

SURVIVING THE FINANCIAL
THUNDERSTORM:

**CAN CORPORATE ARGENTINA
SAVE ITS FOURTH ESTATE?**

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Media and Journalism Research Center (MJRC) is an independent media research and policy think tank that seeks to improve the quality of media policymaking and the state of independent media and journalism through research, knowledge sharing and financial support. The center's main areas of research are regulation and policy, media ownership and funding, and the links between tech companies, politics and journalism.

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Introduction

The economic situation in Argentina has been delicate for several years, worsening with the outbreak of the Covid pandemic in March 2020 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The rise of the new libertarian President Javier Milei, who took office in December 2023, ending Alberto Fernandez's presidency, has not improved matters.

December 2023 registered record numbers of inflation and devaluation of the Argentine Peso (the local currency). During that month alone, inflation rose to 25.5%, accumulating a 211.4% annual increase.[1] This complex economic context represents a great challenge for all of Argentinean society, including small and large media outlets that must find a way to survive in this delicate environment.

Moreover, during his presidential campaign, Javier Milei became popular for using a chainsaw during several political rallies as a symbol of his promise to drastically reduce the size of the State.[2] By the end of 2023, the newly elected President signed an order that suspended all the national administration's propaganda and communication for one year, which amounted to 5.7% of total media funding in Argentina in 2023,[3] representing a considerable reduction in advertisement income to some media outlets.[4] In this case, the so-called "official guideline" was eliminated, which is the budget allocated to management of the national administration, state companies, and decentralized entities of organizations where the majority participation is governmental. In exchange for funding from the official guideline, campaigns are disseminated through different media.[5]

As part of the "chainsaw plan", as it was commonly called by Milei, many ministries and national governmental offices have been closed during the first few months of government, including the Anti-Discrimination Agency, as it "had no purpose"[6], and Telam, the historical state news agency.[7] One Monday it simply appeared to be barred, and the agency's website was shut down for a "reconstruction." [8]

[1] INDEC. (2023). Índices de precios. https://www.indec.gob.ar/uploads/informesdeprensa/ipc_01_24DBD5D8158C.pdf

[2] Seb Starcevic. Argentina elects far-right, chainsaw-wielding Javier Milei as president. 20 November 2023. Politico.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/argentina-elects-a-far-right-chainsaw-wielding-president/>

[3] André Duchiadé. Milei's Problem is with Journalists, Not with the Press Itself. 16 January 2024. LatAm Journalism Review.

<https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/mileis-problem-is-with-journalists-not-with-the-press-itself-5-questions-with-argentine-researcher-santiago-marino/>

[4] Infobae. (2023). El Gobierno oficializó la suspensión de la pauta publicitaria. <https://www.infobae.com/politica/2023/12/27/el-gobierno-oficializo-la-suspension-de-la-pauta-publicitaria/>

[5] La Nación. (2023). Qué es la pauta oficial, la inversión del Estado que suspendió el gobierno de Javier Milei.

<https://www.laNación.com.ar/politica/que-es-la-pauta-oficial-la-inversion-del-estado-que-suspendio-el-gobierno-de-javier-milei-nid12122023/>

[6] France24. (2024). Argentine government shuts anti-discrimination agency. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240222-argentine-government-shuts-anti-discrimination-agency>

[7] Lucila Sigal. Argentine state news agency Telam shut after Milei threat. 4 March 2024. Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/argentine-state-news-agency-telam-shut-after-milei-threat-2024-03-04/>

<https://www.laNación.com.ar/politica/al-final-telam-no-cierra-el-plan-para-reconvertirla-con-240-empleados-y-otro-nombre-nid13062024/>

[8] Telam. (2024). <https://www.telam.com.ar/>

In July 2024, the government announced that Telam would become a publicity and propaganda agency,[9] but there has been no more news related to the topic since then. As a reaction to all these measures, different human rights organizations have presented a request to the Inter American Commission of Human Rights. They expressed their concern about the state of public media since many online portals have been temporarily shut down, including the National TV Channel, National Radio, and other local channels.[10] The organizations highlighted that the restrictions threatened equal opportunities to receive, seek, and impart information through any media without discrimination; and that it affected access to the archive of public documents maintained by these media, making it difficult to archive the events of the nation at federal level.

Moreover, community media are particularly affected, since the competitions for awarding licenses and the Competitive Development Fund for Audiovisual Communication Media (FOMECA), intended to provide funding for non-profit media and indigenous peoples, was suspended. These policies clearly end up benefiting the concentrated media and in the long run this will have a huge effect on small and local media outlets, limiting the public right of access to information.[11] As a consequence of all these different measures, Argentina dropped by 26 places in the annual Freedom of Press Report presented by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), falling from 40 in 2023 to 66 in 2024.[12]

These conflicts between the new government and the journalism industry are not limited to money; Milei has had a tense relationship with plenty of journalists since the first day of his government. The same day he took office, journalists were prevented from witnessing the inaugural act of the new ministers, an event that is historically open and broadcast in the country.[13] Moreover, there have also been personal attacks by the President, made mostly through social media, on different journalists accusing them of being corrupt because they have criticized the practices of his administration.[14]

[9] El Diario. (2024). Gobierno de Milei transforma el medio público Télam en un agencia de publicidad. https://www.eldiario.es/cultura/gobierno-milei-transforma-medio-publico-telam-agencia-publicidad_1_11492672.html

[10] Roberta Clarke, Edgar Stuardo Ralón Orellana, Pedro Vaca & Tania Reneaum Panszi. (2024). Ref: Actualización sobre la solicitud de información artículo 41 sobre las regresiones en materia de Derecho a la comunicación y libertad de expresión en Argentina. Suspensión de las redes de los medios públicos. <https://www.cels.org.ar/web/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CELS-Argentina-Actualizacion-apagon-de-medios-publicos-1.pdf>

[11] Roberta Clarke. (2024). Ref: Actualización..., cit.

[12] RSF. (2024). Clasificación Mundial de la Libertad de Prensa RSF 2024. <https://www.rsf-es.org/clasificacion-mundial-de-la-libertad-de-prensa-rsf-2024-analisis-general-el-periodismo-bajo-las-presiones-politicas/>

[13] France24. (2023). Javier Milei inaugura sus primeros movimientos como presidente de Argentina. <https://www.france24.com/es/am%C3%A9rica-latina/20231211-javier-milei-inaugura-sus-primeros-movimientos-como-presidente-de-argentina>

[14] Perfil. (2024). Anulan el fallo que sobreesoyó al presidente Javier Milei por haber llamado "ensobrado" a Jorge Fontevicchia. <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/actualidad/anulan-el-fallo-que-sobreesoyó-al-presidente-javier-milei-por-haber-llamado-ensobrado-a-jorge-fontevicchia.phtml>

As the Forum for Argentinean Journalism (FOPEA) pointed out, during the first 100 days of the new national administration, 40% of the attacks perpetrated against journalists in the country have been conducted by either Milei or his ministers.[15] Milei regularly discredits, insults, accuses, and verbally assaults journalists and media outlets in his speeches or during interviews. During this time, journalists have suffered direct attacks, which were later replicated by the President's followers and supporters, on social media and even in the streets. To make matters worse, it is the President himself who uses his social media accounts to amplify messages discrediting journalists.

As a consequence of all these political and economic changes, the purpose of this article is to research how small and large media outlets in Argentina are keeping their financial sustainability without compromising their editorial independence. At the same time, the objective is to analyze what motivates private companies to support media outlets through advertisements or different institutional programs, and what values they are looking for in media outlets when choosing platforms to advertise their own businesses.



[15] FOPEA. (2024). #100DíasdeMilei: 40% de los ataques al periodismo provienen del Gobierno. <https://fopea.org/100diasdemilei-40-de-los-ataques-al-periodismo-proviene-del-gobierno/>

Methodology

The research that formed the basis of this report was conducted between July and October 2024. The primary objective has been to track and analyze the motivations of private companies in Argentina to support independent media outlets. The study was primarily conducted through 10 interviews with representatives from Argentinean private companies, various media outlets, and communication and journalism scholars. The majority of interviews were conducted via online meetings, with the entire conversation recorded with the interviewee's approval. The remaining interviews were conducted exclusively through written correspondence. The selected interviewees were chosen based on their academic and professional expertise on the topics under investigation, as well as their involvement and experience at major media outlets, private companies, and media organizations. Following the completion of the interviews, the recordings were transcribed and the relevant sections were incorporated into the final version of the report following a content analysis.

Furthermore, desk research has been conducted to gather news and articles pertaining to the recent shifts in the Argentinian economic and political landscape and their impact on independent media. This has involved the use of published news, government reports on new political measures, and assessments of media freedom to supplement the insights provided by the interviewees and gain a deeper understanding of the country's media landscape.

Analysis

When analyzing the sustainability of independent media outlets in Argentina and the impact private stakeholders have on this, it is important to consider all the different aspects involved. This includes the motivation that every stakeholder has to support independent media in different ways, added to the method. Is it related to a marketing objective only motivated by potential visibility and advertisement, or is it related to the defense of democracy and open society? Also, it is important to consider if this support implies an impact on the editorial independence of the media, in relation to the type of sustainability scheme each individual outlet relies upon.

Values and Motivations of Companies

First, it is good to understand the values and motivations that drive private companies to support media outlets. Here, an important distinction has to be drawn between support as part of a marketing or advertising campaign in juxtaposition to an institutional program.

In relation to the first case, as logic would suggest, marketing strategies are focused on targeting the right audience in the right moment and through the right channel. As Lucia Ricaldoni, Executive Director of the Argentine Chamber of Media Agencies (CAAM), said, at the time of choosing outlets to advertise their products, companies look into two key elements: the size of the audience that can be approached and what is called the environment of the message. This second aspect takes into consideration the format that would work best for the targeted participants, as options nowadays can range from an ad in a commercial break on TV, to a short video on social media (Instagram, TikTok).[16]

Every decision is taken using data that supports it, so the decisions related to advertisements are never done owing to intuitional reasons or for a “good will spirit”, but because there is data that shows that the specifically targeted audience will receive the message that the company wants to deliver successfully through each specific media outlet.[17]

This view was also supported by the Director of Institutional Relations from La Nación, as he explained how the newspaper is constantly investing in their data analysis team to provide a refined analysis of their audience, through different segmentations including gender, age, geographical location and more.

[16] Lucia Ricaldoni. Interviews carried out for this project (see Methodology).

[17] Ricaldoni, cit.

This way, advertisers can improve their targeted audience, both online and in the printed newspaper.[18] This investment in technology can also be seen in the use of different platforms to deliver information in a variety of formats, as a way to approach a wider audience and adapt to their likes and dislikes. This can be exemplified by the La Nación+ TV channel streaming on YouTube and the use of YouTube Shorts, a gambit to approach a younger audience that wants to be informed in a faster way than by the consumption of regular TV.[19]

In addition to this, when brands decide to conduct an “omni-channel approach”, which consists of surrounding the customer using different advertising techniques, companies tend to want to approach the targeted audience from all possible angles to keep the brand “top of mind,” according to Eugenia Mitchelstein from San Andrés University (UDESU).[20] This technique also demands that companies have publicity in almost all relevant outlets, which contravenes the concept of blacklisting an outlet because of its political stance or controversial editorial opinions.[21] This lack of differentiation between media outlets is also fostered by the fact that, in many cases, businesspeople tend to be the owners of media outlets and also private companies that advertise in them, or maybe they are even involved in some political activism. All of this tends to blur the lines.[22]

Contrary to this position, La Nación’s Frigerio stressed that private companies tend to choose this media outlet because of its strong credibility and long lasting tradition of 155 years of quality journalism. According to him, this is because companies would like to show their products in the best possible outlets and channels, as the excellence of the channels reflects the excellence of the product to the consumer. Hence the fact that La Nación is a historically consolidated outlet, which has a code of ethics and operates on a credible and sustainable model. This makes it outstanding in comparison to other outlets which are known for their paid content, bias, and silence on certain topics.[23] A demonstration of this tradition and trustworthiness is in a recent reputational study done by the universities of Granada, Navarra, and Pompeu Fabra, where La Nación was the only Latin American outlet in the top 50 spots, taking 45th place.[24]

[18] Norberto Frigerio. Interviews carried out for this project (see Methodology).

[19] Katherine Pennacchio. Medios latinoamericanos usan YouTube Shorts para incrementar vistas, monetizar y llegar a nuevas audiencias (Latin American media uses YouTube Shorts to gain clicks, monetize and reach new audiences). 20 February 2024. LatAm Journalism Review. <https://latamjournalismreview.org/es/articles/medios-latinoamericanos-usan-youtube-shorts-para-incrementar-vistas-monetizar-y-llegar-a-nuevas-audiencias/>

[20] Eugenia Mitchelstein. Interviews carried out for this project (see Methodology).

[21] Ricaldoni, cit.

[22] Ricaldoni, cit.

[23] Frigerio, cit.

[24] Observatorio de Medios. (2024). La Nación: el sitio latinoamericano de mejor reputación. <https://observatoriodemedios.uca.edu.ar/la-nacion-el-medio-latinoamericano-de-mejor-reputacion/>

Another perspective was offered by Valentín Muro, Head of Development and Technology of Cenital, an online outlet that was created in 2019, a year characterized by political and economic instability. In 2020 they created what now is known as the “Cenital Community,” which is basically a voluntary subscription where people can choose between three different monthly stipends divided between “being part”, “supporting Cenital’s journalism”, and “supporting Cenital to grow”, and there is a final option to personalize an amount of money. The noteworthy thing about this proposal is that Cenital’s webpage does not use paywalls to access the content; therefore the proposal appeals more to a community-oriented model, where people choose to support the outlet because they consume their content and want to help it remain accessible for free for themselves, but also for everyone else.[25] This is quite remarkable in a country where only 15% of people decide to pay for subscriptions to newspapers and/or media outlets.[26]

Another thing that Cenital cares about is preventing its community from adopting “militant support”, which usually happens when an outlet becomes aligned with a specific political party or certain popular figures. Falling into this model sounds tempting at first, because it could bring a great amount of support in a very “accessible” way, but at the same time it tends to not be solid and sustainable as a long-term strategy.[27] Consequently, Cenital has always chosen to keep an independent editorial line and focus on slower but more reliable growth.

Talking about the “risks” of advertising in Cenital, Muro stressed that this is a relatively safe place for private companies to advertise, as information is verified and clear, and Cenital is usually “demanding” with its audience, as their publications tend to be long and even quite technical. The content aligns with a serious audience that wants to consume trustworthy information, and not just short articles that lack details or verification.[28] Muro believes that, in the near future, audiences will choose to support newspapers that are actually written and edited by human beings, and not outlets that use artificial intelligence to write articles faster without fact-checking their information, with the only objective of publishing quickly and constantly attracting an audience.

A representative from a large engineering and construction company provided us with their insight from an institutional relations perspective, highlighting the importance they give to valuing the role of private initiative in the development of the economy.[29] On this line of thought, the firm’s objective is to foster a media landscape that is independent, rigorous, and credible.

[25] Valentín Muro. Interviews carried out for this project (see Methodology).

[26] Reuters Institute. (2024). Argentina. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/es/digital-news-report/2024/argentina#_ftn3

[27] Muro, cit.

[28] Muro, cit.

[29] Construction and engineering company (interviewee requested anonymity). Interviews carried out for this project (see Methodology).

The negative side of institutional programs is that their budget is considerably reduced in comparison to marketing and advertising budgets which, as was mentioned before, tend to follow commercial logic, in comparison to institutional budgets that care more about the important role of independent media for the public.[30] This motivates a shift in marketing budgets every time there is audience migration, as has recently happened with the switch from traditional media outlets to social media and streams broadcast via YouTube or Twitch, putting the financial sustainability of traditional media outlets in danger.[31]

Moreover, representatives from Banco Galicia, one of the most prominent private banks in the country, stated from an institutional point of view that independent media outlets are key actors in society, as they play a fundamental role in shaping public opinion. This adds to the delicate period the country is going through, marked by great political division, making it important to have different independent and objective media outlets that can report from a more impartial perspective in relation to political events. Additionally, from a marketing point of view, the media can also be a great ally when it comes to giving visibility to a company, reinforcing a positive reputation and positioning the company well in the local market.[32]

Finally, UDESA's Mitchelstein analyzed how Google plays both sides on these issues. On the one hand, Google has different institutional programs (for example, the Google News Initiative and Showcase), through which it supports different media outlets to improve their visibility in the search engine and helps them to modernize their work. On the other hand, it is also true that Google benefits from accessibility to quality media content in their search engine, while at the same time it tends to sell publicity cheaper to private companies than media outlets do, creating a disadvantageous situation for them.[33] Consequently, Google partly supports independent media outlets because it contributes to its public image and partly because it also helps their own products (the search engine and Gemini, Google's artificial intelligence) to have access to more and better information.[34]

[30] Construction and engineering company, cit.

[31] Construction and engineering company, cit.

[32] Banco Galicia corporate answer. Interviews carried out for this project (see Methodology).

[33] Mitchelstein, cit.

[34] Mitchelstein, cit.

Types of Financial Support

Once we have analyzed the motivation of companies, the next step is to understand the common ways through which companies materialize this support and the size of their impact on the financial sustainability of these outlets.

All the people interviewed during this research agreed that the most common way private companies support media outlets is through giving money to them, chiefly as part of advertising campaigns. Some money comes in the form of institutional programs, but this is the minority and usually the sums of money are comparatively smaller.

Another important factor to take into account is the plurality of outlets that can be found nowadays, and how private companies distribute their support between all of them. As Andrés D'Alessandro, Executive Director of the Association of Argentine Journalistic Entities (ADEPA), said, 15 years ago the advertising market was largely controlled by broadcast television and print media such as newspapers and magazines, while today, newspapers and magazines have greatly diminished and the internet has grown substantially as an advertising format.[35] Now, a regular outlet's income comes from traditional advertising, digital advertising, branded content, events, agreements with platforms, licensing for content distribution and sales, and more.[36] Before, the reader that bought a newspaper every day was the main source of sustained income for the company, but now the simple reader has been replaced by the subscriber, who tends to look for content tailored to its own interests.[37] In the case of La Nación, they have 375,000 online subscribers[38] and the web page receives 2,500,000 unique daily clicks, which shows the prominence of the online version.[39]

La Nación is not the only traditional media outlet that has made a major shift online. Ambito Financiero, a traditional newspaper focused on financial matters, decided to discontinue its printed version in January 2024.[40] Clarín, the most sold newspaper, reported that during 2023 it sold approximately 51,000 copies daily, in comparison to 65,000 the year before, while its online subscription grew from 550,000 in 2022 to 712,000 in 2023.[41]

[35] Andrés D'Alessandro. Interviews carried out for this project (see Methodology).

[36] D'Alessandro, cit.

[37] Frigerio, cit.

[38] La Nación. (2024). <https://www.laNación.in/>

[39] Frigerio, cit.

[40] La Nación. (2024). *Ámbito Financiero anunció que dejará de imprimir el diario en papel.* <https://www.laNación.com.ar/sociedad/ambito-financiero-anuncio-que-dejara-de-imprimir-el-diario-en-papel-nid25012024/#:~:text=El%20diario%20C3%81mbito%20Financiero%20anunci%C3%B3%20que%20dejar%C3%A1%20de%20salir%20en, fue%20enviado%20a%20los%20trabajadores>.

[41] Reuters Institute. (2024). *Argentina...*, cit.

This view has been supported by Guillermo Mastrini from the National University of Quilmes, who mentioned that nowadays the commercial balance has shifted, as there has been a transfer in advertisement resources from traditional media, which was historically the biggest content creator and concentrated almost all the advertisement budget, to “new content creators” that in reality do not make relevant contributions to the news atmosphere, but which are now receiving more than half of the advertisement budgets.[42]

These new content creators are basically social platforms and media that are now taking between 70% and 80% of marketing budgets; and as a way to prevent possible regulations or limitations to their power, they create institutional programmes to improve their popular image, but which at the end of the day represent “crumbs” for traditional media outlets that have different business models.[43] This can be seen in the data related to advertisement investments where in 2022, for the first time, social platforms received the same marketing investments as television. In 2023, 43% of advertisement money went to digital platforms, while 35% was invested in television ads.[44]

Still, there are many delicate situations, as these platforms have basically taken a great portion of traditional media outlets’ budgets, and now they are giving just a small portion of it back and usually under conditions that only limit the freedom of said outlets. Consequently, what ends up happening is that media outlets receive a band aid for a financial problem that is much more complicated than initially perceived.[45]

As the expert remarked, programs like the Google News Initiative and Showcase look good on paper, and they help the financial stability of media outlets, but they trap media into Google’s own logic. The idea in such programs is always to help them improve their participation or relevance in the context of Google’s own search engine, which makes it impossible for outlets to try to go “outside the box.”[46] The real problem is that it seems like traditional news outlets have not yet found a sustainable business model, so they depend on these band aids, including subscriptions, advertisement, institutional programmes and more, to be able to survive, but this is not an economically sustainable model. Hence, they are not finding a new production model which allows them to cover their publication costs.[47]

Representatives from Banco Galicia stated that their most common way to support outlets is through financial support given through advertising the bank or sponsoring an event organized by the media outlet. The company’s objective is to be broad in its approach and maintain good relationships with all media outlets, as a stable and continued presence helps strengthen the relationship, reputation, and positioning of the brand.[48]

[42] Guillermo Mastrini. Interviews carried out for this project (see Methodology).

[43] Mastrini, cit.

[44] Observatorio de Medios. (2024). El campo digital lidera la publicidad en la Argentina. <https://observatoriomedios.uca.edu.ar/el-campo-digital-lidera-la-publicidad-en-la-argentina/>

[45] Mastrini, cit.

[46] Mastrini, cit.

[47] Mastrini, cit.

[48] Banco Galicia corporate answer, cit.

Regarding the selection of media outlets to be supported, companies tend to diversify their support with ideologically different outlets, in part to avoid being accused of supporting any media outlet with a very specific political stance.[49]

During previous years, there has been an outbreak of new digital media outlets, which are usually characterized as more “niche” and targeted to a more specific audience, in comparison to big outlets like Clarín or La Nación. These media have been in the habit of combining different sources of financial resourcing since their beginning, including publicity, subscription models, and national and international grants. These new outlets are also characterized by openness and transparency, which helps create a community with the readers and eventually improves the reception of money from different sources.[50]

In a global context of great doubt and uncertainty in relation to media outlets' trustworthiness, Argentina is not the exception. Argentinians trust news less than other countries of the region on average (35% in Argentina versus 42% globally, 48% in Brazil, and 41% in Peru, to give some examples).[51] In this context, Chequeado was created in 2010 with the objective of spreading verified information, becoming a global leader in verification of data and information.[52] Franco Piccato, Chequeado's Executive Director, said that their media outlet collaborates with others in forms that do not involve financial support, but through strategic collaborations for fact-checking projects, media education, and technological development. In relation to their own financial scheme, he explained that Chequeado maintains a fund diversification strategy that includes multiple sources: individual donors, corporate support, fundraising events, and international cooperation. This diversification allows them to maintain editorial and operational independence.[53]

As part of their institutional programs, some companies opt to sponsor media outlets through the publication of branded content, as a way to discuss an industry, a service, or a brand through an article or piece of content created by a media outlet with the support of a private firm. Another way to support outlets is the sponsorship of events, usually showing the logo of the company and/or mentioning it as a sponsor, and even bringing speakers from the company to participate in panels and discussions.[54]

[49] Mitchelstein, cit.

[50] Soledad Domínguez. ¿Cómo medios independientes en Argentina se mantienen en la crisis económica? (How does independent media survive in Argentina's economic crisis?). 20 February 2023. LatAm Journalism Review. <https://latamjournalismreview.org/es/articles/como-mantener-la-sostenibilidad-de-medios-independientes-en-argentina-en-un-contexto-de-crisis-economica-tres-medios-cuentan-sus-estrategias-de-membresia-y-captacion-de-recursos-para-mantenerse/>

[51] Reuters Institute. (2024). Argentina..., cit.

[52] Soledad Domínguez. ¿Cómo medios..., cit.

[53] Franco Piccato. Interviews carried out for this project (see Methodology).

[54] D'Alessandro, cit.; Construction and engineering company, cit.

Cenital's Muro has stressed the importance of media outlets keeping their editorial independence, accomplished by preventing a company from having a significant share of the financial participation of the outlet. Therefore, if none of the advertisers have influence over the media in which they advertise, all media outlets become generally stronger.[55] With this in mind, Cenital has worked hard to make most of its income come from the Cenital Community, as a way to prevent the media from giving more power than necessary to other companies, compromising its independence.[56] This balance is not something that happens overnight, but if an outlet can consistently demonstrate its values and dedication to its audience, it is much easier to ask for financial support later on.[57]

One of the most successful subscription models in the country, on a bigger scale than Cenital's, is the model Clarín implemented, followed by La Nación. In 2017 Clarín was the first newspaper in Argentina to use a subscription model, and by May 2023 it already had 658,333 subscriptions, winning an award for the best digital subscription strategy in Latin America.[58] The foresight of the publicity crisis that was starting to show up caused a shift in strategy, hence in 2015 Clarín created a system of registration of its readers, which later contributed to the creation and implementation of the subscription model two years later. With time, the model started improving and giving the reader a more personalized experience, including discounts in different shops and experiences, a wide variety of newsletters, the creation of clusters of readers according to their interests and frequency or news consumption, and more.

In relation to Cenital, Mastrini highlighted it as an example to see how crowdfunding can be a good business model, but mostly for small and medium outlets, as firms like La Nación and Clarín have greater expenses that cannot be covered with this model. [59]

A representative from a relevant construction firm explained that the institutional budget they invest in the media is significantly smaller than what is invested in publicity, but that they still try to be fair with how they administer their funds, in order to help as many outlets as possible.[60] Another policy that the company started implementing is to execute the budgets as early as possible to ensure that they can have a bigger impact, trying to prevent the consequences of inflation. Besides these institutional programs, the company also provides some scholarships for Journalism Master's Degrees which are coordinated between two of the most important national newspapers and two relevant private universities in Buenos Aires.[61]

[55] Muro, cit.

[56] Muro, cit.

[57] Muro, cit.

[58] Clarín. (2024). Clarín, premiado como el medio con Mejor Estrategia de Suscripciones digitales. https://www.clarin.com/sociedad/Clarín-premiado-medio-mejor-estrategia-suscripciones-digitales_0_daNOkKBdaD.html

[59] Mastrini, cit.

[60] Construction and engineering company, cit.

[61] Construction and engineering company, cit.

Examples of Good Alliances

In Argentina, Google has developed the Google News Initiative^[62] in collaboration with ADEPA, with the objective of training media outlets and journalists across the country in using Google tools and understanding industry transformation processes, such as audience analysis and creating engaging content. Through this program, Google has also provided financial support to large and small media outlets, to improve their technological tools and to develop new means of work.^[63]

As explained by Mastrini, the problem with this program is that it follows the logic of the dominating platform (in this case Google), so in reality outlets are pushed to follow the logic of Google and its algorithm to improve their views and clicks, but not necessarily to improve the quality of their information and publications. This way, media outlets are kept captive by this one model, which is not always interested in achieving the best possible results or quality and potentially impacts citizens' access to trustworthy information.

Another program orchestrated by Google is known as Showcase,^[64] which is based on individual agreements with approximately 100 Argentinean media outlets. The agreement depends on publishing a determined number of news articles on this new platform, in exchange for financial support for the outlet.^[65]

Another project created with the collaboration of a tech company, Meta, ADEPA, and the International Center for Journalists, was known as Impulso Local. This program consisted of giving funds to media outlets that submitted transformation projects, which could be related to many different activities like launching a new newsletter, setting up a radio studio, or creating a streaming or podcast studio.^[66] In addition to financial support, the outlets were supported during the development of the project through consultancy spaces that helped to implement them.^[67]

Impulso Local started in 2021 and benefited 100 outlets. In the 2022–2023 edition, there was a round of training focused on financial sustainability, and 235 outlets participated.^[68] Afterwards, a second phase was launched where 94 outlets were chosen to receive financial support to develop specific projects that were essential for their financial sustainability. Unfortunately this project has been halted, as part of a global policy implemented by Meta.^[69]

[62] Google News Initiative. (2024). <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/>

[63] D'Alessandro, cit.

[64] Google News Showcase. (2024). Google News Showcase

[65] D'Alessandro, cit.

[66] D'Alessandro, cit.

[67] D'Alessandro, cit.

[68] ADEPA. (2023). Impulso Local. Impulso Local, el programa de apoyo al periodismo argentino de Adepa, ICFJ y Meta, otorga fondos adicionales a 20 proyectos destacados | ADEPA

[69] D'Alessandro, cit.

In the case of La Nación, private companies like banks and agriculture-related companies are constant supporters of the outlet, which is partially explained by the deeply rooted tradition of the printed newspaper in Argentinean culture. This is in addition to a traditional alignment between the country and agriculture sector and the more traditional sectors of society.[70]

In the case of Cenital, in some cases, they do special articles when a brand asks them to research a certain topic, but the editorial sense is not under negotiation. They usually follow Cenital's own editorial criteria with the help of their experts, but based on the interest of the brand.[71]



[70] Frigerio, cit.

[71] Muro, cit.

Conclusions

Taking into consideration all of the above, there are only a few institutional programs that contribute to the financial sustainability of media outlets while also maintaining their editorial independence in Argentina. Even the most successful programs on paper can pose a threat to media finances, as in the cases related to Google, where media outlets are forced to fit into the logic of the platform to not be left behind. This solution does not always bring the best results in terms of quality of information accessed by the population.

At the same time, most of the money that private companies give to media outlets still comes from advertising and marketing agreements, as they continue to reproduce the commercial logic of using more money for advertisement purposes than for institutional reasons.

This also presents future risks for traditional media, whose business model still needs to find the correct path to catch up with modern technologies and audiences to prevent losing the “ads war” against new online media outlets and content creators that focus on social platforms.

The media landscape in Argentina, as in many other countries around the world, is still undergoing a significant transition process, the outcome of which remains uncertain. The business model is undergoing a rapid transformation, necessitating that traditional media outlets seek novel and more creative solutions to ensure their survival during this crisis. However, it is evident that without the more institutional and programmatic involvement of the private sector in supporting independent journalism outside the commercial logic that drives advertising, Argentinian journalism is likely to face even more significant challenges. For many media outlets, this may entail compromising on independence or ultimately lead to their demise.



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In this study, Turboscribe was used to transcribe the recordings of the interviews conducted for this report, and ChatGPT was used to translate portions of the interviews from Spanish to English.