

# Digital divide challenges of media co-ops in Argentina and Uruguay

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## Abstract

This study analyzes the experiences of two media co-ops, *Tiempo Argentino* newspaper (Argentina) and *La Diaria* newspaper (Uruguay), with the aim of understanding media strategies to reduce the digital divide. These media co-ops are characterized by creating a bridge of exchange and trust with their readers, who are kept informed of the media's actions, projects, and main decisions. We analyze the digital divide in both countries and how the media co-ops implement special methods of membership / subscriptions, along with other strategies that promote communicative feedback so that their news content and work agenda include issues that affect subscribers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight journalists from Argentina and Uruguay, and documentary material was consulted. The methodological approaches for this research are situated in a constructionist perspective, hermeneutic/dialectical, that uses methods and techniques for collecting contextual and situated information. The findings show that both media co-ops adopted strategies – in the internal organization, connection with the audience and news productions – presented as actions that promote the reduction of the digital divide.

## Keywords

Digital divide, media co-ops, Argentina, Uruguay, digital journalism.

## Introduction

Traditional media around the world are in crisis, leading to job insecurity for their employees, and, as noted by Cag (2016: 14), it is a situation that “has radically deepened over the past years. Traditional media are now threatened

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and desperate”. Various studies have been carried out based on the experiences of U.S. media startups as new forms of entrepreneurial journalism (Cag , 2016; Coates Nee, 2014; Schaffer, 2010). In the case of Argentina, media converted into cooperatives is still a new and flourishing sector. While there is a great deal of experience in creating cooperatives, there are few precedents in the media sector (Escudero, 2020).

This study focuses on two cases of media co-ops in Argentina and Uruguay. *La Diaria* and *Tiempo Argentino* are cooperative media that have focused on reducing the digital divide by creating direct spaces of exchange with their readers to discover their needs and priorities. This interaction suggests a connection to the second wave of the digital divide based on socio-cultural, economic, educational, and political contexts. This study sought to answer the following questions. First, what is the current situation of cooperative media, and how do they manage the readers’ memberships? Second, how do they experience the digital divide? Third, how do both cooperatives keep up-to-date on digital literacy?

Argentina and Uruguay are neighboring countries in South America, with various factors in common related to history, politics, culture, and linguistic processes, together with differences, such as their demographics. Argentina has a population of 45,376,763, while Uruguay is populated by 3,473,727. Both countries appear to have similar interests related to their global presence and international relations as they are members of organizations such as the IMF, MERCOSUR, OAS, UN, and USAN (Expansi n, 2021).

For both countries, we examine national newspapers that have become cooperatives managed by their workers, the journalists, analyzing and comparing their media systems. Chadwick (2013) notes that the terminology, media systems, has become hybrid, meaning that ICTs have triggered a new process of “simultaneous integration and fragmentation” (p. 15), where older media, such as newspapers and television, merge with and adapt to the formats, genres, norms, and actors brought about by newer digital media.

According to the most recent classification of Freedom of the Press by Reporters Without Borders (RWB, 2021), the state of journalism in Latin America is deteriorating across the board. The international organization also specifies in its Country Ranking, classifying countries from best to worst for the state of the freedom of the press: Uruguay maintains its position at number 18 while Argentina is at number 69. The report emphasizes that in Latin America, with a few rare exceptions, the working environment of journalists, which was already hostile and complicated before the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis,

has deteriorated even more (RWB, 2021). In a survey based on the number of journalists killed, the Caribbean shows that between 2017–2021, Mexico recorded 57 murders of journalists, which represents more than all other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean together (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2020). During that same five-year period, Colombia witnessed the killings of 12 journalists, while Brazil and Honduras reported the murders of ten journalists each. Argentina and Uruguay represent a small number of countries with no journalists killed between 2017 and 2021 (Navarro, 2022).

The precariousness in the media industry continues to increase, as Romero (2021) pointed out based on a survey conducted in June and July of 2021: 80% of the opinion leaders and prominent journalists surveyed responded that job creation was the most important problem Latin America would face in the incoming 18 months; the second main issue according to these experts was the economy recovery.

The aforementioned precariousness is also represented by the number of closed newspapers in both countries. In Argentina, more than 150 newspapers can be read online (Editorial Ox, 2021); in the last ten years, four emblematic newspapers, around 10 magazines, and two news agencies have closed. In Uruguay, there are about 72 newspapers (Uruguay Total, 2021); in the last 30 years, 32 newspapers have closed.

These reflections have been manifested by the journalist members of those cooperatives through various actions, one of which materializes in the Second National Meeting of Recovered Newspapers, held in the city of Rosario (Argentina) in which 15 self-managed media companies from Latin America participated, and one from Germany. Their representatives decided to meet to “recover the notoriety and value that their independence acquires when doing journalism” (Tiempo Argentino, 2019). The gathered group discussed various dilemmas, recognizing that cooperative media are as free as they are vulnerable, and hence the need to discuss the challenges, claims, and strategies that these cooperatives develop to strengthen the sector and inform its readers by overcoming the dictatorship of paper, gender coverage, and new narratives. One of the main points of this meeting was to discuss the digital divide present in self-managed media that is sustained by the public’s interest and the interactions between the media and the audience.

Among the central issues of the debate was to generate spaces for exchange with readers to bring quality information free of charge, which tends to democratize information access by bringing public opinion closer to those topics that are not covered by traditional media. Thus, favoring not only the coverage

of highly relevant topics for the reading community, but prioritizing the content and making the information more accessible in a language understandable to the reading public.

Notably, in the case of the media under study, there is marked interest in reducing the gaps with their readers; both newsrooms promote horizontal relations with the reading population. Both media outlets design their work spaces for democratic and participatory promotion, not only for elections and news production, but also when it comes to promoting spaces for exchange with their readers and shareholders, reducing cultural gaps and democratic participation.

These cooperative models of journalistic production and news construction ultimately result in newspapers reaching a greater number of readers in their digital version free of charge for them. It is a fundamental difference from their competitors that offer printed versions at relative costs.

### **Literature review**

The digital divide has been widely studied in academic literature worldwide (Monge, & Chacón, 2002; Hilbert, 2011; Gladkova, Vartanova, & Ragnedda, 2020; Ragnedda, 2020; Kampes, & Brentel, 2021). Many authors have suggested definitions of the digital divide, most of which differ mainly in terminology and emphasize various aspects of the phenomenon, such as media literacy, digital skills, digital inclusion, digital inequalities, etc. One of the approaches that allow us to recognize the characteristics of the digital divide is found in the questions suggested by Hilbert (2011):

- Who? (Establish the type of gap: between individuals, groups, countries, etc.)
- With what characteristics? (Refers to types of income, education, geography, age, gender, etc.)
- How does it connect? (Types of access, effective networks)
- Because?
- So that? (for example, telephones, Internet, digital television, etc.)

This approach is used by authors such as van Dijk (2005), among others. However, it is important to specify that in the field of the digital divide, two main research streams can be distinguished: (1) offers rather technical explanations of the phenomenon, and (2) takes into account various socio-cultural aspects.

First-wave researchers describe the digital divide as a matter of infrastructure development, technology adoption, and the cost of both Internet access and ICT devices. Hilbert (2011) describes the digital divide as the gap between those

who have access to digital technologies and those who do not. Monge and Chacón (2002) note that the digital divide “refers to the different access that people have to information and communication technologies, and the ability to use these tools, the current use that is made of them and the impact they have on well-being”. However, Bianco and Peirano (2005) propose different ways of classifying gaps: internal (refers to a study within society), temporary (a segment of the population at a given time), and structural (obstacles and drawbacks). That makes the dissemination and use of ICT impossible and cannot be improved by implementing specific measures or actions.

Second-wave digital divide researchers argue that framing it as a technology issue and an adoption issue means ignoring other variables, such as the broader socio-cultural, economic, educational, and political context (Ragnedda, 2020; Vartanova & Gladkova, 2019, 2022). DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001) defined five levels of the digital divide. The upper level represents the social context, education, age, and other characteristics of the users, which define different experiences and patterns of ICT use (Torres-Díaz, & Duarte, 2015).

This last aspect is the one we use to understand how the digital divide has been and is an obstacle and, at the same time, a significant challenge in the development of proposals for the creation of self-managed media: *Argentine Time* and *La Diaria*. This approach provides detailed and focused information, allowing reasonable conclusions to be drawn about the reasons for the deepening of the digital divide.

The digital divide can be seen from various approaches to draw reasonable conclusions about the possible causes that lead to a deepening. In the second-wave of the digital divide, researchers adopt anthropological approaches to study the phenomenon by analyzing social status, individual characteristics, and capabilities of different users, which make the use of the Internet and mobile devices successful or not (Vartanova, & Gladkova, 2019). Therefore, the study of these characterizations within the digital divide leads to the conclusion that the existing divisions and differences affect it (Trappel, 2019).

According to Trappel (2019), “the imperfections of the economic market that privilege wealth over talent can be observed in the field of media and communication” (p.13). It can easily be shown that economic divides, such as those faced by these media outlets in Argentina and Uruguay, widen the digital divide: lower income groups are less represented in Internet communications and are more likely to interrupt their connection to the global network due to financial problems. Trappel (2019) noted that algorithmic targeting, surveillance, big data, and the Internet of Things are creating new forms of inequality that

follow traditional patterns of class, gender, wealth, and education. There are other examples of social gaps that transform into online gaps and widen the digital gap, such as age gap (Escudero, 2020).

### Methods

At the time of carrying out the inquiry design of this study, we started ontological, epistemological, and methodological depositions close to constructionism. In this sense, we conceive the study of the phenomena that make up reality, of which we are also a part, from a constructionist perspective (Burr, 1995; Gergen, & Gergen, 2004; Holstein, & Gubrium, 2008). This perspective guides us in the analysis and the understanding of “the social bases of knowledge and the symbolic origins of reality” (Ema, & Sandoval, 2003: 7).

From this point of view, we base ourselves on the existence of a singular real world while we distinguish between the reality of the real world and our knowledge about it, without forgetting the fact that the social phenomena of that real world are not natural; rather, they are socially constructed. Hence, we are especially interested in the process of construction of discourses, theories, and visions on different social phenomena. The methodological approaches we adopt are situated in a hermeneutic/dialectical perspective that uses methods and techniques for collecting contextual and situated information (van Manen, 1990). Likewise, we are mindful of the fundamental changes or transitions of the so-called narrative turn in research, which constitute many challenges. Among them, an in-depth review of the relationship between the researcher and the researched, while the research objects/subjects become biographical individuals with the capacity for action and active builders of knowledge and visions of the world while recognizing the inter-influences between the researcher and research participants/collaborators (Clandinin, & Connelly, 2000).

Studying the digital divide in both media involves approaching reality and from the voice of its protagonists to understand the scope and consequences of the dilemmas observed. Hence, this study presents interrelated sections where both case studies are developed (Stake, 1999) for both countries and the current situation of journalism.

The case study uses a qualitative approach and is designed based on purposive sampling. The information from the newspapers *Tiempo Argentino* in Argentina and *La Diaria* in Uruguay were collected through unstructured interviews (Johnson, & Christensen, 2004; Rodriguez et al., 1996; Valls, 1997) conducted with eight journalists, as well as media publications from both countries. The

unstructured interview method was selected for its compatibility with the research topic. The use of open questions allows them to be modified according to the specifics of each interview, which allows the interviews to resemble a natural conversation while the interviewer retains a guiding role (McLeod, 2014). To maintain the anonymity of the journalists who have participated in this study, we use acronyms: Argentine Journalist (AJ), Uruguayan Journalist (UJ), Argentina: AJ1, AJ2, AJ3, AJ4, and Uruguay: UJ1, UJ2, UJ3, UJ4.

### **Digital divide in Argentina**

Regarding Internet access, Argentina has one of the highest rates in the region: among 45 million inhabitants, 93% are active users on the network, and 86% connect through cell phones. The information, then, circulates through smartphones: news sites are among the most visited by Argentines, behind Google and social networks such as Facebook<sup>2</sup> and YouTube (Molina, 2019).

The Permanent Homes Survey collected accessibility data for homes from 31 urban centers in Argentina up until 4Q 2020. The data published in the report *Access to and Use of Information and Communications Technologies* point out that 60,9% of urban homes have access to a computer, 82,9% to the Internet, and 84,3% to a cell phone, with equality of access between men and women, respectively at 84,4% and 84,2% (INDEC, 2021). The highest level of accessibility, 95,9%, was found in those between 18 and 29 years.

In Argentina, work practices were not exempt from the impact of the pandemic (D az-Struck, 2021). They generated, just as in education, a need to be reformulated for virtuality, a change that affected 35,7% of those surveyed. The EPH study also showed that, in the City of Buenos Aires, 42,6% of these experiences took place with equipment provided by the employer, while in the towns on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, this figure was only 26,9% (INDEC, 2021).

### **Digital divide in Uruguay**

Uruguay is in a “privileged situation” given that it carries out a sustained digital policy, reflected in its successive “digital agendas” put into action by the country since 2008, as laid down in the Digital Citizens Strategy for a Society of Information and Knowledge, a document drawn up by the Agencia del Gobierno Electrónico y Sociedad de la Información (AGESIC, 2020) (National Agency for the development of e-Government and the Information Society) and the UNESCO office in Montevideo.

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<sup>2</sup> Belongs to Meta company, banned on the territory of the Russian Federation.

This commitment to extending coverage at a technical level was expanded and reinforced with the launch of Plan Ceibal, a policy implemented during the leftist government. Inspired by the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) program, the initiative was presented at the World Economic Forum by its co-founder Nicholas Negroponte in January 2006 and implemented throughout Uruguay from December of the same year to the present day. In these first weeks, around 360,000 laptops were distributed (Rivoir, & Pittaluga, 2011).

This policy also positioned Uruguay in the software development market, currently being one of the Latin American countries with the largest number of technology incubators, attracting investments from foreign companies. The Ceibal plan marked a milestone in reducing the digital divide and has served as inspiration for the implementation of the access and training model for other countries.

The Uruguayans demonstrate an “extensive use of the Internet,” with nine out of ten people being Internet users, eight out of ten being daily users. The remaining 10% of the population is not evenly distributed, but rather the greatest divide in access to the Internet and digital skills is related to the level of education and age. People with lower levels of education use the Internet less, with less diverse and sophisticated searches, and are less critical of the Internet than those with a higher level of education. Data shows that for people considered of a low level of education (those not having completed secondary school), the percentage is 71%. For people 65 and over, the percentage reduces to 49% (AGESIC, 2020).

The Uruguayan people prefer to use their mobile phones as 90% of the population use them daily. Personal computers are used by 60% of internauts, and only 30% do so on a daily basis. In Uruguay, one of every three Internet users connect using their mobile device; this occurs mainly in 57% of people with a low level of education, while those with a high level of education (7%) connect to their mobile without using another device (AGESIC, 2020).

### **Co-ops and media in Argentina**

In Argentina, various strategies in the field of social and solidary economics set a precedent through socio-productive experiences and processes such as the country's cooperatives. In this way, new production spaces were created, and innovations were made institutionally, aiming to increase and promote social power (Wright, 2010).

This recovered factory movement began with the former Gip-Metal S.R.L factory in August 2000 in the Buenos Aires Province. This was the day the



workers received their dismissal telegrams as the factory's owners had filed for bankruptcy. They realized something unusual was happening as they had normally been working. The workers, who decided to stay and resist, and from this space, made progress with the creation of the *Cooperativa de Trabajo Uni y Fuerza Limitada*. They rented out the machinery and succeeded in the first expropriation legislation being passed for a manufacturing factory (National Movement of Recovered Factories, MNFR, 2000).

Even if the media industry seems to continually seek a way out of the economic crises that the country is going through, media consumption denotes an inevitable adaptation to changes: 95% of the population watch television, 70% listen to the radio, and 57% read newspapers regularly, either in its paper or digital version (Molina, 2019). *Infobae* is the most visited news portal, followed by *clarin.com* and *lanacion.com.ar*. The *Infobae* newspaper climbed to first place in 2019, and it is the only newspaper on that list that does not have a printed edition (Molina, 2019).

In terms of media situation in Argentina, the *State of the Country's Local Journalism* explains how the tendency towards work precariousness grew in the country's media. The investigation concludes that most local journalists work in precarious conditions and are forced to deal with high levels of instability (Fopea, 2021).

Faced with such a hostile situation for the press, several Argentinean journalists sought new paths while not abandoning their profession in communications. This is when several editorial teams found support in the Argentine Bankruptcy Law (1995, 2011), enabling workers to take over bankrupt companies and thereby recuperate the media and register it as a cooperative. Between 2016 and 2017, at least six media outlets were recovered by their workers after they were closed or abandoned by their owners. In 2018, the National Meeting of Recovered Newspapers was created, and the newspaper *La Diaria* from Uruguay was one of the international guests (Media Ownership Monitor, 2019).

According to the survey by the Buenos Aires Press Union (*SiPreBA*, in Spanish), between 2018 and 2019, over 3,100 journalists lost their jobs in the City of Buenos Aires and over 4,500 in the entire country. This took place alongside the silencing of critical voices and increased the concentration of the media in ever increasingly powerful groups that disregard current laws (Escudero, 2020). Moreover, the report by the *SiPreBA* on the situation for workers in the press states that since 2016, there have been 3,127 registered job losses, solely in the City of Buenos Aires. According to the report, business owners took advantage of the critical situation to make journalists' jobs more precarious, turning them

into “collaborators” and freelancers and thereby “violating the Professional Journalist’s Statute”.

### ***Tiempo Argentino* newspaper**

The asset stripping of the *Tiempo Argentino* newspaper became increasingly obvious for its employees when the Balkbrug SA Company did not pay half of the annual bonus. Trips for special reports were canceled, and there was a lack of supplies for the printers and other supplies for the editorial office. All of which led to the first non-payment of the *Tiempo Argentino* employees in December 2015. “On that day, absolutely all of the group’s employees lost their jobs. Some of us decided to carry on, file complaints, continue to write despite not being paid; other colleagues couldn’t afford it and had to go and look for work” (Personal communication, AJ1, 2020). Their wages for January and February were not paid either. On the night February 5, 2016, when the workers had finished the newspaper’s edition, they found out about the lockout. They improvised an assembly and that very night decided to occupy the building to preserve the tools of their trade, organizing round-the-clock watches to ensure no one came in.

The Ministry of Labor decreed that the *Tiempo Argentino* employees were the custodians of the company’s property, clearly abandoned by management. On March 24<sup>th</sup> of the same year, on the 40th anniversary of the coup d’ tat, they published a four-page special edition telling their story. They went out to sell the copies, talking to people and asking them if they would be interested in lending support to a project of self-management. “The supplements sold out, and we returned to the newspaper, where we were sleeping, with hundreds of emails and renewed energy” (Personal communication, AJ3, 2020).

Although the journalists took turns to continue occupying the T.A.’s editorial office, on the night of July 4, 2016, a group of people entered and destroyed much of the office, intimidating three representatives of T.A. The journalists decided to do what they do best – write and report on what happened – and the next day, 30,000 copies were printed of a publication explaining what had occurred in the offices that were still occupied as a “pay protest”.

In April 2016, the workers created the *For More Time Cooperative*), returning as a digital daily newspaper with a Sunday printed edition (as this is the day on which newspaper sales tripled): *Tiempo Argentino*, Due os de Nuestras Palabras (Owers of our words). The first printed edition as a cooperative sold out (30,000 copies), somewhat unusual because when the newspaper was not run by its workers, it sold ten times fewer copies; thus, it became the largest media co-op

in the country. “We decided to create a non-profit work cooperative, where all members take part in decision-making, and we rely on the financial support of our readers” (Personal communication, AJ2, 2020).

The media has subscribers (printed edition at home), members (who pay extra to support independent journalistic projects), and many more readers with free access to content. “We have chosen a solidary model: those who pay don’t do so in order to have exclusive information but so that more people have access and can read us” (Journalist from *Tiempo Argentino*, Personal communication, AJ1, 2020).

In the last four years of intense work, the cooperative members have managed to survive and maintain themselves in a national context with ups and downs. Currently, the community that supports this undertaking consists of 4,000 partners and 1,000+ subscribers between its online and paper editions. According to the current president of the Cooperative, the newspaper receives an average of 2.5 million monthly visits to its online version and maintains a print run of 25,000 copies on Sundays. Thus, income is generated, whereas 70% of *Tiempo Argentino’s* revenue comes directly from its readers, and the remaining 30% comes from advertising (Personal communication, AJ4).

### **Co-ops and media in Uruguay**

In case of Uruguay, the decriminalization of press felonies, as well as the existence of legislation regulating the community radios and guaranteeing access to information, create a favorable atmosphere for journalists’ work. The Law for Audiovisual Communication Services, passed in December 2014, favored the pluralism of the press and provided for the foundation of an independent Board of Audiovisual Communication. Reporters Without Borders (RWB) registered cases of journalists who suffered threats, intimidation, and political pressure when investigating sensitive cases implicating civil servants with the presidency of the Republic; the investigating journalists were also under legal pressure (RWB, 2021).

There is a long history of the Cooperative Movement in Uruguay, with the first initiatives dating back to 1870 and undertaken by collectives of Spanish and Italian immigrants (Terra, 1986). The deep socioeconomic crisis of 2002 was a turning point; the cooperative movement was re-assessed in post-crisis Uruguay and with the arrival of a left-wing party (Frente Amplio) to the government in 2005. According to the Instituto Nacional de Cooperativismo (2018), over the period of ten years, the number of cooperatives tripled, from 1,164 cooperatives in 2007 to 3,490 in 2017.

Despite that, in most cases, the Companies Recovered by Workers (*ERT* in Spanish) adopted a cooperative legal structure to produce collectively; the processes of recuperation require the collective movement to have a particular character, given the close relationship with the trade union from which most prior experiences arose and the subsequent relation they have with this organization. For example, in 2008, ten out of 16 *ERT* and in 2015, 25 out of 41 noted a significant union background at their previous company and the union's central role in their recovery (Rieiro, 2008, 2016).

The *ERT* may therefore be taken as a specific social economy sector, given that, to a large extent, it takes on the legal form of cooperatives, becoming a member of the *Federación de Cooperativas de Producción del Uruguay* (FCPU) [Federation of Production Cooperatives of Uruguay], but concurrently maintaining a strong link to the union movement through the Inter-Union Plenary of Workers – National Workers' Convention and even creating its own representative organization in 2007: the National Association of Companies Recovered by their Workers.

Regarding media consumption in Uruguay, *Montevideo Portal* is the first on the list, with 53% of respondents who say they have read news on the portal, followed by *El Observador* and *Subrayado*, both with 46%, *El País* (45%), and *La Diaria* (34%) (Montevideo Portal, 2021).

### ***La Diaria newspaper***

As communication was challenged, Uruguayan media went through a period of crisis while uncertainty – even greater following the pandemic – still has the media and journalists in a state of alert. Based on the Federation of Production Cooperatives in Uruguay's (2020) report, *La Diaria* managed to avoid one of the main scams of the press in Uruguay, the monopoly of newsstand sales. According to UJ1: “the fact of being a cooperative medium added to the fact that the community accesses the contents of the newspaper by subscription reinforces our position as an independent medium” (Personal communication, UJ1, 2022).

“Its agenda is not dictated by the establishment, but rather it creates its own news with the new agenda of rights as its pillar” (Personal communication, UJ1, 2022). As expressed by a member of the team: “I always say that if the newspaper were not a cooperative, it would not exist as a means of communication. It is not a profitable business for capitalist profit. And the only way to survive without high volumes of advertising, without giving in to pressure from companies and/or political parties, is to be a cooperative media outlet that relies on its community of subscribers” (Personal communication, UJ2, 2022).

The *La Diaria* newspaper was founded in 2006 as the initiative of citizens who wanted to read a good newspaper and professionals who wanted to practice good journalism. Fifteen years have passed since its first edition. This media not only filled the need for an independent newspaper in Uruguay at the time, but also revolutionized how readers were traditionally accustomed to getting their copies: *de la imprenta a casa*/ from the printing house to home. *La Diaria* began with a subscription model and home delivery for 100% of copies.

“We have formed a community of subscribers and readers collaborative and supportive, in which cultural, recreational, leisure, products, and promotions proposals are shared. In times of economic difficulties, we have increased the price of products, explaining the reasons to our community, and generally, we have not lost customers. This implies understanding and solidary support” (Personal communication, UJ2, 2022).

Commitment to a close and direct dialogue with the reader favors the reduction of the gaps insofar as it is from the dialogue and the exposition of the problems of the medium that the subscriber community forms part of the decisions of the management of the media itself. It is through this exchange of information, of sharing the responsibility in decision-making, that both the community and media continue to promote the news spaces.

The situation required adapting to the characteristics of the environment and the demands of its readers. For the cooperative team, this adaptation marked a turning point at an economic level. As one of the journalists points out, “we did not have sources of financing for this type of investment. We have obtained support to develop software and digital platforms, but not for the equipment of the newsroom” (Personal communication, UJ2, 2022).

Analyzing digital reconversion process, journalists point out: “When we started developing our website a few years ago, there was a digital divide between our colleagues in the newsroom. But after various changes, which involved adapting to the digital world with education and training, I think we managed to overcome the differences. For our work, keeping up with technological advances is vital” (Personal communication, UJ2, 2022).

Regarding pending challenges, as journalists point out, we could summarize them in two great reflections. On the one hand, a challenge for the team has focused on imagining new ways of managing a newspaper “In a difficult context for the print media, cooperative management collectivizes some threats that perhaps in a traditional company would not occupy your horizon of concerns” (Personal communication, UJ4, 2022).

## Results

Digital divide is an important part of the public agenda, both in Argentina and Uruguay. From a broader perspective of the digital divide in a regional context, “the region is faced by a real risk of digital exclusion which in the mid-term may worsen structural gaps in terms of low productivity and high social vulnerability” (CAF, Development Bank of Latin America).

The report was titled towards a comprehensive agenda for the adoption of technologies for 4.0 learning in Latin America and used as reference indicators in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay linked to the incorporation of digital technologies in education. It revealed that 46% of the 144 million students between the ages of five and twelve in Latin America who could not have in-person classes during the five months when people were completely stopped from circulating due to the COVID-19 health crisis could not access online classes either (Tellez-Tejada, 2021).

This report specified the importance of joining forces within the public and private sectors, civil society, academia, and multilateral bodies to drive a comprehensive model for the adoption of technologies that are focused not only on the provision of devices with quality access to the Internet, but rather to improve the quality of learning.

In addition, the connectivity problem is broached in this study, with domestic access found within 60% to 80% of households. The assessment revealed that Uruguay possesses digital maturity and comprehensive programs, already boasting high rates of connectivity and access to devices; meanwhile, Argentina is in the process of reaching the same rates.

In Argentina, more than 20 media outlets have closed across the country since 2016, and at least 3,500 media employees have lost their jobs (2,700 in Buenos Aires alone). Eight out of those 20 media outlets were recovered by their staff and continue to operate as workers’ cooperatives with initiatives that promote independent journalism where the aim is independence from the official guideline, at times achieved and at others, less so. Nevertheless, “in Argentina, the media sector is leading the ranking of successfully recovered businesses across all industries” (MOM, 2019).

In certain self-managed media companies from Argentina, income distribution is equitable, whereas solidarity and equality between workers are central to its legitimization. In many cases, wage differences are not significant but have a symbolic value to express the organization’s internal social differentiation. As for AJ2, he recalls when they were occupying the media as a wage protest, and it became a cooperative: “We occupied the editorial department for four

months. In this process, we also understood that we could not only focus our efforts on the printed edition, and we began a long debate about how our website should be and how we would be represented and identified. We were clear that it should have different characteristics” (Personal communication, 2021).

It is crucial to understand the rupture that occurred when it stopped being a newspaper belonging to a media holding company and became a recovered media in a cooperative. AJ4 recalls: “We realized in a moment that we had to learn and improve everything related to ICT: learn to upload information to the media website, to know what would have the greatest impact on the web, to begin to learn to use tools such as Google Analytics to know in which platforms our news was most read, to understand more about our presence and impact in social media” (Personal communication, 2021)

This initiative aims to reduce the gap between press organizations working for the public interest and the large corporations that profit from news. This initiative becomes particularly important in times of profound changes in news consumption, where it is then necessary to create a structure of the media market.

In the case of *La Diaria*, after 15 years of producing news and becoming the second most-read newspaper in the country, its basis for success was and continues to be to remain free, focusing on a human, professional and empathetic style of journalism. UJ1 points out: “What is representing a divide is the digital literacy, the knowledge of what it means to manage news media in the digital economy” (Personal communication, 2022).

The transition of this media over 15 years has been to focus on the digital, as stated by UJ2: “It was a media in print. Today, it is much more than that. It’s a media that has diversified its formats, its content, strongly backing digital and with a transition of the editorial towards digital” (Personal communication, 2021). UJ2 shares the priorities for publication when hiring journalists:

“The last two journalists we hired have a profile more dedicated to data journalism, and journalism and technology (...) It’s great to make quality content, which is really important, but just as important, or even more, is that people feel part of a project they believe in and with which they share certain values” (Personal communication, 2021).

## Conclusion

*Tiempo Argentino* and *La Diaria* newspapers correspond to the characterizations that various scholars attribute to this type of cooperative based around two central axes: cooperation and solidarity (Altuna-Gabilondo, 2019; Coraggio, 2011; Cruz, 2011; Guerra, 2007; Hinkelammert, 2009; Razeto,

2007; Santos-Arajo et al., 2019; Singer, 2007). Solidarity, in this case study, is extrapolated to the audience in a bond of exchange and empathy to comprehend their needs. All these aspects are contemplated in the studies of the second wave of the digital divide since they have anthropological approaches to examining the phenomenon by analyzing social status, individual characteristics, media and audience, and capabilities of different users (journalists and readers), which make the use of the Internet and mobile devices ICT whether successful or not (Vartanova, & Gladkova, 2019).

In both media co-ops experiences, we observe the interest and commitment of their workers in creating a high-quality communication product, corresponding to the needs of an audience (that they already know and want to maintain loyal through new digital actions), the need to add more knowledge related to ICTs, their recognition of the need to reduce the digital divide through collaborative projects and the recruitment of staff with knowledge of new technologies.

Although in both media, their readers' subscriptions cover most of the journalists' wages, they have adjusted their internal finances to invest in material acquisitions, recruit staff with digital experience and knowledge, and create platforms allowing them to stay up-to-date and in touch with their audiences. As Martin (2008) notes, journalists need to acquire the necessary "digital literacy" to cope with the changes and challenges in their profession. This confirms and answers part of the questions posed for this research.

One of the limitations of this study that should be mentioned, was inability to interview 'traditional' media journalists in both countries to find out their strategies for reducing the digital divide and acquiring digital literacy.

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