

Independent Voices of Entrepreneurial News: Setting a New Agenda in Latin America¹

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial journalism relates broadly to digital-native news organizations that are innovating in the field. A chief innovation in Latin America is a newfound opportunity for editorial independence, according to focus groups with entrepreneurial journalists from 16 organizations across the region. Entrepreneurial journalism organizations believe their financial structure gives them editorial autonomy. This study looked at the background for and the reasons why independence is considered a necessary innovation in Latin American journalism. It found that pressures against editorial independence varied from government funding (Argentina and Brazil) to corporate impositions (Peru) and government pressures (Mexico). Our focus group participants found a need for a space to cover topics and issues that were not being addressed or were being misrepresented by mainstream media from the Amazon region of Brazil to investigative reporting in Venezuela and under-covered communities in Chile. This innovation has al-

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lowed journalists to embrace an interventionist role (Hanitzsch, Hanusch, & Lauerer, 2016), based on social engagement and the ability to set the agenda, as our expert group stated, and to be a protagonist of public discourse. While the impact of such news organizations is fairly new, some organizations have developed a sizable and strong community of users, and have influenced public opinion.

Keywords

Entrepreneur; journalism; Latin America; digital-native media; independence; interventionism; news role; agenda setting; online focus group (Source: Unesco Thesaurus).

Voces independientes de noticieros emprendedores: estableciendo una nueva agenda en Latinoamérica

Resumen

El periodismo emprendedor, en general, está relacionado con los medios nativos digitales que están innovando en el campo. De acuerdo con un *focus group* de periodistas emprendedores de 16 organizaciones de la región, una de las innovaciones principales en Latinoamérica es la nueva oportunidad para la independencia editorial. La autonomía editorial es vista como una consecuencia de las estructuras financieras de los medios. Este estudio analiza los antecedentes y las razones por las cuales la independencia es considerada una innovación necesaria en el periodismo latinoamericano y constata las presiones a las cuales los medios han sido sometidos, como el financiamiento gubernamental (Argentina y Brasil), imposiciones corporativas (Perú) e imposiciones gubernamentales (México). Los participantes del *focus group* encontraron que hay una necesidad de buscar espacios que le den cobertura a temas y tópicos que no está siendo desarrollados o han sido excluidos de las agendas de los medios tradicionales desde la región de la Amazonia en Brasil, hasta el periodismo investigativo en Venezuela y comunidades poco abordadas en Chile. Esta innovación ha permitido que periodistas asumiesen un rol intervencionista, circunscripto en el compromiso social y la capacidad de crear una nueva agenda; como nuestro grupo de expertos lo describieron, protagonizar el debate público. Aunque el impacto de estas organizaciones periodísticas sea un tanto reciente, alguna de ellas ya han desarrollado una considerable y fuerte comunidad de usuarios, y han tenido un impacto en la opinión pública.

Palabras clave

Emprendedor; periodismo; America Latina; medios digitales nativos; independencia; intervencionismo; rol de noticias; configuración de la agenda; grupo de enfoque en línea (Fuente: Tesauruso de la Unesco).

Vozes independentes no jornalismo empreendedor: definindo uma nova agenda na América Latina

Resumo

O jornalismo empreendedor, em geral, está relacionado com os meios tipicamente digitais que estão inovando o campo. Uma das principais inovações na América Latina é a oportunidade de independência editorial, de acordo com um grupo focal de jornalistas empreendedores de 16 organizações da região. A autonomia editorial é vista como uma consequência das novas estruturas financeiras desses meios de comunicação. Este estudo identifica os antecedentes e as razões pelas quais a independência é considerada uma inovação necessária para o jornalismo latino-americano. Entre as pressões sofridas pelos meios de comunicação estão o financiamento governamental (Argentina e Brasil), imposições corporativas (Peru) e imposições governamentais (México). Os participantes do grupo focal indicaram que existe uma necessidade de buscar espaços que ofereçam cobertura de tópicos e temas que não estão sendo desenvolvidos ou que estão sendo excluídos das agendas dos meios de comunicação tradicionais, como a Região Amazônica no Brasil, até o jornalismo investigativo na Venezuela e comunidades poucos abordadas no Chile. Essa inovação está permitindo que jornalistas assumam um papel intervencionista enfocado no compromisso social e na capacidade de criar uma nova agenda; como nosso grupo de especialistas descreveu, protagonizar o debate público. Mesmo que o impacto dessas organizações jornalísticas seja um tanto recente, algumas delas já desenvolveram uma forte e considerável comunidade de usuários e influenciaram a opinião pública.

Palavras-chave

América Latina; definição de agenda; empreendedor; grupo focal on-line; independência; intervencionismo; jornalismo; mídia tipicamente digital; papel da mídia (Fonte: Tesouro da Unesco).

Entrepreneurial journalism, a buzzword in the industry in the past decade or so, is often defined broadly and loosely (Vos & Singer, 2016), and for a good reason. Usually referring to digital-native news organizations that bring about innovation to journalism and the news business, the term encompasses new journalistic ventures that have varying purpose, norms, modes of operation, and business structures. What all these current entrepreneurial journalism organizations have in common is that they are actively addressing several challenges and transformations that journalism is facing internationally in this century, and they all are emphasizing innovation in a digital environment.

Several social, technological and market transformations have impacted journalism in recent years. Some of the important transformations in journalism are the global rise and adoption of digital technologies (Cohen, 2015); digital conversion of mainstream organizations (Pereira & Adghirni, 2011); the emergence of the 24/7 news cycle and compressed social distance between producers and audiences (Schmitz Weiss & Higgins Joyce, 2009); a decline in advertising revenue and massive layoffs and closures (Cohen, 2015); increased commercialization in the face of new actors and competition (Pereira & Adghirni, 2011); the rise of social media for information and entertainment; and fragmentation of the media audience. Amidst such instability, an increasing number of journalists throughout the world, and certainly within Latin America, are seeking opportunities for renewal and innovation.

SembraMedia, a nonprofit organization whose objective is to create a Spanish-language, online community and a directory of digital-native entrepreneurial news organizations from Spain, the United States, and Latin America, currently includes 235 non-corporate, digital-native entrepreneurial news projects, many from Latin America, most funded since 2009 (SembraMedia, 2016). In a recent master's thesis, Falquez (2013) pointed to over 30 digital-native news organizations in Ecuador alone. A study by Factual in 2014 identified 34 digital-native entrepreneurial news organizations in Latin America that fit its specified criteria, which included being of a national scope (Factual, 2016). Although there are varying definitions

of what constitutes an entrepreneurial news organization, all these studies point to the growth in numbers and prominence of digital-native entrepreneurial organizations in Latin America.

While trade publications and academics have emphasized the innovative business models of entrepreneurial journalists, few have analyzed the implications for the industry (Vos & Singer, 2016). Cohen defined the entrepreneurial journalist by its independence from traditional media organization, stating that “she is an ideal neoliberal worker: flexible, unattached, and adaptable. She embraces new technologies and ‘innovative’ practices to reinvent journalism as socially relevant, but also as profitable,” (Cohen, 2015, p. 517). Other scholars emphasize the contextual factors for the emergence of new enterprises of journalism. Deuze (2014) situates the rise of entrepreneurial journalism with the increased loosened ties of labor relationship with media organizations, in connection to the rise of freelance work. He relates this rise with broader social and media developments and says that, “we need to take a step back and consider entrepreneurship not just as a subset of individual activities necessary to secure survival (and opportunity) in a globally networked economy, but also as a lived experience increasingly particular to the contemporary arrangement of society as a whole,” (Deuze, 2014, p. 125). Martínez-García (2016) focuses less on the purpose for these new entrepreneurial organizations and defined entrepreneurial journalism in Spain as “news media companies founded and directed by journalists in the context of the global economic crisis of 2008” (p. 429), where those companies operate in a digital environment.

While some scholars present entrepreneurial journalism as a positive transformation in the field, others worry about the ethical implications of blurring the lines between the business and editorial sides of journalism (Carbasse, 2015; Rosenkranz, 2016). The concern is that journalists going solo need to pay as much attention to their organization’s finances as they do to their stories. DeMasi (2013) states that there is a perceived incompatibility between entrepreneurial journalism and journalist’s occupational ideology, specifically in relationship to ethics and maintaining journalistic autonomy while relying on external financial sources. Grounding his

understanding of entrepreneurial journalism within historical norms, and linking the practice to the roots of U.S. newspaper industry in its Colonial past, DeMasi states that “Journalists need not sacrifice core values of autonomy, truth-telling, and impartiality if they choose to become business owner,” (DeMasi, 2013, p. 53).

These entrepreneurial news organizations vary in intent and structure. They are created in response to different challenges and opportunities in different journalistic cultures, norms and identifications, depending on the country. Some innovate in style, others in form and narrative, and others in financial structures. This diversity calls for a definition of entrepreneurial journalism that is broad and would allow for flexibility. This study situates entrepreneurial journalism as news organizations that are native to the digital environment, that were created by one or small group of individuals, often journalists themselves, seeking to innovate the news field independently from traditional news media. As an emerging area of research, the few academic studies on entrepreneurial journalism tend to focus on American or European experiences, which occur in very different political, economic and institutional contexts and, indeed, media systems than those in Latin America.

The past few decades have brought great changes in Latin American political structures, with many countries undergoing a re-democratization period, bringing changes to the economies and media structures. Since the late 1970s, Latin America has seen a far-reaching and continuous wave of democratization, and a turn away from overt authoritarianism (Hagopian & Mainwaring, 2005). This transition, though, came with notable shortcomings, with an overall lack of strength in the quality of democratic life, as well as breakdowns, transitions and, in some cases, erosions (Hagopian & Mainwaring, 2005). While the length and spread of democratic regimes is unprecedented, there is much instability in government and presidencies, with several presidencies having terminated with impeachments since the 1990s (Pérez-Liñán, 2007). Examples from this instability abound, from the recent impeachment of Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff in 2016, massive marches against Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro in 2017,

and many others. However, the move away from overtly authoritarian regimes have brought changes to the media environment in Latin America.

In addition to the political changes, much like in other parts of the world, there was a destabilization of the traditional media companies, which often resulted in lay-offs and the growth of freelance work. There was also a shift in emphasis to online media, where both traditional and entrepreneurial news organizations have found new opportunities and challenges. Amidst all these changes, entrepreneurial journalism emerges as a newer trend in the region, where many journalists have broken ties with traditional organizations and financial structures to present journalism under new norms and focus.

This exploratory study seeks to understand the innovations sought by Latin American journalists under such scenarios, and how entrepreneurial journalism is contextualized within the regional news culture. This analysis focuses less on the technological innovations and more on the perceived purpose of the news produced by these journalists in Latin America.

Methods

This study relied on the expertise of 17 entrepreneurial journalists from 16 new digital-native news organizations in eight Latin American countries to explore their backgrounds and motivations. Three video-based online focus group sessions were conducted, two in Spanish and one in Portuguese, with journalists, directors and founders of entrepreneurial news organizations in Latin America. In each hour-long focus group session, the journalists were asked about their organizational structure and purpose, innovations their organizations are seeking, and challenges of sustainability.

Focus groups aim to provide insights, “interpretations, perceptions and personal experiences” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 182), respecting and exploring dyadic interactions among a small set of participants. This exploratory study presents an analysis of three sets of focus groups with experts as participants, seeking to understand their motivations and feelings (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000) about entrepreneurial journalism

as well as new ideas about how they conceptualize the innovations they are seeking.

Social science academics and professionals have been using the focus group method for almost a century (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), traditionally face-to-face in a set location. New technology has allowed for an online approach to the method (Oringderff, 2004; Rezabek, 2000), being conducted both synchronously or asynchronously (Murray, 1997). An advantage of online focus groups is the potential to reach participants from international locations, convening in an online, virtual conversation room (Schmitz Weiss & Higgins Joyce, 2009). This study convened Latin American entrepreneurial journalists from eight countries in three different private sessions conducted and recorded in an online video-conference communication site, in a synchronous, real-time, discussion. The choice of an online focus group was pertinent to our specific group of participants, who work in a digital environment on a daily basis and are well adapted to the technology.

While social science research through voice-over-internet protocol (VoIP) sites is a fairly new advancement, scholars have proposed its use as a lower cost means to gather research participants while allowing for privacy and the inclusion of non-verbal communication analysis (Bertrand & Bourdeau, 2010) previously utilized in online focus groups. The visual element that VoIP sites offer also allows for a more engaged group discussion, simulating a more natural conversation in comparison to text-only online group discussions. This study utilized such technology, through private sessions of either Skype or Google Hangout, and we recorded and transcribed each of the three sessions. Our sets of focus groups were conducted in June and July 2015.

A trilingual moderator, fluent in Spanish, Portuguese and English, and knowledgeable about entrepreneurial journalism, was hired to guide the three sessions. The moderator received a discussion guide (see Appendix 1) from the researchers and followed a traditional role of monitoring the interactions and encouraging participation while allowing for new themes and discussions to flow naturally. In addition to the traditional role,

the moderator, in conjunction with a support staff, monitored for technical difficulties. The support staff had access to the sessions in real-time but did not interject directly in the sessions. The three sessions were recorded unobtrusively, with the consent of the participants, and the moderator transcribed the discussions in the original language. This analysis is based on the themes that emerged from reviewing the recorded videos as well as the transcript, focusing on verbal communication only. The quotes presented in this study were translated from either Spanish or Portuguese into English by the author. This study received IRB approval and, as such, complies with ethical guidelines. The participants received a consent form in their native language explaining the purpose of the study and voluntary nature of their participation. In an effort to protect the identity of our focus group participants, we omit their names and news organization's name, mentioning only the scope and country as reference. Our focus group participants did not receive any financial incentive to participate.

The discussion guide was drafted based on two main categories: innovation sought and perceived role. This study looks for an understanding and identification of how entrepreneurial news organizations in Latin America are innovating in three specific areas: content production, message dissemination, and business model. It also looked for an understanding of how entrepreneurial journalists in Latin America see their particular role in society.

The focus group participants were selected following the criteria of being journalists (reporter, editor or managers) or founders of emerging or well-established digital-native entrepreneurial news organizations from Latin America. All of these news organizations have been recognized for their journalistic efforts, some through prizes, and many for their stories. A total of 23 journalists were invited by email to participate in the study; 17 of those accepted and gave consent to participate in one of the three focus groups, in a set time determined by the availability of these journalists in a specified week. The groups had between 5 and 7 participants each. These entrepreneurial journalists worked in news organizations from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela.

The analysis of this study is based on themes formed a posteriori, through verbal readings of the focus group participants' discussions, both from recorded videos and transcriptions of the discussions. These themes emerged from a reduction of data focusing on participant's conceptualization of the innovations they bring to the journalistic field within Latin America, interpreted within the regional system of media.

Findings

The history of media in Latin America is one of close ties between governments and elite-owned media organizations. In Brazil, for example, Assis Chateaubriand was one of the country's media barons who launched one of Latin America's first television stations and owned important radio and newspapers. He also had a huge political influence and cozy relationship with government (Martins & Luca, 2008). Chateaubriand even became a Senator and was awarded to be a Brazilian Ambassador to the United Kingdom (Martins & Luca, 2008). Such relationship between these media, owned by powerful elites, and government, can be seen throughout Latin America. This cozy relationship has led to several instances of influence in coverage, restricting in effect freedom of the flow of information, as well as influence in government policies.

During the decades of authoritarian regimes, strict controls on political content of media through direct censorship was commonplace (Fox & Waisbord, 2002). When they weren't practicing overt censorship, states still imposed controls with licensing and paid government advertising (Fox & Waisbord, 2002). Over three decades of a strong wave of democratization in the region (albeit much political instability), coupled with other social and technological advancements, has changed the nature of news in the region, as seen with the proliferation of investigative reporting during that same period (Waisbord, 2000). However, much of Latin American journalism is still operating under traditional oligopolistic structures, and governments still highly influence news production (Hughes & Lawson, 2005). Such influence is seen both in the intricate relationships with media elites and also in terms of government advertising and funding.

A study comparing models of media systems with a focus in Latin America analyzed the level of political parallelism in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico in contrast with southern European systems and found an “instrumentalization of the news media by oligarchs, industrialists, parties or the state,” (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002, p. 182). One of the characteristics of these media systems in Latin America is the low circulation of newspapers that have “traditionally addressed small elite, mainly urban, well-educated and politically active” audiences (Matos, 2012, p. 78). Exceptions exist, certainly, and are often important in their own right. Local journalistic organizations also value autonomy and have, over the decades, been influenced by professionalism standards. The overall climate, though, presents an interdependence of many news organizations and powerful institutions in the region. As the region transitions into more democratic political systems, including the growth of the middle class and rising levels of education, it is possible that media systems in the region also experience substantial transformations in terms of models under which they operate.

“Nuestra razón de ser es la independencia” (Entrepreneurial journalist from Nicaragua)

The concept of *independence* emerged in the analysis, both as return to essence but also in opposition to traditional media, similarly to the understanding of entrepreneurial journalism as presented by Cohen (2015). The ties that these journalists seek independence from can vary depending on the media context. Independence could mean a separation from traditional media, as it is seen throughout the world, but it can also refer to independence from the political, social and economic systems in Latin America. Our focus group participants often defined themselves in contrast with traditional media, which can be part of the traditional elite-owned media. Independence is one of the concepts used by our focus group participants to emphasize such difference. An entrepreneurial journalist from Nicaragua stated that independence gives them the flexibility to “say things that other media cannot say, or don’t dare to.” A Mexican entrepreneurial journalist presented independence as a central canon, saying:

I believe that more than separating between a traditional and digital journalism we should separate between independent and party-liner journalism. If we focus on this division, certainly always debatable, I believe we get to a space where we can work, as was said a little while ago, with an important level of independence. We basically do not have the problem of government advertising.

Likewise, a journalist from Brazil, founder of a very new digital-native news organization, introduced his site as an independent news organization. He describes the new group as a “heterogeneous group, but having in common the dissatisfaction with what was happening in the traditional media.”

This independence from traditional organizational structures, for several reasons and by different means, allows these entrepreneurial journalists the freedom to innovate in different ways. A focus group participant from Mexico emphasized the innovation of freedom to cover central themes in society. This Mexican journalist said that “for different reasons, I believe that traditional media, including some digital (media organizations), find it difficult to produce a journalism product with a margin of freedom to cover topics such as violence, corruption and accountability.”

In a different session, this same theme emerged, by an entrepreneurial journalist from Chile, who said:

The strength of new media in Latin America is an innovation that is not what is traditionally considered an innovation, like new technologies and new tools. There are many media organizations that work with data journalism, which are doing some very interesting visualization, but what we have more in common here is that we are media organizations that are more independent, with our own agenda, with a lot more freedom than traditional media to report and expose themes that are very sensitive in our society.

Our focus group participants generally stated that they were able to find editorial independence by breaking away from traditional means of financing media in their own countries. The entrepreneurial news organizations participating in this study used varied financial structures. Some relied on audiences, funders and donors, including such organizations as Open

Society, for example, a major funder for new entrepreneurial organizations in Latin America. Others sold media products in varying formats or offered different services. They all, however, broke away from the traditional means of financing news organizations, from government funding to traditional advertisement. It is interesting that the changes in financial structure, which is seen as a concern by some scholars (Carbasse, 2015; Rosenkranz, 2016), are perceived by our focus group participants to be an essential means to editorial autonomy. As an entrepreneurial journalist from Argentina stated:

In our particular case, we planned some objectives and missions. One of them was to guarantee that (name of organization) was a media organization with a diverse funding model that would guarantee two things: editorial autonomy and sustainability with time. The theme of independence and autonomy is expensive for journalism.

That same journalist said her organization has a rule against accepting government funding, which is a reality of many traditional news organizations in Latin America. By breaking away from such financing, she said, entrepreneurial news organizations can more autonomously decide on the veracity of public statements. A focus group participant from a different session, who was from Brazil, mentioned a similar point, stating that they innovate by being a news organization without political interference, bolstered by its decision to not receive government funding. According to her, “almost all sites here receive this type of funding, and that interferes with the independence of the media.” An entrepreneurial journalist from Mexico stated that the pressures received as a result of accepting government advertising, funding and financing are a common theme in Latin America. A journalist from Nicaragua stated that the government’s current pressure on the media in his country is very different from the overt censorship faced in other eras, but that it is still a constant battle.

In many countries in Latin America, media organizations do count on government funding, via advertisement or otherwise. That is not, however, the only source of funding, nor of pressure. Many news organizations in the region are dependent on subscribers, as well as advertisement. They operate under corporate leadership. While there have been disruptions in both subscriptions and advertising in the Internet age, cor-

porate financing and imposition is still a major presence, as it is in other media systems in the world. An entrepreneurial journalist from Peru stated that independence from corporate impositions have allowed journalists to have their own voice be heard:

One of the central innovations that I believe all these models of journalism have is that all of these notable publications have been able to free themselves from the corporate restrictions in the publication. That is to say, there is no longer the weight of the economic and corporate interest from the part of the media owners in almost all of these publications.

An entrepreneurial journalist from Venezuela, from a different focus group session, also mentioned that corporate ties can impose pressure on traditional media, saying that traditional media in the country “was seen as an industry that employed journalists but whose decisions taken were not always journalistic, but business or institutional.”

Interventionism with New Agendas Sought

Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) identified the tradition of advocacy as one of the main characteristics of Latin American news media, where opinion and commentaries are emphasized and journalists tend to perceive themselves as social actors. Although the region has been highly influenced by the Anglo-American media’s canons of neutrality, objectivity and professionalization (Hallin & Papathanassopoulo, 2002; Matos, 2012), advocacy is still seen as an acceptable news norm circumvented by organizational and social constraints. Hanitzsch and colleagues identified interventionism as an important force accounting for differences in journalists’ role orientation, stating that “journalists in interventionist professional cultures are more likely to actively put issues on the political agenda (agenda-setting), to influence the way the public thinks about these issues (public influence), and to advocate for certain values and ideas to transform society (advocacy),” (Hanitzsch, Hanusch & Lauerer, 2016, p. 4). They found that journalists were more likely to express agreement with the importance of this active participation in transitional democracies and that they could be motivated when political freedoms are restricted.

Transformations in Latin America, both in the journalism field and in the political and social systems, allow for journalists in these transitional democracies to enact interventionist roles within a new context. Their ties to traditional journalism organizations have weakened and, in some cases, eroded. Thus, journalists going solo may maintain ties and traditions of the occupation and cultural context that impact the construction of news (Reese, 2007) while transitioning ties with traditional news media organizations.

Hanitzsch et al. (2016) found that journalists in an interventionist news culture were more likely to agree with the concept of *intentionally set the agenda*. While agenda-setting effects—or the transference of prioritization of issues and attributes of those issues from the news agenda into the public’s agenda—can certainly be an intentional objective of news media organizations and journalists, it is often presented as an unintentional effect of news media (McCombs, 2004). It is interesting, however, that our focus group participants deliberately presented setting the agenda as an important role of entrepreneurial news organizations in Latin America. This active interventionist role is seen as an innovation, where financial independence has allowed entrepreneurial journalists to focus on a different set of issues and attributes of those issues than those being currently presented, intentionally or not, by traditional news organizations. The agenda-setting role of news media “is not limited to focusing public attention on a particular set of issues, but also influences our understanding and perception on topics in the news” (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007, p. 47).

An entrepreneurial journalist from Chile defined success in terms of bringing new sets of topics to the agenda. She said that “if all you present is serious journalism, with important topics, capable of changing the standards, capable of generating changes in the agenda, by showing that which the rest of media organizations are not showing, you can be successful.” An entrepreneurial journalist from El Salvador supported these arguments in the same session, and added that one of his organization’s main distinction is a focus on depth as opposed to form.

Among the basic functions of the mediated communication process identified by Harold Lasswell in the 1960s, surveillance of the environment is seen, within the context of agenda setting, as an important contribution to how and what we understand about the larger social environment (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). While we rely on traditional and social media to surveil the environment, the pictures of the world that we access are limited, even in an information-saturated age. There are several societal issues and attributes of those issues that compete for the attention of the public, the media and government any given day and stretch of time. This competition and society's limited attention capacity "make it imperative to develop substantial consensus about which issues top the agenda" (McCombs, 1997, p. 434). Journalistic professional norms and practices contextualized within a particular news culture, alongside other institutional influences on the news agenda, help develop this consensus of the news agenda. Thus, the news media selects and emphasizes certain issues pertinent to their news values and norms while de-emphasizing and sometimes ignoring other issues that are competing for attention, under constraints of time, space and, sometimes, other institutional impositions. Over time, the selection of issues and attributes of those issues in the news agenda is then, not universally and under certain conditions, transferred to the public's agenda, intentionally or not.

Shifts in organizational ties, along with the potential for innovative business models less reliant on government and commercial funding, and a fragmented audience, have allowed for the potential for such entrepreneurial news organizations to focus on new representations of the events of the day, potentially destabilizing current norms of news selection. Our focus group participants emphasized the importance of allowing for the emergence of underrepresented themes and topics, focusing intentionally on a different agenda, from the Amazon region in Brazil, to investigative reporting in Venezuela, to under-covered communities in Chile. A Brazilian entrepreneurial journalist presented her organization by saying:

Our idea came up in the midst of a political discussion in Brazil, where a lot of protests were taking place, and we were three journalists who noticed a vacuum in the local press in relation to what was happening.

At that time, we were already out of the newsroom and decided to create a site to talk about matters that were not present in the media, especially to deal with the communities from the (Amazon) region that the national and local media don't have the space for.

In her case, weakened ties to traditional media organizations allowed for an assessment of what issues or communities were being under-represented by media in her country. It also allowed for an opportunity to “go solo.” Her initiative has the potential of bringing new voices and new issues into the public debate in Brazil. Focus group participants from Peru indicated that their digital-native entrepreneurial organizations had the potential of not only bringing new issues to the national debate, but that they could also transcend national boundaries and potentially influence a transnational public, “making sure that these themes are discussed not only in Peru, but in Latin America, as we have correspondents in all of the region.” Another journalist from Peru, from an organization focusing on investigative journalism, stated that its financial independence enables it to “investigate and cover themes that powerful or weak media do not dare to cover.” He added that they aim to “conduct convincing investigation on pension funds, drug trafficking, political violence and to assure that these investigations can reach potentially the whole world.” Our focus group participants, overall, expressed a desire to cover topics and present them in a different way than mainstream media traditionally have.

Hundreds of studies have explored and expanded on agenda-setting research, and have found substantial evidence for this theory in the United States, where it was first tested, and internationally (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). In Latin America, the theory has been tested within different contexts, from national elections in Chile (Valenzuela & Correa, 2006), human rights violation scandal in Mexico (Rodríguez, 2009), a period including a presidential inauguration in Argentina, which found support only in the month of the inauguration (Mitchelstein, Boczkowski, Wagner, & Leiva, 2016), the two first years of Lula's presidency in Brazil, with a focus on a specific policy (Liedtke, 2006), to crime coverage in Brazilian media (Higgins, 2005). A recent analysis of agenda-setting studies in Brazil has criticized an appropriation of the theory by Brazilian scholars and stated that the

theory has gained space since the 1990s, with dozens of studies presented in key academic conferences within the past decade (Maia & Agnez, 2010). In Latin America, the theory has also been proven to be a useful way to understand media effects, often applied to traditional media, though not exclusively. Mitchelstein et al. (2016) analyzed the news gap online between issue preference of journalists and issue preference of audiences and found support for agenda setting theory only in a month with a salient political event. That is to say, studies show that, in certain instances, under certain conditions, Latin American traditional media has set the public's agenda, intentionally or not.

Although the theory has been replicated in different continents and media contexts, there are certain political and media conditions that need to be satisfied in order for agenda-setting effects to occur. Among them, a "reasonably open political system and a reasonably open media system" (McCombs, 2004, p. 37). Liedtke (2006) stated that agenda-setting gains theoretical relevance in mediated societies, where media and public opinion are intensively tied, as he argues is the case of Brazil. Latin America has, overall, undergone dramatic democratization in the past decades, although government and other institutional influences still impact press freedom in many countries (Freedom House, 2016). Latin America also has, in general, a strong and wide-ranging media system. Although it is fair to say that Latin America has reasonably open political and media systems, the level of such openness varies tremendously by country. Freedom House placed five Latin American countries (Mexico, Cuba, Honduras, Venezuela, and Ecuador) as not having a free press in 2016, up from previous years, and warned about the situation in Argentina and Brazil (Freedom House, 2016).

While the region's political and media systems may be open enough for agenda-setting effects to potentially occur in most countries, restrictions and pressures are certainly impacting news media in many countries in the region. In these transitional democracies, such restrictions and pressures, aligned with new possibilities brought by technological advancements and changes in financial structures, may be acting as motivators for entrepreneurial journalists to express agreement with an active participation of

intentionally influencing public opinion, to intentionally set the agenda. Not that interventionism is, in itself, necessarily a new role, but that it can be now articulated differently by entrepreneurial journalists. Hanitzsch et al. (2016) explained that “journalistic interventionism can be articulated in various and distinct ways, depending on the organizational and national contextual setting,” (p. 3) and this can certainly be the case with Latin American entrepreneurial journalists.

Our focus group participants certainly saw interventionism as an important role, but expressed that it was not necessarily something done outside of the larger media system, or independently from community input. A journalist from Mexico expressed the relevance of influencing the public debate, describing his organization’s success at not only presenting a new set of issues to the public debate but also at causing repercussions in traditional media in his country. He said,

I assume that the political class in Mexico continues to be quite analogic but I also assume that the themes we report and work on have gotten repercussion, or some influence, or some resonance, with both the traditional media as well as with the political class and readers.

An entrepreneurial journalist from El Salvador emphasized this interventionist role in conjunction with the community, very much aligned with the compressed social distance that online media allows for (Schmitz Weiss & Higgins Joyce, 2009). He said that:

I believe we are not limited to report information to the public debate but to also lead the debate, that we should infuse the debate arena on the web, with the community interacting. I believe that, at this point, it is key that journalism should also be a protagonist in the public debate.

Limitations

This exploratory study sought the expertise of journalists from 17 different digital-native, entrepreneurial journalists from eight different organizations in Latin America. It sought to understand innovations in the field from the perspective of those deeply involved in the process. It is important to mention, however, that these are not necessarily the perspectives of all

entrepreneurial news organizations in Latin America. This study brings up definitions of entrepreneurial organizations from our participants' perspectives, which vary under contextual conditions. The perspectives presented here, however, are insightful in that the intentions of such organizations are seen through the lenses of those operating them. It therefore focuses on the producer and organizational side of entrepreneurial journalism.

Among the central themes that emerged from the discussions was the perception of independence experienced as innovation in Latin America, and that the interventionist role was embraced with the intention of setting a new agenda. The emergence of such themes is revealing in itself, but it does not tell the full picture of what is being produced by entrepreneurial journalists and how they are impacting both public opinion and traditional media. Future studies should focus on the content and audience sides of this emerging phenomenon. Future studies should also identify if intentionality of news media in setting agendas produces any different of an effect than when agendas are set unintentionally.

Conclusions

Entrepreneurial journalism worldwide is marked by the breaking of ties from the traditional financial structures of media organizations. While such financial structures had been largely profitable in the middle of last century, they currently face much destabilization. At the same time, digital innovations have made it possible for journalists in a climate of uncertainty to risk venturing on their own, loosening their ties with traditional media organization. Journalists going solo face many challenges, from building an audience to finding their unique voice, gaining trust and, certainly, being sustainable and managing both the financial and editorial sides of a news organization ethically. Our expert group of participants pointed to opportunities found amidst such transformations, contextualized within the specific realities faced by media in Latin America.

Scholars analyzing the implications and impact of entrepreneurial journalism have expressed concerns over the blurring of lines between the editorial and financial sides of journalism (Carbasse, 2015; Rosenkranz,

2016; Vos & Singer, 2016). This is because most of these entrepreneurial ventures have, at least in this newer inception, few hands on deck, and journalists need to master the business and editorial sides simultaneously. As a disruption in the fairly stable journalistic field, such concerns are important. It is also important, however, to understand these disruptions within the social, political, economic and, indeed, media systems in which these organizations come to exist. These contexts give us insights into what is being sought by new entrepreneurial news organizations, as well as their implications.

The focus group participants brought up the concept of independence to define who they are, what they do and what it means to be successful. This concept was brought up voluntarily in each of the three focus groups. It is interesting that our experts from Latin America see that entrepreneurial journalism, by breaking from traditional financial and news organizational structures, is an opportunity for editorial independence. Though the theme of independence was a constant throughout the focus groups, the pressures that these organizations seek independence from varied.

Contextualized within countries with historically high levels of political parallelism and close ties between government and media, participants from Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Nicaragua emphasized a found opportunity for independence from government pressures. They pointed to new models of financing their journalistic work that have allowed them to exist without government advertising and financing, which in turns gives them independence to discuss political issues and, indeed, serve a watchdog role. These journalists felt fewer government pressures than they see traditional news organizations experiencing in their countries.

Participants from other countries, such as Peru, Venezuela, and El Salvador, emphasized the importance of independence from market and corporate pressures, which are more commonly seen in liberal models of media systems such as the United States. While the historical and political realities of these countries differ in many ways from that of the United States, our focus group participants pointed to new editorial opportunities found as they broke away from traditional news organizations and their corporate ties.

While financial independence does relieve such news organizations from corporate and government pressure, it does not mean that the pressures cease entirely, as these organizations still operate in a media system very much impacted by such pressures. It also doesn't mean that new pressures won't arise. As scholars have pointed out, entrepreneurial journalists do have to spend time and energy in trying to ensure the sustainability of their projects (Carbasse, 2015; Rosenkranz, 2016). But the fact that many of these journalists brought up voluntarily the pressures that stem from financial structures in traditional media indicate an acknowledgement of the exchanges that have been necessary in traditional media between editorial stance and the financial stance. From their point of view, the editorial and financial sides of traditional media were already blurred, or at least permeable. While new pressures may certainly arise from new structures, at least for the moment, these entrepreneurial organizations feel independent to cover issues and to handle them with the editorial perspective that they see fit. Independence, for these journalists, does not mean to be detached observers and, in some cases, it does not mean being neutral observers, either.

A second major theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was an intentionality to bring up new issues, new communities and new frames, and with that, to change the public debate. This comes not only out of necessity—as new media must vie for potential new audiences and compete with strong traditional media with a level of innovation—it also comes engrained with a social responsibility role of news media in the region, one which, for different reasons, these journalists felt was omitted from the media landscape. Our focus group participants mentioned a re-engagement with the community, a return to their reason for existing. While media systems in Latin America are marked with an advocacy role, an interventionist role, entrepreneurial journalists from these discussions expressed an interest in maintaining such roles, but while setting new agendas, focusing on new issues, new communities, and new attributes of issues in their countries.

A climate of instability has certainly surfaced with all of the political, economic, social and media transitions and transformations that Lat-

in America has faced in the past few decades. This climate has also allowed for journalists to risk changing both their business structures and prevailing norms. Entrepreneurial journalism in Latin America fits within a recent global trend of new journalistic ventures, digital-native ventures. It is, however, contextualized within the specific realities of their own countries. In that climate, these entrepreneurial journalists see a need to be active participants, to be a protagonist in debates about the changes and transformations occurring in the region. As a journalist from El Salvador stated:

I always remember a phrase said by (name omitted) in a forum here in El Salvador, that we have to, by natural law, stop being dinosaurs to become more agile animals; that's for sure, but what we have to make clear is that we don't have to become cockroaches to survive.

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Appendix 1

Introduction and Icebreaker

Please tell us your name, your country and the name of your news organization.

Briefly, tell us a little bit about your news project and what you do in that news organization.

Questions

1. I'd like you to describe the elements that you believe would qualify journalism (whether news practices or models) as "innovative."
2. Can you give me some examples of what you believe to be the best innovative journalism projects/practices in your country or in Latin America? Why do you think that?
3. Thinking of a hypothetical project, if you were to create a new entrepreneurial news platform, product or service, what would be 3 key things that would make it innovative?
4. What do you think is necessary to succeed and operate an entrepreneurial news entity?
5. What defines a successful entrepreneurial news organization, in your opinion?
6. What would you say your role as a journalist and media organization is, and how does it distinguish itself from traditional media organizations?
7. What are some new demands that technology is placing on the relationship between the journalist and the audience?
8. What do you see as the relationship between innovation and sustainability?

Last question

Is there anything that you would like to say or add that we have not discussed here? Please feel free:

Ending

Thank you very much everyone for participating, your perspective is very valuable and the research group thanks you for your time, participation and input. If you'd like to receive a copy of the study once it is finalized, please let me know and we'll send that to you. Again, thank you!