

Journalists' views on innovating in the newsroom: Proposing a model of the diffusion of innovations in media outlets

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This paper explores how innovation emerges in the media through the views of journalists who are leading the process of newsroom change in Spain. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with 20 journalists working in some of the most innovative outlets, according to the 2014 Index of Journalism Innovation in Spain (García-Avilés, Carvajal-Prieto, De Lara-González, & Arias-Robles, 2018). The results highlight the importance of innovations in content production, internal organization, distribution, and commercialization as the drivers of change in the media industry. Our study also reveals several factors that shape both the practice and implementation of innovations in newsrooms. We draw on these factors to outline a model of diffusion of media innovation.

Keywords

Journalism, media innovation, newsroom change, diffusion of innovations, news practices

INTRODUCTION

Journalism is in a stage of constant flux, accelerated by the rise of new technological players that shape multiple areas of journalistic activity. Media organizations are facing disruptive changes in the industry structure, consumers' habits, professional practices, and business models. In the current news ecosystem, there is both "catastrophe and rebirth for institutions that house journalistic work" and also constant "institutional adaptation" (Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2012, section 2). In Deuze's words, "journalism is transitioning from a more or less coherent industry to a highly varied and diverse range of practices" (2007, p. 2). In the field of public communication, journalistic practice offers a way to understand the social structures in which innovation takes place (Raetzsch, 2015, pp. 66–67).

Innovation is essential for any industry. According to Schumpeter (1934), innovation is reflected in novel outputs: a new good or a new quality of a good;

a new method of production; a new market; a new source of supply; or a new organizational structure, which can be summarized as doing things differently. Innovation could also be described as "a process that combines discovering an opportunity, blueprinting an idea to seize that opportunity, and implementing that idea to achieve results" (Anthony, 2012, p. 17). Translated to the media industry, this means that innovation must involve something more than the repetitive cycle of everyday news production. Since innovation often marks an organization's competitive edge (Baregheh, Rowley, & Sambrook, 2009), the concept of innovation has taken on special significance in the context of sweeping changes for the media business (Usher, 2014).

News organizations need "to act strategically and radically in improving their editorial processes and products as well as their business models and organizational structures" (Westlund & Lewis, 2014, p. 11). Thus, media outlets must develop strategies

that respond to disruptive changes in the industry, as outlined in the *New York Times*' Innovation Report (2014), whose goal according to its Newsroom Innovation Team was “to foster innovation and to expand the reach and impact of our journalism at a time when technology, user behavior and our competitors are evolving more rapidly than ever” (p. 1).

The diffusion of innovations has been studied extensively across diverse disciplines (Fagerberg, 2006), and this research has included the identification of steps in the process of innovation as well as key actor categories, such as innovators, early adopters, and laggards (Rogers, 1995, pp. 243–267). In this regard, Rogers' model (1995) highlighted the importance of the initiative taken by key individuals who drive innovation within the company and the role of early adopters who are involved in disseminating innovations in the market and society (pp. 248–249).

This paper aims to study how innovation emerges in the media by exploring the views of those journalists who are leading the process of change in Spanish media outlets. We build on the premises that innovation is essential in order to overcome the difficulties the media industry is facing and that news professionals provide valuable perspectives on how journalism is evolving. After reviewing the literature and providing our own definition of journalism innovation, we present the methodology based on semi-structured interviews with 20 news professionals in

14 media outlets in Spain. We then outline the main results in each of the topics developed from the interview analysis: the concept and implementation of innovation, examples of media innovations, and areas of innovation (production, distribution, organization, and commercialization). Finally, we discuss these findings and we propose a model for how innovation is disseminated in news organizations.

THE ROLE OF INNOVATION IN A DISRUPTIVE NEWS ECOSYSTEM

Research on media innovation has grown considerably over the past 10 years and now encompasses a variety of perspectives: managing strategies (Baumann, 2013; Dal Zotto & van Kranenburg, 2008; Küng, 2013); new technologies and services (Dogruel, 2013; Spyridou et al., 2013); changes in the production processes (Dogruel, 2014; Westlund & Krumsvik, 2014); audience interaction (Bruns, 2014); business models (Bruno & Nielsen, 2012; Carvajal, García-Avilés, & González, 2012); and newsroom culture (Weiss & Domingo, 2010). Scholars have attempted to make sense of the social, cultural, and political implications of the decline of newspapers (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012b). An underlying theme of this research is that media innovations provide a way of facing the crisis of the press by introducing new processes and products that are successful in the market and have social implications (Lüders, 2016).

New technologies enable smaller companies to develop disruptive products or processes, thus overriding the dominant companies (Christensen, 1997; Nee, 2013), in a radical or incremental way (Dewar & Dutton, 1986). Christensen (1997) noted that “disruptive innovations,” which are similar to radical innovations, amount to a complete break with the existing setup and/or the introduction of a wholly new change. Accordingly, incremental innovations are “improvements to existing processes and systems, and usually require existing capabilities to be expanded or adapted” (Küng, 2013, p. 10).

Technological advances are becoming an important actant in news practices, as seen through the lens of the Actor–Network Theory (Plesner, 2009). For example, the software systems used in newsrooms influence the circumstances of journalistic practices and are increasingly an area of media innovation (Rodgers, 2015). Conceptualizing media technologies as assemblages of content and artifacts in a “textomaterial perspective,” which analyzes users' content creation practices in combination with how they shape artifacts, also invites the reexamination of key scholarly debates that emphasize the role of users in the present media landscape (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012a).

Thus, innovators become change agents, who are expected to be adept at identifying audience or company needs, and finding new ways to satisfy them

(García-Avilés, 2012). Media innovation requires solid management that integrates both people and resources in the processes of change, incorporating “mutations” in areas related to technology, communication, and organization (Boczkowski, 2004, p. 11). From Boczkowski’s study, Steensen (2009) shows how work culture, management leadership, technological tools, and individual journalists’ initiative might shape the level of innovation.

Bleyen, Lindmark, Ranaivoson, and Ballon (2014, p. 48) established a typology of media innovations, based on five categories: business model, production and distribution, consumption and media, inner form, and core product. The first three categories are related to innovation processes and the latter two (the inner form and core product) highlight product innovations, such as a groundbreaking program or format. The implementation of new processes might therefore incorporate innovations in a tangible or intangible way (Dogruel, 2014, p. 57–58). Taking one further step, García-Avilés et al. (2016) analyze both incremental and radical innovations that occur in the media, grouped into four areas: production, distribution, organization, and commercialization.

However, media innovation seems to be ill-defined and poorly captured by purely quantitative methods based only on statistics (Bleyen et al., 2014; Lowrey, 2011). Weiss and Domingo (2010, p. 1158) argue that a deeper theoretical framework is needed,

especially now that innovation is becoming a “crucial asset to the survival of the media industry.” They also see the need for more academic fieldwork to be done regarding “the actors, dynamics and factors involved in the processes, theories that acknowledge the changing nature of journalism” (Weiss & Domingo, 2010, p. 1158). Bleyen et al. (2014) note a lack of empirical measurements of in-house innovation within the media industry. This is a remarkable observation, considering the industry’s desperate need to innovate. Media managers are often reluctant to change in their organizations, due to a series of “contradictory logics,” such as uncertainty about audiences and technologies or weak institutional decision-making (Lowrey, 2011, p. 66).

Scholars also turn their attention to internal processes in news organizations. Lucy Küng (2013) examines how media companies cope with this change of culture brought about by the implementation of innovation. Storsul and Krumsvik (2013) extend this approach by expanding Francis and Bessant’s (2005) theory of the four Ps in innovation (product, process, position, and paradigmatic innovation). They argue that “social innovation” should be added to the four-P model and distinguish between internal and exogenous influences of media innovations (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013, p. 17). Thus, innovation does not have to be limited to a new product or technology but it can also be based on a new combination of previ-

ously existing ideas, processes, or resources (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013).

Dogruel (2014) looks at media innovation from a different angle. She examines the theory of media innovations and refines it by including the interaction between the media, existing media products, and media institutions. “Innovation” here no longer focuses only on product- and process-related aspects. Dogruel (2014, p. 62) points out that it also includes “user-sided appropriation processes [and] the combination of different innovation dimensions (e.g., organizational, technological or design-related aspects).” She argues that the field of media innovation therefore requires a combination of “theoretical and empirical approaches from economic and social innovation theory as well as media-specific frameworks” (Dogruel, 2014, p. 62).

Finally, according to Pavlik (2013), innovation as a strategy leads to better services and increased responsiveness to users, and, therefore, an increase in sales or audiences. He concludes that “innovation is the key to the viability of news media in the digital age” (Pavlik, 2013, p. 190).

After reviewing the literature, we define media innovation as *the capacity to react to changes in products, processes, and services through the use of creative skills that allow a problem or need to be identified and solved in a way that results in the introduction of something new that adds value to cus-*

tomers and thereby fosters the viability of the media organization.

METHODOLOGY

Our study explores the innovative processes that originate in media outlets through an analysis of interviews with selected journalists. We believe that through the news professionals' views we can obtain an overview of the context and the factors that shape the process of implementation of innovations in these outlets. Such a perspective complements other approaches about the subject matter, for it sheds light on the role of "agents of change" and the diffusion of innovations in the newsrooms (Steensen, 2009; Weiss & Domingo, 2010). Methodologically, the professional perspective combines the importance of individual initiative with the collective actions and policies that usually shape innovation processes (Küng, 2013). As journalistic practices are embodied in the development of products, the distribution of content, and the interaction with users, this is a necessary perspective in order to understand the reach of innovations and how they come about within media organizations.

We identified three research questions:

RQ1: How do journalists define innovation and how does it take place in their newsrooms?

RQ2: What innovations are adopted in practice?

RQ3: What are the main areas in which innova-

tion is implemented within media organizations?

In our research we relied on a qualitative methodology that allows flexibility in examining those aspects previously identified as the key themes in the study of media innovation (Habann, 2008). We opted for the semi-structured interview method, which ensured that the answers from the interviewees would cover the issues raised in our research questions, as well as allow the interviews to reflect the peculiarities of each media outlet, job position and other possibly relevant information (Howitt, 2013, pp. 57, 66). The interview guide for these in-depth, semi-structured interviews was composed of 14 predetermined open-ended questions (see the Appendix). Recorded interviews were conducted face-to-face from October 2015 to May 2016 by the researchers and two assistants who helped in the transcription and coding process. The interviews lasted 45 minutes on average. They were coded according to analytical categories that identified the relevant issues and themes, based on the initial research questions.

The convenience sample comprised 20 journalists working in Spain: 10 professionals from seven media outlets that were included in the 2014 Index of Journalism Innovation (García-Avilés et al., 2016) and 10 professionals from seven other media outlets not included in this index. Seven were female and 13 were male, all ranging from age 27 to 49.

The 14 media outlets were selected because of

their commitment to innovation. This commitment was discerned through market reports, professional references, and the researchers' knowledge of the market. Table 1 shows the media outlets in the sample and their typology, as well as the interviewees' job positions. In some cases, several professionals with different positions in the same company were interviewed, with the aim of gathering a diversity of viewpoints. At the request of some interviewees, anonymity will be granted when reporting their statements.

Our findings cannot be generalized. However, the selected interviewees provide an understanding of the innovation trends in Spanish media. To that end, the selection of the convenience sample was designed to reflect a wide range of innovative media outlets with different backgrounds (broadcast media, print media with online editions, digital-only outlets, and innovation labs).

RESULTS: ANALYSIS OF THE PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTIONS

Following the analysis of the interviews, a number of themes and issues emerged, which constitute the structure of this section. First, we examine how innovation is defined and how innovations are implemented in the selected media. Second, we present a number of particular innovations, according to the professionals interviewed. Then, the nature of innovation processes is specifically addressed in four

Table 1.

List of the selected media, their typology, and interviewees' job positions.

Outlet	Type	Job position
<i>El Confidencial</i>	Digital-only	Head of innovation Product manager Social media manager
<i>El Español</i>	Digital-only	Assistant editor Head of data unit Newsletter editor
<i>Fundación Civio</i>	Citizen foundation which sponsors news projects	Project manager Data journalist
<i>Vis-à-Vis</i>	Magazine for tablets	Co-director Co-director
<i>eldiario.es</i>	Digital-only	Assistant editor
<i>El Extrarradio</i>	Web radio	CEO
<i>The Spain Report</i>	Digital-only in English language	Editor and founder
<i>Prisa Radio</i>	Radio broadcasting group	Coordinator of video department
<i>RTVE Lab</i>	Lab at the public broadcaster	Head and founder
<i>El Mundo</i>	Print and digital newspaper	Head of social media and new narratives
<i>Revista Mongolia</i>	Print magazine	Co-editor
<i>Vice España</i>	Multimedia web	Executive director
<i>El Desmarque</i>	Sports digital-only	Founder and CEO
<i>Bottup</i>	Citizen journalism platform	Founder and CEO

areas of journalistic practice: content production, distribution, newsroom organization, and commercialization.

The concept and the implementation of innovation

Most of the interviewees gave somewhat generic definitions of the concept of innovation. Many equate it with “the new” or stress the idea of “offering something different to what already exists.” They also emphasize the importance of “experimenting,” and of “trial and error,” which leads to innovation. The interviewees said that innovation takes place through changes in content and narratives (12 mentions), users and audiences (9), technology (7), media outlet organization (4) and finally, business models (3). Most of them also agreed that technology is considered a transversal element, which influences all the areas where innovation is implemented. In this section we provide a summary of some of the main findings from the interviews about the nature and the implementation of innovation, addressing RQ1.

Professionals who work at digital-only outlets offered quite elaborate definitions of innovation. A co-director of the tablet-only magazine *Vis-à-Vis* maintained that, “Innovation arises from the idea that we have to be different at all costs. It’s a way of surviving over the long term and of improving and providing the brand with values.” The head of innovation at *El*

Confidencial argued that innovating is “doing things others don’t do or doing what others do but in a totally different way.” *El Confidencial*’s social media editor noted that “an outlet is innovative when it dedicates a major part of its resources to experimenting, to testing, and to producing new narratives.”

The perceptions of newsroom staff and management underline *the importance of the individual initiative as “agents of change” together with effective leadership and the creation of interdisciplinary teams* made up of journalists and technicians who implement products and services. In this way, according to the interviewees, the most innovative media outlets foster interaction between the various departments and sections, and also flexible workflows that encourage the spread of an innovative culture throughout the organization. As the head of RTVE’s media lab highlighted, “innovation should cut across the whole company, where everybody takes part and the greatest number of people on the corporate ladder gets involved.” Several interviewees were of the opinion that innovation is a process that frequently comes from the management side, but which should be implemented from the ground up – in other words, it should come from rank-and-file professionals.

According to some interviewees, *innovation is a process that requires the implication of journalists and their inputs in different areas of news production* (story ideation, resource allocation, timing, and

team collaboration, just to name a few). In innovation departments set up in some media outlets, journalists, technicians, and developers work together in the implementation of projects, which increases synergies, communication, and the application of new ideas collaboratively. Journalists who work in a setting that encourages innovation (through design thinking, the launch of interdisciplinary projects, experimentation, etc.) are more willing to take risks.

Innovation arises from practice and from the context provided by management through flexible structures. At least four interviewees said that innovation involves the capacity to respond to opportunities and threats within the market, thereby “managing to beat competitors, identify opportunities and take risks,” as one editor put it. There is general consensus among those interviewed that for a project to be innovative it has to be successful – in other words, it should involve an improvement for the outlet in terms of audience, prestige, and revenues and/or market share.

The main obstacles faced by journalists when it comes to innovating *include a lack of investment and an absence of leadership and a clear strategy* that promote specific goals. A journalist from a digital-only outlet stressed that innovation only occurs “in isolated cases, not as an integrated management policy” and that often “it is a public relations activity to promote the media outlet.” There is a general lack of in-

novation in newsrooms because “management resists change and it’s hard for them to transform structures or news practices that have developed over years,” claimed another journalist from a digital-only outlet. According to three interviewees, most managers interact with small groups from a similar level within the company organization and barely have any contact with other areas in the newsroom. In their view, these managers tend to stick to established models and resist change.

Three news editors backed *the need to identify and promote innovative talent, in order to improve their products, services, and business results.* At the same time, however, they warn that with current budgets they can barely invest in innovation. These three editors also argued that as long as managers understand the nature of innovation and its benefits and they foster R&D departments, media companies will be able to make progress in the market.

Above all, most interviewees emphasized that *innovation in journalism consists of hard work rather than strokes of genius.* It requires knowledge, determination and passion. Innovations start gradually, without ostentation. Outlets may consider a creative form of communicating with users, establish a new revenue stream, or develop an application that solves a problem that has been detected. In fact, nobody can predict whether such innovations will work until they are put into practice.

The contributions provided by the interviewees allowed us to identify five key types of players in newsroom innovation processes: drivers of change, who lead the implemented initiatives; early adopters, who quickly incorporate innovations into their work; laggards, who take time to accept innovations, but end up incorporating them into their daily practices; the outsiders, who stay at the margins of innovations and do not wish to get involved; and finally, the “resisters,” those professionals who, for various reasons, oppose the implementation of innovative processes and practices.

Examples of media innovation

The interviewees showcased numerous examples of innovative initiatives which have been implemented in their newsrooms. We classified them into four areas: content production, distribution, newsroom organization, and commercialization, addressing RQ2 and RQ3.

In *content production*, we found several innovations including the implementation of an in-house Content Management System (CMS) that is scalable and exportable to other businesses; the production of long-format feature stories, which increase the time users spend on a web page; interviewing candidates in 360° video during a recent election campaign; producing webdocs (interactive web documentaries) with *immersive* narratives, including data journalism

visualizations; and using bots that automatically inform about share prices on the stock markets.

In the area of *distribution*, mention should be made of a *WhatsApp* channel that provides users with news alerts; early morning and weekend newsletters for subscribers; launching a news app to follow election results; the creation of open investigation databases that others can use; and, in a digital-only outlet, the policy that all journalists collaborate in distributing content on social networks to reach as many users as possible.

In terms of *organization*, the foremost innovations were multidisciplinary project development teams made up of journalists and technicians; the use of software that facilitates internal communication both between editors and journalists, and among team members; producing content simultaneously on many platforms, integrating several professionals from various sections; using scheduling software that allow newsrooms to know at all times what other professionals are doing; and implementing teleworking, with decentralized newsrooms that enable journalists to work from anywhere.

Finally, with regards to *commercialization*, innovations include consolidating a membership model that, through a pre-paid fee, ensures outlet viability; launching a crowdfunding campaign that allowed a digital-only outlet to raise 3.6 million euros in two months; creating new advertising formats natively

integrated into the news product; a branded content strategy to seamlessly integrate brands within content; and securing sponsorship from advertisers or brands for news sections.

Innovation in content production

The user is at the center of most innovations that focus on content production. The key nearly always lies in displaying news such that it is easier for the user to consume it. The head of the lab of public broadcaster RTVE explained that they always try to “provide content in the best possible way” and to “play about with all interactive possibilities provided by mobile devices.” Technology is often essential. At the RTVE lab, the goal is that 30 percent of all projects will include innovative technology that they have never used before, such as new programming languages. In addition to using free tools, technicians have developed their own tools in the newsroom. For example, at the RTVE lab they use a content management system (CMS) developed in-house and they distribute in-house apps to users and mobile devices.

Media outlets are also learning from other industries. The videogame industry, for example, is one step ahead in terms of garnering user loyalty. Media outlets are trying to apply mechanisms typical of *gamification* to journalism and adapt them to mobile devices. One such tool, Apester, allows outlets to create surveys, personality tests, and other types

of interactive content. The design of in-house apps for mobile devices is also coming to the forefront. *El Español* offers an exclusive feature for subscribers, called “The River,” which consists of presenting brief news items in the form of cards that are read in a continuous cascade. According to its promoters, this initiative increases the amount of time users spend on a given page.

Video is increasingly gaining leverage with new formats such as 360° video. One newsroom experimented with this technology in a series of political debates. The use of interactive videos is also growing, with software such as Interlude. In this field perhaps the leading innovation is virtual reality in projects such as those to emerge from the RTVE Lab about the experience of a number of sportsmen and women prior to the 2016 Rio Olympics, its first in-house production using this technology.

Journalists have realized the need to use innovative tools to produce different content. All of those interviewed who work in data journalism use software such as CartoDB, Tableau, and Datawrapper to create maps and graphics, some even with modified codes to adapt them to the needs of newsrooms. Journalists also use software to obtain information from external websites automatically – so-called scraping. But technology is not everything. One reporter pointed out that technologies are only worth putting into practice if they promote news values. Another

trend is the creation of projects related to the readers’ own lives, transcending the media outlet itself. One digital-only media company, for example, created a specific app to visualize huge amounts of information about Spanish cities prior to municipal elections.

Innovation in distribution

Foremost among the most innovative initiatives in content distribution are those that focus on the user. Three editors at digital-only outlets argued that the business of *mass* communication has come to an end and that it is now time to reach out to the user. In addition to the more conventional direct communication via online content, these newsrooms are championing indirect communication through the study of users’ navigation patterns. In this way, news messages can be personalized and content can be recommended based on users’ interests. Journalists at one digital-only outlet use programs such as Chartbeat to obtain this information in real time, in order to assess the effectiveness of the distribution of content to the audience and to design possible improvements.

Another significant innovation is the ability to share and curate content from a variety of media sources. One digital-only outlet found success in using its Twitter account to share content from other sources, even from competing media. This helped the media outlet generate content when it had little of its own material and, at the same time, create the image

of an open and useful outlet. Along this line, another of its main ventures is its editorial newsletter, which differs from bulletins published by other media because it not only shows the outlet’s own news items but also curates the most relevant news in the national and international arenas. This is largely an adaptation of what has successfully been put into practice by media outlets such as *Quartz*. Another media outlet opens to the public the database it uses in certain reports, so that any citizen can access it.

Mention should also be made of the automation of publication processes through the use of bots. For example, one digital-only outlet sends a tweet on its Twitter account when a company listed on the stock market experiences notable changes. This idea has also been exported to the world of sports, with automatic alerts about football teams’ scores.

In the administration of social networks, the most innovative media outlets use various tools such as Slack, Wunderlist, Snappy, SocialFlow, Post Planner, Crowdbooster, and Amplitude, and also social platforms such as Periscope and Snapchat. Many of the professionals interviewed even confessed to amusing themselves by experimenting with new software. Such journalists are focusing on creating content specifically for social media, although they recognize the risk in not monetizing products with direct traffic.

Innovation in organization

Newsroom organization is an area related to planning, organizational structure, and work flow, which directly relates to how innovation is adopted in journalists' daily practice. Most of the media outlets opt to strengthen teamwork, also taking into account the need of coordinating the different departments, in order to generate positive synergies and to favor quick decision-making. By and large, managers recommended that journalists specialize in a particular field and develop in-depth knowledge on the beat they usually cover, allowing the journalists autonomy in the decision-making process with the support of colleagues from other divisions.

As for their work routines, some managers prefer not to organize traditional editorial meetings on a daily basis because they think that time is not optimized and productivity is reduced. Instead, they keep in permanent contact with the rest of the staff through communication tools such as Slack. Content is designed with the distribution channel in mind, something which conditions work dynamics and team formation, most of which are organized according to the most effective form of designing their products.

With regards to coordination, a co-director of tablet-only *Vis-à-Vis* highlighted the importance of working closely with the design department: "It's not a question of everybody being an expert in design,

but you do need to know the basics to understand the limitations and which things work and which don't." According to a manager at one company, multidisciplinary work "makes it easier to see things from another perspective." The product manager of *El Confidencial* explained there is plenty of flexibility in the decision-making processes so as to foster initiative and collaboration. This way of working also occurred in other media, such as the web-only radio service *El Extrarradio*.

Physical space is becoming less important. It should not be forgotten that some of these outlets have a business model based on new technologies that transcend physical boundaries and allow cost savings to be made, while at the same time allowing a greater number of news items to be covered – to the point that some managers talk of "virtual newsrooms."

Teams are normally small (up to 10 employees) to medium sized (up to 50 employees), working intensely with external collaborators in far from traditional newsrooms. Among the various profiles there is a fair degree of specialization. Companies are seeking professionals who master the digital environment and have basic knowledge of web programming. For instance, experts in data processing and visualization are valued. This use of technology is also integrated into the organization. For example, a manager ex-

plained: "We use Telegram to make day-to-day decisions and use Slack for teamwork, so as not to have physical meetings and crash email inboxes."

The decision-making process adopted by many newsrooms is basically horizontal. An example of flexibility is found in a print-based outlet in which the configuration of the news agenda is developed collectively by a team of journalists. Many organizations make use of collaborations to search for different news stories and incorporate alternative approaches, sometimes including external collaborators. This allows them to bring wider and richer points of view into editorial decision-making.

Editorial decisions are also informed by trending topics on social networks, and the desire to attract attention on these platforms. In fact, some news outlets write content specifically for Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. It is worth pointing out that some outlets are beginning to work with WhatsApp to disseminate their content. At the same time, using WhatsApp is challenging: the CEO of the digital-only sports outlet *El Desmarque* observed that "managing communication with 15,000 people through this messaging app involves a great deal of work and requires a level of organization that enables constant synchronization and updating."

In the same vein, a journalist from a digital-only outlet explained that her work dynamics are related

to the behavior of the audience. That is, when deciding to publish content, she takes into account data obtained from audience analytics. Analyzing data such as the profile of the news consumers, their time spent on the website, and the number of page views facilitates the design of an online strategy. The analysis of the data also allows her to adapt certain stories to the social networks, looking to attract further interest.

Although media outlets invest in multidisciplinary training, several interviewees agreed on the importance of reporters mastering social media, information verification, and content management systems, among other skills. It is also considered important that journalists have specialized profiles in different fields, since media initiatives are no longer limited exclusively to journalism. For instance, some outlets now organize cultural events. These kinds of initiatives have expanded horizons of the original business to include other types of services with different business models.

In general terms, most of the analyzed media follow this formula: incorporate technological profiles and teamwork to achieve an innovative product that puts the audience first. Innovation spreads because, as the head of the RTVE Lab put it, “when ideas receive different influences from the outset, they grow.”

Innovation in commercialization

Innovation in commercialization is crucial in the context of the weakness of the traditional model and strong competition from large technology companies. Most of the interviewees agreed that the greatest difficulty in innovating in the media industry is the lack of financing and the strong legacy of the traditional model. “An entrepreneur straight out of business school does not understand journalism. And a journalist straight out of journalism school does not understand business,” pointed out an interviewee at one digital-only outlet. Indirectly, however, the economic crisis in Spain has driven innovation and the creation of new projects.

The most innovative media outlets in the sample believe that establishing strong relationships with users and advertisers is key to coming up with innovative ideas. For example, the assistant news editor of *eldiario.es* highlighted the positive impact of the members/subscribers strategy and special advertising formats, particularly in the face of competition from big advertising platforms such as Facebook and Google.

The head of innovation at *El Confidencial* perceived that journalists from digital outlets are more committed to the business side than those from traditional media companies. One interviewee at a digital-only outlet noted that legacy media outlets have always prioritized their print editions over digital,

“but are not doing anything more innovative than what native media outlets have been doing for years.” He added, “That’s why most innovations have taken place on the periphery, away from the traditional industry.”

Some other interviewees supported this view. A co-director of tablet-only *Vis-à-Vis* pointed out that “the industrial context of the media and advertising agencies also prevents innovation.” These external factors engender a resistance to change that puts directors off and results in conservative attitudes regarding business models. One head of news production explained that “in Spain there is an inertia to do things as they’ve always been done and it is an inertia that is much greater than in other countries.” To overcome this resistance to change, media outlets need to lose their fear of failure and put an end to their obsession for short-term profits. “Mistakes help and inform; creation in these projects is a learning process and is applied to other products. It’s about failing early and failing cheaply,” noted the social media editor of *El Confidencial*.

Several of the interviewees agreed that the membership model of *eldiario.es* is one of the most important commercial innovations for digital-only media. This membership model works well because, according to the assistant editor of *eldiario.es*, “People pay not just to read the news or to break the pay-wall, but to be part of the media, to support journalism with

social values.” The main revenue source of *eldiario.es* is advertising, but thanks to the income it receives from its 15,000 members, *eldiario.es* gains a greater degree of editorial independence. According to one editor at a digital-only outlet,

involving readers, converting them into users, not just a mere passive audience, is a very attractive model. Users’ monthly subscriptions transform them into owners of the company in which they can enjoy a range of perks.

Another successful experience is that of digital-only outlet *El Español*, which raised 3.6 million euros through crowdfunding for its launch in just two months in 2015, breaking the world record for crowdfunding by a media outlet. Other outlets turn to members’ donations or use crowdfunding for specific projects. The one-to-one relationship with customers is seen as one of the keys to commercial innovation, as it bypasses the resistance to change shown by intermediaries.

Several media outlets have experimented with other innovative business strategies. One print outlet avoids advertising as an editorial principle and uses other means to generate revenue, such as book sales, merchandising, and selling tickets to music events organized by the media company. One interviewee at a digital-only outlet pointed out that “it is necessary to be clear about the positioning of the business,

the idea, or the niche where work is carried out and the audience you want to attract.” The CEO of the sports news outlet *El Desmarque* warned of the risk of “copying what others do” and he suggested seeking out hyperlocal segments or niche themes to add value.

Some advertising formats feature innovative resources, including gamification and interactivity. A co-director of *Vis-à-Vis* stated that they maintain a close relationship with advertisers in order to develop innovative formats. This system has allowed them to sell advertising on tablets with average rates close to print magazines. As part of its business model, the company provides content creation, design, and editing services to help third-party companies publish their own corporate tablet magazines.

A MODEL OF DIFFUSION OF MEDIA INNOVATIONS

The professional perspectives we have analyzed provide valuable contributions to the conceptualization of innovation in journalism, its implementation, and the main consequences for those media outlets trying to innovate. The results confirm some conclusions of previous studies (Bleyen et al., 2014; Dogruel, 2014; García-Avilés et al., 2016) that highlight the extent of innovations as the driver of change in the media industry and reveal the importance of implementing innovation processes in order to face the uncertain evo-

lution of a disruptive market (Küing, 2013; Spyridou et al., 2013; Weiss & Domingo, 2010).

Moreover, innovation regarded as a combination of discovering and seizing an opportunity (Anthony, 2012, p. 17), developing something new in the field of products, technologies, processes, or resources (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013), and implementing it through professional practices (Raetzsch, 2015) has been observed in the media outlets analyzed. Journalists have become the “drivers of change” in the media industry. In the Spanish newsrooms, their vision of the diffusion of innovation (Fagerberg, 2006) often turns journalists into early adopters who, through individual initiative, are disseminating innovations in the market and in society (Rogers, 1995, pp. 243–267).

According to our findings addressing RQ1 on how innovations are implemented, journalists highlight several factors that shape the reach of such innovations. These factors emerge from the internal processes of designing, communicating, implementing, and evaluating the various innovations in the newsrooms. Systematizing the different factors allows us to outline a model of diffusion of media innovations, which integrates the different areas, aims, types of players, obstacles, boosters, and results (Figure 1).

Regarding RQ3, and drawing from the examples of innovation in RQ2, four areas were detected in which journalistic innovation might take place: con-

tent production, distribution, the organization of the outlet, and commercialization. Each respective area has its own particular goal: the production of innovative content and formats, improving the distribution channels as well as communication with users, innovation in work processes and, finally, consolidating a valid business model.

With regard to the main obstacles detected in the process, the interviewees stressed the few resources companies allocate to innovation and the absence of leadership. They also mentioned the lack of motivation among staff due to adverse work conditions, management stagnation, and, in one case, the “fear of innovating” because it challenged the company’s traditional values. Moreover, the legacy of the industrial model causes a degree of stagnation among senior and middle management.

In parallel with the replies regarding obstacles, interviewees underlined the ability to increase the budget for implementing newsroom innovation and to provide solid leadership as boosters of innovation. Other factors that favor these processes include staff motivation, the implementation of a “trial and error” attitude in the development of projects, and fostering creativity among professionals. A set of specific outcomes that are obtained as a result of media innovation were identified, including an increase in audience, an improvement in production processes, brand reinforcement, users’ satisfaction with new products,

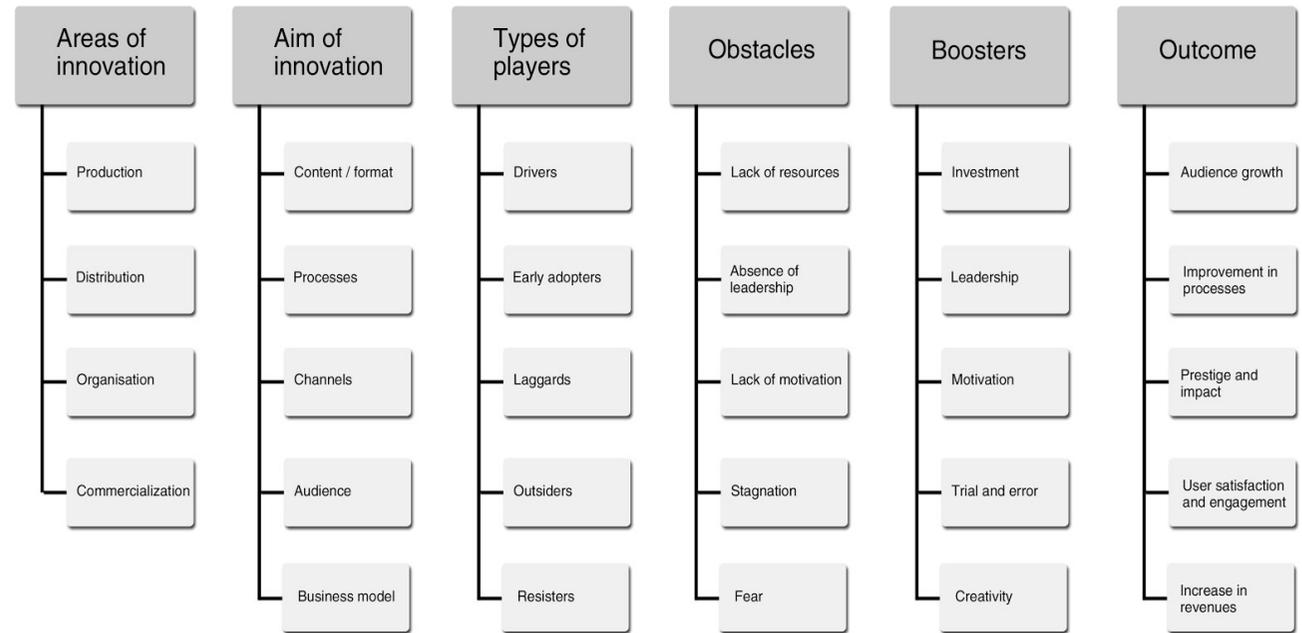


Figure 1. A model of the diffusion of innovations in media outlets.

and an increase in revenues. This underlines the fact that for any product or process to be truly innovative, it needs to be successful for the company and for society (Bruns, 2014), in any shape or form that can be translated into effective results. One of the main lessons professionals have learned is that audiences change at the same rate or even faster than technologies, and therefore should be the focus of innovation processes. As user needs and preferences evolve, me-

dia outlets have to adapt themselves and develop new content, distribution channels, and business models.

This model supports the findings of early studies on diffusions of innovations (Rogers, 1995). At the same time, our model takes into account other issues related to specific factors which might help advance or slow down innovative practices and processes within media companies. While Rogers’ theory focused on how innovations are incorporated both in the market

and in society at large, our model emphasizes internal diffusion, that is, how innovations are embraced and developed specifically by journalists within media organizations. Journalists and organizations on the periphery are often the first to innovate, and it is from this space that innovations diffuse to the rest of the news ecosystem (Anderson, 2013).

In our model, journalistic innovation is conceptualized as a process that includes structural and practical factors derived from journalists' inputs in different areas of news production. If innovations emerge solely through the reaction to the threats from the instability of the news market, the technological disruption, and the competitive commercial environment without a defined strategy, the change is slow and erratic. In contrast, when newsroom talent is incentivized and management takes the lead, innovations increase in number and quality. We found that digital-only outlets have a great willingness to experiment, such that innovations are quickly being incorporated.

When a company focuses too much on the product and on bringing in revenues, innovation usually slows down. The company's innovation energy may end up being spread over a wide variety of small projects that seek immediate profits. This excessive proliferation of projects often confuses the audience, weakens the brand, and increases organizational complexity in detriment to medium-term effectiveness.

To identify innovation opportunities, some media outlets focus on product leadership, organizational competence, or on relationships with users. The bottom line, however, is the same: if a news company realizes that its work consists of satisfying its users' needs and that users consume content, use tools, and subscribe to services they find useful and beneficial, then media outlets can find opportunities to innovate.

Incorporating new practices and experimenting with different ideas is also crucial in innovation projects. If media professionals experiment frequently, many new concepts will obviously end in failure. However, in the early stages these failures are welcome, as they allow teams to quickly eliminate those options that do not work and to focus on the most viable alternatives. The adage "fail early, fail often" is a principle that some media outlets have adopted in their innovation strategies with some success.

We have further discovered that the fundamental cause of innovation failure by the media we analyzed is that management lacks appropriate tools to help them widen markets, strengthen their brands, find new audience niches, select interdisciplinary teams, and develop a focused strategy. In the current market, in which the legacy media are witnessing their traditional business model crumble, and many digital-only media outlets fail to achieve an economically sustainable model, there is increasing urgency to explore innovative alternatives.

While our results cannot be generalized, they provide a valuable understanding of the diffusion of innovations in the Spanish media. Following this study, there is a need for further research with a broader and more representative sample that goes deeper into other contextual factors which also determine the failure or success of innovation projects. Longitudinal studies along a period of time are also encouraged to shed light about the complexity of the implementation of innovative media initiatives.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How do you define innovation in journalism? What are the main characteristics of a media outlet or initiative in order to be truly innovative?
2. What are the main areas where media innovations are implemented?
3. Could you mention specific examples of national or international media whom you regard as especially innovative? Why are they so?
4. What are the main obstacles that both journalists and managers face when they are trying to set new media initiatives, to develop and innovate in them?
5. What are the main incentives both for journalists and managers when they are trying to increase innovation in their newsrooms?
6. Do you think there is an entrepreneurship culture in Spain, which is not fully exploited yet, or rather, that there are fewer opportunities to become a media entrepreneur in Spain than in other countries?
7. What specific aspects of the media company you work for do you regard as the most innovative in technology, production, organization, distribution, other...? Why?
8. Could you please describe the organization and work flow in your newsroom? To what extent does it depart from the traditional practices?
9. What specific needs is your organization addressing? How change and organizational decisions are communicated in your company?
10. Could you please mention any innovative tools your company is using in any of these areas: content production & development, distribution, design, other?
11. How do you manage audience participation in your newsroom? Please, mention any example of successful and/or unsuccessful audience engagement.
12. What are the main business models you are using to become commercially sustainable? To what extent are they working in your particular case?
13. What is the major/latest innovation you have introduced in your media company?
14. What skills are you demanding to the news professionals you are now hiring?