

The emergence of digital platforms as financiers in Latin American media systems: a problem or a solution?

La irrupción de las plataformas digitales como financiadoras en los sistemas mediáticos latinoamericanos: ¿problema o solución?

A emergência das plataformas digitais como financiadoras nos sistemas de mídia latino-americanos: problema ou solução?

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We analyze the role of digital platforms as new international cooperation agencies for media development in Latin America, through a review of literature and documentation. We argue that the growing relevance of digital platforms as international donors can be interpreted as a response to the criticism received by the economic concentration and their control over public discussion, which allows them to project a positive image and continue to evade public regulation while consolidating their position of dominance and reinforcing the unequal power relationship with the media.

KEYWORDS: Digital platforms, media systems, international cooperation, media sustainability, Latin America.

Analizamos el papel de las plataformas digitales como nuevas agencias de cooperación internacional para el desarrollo mediático en América Latina, a través de la revisión de bibliografía y documentación. Argumentamos que la creciente relevancia de las plataformas digitales como donantes internacionales puede interpretarse como una respuesta a las críticas recibidas por la concentración económica y su control sobre la discusión pública, que les permite transmitir una imagen positiva y seguir eludiendo la regulación pública al tiempo que consolida su posición de dominio y refuerza la relación desigual de poder con los medios.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Plataformas digitales, sistemas mediáticos, cooperación internacional, sostenibilidad de medios, Latinoamérica.

Analizamos o papel das plataformas digitais como novas agências de cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento da mídia na América Latina por meio de uma revisão bibliográfica e documental. Argumentamos que a crescente relevância das plataformas digitais como doadoras internacionais pode ser interpretada como uma resposta às críticas à sua concentração econômica e ao seu controle sobre o debate público, o que lhes permite transmitir uma imagem positiva e continuar a escapar da regulamentação pública, ao mesmo tempo em que consolida sua posição dominante e reforça a relação desigual de poder com a mídia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Plataformas digitais, sistemas de mídia, cooperação internacional, sustentabilidade da mídia, América Latina.

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INTRODUCTION

In Latin American media systems, historically marked by high levels of concentration and capture, and more recently by convergence, the influence of social network platforms has grown significantly. Not only do they function as essential support for both the digital version of traditional media and digital native media, or as competitors that produce content and compete for advertising revenue, but also, and increasingly, as financiers. This occurs when international agencies, media, civil society organizations, and national states question the transnational economic concentration of communications exercised by these large technology companies, their role in the private moderation of public discourse, and in the crisis of media sustainability.

We analyze the role played by Google and Meta, as new international cooperation agencies, shaping the media system in Latin America, particularly in the context of digital media. What place do they occupy among the leading international funders of Latin America today? What kind of initiatives do they promote? What is the communication model implicit in these strategies? Under what socio-political and economic conditions do they do it? To do so, we explore how the crisis of viability and sustainability of the media, exacerbated by the transformation of the advertising market and the dominance of platforms, has created fertile ground for them to position themselves simultaneously as problem and solution, redefining the logic of international cooperation in the sector.

We argue that the growing relevance of large digital platforms as agents of international aid can be interpreted as a response to the criticism received by the economic concentration and their control over public discussion, which allows them to continue to evade public regulation and retain the unilateral and the arbitrary decision-making regarding whom to fund and whom to exclude reinforces the unequal power dynamics between donors and local actors.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Our normative-theoretical perspective conceives communication as a universal human right that, among its fundamental principles, includes

not only access but also diversity, participation, and equity (MacBride et al., 1980). Our explanatory-theoretical perspective holds that social practices are understood and explained in terms of the relative power of the agents that produce them and the conditions in which they are created (Costa & Mozejko, 2001).

The Latin American media landscape is marked by significant ownership concentration and widespread media capture. In the 21st century, infocommunication concentration in the region has evolved from a predominantly horizontal and vertical model to a conglomerate one, where large corporations simultaneously dominate multiple media activities (Becerra & Mastrini, 2017). This trend, driven by technological convergence that integrates diverse productive processes, has advanced despite regulations that sought to limit it, which evidences the ineffectiveness of many public policies to moderate these concentration rates (Becerra & Mastrini, 2017). Groups such as Telefónica, América Móvil, Globo, Televisa, and Clarín have been key players in this consolidation of the sector.

Historically, Latin America is home to some of the largest media conglomerates in the world, which initially emerged as family-owned companies and were significantly strengthened by the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. The existence of these conglomerates is intrinsically linked to local politics, as both authoritarian and democratic governments have established close relationships with media owners, often via selective distribution of government advertising funds (Márquez-Ramírez & Guerrero, 2017). This dynamic has shaped a media system deprived of the autonomy required to fulfill its primary function of informing citizens. This situation has greatly benefited media conglomerates, consolidating clientelist relationships rooted since the dictatorships, despite the discourses of democratization (Márquez-Ramírez & Guerrero, 2017).

In recent years, a new communicational ecosystem emerged, made possible by an unprecedented technological leap, accompanied by economic, social, political, and cultural transformations (Becerra, 2021). In this context, digital platforms have become new global intermediaries in content circulation. Google and Meta, along with Apple, Amazon, and Microsoft, are the largest technology companies. Since 2020, they

have been the most valuable corporations in the world. Due to their central role on the Internet, they play a key part in the global communicative and cultural system and have driven unprecedented social change (Miguel de Bustos & Casado del Río, 2016). This process has significantly altered the relationships, interests, and regulations that previously articulated the media (Becerra, 2021).

The digitization of communications, the popularization of the Internet, and the digital platforms of social networks offered the media and journalists the opportunity to expand their audiences, while significantly transforming the distribution of news (Pérez Bertrán & Martínez Elebi, 2022). However, this potential is increasingly conditioned by the intermediation of platforms, their business models, content moderation policies, and how journalists and media adapt to these rules (Pérez Bertrán & Martínez Elebi, 2022). Platforms' control over technology and information distribution channels has exacerbated market failure by allowing them to quickly and cheaply replicate functions historically exclusive to traditional media and generated a lasting impact on the entire journalistic value chain, contributing to the sector's current sustainability crisis (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022).

We understand international cooperation from a critical perspective that recognizes that it can only exist in a world where historical patterns of economic exploitation allow some regions or countries to appear charitable towards others, which enables unequal relations of power and dependency between donors and implementers (Eikenberry & Mooney, 2006, as cited in Segura, 2017, 2018). Still, weaker actors can negotiate, re-signify, and use foreign assistance for different purposes (Segura, 2017, 2018).

The methodological strategy includes the survey and analysis of literature on the subject and of publicly available documentation and information about the categories that emerge from the theoretical approach: the identification and characterization of Google and Meta as agents of international cooperation to digital media in Latin America, their programs, the beneficiary media, the intermediary agencies involved, and the construction of the socioeconomic and political conditions that shape these practices. The construction of these socioeconomic and political conditions produces an analysis located in Latin

America and contemporary, in comparison with historical processes analyzed in previous texts of our authorship on international cooperation in the communicational field in the region (Segura, 2017, 2018) and on the sustainability strategies of self-managed analog media (Bilbao & De Toni, 2020; Segura et al., 2021); in this case, on the incidence of large digital platforms of social networks in media systems.

The selection of the programs to be analyzed focused on two criteria: 1) those aimed at digital native journalistic media due to their direct link with and dependence on digital platforms, even though the funding they allocate to the media system also includes other types of media; and 2) those managed by the SembraMedia organization. This methodological decision is based on two main reasons. Firstly, SembraMedia stands out among the intermediary organizations surveyed for having a significant number of financing programs, and for having among its main lines of action the articulation with cooperating agencies, especially Google, through the Google News Initiative (GNI), and Meta, for their implementation. Secondly, it has established itself as a key reference in the field of digital native journalism in Latin America, which is the focus of this work.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE REGION

International cooperation in the field of communication in Latin America underwent two stages differentiated by the geopolitical interests that guided it, the conditions in which they occurred, the types of cooperation agencies involved, the communication models they promoted, and the experiences they financed in the region: during the Cold War and after it (Segura, 2017, 2018).

From the 1940s until the mid-1990s, two opposing communication models were identified: one aligned to communication for development and another, a collaborative and critical model, which challenged diffusionist theories. The latter emerged from a radical critique of modernization theories, which broke away from a top-down approach to the transmission of development ideals (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1997). Despite the preeminence of the former model, paradoxically, international cooperation was crucial for the development of the leading institutions

of the regional field of communication, which continue to be a reference to this day; promote intellectuals, activists and politicians; and boost organizations that had an impact on the communication policy reforms that occurred in some countries (Segura, 2017, 2018).

During the Cold War, the central cooperation agencies were Christian churches, German and Dutch public media, political foundations, governments, and intergovernmental organizations. These agencies funded local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and groups that focused on community communication and education in communication and development, as well as institutions specialized in popular communication, research, and education (Segura, 2017, 2018). Under these conditions, international cooperation was essential for the birth and subsistence of many community radios in the region, providing vital support that often, however, exposed them to the risk of excessive dependence on external funds (Dagron, 2005).

In the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War, most agencies redirected their funding to other issues and regions of the world. In turn, the technological development of computer networks and the digitization of information allowed the development of a modernizing and neo-diffusionist vision of technology (Segura, 2017, 2018).

Some of the most important changes were the reduction in funding for media and communication in Latin America by the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and agencies linked to European governments, public media and political foundations, unlike the support from the United States that remained solid through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). There was also an increase in private philanthropic organizations such as Open Society Foundation (George Soros), Ford Foundation (Edsel and Henry Ford), and Avina Foundation (Stephan Schmidheiny) linked to large corporations and/or billionaire owners (Segura, 2017, 2018).

At this stage, the academic networks and institutes that were established in the previous stage were left without international support. In contrast, community media and networks had to weather the reduction of foreign funding. The Latin American Association of Radio Education (ALER) continued to be a significant institution in the region, joined

in the 1990s by the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters-Latin America and the Caribbean (AMARC-ALC). These organizations, together with academic and social leaders formed in the previous stage, played a key role in the coalitions that promoted communication policy reforms in the 2000s in the region. Finally, this stage is also characterized by the emergence of pro-digital rights organizations and new digital media that aim for quality and independence, contributing to the growth of investigative journalism in Latin America (Segura, 2017, 2018). Many of these new digital media, often operating as non-profit organizations, have benefited from external support (Palau, 2017).

THE NEW DONORS

Today, philanthropic organizations, along with intergovernmental bodies, governmental international aid agencies, and foundations linked to political parties in core countries continue to be major players in global media development aid. However, the emergence of new players stands out: large transnational corporations of digital social media platforms.

Indeed, a recent study, analyzing the funds received by 40 digital media outlets in 16 Latin American countries between 2016 and 2022, among the 70 different sources of income, identifies some of the so-called “tech giants”, Google and Meta (Skoknic, 2024), along with donors already known in previous stages: philanthropic foundations (Open Society Foundation, Ford Foundation, Luminate, The Reva and David Logan Foundation), intergovernmental agencies (Unesco, United Nations Development Programme), entities linked to governments or political parties (USAID, NED, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung).

Another study, which analyzes the funds received by 100 digital media in 12 Latin American countries between 2019 and 2020, indicates that Google ranks second among the main contributors to these media (mentioned by 41 % of the media), after private foundations and philanthropic organizations. It also indicates that contributions made by private foundations, charitable investors, platforms, and foreign government organizations accounted for 29% of these media’s revenues in 2019, and 37% in 2020. In 2016, these grants were not among the

main revenues of the media as they were received by only 16 % of them (SembraMedia, 2021).

These figures demonstrate that, in recent years, digital platforms have not only inaugurated a new line of action as international funders of digital media in Latin America, but have also rapidly become one of their main contributors.

These platforms are integrated into international cooperation on digital media through the Google News Initiative (GNI) and Meta Journalism Project (MJP). Google's relationship with news publishers in Europe, particularly in France and Germany, became strained in 2010 when they demanded compensation for the use of their online content. In 2013, following political pressure from the French government to advance tax regulation, Google began experimenting with media funding programs, initially in France and then extended to the entire European Union (EU). In 2015, it consolidated these efforts through the Digital News Initiative, and in 2018, it launched GNI globally (Fanta & Dachwitz, 2020).

Currently, Google, in its section "How Google supports journalism and the news industry", bills itself as one of the world's leading sponsors of journalism (Google, n.d.). According to a company report, the GNI initiative, since its inception and until November 2020, had an investment of 26 million dollars across the continent and reached 1 190 media partners (Marino & Espada, 2023).

For its part, Meta's involvement with journalism began in 2014, when it was still known as Facebook, with the launch of Trending Topics and Paper, the first tools it created for the news industry. In 2015, Instant Articles was introduced as a tool for publishing content in a native format, meaning content created and shared specifically for the platform itself.

In 2016, following several problems –including the removal of users' posts, accusations of news suppression related to its Trending Topics tool, and controversies surrounding the U.S. presidential election– Facebook sought to strengthen its ties with journalism as a strategic partner to overcome a growing credibility crisis. In 2017, it launched the Facebook Journalism Project, now known as MJP (Jurno & D'Andréa, 2020).

THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES

A significant portion of the platforms' funding is allocated in collaboration with regional and national institutions, as well as organizations dedicated to the promotion of journalism. These organizations are characterized as non-profit organizations, associations of professional journalists, or journalism business owners. They are recognized in the field of journalism for their efforts to promote the activity and freedom of expression from a classical liberal perspective of this right, and a vision of journalism as the fourth power (Segura, 2020).

Among the regional ones, SembraMedia, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), the Inter-American Press Association (SIP), or the Gabo Foundation stand out; there are also national ones such as the Association of Journalistic Entities of Argentina (ADEPA) and the Editorial Board of Colombia, and the Association of Digital Journalism of Brazil (AJOR), which stand out as intermediary agencies.

These organizations play a key role in the dissemination of calls for proposals and, in many cases, are responsible for training and mentoring digital media. They are distinctive in that they not only function as intermediary organizations between funders and digital media, but also act simultaneously as beneficiaries of international support from the platforms.

They are "key stakeholders in the news ecosystem who, through partnerships, offer platforms privileged access to media networks as well as legitimacy to their funding activities" (Papaevangelou, 2024, p. 242). Their intermediary role gives them access to privileged information about the sector, which provides them with a strategic position. In addition, some of these organizations conduct research on digital media (Gabo Foundation, 2022, 2024) and their sustainability (SembraMedia, 2017, 2021).

BENEFICIARIES AND PROGRAMS

Funding from Meta and Google, through their MPJ and GNI initiatives, is aimed primarily at digital news media and, in some cases, potential new media, with a focus on local or hyperlocal communities or audiences;

although some calls for proposals also include media outlets operating at the national level.

The terms used to describe the target media vary between expressions such as “public interest journalism”, “local media”, “journalistic entrepreneurs”, “social entrepreneurs”, or “independent media”. Despite this diversity, they all share a common approach, which is to analyze digital media from the perspective of so-called “entrepreneurial journalism”. This concept refers to initiatives led by journalists for the creation of new media driven by themselves. It is characterized by the primacy of the digital sphere to the detriment of the analogical structure (Saucedo Espinoza & Sánchez Garza, 2021), by a constant renewal of the old business models, and by the fusion of the journalist’s professional profile with administrative and business management knowledge (Casero-Ripollés, 2016).

In a context of universalization and increasing imposition of liberal and mercantile logic, the entrepreneur responds through the reflexive, flexible and functionally adequate construction of rational actions whose set leads to a unique and differentiated biography, capable of facing the challenges of risk and uncertainty of the environment ... generic presupposition that entails the central idea of modern man that personal effort, freedom of the individual and equal opportunities contribute to the development of the human condition. Being entrepreneurial is a way of life, a cultural model, a way of being, a way of relating to the world, both a derivative of this new flexible system and an active use of its liberating possibilities (Pfeilstetter, 2011, para. 9).

This model of entrepreneurial journalism, while coinciding in self-management, differs from the democratic and critical model that characterized community, alternative, and popular media in the region, which, in the analogical stage, were the option between public-state and private-commercial media (Segura, 2018). Meanwhile, although popular media tend to be local, the latter may include other experiences such as private for-profit projects (Navarro Nicoletti, 2021).

Meta and Google’s proposals include training, commonly called “coaching”, that is delivered by intermediary organizations, and grants to digital media aimed at project development. Generally, these calls for

proposals are structured in two stages, to which the media must apply to be selected. The first stage focuses on training, while the second stage includes mentoring and the delivery of the grant for the media to develop their projects.

This funding and training are offered as a way to promote the economic sustainability of the media. To achieve this, the platforms encourage the development of strategies to diversify and strengthen business models, incorporate innovative technologies in news production, and deepen knowledge about their audiences.

It is essential to add that GNI, together with SembraMedia, recently launched the GNI Startups Lab incubator. This program aims to train entrepreneurs to support the launch of new digital media. Between 2023 and 2024, several editions of the program have been developed or are currently in process, such as GNI Startups Lab Hispanoamérica, GNI Startups Lab Chile, GNI Startups Lab Peru & Uruguay, and GNI Startups Lab Argentina, the latter in conjunction with FOPEA.

MEDIA BENEFICIARIES

It is challenging to ascertain the total number of digital media projects that have benefited from Google and Meta funding, as none of the platforms provide comprehensive and detailed information on the selected media from the inception of their programs to the present day. The availability of data varies according to each call for proposals, and, in general, intermediary agencies usually show greater transparency regarding the beneficiaries and the selection processes.

The media beneficiaries are very diverse as they include different types of ownership, such as private commercial media and non-profit organizations. They also vary in the kind of journalism they do: they include investigative, fact-checking, or opinion journalism; the topics they cover; their countries of origin; their reach and potential audiences, from local communities to national or international audiences.

However, it is essential to note that the funding strategies driven by the platforms are not limited to digital native media. In parallel, Google and Meta have developed other initiatives to connect with the journalistic sector, which include various players in the media ecosys-

tem, among them, the large traditional media. An outstanding example is Google News Showcase, a global program aimed at remunerating media outlets for the use of their content. As of June 2023, this initiative involved more than 2 300 publications in 22 countries, including large press conglomerates that, through private agreements, receive financial compensation for sharing articles of their authorship.

For the analysis of the beneficiaries, we have selected two calls for proposals, both promoted by Sembramedia: GNI Startups Lab Hispanoamérica 2021, with the support of Google, and Amuna Digital 2023, backed by Meta.

The first initiative, GNI Startups Lab Hispanoamérica, is presented as a digital media “accelerator”. In its 2021 edition, 350 media from 18 countries applied, of which only ten were selected. These media received training focused on the development and improvement of their business models, in addition to financial support ranging between USD 10 000 and USD 30 000 (Sembramedia and GNI, n.d.). The ten media selected were: *La Región* (Bolivia), *Runrun.es* (Bolivia), *Shots de Ciencia* (Colombia), *Malvestida* (Mexico), *Quorum.gt* (Guatemala), *Revista Elementos* (El Salvador), *El Cuarto Mosquetero* (Colombia), *Revista Cítrica* (Argentina), *Qué Digital* (Argentina) and *Red es Poder* (Mexico).

Amuna Digital is an education and acceleration initiative for digital media in Latin America. Its first edition, in 2022, was only focused on Argentina. In its 2023 edition, in the first stage, 100 digital media from 16 countries were selected to participate in a three-month training program. In the second stage, ten media were chosen to develop an action plan for six months, accompanied by personalized consulting and financial support of between USD 10 000 and USD 25 000 (Sembramedia, n.d.). The ten selected media are: *Avispa Midia* (Mexico), *Ciencia del Sur* (Paraguay), *Conexión Migrante* (Mexico), *Feminacida* (Argentina), *Escenario Tlaxcala* (Mexico), *La vida de Nos* (Venezuela), *Muy Waso* (Bolivia), *No-Ficción* (Guatemala), *Verificado* (Mexico) and *Wambra* (Ecuador).

The media selected in these two calls are digital natives, founded between 2010 and 2021. They stand out for addressing specific topics such as education and the dissemination of science (*Shots de Ciencia*

and *Ciencia del Sur*), gender (*Muy Waso*, *Malvestida* and *Feminacida*), as well as migration, human rights, and local and regional politics. Most have a local focus, and some are even hyperlocal, such as *Qué Digital* or *Escenario Tlaxcala*. All of them, for various reasons, have resorted to these calls for proposals to access training or subsidies.

It should be noted that, even before their sponsors became sponsors, the media already had a profoundly unequal relationship with them, since their very existence depends on the network infrastructure of the platforms. In any case, the beneficiary media are diverse in scope, size, and the purposes they pursue, and, therefore, so are their negotiation processes with the platforms and intermediary agencies.

CRITICISM AND REGULATION

The irruption of Big Tech as funders of digital journalistic media occurs when there is growing concern on the sustainability of media in the world (Unesco, 2021, 2022) due to the increasing centrality of digital platforms in the circulation of content (Becerra, 2020) and the dominant position in the market (Khan et al., 2023).

The international documents cited warn that this dominant position has undermined traditional press financing models, mainly by appropriating a substantial portion of advertising investment. A telling example of this power is the report produced in 2020 by the UK Competition and Market Authority (CMA). Although focused on the British case, its findings are illustrative for Western countries as a whole (Becerra, 2020). The report details that Google concentrates more than 90% of search traffic and, consequently, captures a similar proportion of the advertising revenue associated with that segment, imposing prices significantly higher than those of its competitors. In turn, Facebook –including Instagram– generated more than half of the advertising revenues in social networks, far surpassing its main competitor, YouTube (Becerra, 2020).

In this framework, it is relevant to recover the contributions of both previous studies and multilateral organizations that have addressed the concentration of ownership in the means of production and circulation of information and communication, and have documented its main consequences (Becerra, 2015; Kaye et al., 2018; Mendel et al.,

2017). Among them, the following stand out: the reduction of information sources, which restricts the plurality of broadcasters; the tendency towards editorial unification, which limits public debate; and the homogenization of genres and formats, which impoverishes the diversity of content. Likewise, there is a thematic and stylistic concentration, as well as the exclusive appropriation of events of general interest, which reinforces the geographic centralization of news production. These processes are also associated with job insecurity in the sector and the deterioration of journalistic quality. Taken together, such dynamics restrict the circulation of diverse ideas in the public sphere, which is why they have been the subject of attention in multiple public policies and regulatory frameworks at the international level (Becerra & Mastrini, 2017).

Various media organizations, journalists and communicators in Latin America have also expressed their concern for the sustainability of the media and the need to promote a balanced digital ecosystem in which abusive practices in the digital advertising market are avoided (Inter American Press Association [SIP] et al., 2021); as well as transparency and accountability on the part of the platforms in terms of private content moderation policies (Segura & Bizberge, 2020).

In this context, 18 media organizations and journalists in the Americas have recognized the value of Google and Meta's initiatives to support journalism. However, they have also stressed that these programs do not represent a comprehensive or equitable solution to address market distortions. They point out that any financial compensation to the media should arise from transparent agreements between platforms and publishers, rather than from unilateral decisions imposed by technology corporations (IAPA et al., 2021).

The crisis of sustainability that journalism is going through at a global level takes on particular urgency in Latin America, a region historically crossed by high levels of media concentration (Becerra & Mastrini, 2017) and by persistent processes of media capture by political and economic actors (Márquez-Ramírez & Guerrero, 2017), which gives specific characteristics to the irruption of Google and Meta as key players in the financing of journalism, despite being a trend of international scope. These platforms occupy an ambivalent place, as they are at the same time part of the problem and part of the solution.

On the one hand, they have been blamed for the deterioration of traditional journalistic financing models by appropriating a large part of advertising revenues and redistributing content without adequate compensation; on the other hand, they have promoted programs aimed at training and financing media to promote innovation and diversification of their business models, positioning themselves as financing agents of a system whose fragility, to a large extent, they have contributed to generate. In turn, these initiatives are often aimed, in many cases, at strengthening local and independent media, which, inserted in highly concentrated systems, were historically marked by structural difficulties in achieving sustainability.

These difficulties affect both non-profit media, which have historically started from a disadvantaged position in economic and legal terms compared to commercial or public media (Linares et al., 2017), and local for-profit media, which face adverse conditions linked to low advertising investment, limited technological infrastructure, and the geographic concentration of audiences and advertisers. In addition, the weakness of regulatory frameworks, the lack of policies to promote media plurality, and the growing dependence on global digital platforms for content distribution have deepened these asymmetries.

Moreover, the platforms have launched these financing programs at a time when many central countries are considering that a key solution to the sustainability crisis of journalism is to require platforms to pay for the use of the content produced by the media. Indeed, in some countries in Europe, Oceania, and North America, regulations have been implemented to balance the relationship between digital platforms and media, based on rules on intellectual property rights and antitrust. It is important to note that these initiatives were mainly driven by the large press publishers in each country, with little or no participation of local or independent media.

A significant precedent was the update of the European Commission's Copyright Law, which includes provisions that oblige platforms to pay for the use of journalistic content or to establish licensing agreements with publishers. This reform was pushed, among others, by the publisher Axel Springer and the president of the German Association of Newspaper Publishers, Mathias Döpfner (Dillenberger, 2019).

In Spain, as a precedent, an Intellectual Property Law was enacted in 2014 that obliged digital platforms to pay for the use of journalistic content and to negotiate collectively, through a management entity, with the media (Observatorio Latinoamericano de Regulación, Medios y Convergencia [Observacom], 2021a). France also stands out with an emblematic case: in 2020, the Competition Authority ordered Google to pay news producers for the use of their content in Google News and Google Search. This action was taken after determining that Google held a dominant position in the digital advertising market, giving it a disproportionate advantage over content producers (Espada & Marino, 2021). The action was triggered by a lawsuit filed by publishers' guilds and Agence France-Presse (AFP). Finally, Google reached an agreement with AFP, committing to pay for the use of its content for five years (Observacom, 2021b).

One of the pioneering regulations worldwide was implemented in Australia in 2021 with the approval of the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code. This regulation obliges digital platforms, such as Google and Facebook, to compensate the media financially for the use of their online content. The measure came after a report by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), which concluded that these platforms distort the functioning of the advertising system, undermining local content producers (Marino & Espada, 2023). Although the regulation succeeded in getting agreements signed with some media, subsequent analysis indicates that these measures did not significantly reduce the power of platforms in the digital advertising market. Instead, platforms began to develop media support programs as a parallel strategy to regulation (Marino, 2024).

On the other hand, in Canada, the Online News Act (C-18), inspired by the Australian model, was passed in 2023. This law obliges large platforms to pay the media for the reproduction of their online content, seeking to compensate for the economic imbalance generated by the use of journalistic material. Likewise, in California, United States, the California Journalism Preservation Act was introduced in 2024 for parliamentary discussion. The proposed regulation requires platforms to pay the media a “news use” fee when selling advertising along

with news content, while requiring the media to invest 70% of those funds in preserving journalism jobs in the state (Cauich, 2024).

The reaction of the technological giants to the processes of public and legislative discussion and the approval of regulations was extortive. In European countries, Australia, and Canada, Google and Meta threatened to block access to news from the countries involved or, in some cases, actually did so (ADEPA, 2023). In California, in addition to threatening to remove news content, Google anticipated the approval of the regulation. It reached an agreement with the State of California, committing to the creation of a USD 250 million fund to support local journalism over five years, in an attempt to curb regulatory pressure (Marino, 2024).

In contrast, in Latin America, most countries began to regulate digital services from 2018 onwards from their general tax frameworks (Espada & Marino, 2021). Still, no regulations are being proposed to regulate digital platforms and ensure the sustainability of journalism. No legislative projects have been introduced, nor are there any significant or lively sectoral debates on this issue. In general, in Latin America, the discussion on State regulation of platforms in various matters remains timid (Becerra & Waisbord, 2024).

An outstanding and recent case is the draft Law 2630 on Internet Freedom, Accountability and Transparency, known as the *Fake News* Law, in Brazil, which was presented in 2020. Although it had several modifications, it aimed to expand the rights of Internet users and regulate content moderation processes in large digital platforms.

In 2022, a provision was included that required platforms to remunerate media outlets for their content. However, this proposal generated criticism from various organizations that argued that, although relevant, this issue should be addressed in a separate project and through a multisectoral debate (Coalizão Direitos na Rede, 2022; Observacom, 2024). Finally, the project was withdrawn from parliamentary debate in May 2024, due to a lack of sufficient support for its approval.

Although Google and Meta as financiers of journalism are an international trend, in Latin America, it acquires particular dimensions as it is one of the regions in the world with the most concentrated media system and a long history of media capture. It is interesting to note that

although the platforms became journalism financiers at a time of sustainability crisis, in which they appear as both problem and solution, the programs mentioned in this article have local media as beneficiaries, for which the development of sustainable models has been a historical challenge.

CONCLUSIONS

In the context of the global economic crisis affecting journalism and media, Meta and Google's funding programs are presented as a response to media sustainability issues, offering a range of proposals, grants, and training opportunities through intermediary journalistic organizations. These initiatives arise in a particular context in which civil society, media organizations, and States have subjected them to scrutiny due to the enormous concentration of power they wield both economically and in terms of moderating public discourse. The analysis of this phenomenon is made more complex by situating it in the Latin American media system, where the contemporary crisis of journalism overlaps with a historically concentrated media system characterized by the capture of the media by political and economic interests, as well as by the dynamics of the advertising industry that have unequally affected the different types of media.

Therefore, one possible interpretation of this strategy is that the platforms are getting ahead of the discussions on the sustainability of journalism in the region, before they are held accountable. The alliance with key organizations linked to the promotion of journalism can be interpreted as an effort to contain or delay a broader debate, such as those that have taken place in central countries.

The emphasis on local media and the promotion of new media creation is a strategy that reinforces the positive image of the platforms as promoters of journalism and the production of local information. This strategy also allows platforms to continue to evade public regulation and retain the unilateral and arbitrary decision of who to fund and who not to fund, reinforcing the unequal power relationship between donors and local agents.

In turn, these media often face severe limitations in developing sustainable business models, which, in the long run, makes them highly dependent on these or similar funding programs. This dependence perpetuates their local character and, under these conditions, limits their ability to influence public policies or broader discussions on the regulation of platforms.

Meanwhile, intermediary agencies play a strategic role in this scheme: they not only act as beneficiaries of the calls for proposals but also legitimize these initiatives and contribute to the implementation of the programs, consolidating the platforms' position.

Thus, the strategy of digital social media platforms to strengthen entrepreneurial journalism, allying with institutions promoting journalism and focusing on local digital media, seems to serve both to enhance the positive image of the platforms, and to ensure an environment that is not able to significantly challenge the dominant power of the platforms in the communication system, nor to question the business model that has positioned them as central, but also problematic, actors for the sustainability of journalism.

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PROFILES

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