

Innovation and Sustainability: A Relationship Examined Among Latin American Entrepreneurial News Organizations

Innovación y sostenibilidad: una relación examinada en organizaciones periodísticas emprendedoras de América Latina

Inovação e Sustentabilidade: explorando esta relação no jornalismo empreendedor latino-americano

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how entrepreneurial news organizations in Latin America perceive innovation and sustainability in relation to the operations of their organizations. Based on online focus groups conducted in June-July 2015 with 16 entrepreneurial news organizations in Latin America, this study identifies that the relationship between innovation and sustainability is complex but fundamental to their operation. Participants identified innovation as both a product and workflow process in the news organization. The implications of these findings are discussed within the context of the academy and journalism profession.

Keywords: sustainability; Latin American journalism; entrepreneurial journalism; online focus group.

RESUMEN

Este estudio investiga cómo las organizaciones emprendedoras de noticias perciben las innovaciones y la sustentabilidad respecto de las operaciones de sus organizaciones. El estudio se basa en una serie de grupos focales en línea, realizados entre junio y julio de 2015, en los que participaron 16 organizaciones emprendedoras de Latinoamérica. Se identificó que la relación entre innovación y sustentabilidad es compleja, pero fundamental: para los participantes, la innovación es tanto un producto originado por estas organizaciones como un flujo de trabajo periodístico en sí mismo. Las implicancias de estos hallazgos se discuten en el contexto de la educación periodística y de la profesión.

Palabras clave: sustentabilidad; periodismo en América Latina; periodismo emprendedor; grupos focales en línea.

RESUMO

Este estudo investiga a percepção de inovações e sustentabilidade nas atividades do jornalismo empreendedor da América Latina. O estudo é fundamentado em uma série de grupos focais que ocorreram entre junho e julho de 2015 com a participação de 16 organizações empreendedoras da América Latina. Este estudo identifica que a relação entre inovação e sustentabilidade é complexa, mas fundamental. Os participantes disseram que a inovação é tanto produto oriundo destas organizações como do processo do trabalho jornalístico em si. As implicações destes resultados são discutidas no contexto da educação jornalística e da profissão.

Palavras-chave: sustentabilidade; jornalismo na América Latina; jornalismo empreendedor; grupo focal online.

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INTRODUCTION

The number of entrepreneurial news organizations has increased worldwide (Robinson, Grennan, & Schiffrin, 2015), especially in Latin America, where “digital media entrepreneurs are serving an increasingly important role” (SembraMedia, 2017, p. 6). A recent global study of 34 media startups found that there is no one universal kind of startup but most are in the business because, more than anything, they want to produce quality journalism (Robinson, Grennan, & Schiffrin, 2015). Most of these startups are small, run by few full-time staff members and operating with a diverse funding model of donations, grants, and other business initiatives (Robinson, Grennan, & Schiffrin, 2015).

In Latin America specifically, fueled by the opportunity brought by lower publishing platform costs associated with digital avenues, together with professional necessity (related to media economics and a drive of independent voices), entrepreneurial news ventures have produced some of the most significant innovations (SembraMedia, 2017). A recent report of 100 news startups in Latin America noted that many of them are becoming “generators of change,” helping to defend human rights, expose corruption, and fighting abuses of power in the region (SembraMedia, 2017, p. 6).

Digital-native media organizations like Animal Político (Mexico), Ojo Público (Peru), Plaza Pública (Guatemala), and La Silla Vacía (Colombia) are setting the path for new forms of storytelling and data journalism projects in Latin America. The region is experiencing a boom in entrepreneurial news organizations. In fact, 73% of digital-native news organizations in Latin America were founded recently, between 2010-2014 (Meléndez Yúdice, 2015).

In Latin America, these entrepreneurial news organizations face some unique challenges but also provide some astonishing possibilities of creative and significant news dissemination, a true revolution of journalism in the region.

This study explores how entrepreneurial news organizations in Latin America are innovating in content production, message dissemination and business models. Through a series of online focus groups conducted with 19 journalists from entrepreneurial news organizations from eight countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela), this study used a phenomenological strategy to discover how these organizations are striving to achieve sustainability while innovating at the same time. Based on a thematic analysis of the focus group

transcripts, this study shows how these journalists perceive innovation and sustainability in the context of their operation.

This work is significant as it helps advance journalism innovation scholarship and demonstrate how entrepreneurial journalism is evolving in this region with this particular group of news startups. Through this lens, it may be possible to see how these forms of entrepreneurial journalism may shape other forms of journalism in different parts of the world.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Innovation is often intertwined with the concept of entrepreneurship. However, it is important to define both concepts. First, let us contextualize entrepreneurship and its role in the media industry.

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) argued that the term entrepreneurship needs to be understood in terms of opportunities, and not just who an entrepreneur is and what that individual does. Entrepreneurship, which is “concerned with the discovery and exploitation of profitable opportunities” (p. 217), first requires entrepreneurial opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Such opportunities include the creation of something new, exploitation of inefficiencies, and changes in the costs and benefits of using resources in different ways (Drucker, 1985). Not all opportunities are entrepreneurial, though, which is where innovation comes into play. What is required is the “discovery of new means-ends relationships” (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Ultimately, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) proffer a framework for understanding entrepreneurship that involves the “sources of opportunities”, the “processes of discover, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities”, and the individuals who do the discovering, evaluating and exploiting (p. 218).

Hang and van Weezel (2007) identify entrepreneurship as a reciprocal relationship. Their meta-analysis found that while the earliest study on media and entrepreneurship dates back to 1971, most research is from the 2000s. Innovation is one of the most commonly researched aspects of media and entrepreneurship, but most of those studies are specific to the audiovisual industry, like radio, TV, and film, or to media firms in general (Hang & van Weezel, 2007). Most studies Hang and van Weezel identified relied on secondary sources or case studies, highlighting the uniqueness of this study’s use of focus groups.

For the purposes of this study, entrepreneurship thus can be contextualized as the individual who brings the ideas and pursues the opportunities that a news organization needs to make innovation possible.

THE DIFFERENT LENSES OF INNOVATION: INDIVIDUAL, PROCESS AND OUTPUT

When discussing innovation, it is important to note that there are multiple lenses by which to contextualize it. According to renowned Diffusion of Innovations scholar Everett Rogers, an innovation can be defined as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (1995, p. 11). Within this context, innovation and invention must be distinguished (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013). Inventions tend to be new combinations of already existing ideas or assets (Shern, Paré, Ross, & Dick, 2013), while innovation is more about “introducing something new into the socioeconomic system” (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013, p. 14). In other words, taking something that exists and applying it to a new context is innovative.

Along this line of thought, Kline and Rosenberg (1986) view innovation as a process, the substitution of another product, the reorganization of a process for efficiency or cost reduction purposes, and/or improvement on a method or instrument (p. 279). Francis and Bessant (2005) referred to the 4Ps of innovation: product, process, position (branding) and paradigmatic innovation (values and business models). From this standpoint, one can also see that innovation can be considered radical or incremental (Schumpeter, 1943; García-Avilés, Carvajal-Prieto, De Lara-González, & Arias-Robles, 2016) or sustaining or disruptive (Christensen, 1997). All of these perspectives highlight that innovation is a concept that has multiple perspectives and applications that range from the product to process.

In the context of the journalism industry, innovation has unique application within the context of existing innovation scholarship.

One approach is looking at innovation holistically. Westlund and Lewis (2012) explore this via the lens of a theoretical construct they posit as the AMI Approach (Agents of Media Innovations). In this context, innovation is derived from multiple sources: the actors (the journalists or staff), the actants (the technology, platforms used), the audience (the publics they serve) and the activities (the news production and workflow processes used to create the news).

Through this lens, the innovation is pocketed within each area and each area carries its own power or agency and, together, they provide media innovation that encapsulates the overall media organization.

García-Avilés et al. (2016) examined innovation within Spanish media to explicate where and how innovation occurred, and what kinds of changes it brought about, in order to create an Index of Media Innovation. Most innovations were seen in the areas of product/service and production/distribution, and involved interacting with audience members. “Radical” innovations occurred mostly within online-only sites—no legacy sites appeared on the index. Still, in general, most innovative initiatives were “incremental,” or smaller advances. The number of technology-related innovations outweighed the amount of non-technological advances, leading García-Avilés et al. (2016) to conclude that “while innovation is not necessarily associated with technology, it is an important driver of change” (p. 38).

On a micro level, one can break innovation down further. According to Steensen (2009), individuals are what drive newsrooms to engage in innovation. The individual comes with an innovative idea and brings that into the newsroom culture. Gynnild (2014) also views innovation at the individual level in which it is the mindset of the individual that determines what changes occur and what ideas lead to innovation in the newsroom: “Inventions within a variety of newsroom structures support the general truth that innovation and change usually start with the ideas of individual creators” (Gynnild, 2014, p. 720).

The individual perspective might also connect to the individual interacting with the innovation. In her study of public radio organizations, Evans (2018) identified that an innovation was contextualized by the individuals working together in the organization while interacting with the development of the innovation. Another approach that connects the individual to the innovation is the concept of an Innovative Learning Culture (ILC), as posited by Porcu (2017). According to this concept, innovation stems from the learning culture that is created in the news organization. Nurturing a learning culture in an organization allows the individual to learn, explore, and experiment, which ultimately is what is needed to lead to the development of an innovation.

Innovation has also been conceptualized as a process (Schumpeter, 1983; Steensen, 2009; Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013; Pavlik, 2013).

Storsul and Krumsvik (2013) identified three main approaches to the study of innovation: sociocultural models, economic innovation models, and constructivist models. Similar to García-Avilés and colleagues' (2016) media innovation index, Storsul and Krumsvik (2013) argue that media innovation must be understood in terms of what is changing and the degree to which it is novel.

Pavlik identifies innovation as a process with specific dimensions and principles: "Innovation in news media is defined here as the process of taking new approaches to media practices and forms while maintaining a commitment to quality and high ethical standards" (Pavlik, 2013, p. 183). According to Pavlik (2013), there are four dimensions for innovation in news media:

These are (1) creating, delivering and presenting quality news content, (2) engaging the public in an interactive news discourse, (3) employing new methods of reporting optimized for the digital, networked age, and (4) developing new management and organizational strategies for a digital, networked and mobile environment (p. 183).

Pavlik (2013) believes these four dimensions help news organizations like *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian* and *New York Magazine* to be successful and make money in the process:

News media that have begun to implement these innovation strategies are beginning to see increasing levels of paying subscribers to their digital products, and are seeing generally increasing advertising revenues from their digital products, both online and mobile (p. 190).

As scholars have noted, innovation can be defined as the individual who brings the innovativeness to the organization or innovation can be the process itself that is changed in the organization. But another way to define it can be an innovative final product created by the news organization.

The final product can be a new mobile application or platform, or a storytelling tool or technique. Today, news organizations are innovating their news products due to the overall disruption to the industry (Christensen, 2003) that has influenced their ability to remain competitive and remain in the market. The factors driving this disruption in the news industry include lost revenue, declining advertising investment, staff and product reduction, audience fragmentation, and digital convergence (Casero-Ripollés, 2010; Küng, 2015; Downie & Schudson, 2009; Powers & Yaros, 2012; Pavlik, 2013).

As a result, this disruption has led to the growth and evolution of digital-native and entrepreneurial news organizations (Downie & Schudson, 2009; Casero-Ripollés, 2010; Powers & Yaros, 2012; Pavlik, 2013; Nee, 2013).

The disruption has made news organizations "reactive rather than re-creative" (Nee, 2013, p. 6) and this can influence the output of what they produce. Casero-Ripollés argues that this kind of disruption to the industry has led to impacts on the organization in many areas: professional, business, technical and editorial—but the business model is impacted the most (Deuze, 2009; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009; Jenkins, 2008; García-Avilés, 2009; Palacios & Díaz-Noci, 2009; Díaz-Noci, 2009).

Küng's (2015) analysis of five news organizations (legacy and digital-native) suggests that innovation is a shift in the outcome or product from a print business model to a digital business model. She makes the simile of moving from horse-drawn transportation to the railway system (p. 5). The innovation needed in the news industry today is a different way of operating the business, not a different way of defining news. The presentation and delivery of the news has changed, but the premise of what is news has not.

Thus, news organizations in this climate must innovate their work process and the news product to remain relevant to their current and future audiences as a matter of survival. Second, innovation is necessary for the news organization to function as a business, and that innovation must lead to new forms of a business model through methods like crowdfunding, blockchain, micropayments, among others.

When innovation is forced to be the news product, it may not result in anything new or ground-breaking. An Open Society Foundation global study of 34 startups found that not one had the likes of the next YouTube or Facebook:

We did not find any single groundbreaking innovation that is turning the world upside down. The likes of YouTube and Facebook are exceptions. The innovations we saw tended to be incremental and based on many practices that are familiar around the world but have been adapted, exported or developed in one place or another. Much innovation seemed to be event-driven—a property that we observed in 20 percent of our case studies (Robinson, Grennan, & Schiffrin, 2015, p. 11).

As Kline and Rosenberg (1986) argue, an innovation can be new and different, but its implementation and worthwhileness depends on its economic benefit. For

example, if the innovation (e.g. news product or news process) can help derive a financial benefit that the news organization can maximize on for years to come, the news organization has the chance of being sustainable in the long run. Thus, news startups must innovate in order to survive as a business. This study aims to identify how the select group of news startups in Latin America are implementing innovation and how sustainability plays a role in this.

SUSTAINABILITY: SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

As mentioned earlier, innovation is crucial as a business model for news startups. A news startup must be innovative in today's digital era—it is the price to pay for survival (to be financially solvent) and for market differentiation (to provide a different service than another competitor) (Deuze, 2017).

When looking at the global startup field, competition is high, funding is “fickle” and there is not yet any real sustainable business model for journalism startups, meaning most such outlets are not really turning a profit (Deuze, 2017). As a result, journalists must get creative and come up with innovative funding mechanisms, such as memberships, paywalls, subsidies, international foundations, even selling tickets to live performances (Deuze, 2017).

Sustainability can be identified as those operations that are making a profit or are able to generate enough revenue to continue to operate. News operations over the years have identified different revenue models (Nee, 2013), from subscriptions to syndication agreements to membership models to paid newsletters. However, no one has identified the one-size-fits-all revenue model. Powers and Yaros (2012) noted that foundations and individual donors have been the major contributors for local nonprofit news organizations. Based on the local nonprofit news organizations they surveyed, the organizations recognized the foundation model was not sustainable.

This funding pattern of donations and foundation grants is evident in Latin America. Scholars have found that in the past decade, non-profit journalism organizations in Latin America continue to rely on a few funding sources, thus potentially negatively impacting their prospects not just for long-term sustainability, but also journalism independence (Gorriti, 2013; Requejo-Alemán & Lugo-Ocando 2014). Surviving on donations, contributions, and foundation money is short-lived and short-sighted on the part of the news

startup, as some scholars have noted (Shaver, 2010; Picard, 2014). The idea of sustainability may come as an afterthought for some news startups. In a recent study of 34 digital-native news organizations in Latin America, 85% did not have a business model when they started (Meléndez Yúdice, 2016).

Not having someone to market the news organization can also hinder sustainability efforts. A recent study of 100 digital news startups in Latin America by Sembramedia noted that many did not have a sales or marketing staff to help showcase their quality journalism and as a result, it was hurting their bottom line:

When we compared the median revenues of those who do have sales staff with those that don't, the difference was dramatic. Those with at least one sales person reported more than \$117,000 in annual revenues; those with no sales staff reported less than \$3,900 (Sembramedia, 2017, p. 9).

Sustainability at first may not be as crucial for the news startup, as the public service role takes precedence for a new organization (Requejo-Alemán & Lugo-Ocando, 2014). The assumption that the news audience will come if it is quality remains the focus in these journalism organizations, but may come at a sacrifice later down the road as news audiences may need to be led to the news versus seeking it out.

Research (Powers & Yaros, 2012; Nee, 2013; Deuze, 2017) shows that the current media climate has created new paths that news organizations must navigate to survive in the 21st century. This climate includes constantly changing digital technologies and a fluid marketplace that makes traditional forms of operating difficult to manage and sustain. The convergence of content, platform, producer, and audience creates another layer by which news organizations must transform to survive amongst their competition.

Thus, the emphasis on survival comes through being different: 1) using different storytelling and newsgathering methods, 2) using different tools and technologies, 3) incorporating different processes, 4) finding different ways to engage the audience; and 5), making the business model different.

There is a unique juxtaposition in terms of what innovation, sustainability and the relationship between the two is for digital news startups. Thus, through thematic analysis via phenomenological strategy of the focus group discussions, this study shows how Latin American entrepreneurial journalists define, in their own words, innovation and sustainability.

METHOD

This study examines entrepreneurial news organizations in Latin America based on data collected from online focus groups. The method of the focus group is well established in the academy (Chase & Alvarez, 2000). The focus group method is usually conducted face-to-face, where participants convene in a set location. Our focus groups were conducted online via video chats, facilitating a real-time interaction among our participants located in different countries. This format allowed for a multinational comparative perspective. This approach of online focus groups has been used in previous digital journalism research (Schmitz Weiss & Higgins Joyce, 2009).

In addition, focus groups is a method well suited for the exploration of new ideas, topics and concepts, offering an in-depth understanding of the reasons behind perceptions, opinions, and behaviors (Zhou & Sloan, 2015). As entrepreneurial news organizations in Latin America are breaking new ground in terms of content and business models, focus groups are well suited for understanding the reasons for and themes of these developments. Focus groups also take into account the group dynamic in meaning making.

The participants (news startups) were selected on the basis of being located geographically in Latin America, being a journalism organization (respondents were either hired journalists working professionally for the startup or the founders themselves), and either already having a developed reputation as an emerging news organization (e.g. receiving journalism prizes or other recognition in the field) or being developed by reputable journalists in Latin America. Twenty-three digital news startups were identified for this study.

The researchers emailed the organizations to ask whether the founders or their staff members could participate in an online focus group. Nineteen accepted our invitation to participate in the study. After this contact, emails about the study were sent to the participants. Considering the language of the participants and the countries they represented, two focus groups were conducted in Spanish and one in Portuguese. The final analysis presented here are English translations of what the participants said in the focus groups.

The 19 founders, directors, and/or journalists of digital news startups who participated in this study were from the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela. Eight of the participants were women and 11 were men.

To protect the identities of our participants, the names of the news organizations or names are not disclosed. The participants did not receive any financial incentive to participate, but were willing to express their opinions with this international group.

A trilingual moderator was hired to guide the focus groups and had an interview guide of specific questions to address with the participants that was developed by the researchers. The same discussion guide was used in all three sets of focus groups. During the focus group, the moderator followed the traditional role in focus groups of monitoring the interactions, encouraging participation, and managing disruptions (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). As an exploratory methodology, the goal of this study is not to generalize the findings, but to point to a shared experience and understandings from our expert group of participants based on the emerging phenomenon of entrepreneurial, digital-native news organizations.

The focus group sessions were conducted online via video using Google Hangout and were conducted synchronously. A recording of each session was made available to the researchers and transcripts of the sessions were sent to them.

Three focus groups were conducted between June-July 2015, with different participants each time. The group size was five to seven participants in each set. This is considerable for the quality and result of the discussion (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). Each focus group session averaged an hour. To protect the identities of our participants, participants are only identified by their title and country in the findings section.

The analysis for this study was based on thematic analysis through phenomenological strategy. A phenomenological strategy was selected given its strength in describing the essence of a common experience shared in our phenomenon of interest: the development of these digital-native news media startups in Latin America. As such, our study employed a thematic analysis of the structure and essence of these experiences. The phenomenological strategy is based on "unpacking the essence of lived experience" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 237). This method entails interpreting the constructs of communicative experience via description through discovery, definition of the lived experience, and interpretation based on the previous two phases that identify the value and logic of that lived experience through the themes that are explicated (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The transcripts of the focus group sessions were reviewed first to identify how the

entrepreneurs described their work, operations and tasks as their lived experience, then the researchers reviewed the underlying definitions of concepts and terms brought up by the participants, and then interpretation of the last two phases were conducted to identify the themes presented in the following section. The two themes identified are 1) the ways innovation is defined and 2) the relationship between innovation and sustainability.

FINDINGS

INNOVATION DEFINED

The first finding of the analysis of the 19 focus group participants' comments was how innovation was perceived as both a product and a part of a work process.

Participants identified innovation in two main ways: new storytelling or narrative forms (e.g. infotainment, independent journalism, etc.), and new forms of work (e.g. collaborative processes, autonomous workflow, community engagement) they used in their operations.

For example, an entrepreneurial journalist from Venezuela said innovation was their news focus, "In our case, I would say that our innovation is small, our efforts are focused on doing investigative journalism with international standards".

An entrepreneurial journalist from Nicaragua identified innovation as the different narrative forms their organization uses to tell stories:

In our case, we are trying to go against the current, which is a mix of infotainment, breaking news and traditional media. So, I do not know if we are innovators, but we try to produce quality information and present it in a multimedia platform.

Innovation also was identified among the participants as a process involving collaborative processes with others, the production of quality journalism, the ability to be autonomous and independent in their work, and the opportunity to converse/engage with the audience.

An entrepreneurial journalist from Peru identified innovation by the way they have worked with others in the region:

And our innovation, beyond technology, has been based on collaborative work and we have managed to sew alliances with civil society to do this type of journalism that is not very common in Peru and Latin America in general.

The focus group participants also said they were innovative because of their autonomy from the existing

media in their country. A Chilean journalist stated how she saw herself along with the other entrepreneurs in the focus group:

I think what we have in common is to be more independent media, with our own agenda and with a lot more freedom than traditional media has. Report and expose very sensitive issues in our society.

The participants also said that their level of community engagement with their audiences was innovative. In El Salvador, this founder identified community engagement as the innovation:

I believe that another interesting innovation incorporates very strongly the participation of readers and the community. In that sense, we have always learned in journalism and in school and we will maintain and we want to incorporate many more web tools that allow this closer interaction with the community, especially among the classes that have the highest incidences on public debate.

Overall, these meanings of innovation are in line with previous scholarship that has noted innovation as a process (Schumpeter, 1983; Kline & Rosenberg, 1986; Steensen, 2009; Pavlik, 2013; Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013) and as a product, as noted earlier (Kline & Rosenberg, 1986; Francis & Bessant, 2005). As identified by this group of participants, the innovative processes included community engagement practices and collaborative newsgathering. As for innovative products, the participants identified new storytelling narratives and formats they are using such as infotainment, infographics, and investigative journalism.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Among the 19 focus group participants, the second finding was the relationship identified between innovation and sustainability. Some participants saw the relationship as fundamental (e.g. innovation as a characteristic or a direct partner), but in other cases, they did not see a clear connection between innovation and sustainability. These findings are discussed in detail next.

A disconnect between innovation and sustainability

Some of the entrepreneurial journalists did not see a clear connection between innovation and sustainability. For example, in one focus group session an entrepreneurial journalist from Venezuela said:

I do not see an organic relationship between innovation and sustainability... In the advertising claim, in our

context, there is a relationship. But in the general context I do not think there is an organic relationship between innovation and sustainability.

Some of the focus group participants did not see a relationship between innovation and sustainability because they felt journalism drives the sustainability of the operation and not the innovation. A Brazilian entrepreneurial journalist said, "What will keep sustainability is the quality of the work we are doing... a passion for the service that we are providing".

These perspectives that sustainability and innovation are not connected are not unusual as previous research has shown that many digital news startups do not launch with a sustainability plan but rather focus on the greater mission of the journalism and their role in the community (Requejo-Alemán & Lugo-Ocando 2014; Meléndez Yúdice, 2016).

Innovation and sustainability are fundamental

The other finding is that other journalists in the focus group sessions thought that innovation was a partner to sustainability. As one Argentine entrepreneurial journalist said:

In our case, the characteristic of innovation contributes to sustainability. But this is not to say that innovative media cannot have other interesting sustainability strategies. In Argentina there are no independent digital media from traditional media who have survived with sustainable business models... But I agree with my colleague that it is not that innovation ensures sustainability, but it may be that in certain models like ours it is part of the feature because we can survive.

According to a Mexican entrepreneurial journalist, innovation and sustainability need each other but this comes at a cost that impacts their operation:

Unfortunately, I would say that innovation is often conditional on sustainability, because innovation involves having designers and programmers to be constantly updated, participate in courses and conferences, and often this involves a cost it is not easy to cover. When we have managed to do things in terms of innovation, it has worked very well in terms of visits, but we cannot do this as often as we would like simply because it is a matter of resources or to finance the work of programmers and designers.

A Venezuelan entrepreneurial journalist with a young operation also felt that costs impact the bottom line but that innovation and sustainability are reliant on each other:

As we are still very young, we are only 6-months-old,

we have the challenge of meeting the year to see if our proposal is tested to sustain. Then of course, we are always very attentive to innovative ways of presenting journalistic pieces and interacting with communities. But we are also very focused on finding innovative ways to receive income, but we are in the trial period.

These journalists highlight the fact that innovation and sustainability are connected and that they each provide an important contribution that could not be accomplished without the other. This finding reflects a key point that Kung (2015) identified in her research on how digital news organizations need to innovate in order to survive in the media landscape today.

Another finding was that the focus group participants saw innovation and sustainability as a part of the journalistic process, or a function of the practice.

According to a Brazilian entrepreneurial journalist in one of the sessions, the journalism is first and foremost and the process of doing the work should lead the innovation to come about, and the sustainability is connected with the journalism content:

So it is very important to think about sustainability, but first we have to think about journalism. So for me, the most important is to have a direct relationship between journalism and sustainability. You will not be sustainable if it is not good journalism. The innovation comes along, but journalism is the main thing... If we are not passionate about what we do, you will not have sustainability.

This reflects the perspective of Pavlik (2013) where innovation can be considered part of the journalistic process as part of the four dimensions he conceptualizes that focus on the reporting and producing of quality journalism content and the nurturing of journalistic practices that encourage this kind of work.

Another Brazilian entrepreneurial journalist indicated that there is a relationship and it is a part of the process, but it is not automatic and there must be components in place for the innovation to occur and the sustainability to follow.

It is not automatic, but if you take into account innovation as a process of solving a problem of someone, someone needs you to solve that problem, then you can have a relationship. Because when you become necessary, someone will pay for its existence.

Another focus group participant from Mexico suggested that innovation is fundamental to the operation and its future, but one cannot rely solely on innovation to survive and that other approaches must be used to diversify their income to survive.

A Peruvian entrepreneurial journalist saw innovation as fundamental to his operation and his survival to perform daily journalistic functions for his operation:

I do not consider that innovation is overrated, I think it is fundamental. And finally, we exist through basic innovations such as the Internet, the ease of publishing tools, many of which are free tools that every day—from how to make infographics to quick ways to do video streaming, are incorporated at very low cost for our practice. The technological innovation and innovation to incorporate these technologies to the journalistic process are absolutely vital for us.

This approach of the relationship being fundamental to the journalism practice is one that notes that the digital media landscape has created a new framework that reflects the digital disruption in the industry (Casero-Ripollés, 2010; Powers & Yaros, 2012; Nee, 2013) and thus, the nature to survive with innovation and sustainability is necessary. Kung (2015) suggested that the business model for news organizations that want to survive in today's media ecosystem lies in the ability to deliver and present the news differently than the traditional models of the past.

A Chilean entrepreneurial journalist identified the relationship as organic, coming from within the news operation and growing naturally out of the organization:

I intend for innovation as something that originates in your organization and involves a change to do things that had not been done before. Today you cannot survive in digital media if you are not using digital tools. Is that innovation? I'm thinking of something else, to create something different. Obviously, nothing is ever created from scratch. Then you can say 'that is different and that can be replicated by other means'. It is a form of financing, a new technology, a new way of doing real journalism.

DISCUSSION

The challenges faced by today's news industry are not country-specific, but regional. In Latin America, the 19 participants in this study highlighted how their news startups are trying to provide a different kind of journalism in their countries to combat the issues with the existing press (e.g. self-censorship, press freedom, etc.) in the region. These differences were identified by how the 19 entrepreneurial journalists defined what innovation meant to them and how the innovations they are using in their operations are allowing them to operate and to succeed in the marketplace.

As noted earlier, Pavlik (2013) suggested that news startups can be innovative if they are creating quality content, engaging in interactive news discourse, using digital reporting tactics and developing organizational strategies that are attuned to the digital media environment. This approach positions innovation as a process, a perspective that was mirrored in our study. For example, focus group participants identified how processes like collaborations with other media outlets and organizations as well as their community engagement approaches set them apart. This has an impact on the wider journalism practice because innovation is not just about a tool or the traditional newsgathering and reporting task that is done differently, but processes such as collaboration and community outreach that have not been incorporated readily and easily into the journalism practice before. This finding extends the work of previous media innovation scholars in demonstrating how innovation as a process is possible (Evans, 2018; Westlund & Lewis, 2012; Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013).

Another significant contribution of this study is the way it identified how Latin American entrepreneurial journalists defined innovation. Focus group participants discussed how the type of news they cover (e.g. investigative journalism), the quality of journalism they produce (e.g. independent journalism), and the tools/platforms (e.g. multimedia, video, infographics) they use to create the news are innovative. Interestingly, innovation in their eyes was not necessarily new per se, but it was new to *them* specifically, and to Latin American journalism more broadly. These aspects of the business are not necessarily new or unique to the innovation discussion but highlight the continual pattern of innovation as a product or output as identified in past scholarship (Westlund & Lewis, 2012; Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013; Evans, 2018). However, what is significant is that the 19 entrepreneurial journalists are identifying the news content, the quality of such content, and the presentation of such content as innovative—when these aspects are a natural part of the journalistic practice. This brings up an important point for the industry that journalism itself—the content, how much effort/time is put into it, and how the content is told—is in question. It raises concerns as to existing journalism values that might have been given up amid technological and economic upheaval, prompting the question of whether this culture of digital news startups aims to innovate by trying to bring back existing journalism values that may have been lost along the way (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016).

In addition, participants saw innovation and sustainability in many different and complex ways. This difference in opinion of how innovation helps or hinders sustainability might provide insight about how news startups might launch but fail to recognize how to maintain their operations. Some of the focus group participants identified that the journalism was first and foremost in their decision for sustainability over innovation. This may highlight a bigger problem for the journalism industry. Entrepreneurs are often told that a new business must be a matter of not something new or different but a matter of solving a problem.

Thus, is innovation and its sustainability among the Latin American entrepreneurs in this study a matter of solving the problem of lost journalism values that they are trying to regain for the communities they serve? And if so, how does one monetize journalism values and practices? This remains a question that the media ecosystem in Latin America and around the world has yet to solve.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, journalism innovation was conceptualized by the participants as a product through new storytelling or narrative forms, as well as a process through collaborations with others and community engagement practices. There was no one answer to defining innovation among the participants. As Kline and Rosenberg (1986) state, innovation is messy, complex and uncertain. This can be complimented by the notion that innovation can be explorative and exploitative (March, 1991; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2004, 2013) that impacts the process by which innovation is done through repeated trial and error which is unpredictable or risky; or enhancing existing procedures or products in the organization that are safer and more predictable. The recent scholarship that extends this line of thought (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013) positions media innovation in the context of radical versus incremental innovation, in which the former focuses on creative destruction and the other as gradual improvements. While on the surface changing storytelling techniques or adopting a new tool might seem like an incremental innovation, this study found that these Latin American entrepreneurial journalists in fact saw themselves as radical innovators, working to disrupt the local and regional media climate.

This research also highlights how these Latin

American entrepreneurial journalists identified the relationship between innovation and sustainability in several ways. Some saw a direct connection and others saw no connection at all. These differences suggest that the pathway to survival is not the same for all and that sustainability can be quite complex. They did recognize that the publics they serve are an important component to their business and survival and thus, loyalty is an important value for their sustainability. Furthermore, the participants focused heavily on their identity as unique from other media outlets in their respective countries and their ability to be autonomous, highlights value propositions they feel will also help their sustainability. It must be noted that the entrepreneurs featured in this study come from distinct countries (i.e. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela) with unique journalism ecosystems and important socio-political histories that impact how these entrepreneurs developed their news startup and their mission to serving publics in their representative countries.

There are some limitations. This study reflects only the opinions of 19 entrepreneurial journalists and does not reflect the larger population of entrepreneurial news organizations in Latin America or their respective countries. Still, this research offers an insight into how these new select group of news startups are defining their work in the Latin American region. Future research should explore these opinions deeper with additional focus groups, in-depth interviews, content analyses of the work produced by these startups, and surveys with more news startups in the region. A holistic approach to examining innovation and sustainability in these specific startups using the AMI approach (Westlund & Lewis, 2012) could be a fruitful research endeavor for future investigation of news startups in the region. As the development of news startups in Latin America remains in a nascent stage, this exploratory study provides a first step for future scholarship to explore this important evolution of entrepreneurial journalism in the region.

As the news ecosystem evolves, it is important for scholars to capture and document how different forms of journalism are created in Latin America and in other regions of the world. This study helps to capture how innovation and sustainability shed light on the study of journalism innovation by showcasing how different processes, relationships, and individuals create the innovation in these news startups, and how this impacts the final product that news consumers receive. This

study identifies that complexities inherent in the relationship between innovation and sustainability is the first step toward recognizing and overcoming challenges these news startups face in their efforts not just to survive, but to transform the Latin American

media ecology. As Robert Picard (2014) states, “The changing ecosystem does not mean that opportunities for quality journalism have disappeared, however —only that the opportunities are different and that we require new ways of providing it (p. 501)”.

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