



LOCAL MEDIA SURVIVAL GUIDE 2022

HOW JOURNALISM IS INNOVATING TO FIND SUSTAINABLE
WAYS TO SERVE LOCAL COMMUNITIES AROUND THE
WORLD AND FIGHT AGAINST MISINFORMATION

BY *JACQUI PARK*



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INTRODUCTION

Across the world, journalists, editors, and publishers are working to build (or, in some cases, rebuild) a dynamic, responsible media that engages their communities in news and information that meets their local needs and wants. The media they're creating leverage the trust of localism to empower people within communities to tell their stories to one another, to give a voice to the rights of their community, and to fight the spread of mis- and dis-information.

It demands a new way of thinking built off a strong journalistic mission. Where once local news media brought the world home to their communities, now their reporting is empowering their communities to talk to one another – and to the world. It's inside-out reporting replacing the old outside-in.

It's the big story of the news media right now. But it's a story that's playing out very differently outside the global media centres in the developed world of North America and Western Europe than it is in the emerging and developing regions of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.

In the latter regions, the demand for local news – and the demand for local news outlets that can share it – is deep. In some countries, communities outside national centres have traditionally been information-poor with weak or no local media (or, often worse, media controlled by the state and/or local oligarchic elites). Information scarcity has walked hand-in-hand with economic disadvantage.

The intensity of this need – of this market gap – is mobilizing journalists and media-builders to commit to meeting the needs of their communities by engaging them in new or transitional media voices that speak for – and of – them.

All of this is an opportunity: an opportunity to open the door to a new and vibrant news media ecosystem. Sometimes, this involves remaking or transitioning old media. More usually, it involves building a new media outlet out of the opportunities that digital and social technologies offer. Either path demands exciting experiments in journalism, in storytelling, and in product thinking.

It also faces challenges: Local communities often lack the resources to support their own local media. Information pollution has generated distrust of all journalism. There's a growing authoritarianism bringing deliberate strategies of media capture. And in some countries, digital opportunities are constrained by potential readers' lack of access to mobile data or stable web connectivity.

These challenges demand supportive interventions. Transition infrastructure support for news media has largely been rooted in and focused on developed economies in North America and western Europe. However, there are some exciting developments that are having an impact in other regions, such as SembrMedia in Latin America.

How we exploit these opportunities and confront these challenges will determine whether this aggregation of thousands of local initiatives successfully entrenches a truth-based news media in the communities where people most in need of engaged and reliable news and information live and work day-to-day.

In this report, we take what is the first deep look at innovation in news media serving local communities outside the U.S. and Western Europe. We talked to many of the journalists and media builders that are on the front-line of this struggle in the regions of Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. They demand our attention and focus as they find and enact in real-time strategies for survival and growth.

This is a real-time qualitative report based on in-depth discussions with more than 35 journalists, editors, media leaders, and entrepreneurs who are transitioning legacy media and creating new local-media voices in the emerging and developing regions of Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, together with readings of their comments and self-reflections in blogs, speeches, and articles. It's part a report back to those who joined in our conversations, and part a stab at a global leveling up of the wisdom they've shared. On the IPI website, you can dig deeper into the topic through stand-alone reports and 21 companion case studies of many of the media profiled in this report.

This report is meant to share the experiences and lessons of local media practitioners globally, and to build a community for networking and support. It's about telling their story in their own voice – and helping all involved learn from one another.

By talking to both new digital start-ups and traditional media in transition, this report identifies how media builders in different circumstances understand and meet the challenges they face. Comparing and contrasting experiences from different parts of the world provides both lessons that can be copied as well as warnings about the need to understand how different regional and national conditions impact success. From there, the report draws practical recommendations for news media leaders, for media support organizations, and for the IPI global network.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “LOCAL”?

Local news media are defined by how they serve their community. It's “local” journalism if it brings a geographically constrained audience together with the news that the audience needs, news that empowers people to tell their own stories to one another and to the world at large. Sometimes, these are hyperlocal media, deeply embedded in small communities like [Nyugat](#) in western Hungary. Sometimes they are networked media, such as those under the umbrella of the [ABO Local Media Development Agency](#) in Ukraine, or replicated, like [Citizen Matters](#) in India's different cities.

In other places, new national media are working out ways to deliver a localized sensibility through a national network, like South Africa's [Scrolla](#), [Kloop](#) in Kyrgyzstan, [Red/Acción](#) in Argentina, or [Ojoconmipisto](#) in Guatemala. This can be done by embedding correspondents, like Jordan's [Radio Al Balad](#), or through innovative product distribution, like [263Chat](#)'s WhatsApp groups in Zimbabwe.

The focus of local media might be regions covering millions. For example, [The News Minute](#) reports on half a dozen states in southern India, while [The Centrum Media](#) meets the news needs of Pakistan's rising generations through video. Or they may be talking to small towns and villages in a particular region, like [Rayon](#)'s hyperlocal network in western Ukraine.

There are “local” lessons to be drawn from all of them.

The key questions for the success of local news media are as follows: Are they solving a problem for their audience? Are they identifying and filling a news or information gap for their community or communities?

In this report, we look at how journalists are innovating to answer these questions to build a new local media ecosystem across three frames: in the journalism that creates the news content; in the products and experiences that aggregate that content; and in the business models that support the process. This innovation is delivering a deep journalism that can engage and hold the attention of its audience and whose contribution is found in the value (or utility) of the information it shares and its role in community-building or social capital.

REFLECTING AND SHAPING THE COMMUNITY

To succeed today, news media need deep engagement with their audience.

The first step is for local media to find (or identify) their audience. Whether they are building this offering out of an existing, traditional outlet or starting something new, they need to start with a clear understanding of who that (new) audience is and the role the news media can play in structuring that audience into a (more or less) coherent community.

For traditional media in transition, this may mean a refocus of just who the audience is. They can learn from the example of the [Limpopo Mirror](#), which was launched as South Africa emerged from apartheid to meet the needs of largely rural Black communities in the country's northeast. For new digital voices, it can mean allowing a potential community to emerge into definition such as India's [The News Minute](#), which aims to create a news centred around a recognition that the five southern Indian states have shared news interests.

Across most of the regions under examination, local newspapers were not the norm in the 20th century as traditional media found it more profitable to build an audience with a demand for national news.

Those that built local audiences – for example, in South Asia – usually did so by publishing in regional languages. In Sri Lanka, for example, the only significant newspapers based outside Colombo were the Tamil-language papers in Jaffna (including the enduring [Uthayan](#)). Because papers published in regional languages were a way of building self-identifying communities at the local level, they were often eyed suspiciously by the national authorities and dominant language institutions.

Some countries are built culturally, politically, and administratively around a single dominant political and cultural centre (for example, Hungary around Budapest). This in-country domination tends to lead to a media ecosystem based in (and tending to speak and act for) that centre.

In post-1980s democracies, local newspapers were historically a tool of state or local elite control. In Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, local newspapers were part of the network of state-owned media. They were a tool for the state to talk to citizens, rather than a tool for building and empowering the community. In some countries, this practice continued into post-Soviet authoritarian regimes. For example, the state-owned newspapers inherited from Soviet-era Ukraine were only forced to begin the hard work of identifying and engaging their communities when they were “destatized” in 2015 after the Maidan uprising.

Most local media in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Slovenia are commercial companies increasingly reliant on financial arrangements (often disguised as “advertising” transactions) with local governments. The Trade Union of Croatian Journalists says journalists who stand up have been censored and lost their jobs, such as four journalists from Glas Istre in western Croatia, who were fired due to public disagreement with the editorial policy of the city authorities.

Journalist organizations in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Slovenia are campaigning to find models to ensure a transparent system of local media funding that would make them independent of the local authorities whose work they monitor and review.

Successfully transitioning local media have to decide which side they are on.

In Mexico, Andrea Miranda, editor-in-chief of El Debate in Sinaloa state, says: “We work for our readers. They are our source of work and our main interest. We do not work for the authorities. We work for readers and we are very close to the people. We like to be close to the people, to walk the cities, to be in the markets, to know what is happening, and not to leave the neighbourhoods.”

Media that are seeking to build out of a pre-existing (often once ad-supported) publication have discovered that success demands a rethinking that centres the audience as they actually are.

For Zoutnet, which owns Zoutpansberger and Limpopo Mirror in northern South Africa, the shift came early. The collapse of apartheid in the early 1990s inspired them to launch a new publication for the largely black and rural community, which had been historically ignored in favour of the town-based white population.

For Rayon, in western Ukraine, it meant understanding that the relationship to readers had to change. As editor Olena Reshotka-Rozhii says: “Our readers are our friends. This is why we organize a summer school for people who want to learn to be journalists. And we’re happy that colleagues from other media often learn from what we do, which is why we organize the largest forum for journalists in western Ukraine each year.”

In Hungary, it’s meant building an emotional link that can transcend the engineered populism of the national government. Antal Jozing, a senior journalist at Nyugat, says: “Hungarian history is about surviving. So we are very good at it. We learned that we have to have a good relationship with our audience, to catch them emotionally. I think it is a very essential part of surviving to somehow get them on our side and to show them this is the right side – and if they feel it emotionally they might help us.”



*Nyugat.hu celebrating the 20th anniversary
(Facebook.com/Nyugathu, 2019)*

In Guatemala, Ojoconmipisto (which translates to “Be careful with my money”) educates and trains citizens on access to public information and supervision of money allocated to their local municipalities. The team also trains journalists to do local journalism and data journalism and promotes citizen participation, believing that informed citizens will be a better source of information.

FINDING THE KEY

Having identified the (potential) community,

successful media organizations need to figure out the key that opens the door to engage their audience. Think of this as the one big idea that lights up the path the organization can walk to success. Often the key can come from grasping a sudden opportunity such as a regulatory or technological change, or it might involve a recognition of a gap opening up in demand or a failure of supply, or experimenting with new journalism formats and products.

Sometimes it might be hiding in plain sight – or at least seem obvious in retrospect. Sometimes it can be uncovered through design-thinking research. Zimbabwe's 263Chat found the key to its WhatsApp distribution model through an analysis of strengths (information-hungry population, high literacy), weaknesses (low income and access to data), opportunities (messaging apps, diversified advertising), and threats (misinformation, uncertain economics).

For Kloop in Kyrgyzstan, the key was understanding that journalism itself wasn't enough. They needed to situate their work in a new media ecosystem - pro-democracy, pro-truth - so that their journalism could exist. That included a journalism school and an election-monitoring department.

For Citizen Matters, which delves into systemic, local, and hyperlocal issues, the key is in the audience, which is made up of people who are engaged in civic issues in their community. They are the changemakers. The Citizen Matters website functions as a platform for civic participation. Having members of the community as both readers and contributors creates a feedback loop and ensures impact on the ground.



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Rayon in western Ukraine, it was understanding that they needed to double down on local news of interest to the local audience, whether this was potholes or weddings. Whereas before locally based media had often been a way of telling national (and global) stories to a local audience, these media recognized that the flood of that sort of information on the internet demanded that they own their own space – news about and by their communities.

In Pakistan, The Centrum Media found that video brought inherent credibility, as viewers were able to see the identified expert speaking for themselves (think of it as “the medium is the message” in practice). In India, Khabar Lahariya found credibility by recruiting their reporting team from villages in the area and then embedding them there, challenging long-held notions on who could tell stories – and on which topics.

Networks of local correspondents are also found to be the key to maintaining a localized focus in national media. The leading independent broadcaster in Jordan, Radio Al Balad, relies on local correspondents drawn from their priority reporting areas: young people, women, and human rights activists. Guatemala’s digital native accountability project, Ojoconmipisto, has made training local reporters a priority. Editor Ana Carolina Alpírez says: “Our principles are threefold. Municipal oversight, training, and citizen participation. We are very interested in the part of training citizens. Why? Because they are the first source of information, they are the ones on the ground.”

South Africa’s Scrolla found opportunity in the challenge of high data fees for its mobile service by piggy-backing off local messaging providers and designing a data-lite site. Similarly, faced with poor internet connectivity in Paraguay, [El Surtidor](#) developed a HTML-based “scrolly-telling” format that consumes little data and works on low-quality connections. The lesson, [El Surtidor](#) says, is that before developing products, it’s important to be sure that they can be properly consumed by users.



Members of [El Surtidor](#) celebrate their [Gabriel Garcia Marquez Journalism Award](#) in the category of innovation in 2018.

Organizations don’t always get it right the first time. They have to be empowered with the freedom to fail, with an innovation mindset that is ready to change direction, try new things, and move on to something else if it doesn’t work out. As [El Debate](#) Editor-in-Chief [Andrea Miranda](#) says about the digital transition: “We messed up a lot of things. We also spent a lot of money on all this learning, but we have a boss who... lets us do it. And for me it has been essential, basic. He is with us and lets us do it. The mistakes we make are part of the learning process and we accept them as such and they allow us to continue investigating and making decisions.”

This need for experimentation reinforces the importance of local innovation infrastructure that can support organizational change.

THE AUTHORITARIAN CHALLENGE

Media capture and other forms of repression by authoritarian regimes pose an increasing challenge to local news media that are perceived as a threat due either to their accountability journalism or simply to their providing an autonomous voice. Pressure can come through blocking advertising revenues from state or oligarchic-owned corporations and pressuring other businesses to do the same; through legal actions such as defamation or tax audits; or through targeted attacks on media institutions and independent journalists.

In Hungary, for example, most media are either owned or tied in some way to the governing Fidesz party of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The party uses state advertising funds to reward supporters and punish independent media, and influences private businesses to do the same. As Nyugat's Antal Jozing says of private advertisers: "They don't want to put advertisements in Nyugat because it is an independent site and maybe they will have some disadvantages from it later on – not so directly, but indirectly. It is a very, very hard situation."

Starting in 2007 with the closure of television broadcaster RCTV, the Venezuelan government started co-opting established media. It took over several radio stations, while government-friendly business people began to buy out "troublemaker" outlets including Últimas Noticias, the most popular newspaper in the country; El Universal, formerly the most respected newspaper; and television news broadcaster Globovisión. After Venezuela's economic crisis in 2013 forced media to cut back their reporting staff and close outlets, almost all the surviving media outlets were taken over by the government or by supportive business elites. Government-friendly media are supported by a [state-organized troll army](#) used to shape public opinion.

Still, with this repression also came opportunity and the emergence of a new digital media ecosystem, with members like the news site [El Pitazo](#). Starting with a YouTube channel before adding in data-lite distribution through WhatsApp and SMS, El Pitazo has sought to fill in Venezuela's information deserts.

After cyber attacks kept crashing its website, the Venezuelan news site El Pitazo brought the news to the streets, climbing the hills of the slums in Caracas and other cities to call out the news with a megaphone.



The attacks that kept crashing El Pitazo's website led them to bring their news to the streets with what they call "El Pitazo en la Calle". They climb the hills of the slums in Caracas and other cities to call out the news with a megaphone and paste posters with the headlines in schools and community centres.

For many organizations, the journalistic mission meshes with a broader demand for social and political accountability. Bektour Iskender from Kyrgyzstan's Kloop says: "The core mission of our organization is to encourage people to become brave enough to fight for something, something good ... We are, I think, balancing on the edge of activism and journalism – I don't know if it's right or wrong, but we just feel like in Kyrgyzstan, it's something we have to do these days."



In Kyrgyzstan, where the fight for democratic, publicly accountable institutions is a central social challenge, this stance ultimately establishes the credibility of their journalism. "It has built a very strong reputation for Kloop, like a media outlet that would be the last one to give up against any sort of pressure", Iskender says.

A JOURNALISM THAT ENGAGES

Successful local media are also experimenting and innovating with the journalism itself to work out what engages their audience across the creation chain. This begins either through specific journalistic content that brings together an audience in need of such specific – usually localized – content (as, for example, 263Chat, which has created a previously unserved audience of farmers through specific WhatsApp products); or, particularly for geographically defined media, by asking (and asking again) what the audience wants to know, what they would find useful, or what would contribute to building their civic engagement.

The demand of engaged readership requires a new way of thinking about journalism – a journalism that holds local institutions to account and provides difficult-to-access information as a service rather than as a report for the record. Local media are differentiating themselves by taking the time to go deep rather than emulate the traditional model of fast coverage of spot news. Implicit in this shift is the idea of understanding the community and making trends/events/developments relevant to local audiences, including scaling national reports and data back to the relatable local size.

Argentina's Red/Acción, for example, uses what it calls “human” journalism: an intersection between solutions journalism and participatory journalism as part of a mission to strengthen citizens' commitment to social change. The outlet engages its audience in conversations around six themes: climate change, gender equality, social inclusion, education, health, and technology for the common good.

El Pitazo in Venezuela, which has correspondents in most regions of the country, engages disconnected communities outside big cities through flip charts pasted on walls, two-minute news briefs before movie showings, and live chat forums through WhatsApp. Using performative journalism, they also produce plays that tell investigative stories so that these stories can reach a wider audience.



El Pitazo in Venezuela engages disconnected communities outside big cities through flip charts pasted on walls, two-minute news briefs before movie showings, and live chat forums through WhatsApp.

Some start with a journalism that reflects a deliberately different perspective. Khabar Lahariya, for example, starts with a feminist lens. 263Chat creates a community of farmers through WhatsApp where the farmers become both creators and consumers of news as they share vital information into 263Chat's network.

An emphasis on the local offers an opening to hold power to account where people live. The Daily Dispatch in South Africa's Eastern Cape province, for example, has a long tradition of exposing corruption and brings this investigatory expertise to its renewed emphasis on local news. Ojoconmipisto similarly centres accountability journalism at the local level in Guatemala.

Successful local media engage their audiences in the acts of research and writing, reaching out to them for information, commentary, and analysis. They also empower their audiences to engage with the story through comments and questions once the story is published. This all works together to shape future stories through a virtuous circle of engagement.

Media are also innovating the structure, readability, and presentation of journalism to make it accessible and readily usable by its audience.

While a locally focused journalism is creating something new for its communities, it isn't doing so in a vacuum. Many communities bring a misunderstanding of what "journalism" is or should be thanks to exposure to a type of journalism that is polluted by state, commercial, and political interests; misshapen by advertising pressures; or misrepresented through mis- and disinformation.

Often, media can only overcome this challenge by embedding themselves in the community and rebuilding trust with a journalism that listens to, rather than talks at, the community – by creating journalism that reports for, rather than about, the community.

Innovation can come with subject matter content that abandons the commodified breaking news cycle and speaks instead to the wants and needs of the communities being served. In western Ukraine, Rayon found this came with a hyperlocal focus (e.g., weddings, school concerts, potholes). Ojoconmipisto in Guatemala found it came by flipping the accountability focus on corruption from the national to the municipal level, tightly tied to the "pisto" – money or taxes that residents pay.



In Guatemala, Ojoconmipisto focuses on uncovering corruption and holding public spending accountable, especially at the municipal level.

Red/Acción in Argentina found the innovation sweet spot at the intersection between solutions journalism and participatory journalism. Founder Chani Guyot explains: "Our mission is focused on helping citizens... do their job well as citizens because we fundamentally deal with six issues: the climate crisis, gender equality, social inclusion, health, education, and technology for the common good. We cover stories underrepresented by other outlets, explain complex social issues, and focus on the story of the people and organizations that are solving them, amplifying the voices of diverse minorities."

An example of how Red/Acción meshes participation and solutions is its project on Centennial economics, exploring how Gen Zers deal with money and planning, and what their expectations for the future are. Starting on Instagram, Red/Acción collected about 3,000 comments. These were fed into an online post that was then distributed by that same network of participants. “They feel their participation, they feel represented in the story, and then we did an event. All this in the course of three weeks”, Guyot says. “And when you look at this whole process, it looks a lot like an open conversation between our newsroom and our community.”

Innovation also comes with the format and structure of journalism. Pakistan's The Centrum Media uses long-form video that identifies experts – particularly those who are young like their audience – and presents them directly. South Africa's Scrolla writes specifically for a mobile audience and for distribution on messaging apps and its data-lite site.

In India, the Bangalore-based Citizen Matters integrates citizens and editors to tell stories about the challenges facing the urban centres of Bangalore, Chennai, and Mumbai. “We created a platform for civic participation in journalism to be a more reflective and inclusive publication, that drew from the truth of people's experiences and could push for change, as a guide to newsworthiness determination”, co-founder Subbu Vincent says. “Editorial stewardship is critical”, adds co-founder Meera K, “to ensure that what citizens develop is journalism – and not just a rant like on social media. An editor facilitates this process – we handhold and mentor community reporters to tell the story with truth, accuracy, and fairness.”

In Hyderabad, meanwhile, [Suno India](#), which launched in 2018, has jumped in to fill another gap: a lack of media using the warmth of audio as a medium for reporting. Incorporating the founders' skills of journalism, policy advocacy, and digital expertise, the outcome is a multilingual and multigenerational podcast platform based in Hyderabad and New Delhi, building the niche of “slow journalism” through its audio stories and targeting among others, regional language communities in Tamil and Telugu. The outlet focuses on topics such as tuberculosis, rare diseases, climate change, technology, and governance.

“As a platform we believe in processing information slowly, synthesizing it thoroughly, and only then putting it out”, co-founder and editorial lead DVL Padma Priya says of Suno India's philosophy.

Audio is not the only way Suno India has reached out to its audience. Partnering with Iranian artist Azamma Soumzadeh, it produced ‘[Corona Flashcards](#)’ in English, Telugu, and Hindi to give practical tips in the form of FAQs. “I think my neighbour has coronavirus, what should I do?” asks one. “Avoid contact but give them a smile”, comes the answer. The Telugu cards were printed out and put up as posters by listeners. Suno India also pivoted this year to airing a two-minute news podcast dealing with COVID-19 each evening to provide trusted and accurate information on this fast-moving story in India.

El Surtidor in Paraguay has invented its own way of visual storytelling: the “surtiscroll”, a vertically scrolling “scrollytelling” format that features information posters, explainer videos, long-form, and Japanese street-theatre, or Kamishibai, stories.

Local media trusted by their communities have an opportunity to leverage that trust to confront disinformation head-on. Bektour Iskender from Kyrgyzstan's Kloop says: “We had this really cool project where we managed to scrape all the comments from Instagram accounts of media outlets in Kyrgyzstan, and then analyze these comments and find out which ones were left by bots, which were organized most likely by the government.”

PRODUCTS THAT REACH THE AUDIENCE WHERE THEY ARE

Once they've understood their audiences and the journalism they want and need, local news media need to work hard to ensure their journalism is packaged into products that can reach the audience where they are and that they will value. In this sense, "products" can be taken to describe any of the means by which the journalism is made readily accessible to the audience. This can include platforms, means of distribution, language used, or the mix of text, audio, and video.

As 263Chat's Nigel Mugamu says: "(We) work backwards to create products that are aligned to either their value system, their purchasing decisions, the way they access the internet, the kinds of information they want to see and hear. (We) really think of the community."

This is design thinking for products in action: starting with the audience and the organizational capabilities, the value of the journalism, and understanding what the organization can do better than anyone else.

Understanding the need for products that mesh with audience practices is central to the rethinking of a journalism that can set the sort of modern habits of consumption that could once be found in the morning newspaper over the breakfast table or the evening television news. A breakthrough moment in the remaking of digital journalism was the recognition that simply transferring the news package to the internet with a "build it and they will come" attitude was inadequate to the moment. Media find that when seeking a locally defined audience, it's particularly important to get the product range right.

Central to getting the product right in the regions under review is grasping the limits of the distribution infrastructure such as the extent and affordability of broadband or other internet connections as well as mobile take-up with related data limits and charges. It's also shaped by government regulation and control of the infrastructure and of the social media platforms that work through it.

South Africa's Scrolla, for example, recognized that if it wanted to reach an audience that skewed young, it had to be mobile-centred, delivering news wherever their potential users were, trading as lightly on data as possible. In doing so, they could create habits of consumption in the daily pockets of time that the mobile internet fills, like on the bus or waiting for a friend.



**Hot on News,
Light on Data**

SCROLLA DATA LITE

In Zimbabwe, 263Chat founder Nigel Mugamu found that “the internet to most people is actually WhatsApp”. He leveraged the platform by publishing a Monday to Friday e-paper in about 200 WhatsApp groups, creating, at the same time, real-time multi-channel engagement.

Suno India saw in the country’s burgeoning podcast market an unserved gap for the 75 million Telugu speakers in southern India, including some who are illiterate, and filled it with deeply reported narrative audio journalism.

Product design calls for a willingness to pivot to hold onto existing audiences or to extend the range to reach new audiences. Previously, media organizations required significant capital expenditure (in, say, new presses) to launch a new product line. Now, there’s a freedom to experiment, to prototype at low cost, to see what works. Successful media need to be open to adapt and change

Sometimes, expansion may call for new languages: Kloop in Kyrgyzstan launched in the largely urban Russian language before expanding into the more rural (and more widely spoken) Kyrgyz language. Scrolla is pairing its English site with news in isiZulu.



In northern India, Khabar Lahariya has pivoted its product iterations. Starting as a literacy project for rural women in northern India, the outlet developed the women they had taught into local reporters in regional languages, like Bundeli, first for print papers and then through video storytelling for their communities. They have now moved into telling the stories from their communities about rural life to the broader Indian community, with special reporting for national media and a growing subscriber base.

Khabar Lahariya brings women’s voices to rural media in India. Khabar Lahiriya reporter Suneeta at work (Black Ticket Films)

The product range is essential to break through the inherent constraints on scale. It can be extended through forms of sharing, adaptation, and replication – almost a form of franchising – or by taking a successful local model and adapting it to other cities and regions. In India, Citizen Matters was launched in Bengaluru and has since been applied in Chennai and Mumbai. According to Meenakshi Ramesh, who was behind the launch of the Chennai chapter of Citizen Matters, “You need a pull from the city. It cannot be a push. I cannot wake up today and say, okay, let’s have a Citizen Matters in Delhi. Somebody who lives and breathes and feels for that city must jump in so we can start Citizen Matters in that city.”

Social media video streaming through YouTube and Facebook Live provides a low-cost point of entry to deliver local news and perspectives to a young mobile audience. Often one- or two-person teams adapt this model to provide low-cost local news.

BUSINESS MODELS THAT WORK (OR MIGHT WORK!)

Local media has been the most disrupted sector of the news media. It had to rethink all aspects of the business model. Previously, local news media were the only path to potential buyers for both national and local advertisers. Now, that business model has been squeezed, on one side from national news media making their digital product widely available along with their national ads; and on the other by social media offering a low-cost alternative for micro-targeting local advertisers. The ability of local media to simply adapt the subscriber-based model of national media is constrained both by the size of their audience and, often, by the disadvantaged nature of their communities.

Local news media need to assess what business models can work best under these circumstances to build financial sustainability into their products while pushing back against information inequality, ensuring their journalism reaches across the community rather than simply servicing those who can afford to pay via, for example, hard paywalls.

The result? Local news media across the regions under review – both new and traditional – are thinking deeply about how they can best leverage their core offering: a deep relationship of trust with their audience. Monetizing that trust demands an open conversation with the audience about how the outlet's journalism is supported and how the audience can help.

There is no single model that works for all local news media. Instead, we're seeing lots of experiments. It's critical that these ideas – and the lessons that can be drawn from them – are able to be shared so that they can be adapted (not simply copied) by others. Each experiment (successful or not) lays another brick in the foundation of local news sustainability.

Advertising and other business or corporate support remains important for some media. This is particularly true for transitioning media that built the traditional business off advertising. El Debate in northern Mexico, for example, continues to be an important platform for advertising in the local community.

The near-universal trend toward programmatic allocation of advertising, particularly through social media platforms like Facebook or YouTube, has particularly hurt local news media. Usually, their inventory (markets, space on page) is simply too small for the programmatic algorithms to bother with. There are exceptions. The News Minute talks to an audience of about 250 million across the southern Indian states and is able to translate that into a programmatic advertising income flow – although even they find that inadequate for their needs. Similarly, Pakistan's The Centrum Media is able to generate programmatic revenues through its YouTube and Facebook channels.

Some translate their deep local relationships into advertising. Rayon is an integrated network of hyperlocal sites in western Ukraine, each of which is targeted at separate communities. The Rayon network is able to leverage its connectivity to source advertising for (and between) local businesses as a continuing income source.

Zimbabwe's 263Chat is able to use the functionality of its core product (a PDF e-paper distributed through WhatsApp groups) to include advertising that it displays to its largely rural audience. Founder Nigel Mugamu says they are cautious to ensure a diversity of advertisers to prevent the risk of perceived (or actual) capture and dependence on any one source.

Scrolla in South Africa is pursuing a diversified revenue stream, allowing content to remain free for all. They use sponsorships to build their content verticals, with individual corporations sponsoring particular subject areas. They have also recently launched a [Data Lite edition](#), where readers can access a version of Scrolla that's both light on data and cost-free thanks to sponsorship from a mobile company.

Organizations are also reaching directly to their communities (or specific sectors of their communities) for support.

The News Minute, for example, developed separate membership products for their local audiences in Southern India and for NRIs (Non-Resident Indians living and working abroad). When they found that they weren't able to convert as many NRIs as expected, but that local audiences were showing their support, they merged the membership products. At the same time, they learned that what people valued was deeper engagement rather than simply more engagement: their monthly editorial meetings open to members were well attended and appreciated. The outlet has been gravitating towards adopting a strategy that looks beyond membership products to reader revenue as a whole through enabling readers to provide support in ways that go beyond the traditional concept of membership – whether it is by supporting a specific project or donating one-off or recurring small amounts to the website.

As TNM's audience editor, Ragamalika Karthikeyan, explains: "Membership exists, and we want to convert as many of our readers into members as possible, because that is then an organic process of involving the reader in everything that we are doing as stakeholders. So that continues, but we're also broadening the focus into audience revenue."

This audience revenue includes crowdfunding initiatives: "We're not just looking at 'Hey, become a member for one year ... or become a recurring member for one month', but sort of looking at it as audience revenue as a whole, and saying we're doing a reporting project about COVID, so why don't you support us for this particular project", Karthikeyan explains.

Having introduced both a subscription model and a wire service, Khabar Lahariya is drawing on its strength of reporting on the ground to bundle its stories into reports on life in rural India for a growing subscriber base and for syndication in city media. They are experimenting with a bulk subscription programme, hoping it can become a serious revenue earner at some point. With discounts for more than 50 subscriptions at a go, institutions, including those outside the country, have shown interest.

Experimentation with crowdfunding is also showing results, particularly where a clearly defined special purpose matches an identified community need. Rayon, for example, has crowdsourced through appeals to its audience to support specific products, including a special podcast series on COVID-19. Rayon's new crowdfunding target is a newly launched culture vertical. The outlet explains that it often seems that cultural life is concentrated only in big cities because that's where the theatres, art galleries, and large concert halls are. The new vertical is driven by a desire to share the unique culture in communities, small towns, and villages, where urban journalists rarely come. The site will become not only a platform for news, reports, interviews, and articles on culture but also a service media for artists and institutions, helping them to communicate with their target audience.

The Centrum Media is also experimenting with crowdfunding by setting up a Patreon account where it offers access to its full interviews in exchange for financial support. The challenge here, though, is finding an audience for feature-length content in a sustainable way so as to ensure long-term financial commitment. “In Pakistan, we’re willing to pay for Netflix, but no one will pay for really good journalism. So it’s very interesting, I think it’s just the behaviour of our audience”, Talha Ahad, The Centrum Media’s CEO and editor, says.

To build revenues to sustain their journalism, organizations are also looking sideways, developing tools that apply their knowledge of regional communities and their understanding of what makes their journalism special.

Most of Khabar Lahariya’s resources go into training journalists from disadvantaged communities. They have recently invested in a new academy, and the newsroom recently became profitable through its content agency work. “We get commissioned to create video content for various foundations and institutions”, Disha Mullick, the organization’s co-founder, says. “We also subsidize our news content – that’s the larger revenue – and we also take on research projects which are located in rural areas. Lastly, we produce high-quality films for other NGOs, which may not be news- or feature-related.”



In Paraguay, El Surtidor translates its visual journalism offering into a visual communications agency through its arm La Fábrica Memética and carries out training through Latinográficas. These two initiatives deliver about a third of the organization’s revenues. In Kyrgyzstan, Kloop monetizes its data insights and media-monitoring capacity to help other institutions and organizations.

Pakistan’s The Centrum Media recently developed an eight-part documentary series called “Wonder Women” in partnership with the U.N. They aim to do three to four long-form collaborations per year as well as smaller videos each month.

Many organizations depend on philanthropic support to get off the ground. Some media have grown out of NGO programmes that pivoted to local news media. Khabar Lahariya started life as a literacy programme in Indian villages before evolving into what it is today. The ABO network in Ukraine relies on external aid support for about 70 percent of its revenues. Ojoconmipisto was first funded under a USAID transparency programme to monitor public money in the municipalities of Guatemala, many of which are isolated from the country's capital and otherwise have no accountability media.

Often this support comes from global support programmes, most prominently the Media Development Investment Fund, which invests in countries where independent media is under threat. Some come from local philanthropy like the Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation in India.

Regional innovation lab-style initiatives are valuable in building sustainability, such as the one-year Velocidad accelerator programme in Latin America, which is supported by Sembra Media and is currently working with 10 media entrepreneurs in its second phase. For example, El Surtidor is using the programme to roll out its visual storytelling consulting company and its training school, developed in phase one, across the region. Meanwhile, El Pitazo is building its membership model.

The recently announced Google News Initiative Startups Lab in India was created in collaboration between the Google News Initiative (GNI), the global innovation lab Echos, and DIGIPUB News India Foundation. It offers a 16-week catalyst programme that aims to help the next generation of independent Indian news startups achieve financial and operational sustainability to deliver high-quality reporting for local and previously underserved communities. Suno India will be one of the 10 media startups joining the first lab with the aim of sharpening its product and audience-research capacity as well as experimenting with more sustainable revenue activities.

INSIGHTS

This report followed on from an earlier look by the IPI global network at local media that contrasted local media in the developed West (particularly the U.S., the UK, and France) and in emerging economies, particularly in South Africa and the Asia/Pacific region. This deeper look at local media in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe has both led to new insights and tested those we drew from our earlier research. So what have we found that is particularly relevant to local news media in the regions under review?

- The disruption of local news media – **the most disrupted sector of the media** – makes it the sector most open to experimentation and innovation and with the greatest potential to form the bedrock of a new, stronger media ecosystem. There is a great need for transition support infrastructure. In many countries, local media are also increasingly targeted by authoritarian populists.
- Too many local communities have **traditionally been information-poor** with weak or no local media (or, often worse, media controlled by the state and/or local oligarchic elites). Information scarcity has walked hand-in-hand with economic disadvantage: affluent and urban, educated audiences have been traditionally better served, reinforcing social inequality.
- The intensity of this need – of this market gap – is **mobilizing journalists and media-builders** to commit to meeting the needs of their communities with **a mission for journalism** by engaging them in new or transitional voices that speak for – and of – them. With the opportunities presented by the digital space, journalists are rethinking the products that will meet audience needs.
- Local news media are **shaped for the local context** to both **reflect and create their communities** with a **clear sense of their mission, editorial vision, and audience** (or potential audience). They have or gain an understanding of the intricacies of local culture and diversity by embedding themselves in the community, by looking like the community, and by being their community's champion in telling their stories to one another and the world.
- Wide-ranging **innovation and experimentation is having a strong positive impact** on local media outlets and the transition infrastructure (grants, advice, networks) available to support them, but this is unevenly distributed and, at times, dependent on reallocation of resources from other philanthropic projects. Innovation in local news is restrained by the limits of scale, which demands new thinking around sharing, replication, and adaptation, including through national media developing a local mindset with correspondents and localized distribution.
- **Digital natives are grasping the opportunity**, not tied by the dead weight of the past (including restraints of legacy organizational culture). They also tend to be less subject to state capture (although as illiberal and authoritarian states expand their repression model, digital native media also become targets). Media that want to transition have to think like a digital native. Remember, too: the rising generation of audiences consists of digital natives.

- Engagement with local communities needs to be **embedded across the process chain as a new way of thinking about journalism**, from design to editorial decision-making to product. Sustainability demands a continued demonstration of local media outlets' value to their community, particularly to communities that have historically been excluded from mass media offerings. It requires writing for, rather than about, communities, and building new audiences through a lens of inclusion.
- Local media need to leverage their inherent connectivity to generate trust and build an emotional attachment of “being on the same side” as their community. This is an essential shield against authoritarianism. Indeed, local news media are central in **the battle against misinformation and disinformation**. They play a key role in fact-checking, carrying out deep reporting, and debunking disinformation and misinformation. Local media understand that they are working in a polluted news environment and use trust and truth to compete with “fake news”.
- There is more **room for experimentation** with the local news product, driven by a reassessment of the job journalism does for a community. There is no right or wrong model – nor one single best product. Local news media are finding ways to reach their audience where they are. As local media transition online, opening access to new audiences, they can explore products that engage communities that may not have been served through traditional print. Having a local transition infrastructure where media can learn from one another is particularly important.
- Not all communities can sustain the media they need at the local level. There are real **limits to reader revenues in low-income and disadvantaged communities** (which can also be less attractive for advertisers). This means looking to other sources such as the region's diaspora, to local businesses as donors, and to philanthropy. The donor community needs to think more about local media outside Europe and the U.S. and be prepared to commit long-term support for basic news operations.

CONCLUSION: A POSITIVE PLAN FOR ACTION

The local news media sector is emerging as the key challenge for a sustainable global news and information system. As this research demonstrates, it's particularly urgent to meet the challenge in emerging and developing democracies and economies across the regions under review: Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe.

This report is the first attempt to paint the picture of where the journalists, editors, and media-builders in these regions find themselves right now as they remake their local media to meet the needs of their audiences. It seeks to identify practical measures that the global media community and its supporters can take to help them succeed. It adapts many of the recommendations in the earlier report of the IPI global network on local media, which focused on the U.S. and Western Europe with some comparisons in India and South Africa.

THERE ARE FIVE BIG MEASURES:

- **Embed a vision and sense of mission** that matches audience/community needs with an appropriate journalism focus;
- **Level up access** to the information, training, network support, and funding essential to building sustainable local media;
- **Create a global network** that prepares local news media to take on the challenges; that allows them to share, understand, and learn from one another's steps and stumbles; and that gives them access to expertise, mentoring, and community support;
- **Ensure that donors and the media support community** (particularly in developing countries and regions) understand that **the future is local**; and
- **Leverage the relationship of local trust** to rebuild confidence in news media and lead the fight against misinformation and disinformation.

HERE ARE NINE IMMEDIATE PRACTICAL STEPS:

1. Create opportunities for news media serving local communities in the regions under review **to develop the skills and knowledge** needed to build sustainable news media. Such opportunities can include bootcamps, virtual training, summits, and labs with a focus on audience engagement, product design, and revenue strategies.
2. Design an adaptable aid package from immersive training to mentoring that will help local news media to know and **understand their audience**; to design news products that create value in the eyes of their audience; and to implement revenue strategies for long-term sustainability.

3. Work with advanced digital transition organizations and programmes globally (particularly in the U.S.) to **explore collaborations** that can see their programmes adapted, extended, or replicated to where they are needed. Build understanding within donor organizations and philanthropic networks that not all communities can sustain the local news media they need. Some will need **long-term funding commitments**.
4. Create a **fund to support local media** in the regions of need with external funding that can:
 1. Support experimentation and innovation;
 2. Support training and networking opportunities;
 3. Support news organizations that are unable to be funded (in full or part) by their communities; and
 4. Address a specific challenge and/or to provide seed money for new products or other initiatives.
5. Identify and build a **global network** of local news media supporters, publishers, and editors that can create **networking and sharing** opportunities across continents. This should include a framework for local media to tell their story to others and collect best practices in an accessible format. Such a network should encourage confidence to share lessons from successes and failures. IPI is ideally placed to **act as a connector** between local media and points of advice, funding, and support; and to advise and help global donors and support organizations to understand the needs of local media, and to act on these.
6. Link **fact-checking experts with local media** to build the essential capacity to fight misinformation and disinformation.
7. Build a local news media focus in the IPI **virtual visits programme** to provide for a deep dive into experiences and lessons that can be shared globally. Facilitate an IPI transnational **mentor network** for media startups by linking across nations and drawing on the expertise of senior IPI members. Build a regular local news summit into the annual IPI World Congress.
8. Evangelize for local news media by leveraging networks and reporting frameworks that showcase local media, encouraging them **to tell their story** to broader audiences and **to act as champions** for one another and for the sector at large.
9. Build an **IPI local news award programme** that recognizes the importance of the sector and promotes great journalism.

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LOCAL JOURNALISM PROJECT CASE STUDIES

▶ 263CHAT.COM (Zimbabwe)



263Chat.com - Join the Conversation

The backstory: Launched in 2012, originally as a Twitter handle and hashtag, 263Chat is now a daily e-paper in Zimbabwe. 263Chat has over 200 WhatsApp groups that function as the primary distributor of its daily e-paper in PDF format to 50,000 Zimbabweans. The media organization also distributes news on its web page and on social media, particularly Twitter. 263Chat seeks to fill the gap in accessible, fact-based journalism in a country that is inundated with state media. 263Chat aims to reach all Zimbabweans — especially those in rural areas and with less access to the internet — through innovative news formats that allow them to get the information they need and want.

Audience: 263Chat has an audience of 50,000+ and seeks to provide a news service to a broad audience and reach people not traditionally well served by media. To do this they design news products to meet different needs and data capacity, guided as a starting point by young women in rural areas. With well over half of the Zimbabwean population being under 35 and highly literate, 263Chat aims to tap into young Zimbabweans in particular. With news available via several different formats, including PDF, WhatsApp, and Twitter, 263Chat reaches Zimbabweans everywhere, regardless of their access to data and internet.

Value proposition: 263Chat covers everything from tabloid-style news to political and economic issues of interest to Zimbabweans both in Zimbabwe and abroad. Uniquely, 263Chat has about 200 WhatsApp groups where readers can give direct feedback to 263Chat and ask about issues they want to be covered. 263Chat goes beyond traditional journalism and aims to serve a community information need. For example, they have six WhatsApp groups for farmers alone, where farmers can connect, share information, and problem-solve together.

Products and distribution: 263Chat's main news distribution happens through their e-paper, a PDF version of their news, which is delivered via hundreds of WhatsApp groups where readers can discuss the paper and give feedback directly to 263Chat. 263Chat's news can also be read on its website and social media channels. The organization is now developing a SMS platform for news distribution and as a new revenue stream.

The team: 263Chat has a team of 15, with 10 on the editorial team and five on the advertising client services team.

Business model: 263Chat funds its work through advertisements and documentary work, and uniquely, by offering multimedia services to other businesses and organizations such as live streaming.

Trust/misinformation: 263Chat builds trust through rigorous, timely, and fact-based reporting. Founder Nigel Mugamu said that Zimbabweans know that if 263Chat hasn't reported it, it probably hasn't happened yet. The e-paper helps counter disinformation because it is sent directly as a PDF from 263Chat to readers' phones, without any intermediaries.

The future: 263Chat founder Nigel Mugamu is optimistic about the future of journalism, particularly across Africa, where populations are young and literate and industries are growing.

Ask them about: News distribution via WhatsApp, reaching rural audiences and designing products to suit the different needs of their audience.

In their words:

“ We don't even call them the audience. We call them the community. So we talk to them every day. You know, my personal number is in every WhatsApp group that we have as 263Chat.

...[We] work backwards to create products that are aligned to either their value system, their purchasing decisions, the way they access the internet, the kinds of information they want to see and hear, [we] really think of the community.

I don't think Africa is ready for the traditional subscription model, you know, reader revenue type thing...It's a massive process of re-educating the market that the news isn't free.

We have six WhatsApp groups for farmers, right. And we sit in those groups and farmers share information, 'Hey, my chickens died. Here's a picture of them. Can someone tell me what this is and how I can solve it.' Right. That's got nothing to do with journalism, right. But we're serving a community need.

The person I'm trying to reach is a woman living in the rural areas. She may have a smartphone. She may not have the data to google. She may have a smartphone, but she may also have the WhatsApp platform...we launched what we call the e-paper...and we did it for two reasons...anyone with unlimited data can go to our website. That's where the freshest, newest information is. And then in the middle is the e-paper, where you have limited internet access.

I look at the market in Zimbabwe and Africa. We're not there yet...the disposable income is not there yet for you to pay a monthly subscription amount. So we've gotta be really creative about what type of products we create and how we serve the community that we serve. So it's that balance.

I'm always thinking about, hang on, is this how people consume news?...What is it about Netflix that makes us subscribers? And I realized that it's because they've given you a product that you can control."

"Obviously people are cost conscious in a country like this, you know, so someone buys their bundle for the month or whatever, and they use it. And so in those closed communities, you know, I pop in, "Hey guys, I've got a question or we want to do this. What do you think?" And so I ask the audience.

So how do we get the subscriber to pay, you know, a small amount to receive the news everyday via SMS for someone who isn't on the internet? Because we mustn't forget about that person, you know? So that's literally what the SMS product is about.




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Every dollar counts, you can't rely on one sector and you can't rely on one revenue stream, which is also very important, which is why the push to create products is also there because you need to create a newsletter as a new product. That's another revenue stream, you know, it might be 2 percent, but it's still revenue.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Nigel Mugamu, founder, 263Chat.com.



263Chat.com: Coordinates

-  Zimbabwe
-  www.263chat.com
-  [@263Chat](https://twitter.com/263Chat)

▶ ABO Local Media Development Agency (Ukraine)



Screenshot from *abo.media*

The backstory: ABO launched after Ukraine passed a 2015 law on the “destatization” – the removal of state influence – as part of a reform of state and municipal media. Before this reform, much of Ukrainian local media was state-funded, which undermined their independence. The goal of the law was to trigger independence and modernization in the media by removing state funding and its editorial influence. Lera Lauda and Oleksandr Bilinskiy decided they wanted to help local media adapt and began by launching a content management system (CMS) and a web platform called “The City” which local news organizations could use to go digital.

Audience: ABO supports a network of about 50 hyperlocal media located in small to medium towns in western Ukraine that are serving their local communities. In February 2020, the monthly audience reach for the local media that make up The City network was up to 1,440,000 unique users and 3,300,000 pageviews, in March they had 2,200,000 unique users and almost 5,000,000 pageviews. The numbers are consistently increasing.

Value proposition: Created a platform to help legacy local media transition to digital as well as launch new local media ventures while also supporting them to create sustainable revenue streams. With as few as ten stories, they can create websites within days and other digital news products. ABO offers mentorship for the transition and helps local media provide services to local businesses that they can charge for.

Products and distribution: ABO developed and launched a unique publishing platform, The City, which gives local editorial teams a base CMS to create websites, while allowing ABO to administer and technically update all websites inside the network and run joint ad campaigns. ABO provides ongoing mentorship for editorial, content, and business direction, and assistance with design and creative production, video editing, etc. through training sessions. It also helps local media find business models from which they can derive income. Currently, ABO has a network of 50 local media outlets across the region.

The team: Initially a partnership between Lera Lauda and Oleksandr Bilinskiy, the base team now has about 30 people of whom 10 are editors. Overall the organization collaborates with 250 editors, journalists, and commercial managers on a daily basis. They also cooperate with media NGOs (Ternopil Press Club, Ukrainian Crisis Media Center) in order to develop and implement gamified training programs for journalists. The individual media outlets tend to have 3 to 4 people.

Business model: ABO's own business model is grants/donations (often foreign grants), which make up about 70 percent of revenue. The remaining revenues come from advertising and content services managed across the network of local media, a model that has the advantage of providing advertisers with access to a larger audience. Over the past three years, ABO has developed further services for website monetization and increasing audience engagement.

Trust/misinformation: A big part of the work ABO is doing to help transform local media that were once tied to local governments for funding is to shift the mindset and create closer, more trusting relationships between these media and the communities they serve. They are further contributing to a lift in quality by helping to train and support independent journalists.

The future: ABO hopes to implement gradual automation of mentoring and monitoring work through the development of algorithms for a smart CMS platform that will decrease demand for mentors but increase the number of organizations that can access their product. They also hope to adjust business processes within the network so that they can retain all current staff without relying on donor funds by raising the funds through earned revenues for at least their monthly expenditures.

Ask them about: The network effects of local media innovation and the importance of marketing and branding strategy and entrepreneurial leadership. Also managing culture change as Soviet-era legacy media transition to independent and self-reliant businesses.

In their words:

“ There were about 650 local media organizations in different regions, and one morning they no longer had funding, their digitization was at a low level and most of them didn't have their own websites, or had really outdated websites. And they didn't know what to do.

On the need to prove your value:

The media is not a first, second, or even third necessity issue for people.

Our biggest challenge is to straighten the mentorship program and work with local media to create this community of local editors ... They keep in touch (with one another) and they have conversations or some joint projects. But they could do more. So we have this challenge too, to understand how to do it better. But I am optimistic.

It's a very simple example but our local media publish long stories with only text and numbers and that's all, and nobody reads it, it doesn't work. So we train them (in new journalism formats, including infographics) and then people really, really read it and share it around social media.




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It's not just about the money. It's about what you're giving to your readers.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Lera Lauda, head of ABO Local Media Development Agency



ABO: Coordinates

-  Ukraine
-  abo.media
-  [/agency.abo](https://www.facebook.com/agency.abo)

► CITIZEN MATTERS (India)



Citizen Matters founders Ashwin, Subbu, and Meera

The backstory: Launched in 2008 by Meera K and Subramaniam Vincent, Citizen Matters (CM) aims to fill a local news gap for Indian cities through fusing community journalism and local investigative work. The digital news site engages citizens by helping them understand that change is possible, and sharing the knowledge that can guide them to take action.

Audience: The paper has three chapters, in Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Chennai. Coverage has expanded to other areas such as Delhi, Hyderabad, and cities such as Pune and Ahmedabad. Citizen Matters aims to balance the voice of the already vocal middle-upper classes with the needs of marginalized communities, mostly focusing on issues affecting the daily lives of urban residents.

Value proposition: In a magazine format, Citizen Matters delves into systemic, local, and hyperlocal issues, which deviates from the Indian media's typical focus on national news. Citizens are able to contribute to the paper with the oversight of the editor. The website functions as a platform for civic participation.

The organization's strength is the audience, people who are engaged in civic issues in their community – for Citizen Matters, they are the “changemakers”. Having them as both readers and contributors creates a feedback loop and ensures impact on the ground.

Product and distribution: Citizen Matters offers various formats of articles, each with its own purpose. Its “explainers” deconstruct government policy, schemes, and civic processes while “solutions” provide evidence-based articles offering ways to overcome local problems. Other formats include citizen journalism, and in-depth reports.

Their online stories are distributed through their website; their newsletter, which reaches 12,000 people; and social media platforms, which have reached just under 33,000 followers across all channels (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn).

Most readers follow the stories on Citizen Matters's website directly or are directed from Google Search or Google News; some stories are republished on other media platforms. Apart from social media, readers can elect to receive a broadcast of the stories published on a given day via WhatsApp or Telegram as well. YouTube is used to post video interviews and webinars.

The team: Meera K is the managing trustee who oversees the direction of the paper. There is one editor for each city. Reporting is done by a team of seven professional journalists across the three city chapters, by various freelancers as well as by volunteer citizen journalists. One team member assists with technology and operations. A community engagement officer is in charge of posting and monitoring social media for potential leads.

Business model: Citizen Matters functions as a non-profit through the Oorvani Foundation. Funding comes from retail donations, grants contributions from high net worth individuals, foundations, and other sources such as philanthropists. Citizen Matters's collaborative approach has enabled it to keep the costs of investigative storytelling down.

Trust/misinformation: Citizen Matters takes the time to research its stories, and has a reputation of credibility in the cities where it operates. Throughout the pandemic, the outlet produced explainers that could warn readers of misinformation and could ensure they were aware of the veracity of the news they were consuming.

The future: Citizen Matters is building a strong community, both on social media and offline through events and workshops. The team plans to improve the website in the near future.

Ask them about: Civic participation

In their words:



Meera K

Our journalism catalyses better cities by empowering the public with the knowledge and understanding to become active and engaged citizens.

Seeing the city unable to deal with sudden explosive growth, I wanted to do something about local issues. I had questions like: why is this flyover project taking so long? Why is the garbage bin overflowing?

Editorial stewardship is critical to ensure that what citizens develop is journalism - and not just a rant like on social media. An editor facilitates this process - we handhold and mentor community reporters to tell the story with truth, accuracy, and fairness.

We have built a collaborative approach that engages citizens deeply, helping them understand change is possible, and sharing the knowledge that can guide them to take action. Citizens bring in lived experiences, understanding of ground reality, and practical insights. Professional journalists are critical for their skills in digging out information, and accessing the right sources, providing multiple perspectives.

Meenakshi Ramesh

One of the learnings is to give equal importance to all voices. Another one is to be always learning... it's a very slow journey and you have to (be optimistic), every morning you have to have at least 5 percent more optimism than pessimism.




”

It takes time. The Mumbai chapter is only a year and a half old. And there were days when we used to say, oh my God, nobody's reading our articles and what are we doing here? But Mumbai is a big city. It's a complex city. And slowly we see traction.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interviews with Meera K, co-founder, Citizen Matters; Meenakshi Ramesh, Citizen Matters, Chennai. Meera K and Meenakshi Ramesh are trustees of the Oorvani Foundation, the nonprofit that runs Citizen Matters.



Citizen Matters: Coordinates

-  India
-  citizenmatters.in
-  [@citizenmatters](https://twitter.com/citizenmatters)

► CONVOCA (Peru)



Screenshot from convoca.pe/experienciaconvoca

The backstory: Convoca was born as an investigative journalism association in 2014, founded by a team of journalists, developers, and data analysts. They started as a partnership to conduct investigations, and their first publication was their contribution to the Swiss Leaks investigation. The team had their main jobs and worked on Convoca on the side until they won a grant for a second big investigative project.

Convoca operates in a challenging media environment. The main threat to media freedom in Peru comes from defamation laws, which often lead to journalists being threatened, intimidated, or prosecuted. Media income and ownership are very concentrated in Peru, especially in the print and online media. In recent years, reporting has been complicated by a lack of transparency and difficulties in access to official information.

Audience: Convoca readers are typically between the ages of 18 and 45, professionals with a critical view of reality and who are looking for different content. Thanks to their programme “Convoca Servicios”, Convoca grew from 80,000 users to three million users during the pandemic.

Value proposition: The main goal of Convoca is to produce high-quality investigative reporting, but they also aim to teach and promote the practice of high-quality journalism. “We want to have an impact on the authorities. From the very beginning, Convoca has aimed to generate changes in public policy”, founder Milagros Salazar says.

The team: The Convoca team is made up of around ten people, including system engineers, computer technicians, and journalists.

Product and distribution: Convoca focuses mainly on investigative series, rather than snapshots of current affairs. They also have a service section with “news you can use”, called “Convoca Servicios”, which has been crucial to their growth. They distribute their podcast through alliances with more than 40 local radio stations in Peru, Mexico, and Bolivia.

Business model: In the search for long-term sustainability Convoca has tried several strategies to diversify its income. In 2016 they conducted a crowdfunding campaign and in 2018 they launched a school for data journalism training.

The operation is nowadays based on four pillars. The first is the media outlet itself, Convoca.pe, which operates on a mixed revenue model, consisting of grants, scholarships, and alliances with different organizations.

The second one is ConvocaEscuela, which in addition to courses and workshops, also publishes digital books and organizes events such as investigative and data journalism congresses. The third pillar is Convoca Deep Data, a platform for data analysis on extractive industries in Peru. Convoca Deep Data is based on a freemium membership model that allows free access to basic data but charges for more advanced features. The fourth is Games for News, an offshoot of Convoca Lab, which is their experimentation space to find new revenue streams.

The future: ConvocaLab is the outlet’s innovation laboratory. It has generated new storytelling formats, including interactive comics, interactive games, 360° videos, and podcasts.

Ask them about: How they built and manage Convoca Deep Data, a data analysis platform on extractive industries in Peru. They processed 2.4 million pieces of data, and analyzed information that dated back 100 years, assessing indicators that measure, for instance, the level of non-compliance with environmental and labor regulations in the last 15 years. Additionally, they processed a 16-year period of information that contains over 200 open files on environmental matters and a registry of penalties and sanctions imposed between 2014 and 2019.

In their words:

“ Convoca emerged as a group of people who wanted to do journalism that would contribute to generating changes in public policy.

Journalists can learn that data can not only be used as a source for immediate publications, but also that it can be integrated with other databases to generate open data platforms such as Convoca Deep Data.

We had experience in working with databases and were very curious as to how to use technology to serve journalism. We thought that there wasn’t a single newsroom with these characteristics in Peru, and we wanted to create a project to pioneer this.




Our methodology for collaboration is that we are the ones who will build or organize all the information and then we distribute it to partners and accompany that process.

I We launched a data analysis platform so that media, civil society, and universities could analyze and cross-reference their own databases from a platform we call *Deep Data*. And that has a business model, of course, which is subscription and memberships in a freemium model.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Milagros Salazar, founder and editor-in-chief, Convoca Peru.



Convoca: Coordinates

-  Peru
-  convoca.pe
-  [@ConvocaPe](https://twitter.com/ConvocaPe)

► DAILY DISPATCH (South Africa)



www.dispatchlive.co.za

The backstory: Founded in 1872, the Daily Dispatch became the first penny daily newspaper published in the Eastern Cape in 1898, and has been an advocate for fair treatment of all South Africans ever since. Due to the South African media's reliability on the declining advertisement model, many outlets, including the Daily Dispatch, witnessed a 50 percent drop in working journalists. Although its newsroom has shrunk, the Daily Dispatch continues to fill a gap in investigative journalism in the region through the paper's strong relationship with the community it is serving and is finding ways to refocus on local communities and experiment with new products.

Audience: With a core readership of over 100,000, the Daily Dispatch targets audiences in the Eastern Cape, one of the poorest provinces in South Africa. While it still relies heavily on the printed newspaper, about 5 percent of its digital audience are paying subscribers.

Value proposition: The Daily Dispatch serves its audience through investigative journalism, exposing corruption and injustices, and hyperlocal reporting in the province of the Eastern Cape. It offers, for example, a local walkabout series in which journalists report their findings through walking specific neighborhoods and meeting with residents who pitch stories that matter to the community.

Products and distribution: The Daily Dispatch distributes its content through its print (circulation 14,000) and online editions. Online, readers can also enjoy an exact replica of the print edition via PDF. It also provides daily news updates via email breakers, as well as three weekly podcasts. The Daily Dispatch has also recently begun making brief videos featuring its journalists, who explain their approaches to reporting different stories, deepening their relationship with readers. This feature is also replicated in a 'Behind the News' feature published in the newspaper every Friday.

The Dispatch is known for its investigative journalism and this year, for the first time ever, the newspaper produced a 50-minute documentary, called *Farmers Under Siege*, to run alongside its print project. The news outlet built a marketing campaign around the investigation, including adverts for print and social media, radio interviews with the authors, and a teaser for the documentary. The project has already won awards.

The team: The Daily Dispatch has an editorial staff of eight managers, three photographers and 14 reporters (including two at the Mthatha bureau). However, they're stretched thin and need more staff to cover everything that is important to the community.

Business model: Advertisements, subscriptions, subscriber-only competitions, and events. South Africans aren't used to paying for news, but the Daily Dispatch is working to change that through its marketing campaigns that encourage people to subscribe by giving them a glimpse behind the story.

Trust/misinformation: In the early days of the pandemic, the Daily Dispatch was seen as a trusted news source compared to other forms of media and received many unique visitors to the news site. People knew the Daily Dispatch is community-focused and so they went straight to them for the best local information on the pandemic, delivering record highs on the paper's website.

Ask them about: How strengthening the editorial focus on local stories helps build audiences as media transition to digital.

The Daily Dispatch had to refocus on local content after coronavirus news fatigue. They did this through:

- Giving readers insight into the newsroom through featuring journalists in short videos that allow for more personal insight into the work they produce.
- Weekly podcasts that dig into the front-page story of the week.
- Getting back into community-specific stories such as the introduction of the *Walkabout* series and *Ward Watch*. "Both these features focus on news from our local communities, with the aim of bringing about positive change through reporting. Plans for the new year include a return to campaign journalism where the newspaper takes on an issue, with the hopes of getting the local authority on board to help.

In their words:

“ I think a lot of people were moving away from the unconventional means of media and going to the trusted sources to find out exactly what the status was in the country.

We always try by all means to have a strong local headline that will get people to come to us where we can then say, 'Hi, we've got something else for you'.

We have actually found that we lost track of that local content that we were really pushing because we were so focused on the big national COVID story. So in the last couple of months, we've been trying to win back that local content.

On their behind-the-news campaign:

We just give people a little bit of insight on how we put the news together for you. This is how we package it. It's been doing really well. There's been a lot of engagement on our social media. People also like to see the faces behind the names they see in the paper every day. So that was pretty cool.

On launching their podcasts:

A lot of people listen to it. So that was exciting because it's a new form of journalism that we're getting into.

We've seen a steady growth in our subscriptions over the last year. And it is something that we're trying to capitalize on. What we did about a month ago is we looked at all our digital packages and looked at how we change it and adjust it in terms of what we're offering people. We want to make it a little bit more enticing.

On serving the whole Eastern Cape community and managing the urban/rural divide:
It's something that I wrestle with every single day. I'm pushing out content and we are trying to deal with our core audience. It's where our money is coming from, our advertising is coming from. But how do you consolidate that with the people in the rural areas who are also buying the newspaper? They may not be buying it as much as people in East London areas, but how do we give them enough content so that more of them are buying it? It's been difficult to balance that out.

Being a regional newspaper, our strength is telling the stories that matter to the people of the Eastern Cape – be it through our everyday reporting on bread and butter issues or our special reports and investigations. Each day, the digital editor provides feedback on which stories pique the interest of readers/subscribers, and we've found that local stories feature in eight to nine of the top 10 stories.

Crime and big political stories are still our biggest drivers of traffic, as are stories of hope and black excellence. The Dispatch in September launched three podcasts: Business Talk, Behind the Headlines and That Weekend Feeling. Behind the Headlines and That Weekend Feeling are done in partnership with a local radio personality, Daron Mann. Behind the Headlines gives our readers insights into our big news story of the week while That Weekend Feeling is a more leisurely interview with a local celebrity.

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Dispatch
LIVE

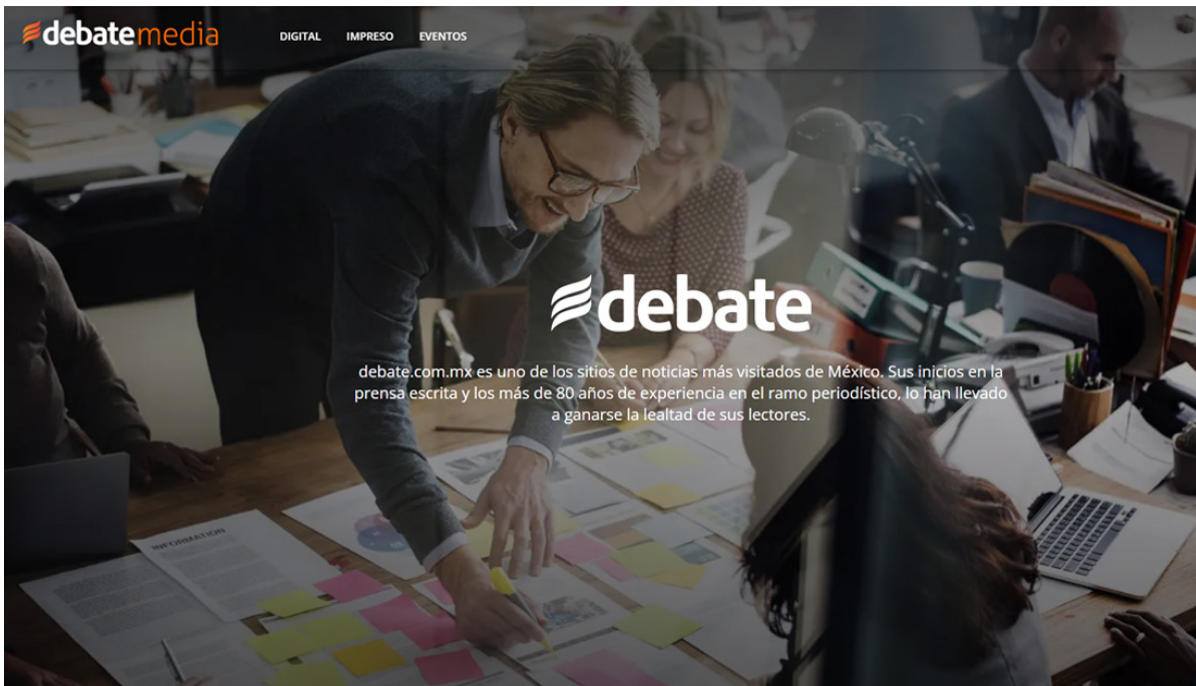
Daily Dispatch: Coordinates

📍 Eastern Cape Province,
South Africa

🌐 www.dispatchlive.co.za

🐦 [@Dispatch_DD](https://twitter.com/Dispatch_DD)

▶ EL DEBATE (Mexico)



Screenshot from www.debate.com.mx/mediakit

The backstory: El Debate was founded in Los Mochis, a city in the north of Sinaloa state, in 1941 by Manuel Moreno Rivas, whose son now runs the company.

Mexico is one of the deadliest countries for the press. Nine journalists were killed in 2019 and 11 in 2020, according to IPI's Death Watch. There have been five killed so far in 2021. Especially at risk are journalists covering organized crime and the drug trade. Impunity is a massive problem in Mexico: the killers of journalists are almost never held accountable.

Audience: The El Debate group has 210 million monthly users on its digital platforms (Comscore 2021). Fifty-six percent are from Mexico and 44 percent from abroad. "If the content is good, they will read you", the group's editorial director says. El Debate is one of the most-read Mexican media outlets.

Value proposition: News and current affairs in Sinaloa, Mexico and the world. The development of verticals has been their major innovation as a regional newspaper, making them the national digital lead. The verticals comprise a broad scope of niche content from fishing competitions to entertainment, and also sites related to young people.

The team: They have five newsrooms in the state of Sinaloa, one in each of the main cities. Its print editions circulate in the state of Sinaloa, mainly in the cities of Los Mochis, Guasave, Guamúchil, Culiacán, and Mazatlán.

Product and distribution: The El Debate group delivers 10 daily print editions. A very active events department produces around 125 events a year with an audience of 120,000 people. They started to allocate resources and strategic planning to the digital area nine years ago and have grown exponentially thanks to their vertical strategy.

They use the chat apps Telegram and WhatsApp to distribute information but Facebook is their most-used social media platform. Due to the nature of the audience, Twitter and Instagram have low impact.

Business model: The main source of income is advertisement, both from local businesses and Google ads. The company also has an important share of income from newspaper sales. The organization owns buildings, clinics, and other real estate. Vertical sites with niche content have been a source of income and traffic for El Debate. They have verticals for sport fishing, couples, health, entertainment, and personal finance. These include Soy Carmín (5.24 million unique users), Soy Futbol (3.63 million), and Mi Bolsillo (2.5 million).. The operation of the verticals consists of teams between four and eight people, according to editorial director Andrea Miranda.

The future: Keep experimenting and failing until they get it right. They are about to launch more verticals.

Ask them about: During the pandemic El Debate launched 20 vertical sites to address a variety of niche audiences. In total, they run 32 niche sites. Sixty-four percent of their traffic comes from this vertical ecosystem and they are always on the lookout to launch new verticals, responding to a need detected from the audience.

In their words:

“ About going digital: *We messed up a lot of things, we also spent a lot of money, but we have a boss who lets us do it. And for me that has been essential. He is with us and lets us do it. The mistakes we make are part of the learning process and we accept them as such and they allow us to continue investigating and making decisions.*

We work for our readers. They are our source of work and our main interest. We do not work for the authorities.

We like to be close to people, to walk the cities, to be in the markets, to know what is happening and to be engaged in the neighborhoods.

” *We are very optimistic. Now that Facebook's Meta has been presented... we would love to be there, right? We want to be there and we want to be in everything new that comes, to be part of the innovation. We're on board. I think we have developed that spirit. We adapt to whatever comes.*

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Andrea Miranda, general editorial director, El Debate



El Debate: Coordinates

 Sinaloa state, Mexico
 www.debate.com.mx
 [@ELDEBATE](https://twitter.com/ELDEBATE)

▶ EL PITAZO (Venezuela)



El Pitazo's team out in the community as part of its "Un Café con El Pitazo" initiative

The backstory: El Pitazo ("The Whistleblower") emerged out of the need to fight censorship and bring information to the most deprived segments of the public in Venezuela. Founded in December 2014, it started as a YouTube channel, but progressively expanded. Today it broadcasts multimedia content through a radio show (on open and digital signal), SMS, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, and four newsletters. The El Pitazo website records a million visitors every month.

As with all independent media in Venezuela, El Pitazo and its staff have been subjected to physical and cyber attacks, as well as legal threats by political leaders and businessmen. In 2019, they won the prestigious Ortega y Gasset Award (Spain) and the Gabo Award from the the Gabo Foundation – an institution created in 1995 by journalist and Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez. They were also selected for the Velocidad Fund, a one-year-long media accelerator program that helped them to implement their membership model.

Audience: El Pitazo reports 3.5 million monthly views on its web page and 12,341 newsletter subscribers. They have a large social media following, with 430,000 followers on Facebook, nearly 1 million on Twitter and Instagram, and close to 12,000 on Telegram. They have reached more than 18,000 people since they started conducting WhatsApp chat forums and have 6,000 readers in WhatsApp groups.

Value proposition: El Pitazo aims to inform a wider audience outside big cities who have less access to reliable digital connections. It has correspondents in almost all regions of Venezuela and though it is positioned as a generalist news outlet, it focuses part of its reporting on local stories using 11 content distribution channels. The outlet's strategies to reach disconnected communities are innovative: flip-charts pasted on walls; two-minute news briefs before a movie show; and live chat forums through WhatsApp. They also employ performative journalism, producing plays that tell investigative stories already in the public domain or dramatizing their own investigative reporting so that it can reach a wider audience.

The team: El Pitazo has a staff of 70 people, including correspondents and web editors, and design and social media staff. When required, it also hires freelance multimedia editors, video and audio producers, and journalists. It has built alliances with 20 radio stations in different states of the country, which reproduce the micro- and notiaudios (two-minute reports from their correspondents). They also have a program called Info Citizens in which they train citizens in different regions on how to do journalism.

Product and distribution: El Pitazo distributes its content through its website, social media, radio, and newsletters. During the energy blackouts in 2019 and also because of the very poor internet connectivity in Venezuela, they also started distribution through “papelógrafos” (poster announcements or flipcharts) in poor neighbourhoods and in other connection-deprived communities.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, El Pitazo created WhatsApp group chats or chat forums, a way to continue informing readers, support disadvantaged communities, and find innovative ways to obtain financing despite poor internet connection. They use this method to create content for all platforms.

Business model: El Pitazo began operating with seed capital from IPYS (Instituto de Prensa y Sociedad, an NGO that promotes freedom of the press and information), Trapiche Films, a commercial production company; as well as from an international grant. They generate grant funding from projects and investigative journalism, and also gain income from programmatic advertising, fixed advertising, sponsored content, events, and a membership model, which began in 2020.

The future: Make the membership model work. El Pitazo aims to reach not only a local audience but also the Venezuelan diaspora, a potential audience of six million people. Their most recent newsletter, “Guayabo”, caters to this audience.

Ask them about: They created a strategy and business team, with six people focused on generating revenue: membership, sales, marketing, and newsletter publishing.

In their words:

“ We are the first media in Venezuela to start a subscription model for Venezuelans in and out of the country and we did not have the technology or the purchasing platforms to do it. We had to start from scratch. This is our big bet towards sustainability.

One of the most important lessons we have learned is to have a product mentality from the beginning. What does it mean? Content, technology, sustainability, and design.

In a country as difficult as Venezuela, doing journalism and innovating is a marathon that we are running with one leg, with numerous obstacles. It forces us to look every day for new alternatives to reach audiences.


Many of our reporters acknowledge that if it weren't for El Pitazo they would have left the country or joined a profession other than journalism.

I We are finding ways to express journalism beyond the forms that we are taught in the academic world, because we have to innovate, discover, and dare, to fight for the attention of audiences in the midst of an environment where there is so much dispersion.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with César Bátiz, co-founder and editor-in-chief, El Pitazo.



El Pitazo: Coordinates

 Venezuela
 www.elpitazo.net
 [@EIPitazoTV](https://twitter.com/EIPitazoTV)

▶ EL SURTIDOR (Paraguay)



Screenshot from Elsurti.com

The backstory: El Surtidor (also called El Surti) was born in 2016 as a Facebook page founded by a group of journalists and designers to become a benchmark for visual journalism in Latin America. Paraguay has one of the most unequal land distributions in the world, which is also reflected in high media concentration. El Surti fills a gap in the region by using graphic elements to tell critical stories affecting communities, from climate change to drug use to COVID. El Surti received the Peter Benenson Award for Journalism Committed to Human Rights in 2016 from Amnesty International Paraguay and the Gabriel García Márquez Journalism Award in 2018 in the Innovation category. The media company was among the 10 startups selected by the accelerator Velocidad to receive direct investment and consulting through the program, and was one of the six to move on to the second phase of the project.

Audience: They are oriented to an under-30 audience, which is a product of a demographic boom in Paraguay. El Surti says that every week they reach 200,000 people. Additionally, 10,000 subscribers listen to their podcast, which is distributed once a week through WhatsApp, where El Surti has a very loyal audience network.

Value proposition: El Surti bets on the power of visual journalism, format innovation and community building to break into the country's public debate. El Surti's poster-style pieces, which synthesize information graphically, have the effect of attracting readers' curiosity about a topic.

Product and distribution: El Surti's main news products are distributed through JPGs of 800 pixels. They've since expanded to other formats: scrolling, animated videos, longer reports, data journalism, timelines, magazines, fanzines, exhibitions in public spaces, and exhibitions in museums. El Surti also distributes content through its website and social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. The latter is now their main distribution channel, where their "hard core" users are. They generate monthly meetings in the chat Discord. In 2019 they implemented "La Precisa", a fact-checking section, and continue to sustain it through international alliances. El Surtidor's podcast is distributed every week via WhatsApp and also through a network of local radios throughout the country.

The team: El Surti is an association of communications workers and functions similarly to an NGO in Paraguay. They started as a team of three: a designer, a writer, and an illustrator, and are now 19 people in total.

Business model: El Surtidor is today an organization divided into three units: media (El Surtidor and La Precisa), training (Latinográficas, 5 percent of annual income), and consulting service La Fábrica Memética (projects with institutions and visual communication consultancy). The latter provides 30 percent of their income. It is in these three areas that they have found sustainability. Futuros, an annual print magazine with El Surtidor's best stories on the climate crisis, generates around 2 percent of income.

The challenge: "That the algorithms don't become our editors"

The future: Combine the magazine, the events, and finally launch their membership program that was abruptly halted by COVID.

Ask them about: An intent to pivot to video did not work because of poor internet connection in the country, so they developed "surtiscroll", a vertically scrolling "scrollytelling" format that uses features of information posters, explainer videos, long-form and Japanese Kamishibai stories. It is HTML-based, consumes very little data and works on low-quality connections. The lesson is: before developing products, be sure that they can be properly consumed by users.

In their words:



We work with a public that is suffering the consequences of the climate crisis.

We did not see our generation's problems reflected in the traditional media, neither in topics nor in forms. And there we saw an opportunity, in the greater access to mobile content and mobile internet and specifically social networks such as Facebook.

Visual storytelling is a very powerful way to mitigate the infodemic, enhance the impact of journalistic work, and deepen interaction with new audiences and community management.

We are always testing, doing, discarding or escalating according to the results we receive. This model has its advantages and disadvantages, but the advantage is that it allows us to be dynamic, so our products are always changing.

About growth:

The first stage was the hardcore fans, they were the first followers, then it was the local organizations and in a third instance it was the international organizations that are investing in independent journalism.

About the audience:

A characteristic of our country is the weak social fabric that exists in general. Our audience falls into two categories: youth, organized, and unorganized. One of our goals is to get people to organize. Understand that collective action is like a response to our reality.

We had prepared our membership plan. Then came the quarantine. The first people who were left without work in the quarantine were our generation, precarious people. It was not a time to ask for money, it was the other way around. It was an audience that needed help.

Listen to the specific problems of our audience. Do journalism on those specific problems, make available what is needed to change the status quo. This is what we want to achieve, what we seek to do with each piece.

About sustainability:


Sustainability and independence is a daily construction. One is never completely independent and never completely sustainable.

I am optimistic in the sense that good journalism has more channels than ever to get through. If there is good journalism, if that journalism serves a community, without a doubt it will find the TikTok, the tweet, the web, the fanzine, the play, whatever it takes to reach more (people).

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with El Surti co-founder Alejandro Vazquez.



El Surtidor: Coordinates

 Paraguay
 elsurti.com
 [@elsurti](https://twitter.com/elsurti)

► KHABAR LAHARIYA (India)



Khabar Lahariya team

The backstory: Khabar Lahariya offers hyper-local watchdog journalism with a feminist lens. Founded by a Delhi-based NGO as a weekly print edition in 2002, Khabar Lahariya began as a women’s collective led by a group of urban and rural feminists. Eighteen years later, the “country’s only digital rural network” is thriving, employing about 40 women journalists from socially and economically marginalized groups to report on issues that directly impact their communities. Now fully digital, their award-winning model has been recognized internationally, having received the UNESCO King Sejong Prize in 2009.

Audience: Khabar Lahariya, which translates as “news wave”, now reaches a monthly audience of up to 10 million people from marginalized communities in rural Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and western Bihar. These states share similarities in their display of gender inequity, structural inequity, and caste inequity.

Their subscription model has attracted mostly people from their English-speaking, global audiences among the Indian diaspora as well as metropolitan English speakers. They are currently looking for ways in which they can diversify their audience and their revenue streams.

Value proposition: Empowering rural communities, and particularly women from disadvantaged groups through reporting in and on communities in accessible local dialects such as Bundeli and Avadhi. Their feminist perspective aims to challenge the prevailing upper caste, and male-dominated, city-centric journalism. They hope to bring rural and urban women together to produce stories, taking a “bottom-up approach”.

Product and distribution: Khabar Lahariya began as a printed paper. As smart phones began to dominate, in 2015 they pivoted to producing and distributing video content for YouTube through a news site. Most of Khabar Lahariya's resources go into training journalists from disadvantaged communities.

Their recent transition into Chambal Media has enabled them to experiment with different forms such as films, podcasts, animations, and screening discussions. They are able to reach local and international audiences through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and TikTok (before it was banned in India). Twitter and Instagram have been popular with their urban digital audience whereas YouTube and Facebook have mainly attracted their rural audience.

The team: To report on a hyper-local level, expose corruption, and provide accountability journalism for low-income communities, Khabar Lahariya relies on journalists embedded in and from the target communities. Located firmly in conservative social milieus, these journalists routinely face misogyny and abuse. Their rootedness, however, ensures the authenticity of their reporting on rural issues for national media audiences. Their location also allows them to act as credible content suppliers of news and features to NGOs, foundations, and institutions engaged in rural issues.

Business model: They derive their revenue from philanthropic support, project grants, content agency, and commissioned content. The shift to Chambal Media has made them a for-profit organization rather than a not-for-profit trust. This allows them to look for partnerships that they hadn't been able to as a not-for-profit trust, and has built their capacity.

They have started experimenting with putting some of the English content behind a paywall, and have adopted a subscription model. The hope is that the recently launched bulk subscription program can become a serious revenue earner at some point.

Trust/misinformation: Khabar Lahariya is renowned for its credibility, painstakingly built over 20 years. The paper began covering previously unexplored issues such as mental health and medical care during the COVID-19 pandemic to combat the misinformation crisis that was occurring. As most information coming from top-down was being met with distrust, a taskforce that focused on disseminating information during this time was assembled by the paper.

The future: Khabar Lahariya has been piloting "Chambal Academy", which is an online rural journalism course. It has been created to meet the needs of rural women in India, who may not be technologically adept. Rural women will be able to learn from reporters who come from similar backgrounds. A toolkit is also being developed to educate women on digital safety, security, and on identifying misinformation.

The piloted version of the Academy is currently being supported with funding, but once it is fully launched it will be available for purchase by individuals and institutions who want to engage in capacity building.

They currently have a three-year plan, citing the regions in which they wish to expand. It is hoped that some of the students from Chambal Academy will be able to assist with establishing bureaus in these areas.

Ask them about: The importance of having women with lived experience articulating feminist stories. Diversifying revenue streams.

In their words:

“ We’re sort of like a local watchdog with a feminist lens.

We do development reporting, but then in a hyper-local context, development reporting also means politics, right? Because how does public money get spent? What are the kinds of corruption and scandals? We expose corruption and the way that public money gets handed around, talking about what kind of welfare schemes are being rolled out, at what point and in what area. How do those actually pan out on the ground?

We do a lot of reporting around human rights related to gender and caste. Our crime reporting is also from the lens of examining the perpetrators of crime. Why do certain crimes have impunity? How does violence against women happen? What exactly does it mean? How does it change?

” All of our stories have that core idea of our rural and urban women coming together, an all-women crew shooting, telling stories with a bottom-up approach.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Disha Mullick, co-founder, Khabar Lahariya; Pooja Pande, head of strategy; and Priya Thuvassery, executive producer.



Khabar Lahariya: Coordinates

- 📍 India
- 🌐 khabarlahariya.org
- 🐦 [@KhabarLahariya](https://twitter.com/KhabarLahariya)

► KLOOP (Kyrgyzstan)



Screenshot from facebook.com/kloop.kg

The backstory: Kyrgyzstan lacks independent media organizations that hold the government accountable. In response, Kloop was founded in 2007 by Bektour Iskender and Rinat Tuhvatshin and has become both a news website with a local focus and a journalism school known for teaching investigative reporting and media literacy. In recent years, Kloop has become one of the country's most popular news sites and has moved to train many journalists from outside of the capital, Bishkek, to report on remote areas to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas of the country. Kloop became especially prominent in 2010 for its coverage of the Kyrgyz revolution and its investigations into alleged criminal activities of the son of the president of Kyrgyzstan.

Audience: Kloop's audience is broad and has strong roots in Bishkek but also around more rural parts of the country. Kloop initially had content only in Russian, but expanded with a Kyrgyz-language version. In particular, Kloop aims to serve those who seek transparency and accountability from the government.

Value proposition: Kloop seeks to hold those in power accountable and improve the quality of the media for local communities in Kyrgyzstan. It says it is known as a newsroom that won't give into pressure from any outside groups or the government. Through teaching Kyrgyz youth about journalism, monitoring elections, and investigative data reporting, Kloop builds demand for trustworthy local news in Kyrgyzstan.

Products and distribution: Kloop distributes daily news through its website and social media channels. Kloop is unique in that it also functions as a journalism school and has trained hundreds of Kyrgyz people in media literacy and journalistic practices. It also functions as an innovation hub for projects that aren't always directly related to journalism. The outlet is also expanding its reach through creating viral TikTok content as well as videos and broadcasts to accompany reporting.

The team: Kloop has 60 employees spread between two offices in Bishkek and Osh, the two largest cities in the country, and a wide network of freelancers and student journalists. Kloop has taken advantage of how small the country is to train many journalists from outside of Bishkek to report on content from more rural areas to bridge this gap. Kloop is comprised of a newsroom, an award-winning investigative journalism department, and a data department, which is working on developing technology. Kloop also has a fundraising department, an election monitoring department (which has become the largest election monitoring organization in the country), and an education department, which provides journalism and general media literacy education. They even have a team that is working on building a satellite.

Business model: Kloop has a diverse revenue stream. It is funded mostly through grants and crowdfunding. Kloop also has some commercial activities such as partner content that is produced with companies, which is highlighted as such. Kloop underscores that it is independent and does not allow money to influence news operations in any way. The organization also charges for its education programs.

Trust/misinformation: Kloop has done a great deal of work to counter misinformation. The team runs stories that debunk misinformation and also provides analysis on social media bots and how they influence internet activity. Kloop also teaches media literacy in its courses. In 2017, Kloop received several awards during its “Samaragate” series of investigations that focused on violations that occurred during Kyrgyzstan’s presidential elections.

The future: Kloop wants to expand internationally and wants to spread information and the latest technologies to civil society, activists, and journalists.

Ask them about: Their journalism school and their programs to train up young journalists. Also, their investigative data projects.

In their words:

“ *The core mission of our organization is to encourage people to become brave enough to fight for something, something good.*

We also have the election monitoring department and we’ve actually become the largest election monitoring organization in Kyrgyzstan during the last few years.

It would be cool if we kind of raised this generation which is fearless, which is able to stand up for themselves. So I think that this is the most unifying idea within the organization.

We were from the very beginning very much focused on covering human rights.

If some corrupt politician is coming after us, we make a whole show out of it - first of all, that’s a safety measure for us, but also we hope that this way we give an example to many people in Kyrgyzstan to not be afraid of these crooks.

We are, I think, balancing on the edge of activism and journalism - I don’t know if it’s right or wrong, but we just feel like in Kyrgyzstan, it’s something we have to do these days.

“ We didn't like the quality of journalism education in the country. And we also didn't like the quality of media in the country. We thought, 'Why don't we just gather a group of young people and teach them what journalism is?'

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Bektour Iskender, co-founder, Kloop



Kloop: Coordinates

 Kyrgyzstan

 kloop.kg

 [@kloopnews](https://twitter.com/kloopnews)

▶ LIMPOPO MIRROR (South Africa)



Limpopo Mirror team: Anton van Zyl, Kaizer Nengovhela (seated), Bernard Chiquvare, Maanda Bele and Thembi Siaga (from left to right).

The backstory: The Limpopo Mirror, an award-winning and internationally acclaimed 33-year-old paper, emerged in post-apartheid South Africa to meet the needs of the rural Black communities bordering the Limpopo River. It was launched by the owners of the Afrikaans/English paper in the town of Louis Trichardt to capitalize on the gap for a paper that could serve the 430,000 members of the Black communities in the surrounding four municipalities. Originally called the Venda Mirror, it was renamed Limpopo Mirror in 2001 to better reflect the diversity of the people who live in the largely rural villages in the region.

Audience: The Limpopo Mirror operates in a poorer part of the community. It is distributed in the Vhembe area of the Limpopo province where the average annual household income is 14,600 rand (about 820 euros). The majority (approximately 68 percent) of its readers fall within the age bracket of 25 to 44. As the South African market the paper operates in does not have a culture of newspaper reading, it has had to gradually build a readership.

Value proposition: Limpopo Mirror's value derives from its emphasis on continuity. The paper is in production for 50 weeks of the year, where it continuously reports on a range of topics including court reporting, current affairs, the arts and investigative journalism. One of the paper's most prominent investigative stories was its exposure of corruption in the national lottery.

The paper is also deeply local. The Limpopo Mirror focuses on covering local stories and local people. In contrast to larger papers that would have a distribution of 60 percent advertisements and 40 percent editorial content, Limpopo Mirror limits its ad loading to 30 to 40 percent due to the "important" nature of its local stories. The paper also maintains good working relationships with existing online publishers, and its partnerships with nonprofit news organizations such as Ground Up assist the team with the production of content.

Products and distribution: The masthead focuses on a print product while also utilizing a website, which was launched in 1997. The paper used to be heavily reliant on street vendors for distribution, but the COVID pandemic forced them to rely more on sales from outlets such as supermarkets. Their website and digital platforms such as Facebook also drive traffic, which has allowed them to reach more people than ever before.

The team: The team is small: an editor, a sub-editor and five to seven regular correspondents who are scattered across the different municipalities. The correspondents have been long-serving contributors to the paper, some for 20 to 30 years.

Business model: The publishers were not sure when they first launched the paper whether it could be viable in the rural-based market, but with a strong local focus they were able to bring it into profit by growing the audience and advertising. With the decline in advertising they don't feel there is a culture or capacity within their low-income community to support a digital media business model that would rely on membership/donation schemes and subscriptions.

Initially, their strategy was that they would aim to produce high-quality journalism which would attract readers and subscribers, and subsequently attract advertisers. However, the changing nature of the industry and the loss of street vendors during the COVID-19 period has forced them to look for alternative revenue streams (including philanthropy), as it is unlikely that advertising will sustain the paper over the next two to three years.

Trust/misinformation: The paper maintains its credibility through its correspondents, who are well known in their community. The paper devotes a substantial amount of its time to ensuring the quality of its journalism through engaging in the process of subediting, re-subediting and rewriting in some cases, following up with sources and checking for legal issues.

The future: The paper recently attempted to adopt an “added value” model that would involve collaborating with retailers, who would subsidize the cost of the papers and distribute the paper for free to customers who purchased their products. However, they were unable to reach decision-makers with this approach. The paper is contemplating shifting to a not-for-profit model where it would supplement dwindling advertising revenues with philanthropy.

Ask them about: Continuing to provide a news product of value in uncertain times. Serving a dispersed local audience with a network of contributors

In their words:

“ There's a need for the Mirror's market because it was rural-based. At the time there was a concern that it would not really be viable. But we pulled it into a very viable market, just sticking to the existing recipe: focus on local and local people – and it's popular. It worked for many years.

We still make time for investigative journalism, which very few do ... as it doesn't bring in money, it doesn't pay the salaries. It doesn't pay the printing bills. And we have to find another revenue stream. I do not foresee that advertising will sustain that in two or three years' time.

It wasn't so difficult to get ad revenue in the past two decades. It almost followed you – you'd bring out good papers, the readers would be there, and the advertisers would come. But that's not been the case for the past few years, even before COVID. But COVID does hit hard.


I think it's sort of a chicken and egg situation where we have to be realistic ... We're sitting in a situation where we are hyper-local, we are not aiming at a huge international audience. The Google AdSense model will not work for us. We're not targeting that. We're deliberately targeting a very small community. So now we have to find a revenue model for that.

” He [Professor Bill Reader] effectively told me, ‘Anton, do away with the commercial model, turn it into a non-profit organization and go on a funding path’. You know, I don't like that, but that's probably the direction that we should be going in and then appeal to donors.

Source for information in this case study: Interview with Anton Van Zyl, publisher, Limpopo Mirror



Limpopo Mirror: Coordinates

-  Limpopo province, South Africa
-  www.limpopomirror.co.za
-  [@LimpopoMirror](https://twitter.com/LimpopoMirror)

▶ LOCAL CALL (Israel/Palestine)



Local Call photojournalist Oren Ziv at work.

The backstory: Launched in 2014 by sister news site +972 Magazine, Local Call is a Hebrew-language news site that advances citizen journalism in Israel and Palestine and works to end the occupation of Palestine. The site was co-founded and is co-published by Just Vision, a nonprofit that highlights Palestinian and Israeli grassroots leaders working to end the occupation by peaceful means. Producing four to five stories a day, Local Call seeks to fill a gap in independent, uncensored media with an “unapologetic, human-rights-centric message” that reflects the truths of the occupation while Israeli political discourse shifts further right.

Audience: With 700,000+ annual readers, Local Call serves Palestinian, Israeli, and international readers through Hebrew coverage of Israel and Palestine. Local Call fills a key gap in Hebrew-language reporting through being one of the only Hebrew-language news sites that covers the occupation, and has journalists on the ground. Some stories are also produced in English, which allows Local Call’s content to reach international audiences who are interested in what’s happening in Israel and Palestine.

Value proposition: Local Call provides human-rights-centered coverage of communities, including of the occupation of Palestine, in Hebrew, bringing a unique anti-occupation voice to Hebrew-language media. The news site also focuses on issues important to a Hebrew-speaking local audience, including housing rights, organized crime, public health, and education.

Products and distribution: Local Call produces daily content for its website and social media channels, including photography and videography, and also distributes a weekly newsletter.

The team: Local Call has eight staffers and a wide network of paid freelancers from diverse communities, including writers who are Israelis and Palestinians, Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, LGBTQ+, religious Orthodox, and secular immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who all share the common goal of respecting human rights and ending the occupation. Business model: Local Call's content is free. Until launching its membership program in 2020, Local Call relied on institutional foundations and one-off, small-scale donations from readers and private donors. Now, Local Call has a membership program with a pay-what-you-can strategy and had more than 500 monthly supporters by the middle of 2021. Supporters make an average monthly contribution of 22 U.S. dollars. With membership, readers receive access to behind-the-scenes insight into stories and webinars.

Trust/misinformation: Local Call builds trust by combating what it describes as a one-sided narrative in Hebrew political discourse on Israel and Palestine. It points to increasing political censorship in Israel and difficulty in accessing decision-makers and official government information. As other newspapers in Israel become more cautious as the government shifts toward the right, Local Call fearlessly reports the facts.

Ask them about: Building a network of journalists that can bridge the Israel/Palestine divide; building a membership network to support mission-driven journalism.

In their words:

“ Our very existence challenges and recognizes the failings of mainstream media... It could be through identifying the stories that are being misstold by bigger outlets... or covering stories they don't talk about.

...The instability of this year has really pushed us to actually say we do need stability and other sources of income. And we need to explain to our readers that (membership) is the way to support us. This is the right way to make us sustainable and to make us the most independent, least reliant on foundations or very rich private donors.

” Having our reporters on the ground allows us to deliver reliable information and counter false facts found on mainstream national media.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Haggai Matar, co-director of Local Call and executive director of 972 – Advancement of Citizen Journalism, an Israeli nonprofit committed to human rights, democracy, social justice, and ending the Israeli occupation.

שיחה
מקומית

Local Call: Coordinates

📍 Israel/Palestine
🌐 www.mekomit.co.il
🐦 @mekomit

► NYUGAT (Hungary)



Nyugat.hu fundraising campaign on Facebook. (Source)

The backstory: Nyugat is the largest regional news site in Hungary. It is based in Szombathely, near the Austrian border, where it serves a community of 200,000 people in the broader region of County Vas. It launched 21 years ago as an online-only media outlet. Nyugat describes itself as fiercely independent, a nonprofit organization seeking to fill the gap of independent media in the region and in the country as a whole. Most mainstream media in Hungary, through a process known as media capture, are controlled in some way by the ruling party Fidesz of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. In this environment independent media face obstacles gaining access to information and securing advertising revenues from the state as well as from private companies that fear the association may impact their business.

Audience: Nyugat serves a regular audience of about 50,000 people in the area. Its audience values a combination of news and information, from simple information about what roads are closed to serious investigative pieces on local corruption.

Value proposition: Nyugat underscores that it provides independent news when so much of the media in Hungary is captured by political interests. It understands and serves its community with high-quality local news while also representing the community's interests against those in power. Nyugat is an important center for community information and people will show up to the office or email the office to discuss what they'd like to know more about.

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Products and distribution: In addition to the news site, Nyugat produces a weekly podcast, YouTube videos, and has a newsletter, in addition to various social media accounts, including Facebook and Instagram. The newsletter highlights the most interesting articles of the week and the team is aiming to use it to drive profit by promoting subscriber-exclusive content. Nyugat also has a very serious and popular comment section where users have to register their email address in order to comment.

The team: As well as the editor, there are three journalists, a couple of news editors, one photographer, one videographer, and a handful of freelancers.

Business model: Nyugat operates as an independent, nonprofit media in a challenging financial and political environment. While advertising is a source of revenue, it is hampered by the distorted allocation of state advertising by the national and local governments. Moreover, many private companies are also reluctant to advertise with independent media, preferring to give their money to pro-government media. Right now Nyugat has no paywall and content is free to access, but the team has been debating for a couple of years now about possibly adding a paywall, but are unsure of its success for regional media. Nyugat mostly relies on grants from abroad, especially from the U.S. and the Netherlands. As well as advertisements on its website, the outlet also holds fundraising campaigns a couple of times a year. The outlet also sometimes has promotional articles in partnership with local companies. They note that before Orbán came to power, it was much easier to make money.

Local conditions: About 10 years ago, when Viktor Orbán came to power, many changes occurred in the Hungarian media landscape. Orbán's government is highly centralized and controlling. The average citizen does not have the bandwidth to pay attention to the issue of media freedom. Nyugat says they can publish what they want; they do not censor themselves. However, government organizations restrict the access of independent media to information and sources, and will often not respond to inquiries, which makes it difficult to report on some issues. The local government recently changed, providing Nyugat with better access to information and answers to their questions.

Trust/misinformation: Nyugat builds trust through providing fresh and credible journalism that has gone through rigorous fact-checking, and by taking care and time to build a relationship of trust and an emotional attachment.

The future: Nyugat's team was adamant that nothing lasts forever, and during the recent round of elections, the country was surprisingly active. They sense there may be more major political change coming. They'd like to work on building a network of independent Hungarian news sites and also change the perception in the country that journalists are propaganda workers. They've been receiving external advice and guidance on developing sustainable revenue streams.

Ask them about: Evolving to stay relevant in the era of Facebook and Instagram. Writing investigative stories in an authoritarian regime where information is hard to come by.

In their words:

“ *Theoretically you can write about what you want, but practically, your work is very, very hard to do.*

They come to the office, they expect us to solve their problems or just listen to their complaints. So we are part of this local community in a very, very lively way.

Hungarian history is about surviving. So we are very good at it. We learned that we have to have a good relationship with our audience, to catch them emotionally. I think it is a very essential part of surviving to somehow get them on our side.

We have always had finance issues because the government manages to finance its media outlets. The state money, the public money, and even the private companies' money goes to these pro-government media outlets.

Like most of the Hungarian regional sites, we work in a kind of isolated way. We have an intention to somehow build a network of these sites. And we would like to play a leading role in this network. We'd also like to start or to continue the education of the future generation (of journalists) because that situation is really a disaster now. Because the Orbán government has been in power for 11 or 12 years now, we have a new generation of journalists who think that the job of a journalist is propaganda.

Source for information in this case study: Interviews with Gyöngyi Roznár, editor-in-chief, Nyugat; Antal Jozing, senior journalist; Adam Vincze, marketing and communications manager.



Nyugat: Coordinates

 Szombathely, Hungary

 www.nyugat.hu

 [@nyugathu](https://twitter.com/nyugathu)

▶ OJOCONMIPISTO (Guatemala)



Ojoconmipisto team: From left to right: Carmen Maldonado Valle, Beatriz Colmenares, Isaías Morales, Ana Carolina Alpírez, Gladys Olmstead and Mirja Valdés.

The backstory: This native digital media outlet, a project of Laboratorio de Medios, was launched in 2013, with the aim of monitoring public money in the municipalities of Guatemala. Ojoconmipisto.com (Watch Out For My Money) is all about keeping an eye on public “pisto” (money).

Many of Guatemala’s 340 municipalities in 22 departments are isolated from the country’s capital and have no media to inform them about issues of governance and public “pisto” allotted to their municipalities.

Audience: The readership comprises urban residents between 25 and 35 years old, evenly split among men and women. Local authorities are also part of their audience because the institutions are aware that the media outlet is monitoring their spending and overall functioning. In order to look for new audiences, Ojoconmipisto.com started an innovative experiment: to monitor public spending on sports. Traditionally, newspapers only focus on the entertainment side of sports and not the backstory. This fresh angle in reporting attracted new audiences.

Value proposition: In addition to reporting on the management of public resources in Guatemala’s municipalities, Ojoconmipisto.com educates and trains citizens on how to access public information and supervise money allocated to their municipalities. They train journalists to carry out local journalism and data journalism. They also promote citizen participation, because they are convinced that well-informed citizens are potentially a better source of information.

The team: The core team based in Guatemala City comprises six members: two reporters, an editor, a community manager, administration, and a project coordinator. The outlet has a network of professional local correspondents who work on an assignment basis.

Product and distribution: Ojoconmipisto has a website and also disseminates content through social media. During COVID-19, they started producing podcasts and videos. While Facebook is the main channel of distribution as well as primary point of contact with its audience, the team also publishes a monthly newsletter. In its podcasts Ojoconmipisto.com delivers not only the news but also information on how the story was produced and some further story: How did they get the mayor to respond? What was the impact of the piece?

Business model: The outlet is attached to Laboratorio de Medios, a journalist organization founded in 2006. Laboratorio does training and consultancies and Ojoconmipisto.com is the journalism side. Ojoconmipisto.com is financed through income from Laboratorio (about 10 percent of revenue) and also grants from foundations (about 90 percent).

The future: Ojoconmipisto believes they need to grow as a team to really be able to cover more municipalities and serve more people.

Ask them about: Ojoconmipisto.com has worked with other journalism outlets, even in other countries, to teach their methodology of monitoring public local money. They also train local reporters on methods of searching local databases for information on public contracts.

In their words:

“ Our principles are threefold. Municipal oversight, training, and citizen participation. We are very interested in this part of training citizens. Why? Because they are the first source of information, they are the ones on the ground”.

The (big) media focus a lot on the big things. So they are not able to see that corruption doesn't just happen with the big things, corruption starts small, at the local level.

” Journalism is needed. It is important to practice journalism in our country. However, there are two crises in journalism: one is the crisis of sustainability, and the other is the crisis of disinformation. We have a lot to do in order to tackle both these crises.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Carolina Alpírez, cofounder, Ojoconmipisto.



Ojoconmipisto: Coordinates

 Guatemala
 www.ojoconmipisto.com
 @ojoconmipisto

▶ RADIO AL BALAD (Jordan)



Photo from [facebook.com/Balad77837](https://www.facebook.com/Balad77837)

The backstory: Radio Al Balad was launched as AmmanNet radio in 2000 with online audio reports, news bulletins, and a variety of programming. It began broadcasting terrestrially in the Amman metropolitan area in 2005 after the King issued a temporary law authorizing terrestrial broadcasts. Known as Radio Al Balad since 2008, the community broadcaster is now the only independent radio station whose audience is spread across the country. It covers human rights and community-centered stories that serve the Jordanian people.

Audience: Radio Al Balad has a widespread audience across Jordan that seeks coverage on human rights and government accountability. Radio Al Balad also provides learning opportunities for local, regional, and international groups on humanizing the news and community radio training.

Value proposition: Radio Al Balad is focused on creating a more democratic society through the topics it covers, including minority issues and issues related to women, refugees, and labour. Radio Al Balad says it challenges societal stereotypes by training hundreds of women to become community journalists across the urban-rural divide.

Product and distribution: Radio Al Balad distributes audio content via radio as well as via AmmanNet and social media.

The team: Radio Al Balad has a network of journalists that they've trained – including many women and young people to match their reporting priorities – located across different governorates throughout Jordan. They collaborate with them to explore how issues affect different local communities. The resulting diversity of the journalists themselves matches the diversity of the journalism that is produced.

The radio also led a programme to empower women from Al Zarqa region in Jordan using media and journalism training to train more than 70 women. Another project focused on training women across Jordan, which also brought to light important issues facing Jordanian women, especially in marginalized communities.

Business model: Radio Al Balad is entirely donor-funded, with funding from the EU and the U.S. as well as local civil society actors. They struggle financially due to their independence.

Trust/misinformation: Radio Al Balad says it is trusted by audiences because they are the only radio in the country that is totally independent. They train their journalists to cross-reference facts and make sure they are reporting the whole story.

Ask them about: The project where they trained hundreds of women to report on their communities across the country and how such programmes can be used to cover more remote areas.

In their words:

“ That’s why we are facing a lot of funding problems at Radio Al Balad, because we are totally independent, we’re trying to have space for everybody, everyone in the whole country.

” For example, when we have a huge event in the governorate, like an election, or something happened in the south or north or east or west, we talk with them (local reporters) and they give us a small report about it.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Etaf Roudan, director, Radio Al Balad.



Radio Al-Balad: Coordinates

📍 Jordan
🌐 ammannet.net/live
🐦 [@Radio_Albalad](https://twitter.com/Radio_Albalad)

▶ RAYON (Ukraine)



Photo from facebook.com/rayoninua

The backstory: In 2015, when the owner of the Family and Home media holding, Ivan Korsak, retired, his son Viktor decided to pivot to invest in new media. The family-owned company launched Rayon.in.ua and leveraged the spread of 3G connectivity to restructure the traditional print newspaper, magazine, and radio combination into three new digital platforms: Family and Home, the tabloid Volyn, and a network of online local media called Rayon. The takeoff of 3G opened up a larger though much more dispersed audience as remote areas that previously never had internet access were now connected. Around the same time, Ukraine's parliament enacted a law on the "destatization" and reform of state and municipal media. Before this reform, local media were largely state-funded, which undermined their status as independent media. The goal of the law was to trigger independence and modernization in the media by removing state funding and its editorial influence.

Audience: Small towns and communities across the Volyn, Zakarpattia, and Rivne regions. The hyperlocal audience colours the products the network creates – people like to read about their neighbours. The hyperlocal news is read by people who know one another and the local area in minute detail.

Value proposition: Rayon has figured out a way to create, unite, and support a network of 30 local media that cover the stories and lives of communities in the Volyn, Rivne, and Zakarpattia regions.

They build communities, involve local people in editorial processes, and train journalists to overcome a serious lack of experience in the region. They also organize a summer school and camp that brings the local media community together to share and learn. They experiment with different journalism formats and revenue streams, and most recently have become known for their successful crowdfunding campaigns.

Products and distribution: An online network of hyperlocal websites, summer school training, and creative services, distributed through the newsrooms and the internet.

The team: Rayon is a network that unites 30 local media organizations that cover the lives and stories of local communities in the Volyn, Rivne, and Zakarpattia regions of Ukraine.

Business model: The main three forms of revenue are advertising, grants, and crowdfunding. Rayon also supports local websites with technical help, like graphic design, and encourages them to offer design and content services to the larger community as a source of revenue. As for its own sustainability, Rayon does run ads, but uses business. rayon to find businesses who want to advertise to other businesses, and is careful to refuse advertisers who they feel will not fit their audience. Rayon also ran a successful round of crowdfunding, which they used to make a 10-part podcast about COVID-19.

Trust/misinformation: By forging a strong relationship with the communities they serve, Rayon network members have built trust in their journalism, which they use to counter misinformation.

The future: They are crowdfunding to support a newly launched culture vertical across sites. According to Rayon it often seems that cultural life is concentrated only in big cities, but there is a unique culture in communities, small towns and villages, and journalists rarely reach the corners of Ukraine. The site will become not only a platform for news, reports, interviews and articles on culture, but also a service media for artists and institutions to be able to communicate with their target audience.

Ask them about: Their journalism forum, the summer school, and involving the community. Editor Olena Reshotka-Rozhiii says the biggest challenge is that people in small communities don't always have the drive to push into investigative journalism, and people all know one other, which can make it difficult to write about problems such as local corruption. It can also be hard to get legacy editors and reporters to adapt to online journalism.

In their words:

“ We want people to associate Rayon with the word ‘news’.




Our readers are our friends. This is why we organize a summer school for people who want to learn to be journalists, and we are happy that colleagues from other media often learn from what we do, and this is why we organize the largest forum for journalists in western Ukraine each year.

I once interviewed a grandmother. And in the end, she cried, so did I. I realized how important each of us is. We collect valuable stories of our area, tell about people that no one would have known about if not for our materials. I understand that we need to communicate with the simplest people because they are the ones who have done and are doing things that are changing the world. And they should know about them, and their stories should not lie in drawers.
(Iryna Vetlyanchuk, editor, Rayon.Lokachi)

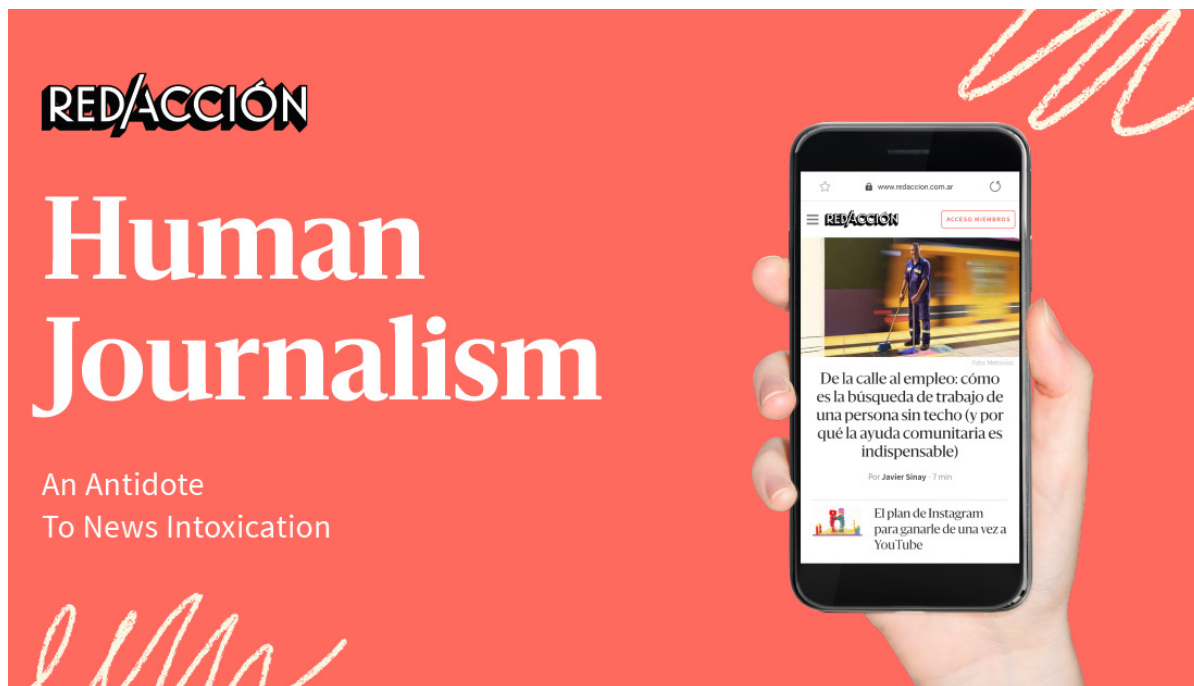
Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Olena Reshotka-Rozhii, editor, Rayon.in.ua.



Rayon: Coordinates

-  Ukraine
-  rayon.in.ua
-  [/rayoninua](https://www.facebook.com/rayoninua)

► RED/ACCIÓN (Argentina)



The backstory: After a fundraising drive that collected one million dollars in just two months, former La Nación Editor-in-Chief Chani Guyot launched Red/Acción in April 2018. He and his team detected a void in Argentina's local media landscape. Audiences seemed to be suffering from media fatigue or avoiding news altogether. Red/Acción does not cover current affairs or politics in the regular sense and focuses instead on six content areas: the climate crisis, gender equality, social inclusion, health, education, and technology. In 2020, they were selected for the Velocidad media accelerator fund established by Sembramedia with support from ICFJ and Luminate.

Audience: Red/Acción has an aggregate audience of 3.5 million people, including traffic on their website and audiences reached through different channels. They have an ecosystem of social networks with more than 100,000 followers, about half of whom are newsletter subscribers. Around 70 percent of the audience is women, and Guyot thinks it may be because of the topics they focus on.

Value proposition: Red/Acción's mission is to contribute to the strengthening of citizens' commitment to social change through "human" journalism: an intersection between solutions journalism and participatory journalism. They cover stories underreported by other outlets, explain complex social issues, and focus on the story of the people and organizations that are solving them. They amplify the voices of diverse minorities, encourage their audiences to engage in their journalism, and therefore also have a positive impact. Red/Acción believes that journalism is not only about informing the world, but also about changing it.

The team: There are 19 members in the core team and an additional 10 freelancers who contribute and edit the newsletter. One person is in charge of interacting with members and many stories come from this interaction.

Product and distribution: They have four products: The website, RedAcción.com.ar; Foco, a bi-weekly podcast; 12 newsletters that reach more than 50,000 readers every month; and Fibra, a content agency for conscious brands.

Business model: A year after they started, they received an early-stage investment from the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF), a not-for-profit investment fund for independent media in countries where access to free and independent media is under threat. Fifty percent of their revenue comes from content created for clients, and branded content related to their focus areas. Membership revenues represent around 18 percent of their total revenue. However, the membership programme is more than a revenue stream, and several mechanisms have been created to interact with members. Three-and-a-half years down the line, they believe they have attained operational sustainability.

Ask them about: Knowing how to focus on what really moves the needle, what makes a difference for the audience or for the business. Around every six months, Red/Acción reviews its operations to assess what works and what doesn't, going on to make a list of things to drop, things to hold on to, and things to incorporate.

In their words:

“ We hack the extreme negativity so ingrained in the media ecosystem and we hack the unilateral, broadcast monologue modality to find conversational journalism.

Our mission is focused on helping citizens to be more committed to do their duties as citizens because we fundamentally deal with six issues: the climate crisis, gender equality, social inclusion, health, education, and technology for the common good.

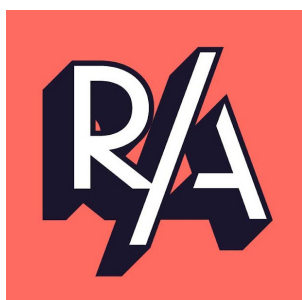
Our vision is to build a model that is scalable, replicable, naturally sustainable, and that does not seek volume for the sake of volume itself.

The newsletter is a product. It is neither a distribution channel nor a pipeline. Each newsletter has a personality, an author, and a personal conversational tone. For us, the newsletter is a mechanism to create community.

An example of our participatory journalism is a story on how Centennials (Generation Z) related to money. We did an Instagram story and about 3,000 people participated.

” *Then we produced the post: that same network of participants became the distribution network. They value their participation as they feel represented in the stories. And then we did an event, all in the course of three weeks. When you examine this process, it shows an open conversation between our newsroom and our community.*

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Chani Guyot, founder and editor-in-chief, Red/Acción.



RED/ACCIÓN: Coordinates

📍 Argentina

🌐 www.redaccion.com.ar

🐦 [@redaccioncomar](https://twitter.com/redaccioncomar)

► SCROLLA (South Africa)



The Scrolla Team

The backstory: Scrolla was founded in 2019 by Mungo Soggot, an entrepreneur and former investigative journalist, along with a team of other seasoned South African journalists including Phillip van Niekerk, Everson Luhanga, Zukile Majova, and Toby Shapshak. Soggot noticed that many South African publications catered to wealthier people with tertiary education and wanted to provide content to those with lower income and education levels. Scrolla aims to reach more South Africans through innovative mobile-first publishing that allows cost-conscious readers to access a blend of punchy tabloid-style news and deeper investigations.

Audience: Scrolla is a South African news startup with channels on major data-free messaging platforms that produces a blend of engaging, tabloid-style news and deeper investigative pieces for mobile phones in both English and isiZulu. Scrolla's data-free messaging platforms allow them to reach people who don't necessarily have the luxury of tertiary education or who have phones that "aren't that posh".

Value proposition: Scrolla provides a combination of high-quality, tabloid-style news and investigations of both local and national interest and has broken major stories. Across channels, Scrolla has seen 400 percent audience growth in the last year alone. They cover what's happening not only in local communities, but also the rest of the world so that readers can be informed about a number of different issues all from their mobile phones. The mobile revolution has made Scrolla's mobile-first business model very successful — from the start, everything Scrolla has produced has been designed with mobile in mind.

Product and distribution: Scrolla distributes its content through different mobile messaging channels - including MTN's Ayoba channel and Moya.App - and its website. Scrolla also recently launched a daily isiZulu news podcast, Scrollacast. Recently, Scrolla has begun shifting more attention to a Data Lite version of Scrolla, where readers can access a version of Scrolla that's both light on data and cost-free thanks to sponsorship from a mobile company. This is immensely important for cost-conscious users in a country that has some of the most expensive data rates in the world.

The team: Scrolla consists of six full-time and six part-time team members, as well as freelancer networks. Scrolla's founding team consists of veteran reporters, editors, and executives from the Mail & Guardian, a South African weekly newspaper based in Johannesburg. Scrolla has a full-time translation team, and has plans to bring on full-time Zulu reporters.

Business model: Multiple revenue streams, including grants and sponsorship. Sponsorship from mobile companies allows Scrolla to produce its data-lite site, which allows readers to access news while avoiding high data charges.

The future: Scrolla plans to expand across the African continent and replicate its model in other markets. Soggot also discussed Scrolla's plans to increase distribution through a data-light version of Scrolla so that even more people can read Scrolla's content, as South Africa's data costs are some of the highest in the world.

Ask them about: How they are building data-light products to serve low-income audiences when data is cost prohibitive. Finding new ways to serve local audiences.

In their words:

“ The thing we're obsessed about is the mix...The ethos of our publication is that we all have, I suppose, highly political investigative anti-corruption instincts and roots. It's the kind of journalism we're most interested in, but our feeling is that you don't get that kind of material out to a wide audience unless you mix it with other things. It's all about the mix.

That's the idea - that you use the technology to get access to the reporters who have intimate knowledge of remote communities and you package it in a way that is gripping to both those communities themselves, but also to a broader national audience.

” You have the most unequal society in the world going through a very difficult political transition. And your gravitational pull towards horror is very strong, but the reality of South Africa is that in the middle of that challenge and suffering, there's great joy and humor, and you've got to try and find that - you've got to try and reflect people's lives.

Source for information and views in this case study: Mungo Soggot, CEO, Scrolla.



Scrolla: Coordinates

📍 South Africa
 🌐 scrolla.africa
 🐦 [@ScrollaAfrica](https://twitter.com/ScrollaAfrica)

▶ SUNO INDIA (India)



Suno India Team

The backstory: Suno India is a podcasting media company that aims to get Indians from a range of language backgrounds to “listen up”. Launched in 2018, their journalistic mission is to use the audio medium to illuminate underreported issues while maintaining their reputation as credible, well-researched, and editorially independent. The podcasts are produced in Telugu, Hindi, English, and occasionally in Tamil and Urdu.

Audience: Suno India is based in Hyderabad and New Delhi. They target regional language communities of Telugu, Tamil, and Hindi as well as English through their multilingual and multigenerational audio stories. Their audio stories, which are of a non-fiction current affairs style, cover a range of topics such as politics; international affairs from a South Asian perspective; LGBTQI+ issues; and science, enable them to remain accessible to even those who are not literate.

Their audience is mainly comprised of 18- to 45-year-olds from metro cities who are interested in current affairs. However, their regional-language shows are also popular with rural audiences. In 2021, they crossed the mark of one million listeners.

Their target audience differs based on each podcast. For instance, children are also a key component of their audience, with narrative podcasts such as “Kathey Chappava Ammama” targeted solely at children. These podcasts have been popular amongst the Telugu-speaking diaspora in Singapore and the U.S.

Value proposition: Their mission is to be the go-to platform for credible and well-researched multilingual audio content. Despite Telugu’s being the 11th most-spoken language in the country, it is underserved in the news media market. Suno India aims to fill the gap of news-led shows that are in these regional languages and illuminate the stories of these underrepresented communities. They are also contributing to developing narrative news in the audio ecosystem in India by developing the skills of journalists unfamiliar with podcasting.

The platform is changing the nature of India's podcast culture, which rarely features reporting and journalism. Instead of the typical "bantering talk-shows" with strong personalities, Suno India features deeply reported narratives and story-telling. This is developing a niche area of slow journalism.

Products and distribution: Suno India produces podcasts. Their innovative use of the audio medium has allowed them to create a more intimate space where they can cover a broader range of topics and their sources can maintain a level of anonymity. They have 14 current shows, nine in English, and five in Hindi and Telugu.

Social media, particularly WhatsApp and Twitter, is used to distribute content, such as their successful two-minute news bulletins that were able to provide COVID-19 updates throughout the pandemic.

The team: The editorial team is small, comprising of six people: three co-founders plus a contributing editor, a reporter based in Kolkata, and a research and communications officer. They are also assisted by two advisors and a range of freelance contributors.

Business model: Suno India was set up as a for-profit enterprise. Their use of audio is cost-efficient since it is a "low entry-medium", which has the advantage of enabling them to work with a range of people remotely. They have received grants from organizations such as Google News Initiative, Internews and the Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation and have an angel investor (film producer Shobu Yarlagadda). Additionally, they offer creative services in production of audio and podcasts for other companies. They also encourage monthly or one-time contributions, articulating such audience support as critical to editorial independence.

Trust/misinformation: Misinformation continues to pose a challenge for the platform. The reluctance of authorities to make on-the-record statements and provide official data makes verification challenging.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Suno India produced "myth-buster" episodes, which featured information-based content that was able to fact-check the news and explore concepts such as social distancing. "Corona Flashcards" in collaboration with an Iranian illustrator Azam were also developed in English, Telugu, and Hindi and were printed out in poster form. These flashcards featured frequently asked questions and practical tips.

The future: Suno India has been looking for alternative models, such as subscription or membership models. They are a part of the first cohort of the Google News Initiative Startup Lab India supported by Echoes and Digipub India, which aims to support startups that "give voice to underrepresented communities". After successfully making it through an elaborate process that involved assessing factors such as innovation, the startup has made to the community, Suno India was one of the 10 startups selected out of 70 applicants. The 16-week program is geared to help them to learn about product development, understanding their audience better, and strengthening sustainability.

There are a number of regional content shows that are also being developed that will feed into their regional audience's eagerness to learn more about culture and traditions.

In their words:

“ As a platform we believe in processing information slowly, synthesizing it thoroughly, and only then putting it out

Our audience is the average middle-class person. We don't know if farmers themselves are listening, but others are listening to farmers we feature on our episodes. Shaking people up and making them think about other communities, and what's happening to others. This is what our show does.

What's working for us is that listening doesn't need literacy. Also that our files, smaller ones, just 10 MB, can be downloaded and shared on WhatsApp.

Very few had taken the leap into narrative or reported-narrative podcasts. No one had done a series based on a single topic. That's the gap we wanted to fill.

We consciously look for the stories that need to be told. So we try to remain true to our mission and prioritize looking for underreported or underrepresented communities and telling those stories

We've realized from the regional audience that they're very keen to know a lot about their own region and their own culture and their own traditions. So I hope that the upcoming content and all the shows that we are planning will feed into that appetite.

As a journalist you can live in your own head and you might be thinking you're telling an important story. But is it really connecting with the larger audience? Is it making them take that action?

” I think that having that sense of security for any startup is important. For us that's what Shobu (Shobu Yarlagadda, angel investor) has offered. He's giving us time and space to experiment, make mistakes, and learn from them.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with DVL Padma Priya, founder and editorial lead, Suno India.



Suno India: Coordinates

India
www.sunoindia.in
[@SunoIndia_in](https://twitter.com/SunoIndia_in)

▶ THE CENTRUM MEDIA (Pakistan)



Children as Assets, Liabilities and Profits | Naked Truth Ft. Julie | Episode 06



Do We Enjoy Others' Miseries? | Naked Truth Ft. Julie | Episode 05



Julie's Take on Memers, Roasters and Pranksters | Naked Truth Ft. Julie | Episode 04



What Pakistanis love to discuss? | Naked Truth Ft. Julie | Episode 03



What did we learn from 2020? | Naked Truth Ft. Julie | Episode 02

Screenshot from thecentrummedia.com/originals

The backstory: Centrum Media launched in 2016 when Talha Ahad returned to Pakistan from his UK studies and saw a gap in the country's traditional media landscape for a centrist non-aligned media voice for younger audiences. He saw, too, that social media delivery of streamed video could reach these audiences where they already were. He also saw an opportunity for a media outlet to show neutrality by presenting expert sources directly to the audience rather than through its own analysis.

Audience: Centrum Media's core audience is young people (16 to 35) in Pakistan, with a secondary reach to South Asia, South East Asia, Europe and the U.S., and generally the well-educated (including students) They are seeking to build their audience by subtitling their Urdu-language videos in English. Within Pakistan, they are using in-depth local stories, often with a human interest angle, to reach and build local audiences outside the major cities.

Value proposition: Centrum Media offers a news platform for people who want to contribute to the debate around change by putting human faces to news stories and providing deeper context around contemporary political issues, particularly those of concern for its target audience. Their focus on youth extends to the voices and experts in their stories as they seek to present the views of younger interviewees and subjects.

Products and distribution: All material is video and distributed via social media particularly Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. The outlet's core pillars for content are in-depth interviews, contextual news videos, mini-documentary series, memoirs of influential people, and entertainment. Their videos range in length from one to 25 minutes. Although they attempt to pull audiences to their own website, video content is usually consumed directly on the social media platforms.

The team: Beginning with just one editor and producer working out of a team member's apartment, Centrum has grown to a team of about 35 full-time employees including journalists, producers, graphic designers, researchers, video editors, and videographers.

Business model: Starting with a small investment from family and friends, the founders have since bootstrapped growth organically by adding revenue streams: ad revenues from Facebook and YouTube, collaborations with other media organizations and brands. (For example, an eight-part documentary series called ‘Wonder Women’ in partnership with the UN Women.) They aim to do three to four long-form collaborations per year as well as smaller videos each month. They are experimenting with audience revenues and have recently set up a Patreon account where they offer access to their full interviews in exchange for financial support. However, technological barriers such as the lack of online tools like PayPal create additional barriers for this revenue stream.

Trust/misinformation: Centrum Media aims to address misinformation by interviewing sources who are “in the game” and can give an accurate depiction of an issue rather than “bias analysis”. By focusing on bringing the views of experts and key players directly to a young audience where they are, they see an opportunity to better engage and inform the next generation. In an environment where there are complaints of repression in the local media sphere, TCM says it has successfully managed to address critical issues on security, law and order, and politics while retaining a sense of credibility in the audience without leaning towards a certain ideology.

The future: Centrum Media is aiming to develop its YouTube revenues up to 40 percent by 2030. They are also hoping to expand internationally into countries including the UK, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Norway, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia where ad rates are much better than in Pakistan.

Ask them about: The importance of having young voices represented when creating content for a younger audience.

In their words:




“ On the gap they saw: “In Pakistan entertainment is politics... from the age of 15 to 55, everyone is into politics. But one of the things I think I started seeing [in Pakistan] was that the media is very polarized. So it's either extreme rightist or extreme leftist.”

” I have noticed that there's so many positive untold stories about Pakistan and generally about humans that a lot of Western outlets are not really interested in because whenever you hear about Pakistan in the Western media, it's mostly about terrorism and mostly about extremism and politics.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interview with Talha Ahad, founder and editor, The Centrum Media.



The Centrum Media: Coordinates

 Pakistan
 thecentrummedia.com
 @thecentrummedia

▶ THE NEWS MINUTE (India)



Dhanya Rajendran, founder and editor-in-chief, The News Minute

The backstory: Founded in 2014 by Dhanya Rajendran, Vignesh Vellore, and veteran journalist Chitra Subramaniam, The News Minute (TNM) prides itself on being a female-driven team, bringing a feminist perspective to coverage on everything from child rights to politics and pop culture.

Audience: The News Minute targets local audiences in India's southern states of Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. They also receive support from the Indian diaspora worldwide.

Value proposition: With deep access to India's southern states, The News Minute offers in-depth analysis, breaking news, and opinion, filling an information gap for 250 million people. Feminist thinking is embedded into their stories, and they aim to cover deeper journalism that people would be more inclined to pay for.

Product and distribution: Articles are distributed through a newsletter and social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook). There is a weekly newsletter called 'Here's the Thing', containing interviews that aim to convey interesting perspectives, as well as a 'Daily Wrap' that distributes the daily news to members and readers.

The News Minute has also launched a new membership product targeting non-resident Indian communities in places such as North America, West Asia, and the UK. They have been able to hit 3,000 subscribers in India and across the world as a consequence.

The team: The News Minute has an editorial team of 25 to 30 people across their five bureaus. 65 percent of the team are women and are of a younger demographic. Part of their team works on the "unfocused" breaking news whilst the rest of the team is in charge of covering the more "focused" ground reports.

Business model: Advertisement revenue has been steadily increasing but it is insufficient to sustain the organization. Sponsored content through “TNM Marquee” and “Brand Studio”, membership programs and consultancies have served as alternate revenue streams. After launching with their personal funds, the founders received funding from media investor Raghav Bahl, which has enabled them to scale up. Collaborations with NGOs and the Telangana police have also acted as a source of revenue.

TNM was selected from 255 applicants to receive a grant as part of the Google News Initiative Innovation Challenge and was chosen for its ability to show an “actionable” solution to the need to increase reader engagement in the region through their TNM Connect concept.

The outlet has been gravitating towards adopting a strategy that looks beyond reader revenue as a whole through enabling readers to provide support in ways that go beyond the traditional concept of membership – whether it is by supporting a specific project or contributing small amounts to the website.

Trust/misinformation: The News Minute aims to foster a deeper form of engagement with its readers. Members are encouraged to involve themselves in its monthly editorial meetings, where they are given the opportunity to be a part of the discussions on potential stories, pitch ideas, and collaborate with reporters. This allows the outlet to remain transparent, approachable, and build credibility and engagement.

The future: Challenges have arisen in relation to their membership program. The Reserve Bank of India has changed its guidelines, which has complicated the process of accepting recurring international payments.

TNM has been looking at ways to improve the engagement they receive from non-resident Indians, who have been more reluctant to convert to members. A “premium model” has been discussed as a potential solution to this.

Editorially, they aim to continue to produce impactful stories that will attract readers and they are currently experimenting with a new newsletter containing reader-generated content. Financially, they don’t foresee that they can remain dependent on advertising revenue in the forthcoming years.

Ask them about: Building a new regional media outlet from scratch; diversifying revenue streams; applying a feminist lens to journalism.

In their words:

“ **Dhanya Rajendran**, founder and editor, The News Minute:

I strongly believe that Kerala and Tamil Nadu behave politically differently than the rest of the country because they have better regional media. The focus should be on regional media.

In a world where there’s so much fake news – and so many options to consume information and content for free (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp...) – should news organizations even be considering restricting access to our journalism?

For regular news, mostly the local matters. Especially in the digital space where you have the choice to not click on a story. People choose and read only what they want to read. They read things about where they live, or where they were born.

Ragamalika Karthikeyan, Editor – Special Projects & Experiments, The News Minute

Journalism followed where people took us. With a membership program, this can be more streamlined and structured, and our members can point us to stories minus the noise of social media.

... We don't see subscription — or going behind a paywall — as the right route for us. A transactional relationship with the reader is not what we want.

Dedicate your resources where you think that they are needed the most. We're not letting go of advertising revenue altogether ... but we realize that's not what we can be dependent on. Because most media in India, if they're depending on advertising revenue, they're depending on government advertisements. We can't depend on that. We don't take any government ads.

Membership exists, and we want to convert as many of our readers into members as possible, because that is then an organic process of involving the reader in everything that we are doing as stakeholders. So that continues, but we're also broadening the focus into audience revenue.

Source for information and views in this case study: Interviews with Dhanya Rajendran, founder and editor-in-chief, The News Minute; and Ragamalika Karthikeyan, Editor – Special Projects & Experiments.

The
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Minute

The News Minute: Coordinates



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