

## Research Article

# Innovation in Local Digital Media: The Case of Sevilla Directo

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**Introduction:** The journalistic company is immersed in a process of permanent transformation to overcome a crisis context. In this scenario, marked by disruptive changes in technology and in the behaviour of audiences and advertisers, a communication ecosystem emerges that facilitates the emergence of new media. Community social media, data journalism, and specialisation are some of the characteristics present in these business models. The objective of this research is to identify and understand the role of innovation in media adaptation to the current communication paradigm.

**Methodology:** The case study will be used. For this, we will analyse a digital native medium in a city of approximately 700,000 inhabitants, Sevilla Directo. The techniques of information collection have been observation, analysis of websites, in-depth interviews, a discussion group between journalists, and reports and databases of the sector. **Results and discussion:** The results show that technological advances and the reach of social networks are fundamental for the growth of local media. However, it is observed that adaptive changes predominate with little disruption and little concern for R&D&I. The organisation under study lacks a business model that guarantees its long-term sustainability and bases its subsistence on traditional income routes. At the same time, social capital stands as a key element in financing.

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## 1. Introduction

The media face a profound crisis due to environmental changes and the inability of their promoters to find a sustainable strategy. Journalism needs a new business model that restores strength in two fundamental pillars to fulfil its social function: business stability and public trust.

On the path to this stability, they have experienced multiple debacles, missteps, and setbacks manifested in media closures, layoffs, resource reductions, and loss of informational plurality. Between mid-2008 and October 2015, 375 media outlets closed in Spain, and 12,200 professionals lost their jobs (APM, 2015). More recently, according to data from the National Statistics Institute (INE), the unemployment rate in the sector stood at 12.29% in the first quarter of 2024, representing a decrease compared to previous quarters but still evidencing a significant problem in the journalism labour sector (INE, 2024).

In the context of Seville, which constitutes the geographical focus of our research, palpable evidence of the crisis affecting journalism has been identified. A significant milestone was the cessation of operations of the Andalusian edition of the newspaper *El Mundo* in April 2016. Subsequently, during the summer of the same year, *El Correo de Andalucía* proceeded to dismiss seven members of the editorial team. The situation reached its critical point in the summer of 2018 with the closure of both its local television channel and its print version. On the other hand, *ABC Sevilla* began 2017 with a labour reduction of six people and had previously dispensed with the personnel corresponding to its printing plant in 2015—a total of thirty-seven workers. These actions reflect more than isolated incidents; they reflect a continuous process towards labour prevarications within the journalism sector, allowing us to recognise a trend towards systemic precariousness (Valera, 2017).

This situation is explained firstly by the impact of the 2008 financial crisis, which had a clear effect on the revenue model of the media based on advertising and the sale of copies (Jawadi, 2016; Kudlyak & Sánchez, 2017; Kaya, 2018). Moreover, social detachment from the media is based on years of malpractice and deontological deficits, creating an informational context marked by the rise of fake news and disinformation fuelled by the proliferation of non-professional information emitters on the web, socially accepted due to a lack of trust in traditional media and low media literacy of society (Quint & Tristani, 2018; Shoham & Pelzman, 2011).

### *Technological Convergence and Journalistic Company*

Technological advancement, especially digital, plays a determining role in the current journalistic context. The process of technological convergence has completely transformed the media in all aspects, affecting both the organisation of the journalistic company and the profile of its workers, as well as the production and distribution of content and the financing model. According to Jamil (2023), technological convergence has forced journalists to adapt to new tools and platforms, integrating various forms of multimedia and collaborating more closely between different departments within news organisations.

In this transformation, production costs decrease, and the newsrooms of cybermedia are constituted with smaller, flexible, and multidisciplinary human teams (Orihuela, 2011). Journalists take on new tasks (Parra Valcarce & Álvarez Marcos, 2004) with more horizontal job positions where often the writer assumes the role of editor (Díaz Noci, 2001). Newsrooms become spaces where more people process content than create it (Parra Valcarce, García de Diego, & Rojo Villada, 2007) due to update shifts of information tending to a continuous flow or 24/7 service. In this context, teleworking grows, and the agenda, narratives, and distribution are increasingly influenced by the audience. New professional profiles have emerged that respond to this new relationship with the audience (Yuste & Cabrera, 2014) and the new informative possibilities. In this whirlpool, one should not lose sight of the informative company whose social function and conversion of its product into a non-perishable and reusable good remain peculiar (Caro-González, 2002).

The concept of journalistic convergence (Salaverría & Negredo, 2008) refers to a process of technology implementation that affects the business, professional, and editorial aspects of the media, promoting the integration of tools, spaces, methods, and languages. This process is broader than the simple concentration of editorial resources and is characterised by immediacy, multimedia, interactivity, audience participation, non-linear message structure, and personalisation possibility (Salaverría, García Avilés, & Masip, 2010). Convergence is therefore the cause of the current informative ecosystem and provokes a more innovative scenario open to user communities and with new strategies to achieve sustainability (Carvajal, Arias, Negredo, & Amoedo, 2015).

Orihuela synthesises that "the internet is at the same time a shredder of intermediaries and a generator of new intermediations" (2015, p. 130). Roger Fidler spoke of 'mediamorphosis' (1998) to refer to the progressiveness of changes, an idea he shares with Smith (1983). These changes, motivated by technological convergence and the internet, constitute a new communicative paradigm, a paradigm whose keys were defined by Orihuela in 2002 and that has resulted in a communicative model in which social networks and users are protagonists (García Avilés, 2015; Nafría, 2017).

According to the Digital News Report 2023, most news editors are now active on platforms like TikTok and YouTube due to their ability to attract younger users (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2023). Furthermore, technological convergence has led to an environment where multimedia and audience participation are essential (Gutiérrez-Caneda, Pérez-Seijo, & López-García, 2020).

Despite the pressing need to innovate to find new ways to convince society and gain its support, the media environment in Spain does not decisively bet on innovation. Innovation in the media is developed

primarily by technology companies, highly specialised media, and media labs (García Avilés, Carvajal Prieto, & Arias Robles, 2018), and incremental changes predominate over disruptive ones.

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

Bleyen et al. (2014) propose classifying media innovations into five categories: business model, production and distribution, media consumption, internal structure of information, and content. However, it is more practical and facilitates comparison with other sectors to use the typology established by the OECD (2005), which distinguishes between product, process, marketing, or organisational innovations. These categories can fit the previous ones, although the relationship is not exact.

### *Changes in Production and Distribution*

In the forms of journalism on the internet, the careful use of images—design, infographics, photography, video—is crucial to offer a differentiated product and capture the visitor's attention (López García, 2015). The use of video and the facilities offered by tools like Periscope, Facebook Live, or YouTube for streaming is particularly noteworthy. According to a Cisco report, by 2020 there will be 5.5 billion mobile users worldwide, and 75% of online content will be video for mobile.

Doing journalism on the internet requires a significant effort to be visible. If you are not indexable, they will not find you (Jarvis, 2010). Most users arrive at cybermedia content through Google or other search engines after making a query. This means that on the internet, you write not only for people but also for algorithms, seeking a balance between both audiences (Cobo, 2012). You write in an environment that allows a process of generic hybridisation where innovative tools such as fact-checking, data visualisation, infographics, and big data analysis are used to capture the reader's attention (Manfredi, 2015).

This process of generic hybridisation has accentuated in recent years. In the first decade of the 21st century, digital newspapers transferred the print format without changes in journalistic genres, although with novelties such as forums, chats, surveys, and animated infographics (Moreno Espinosa, 2011). Transmedia journalism is a burgeoning narrative innovation where a story is told and enriched from various media and platforms with the participation of prosumers (Scolari, 2013).

The active audience of digital media, converted into producer-consumer, increasingly influences the configuration of the news agenda (Vu, 2014). The concepts of 'mobile first'—in Spain, 91% of the population uses a mobile phone—and social networks allow a continuous and increasingly horizontal conversation between cybermedia and audiences (Steensen, 2014). In this framework, mobile journalism not only refers to news consumption on mobile devices but also to news production from the mobile, approaching the idea of ubiquitous journalism characterised by the availability, accessibility, and personalisation of the informative service thanks to the internet of things and big data (Westlund, 2018; Salaverría, 2016).

### *Changes in Financing*

Historically, the press has based its income on two avenues: the sale of information and the sale of advertising space in a dual market, the public and advertisers (Caro-González, 2007; Aguado Guadalupe, 2016). The added difficulty to this business model is that the public is accustomed to getting information for free on the internet and that, in advertising terms, an internet reader is paid up to twenty times less than a print reader (López García, 2015, p. 48). An optimistic fact is that the internet achieves 31.9% of advertising investment despite capturing 26.4% of media consumption time (APM, 2018, p. 70). However, Google and Facebook control web advertising—only 20% of digital advertising revenue goes directly to media—so the digital transition is not yet profitable for print headlines (Sanclemente, 2017). With the data on digital advertising revenue in the third quarter of 2018, a slowdown in its growth is evident, conditioning the reconversion of the Spanish press.

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

Thanks to technology, advertisers can also better control their advertising insertions. The use of algorithms and the exploitation of big data are other trends in cybermedia advertising (Fuentes, 2017) that allow contracting times and spaces programmatically so that the purchased advertising formats

better suit the advertiser's interests (Carrillo-Durán & Rodríguez-Silgado, 2018). However, despite the increase in control over the effectiveness of advertising investment in cybermedia, advertisers prefer textual formats to improve the effectiveness of their advertising (Abuín & Clemente, 2009, p. 259) and to avoid obstacles such as ad blockers or phenomena like "banner blindness" (Ortiz-Chaves et al., 2014). The use of video for advertising purposes in cybermedia is also growing.

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

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

Other ethical issues related to advertising income arise from the need to generate traffic that attracts advertisers. We refer to practices such as clickbait, containers for viral messages without journalistic selection criteria, or the abuse of agency content without editing, context, or analysis, which feeds a process of homogenisation and information overload.

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

In line with this idea, it is necessary to emphasise the sense of community between a cybermedium and its audience, the importance of making it participate, member, partner, etc.

Donations are another important source of income for cybermedia, whether punctual to finance specific informative projects in the form of micro patronage (Dos Santos & Ahmad, 2019), or permanently as is the case of non-profit media based on philanthropy, sponsorship, and foundations (Caro-González et al., 2019; Requejo-Alemán, 2014).

This is a source of income that requires a change of mentality in society because it involves commitment for a common interest purpose (Abad Llorca, 2010). A step that many citizens have already taken, and some media have achieved, but which has not yet become widespread in our society. Meanwhile, in the era of 'engagement,' some common elements in different strategies to reach the user and explore new

income avenues are the use of video, handling the hyper-relevant, or real-time information (Fuentes, 2017), as well as other previously mentioned aspects such as personalising the informative service, exclusivity, or its direct utility. In this line, Rojo Villada (2008, p. 152) warned that the new cyberspace environment enabled by technology opened up new revenue opportunities based on the distribution of more personalised content and emphasised that media consumers would only be willing to pay for four things: entertainment, feeling safer or healthier, enjoying a material benefit, or saving time.

In a context where citizens access information for free, the decision to charge for the content of a cybermedium implies having a loyal audience (Flores & Aguado, 2005), but it also awakens editors' fear of losing readers and therefore influence and advertising (Flores & Aguado, 2005; López García, 2005; Parra et al., 2007), or failing to fulfil the social function of informing all citizens regardless of their income (Benson, 2019). Therefore, an alternative to moving towards paywalls without a loyal community is for journalistic companies to agree on a collective migration towards payment methods (Casero Ripollés, 2010, p. 597).

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

Information is the raw material of cybermedia, and content is their service. Therefore, another form of income related to specialisation and exclusivity, in the case of local media, is selling content to other media. This practice not only diversifies income sources but also strengthens the position of local media in a competitive market (State of Digital Publishing, 2023).

### *Boom of the Local in Cybermedia*

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

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

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

## 2. Goals and methodology

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

Changes will be identified, and it will be defined how innovation is part of that change process in the journalistic company. Special attention is paid to the factors that determine their economic sustainability. The aim is to answer the question of whether new hyperlocal digital media can be sustainable and to establish a series of recommendations for professionals who decide to start their own digital medium.

It is considered that new digital media of a local or hyperlocal nature are possible thanks to the new informative ecosystem where technological advances allow producing content, distributing it, and penetrating the audience with reduced costs and encouraging results.

The role of innovation as a success strategy is highlighted, understanding success as business sustainability and the ability to generate wealth in the form of quality information or decent employment. However, there is doubt about the viability of these new informative companies due to the slow transition of the financial pillars of traditional media towards new digital media—advertising, investors, payment for information. The initial hypothesis is that the initial approaches are not being conducted as presumed, and the formulas to monetise audience indices are still insufficient. The subsistence of the selected medium will be analysed and whether it does so based on innovative strategies from classic formulas or with a hybrid model.



Thus, the effect of the current communication paradigm on new local digital media and how innovation in cybermedia can reconstruct the current sector's deficiencies will be addressed. Loyalising these communities via exclusive and quality content or generating a commitment and identity relationship and involving them in the business model presents itself as the alternative to achieving sustainability and editorial independence in the face of the decline in advertising investment and external pressures. The case study analyses in-depth a cybermedium to understand the impact of innovations on local media.

To achieve the proposed objectives, the particular case study research strategy will be employed. This strategy is recommended when attempting to understand a complex phenomenon not clearly defined in a real context (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). An in-depth study of a digital native journalistic company will be conducted. Different data sources will be triangulated (interviews with various stakeholders, reports, media presence, economic data, web pages, etc.).

The selected company is Sevilla Directo. It is a digital native headline from the city of Seville, emerged after the 2008 crisis during a period of economic recession and with proximity information as a claim. The sociodemographic context is suitable for projects of this type with certain significance; Seville has a population in its metropolitan area exceeding one million inhabitants. Apart from the local relevance of this medium, another important reason for its selection has been the possibility of accessing longitudinal information to understand innovation processes over time. Data provided by the medium itself have been analysed through reports, interviews, and public presentations, as well as specialised websites measuring traffic and influence of informative spaces on the web, such as Google Analytics, Woorank, Jetpack software, or social networks like Twitter and Facebook.

To understand the degree of innovation in this medium, a questionnaire based on Carvajal et al.'s (2015) proposal was applied to analyse and classify various cases of journalism innovation. Additionally, the information was contextualised and completed with the opinions of its editors obtained during a discussion group held in April 2018.

Economic data available from the Mercantile Registry of Seville were also consulted.

At the same time, an updated theoretical review of the change within the journalistic company focused on innovation in cybermedia is conducted.

### 3. Results

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

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

In this framework, Sevilla Directo will base itself on the possibilities of technology that works transversally (García Avilés et al., 2018, p. 6) to incrementally apply innovations in its business organisation and information production.

According to the cybermedia distinction proposed by Professor Ramón Salaverría (2017), Sevilla Directo is a multiplatform, polychromatic cybermedium of general information specialised in the hyperlocal sphere with a local-provincial reach, privately owned, and for-profit. Likewise, it is a medium with an independent editorial proposal, dynamic journalistic approach, and collective authorship.

#### *Business Organisation*

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

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

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

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

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

Additionally, to the journalistic tasks, the newsroom has incorporated, to a greater or lesser extent depending on contracts, communication services, event organisation, and even teaching, all supported by the same journalists. Innovation in the journalists' professional profile is reflected in a polyhedral role with multiple capabilities and roles in their workday. The offer of new services has been developed in most cases unrelated to the principle of scalability, that is, diverting or saturating the necessary resources to continue producing the original informational product (Salaverría & Negredo, 2008). New tasks respond to short-term economic needs but move the medium away from long-term development aimed at promoting its content and quality. Multi-income business models can penalise the true mission of the media (Benson, 2019).

Sevilla Directo's newsroom has been in three different physical locations until opting for teleworking since January 2017, an innovation in work processes motivated by economic reasons. Internal

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

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

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

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

### *Production and Distribution*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Regarding content, technological innovations such as transmedia narrative, virtual reality, or augmented reality are not exploited. Nor are there basic options to personalise the informative experience, such as editing the front page or a personalised notification system. Resource limitations prevent the development of a test section for innovations or a medialab. Narrative innovations are scarce and made from daily experience through trial and error.

However, limited use has been made of interactive formats and geolocation through surveys, contests, or playful dynamics on social networks. Sevilla Directo does not have its own mobile application, although

it does present a responsive design that helps improve the reader's experience. Regarding design, in April 2014, a year and a half after its launch, Sevilla Directo completely redesigned its website, clearly betting on a more visual presentation. The image took centre stage from the front page with large formats—also in photo galleries and inside news—and streaming, or new sections like 'Callejeando' for photo news. The design went from a two-column front page to a three-column one, and new interaction spaces with the audience were created, such as survey and contest sections.

Another innovation in content distribution is the weekly newsletter that collects the week's most outstanding publications and is sent free to subscribed readers. Sevilla Directo plans to diversify the newsletter into various thematic or district newsletters, in addition to promoting broadcast channels from WhatsApp and Telegram.

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

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

Almost 41% of Sevilla Directo's visits came via Facebook or Twitter initially, and in 2017 these two networks continued to attract a similar flow (37.3%). However, over the years and better positioning, the number of readers accessing this medium through search engines and directly has grown. Initially, direct traffic accounted for 17.7% of the total, and in 2017 this figure had grown to 21.5%. As for readers accessing after making a query in search engines, it went from 29% in 2013 to 38% in 2017 (latest data

corroborated by the medium for this study). In any case, the importance of social networks and Google for this cybermedium stands out. Together they provide more than three-quarters of Sevilla Directo's traffic, approaching 80% in 2014 and 2015.

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

On the other hand, how to tell the story is influenced by the medium used and the expectation of a larger audience. According to interviews with the editors, it is observed how the same fact is narrated differently on the website and on social networks. The platform used conditions the production routines, and the information is selected and treated according to the dissemination channels. Social networks determine the medium's organisation, which is especially noticeable in the timeliness of the facts. Facebook Live and Twitter Streaming have become two relevant tools to transmit information, especially immediately, and influence the production routines of its editors. Timeliness, accompanied by professional handling of immediacy, gains prominence. The work routines are oriented towards achieving a permanent renewal of information. This temporal immediacy also influences aspects such as the relationship between speed and quality of information, the use of sources, fact-checking, editing and presentation, etc. Another example of innovative use of these tools is the WhatsApp channel, open in 2016, where Sevilla Directo's readers can receive the most valuable information of the day.

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

### *Business Model*

Sevilla Directo's business model is based on traditional advertising, with special attention to local advertisers. In its first year of life, a generalist advertising marketing agency was used to obtain contracts, and from 2014, the management was handled by the medium itself. In a second phase, from 2016, Sevilla Directo opted for a mixed model between direct advertising marketing, programmatic

advertising, and commercial agreements with local businesses. These agreements seek not only to obtain advertising but also to generate synergies to promote activities and content of mutual interest.

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

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

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

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

### **3. Discussion and Conclusions**

The case of Sevilla Directo illustrates the challenges and opportunities that new local digital media face in the current communicative ecosystem. Technological convergence and the new media environment offer unprecedented opportunities for innovation, but they also impose significant challenges in terms of sustainability and business models.

Sevilla Directo's experience highlights the importance of innovation in different areas: organisational, production, distribution, and financing. The hyperlocal approach, the use of digital tools, and the strategic focus on social networks have been key elements in its development. However, the limited



resources and economic precariousness condition its ability to fully exploit the potential of innovation and develop a sustainable long-term model.

The study also reveals the need for a continuous adaptation process and the importance of maintaining a balance between traditional revenue sources and new business models. The combination of local advertising, branded content, event organisation, and the potential implementation of a subscription model represents a diversified approach that can enhance the medium's sustainability.

The role of the community and the relationship with the audience are fundamental aspects in this context. Building a loyal audience and fostering a sense of community are essential strategies to ensure the medium's viability. The case of Sevilla Directo demonstrates that innovation in local digital media is possible, but it requires a comprehensive and flexible approach that integrates various aspects of the journalistic process and the business model.

In conclusion, new local digital media like Sevilla Directo have the potential to contribute to the revitalisation of the journalistic sector by offering quality information and generating employment. However, achieving sustainability and editorial independence requires a commitment to innovation, diversification of income sources, and a close relationship with the audience. Future research should continue to explore the impact of technological advancements and new business models on local media to develop effective strategies for their development and sustainability.

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## **Declarations**

**Funding:** No specific funding was received for this work.

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.