

Transforming Crises Into Opportunities: Self-Managed Media in Argentina

Carolina Escudero 

Journalism School, University of Missouri, USA

Correspondence: Carolina Escudero (escudero@missouri.edu)

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Abstract

The current situation for journalism in Argentina represents a great challenge due to the continuous economic changes linked to inflation and labour precariousness. Faced with this, a phenomenon known as self-managed media has grown over the recent years, also connected to recovered media that promotes innovation, providing material for use in newsrooms to produce novel content and connect with audiences. For this explorative study, based on journalists' roles and innovation, we conducted a mixed-methods design to analyse self-managed media composed of recovered, cooperatives, community, popular, and alternative media. First, a focus group was held with 10 communicators to understand their current situation; second, 60 journalists were consulted about their roles and innovations; finally, in-depth interviews were conducted with three communicators who work on self-managed media at the Community and Cooperative Media Confederation. The findings reveal the presence of innovative actions, reported by 90% of respondents, and confirm that 70% of the consulted journalists had assumed new roles in management and administration. In addition, 80% of the journalists praised community work as fostering a sense of belonging and its associated benefits regarding motivation and freedom. These sentiments were further validated by the insights shared by the three interviewees. This sense of belonging could be included in the fifth area of innovation in journalism, which centres on the social dimension.

Keywords

Argentina journalists; community media; cooperatives; innovation; journalist roles; news reporters; self-managed media; sense of belonging

1. Introduction

An increasing body of empirical research has addressed the media's different alternative organisational and business schemes, how their forms of collective property are composed, and their ways of transcending the limitations and contradictions associated with capitalist companies (Pickard & Stearns, 2011). The self-managed media (SMM; cooperatives, recovered, alternative, and community-based) comprise a wide spectrum of communication spaces (Sel, 2009). Andrade and Molinari (2021) note that there is no single form of self-management, and just as journalism is a profession that is perfected with practice, self-management is shaped by experience. In recent years, the journalistic field has become "increasingly fragmented, networked and with an atypical nature of the labor market" (Deuze & Witschge, 2018, p. 168), which stimulates different business models.

Argentina is known for the creation and upkeep of SMM (Grohmann, 2020; Segura et al., 2019) in a country whose economic context poses daily challenges; in August 2023, the interannual inflation reached 124.4% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, 2023) and it is expected that by the end of the year, inflation will reach between 140% and 190% (Escobar, 2023). The SMM have proven to have a high adaptive capacity to navigate economic crises through various strategies; since the mid-90s, cooperativism has been noted as a key agent in economic recovery and employment (Parnell, 2001), where the social and solidarity economy played a crucial role (Yunus et al., 2021) by prioritising the maintenance of activity and employment (Calderón & Calderón, 2012).

Scholarly literature focuses on the positive relationship between the economic crisis and the creation of cooperatives (Serrano et al., 2018) and better behaviour in periods of economic contraction and job losses (Birchall & Ketilson, 2009; Carini & Carpita, 2014) where these workers transcend the logic of the system on which their economy is built (Magnani, 2009). The issue of SMM attracts the attention of professionals, the public, and researchers because those experiences have multiplied worldwide in the last decade (Barranquero & Sánchez, 2018; Boyle, 2012; Cagé, 2016; Camps-Durban, 2021; Escudero, 2020; Grohmann, 2020; Price, 2020; Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016).

These experiences and business models respond to what was confirmed by Cagé (2016, p. 14), "Traditional media are now threatened and desperate." For instance, recovered media, which in Argentina corresponds to three coordinated actions of the workers of companies that presented bankruptcy: occupy (the space closed by its owners), resist (from said space, the pressures and threats from owners or shareholders), and produce (in a continuous and organised way; Escudero, 2023). These actions are in response to the growth of unemployment together with the social and economic chaos that led to the factories' recovery by the workers in the closing phase, in which self-management is proposed as the direct assumption of responsibilities by a group of workers (Hudson, 2012). Within this context, the workers consider survival and resistance strategies, differentiated trajectories of exclusion/inclusion, which seek to break with the reproduction cycles of poverty and move away from classical wages and their protections (Elisalde et al., 2013). Thus, the links that seek to establish labour solidarity are re-created (Wyczykier, 2009), becoming an alternative to workers' isolation and vulnerability (Weisz, 2013).

This study aims to introduce the SMM in Argentina and, on the basis the work of Hanitzsch et al. (2019), understand the roles of SMM journalists and learn about their innovation experiences based on the five

areas of innovation in journalism proposed by Carvajal et al. (2015) and Storsul and Krumsvik (2013). To advance our understanding of SMM, we refer to the definition presented by the Buenos Aires Press Union (Sindicato de Prensa de Buenos Aires [SiPreBA], 2019) in which it considers self-managed, alternative, cooperative, and community media as forms of journalism transformed by the emergence of counter-informative experiences developed outside of large industry holdings or from traditional companies that were emptied and later recovered. This study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: Do SMM journalists assume a change of role in these spaces?

RQ2: Do journalists recognise the implementation of innovative strategies within the SMM?

2. Literature Review

To understand the process that SMMs have followed and why it is so distinctive, we must consider that the history of self-management constitutes a field in which there is dispute over the meaning and appropriation of autonomy practices developed in different spaces and socio-historical moments. In relation to social movements, it acquires centrality and is reflected in collective processes of recovered factories, movements of the unemployed, housing cooperatives, assemblies in defence of the environment and habitat, and media. Authors such as Sopransi et al. (2011) suggest that in Latin America, the new governability that emerged in response to social revolts against neoliberalism promotes processes of community self-organisation based on self-management as a way of ensuring new forms of domination that capture the creativity of social movements. In Argentina, self-management represents actions of various social movements that emerged in response to the consolidation of the “neoliberal model” during the 90s and will inspire journalists to extrapolate the experience to their areas of work with the creation of SMM. It should be noted that for the creation of self-managed spaces, journalists not only took as reference the experiences of other social movements but also received the support of workers and unions from other sectors to also begin work on their experiences. In this transversality that enables self-management, journalists were forging contacts outside the journalistic field in which it is necessary to understand the meaning and scope of self-management in Argentina, a country recognised for its constant economic crises where self-managed spaces stay afloat.

As Avron (1978) points out, in English, the term self-management has a double translation: On the one hand as self-government, which refers to the citizen’s will to participate in the democratic functioning of society; and on the other, as self-management, which implies the willingness to transfer decision-making power to all members of a company. For this study, we will use the second translation, which prevailed to the detriment of the first. Hudson (2010, p. 582) analyses the definitions of self-management. He concludes that they “agree on the same point: self-management implies the direct assumption by a group of people—without intermediaries or specialised sectors—of the preparation and decision-making in a given territory—factory, commune, country, etc.”

More precisely, the self-management modalities adopted by the emerging movements in Argentina since the popular insurrection of December 2001 “are rehearsals of new collective experiences” (Sopransi et al., 2011, p. 303). Self-management has become a nodal concept within the praxis of these movements, with several authors agreeing on the centrality of self-management in the collective processes of recovered factories,

SMM, neighbourhood assemblies, cultural centres, and movements of the unemployed, among others. Fernández and Borakievich (2007) point out that self-management is not a model but that there are self-management moments in the future of a group; for Ferreyra and Jaime Bacile (2010), self-management is centrally a social position concerning the productive process, they highlight the relevance of self-management in relation to the configuration of new individual and collective identities at work. Authors such as Salgado and Kasparian (2010) conceptualise self-management as a process of equalisation in the area of power, in parallel to a process of equalisation in the area of material remuneration. This process has two main characteristics: the managerial function is personified in collective work, and the assembly nature of work in decision-making (formal and informal); following Ciolli (2010), self-managed experiences create and question mechanisms that allow increasing the margins of autonomy where other types of interpersonal relationships are built.

As has been argued by several authors, self-management experience is not only limited to the production of goods and services but also to a new way of linking workers that allows them to develop innovative approaches to problems. Argentina is a fertile ground for creating SMM due to the successive economic crises and continuous inflation. According to SiPreBA (2019), between 2018–2019, around 3,100 journalists lost their jobs in Buenos Aires and over 4,500 in the country. The Argentine Journalism Forum (Foro de Periodismo Argentino, 2021) highlight that most local journalists work in precarious conditions and find themselves forced to deal with high levels of instability. SiPreBA's research (2022) confirms that one in ten journalists works for a SMM company and reveals that 14% were fired from a press company during the last five years: "This can be interpreted because a large part of the workers who are fired in private media seek to recover their income and journalism activity" (SiPreBA, 2022, p. 8). The latest study conducted by SiPreBA (2023) shows the precariousness in the media industry (private, public, and self-managed): 57% of journalists from the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires have more than one job; 45% of journalists have salaries below the poverty line. Also, a rapid change in news reporting after the pandemic accelerated the decline of printed newspapers: circulation fell by 21% since 2020, forcing more publishers to focus on digital subscriptions (Newman et al., 2022). This confirms the positioning of SMM when establishing new business models and aligns with laws that support this type of communication service, which will be explained below.

2.1. SMM and Regulations

Argentina's political and economic crisis has been headline news worldwide (Marzi et al., 2020; Muñoz & Zamora, 2021). In response, workers seized control of many abandoned factories following the recovered factories' procedures: occupy, resist, produce (Klein & Lewis, 2004). In this context, the implementation of the Bankruptcy Law (1995, modified in 2011), which enabled workers to take over bankrupt companies, was extended to workers in the media, while modifications were made to the statutes of journalists so that those who worked at SMM could be represented in the unions:

An activity of journalistic work would be taken as that of natural persons regularly carrying out acts or providing services belonging to the profession, whatever the technical support for broadcast through which these journalistic acts or services are expressed (radio, audiovisual, digital), including workers who, within the same conditions of regularity and continuity, provide services for the media of non-profit social organisations. (SiPreBA, 2019)

Since 2004, and for the first time in broadcasting history, “twelve countries have recognised community, alternative, and popular radio and television stations as legal providers of audiovisual communication services” (Segura et al., 2019, p. 75). In Argentina, Law 26522 of Audiovisual Communication Services was enacted in 2009, recognising non-profit media as legal providers of audiovisual services. Since then, the struggle has not only been obtaining their licenses but also finding solutions for their sustainability and growth in the new conditions (Segura, 2015). After the passing of the Law 26522 of Audiovisual Communication Services, several studies analysed its impact on the community and broadcasting stations (Beltrán & Becerra, 2017; Burgos, 2015; Segura & Waisbord, 2016; Vinelli, 2011). The Argentine Federation of Press Workers (Federación Argentina de Trabajadores de Prensa, 2021) notes that there are 261 SMM: 124 radio stations, 102 online and print magazines, 20 newspapers printed and online, nine television, and six news agencies.

2.2. Alliances and Representations

Since their inception, the self-managed factories and media have demonstrated an interest in strengthening their ties with workers who find themselves in similar situations throughout the country and strengthening their relationship with the different institutions. In this line, the National Institute of Associations and Social Economy (Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social, 2023) presented an initiative to give support to SMM: “With the spirit of promoting more democratic communication...and generate specific policies for the cooperative, mutual and community media sector.”

However, one of the broadest and most representative spaces at the national level is the Community and Cooperative Media Confederation, created in 2021 to achieve federal integrity in the representation and coordination of SMM (Ansol, 2021). This confederation is made up of the Argentine Forum of Community Radios (founded in 1998), the Association of Newspapers and Cooperative Communicators Federation of the Argentine Republic (founded in 2009), the Association of Independent Cultural Magazines (founded in 2012), the National Coordinator of Alternative Television (founded in 2018), and the Argentine Digital Media Network (founded in 2019). These spaces for articulation and exchange allow SMM journalists to come together and advance joint strategies. These SMM representations have not gone unnoticed by authors such as Rosa and García (2022, p. 578), who note that “the longest-lived cooperatives with the most participation in federations and confederations are the ones that best withstand the crisis.”

3. Theoretical Framework

The ongoing economic crises experienced in Argentina opened what Bruno and Nielsen (2012) describe as a period of creative destruction in the media industry, both in traditional and emerging sectors. However, the crisis is not limited to economics but to the business model (Deuze & Witschge, 2018), which leads us to delve into the journalists’ roles and experience of innovation.

3.1. Journalist Roles

Presenting the roles of journalists in media reveals the interest throughout history in defining the features of a profession characterised by its dynamism and social function at local and global levels. The first studies on the roles of journalists were introduced by Cohen (1963), Nimmo (1964), and Chittick (1970). However, it is

observed that it will be through the investigations of Johnstone et al. (1972) with empirical classifications based on the functions: neutral, objective, and participatory. Janowitz (1975) defined the journalist as a “gatekeeper” (neutral) and “advocate” (participatory); Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) classified the professional as a “diffuser” (neutral), “interpreter” (participative), “adversary,” and “citizen mobiliser.” Hanitzsch (2011) refers to the journalistic field as a space of struggle between distinct professional milieus, resulting in four global professional milieus. Berganza et al. (2017) analysed the roles of Spanish journalists, distinguishing them as “watchdog,” “diffuser,” “citizenship speaker,” “audience instructor,” “public opinion entertainer,” and “favorer of the status quo.” Mellado et al.’s (2017) study of journalist performance in Latin America notes “interventionist,” “watchdog,” “civic journalist,” “service orientation,” “infotainment,” and “loyal facilitator.”

In analysing journalists’ roles, we consider Hanitzsch et al.’s (2019, p. 161) views: Journalists are primarily location-based and likely to adapt their role to their local situations, “If roles are stimulated and defined locally, a wide variety of journalistic roles is likely to exist around the world.” Our study focuses on their roles and activities in SMM that respond to the local conditions of Argentina.

3.2. Innovation

SMM companies are numerous and comprise a diverse population; Hepp and Loosen (2021) indicate that these actors are often pioneers when adopting innovative approaches to content, production, financing, and internal management. These are professionals who work outside traditional newsrooms, on the peripheries of the field, where there are more possibilities for innovation (García-Avilés et al., 2018). Although innovations in media and journalism have been classified into four areas—the product, production, marketing, and business model (Carvajal et al., 2015; Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013)—a fifth is added, the social. This is due to innovations in media products and services that pursue “social objectives” and that are not necessarily developed in commercial projects (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013, p. 18).

Even if in journalism, the concept of innovation is usually limited to the commercial concept and the preeminence of the technological factor (Creech & Nadler, 2018); for this study, we rely on what was stated by Bhroin and Milan (2020, p. 1), who argue that media innovation is integrated increasingly in processes of activism for social change—understood as the achievement of social justice and the eradication of socioeconomic inequalities—and argue that these innovations “are implanted beyond, or on the margins, of the media industries,” in contact with organised civil society.” Along these lines, Altuna and Gorrotxategi (2021, p. 26) propose the concept of “transformative social innovation” to emphasise the disruptive nature of the initiatives that want to “build another alternative model that confronts capitalism” and confronts “exclusion, alienation and the scarcity of resources” and promote new spaces to communicate (Vinelli, 2011) where new production spaces are created and innovations made institutionally, aiming to increase and promote social power (Segura & Waisbord, 2016; Wright, 2010).

4. Methodology

To overcome perceived difficulties, we employ a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain a more comprehensive picture. Triangulation can be used in quantitative and qualitative research (Wilson, 2014) and “provides a justification for the use of mixed methods” (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 76). Following Creswell (2003), if we have access to quantitative and qualitative data, we can use both

data sources to understand the research problem in greater depth and breadth. Using mixed-methods research allows the development of a systematic research program. The results obtained will be validated and extended in each application, providing a global understanding of the study phenomenon (Morse & Chung, 2003).

For this research, data collection and analyses were planned sequentially. The first phase was the qualitative exploration through a focus group (FG); themes from this qualitative data were then developed into the second phase—the development of an instrument to survey journalists about their roles and experience of innovation. In the third phase, a script for semi-structured in-depth interviews was developed for three journalists who held a representative position in the media (TV, radio, written press, web, and magazines) before the Confederation of Cooperative and Community Media. This exploratory study aims to describe an emerging reality (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), and our sample selection criteria are based on SiPreBA's (2019) definition.

4.1. FG

This study used an FG approach for the first phase of data collection. Kitzinger (1994) defines the FG approach as group discussions to explore specific issues. Other researchers refer to it as a group interaction process that generates data for analysis (Templeton, 1994). Schindler (1992) and Kitzinger (1995) argue for the overt exploration and exploitation of interactions between FG participants; this approach is characterised by the interaction and collective reflection promoted among their participants, and it can be very productive in media studies (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). FG contributions can be an excellent combination with other data collection methodologies since it constitutes a culturally sensitive methodology, and it can also be done online since online-based interaction tends to be similar to in-person (Hoffman et al., 2012).

For the FG, using the Zoom platform, 10 journalists were selected under the SiPreBA criteria and were actively working at SMM. The participants, who had previously been informed about this study's goals through email or WhatsApp, consented to the meeting recording and use of their answers for this study.

During the FG activity, we followed a script in which the introduction, questions, and spaces for dialogue were established: The researcher and moderator presented at different moments of the meeting two open questions to which opinions and experiences were exchanged. The session ended with a summary of the discussion; following this, a survey was designed to gain a broader understanding of the situation of SMM journalists. The participants are introduced as Journalist Focus Group (JFG): JFG1, JFG2, etc.

4.2. Online Survey

In this second phase, the survey was produced through the Google platform (based on reading the material and the FG's summary) and sent by email and WhatsApp. The 60 journalists chosen for this survey were asked for their consent; they met the criteria of SiPreBA's (2019) definition and were actively working in SMM at the time of the survey. The questions covered demographic (name, age, professional status, media) and research-related questions about their roles and experience of innovation. After analysing and categorising the responses, the script for in-depth interviews was produced.

4.3. Interviews

In this third phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with three journalists who met the SiPreBA's definition, to which two other criteria were added: to be actively working in media at the time of the interview and who hold a representative position within the Community and Cooperative Media Confederation. Through the interviews, we delved into details that allowed us to gain greater control over respondent selection (Cassell & Symon, 2004), especially for sensitive or personal topics (Robson & Foster, 1989). The interviews were conducted through Zoom, in Spanish, between May and June 2023 with a semi-structured script derived from the FG and field notes from the survey and covered five topics: general data, media, self-described experiences in the media, roles, and innovation. The journalists represented the following areas at the Community and Cooperative Media Confederation and were identified as J1, National Coordinator of Alternative Television; J2, Association of Independent Cultural Magazines; and J3, Digital Media Network of Argentina.

5. Analysis

5.1. FG

We employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that allowed us to know the first reactions, as is the case of JFG3: "The new ones have been helped by journalists who have been in cooperatives for a long time; they have experience, and they know almost everything about media cooperatives." JFG5 acknowledged, "We have been around for a long time, and yes, we do have experience, we give support, but we do not know everything; we are still learning." This statement is a strength of the technique to highlight differences and allow the researcher to assess various attitudes (Gordon & Langmaid, 1988).

In terms of internal organisation and roles, JFG6 pointed out: "Very interesting topics emerge from our assemblies, both problems and possible solutions; management and administration are also carried out by fellow journalists, and it indeed takes more time; not everyone wants to take on these activities." The rest of the members of the JFG agree with this statement while confirming the adaptation of the roles (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). All participants shared their experiences in plural, using "we," no opinions or personal experiences were presented. Likewise, the country's economic situation represents a concern for all of them, especially this year because there are presidential elections, and according to JFG3, they fear "the possible modification of laws that promote self-managed work."

5.2. Survey Analysis

Thematic analyses were used to organise themes around the two analytical groupings of roles and innovation/s in SMM. The thematic analysis allows us to distinguish and determine themes' prevalence. Participants included 24 women, 35 men, and one gender-diverse person. The fact that there were fewer women than men in the survey could be related to the fact that 70% of Argentine female journalists have a permanent contract (Foro de Periodismo Argentino, 2018) in the media industry. The surveyed journalists worked on radio (22), digital media (19), magazines (9), newspapers (7), and television stations (3). In terms of roles, 70% of the participants agreed that they had assumed new responsibilities such as administration and management activities; 90% of the respondents agreed innovation did occur in their media, which in most cases did not respond to a technological factor but was rather focused on the community (gender, ecology,

diversity) and having work environment that was based on healthy spaces that are open for dialogue; this confirms that although assemblies may last longer than agreed, they are considered spaces that allow group cohesion and promote health and well-being. The survey's respondents are identified in this study as SJ1 up to SJ60.

5.3. Interview Analysis

The approach for analysing the three interview transcriptions followed the grounded and inductive methods proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1994), with analytical categories being inductively derived from the data without pre-defining them before reading the interviews. The interviewees were asked about roles, innovation, and the experience of being part of an SMM. In terms of roles, J1 expressed: "It is not about doing everything, but about learning, understanding the importance of the different roles in television production. Egos are transcended; there are no star journalists here; we all do everything."

A combination of roles and innovation is presented by J3: "One of our goals is to improve the sustainability of the media and provide support in the administration through workshops." Concerning J2:

There is a monopoly concentration of communication. A few commercial media design an informative agenda conditioned by immediacy, effectiveness, and the number of likes. This process differs from the way in which information is produced and disseminated in the territorial, cultural, community, and cooperative media, where space for analysis and research is enabled.

In that sense, J2 and J3 clearly distinguish the type of journalism produced by SMM, which alludes to social innovation beyond generating profits (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Tull & Hawkins, 1993). The three journalists interviewed agree that one of the great strengths of these media is staying united.

5.4. Triangulation and Discussion

In order to reinforce our knowledge and verify the validity of the results, we will follow Amezcua and Gálvez's (2002) recommendations for triangulation. For our analysis, triangulation consists of selecting the information obtained in the fieldwork; triangulating information by category, triangulating the information between all the strata investigated (comparison between the interviewees), triangulating the information with the data obtained through other instruments (FGs, survey), and triangulating the information with the theoretical framework (re-take the bibliographic discussion and discuss it with the results; Cabrera, 2005).

In the three phases of this study (FG, survey, and interviews), we identified a pattern in the responses, the time factor: firstly, administrative and management work that implies a greater workload; secondly, the assemblies in which various issues are decided and important decisions are voted on could be too long. Both issues are presented as taking up too much of their time, although they do not have a solution for this problem. In addition, journalists also present the time factor as a positive point when they specify the freedom to delve into topics that conventional media do not cover in depth. Through these responses, we observe that SMM workers do not idealise their workspaces and, depending on the occasion, they will compare themselves to journalists from traditional media.

In terms of roles, two interviewed journalists agreed that “our roles are not like those of a journalist who works in a traditional media” (J1 and J2). As SJ5 pointed out, “Many of us had to focus on administration; it takes time, but it is necessary.” SJ18 shared, “Management and administration continue to be the activities we like the least but the most necessary to stay afloat.” Confirming the adaptative role (Hanitzsch, 2011), JFG8 stated, “We have had to start managing our own media, and we continue to learn about it.” From the answers obtained through the FG, the survey, and the in-depth interviews, it is confirmed that new roles are assumed in SMM in administration and management, representing 70% of the survey participants. Innovative roles and actions find their points of union as expressed by J2:

Management requires a greater amount of time and a lot of willingness to work. New roles are effectively assumed. It is something that is learned on a day-to-day basis. Media management does not exist in the study programs of tertiary institutes, universities.

In line with J2, Bruno and Nielsen (2012, p. 102) noted that “they all pursue different forms of excellence, aiming to break news, curate content, host conversations, change formats, and invent new genres” in addition to producing communication as a right and not as merchandise (Bhroin & Milan, 2020; SiPreBA, 2022). For learning on a day-to-day basis, J2 confirms Hanitzsch et al.’s (2019) view that they adapt their roles to the local situations they face.

Journalists’ new roles are combined with innovative practices:

Innovative experiences come from freedom and the possibility of gradually defining and re-defining the identity of the media through the debate of ideas. (SJ21)

Innovation is related to common actions; the renewal of the structure of our news portal, carried out in 2022, from which we gave centrality to sections that are not the main ones in the traditional media such as genders, human rights and eco-social. (SJ16)

Those answers allude to what Altuna and Gorrotxategi (2021) argued in relation to transformative social innovation, in which the disruptive nature of the initiatives is distinguished.

Where adaptation to the needs of SMM seems to be key, J3 states, “Innovation has a double edge; in our case, we were focusing on the administrative training.” J1 shared, “There is a before and after in the community television media after the enactment of the law: new physical spaces were opened, and we opened up to new ways of making television, learning to manage equipment and spaces.” These experiences correspond to innovation for social change (Bhroin & Milan, 2020).

“Our innovation is to be the link between the community and state organisations. People write to us asking for information and help” (SJ23); “Our innovation is committed to social justice and rights” (SJ17) which is related to what was stated by Nielsen et al. (2020, p. 27), arguing that these media should offer “a distinctive and valuable product that plays an important role for their audiences and in their communities since subscriptions and memberships represent more stable income than advertising.”

“Some media have presented innovative projects to the European Union and the United States,” explains JFG3, which demonstrates the association of innovation with technological projects; these responses

represented 5% of the sample. However, 33% agree that the innovation associated with the roles within the media alludes to independence, belonging, and better organisation of assets, for which the innovative roles category was created. Likewise, there are experiences of innovation in the media that refer to an organisational issue, representing 34% of the responses in which it is exposed: spaces for reflection, staff training in administration, and time management. Many workers find themselves in multiple jobs and seek ways to adapt the meetings for active participation. For these responses, the organizational innovation category was created.

JFG4 shared an example of organizational innovation and demonstrated the importance given to a sense of belonging and well-being:

In our newsroom, there was a situation of tension between two colleagues; we decided to contact an organisation of psychologists who worked with these two people, but at the same time they shared tools to improve our bond. We allocated money from the cooperative for this expense, and we would do it again because it is a service that improves the internal organisation; it has to do with our well-being.

Several responses gave relevance to the alliances and federations: “We have articulated ourselves”; “we are a force that has its own consensual voice”; “our claims and joint actions represent a broad population of media and journalists” (S17). “Being federated allows us to generate spaces with a greater incidence; we know this and are committed to it” (S24).

Over 65% of the journalists noted the importance and satisfaction of being part of a federation “to reduce economic inequalities and maintain freedom of expression” (SJ3), which responds to the social media innovation presented by Bhroin and Milan (2020). Through the various responses from journalists, the sense of belonging is recognised: “Being part of a federation allowed us to articulate ourselves better” (SJ9); “we are a coordinated force” (SJ21). Several responses obtained through the FG, survey, and in-depth interviews allow us to suggest a journalistic ideology shared by the SMM in terms of a sense of belonging: being federated represents a point of union and strength (41), allows a better exchange of experiences and mutual help (36), and belonging to a federation allows a better articulation of the SMM (14). From here emerges a sense of belonging in tune with Fenster’s (2007) view since it is found within human needs and in the set of feelings built around practices developed in a daily environment to which Vidal and Pol (2005) adhere the principle of identity: “It is a very strong challenge to be autonomous and accompany the community” (SJ53). For JFG8 to be part of an SMM: “It is essential to follow the values of the cooperative principles—solidarity, horizontal decision-making, mediation instances and agreements—by each partner.” This agrees with the definition of self-management pointed out by Ciolli (2010): other types of interpersonal relationships are built.

As Vidal and Pol (2005) explain, it is related to the principle of identity insofar as this is a source of symbolic and referential identification of the person with the group to which they feel they belong and with the environment where they live and interact individually and socially. J2 shared: “We can proudly say that this entire Community Media Confederation has become a seedbed of professionals who were not formatted in the commercial media factory and who, on the contrary, are people who know how to associate.” SJ35 shared: “We have the ability to work in the community, organised through different representations,” followed by SJ44, “We innovate by working collectively and collaboratively. It is our way, and I am proud of it.”

SJ35 and SJ44 respond to Dávila de León and Jiménez-García (2014) statement: The sense of belonging concerning direct work is visualised as interpersonal links and, in relation to the organisational sphere, as a dimension of organisational identification and conclude that a sense of belonging is the construct that seems to have the strongest link with well-being.

6. Conclusion

This study responds to what Hanitzsch (2011, p. 477) presents as the need to move towards a more universal approach, “to go beyond corporate and commercial factors in order to account for the realities of the journalistic field in non-western countries.” Thus, this research examined the experiences of journalists who are outside the corporate/commercial sphere and provided a new dimension to the journalists’ roles and innovative experiences in SMM, where a sense of belonging presents an essential factor that allows them to survive economic crises and keep their jobs. The time factor is something that worries them and that they want, or rather need to improve. Journalists who find themselves under this enormous umbrella of self-management have the support of workers from other sectors with greater experience in self-management, which allows them to feel the ability to unify claims and transcend crises. This research confirmed that SMM journalists assume new roles, which imply longer hours, and new learning (RQ1), demonstrating how they adapt their role to local situations. The innovation factor associated with the role (innovative roles) has to do with the sum of knowledge outside of journalism that they assume: administration and management of the media, with responses to the innovative roles category.

On the other hand, innovation is perceived by most journalists as a social action, and it is presented as organizational innovation (RQ2). However, this study reveals a factor the authors had not planned to study: a sense of belonging evoked in the FG, the survey, and the in-depth interviews that could be incorporated into the fifth area of innovation in journalism.

Despite the challenges that self-management can pose, it is confirmed that the transformation of the crisis into opportunities is not an individual action; it is not simply subordinated to journalists but to an organised force of workers, united in self-management, who seek to maintain their spaces of production, freedom, and leadership. This study has limitations as it was focused on a single country, and the sample is small; a follow-up and more extensive overview of the sense of belonging will provide more accurate results.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author



Carolina Escudero earned her postdoctoral and doctoral degrees in Social Psychology, Argentina; her MA degree in Sexual Difference at the University of Barcelona, Spain; and her BA degree at the University of Robert Schuman, France. Her research focuses on journalism and emotions, mental health, gender, and social movements. She is interested in issues regarding the media's portrayal of victims, survivors, and journalists' practices.