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THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



**By
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INTRODUCTION

**JOURNALISTS IN
THE DIGITAL TRANSITION**

**THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
ON JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY
IN LATIN AMERICA. A REFLECTION
WITHIN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT
OF SOCIAL NETWORKS**



Journalists in the digital transition



Open Society Foundations Media Program

It has been an honor to support the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas in organizing the 2009 Austin Forum, titled “The Impact of Digital Technology on Journalism and Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

At the Open Society Foundations Media Program, we are committed to creating and sustaining networks of journalists, both in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and the rest of the world. This has led to our ongoing collaboration with the Knight Center in exploring important topics like freedom of expression and its defense and investigative journalism: the main themes of the 2007 and 2008 Austin Forums, respectively, which we also sponsored.

The 2009 forum’s theme – the impact of digital technology on journalism and democracy – touches on the fundamental transition that the journalism profession is facing, which, we believe, Latin American and Caribbean journalists need to make their top priority. As in the rest of the world, in order to stay relevant to today’s audience and to the new generation that is shaping the future of the region, journalists must accept the changes and put themselves at the forefront of the transition.

We work closely with the numerous journalists, media outlet directors, and freedom of expression activists that meet each year in Austin. From

Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Haiti and Colombia, to El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile and Argentina, the participants met to discuss their experiences and the challenges they face in producing high quality journalism that is just, balanced and ethical; informing and educating the region’s citizenry while remaining relevant and sustainable; giving a voice to minorities; promoting greater transparency and accountability by those in power; promoting increased participation by citizens and activists in the production and distribution of news and information; and the use and development of digital technology, social networks and user-generated content, benefiting the quality of journalism.

Each year, these discussions help us develop a new strategy to support media development, investigative journalism, freedom of expression, protecting journalists, the fight against corruption, transparency, pluralism and, most recently, facilitating the digital transition.

To carry out our work in Latin America and the Caribbean, we work with the Soros foundations in Guatemala (FSG) and Haiti (Fokal) and with the Open Society Institute’s Latin America Program.

We are also proud to work with a wide range of strategic partners, like the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, in promoting the development of a network of individuals and organizations that share a strong commitment to journalism and promoting democracy, good governance and justice.



The Impact of Digital Technology on Journalism and Democracy in Latin America. A Reflection within the Historical Context of Social Networks



Rosental Calmon Alves
Director of the Knight Center
for Journalism in the Americas

Few periods in human history have been quite as revolutionary for information and knowledge as the current one.

The Internet has broken through as a grand transformative force, creating a new environment that marks the transition from an industrial society to a digital or knowledge-based society.

During this transition, the mass media, which came into prominence when information was scarce, has lost its power and control to networks of individuals.

The vertical and unidirectional communication model (we talk, you listen), a legacy of the old “media-centric” world, is being replaced by a horizontal and multidirectional model, in which people are just as much producers as they are consumers of content, as much broadcasters as receivers. It is the rupture of the mass communication paradigm that dominated the industrial era.

In this new “me-centric” world, the mass media

are being replaced by a mass of media, in which traditional media outlets are only one of many others. This is a clear disintermediation process: people don’t need a journalist to be informed or for their voices to be heard. They have control: they see, listen, and say whatever they want, whenever they want, wherever they want.

Journalism is no longer monopolized by journalists and media companies. Anyone can create media. But this isn’t the end of journalism; on the contrary, it is the beginning of a new era that gives us hope for the democratization of information.

The industrial-era media system is being replaced by a new system that is coming from the digital era. Though we don’t exactly know what this new system will be like, we know that it will be more rich and complex than its predecessor. The best metaphor for what is taking place is an environment filled with intercommunicating, interconnected lives, as in an ecosystem with incredible biodiversity (the Amazon, for example).

The important questions are these: How much of this describes the situation in Latin America and the Caribbean? And how are these revolutionary changes affecting democracy and journalism in the hemisphere? Fifty journalists and representatives from journalism organizations gathered to answer this question at the 7th Austin Forum on Journalism in the Americas.

As shown in this report, the participants discuss an impressive array of projects and initiatives that seek

precisely to take advantage of the opportunities that digital technologies offer for journalism and the development of democracy. It is clear that even a region plagued by social inequalities is already experiencing the transformations caused by the Digital Revolution.

Before the presentations and panel discussions from the Latin American participants, the forum had the privilege of hearing one of the most prestigious specialists in the United States: Amy Webb, head of Webbmedia Group, an international consulting firm that focuses on strategy, research, and training.

She agrees that we are entering a diverse ecosystem that she said is best epitomized by Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Flickr, the Huffington Post, and other sites that connect people and give them a sense of community. Journalists and the media have a lot to learn from these sites, Webb said.

“The one thing that all of these websites have in common: they specifically know who their audience is...and they recognize that their audience is changing. And I think that is a fact that is lost on most media companies,” she explained.

Knowing one’s audience lets the media not only promote content, but promote conversation. However, historically, the media and journalists have been slow to recognize the scope of the industry. The principal social media sites have been around for years, but not until recently have they captured the media’s attention.

Webb said sites need to know their audience, find opportunities for users to participate, and create

content that inspires users to share it with other people.

Knowing the audience also means shying away from generalizations like those in Latin America that “nobody uses mobile phones to get news,” or “everybody is on Facebook,” and recognizing that everyone—regardless of origin, nationality, religion, or age—has a connection to technology and media.

According to Webb, “The thing that you have to consider is: who exactly are your users? And that is a question for foundations and associations and media organizations; because your audience is always changing. You don’t really have a handle on who exactly is your user and how they are actually using your content.”

However, the power of social networks, especially in the Latin American context, can have a broader impact as a tool for political activism, defending human rights, and gathering information.

As with other issues like website design, usability, publishing content on alternative platforms, and new models of financing, journalists and media outlets need to experiment with social networks.

They need to repeatedly try new things, Webb said, and should be thinking like software developers that release different versions of their products. Journalists should be open to the possibility of failure, but flexible enough to change and start over with a new version.

In this general context of experimentation, the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas and Media Program asked what impact has digital

technology had on journalism and democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Representatives from all parts of the region gathered in Austin from September 10-12, 2009, to answer this question.

Beyond general statistics—like those that show that there is a 30 percent Internet penetration rate in the region—that give vague quantitative approximations, the participants put a human face on journalism, democracy, and the digital technology phenomenon.

What you will find below are their stories, opinions,

analyses, successes, failures, expectations, and aspirations: another way to analyzing the issue.

What remains is to thank the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation for their generous financial support of Knight Center programs and the Open Society Foundation Media Program, which generously financed a large part of this event. We also want to thank the Media Program and individuals from the University of Texas in Austin for helping organize this gathering.

Lastly, we want to thank Colombian journalist Guillermo Franco, the author of this report.




* Internet World Stats, mayo 2010, con información a diciembre 2009



SUMMARY



 The impact of digital technology on journalism and democracy can be measured in at least two ways. The first is quantitative, using available data on topics like Internet connectivity and cell phone penetration. A second, qualitative method, is to focus on the voices of those who use and are affected by digital technology. This document is in the latter category, as it relates the experiences of the 50 journalists and leaders of media organizations in Latin American and the Caribbean who met at the 7th Austin Forum on Journalism in the Americas to discuss this issue.

Their experiences and commentary are evidence that digital technology has had—and is still having—unequal effects on journalism and democracy in Latin American and the Caribbean. The definition of digital technology is broad, but it is not yet detached from the concept of connectivity. For this reason, the unequal effects of digital technology in the region are principally caused by unequal levels of Internet penetration between and within countries.

The effects on democracy can be as varied as the meanings of the word, and even as technology's effects become more relevant, justified by Latin America's history of issues with electoral processes and transparency, we cannot ignore other manifestations of digital technology, like the growing incorporation of a diversity of voices into the media ecosystem or the ability to mobilize citizens in political movements.

The effects of digital technology on journalism occur in three principal categories: the dynamics of news and information generation, the professional practices and skills that are necessary to survive and

prosper in the new environment (i.e., training), and the situation of traditional media.

Investigative journalism in Latin America—which merits a separate chapter when discussing the proliferation of new independent media outlets—is increasingly capitalizing on the power of digital technology to elevate the standards of journalism in general. However, it struggles—and not always with success—to find sustainable models for financing. The variety of ways digital technology is being used for investigative journalism ranges from simple distribution of textual content (as in the majority of cases), to compiling complex databases and creating infographics that citizens and other journalists can use.

Citizen journalism is making forceful inroads into Latin American and Caribbean society, but, in the contemporary context, the region's journalists believe that the main challenge is to keep up with the growth of social networks and take advantage of their potential. The main question they are trying to answer is how.

Other forms of participation and interaction, like comment sections on traditional media outlet websites, have become a problem and raise important ethical and legal questions that are not unique to Latin America on anonymity and responsibility for such user-generated content.

The potential of mobile technology—in terms of content distribution, citizen participation, and access to information—can be summed up in a single word: paradox. While its large consumer base is anticipating a rapid expansion of digital technology – like Internet access – high service costs and the



level of quality of the most widely used phones limit mobile technology's potential.

This paradox can be partially expanded to video, where content generators recognize the potential of the Internet and cell phones as new distribution channels, but remain dependent on broadcast TV to reach the general public. This is because broadcast TV, relative to other mediums, has the highest level of penetration in almost every country in the region, and it takes time for new technologies to be

reach the same number of people as broadcast TV. Experimenting with new platforms, however, is still on the agenda.

Within this complex scenario, young people are an evasive target of the new content generators. The media's position towards youth ranges from giving up on trying to win them over, to others who involving youth in different ways than they have been up until now, and others who are redefining who the youth are.



CHAPTER 1

**THE EFFECTS OF DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGY ON DEMOCRACY
IN LATIN AMERICAN AND THE
CARIBBEAN. WHAT HAS CHANGED
UP TO NOW AND WHAT CHANGES ARE
COMING?**

- **THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL
MOBILIZATION**
- **THE OTHER DIGITAL DIVIDE AND
THE ROLE OF THE STATE**

- **ANALYSIS**
**THE INTERNET: MUCH MORE THAN A
POTENTIAL MARKET**



The Effects of Digital Technology on Democracy in Latin American and the Caribbean. What Has Changed Up to Now and What Hanges Are Coming?



Digital technologies have had—and are having—unequal effects on democracy in Latin American countries. What is encompassed in the “digital technology” category is broad, but one cannot conceptualize it without thinking in terms of connectivity. As a result, the unequal effects of this technology in the region currently come primarily from unequal rates of Internet penetration. The differing perceptions about those technologies are similarly marked by this fact.

The effects on democracy can be as varied as the meanings of the word, and even as technology’s effects become more relevant, justified by Latin America’s history of issues with electoral processes and transparency, we cannot ignore other manifestations of digital technology, like the growing incorporation of a diversity of voices into the media ecosystem or the ability to mobilize citizens in political movements.

“Do new technologies, the new methods of information processing, have any relationship, any bridge, with the quality of democracy in Latin America? Do the print media, the use of the Internet, the use of Facebook, Twitter, and blogs have anything to do with the quality of democracy, understood as electoral participation and citizen approval of public institutions and democracy in general?” asked Felipe Heusser, director of Chile’s VotoInteligente, a project organized by the Smart Citizen Foundation, a group that promotes transparency and accountability in Latin American politics.

For Heusser, whose country has the highest rate

of Internet usage in the region (50.4 percent), the quality of information that is produced can also impact the quality of democracy, but the information that is currently available is not good enough to have this effect or to promote accountability.

The current supply of news isn’t useful for this purpose. It deals with who the political representatives are, their goals, their electoral results, their place in the polls, and their opinions on popular nightly news topics like sex scandals and corruption. Much of this information, Heusser said, falls into the category of “political celebrity.”

“We don’t precisely know, however, what the policy positions of the different parties and candidates are on several key issues. We don’t have a connection between electoral promises and their implementation. We don’t have much information on the relationship between money and politics in Latin America, or on the relationship between financing for parties and candidates and their legislative behavior. In practice, we don’t know much about the actual work of our representatives: what committees are they on, are they in the Senate or in the House. In short, citizens don’t have enough information to differentiate between who is doing their job well and who isn’t. Citizens don’t have any information to differentiate with, especially in an electoral context,” Heusser said.

In these circumstances, digital technologies would have the potential to facilitate accountability and the distribution of this information to society, as VotoInteligente’s experience shows (there are similar



Carlos Fernando Chamorro,
nicaraguan journalist.



Peter Richards, Association of
Caribbean Media Workers,
Trinidad Tobago.



Francisco Vidal, Mexico's Center
for Journalism and Public Ethics.

initiatives, with their own unique emphases and scope, in other parts of the region like Congreso Visible in Colombia). However, those behind these projects believe that, at present, their impact is limited, as most Latin Americans get their political news more from TV, radio, and newspapers than from the Internet.

“Therefore, for all the efforts we are making in the civil society world, using all the Internet tools available—the technologies—we need the press to spread this information to citizens,” Heusser added.

Even if we overcome this reality, those who use digital tools to impact democracy, at least in its electoral aspects, face an increasingly harsh reality.

Latin Americans not only don't trust politics, they don't trust the democratic system: only 22 percent of Latin Americans trust political parties, 28 percent trust the legislature, and 50 percent trust TV. To half of Latin America, it doesn't matter whether they live in a democracy or not as long as their economic problems can be fixed (*).

The limited impact of digital technology is more evident in countries with lower levels of connectivity.

“Nicaragua, like other Central American countries, has a relatively low level of connectivity (3.1 percent). So there is no big news on the impact that new technologies have had on journalists and democracy,” said Nicaraguan journalist Carlos Fernando Chamorro.

* Latinbarómetro 2008. http://www.latinobarometro.org/docs/INFORME_LATINOBAROMETRO_2008.pdf
Latinbarómetro 2009. http://www.latinobarometro.org/documentos/LATBD_LATINOBAROMETRO_INFORME_2009.pdf

“A digital shadow” is how Mabel Rehnfeldt, from the Paraguayan Journalism Forum, described the situation in her country. “They said that Nicaragua was behind us, but it feels like we are behind them.”

“The effect of the “digital shadow” in Paraguay? We began to discover what Facebook does six months ago,” added Rehnfeldt. “If I go on Twitter, I’ll find 100 Paraguayans, 99 of whom are people who work with computers. On LinkedIn (another social network), there are only 4,137 accounts.” (The official level of Internet penetration in Paraguay is 12.8 percent *).

Chamorro thinks that new technologies in Nicaragua haven’t led to mobilization, affected politics (by informing voters, for example), or changed power relations. To him, the technologies only serve to document abuses of power, exemplified by what he calls “the best documented electoral fraud in the history of Latin America.”

“In Nicaragua, there were several municipal elections last year (2008) that provoked a big crisis because there was scandalous fraud in 45 of the 150 municipalities—the most important ones. Now, what is new? That, thanks to a web page made by a political movement that was victim of fraud, the people could know the result of the vote in their polling stations, which was suppressed by the Supreme Electoral Council. The results were going to be posted on the Supreme Council’s website. When they saw that the final result would show government party defeat, they simply stopped the project and gave a final aggregate. Thirty percent of polling station results were never published. The website of the “Let’s all go with Eduardo” movement allowed each person, simply through their identification number or polling station where

they voted, to see the outcome, an outcome that was never put on the Supreme Electoral Council’s Website,” Chamorro explained.

THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

Venezuela (28.2 percent Internet penetration), a politically polarized society, demonstrates another aspect of the impact of digital technologies on democracy: the spread of citizen voices into the media ecosystem and, at times, their mobilization.

“People don’t want to do journalism, people want to narrate, they want to tell what is happening, they want their own language—their own way of narrating—to be online,” said Luis Carlos Díaz, from Ordinary People (Gentedeapie), an independent digital journalism training project in Venezuela. “We need this dialogue to have a place, too, and we have done so: the Venezuelan blogosphere was one of the first in South America that had a directory, in 2003. We did electoral coverage in 2006, 2007, and 2008, because we have many elections. Citizen media in Venezuela doesn’t talk a lot about politics, because this already occupies all aspects of our lives. Usually the Internet is used for relaxation, for other things. But, in times of political tension, like elections, people are energized, they turn to journalism. We have been bringing people together, weaving webs; we have journalist facilitators, trained in different areas.”

The failed arrest of human rights activist Carlos Nieto Palma after he wrote a critical article illustrates the power of digital technologies to assemble and mobilize the population. Nieto Palma worked as a lawyer inside Venezuelan prisons and was supposedly under the protection of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. When he realized

* Internet World Stats, May 2010

that police came to arrest him instead of protect him, Palma posted what was happening on Facebook and Twitter and managed to draw a crowd of people to his house, thwarting the police's intentions.

In Venezuela, according to Díaz, the media are players and protagonists in the political conflict as they are heavily polarized, persecuted, attacked, and shut down. In this context, democracy is strengthened by a diversity of voices (which are incorporated into the media ecosystem).

"If any of this is affecting democracy it is that we are building 'info-citizens,'" Díaz said. "We are citizens to the extent that we can be informed, because this gives us a point of reference for our country, we know what is happening, we can produce information. But not everything one does has to be journalism." Díaz maintained that "info-citizens" are also, deep down, a better audience for traditional media: they want higher quality news and they demand more and will not settle for less. "Insofar as we are telling them how to find information, how to process it, how to publish it, we will have many empowered people," he added.

To achieve this, Ordinary People trains citizens, not to make content, but to manage media.

To Chamorro, a factor that could make the difference in digital technology's impact is the level of organization of the citizens who use it. "There is an organized sector of networks, ranging from unions and social movements to movements dealing with human rights and environmental issues, with an enormous opportunity to benefit from these new technologies," he said. "Indeed, [technology has] strengthened their voices and given them more

influence. But there is another mass of people who aren't organized. And [the new technology] probably isn't the way that they will become organized."

Francisco Vidal, from Mexico's Center for Journalism and Public Ethics, stresses the value of diversity: "I believe that it's very good that now we don't depend on Televisa or (evening news anchor) Joaquín Dóriga. How great it is that a half-million Mexicans can also be informed by (a website like) El Universal, he said. "That is very positive: the diversity we get from the sites for newspapers and other publications, aggregators, blogs, and the rise of new players, at least in the distribution of information. Maybe the sources of information haven't diversified much, but fortunately the networks of distribution appear to have [diversified], thanks to the development of the digital economy."

THE OTHER DIGITAL DIVIDE AND THE ROLE OF THE STATE

The unequal level of Internet penetration in Latin American countries corresponds to similar divides in social class. This has led to skepticism about the real potential of digital technology to impact democracy.

Heusser, from Chile's VotoInteligente, detailed the factors that prevent the flow of information that allows citizens to "make an informed vote," and said that in his country, as in all of Latin America, Internet access is deeply exclusive, as it is concentrated among the middle and upper classes, which prevents initiatives from reaching the entire citizenry.

The exclusivity of access, obviously, affects other aspects like media creation, the ability to generate

content, or even express opinions, which means we must downplay the concept of the “universality” of democracy.

Peter Richards, from Trinidad and Tobago, representing the Association of Caribbean Media Workers, elaborates on this issue. He said that liberals have long maintained that individuals should be free to publish what they want as an extension of other rights like freedom of expression, assembly, and association. However, in the modern era, Richards said these ideals have been trampled on and denied by the political and economic reality in which the established media has found itself.

Exclusive access very much remains the norm throughout the region, even in countries with government initiatives intended to expand access to economically and geographically marginalized groups (like in Colombia and elsewhere) or in countries with alternative means of access like Internet cafes.

This situation highlights the role that the state can and does play in promoting Internet access for all citizens—including the middle and upper class—yet, this has still not become common policy in the region. In fact, in some countries the largest obstacle to increasing the level of Internet penetration is the state itself, mainly for economic reasons, though in some cases those reasons are ideological (e.g. Cuba).

Rehnfeldt, from the Paraguayan Journalists' Forum, said that in her country, until this year, the state held an absolute monopoly on Internet services. “Private businesses are (contractually) tied to the state phone company for months or years, which, coupled with the lack of investment in security, leads to slow speeds. The basic connection is only 128 kbps for

\$20 a month, with contracts requiring six-month subscriptions.

VoIP isn't prohibited, the government said, but in practice making calls with Messenger or Skype is not allowed, unless it is through the state phone company.”

At the other end of the spectrum, countries like Mexico and Colombia, among others, have made the digital leap in a few years, thanks to state policy or market logic.

“In Mexico, we went from five million users in 2000 to 25 million in 2009,” said Francisco Vidal, from the Center for Journalism and Public Ethics in Mexico. “We have a low penetration rate relative to other countries, the United States for example, but there is already a strong market in terms of digital technology. Nine percent of Mexico has access to broadband.”

Vidal said that this growth, paradoxically, is the consequence of a monopoly. “Because Carlos Slim, the owner of Telmex, saw broad band as a big business, this is growing a lot. To give you an idea: Telmex's broadband revenue in Mexico is larger than the revenue from the second largest domestic TV network, TV Azteca.”

In Colombia, Internet penetration increased over the same period (2000 – 2009) from 2.1 to 45.3 percent (*), which can be largely attributed to opening the market to free competition.

The great paradox of the relationship between the state and the Internet in some Latin American countries is that, although it is not very active in

* Internet World Stats, May 2010

increasing access, the state understands the Internet's power and uses it to indoctrinate, or mobilize, or simply for propaganda.

"The Nicaraguan government, for example, is completely silent, doesn't give press conferences, is absolutely closed to the public, but, curiously, it uses the Internet to distribute presidential speeches and whatever it wants to be known," said nicaraguan journalist Chamorro. "If there is an interview that is favorable to the government, there is a network through which they can distribute it."

Chamorro mentions, as an example of the effectiveness of this type of diffusion, though done for the wrong reasons: the recent government publication of a report that attacked a conference held by the country's Catholic bishops. The backlash from the media and civil society, for what appeared to be a government-led political campaign against the Catholic Church, gave the government no option but to say, through the mouth of the First Lady, that a "hacker" had broken into their system and was responsible for the report.

Díaz, from Venezuela's Ordinary People, said that his government is "very, very good at positioning on the Internet. They play very well on a level at which the traditional media aren't playing. For example, [when] a new law passes that is controversial, the

government manages to put favorable things in the top Google results, and they do it very effectively."

Díaz said the government sees the Internet as a major threat. In fact, the government-controlled, Bolivarian News Agency reported that Facebook and Twitter were tools of far right terrorists and fascists financed by the CIA. "But, so far, it hasn't considered controls on the Internet, besides a telecommunications bill that we should keep an eye on."

Caribbean countries are engaging in a more structured approach to media control, Richards said, by passing laws dealing with the transformation of the broadcast sector as a result of the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies that is fed by globalization and market forces.

Richard cited a Broadcast Code law in Trinidad and Tobago that gives broadcasters and the public a general understanding of what factors should be taken into account when making editorial choices.

He also cited Dominica's Broadcast Code, which will soon be implemented, referencing statements by Media Workers Association of Dominica President Thalia Remy, saying it could create problems for independent and pluralistic media outlets on the island.



The Internet: Much More than a Potential Market



By Guillermo Franco

When the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas–Austin and the Open Society Foundation Media Program proposed discussing the impact of digital technology on journalism and democracy in Latin America, two mandatory references that contextualize digital technology, democracy, and journalism came immediately to mind.

The first is the final declaration of the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003, which discussed the importance of digital technology: “We...declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life.”

After establishing the “why,” the declaration goes on to state:

“Our challenge is to harness the potential of information and communication technology to promote the development goals of the Millennium Declaration, namely the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achievement of universal primary education; promotion of gender

equality and empowerment of women; reduction of child mortality; improvement of maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and development of global partnerships for development for the attainment of a more peaceful, just and prosperous world.”

The concept of democracy, as such, goes much further than clean and transparent electoral processes (clearly fundamental in Latin America) and becomes a synonym for inclusion and social justice. Similarly, Internet connectivity is another way to measure of social justice – is not simply a potential market for products and services, including media services.

What do connectivity statistics tell us? The data show us a divide between Latin America and the developed world, between countries in those regions, and—what is worse—between those living in them, where access is concentrated in the middle and upper classes.

It is in this context of conflict-plagued inequality that journalists in Latin America do their work, the purpose of which is articulated in *The Elements of Journalism* by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel – the second required reference – a book that chronicled a national conversation in the United States between citizens and journalists:

“The purpose of journalism is to provide people

with the information they need to be free and self-governing.”

This, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel, gives journalists a variety of roles like to “help us define our communities as well as help us create a common language and common knowledge rooted in reality. Journalism also helps identify a community’s goals, heroes, and villains. . . to push people beyond complacency, and offer a voice to the forgotten.”

We now have an increasingly diverse media ecosystem in which journalism is not monopolized by journalists and the media. When journalists—or community voices—denounce the forgotten neighborhoods of Santiago, Chile, they are helping

this purpose; when they stop acts of corruption in Peru, they are helping this purpose; when they document electoral fraud in Nicaragua, they are helping this purpose; when they denounce unjustified increases in congressional stipends in Brazil, they are helping this purpose; when in Colombia, they offer an alternative to the official story, they are helping this purpose.

The discussion on the impact of digital technology on journalism and democracy in Latin America comes at a juncture in the “boom” of social networks, which have recently become a metaphor for a non-authoritarian society that is more collaborative, inclusive, and horizontal. New digital media from Latin America can assuredly help turn this metaphor into reality.



CHAPTER 2

**THE EFFECTS OF DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGIES ON JOURNALISM IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.
WHAT HAS CHANGED UP TO NOW
AND WHAT TRANSFORMATIONS ARE
COMING?**

- **DIGITAL TRAINING**
- **THE DIGITAL THREAT**


- **ANALYSIS**
**ANTICIPATING THE QUESTIONS THE
DIGITAL REVOLUTION WILL BRING**

**DEVELOPING NEW JOURNALISM
SKILLS: THE KEY TO SURVIVAL IN
THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT**

**SHARING DIGITAL JOURNALISM
TEACHING RESOURCES: AN AUSTIN
FORUM PROPOSAL**



The Effects of Digital Technologies on Journalism in Latin America and the Caribbean. What Has Changed Up to Now and What Transformations Are Coming?

 The effects of digital technology on journalism occur in three principal categories: the dynamics of news and information generation, the professional practices— in terms of the skills that are necessary to survive and prosper in the new environment (i.e. training) —, and the situation of traditional media.

“Regarding the relationship between the new technologies and journalism, what is new? Basically, what is new is that the traditional media has put itself ‘online,’ there is more information flow, but there isn’t a change in the way of doing journalism,” said nicaraguan journalist Carlos Fernando Chamorro.

According to Chamorro, the largest beneficiaries are those living outside of the country, which, in Nicaragua’s case, represent 20 percent of the population. He said this group is “now better informed and feels more integrated with their country because they have the opportunity to not only stay informed, but also to express opinions, to participate in the final moment of the process. That is to say, people comment on articles, participate in radio debates, can watch my program in Sweden, Australia, or the United States. But they don’t affect the news-making process. It is an a posteriori impact that serves journalism as feedback. I repeat: it is the traditional media using a new distribution channel, and there are very few real examples of audience participation with respect to making news and in the journalism process.”

However, to Mabel Rehnfeldt from the Paraguayan

Journalists’ Forum, this “a posteriori impact” leads her to argue that, in her country, this a significant step that is leading to a new way of making news.

“There is more speed, instantaneousness, timelessness, transparency for countries so captive like ours, with very rigid dictatorships, and this vertical model is disappearing, in which we (the media and journalists) were right and no one could object,” Rehnfeldt said. “We are building our communities; increasingly critical readers, listeners, and TV viewers are emerging. . . . Unquestionably, on the other side of the story there are people who have recovered their voices.” Rehnfeldt believed that this is truer in countries with histories of totalitarian regimes than in those that have always had democracy, like the United States.

Chamorro and Rehnfeldt’s approaches to the concept of news-making refer to participatory journalism, which includes—beyond “a posteriori participation”—a broad spectrum of practices. They range from cases of users or citizens contributing to the reporting done by professional journalists to individuals building their own media outlets almost entirely on their own (e.g. Korea’s OhmyNews). However, examples of the latter are scarce in Latin America.

I deeply disbelieve in citizen journalism,” said Luis Carlos Díaz from Venezuela’s Ordinary People. “I think there is confusion: in English you talk about ‘citizen media,’ but when it goes into Spanish you start to talk about ‘citizen journalism,’ and you require citizens to engage in journalism, and this can be



Gabriel Michi, of FOPEA in Argentina (standing). From left to right (seated and in the front), Laura Mottaz, CIMA, United States; Fernando Alonso, FNPI, Colombia; Luz Maria Helguero, Network of Provincial Journalists, Peru; Carlos Dada, ElFaro.net, El Salvador; Gotson Pierre, Alterpresse.org, Haiti.)

unkind, it can be unjust.” Díaz said that the people simply want to tell what is happening, not engage in what we call journalism. “For me coming from the academic word, from the university, I say no: this is not objective, impartial, or truthful, this isn’t just.”

Ordinary People’s training project teaches Venezuelan citizens how to manage digital tools to express themselves, without inducing any kind of ideological or political biases. They are working with three types of citizens: journalism students or recent graduates; people working for nongovernmental

organizations, preferably in a communications-related field; and human rights activists.

“They are people that, I believe, urgently need to deal with digital tools,” added Díaz. “We are mixing them together. And, on mixing citizens with journalism students, we are also having them understand that young journalists who are working alongside them are not competitors, they are not people that are going to take your job, but they are information sources. We also teach people to have a better relationship with the press.”

DIGITAL TRAINING

Citizens are not the only ones who need training to function in the digital environment, journalists need it too.

A study by the New Ibero-American Journalism Foundation found that web media providers in Latin America (though responses differed by country) believe their largest training need is learning to tell stories with video and other complex media (contrast this with the fact that online journalism in Latin America is dominated by text first and by photography second). They said their biggest problem was generating revenue to finance Internet sites and media, but paradoxically they had considerably less interest in learning about business models or selling advertising.

The weaknesses of undergraduate journalism programs in Latin America are constantly criticized for not giving the necessary training for surviving in the digital environment.

“What are they doing in communication schools on this planet at this moment? What do they teach? (...) Sometimes it seems like nothing,” said Francisco Vidal from Mexico’s Center for Journalism and Public Ethics. “This is very serious because small courses, even for how intense they are, can’t quickly fill the structural holes in basic education, and this is a reality for our countries. The Political Science College at the Universidad Nacional changed the communication studies program three years ago and left it practically the same. Almost no focus on digital technology, no focus on analytic journalism, no professionalization.”

“Communication schools talk about the job,

but don’t do the job,” said Carlos Cortés, from the Radio Netherlands Training Center. “García Márquez diagnosed it years ago. Moreover, they are institutions used to analog media, and, therefore, they cannot make the transition without engaging in digital media.

That is a black hole that isn’t going to be solved.” To dramatize the situation, Cortés invited people to look over the program for the most recent meeting of the Latin American Federation of Social Communication Colleges, in which these issues were completely tangential.

Big media owners were also blamed for training weaknesses.

“Though you may not believe it, media owners are the least interested in training people,” said Mabel Rehnfeldt from the Paraguayan Journalists’ Forum. “I regret to say this. I hope that Mr. Ricardo Trotti takes this concern (to IAPA. We almost have to beg on our knees for them to let us teach people. We have to go to the media outlets to provide training.”

“In social communication departments, in general, there isn’t preparation for managing the web, managing multimedia, and the media aren’t interested in training their journalists,” added Gabriel Michi from the Argentine Journalism Forum (FOPEA). “With one or two exceptions, it is almost seen as unnecessary. There isn’t a serious investment, there isn’t training.”

Juanita León, from La Silla Vacía, a political news and commentary site in Colombia, was skeptical about the current nature of journalism training: “I feel like we always arrive late. We should invest money into laboratories to build the future and stop training in

the present because that is already the past for the audience.”

THE DIGITAL THREAT

Are digital technologies a real threat to traditional media in Latin America?

The answer is simple: they are not and have never been a threat, but opinions on the issue differ depending on the country and its level of connectivity.

In places with relatively high connectivity, the established media has seen the Internet as a content distribution channel and a way to enhance their brand.

“[In Mexico] currently the second [most popular] way of accessing news information is the Internet,” said Francisco Vidal from Mexico’s Center for Journalism and Public Ethics. “Of course, the most important way is the nightly news program, The Newscast with Joaquín López Dóriga, which has an audience of 2.5 million people. But in second place is the newspaper El Universo’s website, which has a

half million daily unique visitors.”

According to Vidal, Mexican print media see a future in the Internet, at least for a society that is digitalizing rapidly.

“The Mexican government estimates that in 2012 we are going to have 20 million broadband users,” Vidal said. “In three years we are going to double the user base. The opportunities for distributing information and doing business with whatever model you want—more or less balanced toward the digital world—are quite interesting in Mexico. I believe that newspapers are understanding it and are doing it.”

In contrast, in Nicaragua, a country with low connectivity—the norm in Central America—the Internet is seen as a marginal phenomenon.

“It seems to me that there isn’t Internet business, there isn’t a threat to the media’s traditional revenue base,” concluded Nicaraguan journalist Chamorro. “On the contrary, Internet advertising remains a bonus for advertisers when they put ads in newspapers and television, but it doesn’t have value on its own because traffic is still relatively low.”



Anticipating the Questions the Digital Revolution Will Bring



By Guillermo Franco

The semester ending September 30, 2009, was one of the worst in the history of newspapers in the United States: daily and Sunday circulation fell by 10.6 percent and 7.5 percent, respectively.

While one can't deny the effects of the economic crisis on those figures, it is clear that this is the ultimate chapter of a free fall that has been coming since 1987 (when the Internet was of no importance) and grew to dramatic proportions in 2009. Newspaper closures, payroll reductions, and reduced days of circulation are now commonplace.

On February 27, 2009, the Denver's *Rocky Mountain News*, a 150-year old newspaper, published its final edition after its losses became unsustainable. The daily *Christian Science Monitor* (100 years old) migrated to the web for the same reasons and is only publishing a print edition on weekends. In August, *The New York Times* confirmed that *The Boston Globe*, which it owns, is up for sale. *The Globe* experienced one of the largest drops in circulation (18.5 percent) during the semester ending September 30, 2009, following the *San Francisco Chronicle* (25.8 percent) and Newark's *The Star-Ledger* (22.2 percent). In March, *The New York Times* revealed it needed a 5 percent payroll reduction. The list is endless.

The key question: is Latin America shielded from this phenomenon?

Judging by statements from media owners and annual statistics from the World Association of Newspapers that show small growth or only minimal reductions, the answer is yes, Latin America is shielded.

When analyzing the United States, however, one of the top reasons given to explain the newspaper crisis is the migration of readers from print media to the Web, turning Internet penetration statistics into a crisis predictor. In the United States, connectivity exceeds 75 percent (more than 60 percent with broadband *).

As connectivity in Latin America increases, surely this sentiment of traditional media invulnerability will disappear, though this could be a long time coming. As is, it is clear that we are in a different stage, though further behind, in a similar process of transition.

Philip Meyer, a journalism professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, famously predicted that "the last daily reader will disappear in September 2043."

He made that statement in 2003, though five-years later Meyer said he was misinterpreted (responding to an article in *The Economist* saying the same). However, they recognize that within

* Internet World Stats, May 2010

the statistical exercise based on the decline in newspaper circulation, the date is correct.

There are other statements by Meyer; however, that are more transcendental than simply predicting the exact date when newspapers will die.

There was a time when people assumed that as people aged they were more likely to read newspapers. To the contrary, studies in 1983 by Meyers show that media consumption habits that are developed during youth remain for the rest of an individual's life.

This raises the question: how many Latin Americans in their 20s are reading newspapers? As in the rest of the world, that number is declining.

Where are all these people in their 20s? Clearly, one answer is "on the Internet," but not necessarily on traditional media outlets' websites. In countries with an explosive growth in web use (e.g., Colombia, which grew from 2.1 percent in 2000 to 45.3 percent in 2009), there has not been proportional parallel growth in traffic to newspaper Websites.

It is not clear where those people in their 20s are, but when you read that 35 percent of Facebook users are from Latin America, a tentative answer is: many of them are probably on social networks.

This is not to cry out and proclaim the death of newspapers. It is to articulate the questions raised in the places where newspapers are in crisis: are

newspapers fundamental for democracy? How can you fund good journalism if newspapers disappear? Is there a way to finance good journalism outside of the traditional advertising model? Is it viable to charge for content? Curiously, many of these questions are the same as those asked by news Website developers in Latin America.

One undeniable fact is that while readers are migrating to the web, advertisers are not. The most emblematic case is *The New York Times*: the majority of its readers are online, but 90 percent of its earnings come from print. In 2005, *Wired magazine* cofounder John Battelle summarized this aptly, saying the business model that justified the cost of high quality journalism is declining, and the medium where business is booming—the Internet—is not profitable enough to produce journalism at the same level of quality.

In 2004, the annual *The State of the News Media* report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism released a still relevant warning: "While journalistically online appears to represent opportunity for old media rather than simply cannibalization, the bigger issue may be financial. If online proves to be a less useful medium for subscription fees or advertising, will it provide as strong an economic foundation for newsgathering as television and newspapers have? If not, the move to the Web may lead to a general decline in the scope and quality of American journalism, not because the medium isn't suited for news, but because it isn't suited to the kind of profits that underwrite newsgathering."

These quotes point to a truth that holds both for traditional and new web-based media: engaging in good journalism and making good content costs money. However, the discussion into how much it should cost to do so is probably distorted. On one extreme, there are owners of large traditional media outlets who want profits from the web to be as large as those they are accustomed to from print. On the other, there are supporters of new projects, for whom imagination and perseverance is enough.

Both extremes are not good. It is worth laying out a working hypothesis: the majority of newspaper website operations in Latin America, as in the rest of the world, are or can be profitable enough to finance good journalism. However, media owners complain because their profit margins are not as high as in print, which has led to suggestions for content pay walls and other means of capitalization. On the other hand, while creating news projects no longer requires a \$10 million printing press, there is still a minimum capital requirement to engage in quality journalism.

This is the challenge for new web-based journalism projects in Latin America and the rest of the world: obtaining the amount of resources that will guarantee good journalism.

The grand contradiction—at least within the region—is that engaging in quality journalism, as many experiences in this report have demonstrated, can lead can reduce advertising revenue, as many of the projects often question the status quo. This appears to condemn new media to

a dependency on foundation funding and donations.

If newspapers, for their part, want to remain relevant to society, they will have to reduce their earnings expectations for the new web environment and understand that, above all, their vision of reality and society is not the only one.

Whatever the correct answer to the funding question ends up being, it is important to be clear that it is not newspapers but journalism that is essential for democracy (and this is not always associated with newspapers), a thesis that has been voiced by many analysts.

“The insistence on coupling newspapering to democracy irritates me not just because it overstates the quality and urgency of most of the work done by newspapers (a statement especially true in Latin America),” wrote Jack Shafer, editor of *Slate* magazine, in a 2009 issue. “But because it inflates the capacity of newspapers to make us better citizens, wiser voters, and more enlightened taxpayers. All this lovey-dovey about how essential newspapers are to civic life and the political process makes me nostalgic for the days, not all that long ago, when everybody hated them.”

Clay Shirky, a recognized analyst and Internet observer, agreed in a column titled “Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable,” saying that we should forget about saving newspapers and should instead experiment with new forms of digital journalism.

In Latin America, we do not have to wait for the newspaper crisis to reach us to start this process.



Developing New Journalism Skills: the Key to Survival in the Digital Environment



By Guillermo Franco

Communication and journalism departments in Latin America could be protagonists on the front line of the region's digital revolution, but they are not.

Several statistics, which add to the storm of criticism that these departments are facing from all sides (including from Austin Forum participants), should make the departments step back and reflect:

Only 7.5 percent of respondents to a survey organized by the New Ibero-American Journalism Foundation on digital training needs said they acquired the skills to manage an online operation as university undergraduates. Among those that didn't have any additional training in digital journalism (65.4 percent), the majority acquired the knowledge to manage their operation on their own (self-taught).

The online survey received responses from 588 Latin Americans representing sites of all sizes from traditional media to blogs, social organizations (NGOs, unions, political parties), businesses, universities, and research centers.

The minimal percentage of respondents who said they had received enough digital journalism training in college is even more striking as – even though the survey was open to online content

generators of all backgrounds – 94 percent of respondents had university journalism degrees.

At the risk of failing to recognize successful programs, one can say that Latin American universities have used two (incorrect) strategies to deal with digital issues: creating marginal courses called “digital journalism” and—mostly for financial reasons—creating specializations and certifications with flashy names that often hide their low quality.

Rarely are there proposals to totally reconsider and reform a program in light of the new reality. A reformulated program would have three bases: one journalistic, another digital, and the last entrepreneurial.

While the first two bases probably do not require additional justification or explanation, the third represents an important opportunity for students. Universities sell the illusion that graduates will find a job with the traditional media, when they know that this field is not only limited but is in the midst of a deep contraction.

The Internet represents a job opportunity for thousands of students graduating each year in the region, but they are only used to filling out resumes, not creating their own businesses.

The key to success for these graduates, both in the new media environment and in traditional organizations (including media outlets), is new

skills, which they currently are not learning at their universities.

What skills and areas of knowledge do they need? The New Ibero-American Journalism Foundation cataloged at least 33, which cover eight categories: narrative, business, Web 2.0, website design and creation, audience building, website administration, reporting and context.

Narrative

- » How to tell stories through VIDEO/How to capture / edit / produce /publish it.
- » How to tell stories through AUDIO/How to capture / edit / produce /publish it.
- » How to tell stories through PHOTOS (either individual or galleries, with or without audio)/ How to capture / edit / produce / publish them.
- » How to WRITE FOR THE WEB
- » How to use DATABASES for storytelling. (For instance, that every user see on a map how crime affects the neighborhood he or she lives in).
- » How to create ALTERNATE WAYS for storytelling: quizzes, questions and answers, gaming.
- » How to create MULTIMEDIA PRODUCTS (animated infographics)

» How to develop CONTENT FOR MOBILE DEVICES.

Business

- » How to design and assess BUSINESS MODELS (cost structure, sustainability, profitability).
- » How to create, commercialize WEB ADVERTISING
- » How COPYRIGHT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY rule on the Internet.What you can and cannot do with third party content.
- » How to create E-COMMERCE operations in websites.

Web 2.0

- » How to promote and run USER-GENERATED CONTENT as well as user participation in websites.
- » How to create, promote and maintain PARTICIPATORY JOURNALISM projects in the Web.

Website design and creation

- » How to design and create EASY-TO-USE websites. How to improve user experience.
- » How to organize information in a website / INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE.

- » How to use CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS.
- » What OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE can I use in my website.
- » How to design and run DATABASES (i.e. to create city and entertainment guides).

Audience building

- » How to improve the position of a website or content in a search engine / 'Search Engine Optimization' (SEO).
- » How to analyze websites' TRAFFIC MEASUREMENTS (pageviews, unique viewers, etc.) to make content-related decisions (metrics).
- » How to publish, maintain and attract audiences to BLOGS.
- » How to use SOCIAL NETWORKS to promote websites and content and to perform marketing and/or advertising campaigns.

Website administration

- » How to ORGANIZE ONLINE OPERATION.
- » How to train and teach other members of the team new skills or concepts (KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER).
- » How to understand and run relations with

the TECHNOLOGY / ENGINEERING areas regarding online operation (this includes the place where the site is hosted, content project development, functionality, etc.).

- » How to integrate operations/print newsrooms, TV, radio, Internet / CONVERGENCE.

Reporting and basic skills

- » How to do REPORTING AND RESEARCH.
- » How to improve GRAMMAR AND STYLE on writing (Punctuation, spelling, syntax).
- » How to identify and solve ethical conflicts / ONLINE ETHICS.
- » COMPUTER-ASSISTED REPORTING.
- » Using MOBILE TELEPHONY to report newsy events in text, audio and video.

Context:

- » How to understand what's going on in the MEDIA INDUSTRY. Trends at print media, radio, TV, Internet, mobile devices, etc.

To paraphrase the prologue of the Spanish-language edition of Journalism 2.0, by Mark Briggs (which I wrote), it is incorrect to think of these skills as simply a new requirement for traditional media organizations to meet so they can survive. It has become a cliché to say that in the digital age anyone can be a journalist, or anyone can be an

editor, as a \$10 million printing press is no longer needed to distribute content. It has also become a cliché to say that more of this content is being produced outside the traditional media. These clichés (which are not incorrect simply because they are clichés) show that it is the technological environment, and not the media, that is redefining the skills and profiles of both journalists and any others who want to generate content for the Web.

The prologue goes on to say:

“It is a mistake to see digital journalism in the United States context as very different from that of Latin America and that, therefore,

our development and training needs are also different. Those who support this claim base it—fundamentally—on the low level of connectivity in the region and therefore, for example, don't see the Internet as a threat to newspaper circulation. Our context is not so different from that of the developed countries. They are in a more advanced stage of the same process. It is difficult to find other practices for which the word “globalization” has so much meaning as it does for digital media and journalism, thanks to the Internet. Even the low connectivity argument is easily debatable: you only have to see the accelerated penetration of cell phones in the continent. Surely, the same will happen with Internet penetration.”



SHARING DIGITAL JOURNALISM TEACHING RESOURCES: AN AUSTIN FORUM PROPOSAL

The working group on training needs at the Austin Forum proposed the following: promote knowledge exchange between journalism support organizations and journalism training groups, focusing on strengthening the training capacity of each.

They also proposed designing replicable digital journalism training programs and systematizing their training so it can be shared with the broader journalist community.

As part of this initiative, organizations would share training materials, resources, or bibliographies in their areas of expertise and participate in different online events to share their knowledge.

“The idea is to systematize all of that and distribute it through the ‘Austin Forum Learning Platform,’” said group moderator Fernando Alonso, from the New Ibero-American Journalism Foundation.

The group noted that there is a need to explore and promote alliances with business schools for training on web-based journalism ventures. There is also a need to do the same with universities, to share their technology, educational administration, and ability to write proposals. The idea is to avoid redundancy and unify resources. Beyond this, the group said that universities have the capacity to engage in investigative journalism.



CHAPTER 3

**THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
ON INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND
THE NEW WAVE OF INTERNET-BASED
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN THE
AMERICAS**

- THE DEPENDENCE
OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA**
- MODELS FOR FINANCING
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM**
- OTHER ELEMENTS FOR CREATING
SUSTAINABLE MODELS OF
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM**
- INVESTIGATIVE
JOURNALISM AND TV**
- INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM
AND NETWORKS**
- A BUSINESS MODEL FOR AN
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM SITE:
AN AUSTIN FORUM PROPOSAL**



The Impact of Digital Technology on Investigative Journalism and the New Wave of Internet-Based Investigative Journalism in the Americas



Investigative journalism in Latin America is increasingly capitalizing on the power of digital technologies to elevate the standards of journalism in general, but it struggles—and not always with success—to find sustainable models for financing. Although investigators have a platform to distribute their content, they continue to depend – in some manner and for diverse reasons – on the traditional media to resonate, reach a large audience, and influence the public agenda.

The variety of ways digital technologies are being used for investigative journalism ranges from simple distribution of textual content (as in the majority of cases), to compiling complex databases and creating visualization tools that citizens and other journalists can use.

The proliferation of independent media has come at a moment of industry crisis, which has led some media outlets that traditionally did investigative journalism to stop doing it, not only due to a lack of resources—which results in payroll reductions—but also from a lack of conviction in its benefits or because, simply they are uncomfortable with them or they didn't generate enough ratings.

In Peru, journalist Gustavo Gorriti, from the Institute of Legal Defense, prevented an intentionally fraudulent purchase of hundreds of police cars by publishing an investigation on the issue on what he said was a rudimentary website that was terribly ugly, but functional. In 2009, Gorriti said this basic site was the first to reveal the disastrous operation that

took the lives of 24 police officers in the Peruvian jungle province of Bagua.

Chile's Center for Investigation and Journalistic Information (CIPER) published a piece using text and interactive maps called "To Live and/or Die in an Occupied Zone of Santiago." It was the culmination of project lasting over three-months that demonstrated the existence of isolated zones in the Chilean capital. In these areas, there was no state presence and sometimes the de facto rulers were drug traffickers and other criminals.

"We discovered that just in Santiago there were more than 80 entire sectors in which no firefighters, ambulances, mail carriers, water and light technicians, or police officers entered," said CIPER director Mónica González. "More than 660,000 Chileans live in these areas. This map was used by Ministry of the Interior to make new metro lines and by the Ministry of Health to create new clinics."

CIPER has also published investigations on the senators' assets – what was declared versus what they actually have–, on the system that allows senators to increase their salaries, and on the private security industry, among other topics.

The Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (ABRAJI) has a four-year-old database on organized crime coverage. Journalists can do analyses by date, region, and type of crime, for example, and even view articles published on the subject, if they want to emulate the presentation style.



Gustavo Gorriti, Institute of Legal Defense, Peru.



Monica Gonzalez, Center for Journalistic Investigation and Information (CIPER), Chile.



Jose Roberto Toledo, Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (ABRAJI).

"It includes a list of 5,000 names and 5,000 investigative articles (including police investigations)," noted José Roberto Toledo, ABRAJI's project and course coordinator. "We have journalists who explain the investigation and we link to other databases where you can get information about the people involved including defendants, judges, defense attorneys (among other categories)."

The database also can be used for what is called information content mapping, using geographic map software that allows the data to be visualized and interpreted more easily. With this technology ABRAJI developed a project with colleagues in Argentina and Paraguay on crime in the border region, which allowed users to see which places had the highest concentration of different activities

like drug trafficking, human trafficking, and cigarette smuggling.

ABRAJI has also developed a database with publicly disclosed information on the 35,000 mayoral and city council candidates in Brazil. In a single screen, a user could see information from at least five different databases with personal and professional information, donations, expenditures, campaign finances, assets, etc. This was an important source that allowed journalists to write hundreds of articles, for example, on which candidate was the richest by party or by region and the relationship between party loyalty and income level.

These experiences and examples of investigative journalism share many common factors. According

to supporters and practitioners (who are critical of the quality of current reporting practices), these projects are ways to raise the standards of journalism and redefine its role.

They are developed by journalists who are not working for traditional media and often cover issues that are not on the traditional media agenda. They are an attempt to use the many resources offered by new technologies, and they are seeking financial models that will guarantee their sustainability and continuity.

“Today we have many more technological tools to do better journalism, but we aren’t doing it,” Argentine Journalism Forum president Gabriel Michi said. To him, Argentina is weak in investigative journalism, and these tools could improve it, making journalism committed to the things that are happening to people.

CIPER’s González, in turn, said that journalists, especially younger ones, often forget that they work for the people, for the citizen “...who is full of questions and fears in the streets and that, today, more than ever, doesn’t have answers. I don’t understand why young journalists tend to seal themselves into a journalist’s world and lose their connection with the bus, with the taxi, with the street, with this river, and this pulse of the country.”

This means the act of choosing the topics one covers is very important. “To me,” González said, “choosing what to bet on, what we will dedicate this tremendous effort to, is the most difficult part of doing journalism today. Because, really, it is not, I repeat, about doing things that I like, but about doing what we should do and need to do to complete our mission.”

The paradox is that, in spite of being in sync with issues that are relevant to citizens, investigative journalism projects are often met with indifference and receive little attention.

THE DEPENDENCE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Does digital technology substitute for the power of print media in a country?

This is the question that Mabel Rehnfeldt, of the Forum of Paraguayan Journalists (FOPEP), asked after discussing the difficulties her team had in achieving some kind of impact with their investigation into the cigarette mafia.

Rehnfeldt attributes the setbacks to the fact that no important medium in Brazil, Argentina or another country was interested or involved in the project, despite having the support of Chile’s CIPER and the International Consortium of Journalists.

The responses ranged from a frank or definitive “no,” to comments in other contexts in which, consciously or unconsciously, the success of these investigative projects was measured by the interest they aroused in traditional media.

After responding “no,” Gabriel Michi, of FOPEA in Argentina added: “If we only focus on the development of the web page itself, it’s possible we won’t have the impact we’re looking for in matters of general interest.”

Michi suggests using, for example, lists of journalists’ emails for spreading the message. “Like a big megaphone. There will come a time when the message will be repeated in all the other small media

and the larger media will be obligated to enter in the collective agenda. When everyone is talking about a specific topic because the investigation that was done is really good, the media will not be able to continue silencing it by not covering it.”

Monica Gonzalez, of CIPER in Chile, said commented, although not specifically in response to Rehnfeldt, that she aims to influence the public opinion agenda at least once a month. “I have to do an investigative report that would be impossible for other media to carry. They can’t ignore me. I’m betting on this.”

For Gonzalez, it’s clear that, taking into account the statistics of Internet penetration in her country, she works for a rational minority.

Gustavo Gorriti, of IDL in Peru, also mentioned the topic, in another setting, referring to the “ugliness” of his website: “The important thing wasn’t so much how pretty it was but what you get out of it, and this forced traditional media to take it up again, and in some cases, develop it further.” He gave the example of his investigation into the relation between neo-Nazi organizations and the Southern Cone. “Initially, no traditional media wanted to cover it, in spite of the fact that we invited them to do it; as soon as we did it, everyone picked it up.”

John Dinges, executive director of the Center for Investigation and Information (CIINFO), a U.S.-based non-profit organization, said in his formula to create sustainable models of investigative journalism, “Even though the end is to publish in established mediums, we know the future will take us to another type of media. We want to be in those media from the beginning.”

Dinges is convinced that these projects will be successful only to the extent that there is a strong Internet presence. “Without the new technologies,” he said, “none of these things will be possible. This is what we have said thousands of times... presence on the Web not only creates the ability to publish works, but also to make available to citizens a lot of resources (bank data, document collections) or to create interesting blogs (for example, one about the methods of investigation, which also outlines the best articles and investigative projects that are done in all the countries).”

MODELS FOR FINANCING INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

“The fact that investigative journalism is considered a public service, fundamental to democracy, that perhaps can’t be for-profit, does not mean it should depend on donations.”

This declaration by Rosental Alves, director of the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, synthesizes the dilemma and the challenge that confront the majority of investigative journalism projects and independent web media in the region.

Dinges, of CIINFO, backs up this opinion in another of the points of the formula suggested for creating sustainable models of investigative journalism, by saying that you can’t depend on just one financial source or foreign sources.

Dinges dares to fix percentages. “I would say it shouldn’t be more than 40 percent of the total budget. In the case of CIPER in Chile (of which he was a co-founder), it was much less,” he added.

Gonzales, director of CIPER, felt that the investigative journalism project is privileged, as the contributions of Copesa (a private journalism company) allow for paying the wages of six journalists (five reporters and an editor), a web master, and a student intern.

“In every country there are good journalists that can stir up support from business people,” said Gonzalez, who added that credibility is profitable.

Dinges, referring to CIPER, suggested that these national contributions come from the media. Additionally, he’s in favor of the investigative journalism pieces charging the media that use them, and promoting the involvement of the university, which can contribute something, although not necessarily money, and reinforce the national character of the initiative.

Almost all of the heads of investigative journalism projects agreed that what definitely doesn’t work for financing their operation is the advertising

model – or, even if it works, at the moment it barely does – as those impacted by investigations are often advertisers.

“If you do good investigative journalism, you’re not going to get advertising money. Period,” said Gorriti, of IDL in Peru. However, he believes, at least in his country, that there could be a good opportunity derived from the advertising market created by an emerging, informal, solid, and strong economy.

“Some organizations that concern themselves with supporting topics that are important to the local community would be open to financing or supporting an organization,” said Mark Horvit of Investigative Reporters & Editors in the United States.

Another form of financing consists of the users themselves, the citizens, making contributions, following the model of National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States.

Other Elements for Creating Sustainable Models of Investigative Journalism

In formulating sustainable models of investigative journalism, John Dinges, executive director of CIINFO, noted that you not only need a strong Internet presence and diversity of financing sources (as discussed above), but also the following:

- » Independence from direct control another media outlet.
- » Human resources: four or five qualified reporters, well-paid, who work outside a medium, but in close relation with it or others. “This close relation assures it doesn’t become advocacy or cause-

driven journalism— independent journalism that stops being journalism and begins to promote, for example, an ecological cause. It's very important to the independence of the media not to be inside the newsroom. We all know what happens when the investigative units are inside the newsroom: when there's a need, they always eat us and investigative units disappear after a while."

- » The National Security Archive (NSA) factor: It's the leader in the use of access to information laws. The work of making requests, systematic requests with journalistic criteria and, obviously, to support the functioning of democracy. "I think there's opportunity to create institutions dedicated to this," said Dinges. "Or institutions where there is a combination of the function of investigative journalism and the function of making requests, offering technical help so others can use the information access laws, create archives, etc."
- » Continuous training. According to Dinges: "Investigative journalism is a job in which we have to be training ourselves constantly."
- » Participation in international networks. "Not just in conceiving of the center of the investigation as something from one country," Dinges noted. "But all countries in Latin America and perhaps other parts of the world, participating, including conducting international investigations, like the International Center for Journalism in Washington does."

Dinges added that the contribution that CIINFO can make to investigative journalism projects is very simple: provide funds from the United States that come from people who want to make tax-deductible donations.

Dinges recognized that a model for the creation of sustainable investigative journalism projects doesn't exist until there is more than one successful example (like CIPER), and that he is trying to develop more successful examples by getting involved with some of the most ambitious investigative journalism projects in Latin America.

Dinges and Monica Gonzalez in 2007 cofounded the Center for Journalistic Investigation and Information (CIPER) in Chile, which has had significant success with the help of contributions from Copesa and the Open Society Institute.

In Venezuela, Dinges promotes the Venezuelan Agency for Investigative Journalism (AVIP), a project led by journalist Laura Weffer; and in Mexico, Dinges has helped the Center for Documentation and Journalistic Investigation (CEDIP). He also is working to start investigative journalism projects in the Dominican Republic—but as of right now, the only thing he has is a close relationship with a newspaper; and in Argentina, through the Argentine Journalism Forum (FOPEA), launched in October 2009 with support from the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, under the direction of Gabriel Michi.

Michi explained the reasons behind FOPEA's work like this: "We point to professional ethics, journalistic quality, professional training, and the defense of the freedom of expression. We believe that all of these help constitute a democratic system, and, obviously, among these points we believe that investigative journalism is, without a doubt, one of the principle challenges and one of the principle sources for enriching the quality of journalism in general."

In Argentina, FOPEA will develop investigations that

will last two months (with a team made of an editor, two reporters and an assistant, who have experience in investigation and multimedia) and will be distributed via a web page and email lists, for free use, with the only condition that credit be given to FOPEA.

Gabriel Michi said FOPEA will tackle topics of interest to citizens that much of the time are left off the media's agenda, such as corruption, organized crime, violence, the environment, and health, among others. "These are topics that get displaced for not having sufficient ratings," he said.

Another project that will test the validity of Dinges' sustainability formula is directed by Gustavo Gorriti of IDL in Peru, with support from the Open Society Institute.

"We're going to concentrate on investigations," said Gorriti. "But our experience and, more than anything, the sad state of traditional Peruvian journalism make us think that it also will be necessary to do in-depth reports on drug trafficking and guerilla attacks, among other topics," he added. "I think we're going to be able to utilize the experiences we've achieved and also the advantages of IDL, like having available a network of 200 radio stations throughout Peru. I hope this will be the first step in making a series of alliances with those that also are doing similar journalism in Peru."

"Nothing in our formula is absolute or dogmatic, but a combination of some of these could be the recipe for success," Dinges concluded.

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND TV

Television, because of its higher penetration in Latin America than that of the Internet, has the ability now to promote investigative journalism, but it's not doing that.

Monica Gonzalez, of CIPER, attributes this to the existence of different ethical standards and editorial lines.

"We're interested in everything we publish being completely truthful. Our credibility is at stake," she said. "To television, a lot of times it's not important that the product that is airing be completely proven; what they're interested in is ratings. The fight for ratings in Chile has led to a loss of journalistic quality. I think that nowadays what television is doing is denouncing, not investigating."

Carlos Fernando Chamorro, journalist from Nicaragua, said that in Central America there are few television programs that have continued to be concerned about quality journalism. In his television program, Chamorro said, he produces in-depth reports that will have some kind of impact.

Those who are doing good investigative television programs have found that the Internet offers the possibility of reaching new audiences and boosting their messages.

After putting his television program *Contravia* in Colombia on YouTube, Hollman Morris said he "began to discover that I had an audience in different corners of the world. We had to make an effort to do short formats of five minutes to include them on social networks."

Morris attributes YouTube for having maintained his audience, in spite of the fact he's been off the public television network for seven months.

Investigative Journalism and Networks

For investigative journalism projects in Latin America, networks can mean a sharing of resources (to obtain economies of scale), realizing joint projects, obtaining larger audiences, but above all, counting on solidarity as a measure of protection when there are risks. The level of networking experience and the presence of new initiatives in the United States can contribute a lot to Latin America.

Brant Houston, Knight Chair in Investigative and Enterprise Reporting at the University of Illinois, said that his organization (Investigative News Network) was aware of the importance of networks even before they rose into prominence.

Houston described how the massive layoffs of journalists as a result of the newspaper crisis (they can leave their jobs, but not their careers) has led to the creation of local and regional investigation centers that have come together in the Investigative News Network (soon INN.org).

The idea, he said, is that these projects can share resources, data analysis, and administrative tasks, all to elaborate and spread their works in a larger format with a more recognized profile.

This approach has two consequences: the commitment to widening the field of investigative journalism from a local to international level, and to collaborating instead of competing.

“Competition is never going to disappear

completely,” said Houston. “But there are a lot of stories we can’t do alone, and they’re going to have more impact, especially those that are riskier, if we work in a unified way. What we have discovered is that if people can’t tackle a topic alone, they should form a team.”

“Also,” he added, “we’re seeing how to protect ourselves, not just legally, but also in terms of insurance policies, to see if we can gather a group to reduce premiums when it comes to civil responsibility and other similar topics, because we know that a well-focused legal attack can destroy an investigative journalism organization.”

Referring to security issues, Houston told the story of the journalist Don Bolles. In June of 1976, he was killed by a car bomb in Phoenix, prompting a collective response from his colleagues, who published a 25-article series on corruption related to the crime.

“The idea is that if you kill one journalist there are going to be 40 who will come to investigate,” he said.

The call to create networks is already coming from Latin America, not only invoking the shared characteristics of the organizations, but also commonality in investigative topics and their transnational nature, like organized crime, for example.

“We’ve made some regional alliances,” said Gabriel Michi of FOPEA. “It’s a way to confront those topics from our place as journalists.”

A Business Model for an Investigative Journalism Site: an Austin Forum Proposal

There are no infallible recipes to create a successful business model for a website, but there are some patterns collected from the relatively long experience of entrepreneurship worldwide.

“The idea of this plan (for an investigative journalism site) is to offer suggestions instead of rules. The specifics will be dictated by local conditions,” said James Breiner, director of the Center for Digital Journalism at the University of Guadalajara (Mexico), who acted as spokesman for the working group of Austin Forum attendees who addressed the issue.

Breiner gave the following model:

For the exercise, the group assumed the existence of a good product, with coverage of a community (province, state, border area), but without income and with a small audience. The medium may be a business or nonprofit organization. The following models have hybrid aspects. The first step is the selection of key personnel:

- » Editor, who should know the community very well in order to make informed decisions about content, topics, and news items.
- » Head of sales and marketing, who should be part of the group from the launch. Without audience or income there is no business or quality journalism. Many initiatives fail, not because of the quality of content, but because they cannot reach an audience sufficiently large enough to generate enough income to support a substantial newsroom.

The head of sales and marketing should be an employee, a volunteer or a stockholder in the company. This person should have a lot of experience defining and reaching a niche market, and a good understanding of niche marketing and communications on the Internet. Beyond this, they should have experience in selling advertising. A sales and marketing head should create a strategy for targeting audiences, distribution channels, and advertisers or potential sponsors. Additionally, the person should sell advertising and look for sponsorship opportunities.

The journalistic product should be directed to an audience that shares common interests, needs, doubts, and expectations (going beyond the simple demographic profile used in the past that doesn't work well on the web). The site needs to focus on a specific niche; such media outlets are very successful online. It is assumed that the audience wants an agent of change (the media) through investigative journalism on topics such as impunity, monopolies, corruption, human rights violations, failures in public services (education, road infrastructure, water, sewer, etc.), and more.

The specific content depends on local conditions, but it is assumed that the editorial staff knows the issues of the target audience well (whether located in a city, a border region, a country, or a region like the highlands).

Universities, organizations, clubs or any other groups with membership lists to which access is provided can be used to build an audience.



Working group spokesmen present their conclusions. From left to right, Luis Botello, ICFJ, United States (cell phones); Fernando Alonso, Ibero-American Foundation for New Journalism (Training); Ricardo Uceda, IPYS, Peru, moderator; and James Breiner, CPD, Mexico (Business models).

It is assumed that this audience will be largely middle class or higher; college graduates. But do not rule out the possibility that it will be attractive to young people and others who share desires, concerns, and expectations about issues such as governance, education, and human rights.

In many cases, the audience base will not consist of more than 50,000 members/registered users/dedicated subscribers (there will be more visitors).

The site will expand its scope to link up with other networks of investigative journalists, because many issues (drug trafficking, organized crime, immigration, economic development, business) are transnational.

For the initial capital, you can sell shares without any

one shareholder having more than one percent.

If it is assumed to be a “social business,” a nonprofit, products or services that support the main mission could be sold.

Nongovernmental organizations or transnational corporations (that have no local political interests) that are not affected by the reports could be potential sponsors. New entrepreneurs, without relationship to the established power, but with money and the desire to change society, could also be sources of income.

The companies that buy advertising should sign an agreement not to interfere in the site’s content. The site would prominently feature its advertising policy on its home page.

There was divided opinion on the subject of subscriptions for levels of access to information and micro-payments, but it was concluded that everything should be considered.

As a way to diversify income, the distribution of the same information in different formats was proposed.

For example, CD-ROM databases of investigations could be offered. This is a big business for the 40 newspapers of American City Business Journals, <http://www.bizjournals.com/bookoflists/baltimore/>, <http://baltimore.bizjournals.com/baltimore/leads/>.

Because of production and distribution costs, caution was recommended when considering printed products. However, a print edition could be worthwhile if published in magazine or newspaper formats that offer more potential for advertising and graphics and sold through kiosks and news vendors.

Politico.com was presented as a good model for how to support a Website with print revenues.

Contributions from readers are another source of income. Following models such as National Public Radio (NPR) and The Nation from the United States, and other media, the following could be offered:

» Annual membership, with access to certain events, discounts at certain businesses (with a realistic

expectation of participation being about 10 percent of readers).

» Annual fundraising campaign on the web and radio.

» Annual fundraising dinner:

» Other fundraising events, such as music or book festivals, or travel events like The Nation's sea cruise, which featured journalists and prominent columnists who interact with donor/passengers who pay substantially for the trip.

Other income, described as "a side door," include:

» Fee-based training workshops on how to launch and manage a web page or information gathering techniques (like database research).

» Charging for marketing consultations

» Sale of high quality products that strengthen the media brand.

If readers and users do not want to go to the site, journalists should go to where they are, through social network sites.

Alliances with major media such as radio and television can be effective for content distribution and promotion. Promotion, and even income, could be shared.



CHAPTER 4

**ONLINE MEDIA: HOW ARE THE OLD
AND NEW MODELS WORKING ON THE
INTERNET? HAVE WE EXPERIMENTED
ENOUGH?**

**HOW JOURNALISTS FROM LATIN
AMERICA ARE USING DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGY TO CREATE NEW
MEDIA/ SIX STORIES**


- LA SILLA VACÍA
- ALTERPRESSE
- SOLOLOCAL
- VERDAD ABIERTA
- EL FARO
- EL BÚHO

– **START-UP CAPITAL:
IMAGINATION AND PERSEVERANCE**

– **YOUTH.COM?**



Online Media: How Are the Old and New Models Working on the Internet? Have We Experimented Enough?

 Haitian journalists are putting social topics in the news; Salvadorans are explaining and giving context; Colombians are telling how power works in their country and are contributing to the recuperation of historic memory to clarify crimes committed by the paramilitaries; and Peruvians are doing alternative journalism in the provinces.

These are only five of many examples of how journalists in Latin America are using digital technologies to create new media, win audiences, and, although they don't say it explicitly, support the process of change in their countries.

When speaking of old models, the first thing that comes to mind are the good practices of journalism. When speaking of the new models the notions and practices of distribution channels, technological tools, narrative forms, business models, and two-way communication come to mind. As it stands, many media projects in Latin American and the Caribbean are marked by a coexistence of these old and new models.

"Each time a new medium is born, it feeds on the languages of those that already exist," said Carlos Dada of El Faro in El Salvador: "That's how television was, and movies. Now we have the Internet, still feeding on already existing languages, while we find its own language for this new platform." For Dada, the journalistic method (which he resists calling "old") is coexisting with new platforms and technological tools.

In other cases, the meaning of "old" corresponds

with popular traditions or established media that in some places work together with new media with significant success.

For Gotson Pierre of AlterPresse in Haiti, the oral culture, also called neighbor-to-neighbor transmission, which rapidly circulates information, is the setting in which whatever tool, whether digital or traditional, is used.

This is not by chance. Haiti's illiteracy rate is 56 percent, which limits the growth of print media and means radio has the greatest penetration and use (92 percent of Haitians have a radio and 67 percent listen to it twice a day. Within a country of 27,000 square kilometers, there are 290 radio stations). This oral tradition has been boosted by the rapid penetration of cell phones in Haiti, which now has three million cell phone users. (Ten years ago there were only 100,000 fixed telephone lines.)

In this way, Pierre believes that traditional media have been key in the emergence of his project. "More than constructing a medium," he said, "we're starting a process of building a communication space, in alliance with commercial media, community radio, public education institutions, the university, cultural groups, and telecenters (community Internet access points and digital training centers)." These traditional media reproduced the first bulletins that AlterPresse generated, and helped build its credibility.

Another traditional medium, this time in Colombia, brings the magazine *Semana* together with the Ideas for Peace Foundation in project *Verdad Abierta*,



Gotson Pierre,
AlterPresse, Haiti.



Mabel Cáceres,
El Búho, Perú.



Sandra Crucianelli,
SoloLocal, Argentina.

which tries to explain one of the bloodiest chapters in Colombia's recent history: 20 years of violence and repression by paramilitary groups that have entered into a peace process with the government.

"It's a job that could be historic, a small way to get to know things," said project editor Cesar Molinares. "We're not trying to emphasize the big scandals, or topple presidents, congressmen or businessmen, but to let the people know. Thus, *Verdad Abierta* tries to be a reference site".

El Faro in El Salvador produces audio content that is distributed via 30 radio stations to reach segments of the population that don't have access to the Internet. This is another example of collaboration between old and new media.

To have its own multimedia strategy and quadruple its audience, the Peruvian *El Búho*, a weekly newspaper, created a program on an open television channel and a website, that is maintained by the same journalists. The site's long stories are, in essence, the same content as the weekly, except the web format allows for frequent updates.

You could say that Luz Maria Helguero of the Network of Provincial Journalists in Peru has two or three personalities in which old and new media, old and new models coexist.

"I've been director, for 30 years, of a traditional newspaper (*El Tiempo* in Piura), which my family owns," said Helguero. "We promote a network of provincial journalists and we create a citizen

newspaper, using web technology and blogs. And we've done all this trying to deliver information to readers, good information."

This condition has not been exempt from conflicts, in particular related to the management of information. "In traditional information media there always are filters and always are problems with giving the information one wants to give," Helguero added. "So, one has to go armored up, go teaching journalists to train themselves so that no one can tell them what they're reporting isn't correct. And, well, my path is to find the channels so that the truth is told. So, independently of the network, the citizen newspaper was one of those paths. The other members of the board (the owners of the business *El Tiempo*) think you shouldn't attack the government and you shouldn't say a lot of things. But I've said to them: 'This citizen newspaper that you scorned so much, this is going to be our way to get out the information that needs to be told'."

But the "old" way of doing journalism in the traditional media also is challenged explicitly by some new models that can present themselves as an alternative way.

"I created *sillavacia.com* with the idea of telling how power works in Colombia," said Juanita Leon. "And I started with the idea that in the web there is a window of opportunity for people like me who, without the backing of a financial conglomerate or a political family, want to do a better journalism than what I did in the magazine where I worked. I thought the web offered a way of doing a more independent journalism."

And what Luz Maria Helguero calls the existence of information filters in the traditional media, Leon

carries further: "When I finished writing my book, I realized fundamental elements for understanding the war (in Colombia) had been left out of my journalistic articles. They were small things, small edits, small changes in emphasis, but that's where the war was really explained."

Leon said that, although she was proud of her articles, they often appeared with a cover page that offended her, written by another person in another context. "The moment comes when one feels that the container begins to define the content in some way. And I felt that I didn't want to support that container anymore," she said.

Have these new sites been tested enough? As the preceding paragraphs have illustrated, the field of experimentation is wide and ranges from offering and independent perspective, exploring themes that aren't on the traditional media's agenda or that lack necessary context and depth, to new narrative forms offered by the Internet and models of financing its operation. In each of these aspects, the answer is different. All of these sites claim to be independent and say they are not beholden to any economic or political power. Technically, they are experimenting intensely and many of them are employing new narrative possibilities. As far as the business model, all are looking to be self-sufficient and those that are sufficient, depend less on international cooperation.

But the heads of some of these sites say, emphatically, that they haven't experimented enough, not because they don't want to, but because they're learning how to do it and/or because they think that experimentation is an inherent constant of the Internet.

Hearing staff tell the individual histories of each of

the following new media outlets helps reveal how much they have experimented.



LA SILLA VACÍA
www.lasillavacia.com, Colombia
Juanita León

Lasillavacia.com doesn't just provide news; it gives context and explains it. This is its special and unique added value. Lasillavacia.com takes two big stories of the day and provides new information, investigations, forms or different perspectives about what is happening. It doesn't reproduce what's in other media, but offers new information.

In spite of the fact we've only been around five months, Lasillavacia.com has put various topics on the national agenda: it was the first to speak of the "State of Opinion" (a political argument according to which the will of the majority is above the Constitution); of how the government built palatial buildings for local governments to help pass the Congressional referendum (for the re-election of President Álvaro Uribe); of how the governor

of Valle has spent a lot of money promoting himself, of how the government appointed new prison directors (in exchange for support from Congressional representatives) in order to pass the referendum. I think that if one publishes things that people can't ignore, that news will spread everywhere and will have influence over the influential, which was our objective when we created Lasillavacia.com.

I have never thought of lasillavacia.com as alternative media. My aspiration is to point at the axis of power; to be on par with *Semana*, with *El Tiempo*, with *El Espectador* (the principle newspapers in Colombia). To be at the center of society and not on the periphery.

Lasillavacia.com is a platform that serves as a node for grouping other credible networks that already exist in society. My idea was to create a platform that groups the most interesting people in Colombia together. We have a section called "The Happening of the Day," in which candidates and public opinion leaders debate in-depth topics from the week. We attract 15 blogs of people already credible among their own networks. I think that the project started with the important social capital of credibility, that the people knew from the start it wasn't a university or alternative project.

While we have a page, from the beginning we wanted to engage with social media... to be in groups on Twitter, Facebook, etc. As soon as a journalist publishes a story, we look for related groups on Facebook. If it's about Colombia's president, Alvaro Uribe, we look for groups that hate him and those that love him and we post our story there.

One of the strongest points, I think, of lasillavacia.com is

that it has a narrative made and designed exclusively for the web. We make an effort to fragment the information, cover events live, interact with users, use images, and hypertexts. I'm starting to feel that the future of the web is live coverage and unedited information.

The other strong point of lasillavacia.com is that we have tried to improve the quality of users' participation.

Each one has a page, his own profile. We do various things where the users are the ones who produce the content, and what we have seen is they are high quality participants. We're going to start to have an audience editor, who is going to edit that content so that it can be part of the production, like in a newsroom, so that users produce content following the same journalistic parameters.

percent of the population (900,000 Haitians) has access to the Internet. It was founded by a group of journalists and began in 2002. The group was created with the dynamics of media freedom and the right to information in mind.

AlterPresse could be considered a stage in the long journalism experience from the era of the dictatorship and resistance, when graphic and audio material was shared in either a group or individual way, with the support of a human network that influenced communication consciousness in Haiti and facilitated, throughout the 1990s, the birth of a community radio movement.

Diversifying sources, it began to cover topics like sustainable agriculture, economic solidarity, food security, protection of the environment, local participation, gender equality, and migration.

And, because of its dynamism, its attitude, its publishing of uncensored and important information, little by little, AlterPresse became a required reference for media and users who look for information about Haiti. Edited in Creole, French, Spanish, and English, AlterPresse positioned itself from the start as a global communication medium with a local impact. It's not interested just in Haitian events, but in all regional and global developments that may have an impact on Haiti.

AlterPresse looks for its audience inside and outside of Haiti, and has 2 million audience members who live outside the country. In the same sense, it has incorporated Haiti's relations with its neighbor, the Dominican Republic, as a primary theme, something that previously didn't appear in the news but is now an issue that media outlets are competing over to cover:



ALTERPRESSE
www.alterpresse.org, Haïti
Gotson Pierre

AlterPresse is an Internet agency that achieved a space in a news field in a country where only 10

AlterPresse also acts as a resource for international communication media interested in Haiti, and has become a promoter of events like the annual Internet festival, journalism workshops, social networks, and the production of videos and radio chronicles.

AlterPresse attracts visitors from 110 countries, who see between 6,000 and 9,000 pages a day, while many sites republish the agency's content. Through its circulation and daily advisories, it reaches more than 1,300 subscribers, among them communication media, networks, institutions, and associations. It also is one of the sources selected by Google News in French, Spanish and English. At the end of summer 2003, AlterPresse was chosen by the newspaper "Le Monde" in France as one of the principle information sources in the region.

information online—and finding scoops, and if it's possible to standardize this search model.

In the city where I live, there were no hyperlocal media outlets or hyperlocal digital resource centers. As I taught classes about online searches, I realized there is a lot of outside information about the place where one lives. We publish unfamiliar stories about the city (Bahia Blanca) that we can find in Spain, in France, in Germany. The Internet makes the world so small, that we can find stories about Bahia Blanca everywhere.

We don't compete with other media, instead, we create alliances. We have an alliance with a group of television journalists, and once a week we post editorial commentary and they, in turn, every morning on their radio show name or read a story from SoloLocal.

SoloLocal is updated after 5:00 pm each afternoon, with a target audience in mind that arrives home between 6:00 and 8:00 pm.

For the person who doesn't have time to watch all the news, we have the eight major stories of the day from all the television channels summarized to just two minutes each. We have humor and photos on Flickr and we're on Twitter and Facebook.

The SoloLocal model is continuously under study: we don't know how it's going to change, so we are monitoring and studying it by tracking our audience.



SOLOLOCAL
www.sololocal.info, Argentina
 Sandra Crucianelli

SoloLocal is a medium that doesn't use oral sources but digital ones. We want to see if there's a way to build news based on searching—searching for



VERDAD ABIERTA
www.verdadabierta.com, Colombia
César Molinares

Verdad Abierta is a website that documents the peace process with the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, a confederation of paramilitaries that has violated human rights and used violence to intimidate individuals and groups in Colombia for more than 20 years.

The site started as a result of an alliance between the magazine *Semana* and the Ideas for Peace Foundation, both of which have contributed to the overall understanding of the role of paramilitary forces in Colombia's armed conflict.

Verdad Abierta, in the first stage, was given the task of gathering all the available information about paramilitaries in Colombia, sorting it and offering it without access restrictions. Users of the website can find descriptions of the 32 paramilitary structures that operate throughout the country; their political, military and financial bosses; and information on

crimes against the civil population; massacres; affected populations; and disappearances and displacements.

The second stage, which has yet to be completed, is dedicated to documenting and sorting the confessions of the paramilitaries within the framework of the peace process. After the traditional media abandoned this coverage, with the extradition to the United States of the 14 most important paramilitary chiefs, Verdad Abierta dedicated itself to continue to cover the topic and began a stage of investigative journalism.

Afterwards, Verdad Abierta was dedicated to investigating the infiltration of paramilitaries into politics, what has been called in Colombia "parapolitics." Verdad Abierta has monitored and catalogued the paramilitaries' political activities and has created a cartography of paramilitaries that documents how they behaved in various regions.

Now, Verdad Abierta is working on three additional chapters: the penetration of paramilitaries into the economy – whose businesses' most notorious act was to steal of between five and six million hectares of land that dispossessed five million people; the paramilitaries' influence over and commandeering of public administration agencies; and the paramilitaries' role in current conflicts and the supposed post-war period.

Verdad Abierta continues to treat its development as a learning process that started with the construction of the website and the familiarization with the tools the Internet offers.



EL FARO
www.elfaro.net, El Salvador
Carlos Dada

El Faro is an 11-year-old medium that tries to say what no one else will say, and to provide in-depth coverage of issues that both explains and provides context.

We started as an Internet weekly, with large blocks of text and now we're transitioning to a daily, to get back to hard news, without losing the elements that distinguish us from other media organizations.

When we got the software to do audio, we put it in a drawer. We said: "We'll take this out when we know what the hell we're going to do with it." A year and a half passed. But then we made a discovery. What did we discover? That in a poor country like El Salvador, we were reaching an elite audience: the people who read us are professionals, academics, decision makers, officials, politicians, businessmen, Salvadorans living abroad who have reached a certain standard of living. It continues to be the

elite. Is that a bad thing? Not at all. There is nothing wrong in having an impact and influence on decision makers. But is it enough? No.

We started a project, for example, about migration and safety, with a team in Mexico, doing stories about how Central American migrants ended up being the easiest victims of the public safety chaos Mexico is experiencing. Why are they such easy victims? First, because if you kidnap them, no one is waiting for them at home. No one is going to realize they were kidnapped. Second: because if you kill them, so many die in the journey, it won't matter. And third: because if the family pays you a ransom and you let them go, no one is going to go to the police because they were illegal. We have been "chronicling" and trying to portray the complexity of this situation in Mexico for our audience.

And we realized: "This is going to be read by businessmen, cabinet ministers, vice ministers, and other members of the elite." But how do we get this information to people who are thinking of making this journey, who don't have access to the Internet? Radio was the obvious answer. But we said: "We don't have a radio station." And then someone replied: "If we don't have one, why don't we provide material for 30?"

So that's how we started producing audio material. We took the podcast software out of the drawer. We said: "Now we know what we want this for." And we began to produce audio news, chronicles, and magazines that we now give to 30 stations in El Salvador that distribute our material.



EL BÚHO
www.elbuh.com.pe, Peru
Mabel Cáceres

In 2000, the weekly print newspaper El Búho aspired to do impactful, opinion-oriented journalism in Peru, but we were confronted with a difficult truth: our articles and investigations did not have impact or importance (they weren't being quoted among the media of Arequipa) and they didn't reach the young audience, that undoubtedly was on the Internet. Doing alternative journalism in the provinces in Peru was something more or less unprecedented then.

Our principle objectives are covering regional topics and providing analysis, investigation, and opinion.

On the streets of Arequipa, I have never seen anyone under the age of 25 buying a newspaper. Sometimes they'll buy a tabloid called Chicha.

The first thing we did was post all of the content from the weekly on our website, nothing more. The content—long and typical of a weekly publication—

was displayed without any resources or links.

Then we explored using television, because it could give us a large public audience that had never read our publication. We have a daily television program produced by our own team of journalists. The change of language has been a challenge, as we're accustomed to writing long for print. The same journalistic team produces reports for the television program.

From what we realized later, and it was very stimulating, was how television had another impact. Of course, it is less reflective, and doesn't invite one to think... But when there's a report whose images are impressive, the next day people are talking about this, which is something that's difficult to generate with the print. At least, this is our experience. Today, the television program is also on our Web page.

In Arequipa, about 40 percent of the population has cable. That's to say that 60 percent of the population doesn't have cable and is forced to watch us because there are few alternatives in broadcast television.

Through our TV program and our website – which we modernized slightly – we think we have, more or less, quadrupled our weekly print edition's audience.

After this experience with television and the website we have realized that we must use all of these tools.

On the website we have gone from being weekly to hourly, because we have to update the news service frequently.

Start-up Capital: Imagination and Perseverance

The stories above about the creation of new media organizations and websites in Latin America and the Caribbean reveal imagination and perseverance and—stealing the words of Sandra Crucianelli, creator of *SoloLocal.info* in Argentina—a certain amount of resilience. “I do not think *El Faro* is either a traditional or replicable model. Our seed capital was just an old computer and an armchair I had at my place,” said Carlos Dada, from *El Faro*, of El Salvador. “And we spent seven years depending on voluntary and unpaid work, which helped us to train the group of journalists we have now. What happened afterwards? This process makes you go after different sources of funding, because one cannot live like Mother Theresa forever, and journalists can and do get hired away by major media outlets.”

El Faro received funding from the Open Society Institute to support its project on migration and security. Similarly, a Dutch cooperation organization provided some assistance with the audio-production project.

In its aim to become self-sustainable, *El Faro* also embarked upon unsuccessful initiatives, such as selling packets of electoral information and analysis to roughly 15 subscribers. However, *El Faro*’s goals are to become self-sustainable and a profit-generating organization.

“I wish we could make profits. I think it is a complicated model, especially for the kind of independent and thorough journalism that we do,” said Dada. “We expect to decrease our dependence on the money provided to us by international

donors. Does that mean that we will be receiving less money? Not necessarily. It means that we will make an effort to look for more money in other places. We are going through that process. We are trying to give it a more marketing-led approach... and it is hard.”

Unquestionably, according to Dada, this process will give place to new sections on the website, because it is what marketing experts usually foresee—for example, a section on travel might be created.

Gotson Pierre, from *AlterPresse*, agreed that volunteer work has limits. “For us, the start-up capital did not represent much money, but instead it was the volunteer work that three journalists did, even though we knew that such a thing could not be a long-time arrangement. We addressed this by getting involved in other profitable activities, such as consultancy services.”

The editor of *lasillavacia.com*, Juanita León, indicated that the site aims to be self-sustaining through online advertising, services, and low production costs.

“At this moment, we are getting the funds of a fellowship from the Open Society Institute and a ‘fellowship’ from my dad,” she said. “After the second year, I hope to depend less on fellowships. We already have two ads on our site and we hope to continue getting more. There is a person in charge of selling site space. I hope companies [advertising clients] will be interested in having their products affiliated with a highly credible website that wants to become a reference for the most up-to-date people in Colombia.”

León knows that that resources are needed to get a strong start, especially, in her case, because she hired professionals at competitive salaries (in comparison to those offered in other media outlets). Her goal is to develop a model of journalism that people feel they really need and must have.

As alternative ways to generate income, *lasillavacia.com* created a business unit, which advises enterprises on web strategies, particularly around the use of social networking applications like Facebook and Twitter. “I think that in the medium-term this business unit will end up subsidizing, I hope, good journalism,” León said.

Given its nature, other sites are likely to remain dependent upon on contributions from international organizations and other donations. For example, *Verdad Abierta* of Colombia, which has a crucial historical and social function—but not necessarily high commercial value—of documenting crimes committed by paramilitary forces.

Verdad Abierta’s editor, César Molinares, explained that, even though they define themselves as a non-commercial project, they have unsuccessfully tried to get the sponsorship of private companies. But doing a different kind of journalism has naturally attracted donations.

“As we have dared to do things that other media has not done before,” said César Molinares, “some organizations and foundations have approached *Verdad Abierta* to say: ‘We want you to write a report or do research on displacement issues.’ And then we get resources and we like the result. They say ‘do it,’ and in this way we are opening things up little by little. We are now starting a site to deal with

victims [of paramilitary action] alone. And other organizations have told us: ‘We want to help you because it is a subject we are also concerned about.’ As we have been setting the agenda, there are people willing to collaborate with us, without asking for anything in return.”

In addition to *Opens Society Foundations* resources, *Verdad Abierta* has also received money from *Fescol* (which is the foundation of the German socialist party), the *Avina Foundation*, and the *Canadian Embassy*, among other donors.

SoloLocal.info of Argentina is just not worried about advertising revenue in general, but it refuses to publish any ads coming from governments, privatized enterprises providing public services, or petrochemical companies. “Aside from these types of organizations, we accept advertising from anybody else,” said Sandra Crucianelli, of *SoloLocal*. “We have contacted two major regional advertising agencies, but, so far, no one is interested in publishing ads. I knew this would happen because of the political culture where I come from: advertising is used for buying journalists’ silence (which I am not willing to sell). It has been like that for many years. And media owners have been part of it.”

Crucianelli went on to describe some other models: “I have the theory that maybe there is not a business model for these types of media. In Mexico, I saw that many major outlets were producing very profitable police blotter tabloids, whose incomes were paying for the costs of their main—or most serious—newspapers. Then, I said to myself: ‘If it works for the print press, why can’t it work for digital publications?’ At the moment, *SoloLocal* is subsidized by other

lucrative activities: I am an instructor and a teacher, and I do work as a consultant. This is the work that is actually keeping SoloLocal running. That is my business model.”

Crucianelli started her project after the Kirchner family got into office in Argentina, which, according to her, had a negative impact on journalism. “My

investigative journalism unit was dismantled; the program, shut down; the funding, withdrawn. I had an opinion column that was cancelled, and my operational capabilities within the news show—of which I am still its leader and editor—were dramatically reduced. I think it is time to not just change collars, but to stop being the lap dog altogether!”

Youth.com?

Young people are an evasive target of the new content generators. The media’s position towards youth ranges from giving up on trying to win them over, to others who involving youth in different ways than they have been up until now, and others who are redefining who the youth are.

“In our attempt to sell more newspapers,” said El Búho’s Mabel Cáceres, “we ask ourselves: what are we doing wrong, if we are making an effort to improve texts and enlarge photos? But there was a moment in which we stopped torturing ourselves, and realized that people were just reading less, especially young people. The fact that they are not reading, that they do not enjoying a good read, is a problem for the ministries of education in our countries. We cannot do anything else.”

Cáceres believes that the answer is not to trivialize the newspaper. “Not a chance! El Búho remains

as it is. Our typical reader is a 45-year-old person who loves to watch political TV shows, and who has strong reading habits. It is very much a middle- to upper-class demographic.”

As a part of its strategy to engage young followers, El Búho decided to produce TV shows and offer its contents on the web with rather light, easy-to-read subjects.

But others, such as Carlos Dada, from El Faro, thinks this is not the answer, or at least not the most satisfactory answer.

In this respect, he said: “When I talk to young people, they tell me: ‘We feel like we are treated like idiots. What we really want is to be included in the debates that adult people think are exclusively directed at them.’ The last thing the young people I talk to want is, for example, youth-oriented publications. They say: ‘We do not want to be treated as a separate

public.” Dada added, however, that the young people he talks to are probably not representative of a more general audience.

For Dada, the power of his own media outlet is based on its ability to inspire the youth of El Salvador, as happened with La Jornada of Mexico, and El País or El Mundo of Spain, back in their days.

“We have kids visiting El Faro just to tell us: ‘You are the reason for us to imagine that things can be done, that they can be done without resources. We are not journalists. We just want to create video and filmmakers groups, and we want you to help us organize them,’” Dada said. “It is all a manifestation of how young people are approaching us. In the end, I think the best thing we can do with our work is to start talking in their technological language, which is exactly what we are doing—and exactly what others

are also trying to do. So far, I cannot find another way of doing it.”

But for others, such as in the case of Juanita León, from La Silla Vacía in Colombia, youth is a concept that exceeds a simple distinction of age.

“We want to reach modern people, who can anywhere from 20 to 80 years old, living in Bogotá or Chocó (a province of Colombia), who want to be connected with the world,” León said, “who are against the killing of indigents, and who are somehow willing to use new technologies to learn about the country they are living in. For me, (age) segmentation does not work. I believe the solution is doing good journalistic work and creating a community of people identified with certain values and types of information. In such a context, age is not that important.”



CHAPTER 5

**GIVING A VOICE TO CITIZENS:
ARE BLOGS, SOCIAL NETWORKS
AND CITIZEN MEDIA MAKING A
DIFFERENCE?**

**USER COMMENTS: THE GOLD AMIDST
THE GARBAGE**


**QUESTIONS BEHIND THE “PROBLEM”
OF USER COMMENTS ON WEBSITES.
REFERENCES FROM U.S. SOURCES
THAT COULD SHED LIGHT ON THE
SITUATION IN LATIN AMERICA**

**CELL PHONES: THE POWER OF
TEXTING**

**ENTERING THE MOBILE PLATFORM
WITH CONTENT FROM NEW
WEBSITES: A PROPOSAL FROM THE
AUSTIN FORUM**



Giving a Voice to Citizens: Are Blogs, Social Networks and Citizen Media Making a Difference?

 Citizen journalism is making forceful inroads into Latin American and Caribbean society, but in the current context journalists from the region believe that to really capitalize on its potential, the real challenge is for it to happen at the same rate that social networks are growing. The big question they are trying to answer is how to do this (though don't expect to find the answer here).

According to various theorists, the definition of citizen journalism covers myriad activities that include the ability to simply add comments to articles, offering experience or knowledge on a topic to a journalist, and establishing blogs or sites with “non-professional” content, with or without edits, to creating hybrid sites in which citizen media coexists with that of professional journalists.

The tools to promote citizen participation are not evenly distributed in Latin America and some of them (the web, emails, blogs) can be limited by access to the Internet or the cost of devices like digital cameras, but the exponential growth of the cell phone (especially the basic prepaid models) highlights its potential.

Despite these restrictions, Latin America is an active global protagonist in the application of certain tools. For example, the region represents 35 percent of users of the social network Facebook. (As of July 2009, among the 30 countries with the most number of users, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela are in 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14th place, respectively.) Brazil represents 57 percent of Orkut users, another social network and Brazil's most

popular website. According to Felipe Heusser from Chile's Voto Inteligente, in Latin America 72 percent of users of the social network Twitter only just started using it in the first five months of 2009 and the majority are under the age of 30.

Old and new media are capitalizing on this phenomena in order to get audiences involved in generating content and interaction, and not only through the Internet.

In Bahia Blanca, Argentina's second largest petrochemical center, where multinational companies like Dow Chemical, Exxon, and Petrobras are stationed, there was a spontaneous explosion of citizen journalism between 2004 and 2008. “I started to see that there were environmental organizations pushing for a control on environmental contamination,” said Sandra Crucianelli, of SoloLocal in Argentina.

“The users—a TV audience—sent photos of the pollution that they took with their cell phones to the television station where I worked.”

However the environment was not the only topic of concern. Opinion and historical blogs (on the history of the disappeared in Bahia Blanca during the last military dictatorship) began to appear. Blogs about neighborhood complaints, about families and victims (when someone was killed and there was a crime that went unpunished, the family itself was able to obtain the documents of the case), and community blogs also appeared. “The truth started to be revealed. There were always groups in power



Luz María Helguero (right), Network of Provincial Journalists, Peru.

that tried to make sure these stories remained untold,” said Crucianelli.

In more recent times, citizen media has also taken off on Facebook, “both by young people and women my age, close to their fifties, added Crucianelli. “Headlines, like ‘Bahia is Disgusting,’ ‘Pity Bahía,’ ‘Water Crisis in Bahia Blanca,’ ‘I Also Want Them to Close the Zoo,’ ‘Stop Building in Napostá Neighborhood,’ ‘Down with Plaza Group,’ ‘Tremendously Motivated,’ ‘The Bustle,’ ‘Break the Circle,’ ‘Bahia Critic,’ ‘The Other Bahia,’ ‘Grey Bahia,’ ‘Estuary Revolt,’ ‘Take off the Mask,’ ‘Witch Ears,’ and ‘Stand Up,’ have appeared, among others.”

In Peru, the spontaneous explosion of citizens’ voices through blogs and social networks was capitalized

on by the traditional newspaper El Tiempo in Piura, which put advertisements in the paper that offered to teach citizens how to use tools for the web, like blogs.

“We thought that if they didn’t know how to use these tools, they wouldn’t be able to become citizens,” recounted Luz María Helguero, of the Network of Provincial Journalists. “On August 28, 2007, ‘Gua’ (an expression in Peru which means surprise or happiness) became the first citizen newspaper in Peru. Originating in the province, it was the first time that residents of a rural area were given a voice.” Helguero said the network was inspired by the rich Chilean experience of citizen media and received input by a woman who had directed and promoted various of these endeavors.

In the classes, El Tiempo taught journalists, enterprising women (the most active), citizen bloggers, and student correspondents how to use web tools. As an example of the coverage done by the network, Helguero mentions a citizen consultation done in towns in the more rural highland areas that were “ignored” by the traditional media, and that allowed the people from this area to tell their own version. Later, this experience was reproduced in the city of Trujillo, with the Trujillo ¿di? another citizen newspaper:

Georgia Popplewell of Global Voices On-Line defends this line of collaboration, saying that traditional media can benefit from public and citizen media.

Global Voices—as it notes on its own page—is a community of more than 200 bloggers from all over the world who work together voluntarily in order to distribute translations and reports from blogs and citizen media to a wider audience, with an emphasis on voices that are not normally heard in traditional media. With 100 translators, its content is found in 17 languages.

“Traditional media gives access to our information pretty regularly,” said Popplewell. “We have this information for free and we are currently working with the BBC. What we have discovered is that we have become a point of reference, for example on topics like Iran. If you want to interview someone, you can go through us.”

Popplewell added that Global Voices was founded on citizen action and the lack of attention that the media gave to this part of the world in development except when there was a major crisis.

The traditional media’s narrow agenda is also the reason behind the growth in citizen media in Latin America in particular. “An analysis of 30 consecutive days lead me to the conclusion that 82 percent of the headlines were similar; all of them said the same thing,” said Crucianelli of SoloLocal. “There was a sort of information indoctrination, that I believe has an impact on public opinion,”

Using an expression coined by the Colombian expert Javier Darío Restrepo, who teaches journalism and ethics around the continent, Helguero described the situation as “unanimism in the media.”

Crucianelli conducted a small study of citizen media that appeared in the city. The authors told her that they were tired of traditional media; that the government did not listen to their demands; that the media didn’t have resources, time or interest in investigating; of the way the corruption affected them; that no one did anything; that the people’s message was ignored; that they were censured; that they were forced to remain anonymous in the message systems of digital newspapers; and that they were not allowed to give their opinion.

In other countries in Latin America, there is less dynamism in journalism, mainly due to low levels of online use.

“In the relationship between social networks and journalism, I would say that there are anecdotes,” claimed Carlos Fernando Chamorro, journalist from Nicaragua. “There are examples of opportunities that have highlighted its potential, but these are isolated cases, good, but it is not a generalized trend.”

Chamorro cited the use of Nicaragua’s presidential

plane for personal trips by Daniel Ortega's family, which was made public by a post made by his daughter on the social network Facebook for all her friends to see, and the boycott attempt against the company Flor de Caña, which produces rum, also organized on Facebook, because of the connection between the refinery and problems of chronic renal failure in the coastal area of the country.

In places in which the influence of the Internet is low, or doesn't reach the lowest social classes, the radio is an important alternative to giving citizens a voice. Nevertheless, the radio has laws that restrict its use.

"There is increasingly more ground being gained in the generation of converging laws that complement telecommunications with the media, especially with the arrival of the cyberspace platform," argued Carlos Cortés, from the Radio Netherlands Training Center. "And this has allowed for the emergence of an increasingly clearer understanding about redistributing the spectrum once it is digitalized." Cortés recognizes, however, that many people don't

even understand what the radioelectric spectrum is and even less about how it is a public good administered by the state.

The countries that have been able to advance the most in this area now distribute the spectrum in a public sector, a citizen sector, and a private sector, which allows it to maintain a healthy equilibrium. And in the citizen sector there are citizen and community radio stations emerging that are regulated by the state, often with advertising restrictions, though some are allowed to find sponsors.

"In the case of Colombia, there are 600 citizen radio stations that are autonomous and with very difficult levels of sustainability," Cortés added. "In these radio stations, volunteers are fundamental to their operation. In some cases they are connected to community activities, because they can't make it just as a radio station. And definitely, you see how this is reflected in the activity of the citizens exercising their right of expression."

User Comments: the Gold Amidst the Garbage

User comments became a headache for media websites in Latin America, in particular the newspapers, possibly putting at risk the simplest form of interaction with the users.

Rosental Calmon Alves, director of the Knight Center

for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas, said that the comments are "part of this new world of conversation, and there is no way to stop it. Journalism cannot simply ignore this trend. Gold does not abound, but rather is mixed in with the dirt, with the garbage."

But in some Latin American countries that garbage has certain legal connotations.

“At La Nación of Costa Rica, we cannot publish comments made by citizens in the news because there is legal jurisprudence that makes the media coresponsible for whatever offense against someone’s honor or anything else that is committed. So, now we are considering hiring an army (of people, with or without journalistic background) to filter comments,” said Giannina Segnini.

The New York Times opted for the last option and has had to increase its initial army of 11 filters to more than 70, but this option is a problem in Latin America because few media outlets have or are willing to invest the resources to do this.

In other countries, legal initiatives have emerged that can potentially stifle comments and two-way exchanges. For example, legislators in Colombia are considering a recently introduced bill that would require disclosure of the full identity of those who participate in these forums and also require the press to publish this information.

“Recently in Peru they wanted to introduce a law on the topic of blogs as a way of shutting them down,”

said Helguero, from the Network of Provincial Journalists in Peru. “But there was so much criticism against this bill, that they stopped it.”

“In Venezuela the problem is not if there is or is not a law that prohibits this,” said Luis Carlos Díaz of Gentedapie. “In fact, the law on crimes in the media was not passed because it was so horrible: everyone was guilty before the fact. The problem in Venezuela is the discreteness of the law. So, it doesn’t matter if they have a comment or not. The day that they want to shut you down they are going to do so for a different reason. There is total freedom of expression until a public servant falls in love with you and decides to shut you down.”

The site that receives the most hits in Venezuela is the blog Noticias24.com, and the commentaries are plagued with calls for assassination, for political violence, “but that doesn’t worry anybody,” Díaz added.

Other sites, like SoloLocal in Argentina, depend on the system of reporting abuses by their own community. “The guidelines for publishing are clear in that we don’t allow insults, or anything like that,” said editor Sandra Crucianelli. “But we have opened all the channels so that they can say what they want, even about me, like that I am crazy.”



Questions Behind the “Problem” of User Comments on Websites. References from U.S. Sources that Could Shed Light on the Situation in Latin America



The problems that websites have, especially the traditional media (for example, newspapers), in handling user comments, offer important questions that are not exclusive to Latin America, like the issue of anonymity and responsibility for the content that these services generate. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that we are late in addressing these issues and questions.

For example, legislators in Colombia are considering a recently introduced bill that would require disclosure of the full identity of forum participants and requires the media to enforce that rule. Around the same time, in September of 2009, The New York Times reported that a similar initiative had been secretly ordered by the Chinese government, widely considered one of the most digitally restrictive countries.

The Chinese government’s outward position is, curiously, very similar to the latent arguments that justify censorship (digital or otherwise) in other regions, Latin America in particular. This is because governments do not just want to restrict comments that are libelous, threatening, or violent, but to restrict different views: the initiative is meant to promote “greater social responsibility” and “civility” among users.

rdia, United States legislation discriminated against the editors (or generators) of content by exonerating the distributors of all responsibility regarding the content. “(...)The responsibility

of the distributor applies to things like kiosks and book stores, where the courts basically take the position of knowing everything that is available to the public; therefore they aren’t going to sentence them as responsible.”

The legislation promoted in China, known as “the real name system,” is defended by pro-government academics who say that “required controls are necessary in order to reduce inflammatory attacks, disinformation, and other illegal activity that is deemed dangerous to the social order.”

In an article published in the Knight Citizen News Network, Giovanni Rodriguez, founder of Hubbub, a consulting firm with headquarters in Silicon Valley, concluded that the legal and political issues that highlight the debate about anonymity on the web are serious and that there are many more topics connected to transparency than simply attribution.

To support this claim, Rodriguez cites the publication of an article with a practical focus on anonymous blogging, with tools, suggestions, and tricks on the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) website.

According to Rodriguez: “For many, particularly for those of us working on community issues, where transparency has become almost a religious concern, this seems like a very strange

movement. I felt almost as if the EFF was letting us down by encouraging people to write anonymously, that the important stories by anonymous bloggers would be read with skepticism.”

Rodriguez mentions that in an interview in the magazine *Gelf*, the author and analyst for EFF, Annalee Newitz, pointed out that “various groups of people clearly deserve anonymous coverage, including: corporate informants, dissidents of politically repressive countries, victims of domestic violence and homosexuals who can contact the media without fear of repercussion by family members or their employers.” The category “dissidents of politically repressive countries” is particularly relevant in many Latin American countries.

Rodriguez goes on to note that most successful bloggers do not agree on this topic. “In an email to the magazine *Gelf*, David Weinberger, coauthor of the *Cluetrain Manifesto*, the text that started the blogging revolution, clearly argued for a libertarian view of anonymity: ‘It is a personal option. In my opinion, allowing for anonymous discussions is a requirement for an open society and is essential in repressive societies.’ Jay Rosen, professor of journalism at New York University who blogs on *Press Think*, said to the magazine *Gelf*: ‘There is a mysterious type of guarantee when a real name is connected to a blog. Without it, everything is less real, more insignificant. Transparency and anonymity are in conflict.’”

However, upon citing David Weinberger who in 2003 published an assessment on this topic, Rodriguez distances himself from Rosen’s opinion. “(Weinberger) concludes that, beyond the issue of transparency, there are other ways in which bloggers can demonstrate that they have a hand in the game.” In fact, in a number of blogs popular writers have won the respect of their readers despite writing anonymously. An interesting example is the increasingly more diverse world of the military blog, where anonymous blogs have large and respectful audiences.

In a study on the subject of anonymity on the Internet, Karina Rigby of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said: “Even though some people automatically ignore any anonymous publication, other people don’t care who writes it as long as it is intelligent or fun.”

In the case of China, discussed at the beginning of this article, critics of full identity cited by the *New York Times* say that government regulations represent an attack on the right to freedom of expression and individual privacy. Also, they add, websites and users should reserve for themselves the right to discipline.

With the title “Why Anonymity Exists and Works on Newspaper Web Sites,” journalist Steve Yelvington published an article in 2006 in the Harvard University magazine *Nieman Reports*, in which he maintains that there are historical, ethical, and legal grounds for the existence of anonymity and pseudoanonymity in the Internet culture, which makes it difficult to simply transfer

the regulations of identity that apply in print publications.

Yelvington notes that these topics are not exclusive to the Internet. “Indeed, early American journalists often wrote under pen names, particularly in the Revolutionary period, when the oppressive danger was not merely a tyranny of the majority but a tyranny backed up by military force. Founding Fathers Ben Franklin, John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison were among those who occasionally took advantage of pseudonyms.”

Yelvington, who participated in the discussions promoted by the Poynter Institute on ethics, recognizes that “identity was rapidly seen as one of those questions that doesn’t have a simple answer.” Instead, Yelvington asked more questions: Who is benefiting? Who is being hurt?

Yelvington characterizes five identity models found on online forums:

1. Real, verified, published names. It’s almost impossible to do this without requiring credit-card transactions.

2. Real names required but not verified. Most “real name” forums on the net today operate this way.

3. Pseudonyms allowed, tied to unpublished real names. Most newspapers with Web registration systems can implement this model easily.

4. Pseudonyms allowed with complete anonymity.

5. Completely open systems—post under any name. This “most free” environment is the most abuse-prone, but a peer-moderation system (such as found on Slashdot.org) can mitigate the damage of an abusive minority.

“Among these routes, there is no “correct” path, just a need to consider all these issues and strike a balance. The middle road—public pseudonyms, private identity—might be the optimal, if not ideal, solution. The mask provided by a pseudonym might entice shy persons to contribute, just as they might open up at a costume party. But as with the real event, it helps if the host knows the identity of everyone in the room; knowing this tends to keep behavior from getting out of hand.”

In its document on ethics, the Poynter Institute suggests the following questions to guide the discussion on the content generated by public user anonymity versus internal policies on publications:

» Does the content contributor face personal safety and/or privacy issues?

» Will anonymous posting of user-generated content increase the flow and exchange of ideas? Will it enhance the diversity of the conversation?

» Will anonymity damage the credibility of the information or debate?

- » Do I have the capacity to moderate or clean up anonymous posts that violate other standards?
- » Are some categories of anonymous user-generated content essential, and others unacceptable?
- » Is the community clear on the conditions under which the anonymity is granted and/or limited?

In another section of the document on ethics produced by the Poynter Institute, the need to resolve any deviation “between the standards developed for user-generated content and those which exist for the journalists inside the organization” is highlighted. “For example: Do the benefits associated with permitting anonymously posted user-generated content justify a departure from the internal policies that govern my organization’s use of anonymous sourcing?” Another question for this debate is: should we require citizens to follow the same standards?

Relinquishing the option for the community to be part of the conversation because of the legal consequences that this may have, or simply because their opinions may be discomfoting for the media, is a harmful solution. It has been shown in recent cases that the conversation moves to other arenas, like social networks that paradoxically may be the answer to anonymity and abuses in forums that contain user comments. Since in social networks people are not only directly identified, but also they offer hundreds of photos of themselves. (It is worth

mentioning as a case in point in this sense the Huffington Post.)

In his article Yelvington also point out that: “Some journalists, such as blogger Jeff Jarvis, have begun to question whether the editorial page has outlived its usefulness. Community conversation will thrive even if every newspaper disappears. Is there a vital and continuing role for newspapers, or even for journalists, to play in providing such a forum for civic and social conversation?”

Community conversation can benefit from a framework of goals, ground rules and leadership, and newspapers can perform a real public service by helping provide this.” Yelvington, who asks the question, what works in order to make the transition to the next topic relevant to Latin America: How does the law deal with anonymity today? Who is responsible for the content of these publications? “Here a common Internet acronym applies: IANAL (I am not a lawyer), so an editor must consult his or her own legal resources and ultimately make an informed decision about risk,” he adds.

Almost all of the laws on the continent, inherited from the print world make the media coresponsible for what the users say in online forums. The problem is so complicated that in countries like Costa Rica, the most important newspaper decided to deactivate this function and thus lose a golden opportunity to involve their users in the conversation.

Starting from the assumption that the majority

of Latin American governments are democratic, at least by name, and that the only intention is to control abuses in media discussion forums, we ask if these (or the courts) should not legally give almost total immunity to them for the content generated by the user, following the model that exists in the United States.

Since 1996, in the United States the discussions about responsibility for user content have been guided by section 230 of the Communications Decency Act or CDA 230. In the article “Why News Orgs Can

Police Comments and Not Get Sued,” published in January 2009 by the Nieman Journalism Lab of the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University, David Ardia, director of Harvard’s Citizen Media Law Project and former assistant counsel for The Washington Post, explains that the act does not provide one hundred percent immunity for the editors of websites, but close to it, on the condition that they do not force their users to make libelous declarations or significantly change the meaning of the comments (for example, to add the word “no” where it doesn’t belong).

With section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, whose title is “Protection of Good Samaritan Blocking and Screening of Offensive Content”, Ardia feels that the U.S. Congress has basically said: “No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.”

Ardia clarifies that, for the objectives of this statute, a service of interactive computers “it’s any means of communication that involves multiple users accessing a computer system. It also could be listservs, email lists that you may use or send out. All of those are covered. Anything that involves multiple users, multiple recipients, falls under this protection.”

Before the Decency Act was passed, notes Ardia, United States legislation differentiated editors (or content generators) from distributors, as the later were exonerated of all responsibility regarding the content. “(...)The responsibility of the distributor applies to things like kiosks and book stores, where the courts basically take the position that distributors aren’t in a position to know everything that is available in the public; therefore they aren’t going to sentence them as responsible.”

Two court cases, nevertheless, arrived at what Ardia called “aberrant ambiguity.”

In 1991, CompuServe’s line service was sued for a libelous statement in a forum called “Rumorville,” that exchanged business rumors. CompuServe argued that it should be seen as a distributor of content, like a kiosk or a bookstore, and they won. According to their argument, writes Ardia, “it was not in a position to review everything published on their servers and it shouldn’t be responsible for what was on their forums.”

In 1995, Prodigy, another online information

service, was sued for a post in one of its forums. Although it presented the same argument as CompuServe—that it should be seen as a distributor and not as an editor—it lost the suit. The reason? Prodigy removed the content that was offensive and did not fulfill its civil requirements, which meant that the court saw it as an editor of content therefore submitting it to the same norms as those of newspapers and TV stations.

In his article, Ardia asks: “So, what kind of activities are covered? What can you do and what things should you be concerned about if you engage in them online that may lose your protections? So the first thing is a screening of content prior to publication is clearly covered under CDA 230. This is the quintessential activity that the law was passed to address. This means that if you engage in traditional editorial functions — such as deciding what to allow on your site, whether you remove foul language or otherwise edit content, as long as you don’t materially change its meaning — you’re going to be covered under the act. For probably 99 percent of the things you do on a daily basis or would like to do, those activities are going to be covered. So think about a situation where you, for example, you take the position that our site is going to be a civil, adult conversation — that we’re not going to allow the riffraff to come in here and say all kinds of things... That’s not going to change the liability for you, you’re still going to be immune. If you pay a third party to create or submit content, you’re also going to be protected, so long as the author the material is not your employee... And

if you have independent contractors that you use to create content — many of you do — you probably should have your lawyers look at those agreements to make sure that they are going to be truly classified as independent contractors. ... If they’re an independent contractor for you, then if they create something that is defamatory and invades someone else’s privacy and you publish it online, you’re not going to be liable for that content.”

Ardia notes that a site cannot be held responsible under the CDA 230, not even when it cannot keep its own promise of maintaining decent behavior (because someone was able to infiltrate and publish a libelous commentary).

“We believe that it is a good thing that sites try to create these kinds of civic places for conversation,” declared the court (in the case against an online site called *ibrattleboro.com* in Brownsborough, Vermont) cited by Ardia. “But we’re not going to hold you liable if you are unsuccessful in making sure that every single comment on your site meets that criteria.”

What is clear is that Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act does not protect the original creator of the content itself—in other words the user who contributes it to the site.

According to Ardia, there are actions that do not absolve the website from responsibility, such as the editing of content in order to change its meaning, and creating content that forces users to make discriminatory choices.

An obvious example of that is somebody puts up a post that says: 'Jim Jones is not a murderer.'", writes Ardia. "And you go and edit the content and you take out the word 'not.' So all of a sudden it reads 'Jim Jones is a murderer.' You've materially changed what the user submitted, and most courts would view you as a creator of the content and would not hold you to be immune."

To illustrate the second exception, Ardia mentions a lawsuit against a site in California, Roommates.

com, that offered the service of matching people to share housing and asked users to make selections on descending menus, where the service asked for personal information, and also asked users to indicate if they wanted to live with heterosexual or homosexual men, only heterosexuals, only gays or neither. Later the site had similar terms for women. In a lawsuit on discrimination in the topic of housing, the court argued that the CDA 230 did not protect Roommates.com.



Cell Phones: the Power of Texting

The potential of cellular technology in Latin America in terms of dissemination, access to information, and citizen participation, could be defined as a paradox. Its large installed base anticipates the rapid expansion of other technology, like access to the Internet, however the service costs and characteristics of the apparatus' in the hands of the population limit its possibilities.

In the region, 80 percent of mobile phones are used with the system of prepayment, or a card, and there are only 4.8 million telephones with 3G technology (intelligent).

Despite this, the World Bank, according to Peter Richards of the Association of Caribbean Media Workers of Trinidad and Tobago, identified the mobile platform as the most powerful form of reaching and offering public and private services to hundreds of persons in remote, rural areas of the developing world.

Amy Webb, from Webbmedia Group, a consulting firm in the United States, recommends using this stable base with the business model that exists in Latin America. This means more or less promoting participation by the population through text messages.

El Periódico of Guatemala is a successful example of how understanding this reality has resulted in a profitable business.

"We have confirmed that cellular phones were the way to go," commented José Rubén Zamora,

president of the *El Periódico*. "We determined how to work with telephone companies and we arrived at an agreement to co-participate in the income that we generated from this strategy. We started with 30,000 users and we are giving personalized information, from traffic to vegetable prices and prices of short-cycle crops like coffee, as well as general news, sports, and entertainment."

This has meant a dynamic change in the business of journalism that has started to compete directly with radio and television for the scoops. "And, fortunately, since we count as a contractual partner of the telephone companies," added Zamora, "they help us in moments of high traffic to jump to the head of the line to send our messages. We work 24 hours." Zamora is now planning to penetrate the market in sending video content for the next generation of cellular phones that have begun arriving in his country.

For Zamora, the value of this experience lies in the fact that a traditional newspaper found a source of income in digital technology in order to continue doing journalism without relying on official publicity from the state or having to deal with boycotts of newspapers by people in the private sector who don't like what they publish.

"We found a way to be able to make serious headlines," Zamora said, "which allowed us to survive, and the people are happy. As a newspaper, that gave us an image that we didn't have before. An eminently urban newspaper, that is now known nationally."

In other countries, like Nicaragua, telephones are principally used for users to send messages in order to participate in promotions and raffles. “We know that this has been used in other contexts in different crises to develop networks, to mobilize people, but other than that there isn’t a lot of experience here,” said nicaraguan journalist Chamorro.

In Paraguay, this use of cell phones for this type of content is seen as a cancer, especially for low-income users. “We have about 10 or 15 companies offering this service,” said Mabel Rehnfeldt from the Foro de Periodistas Paraguayos (Forum of Paraguayan Journalists). “They send you a message and, aside from paying the company [that wrote the message], you have to pay the telephone company to transmit it. There are many ignorant people who subscribe to receive sports scores, photos of nude women, horoscopes. The users desperately ask to get out of the [messaging] plans, and they end up captives to plans that they signed up for and can’t get out of later.”


Ana Carlos, a content producer for television in

Guatemala confirmed that from her experience trying to negotiate with a multinational phone company about the creation of content for cell phones that “they are not at all interested the construction of content that is the reflection of a country. They only care about Shakira’s butt.”

On the other hand, the creators of new websites are experimenting with mobile technology for reporting. Crucianelli, of SoloLocal in Argentina, said that 10 of its users use cell phones that she pays for. “In different neighborhoods they take photographs, they don’t use video yet, she noted. “When they see something that is wrong, they take photos.”

Luis Carlos Díaz, of Gentedeapie in Venezuela, said he teaches his students to use “video streaming” on cell phones, which is changing the coverage of protests, for example, because it is transmitted live for the Internet and the recording remains in the system. At the same time, the class on photography has a section that teaches students how to control and improve images produced with cell phones.

ENTERING THE MOBILE PLATFORM WITH CONTENT FROM NEW WEBSITES: A PROPOSAL FROM THE AUSTIN FORUM

Capitalizing on the information input of existing radio and television networks in order to sell services by way of cellular phones is a project that is viable in the region, according to the proposal that one of the working groups formulated at the Austin Forum. 

➡➡➡ The pilot project could happen with RedTV from Peru, which draws together small municipal and private television channels in that country, said Luis Botello of the International Center for Journalists in the United States, who acted as the working group's representative.

According to the group's conclusions, an initiative with these characteristics would require arriving at agreements with the telephone companies of each country, and sharing the revenue from subscriptions, following the successful experience of this platform of elPeriódico in Guatemala.

The project considered a variety of audiences: from groups made up of people who live in remote areas with very basic telephones, to those who reside in the capital and have the latest 3G telephones with multimedia service.

The content, produced by online affiliates, would be sold as "basic" or "premium" packages, the later with on demand access. For an additional charge, both services would allow users to access in depth information on the specific topics of their choice. The content design for specific interest groups has also been suggested, (for example, agricultural groups who may want information about the supply and demand of products, fertilizer, or feed for animals) or video content. These would also have an additional cost.

The project would require a program to train the team of affiliated stations, citizen journalists from all of these communities, and consumers how to use the telephones.

"We are going to try to strengthen what is already being done," Botello said, "for example, with the network of (citizen) journalists from the province (also from Peru), so that they can make great volunteers from this television network that is expanding its cellular phone service. At the same time, we are going to promote the production of stories from all of these people that we are trying to support so that they are active citizens, not only consumers, who help in the production of stories that are going to be retransmitted on this network."



CHAPTER 6

**THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGIES IN THE PRODUCTION
AND DISTRIBUTION OF VIDEO: ARE
WE READY FOR THE GROWTH OF
VIDEO AUDIENCES ON THE WEB AND
WITH MOBILE PHONES?**

**THE OTHER SIDE OF DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGY: HOW GOVERNMENTS
ARE USING TECHNOLOGY TO SPY ON
JOURNALISTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS
ACTIVISTS**



The Impact of Digital Technologies in the Production and Distribution of Video: Are We Ready for the Growth of Video Audiences on the Web and with Mobile Phones?



Video producers in Latin America are still focused on public television as a means for reaching greater audiences, in spite of recognizing the potential of the Internet and mobile phones as new channels for information distribution. This has to do with the fact that television continues to have greater penetration than any other media in Latin America, and also because it will take some time for new technologies to fully expand throughout the region. Experiments based on new technological platforms, however, are increasingly common.

In Peru, where some 250 to 300 small private and local TV stations are currently operating, a group of 36 broadcasting companies established an alliance in 2005, RedTV, in order to share content and marketing. In 2007, RedTV launched the show *No Apto para Adultos*, aimed at youth; then, in 2008, it launched *Enlace Nacional*, a news service involving all partners; and finally, in 2009, RedTV came up with what the network has called a scheme for collaborative TV production, including news and sport shows.

Thus, RedTV's strategy faced the Peruvian reality, characterized by the political, economic, and media centralization in Lima, the capital.

"Ninety percent of the advertising investment is concentrated in Lima, only in the TV stations of the capital," said project creator Carlos Cárdenas. "Information content is produced there and then distributed by national broadcasters. We knew about

the existence of small stations around the country— independent, autonomous broadcasting companies that did not depend on Lima's media—and started working with them."

In order to end the "TV monopoly in his country," a group of video producers from Guatemala decided to buy some time slots in national TV stations with resources received from advertising sales and international cooperation (in this case, the Open Society Institute).

"We were tired of seeing, over and over again, the same people, the same voices, taking over media space, said Ana Carlos, producer of *Caminos de Asombro*. "In my country, editorial freedom is a good for sale, and we bought it instead of asking for the permission of media owners, which usually implies acquiring a commitment from them."

Carlos worked with Harry Whitbeck, a former CNN journalist, to create a show for Guatemalan youth, a segment of the population that was considered excluded, voiceless, and without leadership. Using an appealing and lively image-based language, in which the Guatemalan youth had a leading role, the show traveled through the most remote parts of the country, searching for programming that would bridge the gap between urban and rural Guatemala. In three monthly editions, the show interviewed several people about their development projects, and the means they were using for tackling critical situations and producing positive results.



Hollman Morris,
Contravía, Colombia.



Carlos Cardenas,
RedTV, Peru



Ana Carlos,
Caminos del Asombro, Guatemala

As the show exercised its editorial freedom, its five original sponsors withdrew, and it ended up depending on contributions from international donors. A cement company, for instance, withdrew its sponsorship after a segment about mining; a pharmaceutical company did the same after the show featured a report on generic medications.

“Guatemalan TV shows are created by the same advertising agencies managing newspapers in the country, and they all share the same commercial interests, said Ana Carlos. “All TV programming is defined to please the sponsors.”

Hollman Morris, of the Colombian show *Contravía*, took criticism of commercial television further:

“Unfortunately,” he pointed out, “in many countries of Latin America, including Colombia, TV, instead of helping does not help build collective memory and generating public opinion, it helps promote ‘invisibilization.’” In our situation, TV makes the victims of our internal conflict invisible, as it does it with the lack of memory and, in many cases, with impunity.”

The show *Contravía* has produced more than 200 half-hour long segments during the last six years, providing a space for the voices of the victims of Colombia’s internal conflict.

“Our audience includes communities and the human rights’ movement, youth and women—women who sacrificed their children for the sake of war;”

said Morris. He also mentioned that, according to official sources, paramilitary forces have killed 22,000 Colombians in the last 10 years.

Through YouTube, Morris and Contravía found a way to keep in touch with its audience, in spite of interruptions of their broadcasts on public television. They created their own YouTube channel and uploaded episodes from 2003 and 2004. Morris and his team also witnessed how social networking sites, such as Facebook, created a movement in favor of putting the show back on the air.

As a new distribution channel, YouTube, helped the team face the demand—and the challenge—of offering five- to 10-minute segments, instead of the 30-minute shows it used to produce for public television. This new format has caused conflict and further debates among the production team, especially when the possibility of distributing this content over mobile phones came up.

“For the coverage of conflicts and humanitarian emergencies, 40-second TV segments create confusion, rather than a deeper understanding,” Morris said. “Cell phones can be useful for alerting people about a tragic event, a murder, an attack of any kind. But the process has to be different when it comes to informing. Documenting and reporting are two different things. We have tried to turn several 30-minute programs into one, but most of the time, we think, we have failed.”

Cárdenas, from RedTV, said that, when they came up with the project, they thought about using new formats, and so began producing 40- and 80-second segments, although telecommunication companies in Peru do not offer such services, given the insufficient

number of smart phones or G3-supported phone technology available in the country.

For these reasons, the Internet has been more effective in the improvement of RedTV's operations than in the distribution of its content via a new platform. For example, the Internet has allowed the network to save in the cost of satellite transmission of data files to and from TV stations from different regions of the country.

Local TV stations send short video segments via Internet to a support center in Lima, where the material is assembled into a half-hour news show, and then sent back to its producers. An international version is created and broadcast in the United States. “This process takes about 24 hours, but it is faster than the channels of Lima, which usually take two or three days to reach places far in the countryside.”

In Chile, the cable station CNN has managed to take advantage of the power of social network applications, particularly Twitter, for enriching its news editions and becoming closer to its audience. Carolina Fuentes, anchor of Noticias Online, and the person who first came up with the idea of this format before CNN Chile integrated it into its programming, said the advantages of this modality are, namely: more information (six news items even half-hour); exposure for work done by other media outlets (many of them alternative media, whose work is always acknowledged); and a new channel for audience expression.

“Here we can have teamwork where there is fusion,” Fuentes said. “Where neither traditional media nor online media are excluded, but instead

there is a mix of the two. We can find a way for these media to cooperate, combining their efforts, and coming up with a win-win solution.”

Twitter has enabled CNN Chile to present

breaking news that before was not even available in other news services, like when president Barack Obama mentioned Chilean president Michelle Bachelet in a speech that was being “re-tweeted” by a user.

THE OTHER SIDE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY: HOW GOVERNMENTS ARE USING TECHNOLOGY TO SPY ON JOURNALISTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

“Beyond learning strategies for encrypting e-mails or using a tool to prevent cell phones from being intercepted, what we should demand is more democracy.”

This is the proposal of Hollman Morris, director of the TV show *Contravía*, in response to each situation that involved espionage and illegal wiretaps on dozens of journalists, human rights activists, and opposition leaders in Colombia, which have been repeatedly reported in the media.

Morris affirmed that law enforcement agencies—such as the president-led Administrative Department of Security (DAS) in Colombia—have been responsible for these illegal acts, which seek to stigmatize, criminalize and delegitimize the credibility of journalists and human rights activists.

“President Álvaro Uribe referred to human rights activists as creating political intrigue in the service of terrorism,” Morris said, “a statement Colombian law enforcement agencies took as an executive order. The very next year, it started what Colombia’s Attorney General’s called a ‘criminal hunt’ against these three groups:” journalists, activists, and members of the opposition,” he said.

In Morris’s case, he knows about the existence of a 500-page file, called “Operación Puerto Asís,” containing detailed information about his whereabouts—and those of his family and collaborators—during the last five years.



➡➡➡ Morris is certain that the greatest mistake of journalists is to accept this situation as something normal, because “this chasing-around and [cell phone] interceptions constitute a series of events that might end with you or your sources being eliminated physically.”

The editorial council of the TV show that Morris conducts is made up of the most important human rights organizations of Colombia.

“What were we doing with our show? We were giving a voice to the victims of war in Colombia,” said Morris. “We were showcasing that there is an armed conflict—something that president Álvaro Uribe had systematically denied. Denying this armed conflict is denying its victims their face, their voice, their memories. This is the reason why the Contravía journalist team was seen as a target for Colombian law enforcement agencies and for president Álvaro Uribe.” Morris thinks that solidarity and international advocacy are the right ways to face these aggressions.

He added: “We have learned that we have to go to those who are offering Colombia military and intelligence cooperation, to tell them: ‘Look at how the equipment you provided is being used for interceptions.’”



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**THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGY ON JOURNALISM
AND DEMOCRACY IN
LATIN AMERICA AND
THE CARIBBEAN**

