

# Local media, radio, active audience and precarious journalism.

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## MÍDIA LOCAL, RÁDIO, AUDIÊNCIA ATIVA E JORNALISMO PRECÁRIO

*Local media, radio, active audience and precarious journalism*

*Medios locales, radio, audiencia activa y periodismo precario*

Sergio Quiroga<sup>1</sup>

**Resumo:** Este trabalho é uma descrição inicial do surgimento, desenvolvimento e papel da mídia local e rádio local na província de San Luis, Argentina, que nasceram favorecidos pelo desenvolvimento da web e redes sociais e o surgimento de dispositivos de conexão cada vez menores, para atender às necessidades de informação dos cidadãos, oferecendo pontos de vista alternativos. Esses meios constituem uma pequena barreira ao poder hegemônico político e econômico. Este trabalho contém uma análise inicial e descritiva de duas mídias digitais na província de San Luis, Argentina: El Chorrillero e Villa Mercedes.Info. O espaço construído por essas mídias locais permite que as pessoas não apenas sejam ouvidas, mas também expressem sua visão da realidade, com clara influência nas normas sociais e culturais que sustentam o conhecimento e a denúncia de abusos de poder.

**Palavras-chave:** Rádio. Mídia local. Jornalismo. Democracia. Poder.

**Abstract:** This work is an initial description of the emergence, development and role of local media and local radio in the province of San Luis, Argentina, which were born favored by the development of the web and social networks and the appearance of connection devices every smaller, to meet the information needs of citizens, offering alternative points of view. These means constitute a small barrier to the political and economic hegemonic power. This work contains an initial and descriptive analysis of two digital media in the province of San Luis, Argentina: El Chorrillero and Villa Mercedes.Info. The space built by these local media allows people not only to be heard, but also to express their vision of reality, with a clear influence on the social and cultural norms that support the knowledge and denunciation of abuses of power.

**Key words:** Radio. Local media. Journalism. Democracy. Power.

**Resumen:** Este trabajo es una descripción inicial del surgimiento, desarrollo y rol de los medios locales y la radio local en la provincia de San Luis, Argentina, que nacieron favorecidos por el desarrollo de la web y las redes sociales y la aparición de dispositivos de conexión cada vez más pequeños, para satisfacer las necesidades de información de los ciudadanos, ofreciendo puntos de vista alternativos. Estos medios constituyen una pequeña barrera al poder hegemónico político y económico. Este trabajo contiene un análisis inicial y descriptivo de dos medios digitales de la provincia de San Luis Argentina: El Chorrillero y Villa Mercedes.Info. El espacio construido por estos medios locales permite que las personas no solo sean escuchadas, sino también expresen su visión de la realidad, con una clara influencia en las normas sociales y culturales que sustentan el conocimiento y denuncia de los abusos de poder.

**Palabras-clave:** Radio. Medios locales. Periodismo. Democracia. Poder.

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## **1. Introduction**

This work is an initial description of the emergence, development and role of small local media in the province of San Luis, Argentina, which have been born favored by the development of the web, Internet access, social networks and the appearance of smaller and smaller connecting devices. These media provide new pictures of reality and alternative images that seem to satisfy the informational needs of citizens who offer alternative points of view and constitute a small barrier against political and economic power. The media industry around the world has been going through a severe structural crisis over the past 10 years. In 2008, the financial collapse that impacted the United States and Europe began, motivating the media to adopt a multiplatform approach, reviewing their business models and organizational models, which they inherited from the media industry.

The global media began a deep adjustment, where technological transformations and the strong penetration of the Internet had a great influence, which had a significant impact on the traditional media industry. On the one hand, news content consumption habits were transformed by audiences that dispersed their attention across multiple digital platforms, many of them not dedicated to information content, and on the other hand, a change in content production. The centrality of communication and new digital technologies as vectors of new forms of sociability in the development of urban culture defined, at present, new processes of development and collective construction that transcend the asymmetric forms of globalization and social representation characteristic of the capitalism (SIERRA-CABALLERO, 2018).

Possibly, globally, in the mid-1990s, year after year began a permanent decline in the number of readers of paper newspapers. The increasingly easy desktop publishing on the

Internet required some technical skills. Blogger was invented in the late 90s and some advertisers started redirecting their investments to digital sites. So social media changed distribution and a printed newspaper that produced and controlled content and distribution. Before the newspaper showed the best news, now Google does.

Probably, the crisis that has affected journalism in recent times is part of a broader digital revolution, manifested in a constant erosion and fragmentation of the audience, a large decrease in advertising investments, a questioning of the credibility of journalistic mediation and in confidence in the authority of professionals. Argentina is a heterogeneous country, with different realities in each region. Each province makes up a different universe: inside borders there are populations with different information needs. These demands collide with the centrality of the main communication media based in the city of Buenos Aires. The production of journalistic information replicates this model and has repercussions in the configuration of gigantic spaces without local media. So-called "information needs" may possibly be met in a different way than traditional journalism aspires. What is certain is that there is an unequal distribution of the media and journalists in Argentina and the governments installed in democracy after December 1983 do not seem to help much.

On the other hand, in research on digital media, little importance has been given to historical studies on the evolution of cyberjournalism, the history of communication, the right to information, the ethics of communication and journalistic design. Despite having given rise to relevant research, they still offer a wide margin of evolution in the study of cybermedia and its phenomena. Thus seen, the challenge for research on cyberjournalism is to enrich them with

transversal contributions from other disciplines with a long history in the university (SALAVERRIA, 2015).

## **2. Local media**

The category of "local media" can be novel to characterize small alternative media that with great difficulties try to offer different visions of reality from their subordinate journalistic practices. Local media bring together community media, as well as small private and commercial media, which in a turbulent context of pandemic and quarantine manage to survive by offering alternative points of view. Although community media that are managed by specific groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been the subject of increasingly complete studies, we observe how in some regions of Argentina, the result of access to new technologies and the growing development of services of the Internet, small media are emerging that have a predilection for local news. Local media is a general term to characterize a variety of different media outlets, which produce news, represent their territory and which could allow a more active citizenry.

Societies are moving towards increasingly digital, mobile and social technology, in a media environment with more intense competition for attention. More and more people receive news through digital media, increasingly access news through mobile devices (especially smartphones) and rely on social media and other intermediaries. These small local media outlets have lower costs and can be more agile in adapting to change. The local media are those that

build and disseminate local news and are characterized in the context of study, the province of San Luis, Argentina, by hybridity and constant renewal.

The space built by these media allows people not only to be heard, but also to express their vision of reality, with a clear influence on the social and cultural norms that support the knowledge and exposure of the abuses of power. The adjective local basically refers to what is related to a place or territory and can also refer to the municipal or provincial, as something opposite to the national. The local news media are then those media that privilege the construction of news defined in geographical, social and cultural terms referring to a certain locality or region. That is, to the treatment of events close to the environment and that affect the citizen of that territory. This definition of local medium is made based on the contents of the media, since the local concept in terms of receivers has transcended the physical space due to the presence of the Internet network.

Lluís Costa Fernández and Mònica Puntí Brun (2013) affirm that the concept of local should not be the antithesis of the concept of global and point out that the process is to think locally and act globally to give meaning to communication processes (glocalization). Hess (2013) has studied the role of the small "local" newspaper in a new media environment and argues that the definitions and concepts that are currently used to describe and define such publications are becoming increasingly problematic as newspapers shift to formats in print and online. Hess (2013) highlights the continuing importance of geography for such newspapers and exposes the relevance of the territory and the limits and the impact of space-time compression in a world of new media. However, he argues that the concept of "geo-social" news may be a more appropriate framework for academics to consider such publications. Both journalists and local

media have direct access to information sources, they know the local community, they have the ability to generate feedback and interactions with their audiences, and the technologies of use provide the instruments that they previously lacked to be able to contextualize the news. The local journalist has a good knowledge of his immediate environment and of the characteristics of the local community's functioning, of the sources to know what happens, how and why of the news.

### **3. The web paradigm and the media**

The web communication model has received contributions from Orihuela (2002); Lehman-Wilzig and Cohen-Avigdor (2004); Castells (2001); Jenkins (2006) and Scolari (2013) among others. Orihuela (2002) has identified ten paradigm changes that give rise to e-Communication: the user as the axis of the communicative process, content as a vector of media identity, the universalization of multimedia language, the demand for real time, the management of information abundance, the disintermediation of communication processes, the emphasis on access to systems, the various dimensions of interactivity, hypertext as a grammar of the digital world and the revaluation of knowledge over information. Lehman-Wilzig and Cohen-Avigdor (2004) proposed a model based on the “media life cycle” model to which Scolari simplifies and reduces to three moments: emergence, domination and survival / extinction, each exemplified in the emergence of the Web.

When a new media emerges in the ecology of media experiencing new forms of production and appropriation, we are in a moment of emergency (SCOLARI, 2013). At a time when a few

media manage to consolidate and impose their logic, grammar and) forms of production / use on other media, we find the presence of dominant media that attract our attention is the moment of domination (SCOLARI, 2013). When the decline of an environment occurs after the emergence of new predatory species of our interest and attention, two things can happen: the environment adapts and survives in the new ecology, not as a dominant species or enters a more or less slow process of extinction (SCOLARI, 2013). The Internet has upset a large part of the paradigms that until now helped us to understand the processes of public communication in mass media. Manuel Castells (2001) has highlighted the need to include local scenarios in global actions, and has described the Internet as an instrument that for the first time in the history of humanity has allowed communication from many to many at a time on a global scale, but with great repercussions in the local scenes. The ability to globalize communication and interconnection of both personal and mass media is allowed by the development of interactive applications that allows what Castells (2001) calls "mass self-communication", meaning communication from many to many, one to many.

Fattorello's theory (2005) is opposed to the theorizations of the Frankfurt School that characterized in mass communication a process that determines people's behaviors. More than sixty years ago it was not easy for scholars and those who work in the industry to accept the ideas of Fattorello, who assumed an active audience. Instead of accepting the idea that companies in the media industry-imposed values, behaviors and patterns that served to maintain dominance, Fattorello focused on the public as active participants, and as the lynchpin of the communication process. Undoubtedly, the participation of audiences is essential today to develop quality information disseminated through the media on the web. The phenomenon of



Web 2.0 demonstrates the validity of Fattorello's theory. In the online space prosumers have the potential to share a great variety of content, if not, as a large number of studies show, where there is no cultural correspondence, the relationship of the information will not have the desired effect. The content cannot be received or understood, or will be misunderstood, or whatever, with difficulty and with considerable dystonia.

#### **4. Local / global voltage**

Today, the local is not the opposite of the global; rather they are two interrelated terms. In fact, with new technologies we have not only more global spaces but also more local spaces. The relationship between the two terms is described precisely with the term glocalization. Costa Fernández and Puntí Brun (2013) affirm that local communication has become an important concept in our society, and within it we can find the free press, a model of local communication. It is a model that has been perfected, although originally it was not oriented to informative production. It was more of a kind of alternative press that emerged to cover previously unmet needs (COSTA FERNÁNDEZ and PUNTÍ BRUN, 2013).

Local means do not exist in all places and their subsistence is difficult. There are still no adequate investments, on the one hand, technologies are advancing and on the other, journalistic work has become precarious. Internet users have access to more information in convenient and often free formats through a range of increasingly sophisticated personal and mobile devices, enabling new forms of participation. Those most interested embrace the new opportunities they offer to obtain, share and comment on news, but more people opt for more

casual and passive forms of use and, for the most part, use the opportunities offered by digital media for things that they have little to do with the news. In combination, these developments mean that Internet users have access to more and more information from more and more sources, increasing the opportunities most people have to use various sources and find different perspectives. At the same time, the environment is increasingly dominated by a limited number of large players and accompanied by consolidation and cost reduction. Over time, this can reduce media pluralism by undermining the diversity of news production.

The shift to an increasingly digital, mobile and social media environment also means that forms of political intervention can be transformed. The connection with social media platforms and the new attention economy introduced by algorithmic mediation brings a broader reconfiguration of the disintermediation dynamics of public discourse. Among the many challenges that journalism must face, perhaps one of the most relevant has to do with how to manage competition and cooperation, in the midst and with a plurality of autonomous collective subjects in the production and dissemination of news, in a more extensive transformations in the media. According to Salaverria (2005), digital journalism, also called cyberjournalism, web journalism, online journalism, webjournalism, electronic journalism or multimedia journalism, refers to a journalism that has the internet as the main development environment, as well as networks and digital devices. in general, as its auxiliary means. In the words of Ramón Salaverría, “it is the specialty of journalism that uses cyberspace to investigate, produce and above all, to disseminate journalistic content” (SALAVERRIA, 2005, p. 21).

## 5. San Luis and the media

The province of San Luis, Argentina has around 500,000 inhabitants and is located almost in the center of Argentina. In the last thirty-five years, the main medium of the province has been the *Diario de la Republica*, reaching a good part of the provincial territory since its creation. The *Diario de San Luis* was founded on May 2, 1966, but in 1984 it changed hands. It was and is the only paper newspaper with a provincial scope and the main beneficiary of official advertising. In July 17, 1992, *El Diario de San Luis* was renamed *El Diario de la República*. On January 9, this communication medium appeared in the digital space ([www.eldariodelarepublica.com](http://www.eldariodelarepublica.com))

For many years this mass media was the most important space in the provincial narratives and the power of the main and reduced group that has held the government and power in the province since December 1983: the Rodríguez Saa brothers. At the same time, it has been a direct beneficiary of the largest portion of the state advertising budget in the last thirty-five years.

In the city of San Luis there are two main media in the province, LV 90 Canal 13, the only air channel, of a state nature, and *Diario de la República*, the only graphic medium, which belongs to the business group of the ruling family since the beginning of democracy. In Villa Mercedes, the second most important city in the province of San Luis, there are no print media, although there are a significant number of radios and two cable TV channels with local informational content. Only 27% of journalists are in a dependency relationship, so 73% of journalists in San Luis are in a precarious job situation. Approximately, according to a Report from the Argentine Journalism Forum (FOPEA) of 2021, 30% of journalists sell advertising to pay for their work and 27% are external workers.

## 6. Two cases

Two paradigmatic media are examined, such as El Chorrillero ([elchorrillero.com](http://elchorrillero.com)) and Villa Mercedes.Info ([www.villamercedes.info](http://www.villamercedes.info)). The analysis is formulated taking into account their news production, their networks and a qualitative questionnaire directed at journalists. This is a descriptive examination of two digital media of the province of San Luis. The observations of its websites and news production, its radio spaces and the dialogue with the actors have allowed us to enrich our gaze. In our observations we have realized in 2022 year. that the needs of online media are complex and varied, from the ability to work in a team, the sending of periodic communications or newsletters, the administration of advertising spaces, the agility of content loading, dissemination of the medium itself on social networks and many other needs. But it is not only a content management system (journalistic production, but the tasks also integrate having a web design adaptable to all types of devices and hosting prepared for high traffic.

### 6.1. The Chorrillero

El Chorrillero is a digital newspaper that publishes news through its website (<https://elchorrillero.com/>), and also transmits the programming of Radio Dimensión de San Luis on the frequencies of: FM 102, 07 from San Luis and FM 101.05 from Villa Mercedes. Inside information is local news, although coverage extends to the regional, national and international spheres.

El Chorrillero is a digital newspaper that has a logo on a blue background with orange and white letters. News items are titled in black on a white background. Each news item has at least

one image. There are two possibilities of connecting with the media: through a "citizen journalism" link where it says *"Tell us what happened and send us photos and videos"* and by email, channels through which information and images can be uploaded. The social networks that the media outlet uses are Facebook, You Tube and Twitter. The advertisement appears at the top of the page in red.



Figura 1 – Capture of images of Chorrillero June 2022

The media has four journalists. They also produce, in the case of El Chorrillero, a five-minute newsletter that is disseminated on social networks with the main news of the day.

## 6.2. Villa Mercedes.Info

Villa Mercedes.Info is a news website that combines news on the web and a radio program. Villa Mercedes informs and is presented as the City Portal (<https://www.villamercedes.info>). The sources of the news are mostly local, although they include national news using the services of the National State News Agency (TELAM). The informative theme is organized based on: Home, Villa Mercedes, The Province, The Country, El Mundo, Economy, Bad News, Sports, Politics, and has its own magazine called VMI (<https://www.villamercedes.info/category/magazine/>) that addresses issues of the Argentine national sphere. The media has two journalists.

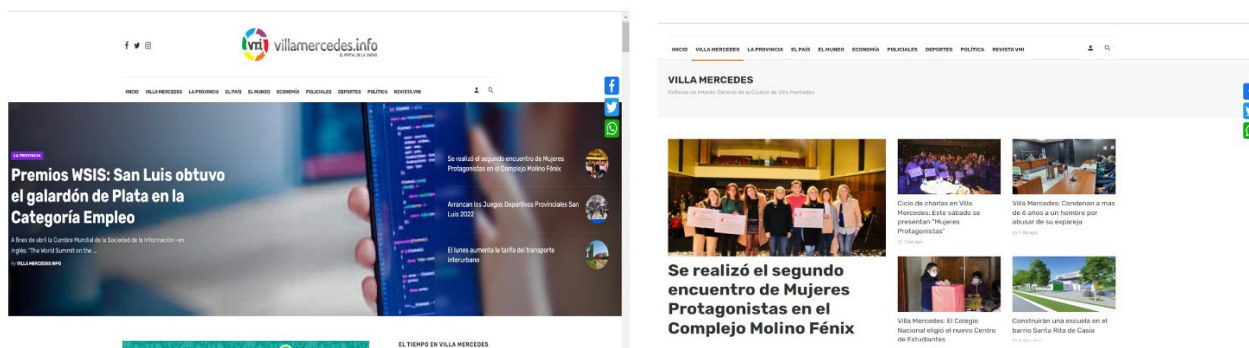


Figura 2 – Capture of images of VillaMercedes.Info June 2022

Villa Mercedes.Info has a multicolored logo. It is made up of the color's orange, yellow, green, light blue, purple and red. The media has the option of receiving the news by WhatsApp. The option of networks that it has are Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. The advertisement appears on a bar to the right of the image.

The work of these media journalists is precarious. They are autonomous employees who pay mono-tax and charge the company for their services. This condition makes journalists a problematic issue, which given the size of the media and the shrinking of the advertising pie, they try to survive. Journalists often not only write their articles, but also edit them, provide images, and incorporate them into the media.

Another characteristic of these emerging media in the province of San Luis is that they have their own radio or associate a radio with their website in order to provide another alternative service to their audiences. The production processes of small digital media are framed in the general context of the media crisis, today deepened by the presence of the COVID 19 pandemic and the Argentine quarantine, one of the longest in the world. The productive processes were characterized by the abundance of news of the pandemic, whose sources are governmental in 2020, while in the last months of that year and early 2021. The topics covered the subject of classes in schools and universities, the dilemmas of presence and virtuality, vaccines and vaccination operations, sports, etc. In some media, the activity of journalists in this context of crisis, generally poorly paid, in some cases is carried out through the reproduction of state news. It is not the case of these media that were investigated.

Certainly, there are challenges for industry and journalism, but neither the media nor relations with the public will ever be the same as in previous years. Faced with the emergence of these local media that, on the one hand, take advantage of a time of great technological transformations and access to social media, on the other hand, they fight for their survival in a context of shrinking advertising universe, the null or scarce government advertising (that depends on the editorial direction of the media) and the craft and precarious work of journalists in these media. It is worth asking here if communication schools and careers are preparing journalists and communicators for this new context. Journalism must not only adapt to new circumstances, but also meet the requirements that appeal to transparency and quality. The future of the press is defined today through continuous media and the development of lightweight and practical terminals and possibly the idea of a revival of paper newspapers, with significant media relevance, is unlikely. Possibly, a small-scale print media renaissance can be associated with high-quality custom products with great aesthetics and design. These local media do not have subscribers and are financed with advertisements and in some cases, according to their political affinity, with the political direction given to official advertising in the Government of San Luis, contrary to the laws and regulations in force. Despite the progressive and incipient development of local digital media, favored by the emergence and availability of useful and available technologies, in many places we assist communities without means of communication to monitor those in power.

According to data from FOPEA (Argentine Journalism Forum) collected between December 2020 and May 2021 "Desert News Report", the trend towards job insecurity is consolidated in the Argentine media. Almost seven out of 10 local media outlets lack journalists in a dependency



relationship. This reality worsens in half of the Argentine provinces. A third of the media outlets prefer not to specify what type of employment relationship they have with journalists. Independent workers, self-employment, and paid work with advertising commissions or the sale of spaces are presented as frequent options for linking journalists and their institutions.

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The precariousness of journalists is an emerging phenomenon of the last forty years in the Argentine context, and emphasized by the appearance of the Internet and highly connected devices. Local and digital media in San Luis often do not have a defined business model, they must look for it (QUIROGA, 2020) and this has a significant influence on their survival or development. The precariousness of journalists is an emerging phenomenon of the last forty years in the Argentine context. In the context of San Luis, despite the growth of small digital publications, often combined with radio programs on the web, most journalists are mono-tribute and are not sufficiently recognized in their salaries (QUIROGA, 2020). With these rewards, the citizens of San Luis probably should not request informational quality. Despite the progressive appearance of small digital media and the strong coverage of Internet services in the province

of San Luis, the printed product continues to generate large amounts of income compared to digital. Many people still read the traditional newspaper. We need new investments, publishers with new visions, greater use of the assets that technology brings, creative and healthy media, according to the times. The media must control power, its excesses and promote democracy. The digital news model needs to be completely reinvented. We need from the academy new methodologies and more analysis.

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