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# The shortcomings of the traditional press, a burden on entrepreneurial journalism

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** This article reviews the four challenges that the traditional press has inherited to its digital counterpart: introduce multimedia information narratives to attract new readers, generate proximity strategies for users, develop new business models, and become a professional space that reflects the feminisation of journalism studies. **Method:** This article presents the results of a content analysis applied to 281 news media companies founded by entrepreneurial journalists. **Results and conclusions:** The results of this study show that entrepreneurial journalism has not innovated in the presentation of information (it uses fixed images as the main attraction). Entrepreneurial news media have adopted the same advertising-based business model of the traditional press and lack channels to receive feedback from users. Finally, like their printed counterparts, digital news media are not yet a space for female empowerment.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial journalism; digital media; Internet; women journalists; economic crisis; traditional press.

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Translation by **CA Martínez-Arcos** (PhD in Communications from the University of London)

## 1. Introduction

The overall objective of this research is to describe the news media organisations created by the so-called “entrepreneurial journalism”, which is the term used to refer to the news media companies founded and directed by journalists in the context of the global economic crisis of 2008.

The analysis of the products of entrepreneurial journalism takes into account their form and background. The study of the form is justified because it is important to determine whether the digital press, founded by journalists, is creating new informative narratives, which are, in principle, presupposed to be multimedia because they have been designed especially for the Internet. Their focus on the Internet eliminates past commitments and promotes the unrestricted presentation of information, multi-platform accessibility, permanent availability, interactivity and, even, the ability to carry out complete product and service transactions” (Manfredi, Rojas and Herranz de la Casa, 2015: 76).

The other objective is to determine whether entrepreneurial journalism has proposed structural changes in gender-based dynamics in the workplace. What is the role of the female journalist in this digital scenario and economic crisis? Does the agenda of entrepreneurial journalist include the need to break male dominance in the production of information? These questions are fundamental to determine whether the feminisation of journalism studies has also permeated to the digital professional field with the same strength or whether it is as weak as in the traditional press. “The feminisation of journalism studies is a fully accepted reality, shows very constant values, and strengthened over the past two decades in a uniform manner in all the autonomous communities [of Spain]” (Rivero, Meso and Peña, 2015: 566). More specifically, the question is whether the dominance of women over men in the realm of journalism studies (Rivero, Meso and Peña, 2015), has also occurred in entrepreneurial digital journalism.

Journalism is one of the professional sectors that has been affected the most by the economic crisis, at least in Spain, with the closure of 197 media outlets, from the beginning of the crisis in 2008 to the end of 2012, according to the Madrid Press Association (APM, 2012). Only in 2007, 3,247 journalists were laid off. In 2012 the situation worsened and 27,443 journalists became unemployed (APM, 2012) and 64% of them were women (APM 2012). In a broader context, according to the report of the Spanish Ministry of Education (2014) on employment among university students, the percentage of journalists with social security was 59.2%, which makes journalism one of the profession with fewest job offers.

The press lives its own crisis since the 1990s, with the progressive loss of readers, revenue and grants. Some authors (Casero-Ripollés, 2010, 2012; Soengas, Rodríguez and Abuín, 2014) consider that the liberation of the media market in Spain in the 1990s prompted the proliferation of news media organisations whose guidelines were not committed to satisfy the needs of readers. To ensure

their survival, the most important news media corporations in Spain have used property as security for the payment of their debts to banks (Revista Mongolia, 2013), which calls into question the freedom of expression of these companies and provokes a conflict of interest that reduces the quality and credibility of their information. Another measure adopted by the press in times of crisis has been the reduction of costs and staff, which has served to “prolong the agony of the newspapers that have lost their ability to generate interest and surprise readers” (Sánchez-Taberner, 2009: 105). The press based its business model on advertising and newspapers sales but this strategy suffered its most precipitous fall in 2007 and 2008, when it lost 95% of its profits (AEDE, 2009).

In this context, journalists have launched more than three hundred new online media, which some have referred to as “entrepreneurial journalism” (Manfredi, Rojas and Herranz de la Casa, 2015: 70). These new information projects were designed for the Internet partly because, in comparison to the traditional press, the online press involves lower production costs and can be run by a much smaller team (Edo, 2002). Entrepreneurial journalism is credited with an innovative character due to its digital nature and opportunities, “which means more flexibility, dynamism and speed in the adaptation to change” (Manfredi, Rojas and Herranz de la Casa, 2015: 74).

Finally, based on the previous facts, the traditional media has inherited four challenges to the digital press: attract new readers through new information narratives, generate proximity strategies for users, create new business models, and project itself as a professional space that reflects the strong feminisation of journalism studies. The verification of these challenges summarises the objectives of this research study.

## **2. The digital press and the economic crisis**

The new media founded by journalists during the economic crisis, as mentioned, have been created under the shadow of the quality and credibility of the traditional media. The discrediting of the press is based, above all, on the quality and rigour of the published information which seems to “obey more to the interests of companies, political parties and public and private institutions of varied nature than to the principles of journalism” (Sánchez-Taberner, 2009: 105).

The quality of Information and the economic crisis go hand in hand. Professional intrusion, low wages, short-term contracts, the laying off of prestigious journalists and job insecurity has led the journalistic profession to opt for “sensationalism, entertainment, superficial analysis and the privileging of content quantity over quality” (Ufarte, 2012: 1). All of these features of the digital news narratives condition the creation of new readers (Flores and Aguado, 2005: 29). To this we must add the dissatisfaction of readers who choose to obtain information from amateur news sites and social networks (Diezhandino, 2009) in the absence of quality and credibility.

The crisis of journalism in Spain has occurred not only because its business model is unsustainable but also because “readers do not want to pay for information they do not trust (Mongolia, 2013: 15).”

According to Cabrera (2001), online media are at a multimedia stage which involves the use of all the resources and possibilities offered by the Internet. Cabrera explains that many of these media have gone through a facsimile stage, which consisted in offering a PDF version of the printed newspaper. Some online news media opted for tailored models, in which the news produced for the

printed media were adapted to the web, while others decided to produce information exclusively for the digital environment to differentiate themselves from the printed press.

Multimedia was almost non-existent in the Spanish press until 2000. One of the newspapers to first exploit the resource offered by this new scenario was *El Mundo*, whose digital edition contained interactive graphics, audio, video and photographs (Cabrera, 2001). The possibilities offered by the Internet has forced news companies to reorganise their traditional and digital newsrooms, and, in some cases, to merge both types of newsrooms. Thus, journalists began to nourish both the printed and digital editions of the newspapers. In Spain, this process began in 2005 with the renewal of the design of the newspapers' websites (Guallar, 2008).

The multimedia possibilities of the online press have made journalists to expand their knowledge of digital tools and audio and video devices, which has given a versatile character to the profession (Scolari, Micó, Navarro and Kuklisnky, 2008; Cabrera, 2009; Salaverría, 2007; Salaverría and Avilés, 2008; Gil, 1999). In this context, versatility is understood as the capacity of journalists to produce news in different platforms” (Salaverría and Avilés, 2008: 43).

The transformation of the press in Spain has been carried out in a context of deep economic crisis, which has not only determined the new ways of doing journalism, but has also defined the professional practices.

### **2.1. The feminisation of journalism studies and the masculinisation of the newsroom**

In the traditional press gender dynamics are dominated by men and their narrative reproduces a hegemonic culture identified with male values (Van Zoonen, 1994).

Studies on the empowerment of the female journalist in Spain have yielded contradictory results. The analyses of the journalistic profession began in 1990, when the Madrid Press Association commissioned a survey to more than 700 Spanish journalists (Rodríguez, 2002). The results of this survey indicated that 17% of the journalists were women. Since then the participation of women in traditional media has been increasing, increasing to 25% in 1994 and to 34% in 1999. It is worth mentioning that the career of the female journalist is short because they have more family responsibilities than their male counterparts before the age of 40 (CIS, 1998). This situation was confirmed by the study of Jaume Soriano, María José Cantón and Mercè Díez (2005), whose results indicate that work-family compatibility was perceived as a problem by women engaged in this profession but not by their male counterparts.

Another important aspect about gender-based professional dynamics in journalism is that in traditional media the managerial positions are given to men. In 2007, only 30 of the existing 210 newspapers were directed by women (Ufarte, 2007: 414).

In Spain there is a set of laws and regulations that guarantee gender equality in different areas - including the Spanish Constitution of 1976 and the five plans for equal opportunities (1988-1990,

1993-1995, 1997-2000, 2003-2006, 2008-2011)- and this analysis seeks to identify the extent to what gender equality exists in entrepreneurial journalism.

### **3. Research questions**

The study is guided by two research questions: one is focused on the description of each of the digital news products, networks and multimedia resources used by entrepreneurial journalism. The other question is related to the description of the organisation of gender-based professional dynamics. Both questions contribute to the ultimate objective, which is to characterise entrepreneurial journalism in times of economic crisis.

Q1: Does entrepreneurial journalism use new strategies to produce and present information?

P2: Is entrepreneurial journalism a professional space that reflects the feminisation of journalism studies?

### **4. Methods**

This study is based on quantitative content analysis. The analysis is divided into two parts: the first one explores the characteristics of the new online media. The second part identifies the distribution of men and women in the organisation and positions of responsibility of these media. All the information was collected from the websites of each of the news media.

#### **4.1. Categories of quantitative content analysis**

The categories of both phases of analysis aim to contribute to the quantitative content analysis. The categories used are nominal and dichotomous. The treatment and analysis of the categories was carried out with SPSS.

##### **4.1.2. Categories to analyse the new media**

The categories of the quantitative content analysis that were used to examine the forms of digital media are dichotomous and seek to examine the following elements:

- Theme
- Type of information (national, regional, local or hyperlocal)
- Language (Spanish, Catalan, Galician, Basque)
- Platform (website, only mobile devices -mobile phone and tablet- and mobile and tablet platforms)
- Use of social networks
- Use of multimedia resources
- Business model (advertising-based, crowdfunding, mixed -donations and advertising-)
- Rights to use published information (Creative Commons or all rights reserved).

#### 4.1.3. Categories of qualitative analysis

The categories of the second phase of the analysis seek to obtain data necessary to characterise the socio-professional panorama of the digital journalist, specifically the variable of gender. In this case, the qualitative analysis seeks to identify:

-The organisation of human resources: vertical or horizontal. For this research, vertical organisation refers to the hierarchical organisation of human resources in the digital media. On the other hand, the analysis of the horizontal organisation focused on the work team and does not seek to identify any type of managerial position. The data related to the organisation of the human resources of the media under study were directly obtained from their websites.

-The positions of responsibility, which in principle would be occupied by journalists, and the gender of the persons that occupy them.

#### 4.2. Research sample

The study sample is based on the list of new media created by journalists from 2008 to 2014, which is included in the 2014 report of the journalist profession, published by the Madrid Press Association (APM, 2014). From this list we discarded those media, mostly magazines, that only offered their content through mobile phone and tablet (9), printed-only media (17), digital and printed media (23), and digital and tablet-based media (5). In addition, we discarded those media that were closed prior to November 2014 (44). We studied 281 digital media that did not have printed or tablet editions/versions. The list of the media included in the sample is available in the annex of this article.

### 5. Results

The consolidation of the creation of new media concentrated between 2011 and 2013, when 64% of the digital media under analysis were launched. In 2008, when the economic crisis in the media worsened and the Madrid Press Association began to register the emergence of new media, the enthusiasm of journalists was rather shy as only 11 digital media were launched. As the crisis in the press and the media in general worsened the number of new media soared up and by 2013 it had increased seven times.

The Internet, conceived as a global village, as a placeless context, is for journalists a space to talk about what is close, local. At least three of every ten new media created by journalists from 2008 to 2014 have a regional and local scope (see Table 1). Of the 104 media, 7 are hyperlocal and cover the events that take place in the neighbourhoods, most of them from Madrid. Thus, proximity is the field that has generated the most interest among entrepreneurial journalists.

Thematic specialisation is a feature of the digital media and in this case the trend is confirmed. More than half of them are specialised in art, culture, sports, economy, business, international news, TV, lifestyle, science, energy, women, etc. The conclusion that emerges from these data is that the new media do not seek to compete with the general-information media that are already consolidated nationwide. Only 1 of every 10 media produces general and national news.



**Table 1. Theme of the new media created by journalists**

	No. of media	%
General, regional, local and hyperlocal information	104	37
Art and culture	32	11.3
Sports	31	11
Other topics	30	10.6
General national information	23	8.1
Economy and business	18	6.4
International news	9	3.2
Theatre, film and television	8	2.8
Technology	7	2.4
Lifestyle	6	2.1
Media	4	1.4
Tourism, gastronomy, travel	3	1
Science	2	0.7
Energy	2	0.7
Women	2	0.7

Source: Authors' own creation based on data from the 2014 report of the Madrid Press Association (APM, 2014)

Diversity, in its broadest sense, is a *conditio sine qua non* attributed to the Internet. In the specific case of the Spanish linguistic context, entrepreneurial journalism could be a vehicle to boost the use of the different languages that coexist with Spanish (Basque, Galician and Catalan) and establish closer ties with readers. However, 89% the sample of media are written in Spanish, only 6% in Catalan and 1.7% in Galician (see table 2).

**Table 2. Languages used in the new media created by journalists**

	No. of media	%
Spanish	250	89
Catalan	17	6
Galician	5	1.7
Valencian	3	1
Spanish-Catalan	2	0.7
Spanish-Galician	1	0.3
English	1	0.3
Spanish-English	1	0.3
Spanish-Portuguese	1	0.3

Source: Authors' own creation

Interactivity is one of the characteristics of the Internet and it could be used by the digital media to attract, retain, and maintain communication with their audience. In this case, social networks dominate the relationship with readers, particularly *Facebook* (94.6%), *Twitter* (94%) and *Google+* (41%). According to Alexa (2014), based on the rankings and data traffic of these *websites*, is not surprising that *Facebook* is the website with the heaviest traffic in the world.

Another issue explored in this analysis is whether the new media exploit the possibilities of the Internet to generate new information narratives supported among other things, by multimedia resources. Data indicate that the use of multimedia resources is limited, since video and audio is hardly integrated in news pieces. In fact, only 33.4% of the media have a YouTube channel and 0.3% Vimeo channel. Photography continues to be the main resource of 100% of the media.

Another feature of Internet that is hardly exploited by the analysed media is the model of “information for all”, information free of copyright restrictions, like *Creative Commons* content, which only represents 16% (46) of the sample of media. Most of the media (181) are copyrighted, i.e. all rights reserved for the use and exploitation of the information published.

It is assumed that the Internet could also generate new business models. However, 67% of the media included in the sample is supported by advertising, only 5.6% by crowdfunding and 3.5% by a mixed model (donations and advertising). These data indicate that at the moment the only difference between these news projects and the traditional press is the use of a digital platform by the former. The new projects still present information through text and images, and still has not adopted a business model that differs from the one used by the printed press.

### **5.1. Who runs the new digital news media created by journalists?**

The organisation of human resources in digital media can be seen *a priori* different from traditional media based on the needs and resources of the Internet, which requires other professional figures. However, and in the light of the results obtained in this analysis, the organisation of the digital media seems to be the same as that of any printed newspaper. Half of the sample of media has a hierarchical organisation, 17.4% a horizontal organisation, and 32% did not share information about this aspect on their website.

The media that are hierarchically organised included three managerial positions that are key in any journalistic enterprise: President, director and editor. It can be assumed that these positions do not have to be forcibly occupied by journalists, but this information may enrich the discussion. We identified 11 Presidents and all of them were men.

In the case of other managerial positions, including director and editor, the panorama changes and opens a professional space for the female journalist. 50% of the media companies have male directors and 15.4% female directors. In only one case the position is shared by male and female professionals. The figure of the director does not appear in 26.7% of the sample of media.

The editors of new media with hierarchical organisation are male (31.6%). This figure is devastating and significant if we only take into account the media that have this professional position, since the share of media that have male editors goes from 3 to 8 of every 10 (62% of the sample does not



include editors in its organisation). Women only represent 5.6% of all the editors in new digital media. Finally, in only one medium the position of editor is shared by a man and a woman.

Deputy directors are present in very few of the analysed media: only 19. Of these media, 8.4% have men occupying the position of deputy-director, and 4.2% have women in that position. Only one medium has one man and one woman sharing the position of deputy-directors. A similar situation occurs in the case of the editor-in-chief, which appears only in 22.5% of the sample of media. Women journalists are editors-in-chief in 7.7% of the sample of media, while men occupy that position in 14% of the sample.

The only position in which women dominate is the section editor: 21.8% against 13.3% in favour of women.

News are mostly written by men (62%), while only 29.8% of the pieces are crafted by women. Half of the media with a hierarchical organisation do not specify the identity of the editorial team.

The last aspect to explain is the gender of the contributors, who may not necessarily be trained journalists but are also part of the media and the debate. In this category, the scenario is similar: male contributors account for 67.4% while female contributors represent 32.5% of the sample. As we can see, in some cases the presence of men in new media duplicates and even triplicates the presence of female professionals.

The teams of human resources that are organised horizontally include two figures: writers and collaborators. Men represent 61.7% of the sample of writers, while women only represent 33%. In 4.4% of media, this professional role does not exist. Professional gender equality does exist when we focus on the figure of collaborator in the media organised horizontally, which together had 31 male collaborators and 30 female collaborators. 44 of the sample of media did not shared information on the existence of this professional position.

## **6. Conclusions**

The Spanish economic crisis has hit many professional sectors and one of the most damaged has been the newspaper industry. Thousands of jobs have been lost since 2008 and, to respond to this situation, journalists have launched their own news media projects. The Internet has become the medium, the tool, that has enabled the development of a large number of media. However, although it was believed that the use of the Internet would led to the creation of new information narratives, this has not happened yet.

In the media under analysis, there is no room for linguistic diversity as a strategy of proximity, nor for the creation of new forms of news presentation, nor for multimedia journalism, which in principle could attract new readers to a medium that is in crisis since the 1990s.

Proximity is the main theme among the largest number of media companies and in this sense specialisation is a niche for entrepreneurial journalists, mainly in subjects such as art, culture and sports. To a lesser extent, new media are trying to compete with the traditional general-interest press.

Entrepreneurial journalism has widened the number of media written in Spanish and this clashes with the number of local media because they report on issues close to readers and in most cases the language in which the news are written does not correspond to a linguistic reality of proximity.

The multimedia and interactivity possibilities of the Internet are not exploited by the new media. Their multimedia offer is almost non-existent and photography continues to be the main attraction just like in traditional media. Interactivity is limited to the use of Facebook and Twitter. The relationship with readers is exploited so little that, for example, very few media have a person in charge of managing social networks. This may be due to the fact that journalists are now multipurpose and can manage themselves the interactivity of their sections and news pieces.

One of the features of the Internet is the principle of free use of information, however, only few media use Creative Commons licenses and when they do so they use the restricted ones.

The business models of the media under analysis are based on advertising revenue. Little has been done by the new media to develop other ways to sustain themselves economically. It seems that so far entrepreneurial journalism has been unable to get rid of certain inherited practices, which maintain the traditional press in crisis: the advertising-based business model, the little interest in innovating on the forms of news presentation, and the few channels of communication with readers, which prevents them from meeting their needs (Q1).

The results also indicate that in the newsroom there is a preponderance of male journalists over their female counterparts, which is a reality at odds with the number of women graduating every year in journalism studies (Q2).

The study makes it clear that women have few decisions to make and little chances to write in the new digital media, just as it happens in the traditional media. The strength of the feminisation of journalism studies is not matched with the same force in the professional field of entrepreneurial journalism.

Women occupy intermediate positions, such as section editors, but are not directors, just as it happens in the traditional press. The fact that no woman was the president of any media is worrying. However, this figure is relativized by the fact that this professional position did not exist in 92.2% of the sample of media. Still, the absence of women is latent and also occurs, to a lesser extent, in the positions of director and editor. News are written mostly by men, which contradicts the preponderance of women in journalism studies. The masculinisation of news-making is another legacy the traditional media has left to the digital media and at the moment entrepreneurial journalism has yet to differentiate itself from the traditional press.

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## 8. Annex

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|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Abajoeltelon.com (2010)           | Castelloninformacion.com (2012) | Diariodelcampo.com (2012)           |
| Aerotendencias.com (2009)         | Catalunyaplural.cat (2013)      | Diariofinanciero.com                |
| Agronewscastillayleon.com (2013)  | Chamberidigital.com (2010)      | Diarioindependientedigital.com      |
| Ahoraempresas.com (2013)          | Ciclo21.com (2013)              | Diariopractico.com                  |
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