at Radio La Red and *Página 12*, and professor at Buenos Aires University, 18 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

87. Interview conducted for this report with Mario Wainfeld, columnist on *Página 12*, 2 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

encourage the creation of a space for thought, dialog and promotion of journalistic quality. Though it does not issue opinions on the activities of professionals or its members, FOPEA has an ethics code that covers 42 points, and is one of the main references in this matter in Argentina. There are no explicit references to any digitization issues in this code.

Journalists interviewed for this study have indicated that they do not see that digitization has triggered any specific unethical behavior, but that it has certainly enhanced its potential. For instance, the excess of information encourages information theft and insufficient verification of data obtained over the internet.

Raquel San Martín emphasizes another point that should also be considered:

A major threat is that digital tools can bring journalism too close to marketing, as the analysis of trends, top articles, pasted paragraphs, etc., enables detecting what “sells,” and that implies that a more economic criterion finds its way through the tensions of deciding what the difference is between what is important and what is interesting, or even defining what ad should go with an article, for instance. In fact, there is a saying in journalism that goes, “What do we have for sale today?”⁸⁸

Ms San Martín adds that one of the risks is giving up the very essence of journalism: doing research, checking the sources, reporting on sound grounds:

I do not have data about verified information, but I do have the certainty that information is being produced (more than ever before), without checking the sources. The internet has become “the” source, without requiring any further verification. The old premise of the “three sources” has become outdated.⁸⁹

A *Clarín* journalist, Claudio Savoia, agrees:

Digitization has brought journalists closer to a volume of information that is geometrically larger than the one we handled before the advent of this era, compounded by the fact that said information must be processed and published at a much faster speed than ever. These two changes have increased the possibility of making mistakes; in a way, they have reduced the need to correct them: only under very strict ethical parameters—which tend to be more personal than explicit in a company—are solid checking routines established, being kind enough to recognize and correct errors. Because on the internet things fly, and a mistake made for lack of professionalism could be buried in a mountain of articles that will succeed it in a matter of minutes. The dispersion of user attention and the speed of dissemination by the media work as the perfect excuses to disguise—and even justify—a breach of ethics.⁹⁰

88. Interview conducted for this report with Raquel San Martín, a journalist at *Diario La Nación*, 12 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

89. Interview conducted for this report with Raquel San Martín, a journalist at *Diario La Nación*, 12 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

90. Interview conducted for this report with Claudio Savoia, a journalist at *Diario Clarín*, 6 January, 2011, Buenos Aires.

In summary, the answers provided by journalists underscore the low level of self-regulation as regards ethical matters. Digitization risks compromising journalistic rigor as a result of source overload and immediacy demands. Nevertheless, all the interviewees agree that journalists should strive to follow the same ethical standards as in the analog environment.

4.2 Investigative Journalism

4.2.1 Opportunities

Investigative journalism is under sustained pressure in Argentina. While in the 1990s investigative journalism gained momentum with investigations of corruption during the Carlos Menem administration, it dwindled in the first decade of the 21st century. Several journalists and academics agreed that the emergence of large multimedia groups in the 1990s has made journalists sensitive to the interests of shareholders, resulting in limitations on the activities and reach of investigative reporters. Though *Clarín* has an investigation team, its participation has been decreasing. The disappearance of the Sunday supplement *Zona*, in which the production of the investigative team played a major role, is also noteworthy.

According to those interviewed for this report, the most significant contributions of digitization to investigative journalism can be summarized as follows:

- access to more sources, diversity of perspectives and opinions;
- speed in the search for information;
- access to national and international files and background, and
- long-distance enquiries (lower costs).

However, Mr Lavieri has commented: “These possibilities are greater in countries that are at more advanced stages of information availability. In Argentina, it is still very difficult to get public information in a digital format. If you ask a police officer by e-mail to send you the statistics of how many drunk drivers have been arrested, for instance, you won’t get it.”⁹¹

Nonetheless, Mr Lavieri believes that shrewd journalists can leverage digitization if they can access the right kind of sources: “What is available is the mixed database of the Social Security Agency (ANSES) and the Tax Agency (AFIP), so you can find out if the daughter of a government official who bought a mansion has ever registered with the AFIP.”⁹² However, and in general terms, journalists agree that digitization has had little impact on investigative journalism so far, save for some sporadic instances of records linkage across databases.

91. Interview conducted for this report with Omar Lavieri, journalist at *Diario Clarín* and Continental Radio, 17 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

92. Interview conducted for this report with Omar Lavieri, journalist at *Diario Clarín* and Continental Radio, 17 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

4.2.2 Threats

The transformation that journalism is currently undergoing in Argentina and the threats derived from it have more to do with the general political climate in the country than with digitization. Nonetheless, a recurrent problem of journalistic activity with the advent of digitization is information theft. However, Mr Savoia tones down the problem: “In Argentina hacking is only to be feared by intelligence agencies (devoted more than ever to spying on the journalists that have not taken sides with the government). Censorship is much more difficult in the digital era. Voices have multiplied, it is easier to disseminate data—both true and false— anonymously, and it is no longer possible to control or seize journalistic editions.”⁹³

In this sense, the threat of information theft by intelligence agencies is counterbalanced by the ways in which information flows and evades censorship.

4.2.3 New Platforms

Journalists interviewed for this study said that though digitization has aided the dissemination of investigative journalism output, in some cases even in raw data form, editorial impact continues to be in the hands of print media. It is a reality reflected in the recent spate of Wikileaks revelations (which have had strong reverberations in Argentina), the global impact of which has been facilitated by strategic alliances with major newspaper groups.

According to Mr Savoia,

Blogs are not the best vehicle for investigative journalism, which, as we all know, is expensive and has a slow digestion—the anathema of “immediacy” and “spontaneity” that are the hallmark of blogs. There are, however, excellent independent organizations devoted to investigative journalism that only disclose their articles on the internet. Digitization has enabled a dramatic cost reduction in news dissemination, which no longer needs expensive physical support to circulate. Among these internet sites, I will mention three: ProPublica (a new star in the U.S. journalistic sky), CIPER (a Chilean undertaking by a team of prestigious journalists that disseminate their materials over the internet, also offering research to traditional media), and El Faro (El Salvador).⁹⁴

As can be seen, none of them is from Argentina. Though there are blogs in the country by journalists and media critics, there is no site that is acknowledged by the journalistic community and dedicated specifically to investigative reporting.

93. Interview conducted for this report with Claudio Savoia, a journalist at *Diario Clarín*, 6 January, 2011, Buenos Aires.

94. Interview conducted for this report with Claudio Savoia, a journalist at *Diario Clarín*, 6 January, 2011, Buenos Aires.

Fabián Rodríguez, director of the Conurbanos portal, adds:

I do not believe that blogs will replace journalism at all. I believe they are complementary of traditional journalism. Perhaps they will take a stronger role but not much stronger. By stronger role I mean their functioning dynamics, not massive nature, as I believe they have reached a ceiling in that respect. The blog with the highest readership in politics and current affairs has a daily average of 10,000 entries, by Artemio López. And López himself believes that it will not pass that barrier. At most, it may reach 12,000 entries in six months, but it's nothing compared to the spiraling growth it experienced over the past three years.⁹⁵

In short, the propagation capacity created by digitization for investigative journalism is worth considering (it creates new publics and anonymous alternatives), but it has not yet been significant to the extent of enabling online investigative reporting to reach critical mass audiences.

4.2.4 Dissemination and Impact

Journalists nevertheless by and large concur that digitization has contributed to expanding the scope of investigative journalism. Rather than seeing online platforms in isolation, there is recognition of their potential to leverage output from traditional formats. Mr Lavieri notes: “Before, fully-fledged journalistic investigations were limited to newspaper readers and what the papers and TV did with it. Now, a journalistic publication is published by thousands, because it is taken up by citizen journalists. So, I'm not so sure that the impact, but certainly the dissemination of fully-fledged investigations has acquired a larger dimension.”⁹⁶

In that regard, Mr Savoia says:

Digitization has contributed to disseminate the materials produced, but not to boost their impact, at least in Argentina. The news sites that proliferate on the web are hard to follow, and on mere mathematical grounds, that multiplication—excellent in its democratizing effects on journalism—reduces the impact and influence of each source. This balance is producing ongoing changes, though traditional media outlets still have a very strong credibility as news sources for complex cases and stories. Again, investigative journalism is expensive, complex, and does not result in an immediate impact.⁹⁷

Journalists agree that the main benefit of digitization is the increased capacity for the dissemination of their investigations. However, they also note that, save for niche audiences, the impact of investigative journalism is still low and requires the engagement of mainstream media. An example of this is the Wikileaks' diffusion of the U.S. Department of State cables, an action that only acquired notoriety when the print press started publishing the cables.

95. Interview conducted for this report with Fabián Rodríguez, director of the Conurbanos portal, 4 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

96. Interview conducted for this report with Omar Lavieri, journalist at *Diario Clarín* and Continental Radio, 17 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

97. Interview conducted for this report with Claudio Savoia, a journalist at *Diario Clarín*, 6 January, 2011, Buenos Aires.

4.3 Social and Cultural Diversity

4.3.1 Sensitive Issues

In 2007 the Urgency Law No. 26,160 on the possession and ownership of the land occupied by indigenous communities was passed. In 2010, there was a discussion about a proposal of historical redress legislation for indigenous peoples, which so far has not been passed. This state of affairs has favored greater coverage of the issue, though it is still considered to some extent inadequate. It should also be noted that in the SCA Law No. 26,522 (passed in 2009), native communities have been granted the specific right to receive radio and TV licenses (see section 5).

Another culturally sensitive issue concerns the rights of migrants from countries bordering Argentina, which receives a significant number of immigrants from neighboring countries. In 2004 Law No. 25.871/04, regulating the immigration process, was approved, and it meant a significant improvement in the rights of immigrants. In 2006 the Patria Grande plan allowed undocumented immigrants from neighboring countries to regularize their situation in Argentina.

There were also advancements regarding sexual minorities. The adoption in July 2010 of the law that permitted same-sex marriage (the first such a law in Latin America) stirred intense debate.

Another issue that deserves attention is the protection of physically and mentally handicapped people. In recent years, legal reforms have been made in order to guarantee their rights.

The rights of minorities are not an issue of general public concern. But especially since 2003, advances have been made in acknowledging the rights of native people and immigrants, and recognizing sexual and gender diversity.

4.3.2 Coverage of Sensitive Issues

There are no precise statistical data on journalistic coverage of social diversity, though many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a specific concern for social issues address it. It should be noted that due to various political and social developments, over the last five years, news topics involving minorities have attained prime positioning in the media.

The news coverage of immigrants in Argentina is usually full of prejudices. Broadly speaking, it treads on the limits of political correctness and, in many cases, openly traverses them. A paradigmatic example of this situation took place when the cable TV program *Crónica* included in its titles that in a traffic accident “three persons and one Bolivian” had been killed. It is not unusual to hear politically incorrect expressions on radio and TV for the Bolivian and Paraguayan communities (referred to as *bolitas* and *paraguas*, respectively).

Native people hardly have a presence in the national media. They only appear in relation to land conflicts and violent acts. The coverage is full of prejudices similar to the coverage of immigration. It is still early to assess the impact of the media outlets that are dedicated to covering native people.

As far as gender issues are concerned, the NGO Social Journalism (*Periodismo Social*) published in 2010 a report (based on consultations with journalists from different areas of the country) about coverage.⁹⁸ Findings include frequent allusions to mitigating circumstances in the press in relation to acts of violence, abuse or the murder of women. A website that addresses the problem, La Casa del Encuentro (<http://www.lacasadelencuentro.org>), calls for journalists to increase the visibility of violence against women (in 2009, it counted 231 murders of women, based on media reports) and to end prejudices in news reportage.

Disability issues have failed to attract widespread media attention, although in 2010 a website accessibility law came into force. Once regulated, the law will require all web pages in the sphere of the state and of related organizations to be designed in such a way that information is accessible for individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities, and for any kind of configuration or operating system in use. The SCA Law also includes regulations so that people with visual or hearing impairments can access the media. There are special communication systems for blind people, which convert written content into speech.

Finally, Social Journalism addresses childhood, drawing attention to the fact that between 2004 and 2009 child labor only represented 0.5 percent of the news articles on childhood in the 22 best-selling newspapers of the country. The finding comes from an investigation called Childhood Dispossessed (*La niñez arrebatada*) that the NGO conducted jointly with the Telefonica Foundation.⁹⁹ The issue of child labor is not only absent from the agenda of the papers, but also, when it is addressed, the approaches chosen by different papers ignore a number of the causes and consequences of this problem.

In sum, there are no regulations in Argentina on the media coverage of social and cultural diversity in the analog or digital domains, either in the form of quotas or complaints procedures. As a result, coverage of these issues by commercial media is limited to those stories that are of broad interest and high social impact, in accordance with market logic. Nonetheless, minority advocacy organizations have taken advantage of digitization, creating their own digital communication media (see section 4.3.3).

However, the National Anti-Discrimination Institute (*Instituto Nacional contra la Discriminación*, INADI) has a Radio and TV Anti-Discrimination Observatory, jointly with the National Women's Commission (*Comisión Nacional de la Mujer*, CNM) and the Federal Authority of Audiovisual Communication Services (*Autoridad Federal de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual*, AFSCA). The Observatory has addressed some cases of discrimination in radio and TV, and has put forward its recommendations to avoid such practices. But it does not have an enforcement capacity and to date it has not dealt with any cases of discrimination in digital media.

98. *Periodismo social, Informe sobre cobertura de género en la prensa argentina* (Social Journalism, Report on the coverage of gender issues in the Argentinean Press), Buenos Aires, 2010. Available at www.periodismosocial.org.ar (accessed 22 December 2010).

99. A. Cytrynblum, *Niñez y adolescencia en la prensa argentina* (Childhood and Youth in the Argentinean Press), Buenos Aires, December 2010. Available at www.periodismosocial.org.ar (accessed 22 December 2010).

4.3.3 Space for Public Expression

Digitization has helped minority groups to gain more space for public expression. This is mainly due to the reduction of production costs, which has enabled them to produce their own digital media. In any event, these media have limitations, as Washington Uranga indicates:

Digital media have helped, multiplying sources and voices. But there are parallel circuits and public space (the public and communicational arena) is not built with digital media. Public incidence continues to be centered on the mainstream print and audiovisual media. What should be considered, however, is that complementary and converging processes occur. It is rare to conceive of a “traditional” medium without its digital platform, and its convergence with other proposals.¹⁰⁰

Gastón Montells adds: “Digitization has amplified small battles, and in that amplification they have achieved coverage, and today they even build programming processes. Digital processes have enabled the public disclosure of practices that the media system used to hide. And the media system for that matter is a laboratory: if it works, even though it does not agree with it, it includes it anyway.”¹⁰¹

In summary, digital media are considered a major tool for social constituencies, such as minority political parties and social minority advocacy groups, which pursue coverage across the media. However success is not simply about coverage, but about the ability these groups may have in getting Parliament or the government to assimilate their points of view and support their interests.

4.4 Political Diversity

4.4.1 Elections and Political Coverage

Generally, no major changes have occurred in political coverage that can be attributed to digitization. A recent publication coordinated by Professor Adriana Amado points to the increasing relevance of political press departments as sources: “The conclusions that can be drawn from the monitoring of the election campaigns of 2003 and 2007 show the imbalance of coverage in favor of candidates with larger press actions, which would confirm the growing reliance by the media on materials provided by the candidates themselves.”¹⁰²

But this tendency cannot be directly linked to digitization, which has not entailed major changes in the coverage of elections. Minority political parties have also taken advantage of the economic benefits of the digital environment to launch their own communication systems. An example is the Trotskyist Party of

100. Interview conducted for this report with Washington Uranga, journalist at *Página 12* and professor at the Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires, 19 January 2011, Buenos Aires..

101. Interview conducted for this report with Gastón Montells, director of Radio La Tribu, 9 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

102. A. Amado, *La palabra empeñada* (Word pledged), Fundación Friedrich Ebert, Buenos Aires, 2010.

Socialist Workers (*Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo*, PTS), which has launched its own TV channel on the web (<http://www.tvpts.tv>). But even though internet penetration figures are high compared with other countries in the region, so far no significant changes have materialized in coverage proportion or in behavior around elections that can be directly attributed to the impact of digitization.

There is, however, some change in the dynamics of journalism. In this respect, Mr D’Atri expressed optimism:

Election after election, what the internet has prompted is a phenomenal change in the way of delivering information, of elaborating it. On the same day of elections, at 8 p.m. a website like Clarin.com has got all the previous materials with background, simulations, maps of where to vote, and a very sophisticated mix of candidate information and profiles. When results start to come, there is also a phenomenal change—we have already done that in the last election—in which the digital newspaper is articulated with audiovisual support. In the last election we decided to have a studio for live transmission every 15 minutes. The resources that technology makes available to propose a thousand ideas from the journalistic standpoint are unlimited. The technological elements really change it all.¹⁰³

In Argentina there is a regulation that prevents the media from providing partial results or estimates during the three hours following the closure of polls. This measure was introduced when the popularization of exit polls led the media to disclose data that in some cases was refuted by official counts. Indeed, Article 71 paragraph “h” of the National Elections Code (*Código Nacional Electoral*) prohibits polls and projections on the results of elections while the polls are taking place, and for three hours after they close. Though the prohibition is expressed in a broad sense, one may wonder what would happen if the information originated from a website hosted in a foreign country (e.g. Clarin.com with its server in the United States). Until now, websites and blogs have observed this limitation. Only the blog of the consultant Artemio López (rambletamble.blogspot.com) playfully evaded the rule during the elections for the governor of Buenos Aires city in 2007, when it published exit poll results without naming the candidates but identifying them using the names of the soccer teams they are fans of.

4.4.2 Digital Political Communications

The internet has a large impact on political communication. In 2010, politicians started to value the use of Twitter, and the media usually comment on their tweets. Even President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner often sends tweets that are immediately reproduced in conventional media output. Most politicians make intensive use of websites and social networks, including Facebook and Twitter. Since these are much cheaper than traditional media, it could be argued that they allow all kinds of political expressions to be present in the network on a level playing field. However, most sources surveyed agree that while most politicians understand the importance of the new communication channel, they do not have the knowledge or the support to create new means of political communication attuned to the digital environment. Though there

103. Interview conducted for this report with Darío D’Atri, editor-in-chief of Clarin.com, 11 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

are frequent allusions to the “Obama effect,” meaning the digital campaign that accompanied the U.S. president’s successful election bid in 2008, the strategies used in Argentina have not followed that model.

According to Mr Roitberg,

Ricocheting the effects of Obama’s utilization of digital media, Argentinean politicians and parties have entered the social networks, and improved their web portals. The particularity in this fad is that the politician is in the hands of advisors that outsource the use of digital tools. The result is that there are large blunders because when this happens politicians are not genuinely involved in the networks—their appearance is the result of laboratory work.¹⁰⁴

Professor Rodríguez added: “Those who truly use social networks, such as national deputy Felipe Solá (@felipe_sola), and Buenos Aires Province deputies Fernando “Chino” Navarro (@chino_navarro) and Raúl Pérez (@raul_perez) do it well. It is interesting dynamics, it is clear that they are discovering and asking—they do ask. The rest have employees that handle it for them, it’s deplorable.”¹⁰⁵

4.5 Assessments

Digitization has affected journalistic practices. In the first place, the very job of the journalist is transforming and transitioning towards a model in which a significant portion of media workers must have an understanding of multimedia. In general terms, a higher degree of flexibility is observed in the work relationships of journalists.

A highly positive factor for information quality is the possibility of consulting more sources and files, and having a larger amount of information available to prepare news articles. But this abundance is also a problem if there is no adequate selection and careful analysis of information. Another risk is the trend to a more rapid pace in news production, threatening the quality of information output.

Investigative journalism has benefited from the possibility of better access to the sources and particularly, documentary sources. The digitization of state information creates expectations for transparency, though this process is still rather limited in Argentina. The possibility of cross-checking databases is also auspicious. All these positive aspects, however, are somewhat overshadowed by the fact that investigative journalism in Argentina is not currently at its best.

As regards elections coverage, the digitization process is in the phase of development. Even though there are more innovative and instantaneous ways of presenting information, with a trend to encouraging multimedia deployment, there is no evidence that the media and politicians have started to use new ICTs, which would

104. Interview conducted with Gastón Roitberg, Multimedia Assistant Managing Editor, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, 22 February 2011.

105. Interview conducted for this report with Fabián Rodríguez, director of the Conurbanos portal, 4 January 2011, Buenos Aires.

constitute a radical shift in the nature of electoral coverage. Nonetheless, the editors interviewed for this project expect major developments to occur in time, especially for multimedia content promotion.

Minority groups have taken advantage of digitization to produce information, disseminate it, and do advocacy work. The visibility of such groups undoubtedly has had a positive impact. Nevertheless, there has been no substantive boost to their appearance in traditional media, which have persisted in restricting information about them to only those situations which are significant from a social perspective. Civil society organizations interviewed for this paper are highly critical of the quality of information produced by the media about minority groups. Two professionals from alternative media, Gastón Montells of Radio La Tribu and Natalia Vinelli of Barricada TV,¹⁰⁶ while offering opposing views on the phenomenon of alternative communication media, agree that these media provide a news agenda that is different from that of mainstream media, with a more extensive coverage of the political and social agenda of minority groups.

Finally, digitization has enabled more and better access to information by the population. From a geographical and time perspective, information is available for the population at large. It has also magnified the ability to disseminate information about social groups and individuals. Even though digitization permits a new level of exchange between the professional producers of information (journalists) and the rest of the population, so far experts are skeptical about the extent to which such exchanges can improve the quality of information.

106. Interview conducted for this report with Gastón Montells, director of Radio La Tribu, 9 December 2010, Buenos Aires; interview conducted for this report with Natalia Vinelli, director of Barricada TV, January 2010, Buenos Aires.

5. Digital Media and Technology

5.1 Spectrum

5.1.1 Spectrum Allocation Policy

The regulation of the media system in Argentina has specific rules for broadcasting and others for telecoms services, and this characteristic has not yet been modified, in spite of the opportunities of convergence between both systems enabled by digitization.

Law No. 19,798 on Telecommunications was passed in August 1972.¹⁰⁷ It regulated all forms of broadcasting and electronic communication. In 1980, with the introduction of Decree-Law No. 22,285,¹⁰⁸ radio broadcasting (AM and FM), free-to-air television, and cable were excluded from the application of the general standard for telecoms, and have since been governed by sector-specific legislation (see section 5.3.1), with several changes implemented during the democratic period, especially since 1989, on the issue of licenses.

Audiovisual media are regulated today in accordance with the SCA Law passed in October 2009, after an intense and lengthy debate to repeal the Decree-Law of 1980, including a series of forums for citizen participation and spaces for public discussion. The debate was characterized by strong confrontations between the highly concentrated media groups owned by national and international capitals and the government and sectors that supported the project.

Democratic values are at the heart of the SCA Law, guaranteeing freedom of expression, reserving a portion of the spectrum for the not-for-profit private sector on all bands and frequencies, defining mechanisms to thwart the emergence of highly concentrated oligopolies, defending radios and small channels in provincial towns, and requiring local production quotas from all operators in the system. Its objectives propose advances like creating an authority for federal regulation, with autarchic powers, and inclusive of members from the political parliamentary minorities; establishing rules to prevent cross-ownership

107. During the military dictatorship which claimed to be the “Argentinean Revolution,” and remained in power from 1966 to 1973.

108. This rule was introduced during the civil-military dictatorship called the “National Reorganization Process,” which lasted from 1976 to 1983.

in the audiovisual market (free-to-air and pay TV) so as to facilitate new entrants; and prohibiting telephone companies to hold media licenses (thus preventing powerful operators from potentially monopolizing the system).¹⁰⁹

The law created AFSCA,¹¹⁰ the agency charged with the allocation of radio-electric spectrum licenses, both digital and analog (except for cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants where licenses are granted by the PEN). The only article of this law that defines DTT-related matters states that existing terrestrial TV licensees will receive the so-called “mirror signal,” that is, space for one broadcasting signal out of the six or eight possible signals that can be developed on the 6 MHz used by an analog signal.

It should be noted that the democratizing intentions of the law encounter a significant limit in the fact that licenses for cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants will be granted directly by the PEN. As a result of this provision, the decision on the allocation of top spaces in the ether—located in large cities, thus having the greatest advertising potential—is in the hands of an individual (the president of the nation), rather than a collegiate body formed by representatives from multiple sectors of communication and culture (that is, the regulatory authority, AFSCA). This is coupled with the concrete fact that the spectrum in several of such cities had been saturated before the application of the SCA Law.

The law recognizes three types of licensees: public (*estatales*), commercial private, and non-commercial private. An original aspect of the SCA Law is that it reserves 33 percent of the spectrum for non-profit civil society organizations. This reservation applies to both the analog and the digital environment, and is a positive development in terms of diversity, since economic considerations are not the only ones determining who obtains a license. Other groups receiving special treatment, and included under the public (*estatales*) category, are national universities, the Catholic Church, and the indigenous peoples. These groups will receive directly assigned frequencies, with a maximum of one AM radio, one FM radio, and one free-to-air television (as with municipalities and regions). The remaining spectrum, which is estimated to be far more than 50 percent, is available for commercial private operators.

It should be remarked that this process has just begun and it is evolving slowly due to the judicial actions that commercial groups have initiated in order to stop the application of the law, coupled with a certain political sloppiness and indecision on the part of the government and the refusal of opposition parties to join the decision bodies created by the law.

5.1.2 Transparency

The implementation of the digital TV Technical Plan (see sections 2.1.2, 2.1.3 and 2.1.4) has been ongoing since early 2011. The first step will be awarding 12 licenses for new DTT channels. The decision on which frequencies are free and which frequencies are to be reallocated in the spectrum is still to be made. It will

109. Marino, S., G. Mastrini and M. Becerra, 2010.

110. This agency is made up of seven members: two are designated by the PEN, three by the National Congress (two of them from political minorities), and three by the CFC, also created by this new law.

involve collaboration between the licensing body (AFSCA) and the Ministry for Federal Planning through its DTT Advisory Council.

Licenses are awarded by AFSCA in accordance with the SCA Law, with the above-mentioned exception of cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants, where the government retains its discretionary power over spectrum allocation. Licenses are granted as per the criteria established in Law No. 26,522, that is to say, as part of a bidding process. But the law remains silent about DTT licenses. The frequencies that are tendered are those for the Ultra High Frequency (UHF) band, using the radio-electric spectrum in the 21–69 band. That is the band used today by the free-to-air DTT package of the state, supported by public infrastructure and transmission plants.

The award of frequencies in the digital space faces strong criticism from media groups. The focus of most criticism of this process is, on the one hand, the fact that those spaces are granted directly and without any public competition, and on the other, the fact that most licenses are being granted to cable TV operators that did not have a license in the analog spectrum but will obtain a digital one without proper procedure or competition.

As for transparency, it can be said that the Technical Plan for digital TV offers accessible information on the funds invested and the progress made. However, there is some obscurity over the mechanism through which some private companies access licenses to operate digital TV signals and the criteria followed to grant this access.

The group of signals was granted directly by award—as mentioned in the SCA Law—of a series of frequencies for public entities, including provincial governments. In Buenos Aires, the four private terrestrial TV channels that use the VHF band could adhere to the system, because they were enabled to do so in November 2010.¹¹¹ The following frequencies were assigned to them: 33 to Canal Trece (Grupo Clarín); 34 to Telefé (Telefónica de España); 35 to Canal 9 (owned by Mr González), and 36 to América (owned by business group Vila-De Narvárez). Companies face a complex dilemma, since participation entails giving up their intention to obtain and control a full multiplex, while opting out means delaying their access to the digital environment.

5.1.3 Competition for Spectrum

Digitization policy has been focused on expanding the offer of terrestrial signals (several of which have been created to that end) by means of a platform owned by the state, including the development of high-definition signals. Private agents seeking to have the state platform carry their signal, including the channels that belong to the private groups that are politically against the government, require the consent of state bodies. This turns out to be a rather awkward, unique, and inappropriate procedure.

111. In another instance of the key issues involved in the confrontation between the government and some private media, mainly Grupo Clarín.

As mentioned above (see section 5.1.1), the distribution of both spectrum resources and existing signals is controlled by the state. According to the journalist Eduardo Aliverti, the government's protection of its stake in digital switch-over is a "project for change" designed to redress a systemic imbalance that has favored the commercial sector. He believes this in no way implies that the government is using digitization to hamper freedom of expression. He said:

In no way has the government used its media in a monopolist manner to restrain opinions—on the contrary, it has used them to compete with the dominant opinion. This includes some kind of restraint in official media, it's true. But one parameter is the analysis of what the government does inside its media, and another is the analysis of what should be done regarding the media discourse in general. And the general discourse in the media system is clearly anti-government. Faced with this situation, a decision has been made to compete with a starkly different discourse, without nuances from inside the media. This is a typical Argentinean trait, reflecting how politics is understood in Argentina—based entirely on confrontation.¹¹²

5.2 Digital Gatekeeping

5.2.1 Technical Standards

The decision on the standard for digital TV in Argentina involved a complex process with various gains and setbacks. This included a series of decisions made by administrations starting in 1998, each of which changed the the previous one. The deliberations culminated in 2009 with the adoption of the Japanese-Brazilian standard STVD-TB. It was not the result of democratic debate but of strong business lobbies, and the defense of corporate interests.

The saga started with the decision by the ex-president, Carlos Menem, to adopt the ATSC¹¹³ standard in 1998, when Argentina became the fifth country—after the United States, Canada, Taiwan and South Korea—to select it.¹¹⁴ As noted by C. Labate,¹¹⁵ during the Fernando De la Rúa administration, in May 2000, the Secretary of Communications, Henoch Aguiar, announced that the measure adopted by ex-President Menem would be reviewed, claiming that it had been taken on the wrong grounds, based on false considerations about the European format (DVB). The 1998 resolution has, however, remained in force.

The issue was reprised during Néstor Kirchner's administration. In 2006, the Communication Media Secretariat created the Digital TV Systems Study and Analysis Commission, comprising representatives

112. Interview conducted for this report with Eduardo Aliverti, journalist at Radio La Red and *Página 12*, and professor at Buenos Aires University, 18 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

113. SC Resolution No. 2.357, published in *Official Gazette* No. 29,011, 29 October 1998.

114. Luis Albornoz, Pablo Hernández, and Glenn Postolski, *La televisión digital en la Argentina, aproximaciones a un proceso incipiente, en Al fin solos... la nueva televisión del Mercosur*, Albornoz, Luis (compiler), Ciccus/La Crujía, Buenos Aires, 2000.

115. C. Labate, "La televisión pública en la era digital. El caso de canal 7" (Public TV in the digital era. The case of Canal 7), paper submitted at the Eighth ENACOM Meeting, July 2010, p. 11. Available at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/57605841/La-Television-Publica-en-La-Era-Digital-El-Caso-de-Canal-7-Argentina-Cecilia-Labate> (accessed 29 February 2012).

from communications companies, private TV and related associations, as well as the government.¹¹⁶ In its final report, the Commission described the proposals for each standard, except ISBD-T, which was merely mentioned in the introduction as one of the various standards on the market. However, the shift in political dynamics (including the confrontations with Grupo Clarín), coupled with offers by representatives of the Japanese standard and the Japanese government, led to the decision to adopt STVD-TB, the Brazilian variant of the ISDB-T standard. Civil society was excluded from this decision, and was not sufficiently informed (which contrasts with the preparation of the SCA Law).

5.2.2 Gatekeepers

Generally speaking, the TV digitization process has neither created any specific problems relating to gatekeeping nor aggravated pre-existing ones. The barriers to spectrum access confronting not-for-profit civil society sectors were removed by the recent law, and the maximum number of licenses that a single licensee can hold has been reduced, so as to decrease ownership concentration levels. These two elements, coupled with a digital TV signal development policy, could pave the way for democratizing the system. What is pending today is the implementation of the legislation as a whole, granting licenses in the areas where it is already possible, and solving the problem of the saturation of the spectrum in the country's largest urban centers, mainly in broadcasting.

5.2.3 Transmission Networks

For terrestrial TV, the five main channels are located in Buenos Aires city¹¹⁷ (see section 1.3.1). Stations in the rest of the country retransmit most of their programming. The Argentinean cable TV system is a world leader in subscriber base, as it has been traditionally a way to overcome the limitations of terrestrial coverage. Thus, Grupo Clarín has a privileged position in this sector, because it controls Cablevisión (the main cable operator, with a market share of more than 55 percent nationwide, and 80 percent in Buenos Aires city), and the main national signals for news, sports, movies, and general affairs. The distribution of satellite signals is dominated by Direct TV, the only operator in this market, with more than 1.2 million subscribers as of 2011. None of the operators has intervened in spectrum issues, except in those cases in which the owners were also radio and/or television licensees.

5.3 Telecommunications

5.3.1 Telecoms and News

The telecoms companies have attempted to enter the media sector, particularly through triple play services, in an effort to take full advantage of their networks by providing telephony, internet, and cable TV services. However, the telecoms industry has its own regulations, separate from the SCA Law. Telecoms carriers are

116. SC Resolution No. 4, published in *Official Gazette* No. 30,899, 5 May 2006.

117. Canal 7 la Televisión Pública (national State), Canal 2 (América Medios), Canal 9 (Ángel González González), Canal 11 (Telefé, Telefónica), and Canal 13 (Grupo Clarín).

disqualified from the provision of audiovisual services, and telephone licensees are prohibited from accessing broadcasting licenses (in accordance with the terms and conditions governing the privatization of the state operator Entel in 1991).

The legislation that specifically applies to the cable TV distribution sector is enshrined in the SCA Law. According to this legislation, cable TV licensees (individuals and profit and not-for-profit associations, with a maximum of 30 percent foreign capital, among other requirements) may have access to up to a maximum of 24 licenses, each in different areas of coverage, without being able to control more than 35 percent of total subscribers. They are also only qualified to operate one signal of their own, and are barred from terrestrial TV licenses.

The main cable TV operator is the company Cablevisión, owned by Grupo Clarín, which is also the owner of a number of stations, including TN (the country's top news channel, with the highest viewership: see section 1.3.2). This situation has not been subject to any recent changes, in spite of the fact that the enactment of the SCA Law set the foundations for its transformation.

The incipient nature of the digitization process (which is, by the way, centralized in the state), on the one hand, and the impossibility of applying some core aspects of the new legislation (which would reduce the dominant position of some private commercial media groups), on the other hand, have prevented the consolidation of a new landscape, with a larger number of players, to capitalize on the full potential of the technological capabilities enabled by digital TV. One of the things that hampers the application of the new SCA Law is that Grupo Clarín in 2010 obtained an injunctive order from a court of Buenos Aires city suspending the enforcement of Art. 161 (which defines the way in which the licensees holding more than the permitted number of licenses must comply with the new requirements), and therefore it is not yet compelled to give up some of its media. For that reason, in some regions of the country the spectrum still faces the same situation as before the enactment of the law.

The original bill for the SCA Law, submitted by the PEN in March 2009 for discussion in forums and hearings, proposed that basic telephony carriers should be included among licensees, with certain restrictions to reduce their dominant position in network control. The bill proposed that telecoms companies could be holders of a subscription-based TV distribution license over a physical link if the following conditions were met: interconnection with other carriers at any technically feasible point of the network; number portability as a right of the customer/user; network interoperability; de-monopolized access options to and from the national telecommunications system; making technical information available to the other carriers; and refraining from any anti-competitive practices.

During the discussion and debate, many actors opposed this aspect of the regulation. In the negotiations in which various political forces engaged for obtaining votes, the pressures exerted by those seeking to exclude telecoms companies (offering in exchange their support for the government in the passing of the law) prevailed. Thus, the provision of converging services was left unresolved.

5.3.2 Pressure of Telecoms on News Providers

As noted, the telecoms and broadcasting sectors in Argentina still inhabit separate parts of the regulatory framework, in spite of the technological innovations that point in the direction of convergence. Both sectors are highly concentrated markets, with economically dominant groups, such as Grupo Clarín (cable TV) and Telefónica (telecoms), though they face a more competitive environment in internet service provision.

In the subscription TV market, operators must comply with “must carry” and “must offer” obligations. Arts 65 and 66 of the law require subscription TV operators to include, in un-encoded format, the broadcasting of private terrestrial TV channels in their area of coverage, the signals of RTA, all the stations and public signals of the national state, and those signals in which the national state has a stake. Must-carry rules also stipulate a minimum number of signals originating from Mercosur countries and Latin American countries with which the Argentinean Republic has signed, or will sign in the future, agreements for that purpose. Additionally, it requires them to arrange their programming schedule in such a way that all signals in the same category are correlatively listed, and terrestrial TV signals follow an established order of priority based on local, regional, and national coverage.

In the context of pressures on news providers, attention should be drawn to the exclusion of pro-government news stations from the programming schedule of opposing companies. This is the case with Cablevisión (Grupo Clarín), which has not yet included CN23 (national) and Telesur (South America), though it is required to do so under the new law. AFSCA has initiated legal actions to force this operator to organize the grid according to the regulation and to include excluded signals. But this move has been so far unsuccessful. The rest of the operators (Telecentro, Direct TV, and a host of small local operators) have included the signals. Tactics also encompass the inclusion of own signals in key spaces of the programming schedule. In this case, Grupo Clarín places its TN news station at number 11, precisely between 10 and 12 in its programming schedule, corresponding to terrestrial TV channels *Telefé* and *El Trece*, the two channels with the highest viewership in the country.

The fixed telephony market in Argentina is dominated by two players: Telecom (58 percent owned by Telecom Italia, which in turn is owned by Telefónica, and 42 percent owned by the Werthein family),¹¹⁸ and Telefónica de Argentina (controlled by Telefónica de España). When Entel was privatized in 1991, the country was divided into two regions (north and south), each controlled by one carrier. The telecoms landscape was opened up for competition (in a biased manner) in 2000, through Decree No. 764 on the deregulation of the telephone market, with a series of requirements, including the pending right of customers to number portability, in addition to the Universal Service Fund (*Fondo del Servicio Universal*, FSU).¹¹⁹

118. Data as of February 2011.

119. The FSU comprises the funds that finance the costs incurred by telecoms operators when providing service to populations or areas that are not profitable but have to be serviced to respect universal service principles. F. Krakowiak, “*Para que la banda sea cada vez más ancha*” (Let the band get wider), in *Página 12*, 19 October 2010, p. 8.

In October 2010, President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner submitted the National Telecommunications Plan “Argentina Connected” (*Argentina Conectada*), with the goal of democratizing access to new technologies, thus achieving closer integration of the national territory in five years (2010–2014).¹²⁰ The projected investment is US\$ 1,884 million. The measures include the new role to be played by the state company AR-SAT, which will be in charge of expanding the fiber optics network, and will become a broadband wholesale supplier for small and medium-sized businesses, and for cooperatives. As part of the new program, an announcement was made to build public centers where internet connection will be available free. The journalist Fernando Krakowiak commented: “This measure seems to be one of the trade-offs accepted by Telefónica and Telecom to induce the government to finally desist ... from its initial intention to force the Italians to divest in the country after their European partnership with the Spanish ... At least one part of the fiber optics expansion will be funded with Telefónica and Telecom’s contributions to the Universal Service Fund.”

The argument frames the announcement of public policies to intervene in a sector from which the state has remained historically absent, in order to allow the recently merged companies to consolidate a market monopoly. For Mr Becerra:

The recent agreement between the Government and Telefónica/Telecom, validating the telephone monopoly, in view of the equity share that the former has in the latter, is no coincidence. It is the result of a policy that tries to keep alive, with a respirator, an old paradigm, which is incompatible with the needs of a country affected by serious social and geographic inequalities—for which this very paradigm is to a certain degree responsible ... Recent decades have seen structural transformations: Argentina has more than 50 million mobile telephony lines (with 40 million inhabitants), and approximately eight million fixed lines. Agonizing, the ideas of 1989 have put away their “free competition” rhetoric, and endure because the State does not apply rules that would benefit users (such as Decree No. 764/2000), and it does not control a market that is concentrated in two actors, Telefónica and the Mexican company Telmex, owned by tycoon Carlos Slim.¹²¹

Both Telmex and Claro are part of América Móvil, a holding company with businesses throughout Latin America, but which only bundles the Telmex and Claro brands in Argentina, Chile, and Peru. In October 2010, the companies of Carlos Slim in Argentina started operating under a single brand, Claro, after the National Anti-Trust Commission (*Comisión Nacional de Defensa de la Competencia*, CNDC) permitted the decision because it was not a merger of companies but of brands. Until then, the company held the cellular telephony businesses of the Mexican multi-millionaire, and also started to control the activities of Telmex, the supplier of telecoms services for the corporate segment and government areas. Since October 2010, in addition to offering mobile telephony, Claro operates fixed and internet telephony, all invoiced on the same

120. See more at http://www.argentina.ar/_es/pais/C5121-plan-nacional-de-telecomunicacion-argentina-conectada.php (accessed 28 September 2011).

121. M. Becerra, “*Telecomunicaciones, el ocaso de un paradigma*” (Telecommunications, the fall of a paradigm), p. 12, at www.mbecerra.blog.unq.edu.ar/modules/news/article.php?storyid=717 accessed 28 September 2011). (hereafter M. Becerra, “*Telecomunicaciones, el ocaso de un paradigma*”).

bill, and delivered with its own infrastructure. The decision to operate under a single brand was based on the intention to extend to the fixed-line sector (dominated by Telecom and Telefónica) the leadership that the company has in the mobile telephony business, where it provides services for more than 18 million customers, compared with 16.4 million for Movistar (Telefónica), and 15.3 million for Personal (Telecom).

As Mr Becerra points out, “The State does not carry out a cost analysis or impose obligations on the actors with a dominant position. In reciprocity, the market tolerates the regulation of fixed telephony rates in exchange for fancying the fiction that mobile telephony is a luxury product with free prices.”¹²² This critical view attributes the reasons for inequality to the structuring of the neo-liberal model, and the logic that was shaped in telecommunications and broadcasting policy. And it marks the impossibility of altering its negative consequences outside the current system. Mobile telephony represents 65 percent of the income of telephone companies, a market whose revenues amounted to ARS 24 billion (US\$ 5.66 billion) in 2009.

5.4 Assessments

The extent to which the Argentinean process is politicized as a result of the dispute between the government and opposing media groups is not restricted to the administration of the spectrum and the granting of licenses, it encompasses the whole set of measures involved in government communication policies, starting with the government’s own actions.

The Argentinean media system is still shaking off the shackles of the regulatory framework bequeathed to it by military rule in 1980. This set the foundations for a broadcasting sector that was centralist, privatist, and commercial, depriving multiple sectors of their right to information.

Subsequently, during 25 years of constitutional rule, arguably even less democratic conditions have been instituted for access to spectrum. This has been the result of procedures and steps taken by the state, as well as pressures exerted by the market, which took up the role of promoting neo-liberal policies particularly after 1989. The passing of the SCA Law, however, represents a potential shift in direction, with the state acting as guarantor of social rights in communication.

In our opinion, the discussion on the democratic regulation of the media is a phenomenon that surpasses the national dimension, and is part of a healthy Latin American process. For the first time in history, the citizenship, with a more active role in civil society organizations, has embarked on discussions and initiatives on public communication policies, outside any implicit agreements between governments and media owners. Such has been the case of the debate on the SCA Law, with its public discussions and open forums, which constitute an unprecedented event in the history of media policy in the country.

122. M. Becerra, “*Telecomunicaciones, el ocaso de un paradigma*,” p. 13.

The framing of the SCA Law was a legal advance that, if enforced to its plenitude, would have a democratizing effect on spectrum allocation. But it will be counterbalanced by two issues: first, the view of digital spectrum allocation as a tool to create an alternative to commercial media opposed to the government; and second, the fact that in the main cities licenses will not be granted by AFSCA but by the PEN.

For all its virtues and defects, the parliamentary debate on the SCA Law has expanded understanding of the kind of support that the state provides for the media, while introducing the problem—yet to be resolved—of the technological convergence of audiovisual media, telecoms, and the internet, plus the need to extend the agenda of the democratization of communications.

As mentioned, in Argentina there is no clear definition of how the digital dividend will be used, and the issue has not been raised for debate either. In this context, there is no reference to public interest, the values of public service, or of socio-cultural objectives, in the allocation of white spaces, other than a bare mention in the SCA Law proposing a decision be made for the future. The announcement of an investment in the development of the telecoms sector made by the government in 2010 includes, as one of its main goals, the desire to meet the communication needs of the public interest, but the process is just in the early stages of development.

6. Digital Business

6.1 Ownership

6.1.1 Legal Developments in Media Ownership

In October 2009 the Congress passed the SCA Law governing audiovisual media: radio, terrestrial TV, cable TV, and satellite TV. The new law replaced the Broadcasting Law (*Ley de Radiodifusión*) inherited from the last military dictatorship (1976–1983), which in turn had been amended over a period of 20 years.

The law introduced in 2009 implies major changes in terms of ownership, as one of its stated objectives is to promote the deconcentration of the media market by lowering the threshold on the number of permitted media owned by the same owner, and to encourage more diversity, both in ownership and contents.

The SCA Law sets major limits on the number of audiovisual service licenses that an individual operator can hold. For satellite TV services, an operator may hold only one license for the entire territory. Furthermore, such a license disqualifies the holder from holding any other license for any other broadcasting service. There is no restriction on cross-ownership between broadcasting companies and newspapers.

For terrestrial TV and radio broadcasting services, there is a maximum limit of 10 licenses. In Argentina there are no broadcast licenses for national coverage, and permits are granted for coverage areas in a radius of approximately 70 km. A maximum of 24 licenses has been established for cable TV services. Cable TV licensees may not hold terrestrial TV licenses in the same coverage area.

In parallel, the law sets a cap on the market share that a single licensee can reach: it determines that no individual operator may provide services for more than 35 percent of the population or of the market for a service covered by the law. This restriction represents in fact a limitation for those having licenses in the AMBA region. Considering that approximately 33 percent of the Argentinean population resides in the AMBA, the regulation effectively precludes license-holders in that region from holding licenses in other regions.

A maximum of three licenses may be held in a single area of coverage. Cable TV operators have the obligation to provide a signal with local content, but can only distribute a signal owned by the operator, while all others have to be purchased by external producers.

Finally, the new regulation introduces a number of limitations on the establishment of broadcasting networks. The most important one requires operators that become part of a chain to ensure that content produced by other operators within the network is limited to 30 percent of airtime. In all cases, there are no restrictions on cross-ownership between audiovisual and print media.

Considering that the previous law established the overall maximum limit at 24 licenses, permitted chains without restrictions, and had even fewer cross-ownership limitations, the change has been quite significant. More importantly, Art. 161 of the SCA Law granted all media companies exceeding the new quotas at the time the law was passed a one-year term to adjust to the new regulatory framework. The article has stirred up much controversy, and Grupo Clarín (the group that is most affected by the SCA Law) filed a complaint in court at the end of 2009. In 2010 it obtained two court decisions ordering the interim suspension of this article until it was resolved whether or not the retroactive enforcement of the law was constitutional. The suspension order applies to Grupo Clarín only.

Less than two years after the law was passed, and after overcoming legal obstacles that hindered its immediate application, it is too soon to evaluate its impact on the media map. So far, no substantive modifications have been observed. The newly appointed authority, AFSCA, created by Law No. 26.522, has the power to force owners to sell those media outlets that exceed the legal ownership quota. Originally, a transition period of one year was introduced to allow owners to adapt to the new regulations. However, due to the legal challenges by media owners, this deadline is not being enforced. It may be assumed, however, that if the provisions of the law are honored, there will be a positive result for pluralism and diversity and increased national and regional content production.

The AFSCA was established by the SCA Law to enforce the norms against concentration and to run the process of granting licenses. This body is composed of seven members, two appointed by the PEN, three by parliament (among which two need to be appointed by opposition parties), and two by the National Communication Council (*Consejo Federal de Comunicación*).¹²³ Opposition parties have refused to appoint any members in solidarity with media owners, and AFSCA has as a result been functioning with five members only.

What has undoubtedly been observed is an unflinching resistance by media owners to the new regulation, through both national (ATA, ATVC, ADEPA, CEMCI)¹²⁴ and regional organizations (IAPA, AIR).¹²⁵ The argument presented by the business sector is that the intervention of the state as regulator of the functioning of the media operates as a restriction on freedom of the press. And though the law design can be considered

123. The National Communication Council (*Consejo Federal de Comunicación*) is a consulting body with representatives of the provinces, workers, universities, media owners, and civil society organizations.

124. Association of Argentinean TV Broadcasters (*Asociación de Televisoras Argentinas*, ATA), Cable TV Association (*Asociación de televisión por cable*, ATVC), Association of Argentinean Journalistic Entities (*Asociación de Entidades Periodísticas Argentinas*, ADEPA), Entrepreneurial Commission of Independent Communication Media (*Comisión Empresarial de Medios de Comunicación Independientes*, CEMCI). Given their high levels of multimedia concentration, some media groups are members in all of these associations. Grupo Clarín and Grupo Vila-Manzano are two examples.

125. Inter-American Press Association (IAPA), Inter-American Radio Broadcasters' Association (AIR).

a movement towards a more democratic media system, the government has not applied the law in a way consistent with the law's objectives.

Generally, it may be claimed that the orientation of the new law is not aligned with mainstream trends worldwide, as it does not include the loosening of limits to ownership concentration, and it does not encourage cross-ownership. The law has received a lot of attention in the region. In several South American countries, moderately leftist political forces have taken it as a beacon of social action in the media sphere.

It should also be remarked that in the original drafting of the bill it was allowed for telecom companies to enter the media sector, though with severe limitations to prevent them from becoming dominant players. However, the government removed that provision during the parliamentary debates in order to secure the votes of left-wing parties which supported the law. In the privatization process of the former state telecom company Entel in 1990 it was established that companies would have a monopoly in the telephone market but were forbidden from entering the broadcasting market. Laws Nos. 22.285/80 and 26.522/09 prevent companies providing or distributing public services like gas, energy or telecoms from entering the audiovisual sector. In any event, and taking advantage of the ambiguous dispositions of some laws (Laws Nos. 25.750/03 and 26.053) and the inactivity of the government, Telefonica of Spain owns one of the most prominent channels in the city of Buenos Aires, and a few more in the interior. It should be remarked that Telefonica keeps separate company structures and does not provide convergent services, in order to avoid obvious conflict with the telecoms' regulatory framework (Decree PEN 764/00), that prohibits the ownership of communication media by telecoms service providers.

6.1.2 New Entrants in the News Market

The strongest concentration of media ownership in Argentina can be traced back to the 1990s, when the regulatory framework was modified, removing the restrictions on cross-ownership of the media and allowing the creation of large multimedia companies.

In 1989 Grupo Clarín entered the audiovisual market and became the largest media group in the country and a significant player at regional level. It owns the leading newspaper in the country in circulation and revenues, and one of the most important TV stations in Buenos Aires city in audience size (retransmitted in several provinces). It holds more than 50 percent of the pay-TV market, and controls news agencies, paper pulp mills, and film and TV production companies. Another prominent group is Telefónica, which has a system of terrestrial TV stations, and controls fixed and mobile telephony in the country, in addition to 60 percent of broadband connections. In the past, the company also operated radio stations, and had a stake in the cable TV system, in spite of legal impediments (as noted above). The group does not have print media, but is one of the largest advertisers in all media markets because of its telephone business, particularly in the mobile segment. It should be noted (see section 5.3.1) that the legal framework formally prohibits telephone companies from providing audiovisual media. But the company has deployed a strategy of *fait accompli*, pressure on parliament and government, and strong lobbying, enabling it to date to effectively bypass these limitations in violation of the law.

Without respect for the legal framework in force, Telefónica manages *Telefé* in Buenos Aires city, keeping the formality of showing a separate business structure. The third most important player is Grupo Vila-Manzano, which expanded from the province of Mendoza to the rest of the country, and has achieved major coverage in several provinces (though it has no penetration in the capital). It has a 25 percent market share of pay-TV subscribers, controls several newspapers in provincial capitals, and has radio and TV stations.

Perhaps in view of the established market power wielded by these groups, no new major media entities have emerged in Argentina over the past five years. The creation and growth over the past five years of Grupo Szpolski-Garfunkel is noteworthy, as it has several papers, magazines, cable TV signals, and radio stations. The group has very close ties with the government, and receives substantial support in the form of state advertising. In any event, none of its individual media outlets reaches significant audiences and its relevance seems more political than economic.

Another actor that is worth mentioning is the state. The near-monopolization of digital TV by the state has reinforced its presence on the media map (see section 5).

As mentioned, the SCA Law reserves 33 percent of the radio-electric spectrum for non-profit civil society organizations. It is still too early to speculate on the impact of this measure, whose implementation has been delayed to date.

6.1.3 Ownership Consolidation

The relation between media ownership concentration, and pluralism and diversity is a complex one. In the case of Argentina, the main problem here at this point in history is the confrontation between the government and the major media groups. As mentioned, the confrontation which started in early 2008 has created a media alignment on either of two sides: for the government (mostly state-run media, plus some private media with low readership/viewership), or against the government (the main newspapers, and radio and TV stations in the country). On both sides, journalistic impartiality has been lost. Journalists are barely able to write independently from the conflict and political polarization that it has spawned. They even admit, off-the-record, that their work is highly affected by such dynamics; if they write something that is not fully aligned with the editorial line, it will not get published, and if they write in accordance with the editorial line, their work will not be valued for its integrity.

Concentration of media ownership since the 1990s has had a collateral effect on independent media, particularly as regards the acquisition of independent outlets based in the interior (e.g., the newspaper *La Voz del Interior* in Córdoba, or the newspaper *Los Andes* in Mendoza, which merged into Grupo Clarín; or *La Capital*, in Rosario, acquired by Grupo Vila-Manzano). This has had an accompanying impact on the diversity of news contents, which can be perceived in that several newspapers from different provinces share the same national information. Concentration of ownership has also affected the job market for journalists, who have fewer opportunities to find employment if they decide to leave the company they work for.

The vertical integration of the business structure of major media groups is often considered to have a negative impact on pluralism in view of the control exerted by the same owner on the various links of the news production chain. But a positive aspect can be highlighted in the Argentinean case: the consolidation of a strong audiovisual industry, particularly in the cable TV sector, has encouraged the proliferation of a large number of small content production companies. This productive capacity has been reflected not only in Argentinean pay-TV, which features a good proportion of national programming, but also in a significant increase of audiovisual exports. According to the British Television Distributors' Association, with 40,000 hours' worth of TV content exports during 2010, Argentina ranks fourth, after the UK, the United States, and the Netherlands, in media content exports.¹²⁶

But the economic success of the sector does not translate into plurality. In December 2007, the government approved the merger of the two largest cable TV operators that existed at the time. Cablevisión acquired Multicanal, and both ended up in the hands of Grupo Clarín, which acquired more than 50 percent of the country's pay-TV subscriber base. However, the worst effects of the merger were seen in many cities of the interior, where the service turned into a monopoly. As a result, residents of those cities have had to face an increase in the cost of service in a market where there is no competition. Another adverse effect was the disappearance of many local signals, because the large cable TV operators unify programming to the detriment of local content.

In general terms, even though the current government has sustained a public discourse in favor of reducing media concentration, concentration is still high, with a partial exception in the radio market.¹²⁷ While there is a certain degree of diversity in the media offering, especially in the city of Buenos Aires, both audiences and economic power are mostly concentrated in two groups, Clarín and Telefónica. The existence of a handful of other somewhat smaller groups does not challenge the dominant position of these two larger groups.

6.1.4 Telecoms Business and the Media

The telecom companies have attempted, as mentioned in section 5, to enter the media sector, through triple play services providing telephony, internet, and cable TV services. Telephone companies, which have invested heavily in digitizing their networks, are trying to enter the cable market in order to maximize the returns on that investment. They have, however, encountered some hurdles. The conditions established for the privatization of the state telephone company granted a 10-year monopoly to telecoms providing telephone services, but also restricted them from entering the audiovisual market. On the other hand, both the Broadcasting Law No. 22285/80 and the SCA Law No. 26522/09 set strict restrictions on the penetration of telecoms in the television market. In terms of market competition, big players in the cable market (mostly Clarín) have so far been successful in barring telecoms from entering this territory. Considering their investment in digitizing networks and their financial strength, incumbents fear telecoms may become dominant players once they enter the cable market.

126. British Television Distributors Association (BTDA). Report mentioned on the website of the Ministry of Economic Development of the City of Buenos Aires, at <http://buenosairesexporta.blogspot.com/2011/08/de-granero-set-del-mundo.html> (accessed 2 October 2011).

127. Radio, for its part, is the least important media platform economically, but the one that admits the largest number of different voices. Of more than 4,000 stations, a mere handful are economically sound; these command most of the audience.

The Spanish telecom group Telefónica has implemented various legal and business strategies to overcome these limitations in the field of free-to-air television. As a result, Telefónica manages the licence of one of the main free-to-air channels in Buenos Aires (Telefé), plus seven others in the rest of the country. They are formally two different companies, but channels are under Telefonica's control.

Telefónica Group has been particularly proactive in this respect, in line with the group's regional policy. In a bid to circumvent legal restrictions on telephone companies entering television markets, it has set up agreements with DirecTV (satellite TV) to offer joint services packages independently operated by each carrier.

Mr Krakowiak believes the current status of the sector in Argentina is defined by the confrontation between Telefónica and Grupo Clarín.¹²⁸ The Spanish owners of Telefónica argue that the continuity of the prohibition that prevents them from providing broadcasting services is the result of constant lobbying by Grupo Clarín to protect its interests in the cable industry.

6.1.5 Transparency of Media Ownership

In Argentina there are no rules requiring print media to publicly disclose data on their holding structure or their financial results. However, both Grupo Clarín and the telecom companies are listed on the Stock Exchange, and as such, they are required to publish their financial statements.

The SCA Law has imposed additional transparency obligations on broadcasters. Art. 48 requires them to keep a shareholder register for each licensee, while Art. 49 requires the regulatory authority (AFSCA) to have a public record of licensees available for consultation on the web. The measure also affects advertising companies, program producers, and foreign cable TV stations with broadcasting rights in Argentina.

The law's implementation is currently in progress, so this register was in preparation at the time this report was drafted, and its functioning could not be verified. But as of today is generally difficult to know who owns the media in Argentina, save for those companies that are publicly traded in the stockmarket. Middlemen are common, and often licenses are administered by someone who is not the official grantee.

6.2 Funding

6.2.1 Public and Private Funding

The main source of funding for media in Argentina is advertising. Advertising spend throughout 2010 exceeded US\$3 billion (ARS 12.34 billion). According to reports from the Argentinean Chamber of Media Agencies (*Cámara Argentina de Agencias de Medios*, CAAM),¹²⁹ official figures for the January–December

128. F. Krakowiak, "El gobierno sueña con el post fibertel" (The government dreams with the Post Fibertel), *Página 12*, at <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/economia/2-152530.html> (accessed 4 January 2012).

129. See www.agenciasdemedios.com.ar (accessed 15 March 2011).

2010 period point to a strong 38.6 percent increase compared with the same period of the previous year. This increase is explained partly by inflationary factors, and partly by the actual growth of the advertising market, which has been aligned with the macroeconomic growth experienced over the past five years.

This phenomenon cannot be understood unless its background is explained: in 2001 and 2002, Argentina sustained a profound economic crisis that led, among other things, to the default of its foreign debt, coupled with unprecedented levels of poverty and unemployment. The impact of the crisis on the advertising market can be seen from the fact that national spend fell from US\$ 3.28 billion in 1998 to barely US\$ 400 million in 2002.¹³⁰ From 2003 onwards, it experienced a significant rebound. See Table 15.

Table 15.
Evolution of advertising spend in the media, 2006–2010

Year	Spend, RS million	Annual change %	Spend, US\$ million	Annual change %	Annual GDP growth %
2006	4,903		1,602.2		8.5
2007	6,031	23.0	1,920.7	19.8	8.7
2008	7,594	25.9	2,201.1	14.6	7.0
2009	8,902	17.2	2,342.6	6.4	0.9
2010	12,340	38.6	3,085.0	31.7	8.2

Source: Chart prepared for this study based on data provided by CAAM, INDEC, and the official exchange rate as of 31 December of each year: CAAM, Annual Reports 2006/2007/2008/2009/2010; INDEC, Annual Reports 2006/2007/2008/2009/2010.

As Table 15 shows, there is a strong correlation between the development of the advertising market and the country's economy, though the growth in advertising spend seems to be more elastic than the country's GDP. This is partly explained by inflationary pressures as reflected in the difference between the annual change in advertising spend in U.S. dollars and Argentinean pesos (ARS).

An analysis of the variation of distribution among the different media types attracting advertising spend leads to the conclusion that there have been no strong shifts over the past five years. There has been progressive growth of advertising on the internet and cable TV.¹³¹ According to the Argentinean Association of Advertising Agencies (*Asociación Argentina de Agencias de Publicidad*, AAAP), online advertising has grown from 0.8 percent of total advertising (US\$ 10.8 million) in 2005 to 3.9 percent (US\$ 132 million) in 2010.¹³² There has also been a slight drop in print media, especially in the Interior. Terrestrial TV in the AMBA is the largest advertising platform, capturing one-third of the total spend.

130. It is worth noting that Argentinean monetary policy between 1989 and 2001 led to the over-valuation of the Argentine peso, so figures stated in U.S. dollars are distorted. In early 2002 there was a process of peso devaluation: its cost went from US\$ 1 to US\$ 4. This explains why advertising investment plummeted, in tandem with the decline of economic activity throughout the year 2002.

131. See <http://www.agenciasdemedios.com.ar/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/informe-oficial-inversi%3%b3n-publicitaria-argentina-2010-caam-para-aaap3.pdf> (accessed 7 January 2012).

132 See http://190.220.150.93/webaaap/wp-content/inversion_publicitaria/2009/argentina/cuadro_evolucion_inversion_publicitaria_1999-2009.pdf (accessed 7 January 2012).

Another revenue stream for the audiovisual sector is TV subscriptions. The reader is reminded that Argentina has cable TV penetration indices above 70 percent over the entire population. There is no precise figure for subscription revenues, but the sources interviewed for this study believe it stands at approximately US\$ 800 million for 2010.

Finally, a third sector that increasingly contributes higher revenues is the export of audiovisual formats and programs created by TV channels and by independent production companies. Figures so far have been modest: according to data from the National Department of Culture, in 2010 this revenue stream would amount to approximately US\$ 100 million. However, it has experienced a significant growth in recent years.

In summary, media funding is largely dependent on the advertising industry, and supported by the revenues generated by pay-TV. The volume of advertising revenues is poorly distributed geographically, and is highly concentrated in the AMBA. Media in the interior generate scarce advertising revenues, and are exposed to dependence on official advertising.

In Argentina there is no explicit public policy governing the funding of private media. Radio and TV stations run by the national state (Canal 7 and Radio Nacional) and provincial states (numerous broadcasters in different provinces) are funded through the government. Though national budget items are assigned every year, the amounts allocated to state media over the past five years have lacked any transparency. In 2009, according to journalistic sources like *La Nación*, the SNMP, which oversees all state-run media, received subsidies amounting to US\$ 112 million.

Public radio and TV are funded by a mixture of direct taxation, state budget allocation, advertising sales, content sales, and various non-profit sources. But in spite of this diversity of sources, most of the financing comes from the national treasury, which at times had to provide extraordinary funds to pay for salaries. Public media have historically generated large deficits.

In 2009, the SNMP's projected budget amounted to US\$ 87.36 million, but according to reports from the Argentinean Association of Public Funding Budget and Administration (*Asociación Argentina de Presupuesto y Administración Financiera Pública*, ASAP), the government had to allocate an extra US\$ 5 million in August 2009 to pay salaries, while the budget for 2010 included an extra caption, "financial assistance for operating expenses," for an additional US\$ 12 million.

Table 16.
Public TV budget and average rating (as % of total population), 2009–2010

	2009			2010		
	ARS (million)	US\$ (million)	Rating	ARS (M)	US\$ (million)	Rating
Canal 7	332.2	87.36	1.7	380	95	1.9

Source: Based on data from the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (*Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento*, CIPPEC (for Canal 7 Budget) and IBOPE (for Rating).

Furthermore, in recent years, official advertising has played a major role. According to the latest data available for 2009, advertising spend by the state stood at approximately US\$ 171 million. According to the Association for Civil Rights (*Asociación por los Derechos Civiles*, ADC), this figure shows 64 percent growth compared with the previous year. Though official advertising represents less than 8 percent of the advertising spend, and its management in Argentina has always been discretionary, recent governments have increased its volume, as well as favoritism for media that have affinities with the PEN. However, a Supreme Court decision in March 2011 required the government to refrain from discriminating against private media in the distribution of official advertising, though it seems that no significant changes have occurred since then. The influence of official advertising on the independence of the media is especially negative in the interior, where the state (in this case, provincial), is the main advertiser in most media. One of the most prominent cases has been the one involving the newspaper *Diario de Rio Negro* and Neuquén province. After some criticism of the provincial government in the newspaper, the provincial government decided to withdraw all official advertising from it. The National Supreme Court mandated the province to include the paper in its advertising plans.

Table 17.
State (national) official advertising spend, 2005–2009

Year	ARS	% annual variation	US\$	% annual variation
2005	127,462,075	28	42,487,000	25
2006	209,638,868	64	68,589,000	61
2007	332,392,600	55	105,857,000	54
2008	396,307,367	23	114,871,000	9
2009	649,569,411	64	170,939,000	48

Sources: *La publicidad oficial del Poder Ejecutivo Nacional durante 2009* (Advertising by the National Executive in 2009), ADC, Buenos Aires, November 2010.

6.2.2 Other Sources of Funding

Over the past five years, no new forms of funding have emerged. The digital dividend has not been taken advantage of economically speaking. No bids or auctions have been introduced to utilize the spectrum generated by digitization. Digital and analog media companies have pursued new ways of generating advertising revenue streams in the digital environment, but with no notable success to date. These are discussed further in the following section.

6.3 Media Business Models

6.3.1 Changes in Media Business Models

Digitization has affected the business models of analog media, mainly because it has introduced the availability of large amounts of content and information free of charge for users. For instance, print media have faced a decline in sales after their news have become available online. The causal relationship could be inferred—

though no hard data on the subject are available—from the fact that the print media that have lost fewer readers are those that appeal to a popular audience with less internet access, such as the *Diario Popular*. In contrast, pay-TV does not seem to have been adversely affected by digitization to date, as the number of subscribers continues to grow steadily. Conversely, terrestrial TV has faced increased competition due to the encroachment of cable TV, and has experienced a reduction in audience reach as a result (though this has not yet entailed a reduction of advertising revenues). With the arrival of digital terrestrial TV, some journalists speculate that if the state ultimately manages to deploy an offering of 15 free-to-air digital channels in the main cities, this new landscape could seriously affect the business models of both commercial terrestrial and pay-TV. However, such a hypothesis has yet to be empirically demonstrated.

So far, the sector that has felt the impact of digitization most acutely has been print media. Sales have decreased steadily in recent years (though not in the same proportion, all papers have reported varying declines over the past five years). In 2009 and 2010, both *Clarín* and *La Nación* have placed their bets on the consolidation of their analog and digital editorial staff, thus obtaining a cost reduction. However, the traditional revenue model consisting of cover price and advertising revenues has been threatened by the drop in circulation, and the revenues from digital adverts are not yet sufficient to offset the loss.

For that reason, papers have taken the lead in redefining the business model. Mr D'Atri (editor-in-chief, Clarin.com),¹³³ summarizes some of the strategies that were introduced, with the aim of building loyalty to the brand:

The internet has allowed journalism to play the role of a service. Any website today has a front page with more classic contents, but all of them include services. Clarin.com today has entertainment directories, job searches, car searches, foreign exchange rate tools ... there are more than one hundred services. This explains the high level of loyalty and credibility that websites are creating. Faced with the debate on how to increase the profitability of what is offered for free to mass audiences, and how to replace the revenues of print media, loyalty-building should be acknowledged as a good strategy ... A very dynamic process is taking place, in which each of the companies is at different stages that depend on previous economics. It has soon dawned on the media that the main sources of income of the traditional business model –i.e. classifieds and car ads, personnel searches, and real estate searchers – could not be lost. *Clarín* has developed a real estate website that leads to major revenue levels.

Mr Roitberg of *La Nación* agrees on the importance of safeguarding sectors of the traditional business, like classified ads, and building loyalty in the audience:

As regards the business model, you have the online classified ads. The media make large investments in e-commerce sites (*La Nación* invested US\$32 million in its own), because

133. Interview conducted for this report with Darío D'Atri, editor-in-chief of Clarin.com, 11 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

they used to live on three sources of revenue: advertising, sales, and classifieds. All three are declining, but the largest threat so far has been found in classified ads. Another business model is Club La Nación, which on the one hand builds loyalty with readers, and on the other hand, links us with other entities in a network.¹³⁴

The external communications manager of Grupo Clarín, Martín Etchevers, believes that generalist media have failed in their attempt to charge readers for subscriptions, and are looking for new formats and supports to sustain new business models, for instance, with tablets. He expects that some niche opportunities may be developed to get a return over the investment in contents, but this is in the analysis and trial stage.¹³⁵

Ariel Barlaro (director of NexTV Latam) is more skeptical about the business model in the digital environment:

With all of this, traditional concepts are check-mated. Everyone wants free services but no one raises the question of how media will afford the production of contents. Options are problematic: consumption could be expanded to generate new revenues from new subscriptions to existing and new services, or the advertising pie could be extended (which is difficult, because the advertising-to-revenue percentage in companies is always static, and in any case, it goes hand in hand with the overall growth of the economy), or the product and content quality is significantly lowered, or some media will eventually die, or the State will take over the construction of infrastructures promoting new value chains, or the State will accept subsidizing certain groups, assigning certain priorities. This latter option obviously requires changing the very notion of communication, if the intervention of the State is legitimized to ensure communication for certain groups.¹³⁶

In sum, the media acknowledge the impact digitization has had (and will have) on their business model, and as a result they are trying to devise winning strategies for the new environment. Thus far, however, these strategies do not coincide among different media and lack a clear focus.

6.4 Assessments

It cannot be inferred that the digitization process has increased concentration in media ownership. In any case, the media outlets with dominant positions in the analog environment have also managed to position themselves as the most important players in the digital environment. In that manner, though the provision of information is much more diverse, consumption continues to be highly concentrated. It is yet to be analyzed

134. Interview conducted for this report with Gastón Roitberg, Multimedia Assistant Managing Editor, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, 22 February 2011.

135. Interview conducted for this report with Martín Etchevers, external communications manager of Grupo Clarín, 8 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

136. Interview conducted for this report with Adrian Barlaro, director of NexTVLatam, 8 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

how capable the national government will be in the coming months to enforce the maximum cap of a 35 percent market share required by the new SCA Law.

There is strong pressure from telecoms companies to provide converging services as a result of opportunities presented by digitization. The provision of triple and quadruple play services could increase the already high levels of concentrated market power in the telecoms sector. So far, lobbying by media companies and some degree of political reluctance have hindered this development.

As for transparency, digitization favors access to data about companies, particularly those publicly listed ones which are compelled to publish annual reports. There are no remarkable voluntary transparency initiatives on the part of media companies. The SCA Law promotes greater transparency with regard to the structure of all licensed broadcasters, but such legislation is in the implementation phase.

It is difficult to establish a direct relationship between the concentration process and the level of media pluralism and diversity. In any case there has not been a noteworthy intensification or slackening in market concentration over the last five years in the media and telecoms sectors generally.

The independence of the media in Argentina has nonetheless been compromised over this period. The change is not due to digitization but to the political polarization between the government and the main commercial media groups that has developed since 2008.

There is no glimpse yet of a stable business model for the digital world. The media are looking for funding options, with none of them proving particularly sustainable to date. Advertising financing continues to prevail in private media, though it faces problems derived from a tendency towards audience dispersion in the digital world.

The state is poised to be a major player in the media market, due to both the use of official advertising as an enabler of media sustainability, and its decisive participation in the deployment of digital TV.

7. Policies, Laws, and Regulators

7.1 Policies and Laws

7.1.1 Digital Switch-over of Terrestrial Transmission

7.1.1.1 Access and Affordability

In August 2009, the government adopted the Japanese-Brazilian ISDB-T TV standard (see section 5.2.1), and one month later, it issued decree 1148/09, introducing SATVD-T. At the same time Decree No. 1785/09 established the Advisory Council of SATVD-T, all within the sphere of the PEN. It also introduced a 10-year term (2019) for the analog switch-off. Consequently, operators and users still have plenty of time to migrate to. Broader switch-over policy was enshrined in the SCA Law passed in 2009, which began to be implemented in 2010.

Since then, the government has assumed leadership in the deployment of digital TV, so far with feeble support from commercial players. The government has made—and is making—the first digital signal transmissions; it funds the purchase of the infrastructure, including transmitter and repeater towers; it is handing out set-top boxes free,¹³⁷ to low-income sectors of the population (it is estimated that some 600,000 set-top boxes were distributed to beneficiaries of social welfare plans,¹³⁸ and pensioners from early 2010 to March 2011); it assigns provisional licenses to some carriers willing to carry out trials (licenses are granted under provisional terms because the SCA Law includes a provision requiring licenses to be awarded as a result of competitive bidding processes), and subsidizes content production.

Under this scheme, the following operators provide digital transmission:

- state-run: Canal 7, Canal Encuentro, PakaPaka, INCAA TV, Tatetí, Turismo Argentina HD, Telesur (owned by various Latin American countries including Argentina, with Latin American coverage in particular);
- privately managed (with no link to analog open TV licensees): C5N, CN23, GolTV, Video Éxito, Vivra.

137. See http://www.argentina.ar/_es/pais/C3792-plan-mi-tv-digital-como-acceder-al-receptor.php (accessed 28 February 2011).

138. Information provided by the government. See <http://www.tda.gob.ar/contenidos/home.html> (accessed 21 May 2011).

According to Carla Rodríguez Miranda,¹³⁹ “in this setting, the State assumes a leading role in the development of DTT but fails to agree on a strategic and transversal position with the other social sectors. Private broadcasters are waiting for the 6Mhz allocation for the simulcasting process, still pending definition, so their investments in DTT contents and networks are frozen.”

There are no binding obligations for state or privately managed operators beyond the provision of free-to-air transmission. However, there is no rule or law supporting this situation; rather, it follows the course of customary free-to-air transmission in the history of terrestrial analog broadcasting. There are no indications of how spectrum allocated to each operator is to be utilized. Nor is there certainty over whether the current licensees of terrestrial analog TV will simply enjoy a mirror channel—a digital reproduction of their analog signal that would permit the remaining bandwidth to be used for the benefit of non-profitable social sectors—or whether they will be granted the full bandwidth for them to decide if they will broadcast in HD or in a lower definition.¹⁴⁰

All operators, however, have to comply with a set of obligations set forth by the SCA Law, including respecting the hours of special protection for children, the length of advertising blocks (12 minutes/hour), inclusion of the closed caption service, and percentages of own production and local production, among others.

7.1.1.2 Subsidies for Equipment

As noted above, the government launched a scheme for the distribution of 1.2 million set-top boxes that are delivered free of charge to low-income sectors (the beneficiaries of welfare plans and pensioners). This scheme is funded by the national budget. The rest of the population can buy their set-top boxes at home appliance stores (with prices ranging from US\$ 150 to US\$ 250, depending on model), or access digital TV through mobile telephony, though the stock of mobile telephony equipment enabled for digital TV reception is still limited. Penetration of digital TV in the population is still very low compared with cable and satellite TV. The high penetration of cable TV partly explains the fact that so far migration to digital TV has been slow: if 70 percent of households have a menu with more than 75 cable stations, changing to a system that until September 2011 was only received in large cities and includes approximately 10 signals is not very attractive for many viewers, even if DTT reception is free.

139. Interview conducted for this report with Carla Rodríguez Miranda, a PhD student doing her research on digital TV, 1 February 2011, Buenos Aires.

140. For Ms Rodríguez Miranda, “The combination of services that can be developed based on the digitization of signals under the ISDB-T standard is multiple and diverse. For instance, a multiplex can transmit two HD signals or six SD signals. HD production has high fixed costs, therefore, starting the implementation process in SD is recommendable, and it would also enable including new actors. But it is a decision on the DTT model to be adopted: whether or not to keep the existing balance. Other services: mobility, which is the transmission of contents on OneSeg, i.e. contents reaching mobile phones without using telecommunication networks, portability that could serve a captive market with an advertising-based system, and interactive services that depend on the return channel. It is still unclear whether these services will be paid or free, so there is much uncertainty surrounding the combined business model, coupled with the lack of rules of the game for convergence.” (Interview, 1 February 2011, in Buenos Aires)

7.1.1.3 Legal Provisions on Public Interest

In Argentina, as in most Latin American countries, the definition of the term “public interest” is controversial. In the first place, there is neither a legal mandate bestowing on communication media the protection or construction of public interest, nor is there any regulation for public interest. The only media that are required by law to serve cultural, political, and news pluralism are the state-run media. However, as mentioned above, the media managed by the state have historically been strongly biased in favor of the government, compared with the media situation in western Europe, for example.

The SCA Law marked a potential step forward from the legal standpoint in separating the functions of state-run media from political, editorial, and economic subordination to the administration in office. But this potential has not yet been realized. In this context, legal obligations for state-run media in Argentina have remained effectively unchanged in the face of digitization. In fact, while the new law establishes in its Art. 121 (inc. b) that public media should “respect and promote political, religious, social, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic plurality,” in practice new programs in the media managed by the state only have as guests government officials and government supporters.

In Argentina, there is no transparency in digital switch-over funding. The plan for distributing set-top boxes to low-income sectors of the population has no political or social audit mechanisms. Moreover, commercial licensing of digital terrestrial broadcasting has so far not adhered to the bidding mechanism stipulated in the SCA Law. And this could be attributed to regulators’ negligence.

7.1.1.4 Public Consultation

The involvement of civil society in the recent process of regulating and implementing digital TV in Argentina is subject to different readings. On the one hand, civil society groups have not been explicitly consulted on the process of digital TV deployment. On the other hand, participation of civil society was strong (civil society was active and had access to relevant politicians and officials) in the unprecedented process that is currently under way to change the regulatory framework of the SCA Law, which regulates analog media and does not have a separate chapter for digitization.

It should be noted, however, that in the formal sphere, civil society has a consultative position of its own in the follow-up of certain guidelines governing the digital switchover. Thus, the SATVD-T Advisory Council, a governmental office reporting to the Ministry for Federal Planning, has a Consultative Forum made up of several industry players and social organizations invited by the government. Forums have been conducted on specific topics, including the promotion of content production by industry players and academia.

7.1.2 The Internet

7.1.2.1 Regulation of News on the Internet

There is no regulation of news delivery in Argentina on any platform. The content regulation applied to broadcasting, aimed at protecting children and punishing discrimination based on social, economic, political,

religious, cultural or ethnic bases, can also be applied to online communication, but there is no specific regulation regarding the internet. The same holds for those laws that address copyright (Law No. 11723) and those provisions in the national constitution that protect freedom of speech.

A recent case involves Clarín's newspaper blogs, where an author who had no formal relationship with the newspaper wrote some anti-semitic comments directed at the former chancellor, Héctor Timmerman, who accused Clarín of promoting discrimination. The case was taken to court, and it led to a request by the Delegation of Israeli Associations in Argentina (*Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas*, DAIA) that the media should "assume responsibility for the contents they publish and to make the maximum effort to limit discriminatory, antisemitic, and/or xenophobic content that offends any community's identity."¹⁴¹

Nonetheless, the judicial intervention in cases of discriminatory content is often controversial, as was the case with a Buenos Aires court decision that, in response to a DAIA request, ordered Google to eliminate from its search results a number of discriminatory sites.¹⁴²

7.1.2.2 Legal Liability for Internet Content

In Argentina, as of March 2011, there was no legal provision for liability specifically addressing internet content. In 2004 the site Juyjuy.com was considered liable of publishing slanderous content after failing to promptly remove content that imputed adulterous conduct to a couple, and damages were set at US\$ 40,000.¹⁴³ In recent years, this legal vacuum over liability has opened the door to a series of lawsuits against companies such as Google and Yahoo.¹⁴⁴

7.2 Regulators

7.2.1 Changes in Content Regulation

Chapter V of the SCA Law is devoted to content regulation. Art. 65 establishes that holders of licenses and authorizations to provide audiovisual communication services must comply with certain rules regarding content:

- All non-public radio stations must broadcast at least 70 percent of national production, and a minimum of 50 percent of own production that must include news.
- State, municipal, and university radio stations must broadcast at least 60 percent of own and local programming, which must include newscasts with local news, and at least 20 percent of educational, cultural, and public service programming.

141. See <http://prensa.cancilleria.gov.ar/noticia.php?id=19745624> (accessed 20 May 2011).

142. See <http://www.losandes.com.ar/notas/2011/5/17/justicia-ordeno-google-borrar-busquedas-sitios-discriminatorios-568773.asp> (accessed 17 May 2011).

143. In 2009 the Congress suppressed the penal consequences—which included prison term—of slandering and defamation cases in which there was a public interest involved.

144. See <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/20/no-safe-harbors-in-argentina/> (accessed 23 January 2012).

- Free-to-air television stations must broadcast a minimum of 60 percent of national production, of which at least 30 percent must be own production that includes local newscasts. In cities of more than 1.5 million inhabitants they must also broadcast 30 percent of independent local production, 15 percent in cities of between 600,000 and 1.5 million inhabitants, and 10 percent in smaller cities.
- Pay-TV services (cable and satellite) must include an open signal with all channels in which the state has a participation, all free-to-air channels in its coverage area, and all public regional, municipal and university channels within its coverage area. They must organize their programming guide so that all channels belonging in the same genre are side by side, and they must include at least one local channel that satisfies the aforementioned conditions for free-to-air stations.

Besides Art. 68, the law aims at protecting children, and mentions that all content (including advertising) must be child-friendly from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., while from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. adult content is allowed. The law forbids the participation of children under the age of 12 in programs that are broadcast between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m., unless they have been recorded before, in which case it must be mentioned during the broadcast.

7.2.2 Regulatory Independence

Historically, the enforcement of audiovisual laws in Argentina depended exclusively on the PEN, until the enactment of the SCA Law. This law created the broadcasting regulatory authority, AFSCA, made up of seven members: two are appointed by the National Executive Power, three by the National Congress (the law requires that two of these three members should be appointed by parliamentary minorities), and three by the Federal Council on Audiovisual Communication (*Consejo Federal de Comunicación Audiovisual*, CFC). This Council is also a new institution for the discussion of industry policies, with the participation of representatives from the provinces, not-for-profit broadcasters, native peoples, public media, media workers' unions, and universities.

It is important to note that, though both AFSCA, which has already made numerous decisions, and the CFC are in full operation, the representatives of the opposition in the National Congress have not yet been appointed to the former, because the opposition resists the application of the new law.

The mechanisms to ensure the independence of the regulator from both the government and political parties warrant three distinct considerations in the Argentinean case: first, these mechanisms are very recent (they were introduced with the SCA Law in 2009); second, they are contrary to the tradition that media regulation has followed in Argentina which has been one characterized by subordination to the government; and finally, the strong polarization existing between the administration and the main parties of the opposition (joined by the major commercial media groups) prohibits the development of a media policy consensus.

The institutional design of AFSCA might in theory promote a radical shift in the traditional balance of power between the government and the regulatory authority. But as a result of the constraints outlined above, so far the new regulator has not been legitimized by the political opposition. This problem is compounded by the fact that the present administration has deviated from the principles of the SCA Law by, for instance, ensuring a consistent majority of its own representatives among AFSCA members.

For example, the government promoted the nomination of Jorge Capitanich, Governor of Chaco, as an AFSCA commissioner. Mr Capinatich lacked media policy and professional media experience, but guaranteed the government's political control of the regulatory authority.

All this means that even though the original legal design seemed to promote independence, in practice, and due to the government's maneuvers and the opposition's inaction, the regulator is not independent.

7.2.3 Digital Licensing

The audiovisual media licenses that are in force in Argentina were granted before the adoption of the new legal framework of 2009, and have been criticized for a number of reasons:

- because they prevented not-for-profit groups from holding radio and TV licenses, a measure that the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional in 2005 but which was not reverted until the application of the SCA Law in 2009.
- Because they were granted by a regulatory entity that was fully dependent on the PEN, and therefore the competitive process for the awarding of licenses was prone to controversy, stirring suspicions regarding biased treatment in favor of pro-government applicants.
- because there were no proper political or social auditing mechanisms to ensure that licensees fulfilled the obligations required by the legislation then in force (Broadcasting Law No. 22,285 introduced by the military dictatorship in 1980).

After the passing of the SCA Law, AFSCA drafted a technical plan to open up new competitive processes and grant new licenses in accordance with the new regulations. However, the main private licensees, in confrontation with the government, and historically resistant to any changes in the regulation of audiovisual media and to the entry of new market players, are distrustful of the ability of the new regulatory entity to operate in a balanced manner.

On the other hand, the digital TV signals that started operating in mid-2010 are for the most part state-run, and there have been experimental tests by private companies that have not received the license because the rules of the game are not clear yet as regards the use of the bandwidth allocated to each digital channel (see section 7.1.1.1).

7.2.4 Role of Self-regulatory Mechanisms

Media in Argentina do not have self-regulation mechanisms,¹⁴⁵ nor do internet service providers or major websites.

¹⁴⁵ A lukewarm exception is the printed paper *Perfil*, which has a readers' ombudsman.

7.3 Government Interference

7.3.1 The Market

When considering interference by state authorities, there are contradictions and unique complexities in the Argentinean case. In previous sections of this report, we have referred to the state of polarization that the government faces in its relationship with the large media groups and a portion of the political opposition. This environment influences the references that are often cited, at both extremes of the spectrum, as examples of either too little or too much intervention by the state. The experts interviewed as part of this study are a representative sample of the diversity of opinions.

The decriminalization of slander and defamation that was introduced with the passing of the SCA Law and the high level of daily criticism that the main media voice against the government are clues that have led many specialists to argue that there is no serious interference of state authority with the media market. Other specialists, however, differ. They ground their opinions on the absolutely discretionary handling of official advertising (which is not subject to any rules and was criticized by the Supreme Court of Justice on 2 March 2011), and its significant increase in recent years, coupled with the rigorous penalization (by removing official advertising) of journalistic companies whose editorial line is clearly critical of the government. This is in contrast with the high degree of tolerance towards the irregularities of journalistic companies that are supportive of the government (which tend to be smaller media groups and independents).

Two examples of the controversy raised in terms of state intervention are the “Fútbolparatodos” program, and the “PapelPrensa” case.

“Fútbol para todos” – Football for all

An instance of explicit interference that is hailed enthusiastically by government followers and denounced by the opposition was the release in 2009 of the rights for TV broadcasting of soccer games, the most popular sport in Argentina. This measure came before the passing of the SCA Law, and was a significant setback for Grupo Clarín, which had controlled these rights since the early 1990s. Grupo Clarín held exclusive rights to show the games through its cable channels (including pay-per-view of the most prominent ones). This prevented other channels not only from showing the games, but also from showing summaries of them. In 2009, the Argentinean Soccer Association terminated its exclusivity contract following an offer made by the government. Consequently, 2009 marked the start of free-to-air TV broadcasting of big-league games in Argentina. This led to a general loss of revenues and audiences for Grupo Clarín, affecting cable, pay-per-view and free-to-air.

Papel Prensa

Another significant case was the announcement in 2010 of the Papel Prensa case. Papel Prensa, a joint company formed in 1977 by the *Clarín* and *La Nación* dailies together with the state, is a monopoly that owns the only plant producing paper for newspapers in Argentina. The case was brought before the National Congress to discuss the passing of a law that would allow the publishers of all newspapers to have shared responsibilities in managing the only paper company that supplied the raw material for printing all papers in Argentina. The company was formed in 1977,¹⁴⁶ when the relatives of former owner David Gravier were dispossessed of their shares at his death. These shares were transferred to *La Nación*, *La Razón*, and *Clarín*. The Gravier family did not only receive no compensation for the transfer, they were also arrested and their possessions were confiscated. In 2010, the government filed a case in court to petition an investigation regarding the legality of the partnership that links the government with the publishing houses of the two leading newspapers in the country.

An opinion that is truly representative of anti-government criticism was offered by Mr Etchevers (Grupo Clarín's external communications manager), who believes that "state interference in the Argentine media system is extremely distorting."¹⁴⁷ He points out, "In official media, the bias of governmental propaganda is strongly felt, but the distortive effects also reach so-called 'para-official' media." Etchevers grounds his opinion on five levers of government interference:

- 1) official advertising, which is increasingly distorting and discretionary;
- 2) media outlets managed by the government, or friends of the government;
- 3) the program "*Fútbol para todos*," which artificially creates audiences for the purpose of disseminating government messages;
- 4) the administrative arbitrariness of the authorities, which uphold a precarious juridical structure as a strategy to remain in control. Examples are terrestrial TV channels in the AMBA: Canal 9, *Telefé* (Channel 11) and *América TV* (Channel 2). These channels have certain ownership issues as yet unresolved and in conflict with regulatory requirements, (because Canal 9 and *Telefé* are managed by foreign businessmen, and *América TV*'s shareholders include a Member of Parliament, which is prohibited by law. But the government maintains control over media owners by *not* enforcing the law. So, except for Canal 13, the only channel whose papers are in full compliance is the state-run Canal 7; there is no terrestrial TV outlet in AMBA that can claim to be independent from official pressure.

146. When, in a transaction whose investigation at court is pending, the successors of its previous owner, entrepreneur David Graiver, were deprived of their shares in the company.

147. Interview conducted for this report with Martin Etchevers, external communications manager at Grupo Clarín 20 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

- 5) the tax debt of the media (social security contributions as VAT prepayments), an issue that is permanently unresolved, and is another avenue of government pressure. The total debt of all media outlets amounts to approximately ARS 1.5 billion (US\$ 375 million). The only outlet that accepts the moratorium in this regard has been *Clarín*, and possibly *La Nación*; the remainder depends on the government's indulgence because they are indebted towards the state.

Based on these, Mr Etchevers concludes, "In 2011, a year of elections, we have a combination of official advertising, administrative precariousness, trade-offs involving social security debts ... and it all leads to a great distortion."

The journalist José Natanson is much more supportive of the government's role: "I do not believe the government has abused its regulatory capacity. I believe it has used it..." He recognizes that the government "uses the economic resources at hand to suffocate Grupo Clarín and help its own groups. By itself, that does not seem wrong to me, if it is within the laws." So for him, the pressure is exerted on the economics side, which does not amount to censorship. As regards state-run media, Mr Natanson perceives "an effort by the Government to strengthen them, particularly since the confrontation with Grupo Clarín started [in 2008]. Every government has a channel from which it expects to be praised. The fact that the Government uses state-run channels to favor its own interests does not shock me ... I criticized it because I believe it is too schematic and biased. But letting the Government install its own historical perspective does not seem wrong to me."

For the *Página 12* columnist Mr Wainfeld, interference is, in any case, reciprocal, in view of the fire power that the large media groups have in their confrontation with the government, because "the media agenda, at least in Argentina, continues to be defined by the large traditional media with their traditional support structures."¹⁴⁸

Ms San Martín, a journalist for *La Nación*, believes that: "The Argentine administrations have always had the desire, and sometimes taken action too, to control what is published in the media. This is a historical trait, but since 2003 in Argentina that desire has been more explicit. I see a more interventionist action on the part of the Government, starting with the communication 'style' of different government officials with journalism marked by mutual distrust and a discourse against journalists."¹⁴⁹ For Ms San Martín, the fight between the government and *Clarín* has cascaded down to the rest of the media, leading to unprecedented distrust and conflict among colleagues working for different media outlets. "In this conflict," adds Ms San Martín, "there is the risk of self-referentiality ... the media speak to the Government and the Government speaks to the media; the audience is then left aside, and oftentimes, even journalists are left aside."

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Frank La Rue, has frequently praised the Argentinean government's media policy, calling it "exemplary," particularly in reference to the SCA Law. Similar feedback has come from such organizations

148. Interview conducted for this report with Mario Wainfeld, columnist of *Página 12*, 2 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

149. Interview conducted for this report with Raquel San Martín, journalist at *Diario La Nación*, 12 December 2010, Buenos Aires.

as Reporters without Borders (<http://es.rsf.org/>) and the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC, at <http://alc.amarc.org/index.php?p=home&l=ES>). On the contrary, the media owners gathered at the Inter-American Press Society (<http://www.sipiapa.org/v4/>) have reiteratively condemned the Argentinean government on the same account.

7.3.2 The Regulator

adopted so far, in the extremely recent process of digital TV deployment, have been of a preliminary nature. Under these measures, the critics of the government argue that it is abusing and exploiting the licensing process in order to favor politically friendly broadcasters. For example, the implementation of DTT assigned experimental signals to a group of entrepreneurs without any public contest, as established by the SCA Law. The status of “experimental transmissions” is ambiguous enough that it may be used to circumvent the licensing requirements of the new law.

7.3.3 Other Forms of Interference

Other than the issues mentioned in section 7.3.1, there are no known cases of pressure on the media. However, as far as state interference is concerned, it should be noted that there are positions in stark contrast: there are those who will argue that there is no state interference in the operation of the media, and there are those who will argue exactly the opposite. The authors of this research believe that state interference with digital media is infrequent in terms of freedom of expression and contents published or broadcasted; however, a consideration of the economic relations that exist between the government and the media—both analog and digital—reveals that state funding is vital for the survival of many media outlets, and this could influence their editorial line.

7.4 Assessments

The framework of policies, laws, and regulations in Argentina is not adequate to meet the challenges of digitization, as it has been designed by reference to the analog media system. The digital TV switch-over, in barely a year of trials, has so far been implemented through administrative resolutions (usually, executive decrees), which are not consistent with the SCA Law.

As in 1951, when for the first time analog TV was broadcast in the country, the state is undertaking the costs and risks of developing a new market, now of a digital nature. But because existing rules have not been designed for the digital environment, the government’s discretion is greater in defining criteria for allocating signals and channels, licensing possibilities, and operational rules; so, in this sense, the state’s ability to interfere is high.

There have been positive aspects of intervention. The set-top box distribution program launched by the government to provide free access for low-income sectors of the population, the beneficiaries of welfare plans and pensioners, is unprecedented, as it gives priority to the most socially disfavored sectors in the introduction of new technological platforms as part of a public policy.

The nature of state interference has changed with the introduction of the SCA Law in 2009, which entailed some degree of progress not only because the previous law was from the dictatorship era (it had been introduced in 1980), but also because it recognizes and extends the communication rights of social sectors that were previously prevented from exercising this right through the mass media, and because in the wording of the law, it separates the government from the regulatory authority and from the management of public media. However, the law has not been fully enforced and the polarization between the government and a large part of the opposition (including major private media groups) makes it difficult to apply policies in the public interest.

Digitization seems to be totally unrelated to the changes that have occurred. Digitization was not a driver in any sense for the 2009 legislation. More so, it was implemented in parallel by other areas of government, different from those that manage media policy. And while the digitization process has been led by the state through SATVD-T, which depends on the Ministry of Federal Planning (*Ministerio de Planificación Federal*), the Broadcasting Law is being implemented by AFSCA.

Strictly speaking, the central role that public debate and the subsequent passing of the SCA Law have had in Argentinean media policy (including the convening of forums throughout the territory with the participation of numerous social organizations, labor unions, business associations, and universities) has not yet materialized for digitization. Indeed, the digital TV implementation process has not yet included consultation and engagement mechanisms similar to those used to introduce the media law. The permits for digital experimental transmissions have not followed the procedures required by the law, creating a contradiction between the goals of the law and the actual policies being implemented.

Beyond consideration of the impact of digitization on diversity and pluralism (see section 6), policies and regulations on this matter have not yet had a significant impact, but that is largely because the implementation of digital TV only started in 2010 and the analog switch-off is anticipated for 2019.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Media Today

The shift in the relationship between the government and the corporate media since 2008 has been the main driver for transformation in the communications sector since 2005. Digitization is still an incipient process, and has little significance as an engine for change. The approval of the SCA Law has its origins in an attempt to regulate and transform the media sector. In this sense, it is a step towards the democratization of the media, but is not the most appropriate framework for facilitating the transition to the digital environment.

Since the start of the government–media conflict there have been new alignments, on the one hand, with the large media companies defined by their rivalry with the government, and with an emerging group of smaller broadcasters and print outlets that are supportive of the administration on the other. A highlight of this realignment was the adoption of the new media legislation discussed here.

Since 2008, media coverage has polarized along these lines. In the case of the large corporate media, this has had a deleterious impact on their credibility due to the editorial bias that is evidenced in their agenda and in the sources they use. In state-run media, on the other hand, polarization has reduced the potential for building genuinely public media featuring a plurality of voices.

Polarization itself has engendered the appearance of diversity, with voices from both sides, depending on the media chosen. But behind the façade it has had two detrimental effects: the suppression of internal diversity inside individual media, excluding any voices that differ from the editorial line adopted; and the deterioration of diversity in the system as a whole due to the absence of media with broader perspectives that refrain from taking sides with either contender in the battle.

In this context, digitization is more a tool that is used in the struggle than a driver for the changes that have occurred over the last years. For example, the launch of DTT is being used as a tool to reinforce public media.

8.1.1 Positive Aspects

- The approval of the SCA Law replacing the dictatorship's broadcasting regulation constitutes a necessary step towards a greater democratization of the media system.
- High penetration of digital technologies, especially in the telephone market.
- State programs to facilitate access to digital resources for the low-income population: set-top box distribution and Plan Argentina Conectada.

8.1.2 Negative Aspects

- Polarization between big media groups and the government.
- The implementation of the law has not been according to the letter of the law.
- Lack of a clear and coherent public policy for the transition towards digital environments.
- Media have lost credibility due to their confrontation with the government.
- Difficulties achieving a stable economic model for the media market.

8.2 Media Tomorrow

Digitization is only a very recent development, and dependent on the action of the government, so far, its lead actor. Given that 2011 was a year of presidential elections in Argentina and the opposition parties did not adopt a public stance about digitization, its future is shrouded in uncertainty.

Two items on the agenda are the commitment by state agencies to the implementation of the SCA Law beyond the 2011 elections, and the necessary adjustment of the law to the digital environment through public debate about convergence laws and standards.

There is much uncertainty regarding the business model that will be viable in the digitized environment, as advertising revenues from new media are still insignificant compared with traditional media. Paradoxically enough, audiences are shifting to the new media and digital and mobile platforms, while advertising and funding are still anchored in the old media. The growth of online advertising seems to be slower than the decline in newspaper sales.

The questions that remain unanswered warrant attentive follow-up, because Argentina has been a leading case in Latin America, where media regulation, the broadening of freedom of expression, and the right to information, as well as the role that the state has to play in news generation and dissemination, are all being discussed.

9. Recommendations

9.1 Policy

9.1.1 Media Policy

9.1.1.1 Remedy of Inconsistencies between Analog and Digital Regulatory Frameworks

Issue

The digital transition in Argentina is underway. However, the first policies and regulations on digital transition are unfocused and incoherent in many respects. The implementation of the Law on Audiovisual Communication Services has not properly addressed the roll-out of digital television, or the issue of convergence. For example, the law forbids telecom companies to enter the audiovisual sector. This prohibition seems to resist the trend of media convergence.

Recommendation

The Government and the National Congress should develop, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, a coherent policy for digital transition, incorporating the provisions on convergent services from Law 26522. This policy should include:

- The creation of a regulatory authority to regulate both telecoms and media companies
- The removal of the prohibition on telecom companies from entering the audiovisual sector, while at the same time penalizing anti-competitive practices and preventing the problems that may derive from high levels of concentration in the telecoms market
- Obligations on telecoms companies to provide services such as:
 - a) Fair interconnection conditions for alternative operators, including open access for competitors to the supporting infrastructure
 - b) Number portability as a consumer right
- The obligation on converged telecommunications and media players to keep separate books for audiovisual communication subscription services and for telecommunications services, in order to prevent undue pressures on media content and media players

- The definition of appropriate powers and duties for the public company that distributes digital audiovisual signals, and the obligation to cover the full territory of the country and to facilitate access universal access

9.2 Media Law and Regulation

9.2.1 Media Ownership

9.2.1.1 Reduction of Concentration of Ownership in the Media, Telecommunications and Content Distribution

Issue

Media ownership is highly concentrated both horizontally and vertically, which has had harmful consequences for news diversity in Argentina. The Law on Audiovisual Communications Services (*Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual*, LSCA) was praised by experts for improving media regulation by increasing the diversity of ownership (for example, by reserving a third of licenses to non-commercial media), and limiting ownership by existing commercial media groups. But these provisions have not been properly implemented: the process of granting new licenses has been slow (not many have been granted), and the limitations on existing media groups have been challenged in court.

Recommendation

The Government should promote greater access by different political, economic, and social groups to broadcast licenses by enforcing the provisions in the LSCA. In particular, it should prepare a technical plan to:

- a) specify the current use of the spectrum
- b) establish which licenses are valid, and
- c) launch new tenders for licenses to give non-commercial organizations access to the frequencies reserved for them by law.

For their part, the courts should quickly clarify the interpretation and implementation of the limits on established media groups contemplated in the law, in order to avoid regulatory uncertainty and power struggles between the Government and these groups.

9.2.2 Regulation

9.2.2.1 Establishment of the control and auditing bodies contemplated in the SCA Law

Issue

A further crucial provision of the LSCA has not been implemented: the control and audit bodies envisaged by this law—the Authority for Audiovisual Communications Services (*Autoridad de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual*, AFSCA), the Bicameral Commission for Monitoring Audiovisual Communications Services (*Comisión Bicameral de seguimiento de de los Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual*), and the Federal Council (*Consejo Federal*)—are not fully formed. The LSCA requires the second and third largest parliamentary

groupings to appoint their representatives to the audiovisual authority and to the federal council, and to join the bicameral commission in charge of monitoring the implementation of the law. Due to political disputes, however, the opposition has not taken up its assigned seats on the commission; this has prevented the control mechanisms from becoming functional.¹

Recommendation

The entities created by the SCA Law to implement and monitor its implementation—AFSCA, the Bicameral Commission, and the Federal Council—should become fully functional. The opposition parties should comply with the Article 14 of the LSCA, which obliges them to participate in the above institutions. In turn, the Government should facilitate this move by convening the meetings in which, under the law, members of the opposition would take their assigned seats. The selection of the members of the regulatory bodies should be transparent and civil society should be consulted, as the law requires.

9.2.2.2 Access to Public Information on the Media

Issue

There is a glaring lack of publicly accessible information about media ownership. Provisions in the LSCA on access to public information have not been implemented. The aforementioned problems in the functionality of the institutional bodies that were created by the law, and the lack of cooperation by media companies over providing the required information about their ownership as part of the bidding process for broadcast licenses, and about official advertising revenues, have all exacerbated this situation.

Recommendation

- 1) Once the regulatory and implementation bodies provided for by the LSCA have been constituted, they should provide regular and accessible information about their decisions and resolutions, as the law requires them to do.
- 2) In addition, these bodies should require media operators to publish the information that the LSCA requires of them, such as ownership structure and income from official advertising.
- 3) Private operators should, in turn, facilitate the implementation of the regulation, and provide public information on, for instance, the identity of companies that exploit public resources (such as spectrum), their programming commitments, and the terms of their licenses, as the law requires them to do.
- 4) Private operators, and civil society organizations, should publish reports on media advertisers (both public and private), so that citizens can know who is paying for programming.

150. After the approval of the LSCA in 2009, the two main opposition parties (UCR and PJ) decided not to join AFSCA as a way of delegitimizing the new law. Since 2011, the opposition parties that should have seats at the regulating authority (UCR and *Frente Amplio Progresista*) have expressed their willingness to take those seats, but the Government has prevented them from doing so by not setting up the Bicameral Commission for the Monitoring of Audiovisual Communication (*Comisión Bicameral de Seguimiento de la Comunicación Audiovisual*).

Issue

Recent years have seen a notable increase in government advertising spending, along with increasing discriminatory allocation of this funding against critical media at national, province, and municipality levels. This situation has led the nation's Supreme Court to order, in two separate cases, the government of the Neuquen province and the national government to stop allocating government advertising preferentially. These orders point to the inadequate regulation of official advertising.

Recommendation

As a first step, the State authorities at national, province and municipality levels should publish the names of the media outlets that receive such advertising, and the amounts they receive. In addition, the Government should initiate—and the Congress should adopt—a law to ensure non-discriminatory allocation of official advertising by introducing clear allocation criteria.

9.3 Public Service Media

9.3.1 Strengthening Independence of Public Media

Issue

Historically, the state-owned media have suffered from poor ratings and have not played a major role in the media system. While these outlets have traditionally led the implementation of technological developments, audience levels have historically been low. This reflected at least three different, though often related, reasons:

- They have been directly linked, both politically and economically, to the Government.
- They have failed to reflect Argentina's political, social, and cultural diversity.
- They have had limited territorial reach.

Recommendation

The government and the provincial authorities should strengthen the public broadcasting media by using the potential of digital transition to:

- Increase their autonomy from political power by implementing the provisions in the LSCA, which prepare the ground for a more democratic functioning of state-owned media.
- Promote the implementation of the administration system defined in the LSCA for these media to reflect the political, cultural, and linguistic diversity of society.
- Increase their territorial reach.

This should be done, first, by applying the provisions of the LSCA to the state-owned media; and, second, by reforming their financing system and their institutional and governance structure—including those of the state news agency, TELAM.

9.4 Journalism

9.4.1 Decentralization of News Production

Issue

Production of news and cultural content is concentrated in Buenos Aires because of the concentration of ad spending and other resources in the capital city. In addition, the existing incentive policies for film and television production (INCAA, ACUA, BACUA), have, while useful, not always been managed with a federal, non-centralized perspective. In this context, a common problem is the shortage of properly trained professionals outside the capital.

Recommendation

The government should adopt policies at national and province levels to promote the production of news and cultural content across the country, so as to encourage genre diversity as well as diversity of political, social, and cultural perspectives, voices and geographical origins.

Existing policies to promote federal production in film and television, coordination and strategic coherence should be improved. Such policies should aim to help producers achieve sustainability. They could include human resources policies for training of professionals in technology, media management, and content creation. Such training should be done through a network to allow different training and production centers to share experiences.

9.4.2 Polarization and News Bias

Issue

In recent years, the overall political polarization and confrontation between the government and major media groups have blurred the separation between opinion and news, leading to news coverage biased towards one group or another. The news tends to become opinionated, either for or against the government. This is the result of a combination of a lack of diverse voices within media outlets themselves, and of the marginality of non-polarized media. Lack of media self-regulatory mechanisms further aggravates the situation.

Recommendation

Both state and private media outlets should give more independence to their newsrooms. They should promote the creation of ethics committees and ombudsmen. In order to protect diversity within media organizations, the regulation by law of the “conscience clause” to protect journalists from possible abuse of power by their employers (public or private) is recommended. Drafts of this law have circulated among media and lawmakers, but none has been adopted to date. The media should also openly disclose conflicts of interest when reporting on matters related to their shareholders or to companies related to the outlet itself.

9.4.3 Spaces for Debate and Analysis

Issue

With the digital transition, the trend of convergence, and the adoption of the LSCA in 2009, communication media have become a common topic of discussion and a central issue on Argentina's public agenda. However, the quality of journalism is deteriorating as a result of the confrontation between the largest media groups and the government. The lack of critical analysis and insights on the current situation of Argentinian media is exacerbated by the absence of independent observatories or media consumer associations.

Recommendation

Civil society groups and universities should contribute to monitoring, debating, and analyzing the current situation of the media system in Argentina. They should create independent monitoring mechanisms, not contaminated by the political disputes that have harmed journalistic practice. Universities should promote critical and independent research on media policy, while also making an effort to train students, journalists, and civil society organizations in the subject.

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List of Abbreviations, Figures, Tables, and Companies

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAAP	Argentinean Association of Advertising Agencies (<i>Asociación Argentina de Agencias de Publicidad</i>)
AAPRESID	Argentinean Association of Direct Crop Producers (<i>Asociación Argentina de Productores en Siembra Directa</i>)
ADC	Association for Civil Rights (<i>Asociación por los Derechos Civiles</i>)
ADEPA	Association of Argentinean Journalistic Entities (<i>Asociación de Entidades Periodísticas Argentinas</i>)
AFIP	Federal Administration of Public Revenues (<i>Administración Federal de Ingresos Públicos</i>)
AFSCA	Federal Authority of Audiovisual Communication Services (<i>Autoridad Federal de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual</i>)
AIR	Inter-American Radio Broadcasters' Association
AMBA	Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (<i>Área Metropolitana Buenos Aires</i>)
ANSES	National Administration of Social Security (<i>Administración Nacional de la Seguridad Social</i>)
ASAP	Argentinean Association of Public Funding Budget and Administration (<i>Asociación Argentina de Presupuesto y Administración Financiera Pública</i>)
ATA	Association of Argentinean TV Broadcasters (<i>Asociación de Televisoras Argentinas</i>)
ATSC	Advanced Television Systems Committee
ATVC	Cable TV Association (<i>Asociación de televisión por cable</i>)
BTDA	British Television Distributors' Association
CAAM	Argentinean Chamber of Media Agencies (<i>Cámara Argentina de Agencias de Medios</i>)
CEMCI	Entrepreneurial Commission of Independent Communication Media (<i>Comisión Empresarial de Medios de Comunicación Independientes</i>)
CFC	Federal Council on Audiovisual Communication (<i>Consejo Federal de Comunicación Audiovisual</i>)
CIPPEC	Center for the Implementation of Public Policies promoting Equity and Growth (<i>Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento</i>)
CNDC	National Anti-Trust Commission (<i>Comisión Nacional de Defensa de la Competencia</i>)
CNM	National Women's Commission (<i>Comisión Nacional de la Mujer</i>)

COMFER	Federal Broadcasting Committee (<i>Comité Federal de Radiodifusión</i>)
DTT	digital terrestrial television
ECPI	Complementary Survey of Indigenous Peoples (<i>Encuesta Complementaria de Pueblos Indígenas</i>)
ENACOM	National Conference of Communication Careers (<i>Encuentro Nacional de Carreras de Comunicación</i>)
FOPEA	Forum for Argentinean Journalism (<i>Foro de Periodismo Argentino</i>)
FSU	Universal Service Fund (<i>Fondo del Servicio Universal</i>)
HD	High Definition
IAPA	Inter-American Press Association
IBOPE	Brazilian Institute for Public Opinion and Statistics (<i>Instituto Brasileño de Opinión Pública y Estadística</i>)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INADI	National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (<i>Instituto Nacional contra la Discriminación, la Xenofobia y el Racismo</i>)
INCAA	National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (<i>Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales</i>)
INDEC	National Statistics and Census Institute (<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos</i>)
IVC	Circulation Verification Institute (<i>Instituto Verificador de la Circulaciones</i>)
MECon	Ministry of Economy and Public Finance (<i>Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas Públicas</i>)
NGO	non-governmental organization
PEN	National Executive Power (<i>Poder Ejecutivo Nacional</i>)
PTS	Trotskyist Party of Socialist Workers (<i>Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo</i>) RAE International Service of Argentinean Radio (<i>Radiodifusión Argentina al Exterior</i>)
RTA	Argentinean Radio and Television State Society (<i>Radio y Televisión Argentina Sociedad del Estado</i>)
SATVD-T	Argentinean Terrestrial Digital Television System (<i>Sistema Argentino de Televisión Digital Terrestre</i>)
SCA Law	Audiovisual Communication Services Law (<i>Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual</i>)
SIP	Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) (<i>Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa</i>)
SD	Standard Definition
SNMP	National Public Media System (<i>Sistema Nacional de Medios Públicos</i>)
TN	TodoNoticias
UHF	Ultra High Frequency
UNLP	Universidad Nacional de La Plata
VHF	Very High Frequency

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Companies

AméricaMóvil

AR-SAT

Cablevisión, owned by Grupo Clarín

Daniel Hadad group

Grupo Clarín

Grupo Pierri

Grupo Vila

Papel Prensa

Pensar para Televisión

Prisa

Spolski group/ Grupo Szpolski-Garfunkel

Telecom

Telefó (the company owned by Telefónica de España)

Telefónica de España

Vila-De Narváz

Vila-Manzano Group

Mapping Digital Media: Country Reports

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Mapping Digital Media is a project of the **Open Society Media Program** and the **Open Society Information Program**.

Open Society Media Program

The Media Program works globally to support independent and professional media as crucial players for informing citizens and allowing for their democratic participation in debate. The program provides operational and developmental support to independent media outlets and networks around the world, proposes engaging media policies, and engages in efforts towards improving media laws and creating an enabling legal environment for good, brave and enterprising journalism to flourish. In order to promote transparency and accountability, and tackle issues of organized crime and corruption the Program also fosters quality investigative journalism.

Open Society Information Program

The Open Society Information Program works to increase public access to knowledge, facilitate civil society communication, and protect civil liberties and the freedom to communicate in the digital environment. The Program pays particular attention to the information needs of disadvantaged groups and people in less developed parts of the world. The Program also uses new tools and techniques to empower civil society groups in their various international, national, and local efforts to promote open society.

Open Society Foundations

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