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# CHALLENGES OF ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNALISM IN MEXICO:

## comparing cases in the states of Jalisco and Chiapas



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**ABSTRACT** – Entrepreneurial journalism, which has multiplied in different parts of the world, has its own nuances in each country. In this paper we analyze eight journalistic projects in two states of Mexico, Chiapas and Jalisco; the first, the poorest in the country and with less access to the internet, and the second, of the most developed in the economic plane, with more teledensity and greater contribution to the national GDP. The results show, in both entities, enterprising journalistic projects not yet consolidated that explore different forms of revenue, such as institutional advertising agreements, first, and more marginally, commercial advertising, digital monetization, and solidarity support from readers and foundations. In Chiapas, the projects are characterized by being unipersonal initiatives, while in Jalisco they arise within the new cooperativism that digital journalism experiences.

**Key words:** Entrepreneurial journalism. Chiapas. Jalisco. Journalism company. Informative portal.

## **DESAFIOS DO JORNALISMO EMPREENDEDOR NO MÉXICO: comparação de casos nos estados de Jalisco e Chiapas**

**RESUMO** – O jornalismo empreendedor, que se multiplicou em diferentes partes do mundo, apresenta suas próprias nuances em cada país. Neste trabalho analisamos oito projetos jornalísticos de dois estados do México, Chiapas e Jalisco; o primeiro, o mais pobre do país e de menor acesso à internet, e o segundo, dos mais desenvolvidos no plano econômico, com mais teledensidade e maior contribuição ao PIB nacional. Os resultados obtidos em ambas as entidades são projetos jornalísticos empreendedores ainda não consolidados que exploram diferentes formas de receitas, como convenções publicitárias institucionais, em primeiro lugar, e de forma mais marginal, publicidade comercial, monetização digital, e apoio solidário de leitores e de fundações. Em Chiapas, os projetos se caracterizam por serem iniciativas unipessoais, enquanto em Jalisco surgem dentro do novo cooperativismo que experimenta o jornalismo digital.

**Palabras clave:** Jornalismo empreendedor. Chiapas. Jalisco. Empresa jornalística. Portal informativo.

## **DESAFÍOS DEL PERIODISMO EMPRENDEDOR EN MÉXICO: comparación de casos en los estados de Jalisco y Chiapas**

**RESUMEN** – El periodismo emprendedor, que se ha multiplicado en diferentes partes del mundo, presenta sus propios matices en cada país. En este trabajo analizamos ocho proyectos periodísticos de dos estados de México, Chiapas y Jalisco; el primero, el más pobre del país y de menor acceso a internet, y el segundo, de los más desarrollados en el plano económico, con más teledensidad y mayor aportación al PIB nacional. Los resultados arrojan, en ambas entidades, proyectos periodísticos emprendedores aún no consolidados que exploran diferentes formas de ingresos, como convenios publicitarios institucionales, en primer lugar, y de manera más marginal, publicidad comercial, monetización digital, y apoyo solidario de lectores y de fundaciones. En Chiapas, los proyectos se caracterizan por ser iniciativas unipersonales, mientras que en Jalisco surgen dentro del nuevo cooperativismo que experimenta el periodismo digital.

**Palabras clave:** Periodismo emprendedor. Chiapas. Jalisco. Empresa periodística. Portal informativo

## **1 Entrepreneurial journalism**

Entrepreneurial journalism creates business models characterized by innovation, not only in content production but also in searching for sustainability (Briggs, 2011). It is a relatively new phenomenon (Gómez et al., 2015) that takes place in a context where many traditional journalistic companies carried on with their business models and became unable to adapt to changes (Anderson et al., 2013), which has meant that some media face challenges to manage their incomes and expenditures, while others look for original forms of profitability (Jarvis, 2015).

In this context, entrepreneurial journalism has revitalized as a growing field (Jarvis, 2015) and entered into a consolidation phase with the global economic crisis that has affected the industrial

model of journalism since 2008 (Yuste & Cabrera, 2014; Merchant, 2019), with online informational firms, mainly supported on the diversification of income sources as it has been the case in the United States (Berkey-Gerard, 2018), Spain (Gómez et al., 2015; Casero-Ripollés, 2016), and Germany (Buschow & Laugemann, 2020).

Owing to their low cost and accessible technology, these portals are easy to create, which has allowed their proliferation (Casero-Ripollés, 2016), and largely focus on hyper-local coverage (Flores Vivar, 2014) and proximity coverage (Camps Durban, 2021; Pardo Baldeón, 2016), in which the neighborhood, town, or region, blurred in the traditional media, become relevant in the new portals. James Breiner (2020) considers that a journalistic firm with a successful model has an editorial team of between five and 20 individuals, and requires to use their talents and skills. Some journalists manage a portal on their own, while others join efforts with other communicators who lost their jobs, or want to diversify their incomes, in a stake on new cooperativism, collectivity synergies, and collaborative activities (Martínez & Ramos, 2020), and also on taking up new roles, in which the usual dexterities of journalists, as content generators, combine with managerial and administrative tasks. These roles define the fate of digital media since they largely lack marketing strategies and a defined business model (Pardo Baldeón, 2016).

In this scenario, noticeable are both the independence and uncertainty of entrepreneurship (Yuste & Cabrera, 2014), where the only certitude is that no model ensures entrepreneurial success (Marín-Sanchiz & Carvajal-Prieto, 2019); owing to this, entrepreneurial journalists must try new formulas to obtain incomes that guarantee the viability of the medium, in which publicity is a scarce good and digital monetization sources must be attained through the number of visits and coverage within an especial niche of the information market, where “pioneering spirit and purpose singularity” become important as “fundamental keys for new journalistic endeavors to succeed” (Casero-Ripollés, 2016, p. 207).

The new communication proposals, whose goal is to capitalize on digital information, are encompassed within a generic name, that is, entrepreneurial journalism. Rosental Alves, a scholar of the transformations experienced in the world of communication media and journalism, understands it as the search for a business model functional for the development of a proper communication medium (Mena Erazo, 2018). Entrepreneurship, with a history as

old as trade itself, takes characteristics of its own when it appears in a journalistic market where the light industry of information is increasingly more defining than heavy industries, which defined the journalism of large print runs.

## **2 Conceiving entrepreneurial journalism in Ibero-America**

In Ibero-America, traditional media started to move their contents to the internet between 1994 and 1996, depending on the country, with Spain, Portugal, and Brazil leading the way. Salaverría (2016) states that the earliest digital media in Iberian-America were ignored, though, over time, native digital media have become the most relevant in the informational sphere.

In Latin America, digital media have lived through different periods. Argentina and Bolivia experienced a corporative stage by exploring the use of social media and multiple platforms (Rost & Bergero, 2016; Banegas Flores, 2016). The case of digital media in Brazil is noteworthy as they quickly found a way to go: depending less on traditional publicity and searching for new income sources (Barbosa, 2016). Digital media in Chile have demonstrated their ability to remain on the internet, despite traditional media having considered them a threat (Arriagada & Muñiz, 2016). In Colombia, it has been difficult for entrepreneurial journalists to make a name for themselves due to the concentration of media and lack of plurality in access to advertising schedules (Gutiérrez & García, 2016). In Ecuador, new digital media appeared in the context of the covid-19 pandemic, nevertheless, it is estimated that many will not be able to support themselves in the coming years owing to the absence of an adequate business model (Antunish, 2021).

In Spain, it is clear for an important sector of journalists that innovation and journalism go hand in hand; a product has to contain a valuable proposal that allows a quick pivoting to perceive its odds of success, supported by tried methodologies such as design thinking and lean startup (Manfredi, 2015). Medina-Laverón et al. (2021) compared the business models of 20 digital news publications in 16 countries (among them Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador, Brazil, and Argentina) and found that a model that fits the new market conditions may be the solution for the survival of many news firms. Moreover, they identified that it is fundamental for digital media,

focused on public service journalism, to offer quality informational and investigative content.

One of the main challenges in Ibero-America is the lack of professors specialized in teaching entrepreneurial journalism, thereby, it is also a challenge to train professional journalists in universities so that they have tools (in the use of technologies and methodologies) to create and develop informative media on various digital platforms (Sausedo Espinosa, 2021). A promising road to solving this educational need is the alliance that might take place between “universities, innovation laboratories, foundations, training centers, not-for-profit organizations, and news agencies” (Torres Sánchez, 2018), including business incubators as key for the support of the projects in their initial stages (Rodríguez Pellecer, 2018).

The structural changes that information media undergo at a global level have reached entrepreneurial and professional spheres in Mexico (Orozco, 2014). Records for the earliest appearances of Mexican newspapers on the web, as “mirror editions”, date back to 1995 (Farina, 2014; Trejo, 1996). With the broadening of the internet, the printed media crisis, and the arrival of digitalization, having electronic editions and specialized and targeted content for the audiences turned into a necessity for journalistic businesses. With this, a greater challenge arose: searching for the profitability of online publications. The traditional information media first to decide in favor of digital editions were La Jornada, El Universal, and Grupo Reforma. As time passed, new independent media appeared, inspired by digital portals such as El Faro in El Salvador, the oldest digital native medium in Latin America (founded in 1998) that has maintained quality journalistic investigative work. In Mexico, examples of entrepreneurial journalism, because of their funding and contents, are Desinformémonos (2009), Animal Político (2010), Sinembargo.mx (2011), LadoB (2011), and RompevientoTv (2012).

These media paved the road for other informative portals that also appeared in the second decade of the XXI century; later on, more ambitious endeavors based on collaborative journalists appeared. A noticeable case is Alianza de Medios Tejiendo Redes, coordinated and created by Red de Periodistas de a Pie in 2018. Such an organization had the initiative of putting forward this schema and calling on various media in the country. The funding sources of Alianza de Medios Tejiendo Redes have been one of the greatest challenges; this way, this venture has entailed “restating its

working ways and organizing in various manners, proposing a media scheme alternative to the traditional, both from the journalistic and managerial viewpoint” (Martínez & Ramos, 2021, p. 42).

Raíchali (raichali.com), which is part of Alianza de Medios Tejiendo Redes, is considered by SembraMedia organization as a case of success of the solidity of its business model, especially because it has diversified its income sources, strengthening that from foundations and subsidies (grants). Tejiendo Redes has influenced some regions in the country; an example is the network of digital and independent media devised in Jalisco, called Red Macollo, which replicated the model of Tejiendo Redes at a state scale from a proposal put forward by Perimetral (perimetral.press).

In Ibero-America, there are almost a thousand informative portals (SembraMedia, 2021), with Mexico being the country with the most independent digital media recorded, totaling 151 (Torres Sánchez, 2021). SembraMedia (2021) has found that, over the covid-19 pandemic in 2020, 20% of the portals stopped publishing for six months, which is considered a high fail rate. The stone of stumbling is to find income sources that allow maintaining the publications and attaining profitability for the partners.

This multiplicity of entrepreneurship invites research of the new media that permeate the informational landscape in Latin America. In this case, we focus on two states of Mexico, and on eight informative portals that have appeared in recent years in these regions of the country. The work is structured, at first, in the context of entrepreneurial journalism; later on, the methodology utilized is referred to, followed by the analysis of results, with an emphasis on incomes. The article concludes with the difficulties, opportunities, and limitations, necessarily entailed by the research on this topic.

### **3 Methodologic note**

This work approaches the intrinsic values of entrepreneurial action in digital media and the intention to generate a valuable proposal that may match the goals of journalist projects. In addition to retaking the methodological proposal by Marín-Sanchiz and Carvajal-Prieto (2019), it supports the Business Model Canvas by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), as it allows integrating the categories proposed by the main studies on business models such as a) value; b) market;

c) capabilities; d) positioning; e) incomes; and, f) mission. In short, it analyzes the modalities to obtain resources by digital media such as 1) subventions; 2) incomes from publicity or sponsorships; 3) consulting services; 4) content services; 5) incomes from the audience (SembraMedia, 2022). In this way, the purpose is to research income modalities that eight informative portals have, which were created by entrepreneurial journalists in the states of Jalisco and Chiapas, to find out whether these resources provide them with profitability to develop informational activities.

We chose eight journalistic initiatives, four from Chiapas and four from Jalisco, with which we cover comparative sufficiently (Orozco & González, 2011). We are supported by qualitative interviews, following a semi-structured questionnaire, which was a script divided into four analysis axes that refer to the possible parallelisms in publications: 1) inception; 2) value proposal; 3) income sources; 4) business model strategies. The interviews were carried out considering the informants as representative of the medium, from the logic of the spokespersons (Sánchez-García, 2016), who, when speaking of the activity in the medium, do so as a part and in the representation of their publications. In this sense, each spokesperson opens the possibility for deeper answers.

For the research, we only take into account media with active domains and portals on the Internet, and were as follows:

**Table 1**  
*Case selection, digital media in Jalisco*

Name	Foundation year	Web site	Origin	Coverage
Decisiones	2015	decisiones.com.mx	Ocotlán, Jalisco	Local / Regional
Ciudad Olinka	2017	ciudadolinka.com	Guadalajara, Jalisco	Regional / State
ZonaDocs	2017	zonadocs.mx	Guadalajara, Jalisco	State / National
CuartaMx / Siker	2017	siker.com.mx	Guadalajara, Jalisco	State / National

**Table 2**  
*Case Selection, digital media in Chiapas*

Name	Foundation year	Web site	Origin	Coverage
Chiapas Paralelo	2013	chiapasparalelo.com	Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas	State / National
Alerta Chiapas	2013	alertachiapas.com	Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas	Local / State
Aquí Noticias	2014	aquinoticias.com	Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas	Local / State
Enheduanna	2015	revistaenheduanna.com.mx	Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas	Local / State

This exploratory research leaves aside migrant newspapers, considered in the traditional press. The media selected here are digital natives; the oldest two were founded in 2013, while the three most recent, in 2017. That is to say, they have a trajectory of between five and nine years, a sufficiently long period to value their situation as journalistic firms. Two contrasting states in the economic aspect were chosen, Jalisco and Chiapas, to understand the unfolding of entrepreneurial journalism in different contexts.

## 4 Results

Chiapas and Jalisco are two Mexican states with disparities and, indeed, similarities. One of the starkest contrasts is poverty; for instance, 75.5% of Chiapas' inhabitants live in conditions of poverty, while in Jalisco such percentage is 31.4% (Coneval, 2020); the mean income per household is also uneven: that of Chiapas is 29 MXN, while in Jalisco it is almost twice as much, 55.7 MXN (Inegi-Enigh, 2020). As for internet access, there are differences as well: 27.3% of households in Chiapas have Internet access, whereas in Jalisco, 66.9% (IIEG, 2021; Article 19, 2021); in relation to cellular phone users there are contrasts: 55.7% for Chiapas, and 91.7% for Jalisco. In Chiapas, 14 out of 100 inhabitants older than 15 years are illiterate, and in Jalisco



three out of 100 (Inegi, 2020). Schooling, besides, is unfavorable for the former: 7.8 years v. 9.9 years. As regards insecurity, Jalisco is among the five states with the most homicides in the county; for its part, Chiapas holds the last place (Statista, 2022). It is in these contrasting contexts that initiatives for journalistic projects have to be envisioned in these states.

Jalisco was, together with Mexico City, among the first states in placing its journalistic editions on the web. El Informador was a pioneer in digital journalism in this state with its “mirror editions” which started to appear in 1996 (Farina, 2014), little after La Jornada and Reforma started, at a national level, to publish their contents on the cyberspace (Navarro, 2002). As of 2000, larger numbers of media uploaded their contents to the web; however, it was Replicante, one of the earliest native digital portals, which managed to position itself as an informational proposal in the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara (MAG). It was 2004, and ever since, the conurbation (Guadalajara, Zapopan, Tlaquepaque, Tonalá, Tlajomulco de Zúñiga, El Salto, Juanacatlán, Ixtlahuacán de los Membrillos and Zapotlanejo) has witnessed the appearance of all sorts of digital media. Three projects that survive are Tráfico ZMG ([traficozmg.com](http://traficozmg.com)), Zona Docs ([zonadocs.mx](http://zonadocs.mx)) and Territorio ([territorio.mx](http://territorio.mx)). The first two have been analyzed as alternative forms to mainstream journalism (Gómez Rodríguez & Celecia Pérez, 2022). González Vega (2019) counted 31 digital media published in MAG in 2017 and which were characterized by having a website, publishing their multimedia content, and generating interaction with the users (Orozco & Romero, 2015). In 2021, digital media registered for Guadalajara’s International Book Fair reached 48 for the metropolitan area, and three outside this area.

Chiapas, for its part, published its first digital journals in 2000, that is to say, four years after the earliest digital publications in Jalisco. On August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2000, Emilio Gregorio Cerdio and Carlos Fuentes Ramón founded the native digital newspaper Soconusco News Network ([soconusco.com](http://soconusco.com)); on October 10<sup>th</sup>, the same year, newspaper El Orbe created its website. The following year, two publications from Tuxtla Gutiérrez started to digitalize their news items: Cuarto Poder and Este Sur [a play of words; This South / East South]; Asich and Diario de Chiapas ensued in 2003; La Voz del Sureste, 2004, and Diario del Sur, 2005. From that moment on, new migrant or digital native publications would have their webpage on the internet up to reaching 89 informative portals in 2018. In

November, though, they dropped to 63. The causes for the closure are multiple, but they indicate that journalistic entrepreneurship is a complex task that needs a readership, funding mechanisms, and attractive content.

One first difference in the digital journalistic initiatives is that in Jalisco collective projects prevail, while in Chiapas they are unipersonal; they are created on the journalist's prestige and political relationships and are individual endeavors, therefore, artisanal, where one journalist publishes most of the contents, though article writers and columnists are invited to collaborate drafting the editorial. The new cooperativism, which renews journalism across the globe, is absent in Chiapas, in this way, the possibility of sharing expenses and producing larger content via the concurrence of efforts of several journalists is left behind. In Jalisco and Chiapas, and this may be a national characteristic, journalistic projects were envisioned to alleviate unemployment. The initiative was somewhat spurred by the cuts and mass dismissals experienced in traditional media (Rodelo, 2022).

The first feature shared by the publications analyzed is dependence on governmental publicity, that is to say, the presence of the government (federal, state, municipal) as the main advertiser/funder of journalistic initiatives. It is difficult to do without this economic contributor that is able to deliver sums of money by employing advertising agreements or monthly subventions (SembraMedia, 2022) to monetize the publications, something closely resembling the events in traditional journalism, documented by Scherer and Monsiváis (2003), Rivapalacio (2004), and Martínez (2004), among others.

Let us see two cases, in which official support has been fundamental. The first is *Enheduanna* ([revistaenheduanna.com.mx](http://revistaenheduanna.com.mx)), an informative portal with a gender perspective, which publishes news and in-depth content, created in 2015 by female journalists:

Enheduana was created because in Chiapas, we, female journalists did not have a medium to disseminate our topics that deal with the inequalities we have lived for centuries, and doing so with a gender perspective; we thought, if there is no medium, we have to create it. This way, making use of digital platforms — with the internet that offered us the means we hadn't thought of using to publish, to write — the portal was created. We joined Sandra de los Santos, Valeria Valencia, and Karina Álvarez, with whom we have worked in journalism before. We knew what we were doing and we knew what we wanted to do. This way the digital platform was created. We had this crazy idea of printing three issues of the magazine, and that was it because you need a lot of money, so we decided to stay digital.

Although the main idea was to speak of feminist journalism from a gender perspective, at once, we wanted it to serve as a platform to disseminate the work of any woman, in any sphere — artists, writers, painters, scientists, disseminators, reading advocates, artisans —; any woman with a story to tell would have a space for her voice in *Enheduana*. (Cinthya Vasconcelos, personal communication, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

*Enheduana* entered into an advertising agreement with Instituto de Comunicación Social y Relaciones Públicas del Estado de Chiapas [Institute of Social Communication and Public Relationships of the State of Chiapas], for two years; however, due to the editorial line of the publication, the agreement was cut short at five months. When State resources were no longer received, the magazine was no longer periodically published, and only when any of the collaborators decide to publish a text, does she upload it, but there are neither deadlines nor rigidly fixed dates, as it used to be. This is because no one receives a salary. *Enheduana* is no longer a journalistic project with an income to pay the collaborators, it became an informative portal with intermittent information.

With similarities to *Enheduana* in the obtention of resources, Ciudad Olinka ([ciudadolinka.com](http://ciudadolinka.com)) has had better luck. It is an informative portal created by Iván Serrano Jáuregui, Moisés Arnoldo Rodríguez, and Jonathan Bañuelos in Guadalajara in 2017. Its inception dates back to a university radio project in Ocotlán, Jalisco, in 2009, which concluded in 2014. When the project was reborn as Ciudad Olinka, its members decided to broaden the scope to the entire state, working in the capital city, under a digital format. The team of journalists works for free, which is a sort of contradiction, for despite they look for funding for the medium to survive, this does not turn into salaries for collaborators. One of the cofounders, Iván Serrano, points out that he has not needed to receive a wage because he has income from other media he works for. The flagship journalistic project of Ciudad Olinka is *Jalisco voces de leyenda* [Jalisco legend voices], which received funding worth 50 thousand MXN in 2018 from Programa de Estímulos a la Creación y Desarrollo Artístico, PECDA [Stimulus Program for Artistic Creation and Development] part of Secretaría de Cultura de Jalisco [Secretariat of Culture of Jalisco] and from the Mexican Government. With this sound project, they have recorded the oral tradition of the State municipalities. Presently, Ciudad Olinka receives a funding of 55 thousand MXN from the Audionautas [Audionauts] project of Secretaría de Cultura de Jalisco in the category Open Sound Patrimony:

We need to formalize the financial side with specialized people. We are in no hurry either, because Ciudad Olinka is a collective endeavor (...) something we have clear is that if we want to monetize or make the medium profitable, we have to stop doing journalism to engage in the financial aspect. (Iván Serrano, personal communication, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

For these journalistic projects, characterized by their quality content, official supports are fundamental: Enheduanna obtained resources through an advertising agreement with the Government of the State of Chiapas; while Ciudad Olinka, from programs to stimulate the creation of the Secretariat of Culture of Jalisco. When these supports, which are usually neither permanent nor abundant for new journalistic proposals, come to a halt, they compromise the viability of informative portals.

Without disregarding official publicity, other portals try to diversify their incomes by means of image consulting services for either public agents or private individuals. Two instances in this regard are Aquí Noticias, in Chiapas, and Siker in Jalisco. Aquí Noticias (aquinoticias.com), founded on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014, is positioned fourth in traffic among Chiapas' informative portals and has become a profitable firm with diversified incomes from institutional advertising agreements and image consulting:

As an informative portal, we are the second wave of digital transmission in Chiapas, after En Tiempo Real, Reporte Ciudadano, Chiapas Paralelo... I started the initiative Aquí Noticias, which is a play on words with my surname because in the paper I used to work on, Noticias, Voz e Imagen de Chiapas, I was in charge of creating the digital platform, and what I learned I decided to apply in my project, so I made a digital newspaper, which at first was just like the rest. Then I wondered, "what do print papers have that digital ones don't?" "Front page", I said, so I designed editorial front pages, well balanced, really serious. I went further, I made some front pages with movement, as gifts. I then conceived Aquí Noticias as a young medium, dynamic, though serious and responsible. I focused on gathering an organic audience and on the portal having a public dialogue with power. From the start, I wondered: is it for the sake of it, or do I want a firm? I'm no artist, I studied communication and I want to make a living out of it. I had it clear from the start that as a mercenary journalist I wouldn't appeal to public dialogue, I looked for three or four political professionals, who recognize there are professional journalists and value them. I wanted this, intelligent journalism, and to sell other products such as image and discourse consulting, in short, public figure consulting. And that has been the way, plus Aquí Noticias allies with the best causes of society such as feminism, equality, and inclusion. (Rodrigo Ramón Aquino Alcira, personal communication, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021).

Observing the volatility of governmental publicity, the inexistence of solidary support from readers, and the complications to receive funds from foundations, Aquí Noticias decided to explore

incomes from image consulting and speech drafting for politicians, what SembraMedia (2022) calls consulting and/or content consulting. Siker ([siker.com.mx](http://siker.com.mx), formerly known as [cuarta.mx](http://cuarta.mx)), has aspects similar to Aquí Noticias in the search for income diversification. Juan Carlos Sagredo, Mayra Torres, and Ricardo Gómez committed their savings (around one hundred thousand MXN) to create Siker; they divided this seed money into twelve (months) to ascertain their viability. The mission was clear from its inception: focus on telling human-interest stories:

We wanted to cover positive stories that take place in the country. Yes, there's narco in the country, violence, poverty, corruption, but also good things are taking place, people are fighting for their communities, scientists discovering fantastic things, extraordinary sportspeople (...) we created a space for people not to read bad news, but to listen to good news, on condition they are real and are journalistically rigorous (...) for instance, a space devoted to the eroticism of the city, the sex and erotic life of the city; we invited journalist friends to write chronicles on the only condition that they were based on actual events and in the city. Basically, we started to open spaces that we did not find on the radar of the local and national. (Juan Carlos Sagredo, personal communication, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

The founders of this digital medium, Siker, opted to produce contents they liked; their motto drives their agenda: "if you wouldn't publish it in your social media, don't publish it" (Juan Carlos Sagredo, personal communication, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021). In the first year (2017), they gathered 120.585 followers on Facebook, while at present they have 177.156. Even with this number of followers, it has not been easy for Siker to generate sufficient resources to pay the salaries of workers and collaborators. The main sources of income are audiovisual content services and social media management for private enterprises and personalities; and also, from the online selling of cups printed with cartoons by Qucho Monero. As well, they have obtained publicity incomes from the councils of the municipalities of Guadalajara, Zapopan, and Tlajomulco.

Another source of income is digital monetization, in this case, distinguishable is Alerta Chiapas [Chiapas Alert] ([alertachiapas.com](http://alertachiapas.com)) which obtains more than 30 thousand USD from this concept, which accounts for 70% of its incomes; 18% comes from commercial publicity, 12% governmental, according to Gustavo Caballero, director of the informative portal. Alerta Chiapas positioned itself by publishing *Nota roja*<sup>1</sup> items, but they had to diversify their topics, due to Facebook demands, which is the main way for monetization. Unlike the rest of the news platforms, which have been founded by journalists, Alerta Chiapas appeared in September 2013, after a request by a computing engineer:

I come from a very large family. We are 12 siblings and when I went to visit a sister, who lives in Monterrey, she suggested checking Twitter accounts to be updated about dangerous places, where generally delinquent group clashes took place. That seemed a novelty to me and I realized Chiapas lacked a medium that reported on accidents. And so, I created a portal, with an account on Twitter and Facebook, where I published accidents and *nota roja*. I had no other intention but to inform, disclose, neither did I glimpse that it may be profitable; for three years it was not so, that is to say, from 2013, when Alerta Chiapas appeared, up to 2016. Little by little, some announcers and institutions approached me to manage their information. And I realized it may be profitable. I had already spent some time looking for funds; suddenly, we arrived at the journalistic business, by chance, and we realized it may be monetized. First, we did it on Google, YouTube, and presently, Facebook, which is our main economic support. (Gustavo Caballero, personal communication, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

Alerta Chiapas, which out of the analyzed informative portals is the one with the most followers on Facebook (one million 459 thousand), not only generates content for this platform, but also YouTube, Instagram, Vimeo, Twitch, TikTok, Spotify, WhatsApp, and Telegram, expecting that such platforms offer attractive monetization opportunities.

To be entitled to the so-called Facebook grants, through Meta Journalism Project, which may be ten thousand USD a month, this social medium requires that all the contents are authentic, safe, respect the privacy and dignity of people, and generate interactions. Alerta Chiapas, which is largely supported by incomes from Meta, formally hires 15 people who are programmers, reporters, and newscasters.

In Jalisco, there is no medium with monetization similar to Alerta Chiapas; however, Decisiones ([decisiones.com.mx](http://decisiones.com.mx)), founded by Marcelo Ramírez and Jesica Padilla, has explored this way, as it received a single support worth 114 thousand MXN from Google:

We have an editorial line and indeed, we set limits, I sell publicity to you, municipal government, but it is not that you take part in the editorial line; it has been difficult and some administrations have mistaken that. We also have had publicity agreements with strong enterprises such as car dealers, restaurants, etc. (...) we have generated a sort of communications and social media mini-agency, and we had a councilor of the municipality of Ocotlán as a client for five years. (Marcelo Ramírez, personal communication, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021).

In the case of Jalisco, informative portals are still unable to harness the monetization offered by Facebook or Google; in reality, they use social media as mere broadcasters of their contents.

The other possibility for income is an audience, though, in Chiapas, the reader is little solidary with the publications. Readers

from Chiapas assume the characteristics of the social media readers, more interested in brief texts, attractive and sensationalist:

When we published humoristic information, quite shallow, we had high consumption: some thousand likes on the Facebook fan page, but deeper contents, the most cared, some visits and some likes, if the reader is unwilling to give “like”, much less they will make monetary payments for the journalistic contents. (Idalia Díaz Román, personal communication, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

Readers from Chiapas are somewhat alien to the fate of printed, hybrid, or digital publications:

Media in Chiapas are heavily dependent on publicity agreements with the state government, with all the implications it has, for instance, information control. Book clubs or crowdfunding do not work, and neither do we have the time, as female journalists, to organize fundraising dinners or meetings. (Cinthya Vasconcelos, personal communication, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

Owing to the reluctance to accept commercial and governmental publicity, Territorio, in Jalisco, appeals to the solidary support from its readers; it organizes meetings, courses, and points of sale such as Común festival de periodismo [Common, Journalism Festival], Plural escuela de periodismo [Plural, school of journalism] and Café Territorio, a cafeteria that serves as a space for public thinking, in addition to selling food and products related to the organization. Each of these initiatives is focused on an activity: editorial, pedagogical, and communitarian, respectively. As well, Decisiones explores this way with promising success, though it is very early to think of a loyal income community via subscriptions or memberships. Expressions of support for this journalistic project have been noticed in funds collected in annual dinners organized by the founders.

Regarding this concept, in which the readers become sponsors of the media, there are noticeable differences in the states; in Chiapas, readers of hyperlocal content cannot be thought of as patrons of news media. Some possible causes are the inhabitants' conditions of poverty or the persistence of a culture of information gratuity. In Jalisco, where inhabitants enjoy a better economic situation, readers are more solidary with their media, which despite not being the main sources are deemed a promising factor in the repertoire of the media created in this state, and that they are looking for a variety of incomes.

Zona Docs and Chiapas Paralelo, for their part, are referents of entrepreneurial journalism supported by foundations and international

organizations with the goal of benefitting community-service journalistic projects. In the case of Zona Docs, a considerable part of its income comes from donations from readers and communication services, and consultancies (Gómez Rodríguez & Celecia Pérez, 2022).

Being beneficiaries of these supports is not an easy task because the foundations ask for the credit history of the applicants. The members of Enheduanna looked for funding through foundations, but they were not successful owing to administrative issues:

We found out how to get money to support the medium, but the foundations asked for five years of publication in a row, and we had to be half women, half men because there is not much specific funding for women-only projects. What we underscore about the importance that media have a share of women was what we were answered. "But we are a women-only medium", we said and they told us to look for organizations that only supported women. (Cinthya Vasconcelos, personal communication, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

Some journalistic initiatives have received support from foundations such as Zona Docs and Chiapas Paralelo because they are part of Alianza de Medios Tejiendo Redes, a national organization that fosters collaborative work, and in this dynamic, it has trained journalists in a number of states to participate and benefit from resources provided by organizations such as Open Society Foundations, W. K. Kellogs, European Union, Ford Foundation, and Heinrich Böll Stiftung, among the most important.

In the eight analyzed cases, there is no entrepreneurial journalism model that ensures success. There are interesting journalistic proposals in Jalisco and Chiapas which, nevertheless, have failed to survive or do so with difficulty. In the transition from a model that depends on traditional publicity, with a high presence of governmental publicity or subventions, to the diversification of incomes with sponsorships, solidary support from the readers, crowdfunding, and support from foundations, some media disappear, unable to insert into the new conditions imposed on the journalistic sector.

## 5 Conclusions

When we analyze the results from the categories of digital macro sources by SembraMedia (2022) and the Business Model Canvas by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), we noticed an increasing variety of



incomes, which do not concentrate on subventions, even though they still play an important role, but come from consulting services, economic support from their audiences, and advertising agreements. We verified that the traditional model dependent on publicity is exhausted, and that “more sources are to be developed” (Knight Center, 2022).

Following a winding road, the informative portals of Chiapas and Jalisco are subjected to the volatility proper to the times of the internet and its threats, changes in the foundations’ policies, the digital monetization of social media, and institutional publicity. This scenario makes it difficult for digital informative portals to consolidate; they are, almost all, precarious, very vulnerable, and unstable media. There are others, a few, that manage to diversify their incomes and pay their collaborators.

Despite the income diversity, the importance of governmental publicity regarding journalistic projects is undeniable; it is a situation that present-day entrepreneurs have not been able to overcome. Governmental publicity — municipal, state, or federal — was defining for traditional journalism; a newspaper that did not manage to set up advertising agreements with the government barely survived in the information market. Nowadays, despite new journalistic projects having a broader variety of resources, governmental publicity may remedy their economic deprivations, but hardly exercise vertical control on editorial policies. Diversity in the obtaining of resources is a favorable factor for entrepreneurial journalism.

Digital monetization in social media is poorly explored and harnessed by present-day journalistic entrepreneurs. The main restriction is the administrative and technical aspects involved, for example, Facebook, with Meta Journalism Project agreement to receive grants for journalistic projects that start at ten thousand USD, but which may reach three times this figure, as in the case of Alerta Chiapas.

Support from foundations is vital for two of the researched media: Zonadocs and Chiapas Paralelo. These two informative portals, members of an alliance of journalists at a national level, have resorted to such new funding sources, which enable them to pay wages, afford the hosting of the portals and purchase the basic equipment for their information activities. They are far from being solid and stable firms with these incomes nevertheless, it is rather a palliative for the lack of unemployment due to the livelihood crisis of traditional information media.

The other source of income is their readers who, in a context

of free-of-charge information overabundance, hardly pay attention to the calls for solidarity with the emerging media, even if they stake on specialized hyperlocal content. Chiapas virtually lacks these sorts of support from readers, whereas Jalisco has a wider variety of benefactors-readers, who attend special dinners to sponsor journalistic projects, donate resources, buy raffle tickets, buy notebooks, pens, mugs, or any other sort of merchandise from the informative portal. Conversely, in Chiapas, readers who solidarize with media are inexistent. Alerta Chiapas, which has one million 459 thousand followers on Facebook, has only one donor.

In this context, a communication professional emerges, from which new aptitudes are demanded, besides commanding the profession; poly-functionality to perform as administrator, webmaster, content editor, marketer, publicist, and project manager to obtain support from the foundations. The new information platforms' proposals, in the case of Chiapas, come from a journalist in solitary, who, from their houses and with a computer, create an informative portal, where they preferably upload news items, press releases, and from time to time, in-depth contents. In Jalisco, initiatives are rather collective, that is to say, journalists tend to join to create journalistic projects. In these two cases, the journalists' characteristics are fundamental because through their careers as professional journalists motivate their project partners, establish connections to receive government funding, and/or facilitate support from foundations or readers.

In this comparative work, it is crystal clear that the profitability of a digital journalistic project does not depend on the economic conditions of the State but on the ability of the entrepreneurs to make the most of their context. The most solid media out of the eight analyzed is Alerta Chiapas which because of its publishing in the poorest state of the country would be thought of with few possibilities to survive, it is not the case, however. Its founder has been able to make digital monetization on Facebook the main income source, and such resources allow funding content for the followers on various social media. Plus, if the media still have their audience volume as the main sales item, it seems natural that Alerta Chiapas gathers other announcers, governmental or private, which produce more economic resources.

We noticed no homogeneity in the journalistic projects in Chiapas or Jalisco. Instead, they are distinguished by the diversification of their contents and pursuing income generation. That is to say, we witness various sorts of journalistic projects, proposals, and ventures

that enrich professional communication in Mexico.

In the face of new demands for journalists, a line that must be opened for new research is to explore whether the training in communication universities is sufficient to deal with these challenges. The journalists interviewed in this work agreed that topics related to entrepreneurship, monetization on the internet, and project management have to be included in the curricula of communications and journalism studies. As well, incomes from native publicity paid access or micropayments in other parts of Mexico and Latin America may be researched. Likewise, comparative works have to be carried out to find out the dynamics experienced in other parts of the country or continent, regarding the nebulous and challenging aspects of incomes, so as to attain the profitability of new communication firms.

A restriction we faced was not to find out the journalistic projects' incomes; neither the money earned nor the expenses made are known for certain. In this regard, the journalists' words and the evidence gathered in the portals have to be trusted. Mexican projects do not publish publicity contracts, governmental or private, nor support from foundations, which has to be discussed as a public-interest issue. This lack of information necessarily restricts works such as ours, which explore the current conditions of journalistic entrepreneurship.

## NOTES

- 1 A journalistic genre similar to yellow journalism, but focusing on crimes, accidents and deaths.

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