

# Business models for digital newspapers: an online response to a growing demand for news content

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## Keywords:

*Digital business model, online media, news content, newspaper, demand*

## Abstract

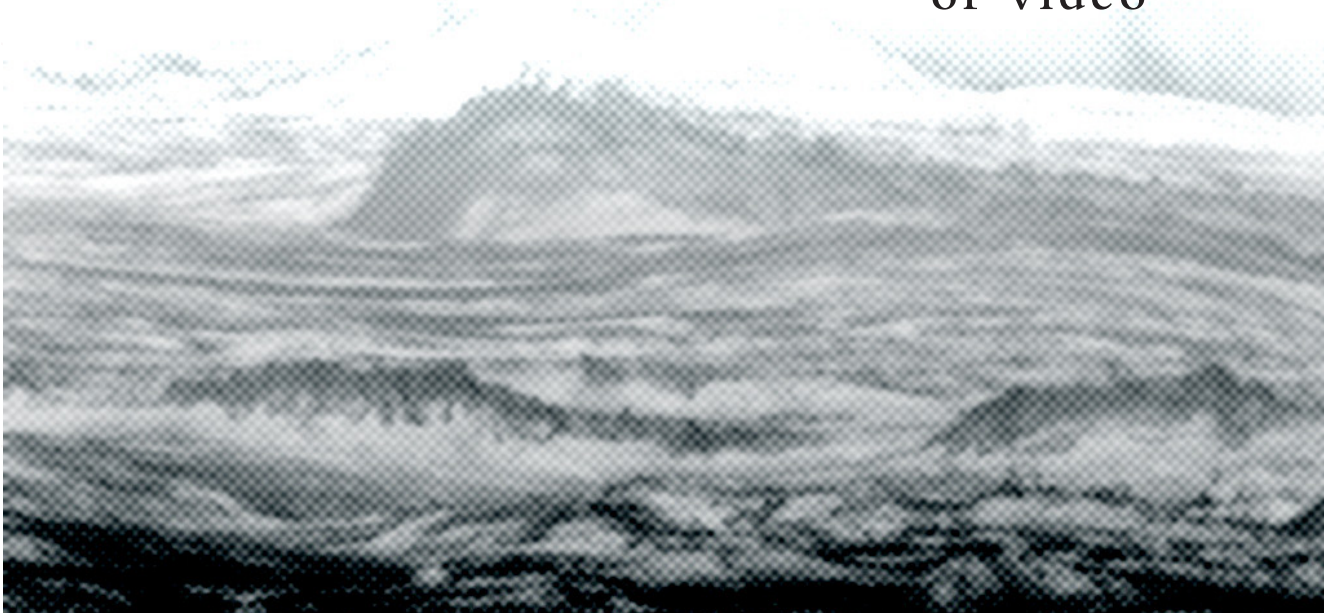
*The newspaper industry crisis coincides with an explosion in demand for content in diverse areas and forms of news consumption. The diverse digital business paradigms that arise in such a context come in various forms, from pay per view to free of charge content types: a) payment model that combines advertising, subscription and sale techniques similar to the print version, although offering additional services; b) payment model based on quality version subscription; c) payment model charging for access to certain content and d) open and free model with strategies that are increasingly similar to the ones of native digital media. Therefore, there is a paradox between the growing demand for digital content and the difficulty of choosing an online media business model.*

# 1. Theoretical Framework

## 1.1. The concept of online media

The first theoretical conceptualization of cybermedia was posed by Ramón Salaverría: “that issuer of contents that has the will to mediate between facts and Public, uses mainly journalistic criteria and techniques, uses the multimedia language, is interactive and hypertextual, updated and published on the internet ” (Salaverría, 2005, p. 40). Salaverría (2001) delimited the concept of multimedia as the combination of “multi-”, which

**“multimedia is whatever  
is expressed, transmitted  
or perceived through  
(...) text, image, audio  
or video”**



means diverse, and “-media”, as the plural of medium. As a consequence, multimedia is whatever is expressed, transmitted or perceived through many media: text, image, audio or video.

The name of cybermedium was proposed in 2003 by the Novos Medios research group. Novos Medios explained the composition of this neologism: the prefix cyber indicates the use of multimedia language, interactivity and hypertext, that is published and updated network from Internet. Thus, the online medium is conceived as the content broadcaster

which mediates between facts and public, it mainly uses journalistic criteria and techniques, applying multimedia language, interactivity and hypertext, updating and publishing on the Internet" (López García et al, 2003, p. 40).

From the concept of online media, López García et al (2003) projected six possible approaches to the model:

- The perspective of the media with structured newsrooms, narrative and discourse.

- The perspective of the editor of information, commercial or entertainment, communication and relational or intermediary content or infomediation.

- The perspective of the public, which establishes a personalized and individualized communication in which "the user leaves the passive role that often plays in the mass media, becoming active (and interactive) subject" (Díaz Noci y Salaverría, 2003, p. 41). Because of interactivity, the audience is not only considered to be a consumer, but a prosumer who also produces content, according to Salaverría (2003).

- The perspective of professional criteria, structure, writing and ethics related to journalism.

- The concept of hypertext, multimedia technology and interactivity.

- The content updates.

Díaz Noci et al (2014) reviewed the definition of online media in a more precise way to provide a methodology for studying digital media:

**A media that uses an interactive digital platform online, either in the form of a website or a mobile app. It does not necessarily differ from print or analogous media counterparts, but this characteristic influences its nature in a cer-**

**tain way. In all cases, the digital version, whether it is online or interactive, is a case of cybermedium. (Díaz Noci et al, 2014).**

There is an agreement between these two definitions that the purpose of online media is to develop and disseminate content on the Internet. Yet, in the latest specification of mentions that there has to be an interactive element for users of all devices.

Díaz Arias (2009) distinguished between digital media (newspapers and magazines) and online media depending on the origin of online content, context diffusion and interaction which matches the term 'cyberspace' provided by Díaz Noci et al (2014).

**Cybermedia is a term commonly used to indicate the presence of traditional media in cyberspace. It is broader than the digital press, which directly refers to newspapers and magazines on the Internet. Online media, however, is a term that refers to all traditional analogous media in cyberspace. One assumes that cyberspace interactions create a globally shared information in a navigable space, a space which one can navigate through using the hypertext language (Díaz Arias, 2009, p. 2).**

The Internet hosts most of these interactions, but lately there is an increasing role of mobile phone networks as well. Cyberspace is the virtual environment of interactive communication which complements the natural interpersonal communication and the traditional media.

**In this interactive, multimedia, hypertext virtual environment, we interact with multiple subjects through technology as we would**

in the personal communication, but without spatial or temporal limits; we can use oral language, written or audiovisual, juxtapose or interrelate it; we can acquire the knowledge as we do while reading or piecemeal exchanging messages. The consolidation of this virtual environment means the first order anthropological change (Díaz Arias, 2009, p. 2).

When characterizing online media, López García et al. (2003) detected a differentiation factor of the degree of dynamism, which defines four dimensions: hypertextuality, multimedia, interactivity and refresh rate. Thanks to the new version of semantics, in this academic proposal customizing content, which makes distinctions in its bid, is added according to the user profile and preferences manifested in the network utilization.

Pavlick (2005) explained that the adaptation of content writing for online media has led to the emergence of contextualized journalism, which meets five conditions: the breadth of communication modes; the hypermediality; the increasing participation of the audience; dynamic content; and customization.

Mayoral Sánchez and Edo Bolós (2014) characterized cyberjournalism using the following terms: hypertext, interactivity and multimedia. Other distinctive features are customization and continuous updating of content, "but the emphasis is often placed on the new press information online links the printed traditions of linear narrative with interactive capabilities and multimedia computing" (Mayoral Sánchez and Edo Bolós, 2014, p. 233).

Fernández Castrillo (2013) listed five fundamental concepts for transmedia configuration that differ from above-mentioned authors' definition of an immersive

virtual simulation:

- Integration: the combination of an increasing number of means.
- Interactivity: the user's ability to manipulate and directly influence the media experience.
- Hipermediacy: Nonlinear navigation.
- Immersion: in reference to the experiences of virtual simulation.
- Narrativity: the creation of alternative narrative structures that enhance the sense of simultaneity and omnipresence in the network.

Aguado and Castellet (2013) also referred to the paradox between the growing demand for digital content and the challenges of choosing the appropriate online media business model: "The newspaper industry crisis coincides with an explosion in demand for content in diverse areas and forms of news consumption." Salaverría and Negrodo's (2013) definition of digital media may be useful. The appearance of confidential content, for example, [www.elconfidencial.com](http://www.elconfidencial.com), makes a difference.

"At the end of the first decade of the XXI century second generation of native cibermedia appeared in Spain. It is characterized by purely informative and opinion journalism unlike the paternalising type cultivated by its predecessors" (Salaverría y Negrodo, 2013, p. 173).

If the advent of computers and the Internet there was a paradigm shift with the transition from mainstream to online media communication. The rise of mobile terminals and tablets also involves changes in design, editing and digital content consumption – now they adapt to portability and multiple screens.

**In a world of mobile phones  
(6800 million) and people (7100**



million), rapid technological progress is changing the way in which users interact with the Internet and interact with online media (Koldobika et al, 2014, p. 1).

The same way that the online media content evolved into multimedia, hyper-text and interactive online creation, the transition from computer screen to mobile devices and tablets has also experienced two evolutionary stages. At first, mobile devices only offered text messaging services (SMS) or multimedia (MMS), email and web browsing, but similar content to those offered in the web; the launch of the iPhone in 2007 and the advent of digital tablets led to the development of specific content which is more dynamic and designed for ubiquitous touch devices (*responsive design*).

Meso et al (2014) argued that the mobile was the fourth screen and concluded that this new communication channel posed new challenges for journalism: it leads to the development of narrative formats, genre adaptation and effective formulas for participation of prosumer audiences. However, we also believe that mobile apps favor brand consolidation, which in turn brings a new form of advertising revenue and user loyalty. In this way, mobile apps ensure that the future of online media is on a strategic way towards multiplatform content.

Aguado and Castellet (2013) mentioned two different online media business paradigms: a) payment model that combines advertising, subscription and copy sales, which is similar to what the print media offer but with some additional services; b) payment model based on offering quality version subscription; c) payment model which charges for access to certain parts of content and d) open and

free access which has a similar strategy to the digital-only media.

Meanwhile, there are two tools that contribute to the collaborative production, crowdsourcing and crowdfunding. This has allowed a new digital headend *El Español* to appear in Spain in 2015. It is created by Pedro J. Ramírez, ex-director of *El Mundo*.

The Office for Justification of Interactive Dissemination (OJD) has been auditing the internet since 1997. By now, it has studied 274 electronic means in accordance with international standards and technical rules governing publication process and relations with publishers. Specifically, the issue of technical standards control of electronic media (OJD, 2012), publications and digital editions (OJD, 2015) reflect OJD's definition and classification. For the purposes of audience measurement, it is considered that an electronic media is a website while its editor is a "person or legal entity making the publication of one or more electronic media" (OJD, 2012, p. 5).

In September 2015, OJD defined and classified interactive publications and digital editions. "A Digital Publication is defined as a title only which is released in digital format, and Digital Edition is the replica of a print publication. Both are distributed electronically" (OJD, 2015, p. 3).

If replica of a print publication, OJD observes two cases in which digital copies should be published on the same date and incorporate the same numbering and logo: 1) an exact copy of the editorial and advertising content and 2) a similar copy which allows to consider the same product for both editions.

Then, the OJD makes a classification of publications and digital editions (<http://www.ojdinteractiva.es/medios-digitales>), according to three criteria:

- According to the nature of the diffu-

sion: considering a publisher's financial situation, the publisher may set a paywall, use a combined method or make content publicly available for free.

- According to their periodicity: daily, weekly, biweekly, monthly and other.

- According to the characteristics, content and readership: digital newspapers, digital publications and digital publications aimed at business or B2B (Business to Business).

Also, monthly data of digital media may be classified by subject areas.

## 2. Methodology

This study of digital press models uses a mixed-method approach to assess the factors of success in online media business models.

The fieldwork was carried out by a triangulation of methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The fieldwork aimed at defining the variables of the study on the interaction of audiences and journalists in the information production process and their economic viability through content, subscription, advertising, *crowdsourcing* or *crowdfunding*.

55 media outlets were selected for the quantitative analysis within category "news and information". Within this category there were subcategories "global news and current affairs" and "general news". The sample consisted of the nation-wide media outlets (OJD, 2016): [www.publico.es](http://www.publico.es), [www.eldiario.es](http://www.eldiario.es), [www.larazon.es](http://www.larazon.es), [www.diariocritico.com](http://www.diariocritico.com), [www.esdiario.com](http://www.esdiario.com), [www.infolibre.es](http://www.infolibre.es), [www.theobjective.com](http://www.theobjective.com), [www.diarosigloxxi.com](http://www.diarosigloxxi.com),

[www.gentedigital.es](http://www.gentedigital.es), [www.efempresas.es](http://www.efempresas.es), [www.efefuturo.es](http://www.efefuturo.es), [www.europapress.es](http://www.europapress.es) y [www.españaexterior.com](http://www.españaexterior.com).

The research involved identifying the selected media and its classification within digital business models proposed: according to characteristics, distribution, frequency, content and audience.

The study considered the data published by OJD from January 2016 until the date of the end of the study.

For qualitative analysis, case study drew on the digital business model launched by the public entity Radio Spanish Television. OJD classified it as "entertainment" and subclassified it as "Broadcast" with an online presence and in a form of mobile and tablet apps.

In addition, this study analyzed the proposed new immersive journalism, developed by nine Spanish media groups: TVE, El País, Vocento, Cadena Ser, ABC, El Mundo, La Sexta, Cuatro, Grupo Zeta, El Diario and Yorokobu. Immersive journalism is, according to its creators, "a new genre or narrative journalism linked to virtual reality, a technology that promises to become one of the most powerful machines of empathy" (Immersive Journalism Lab, 2016).

Method I. Discourse analysis:

It is a qualitative content analysis of online academic publications in scientific journals, academic literature and those available online.

Method II. Quantitative analysis:

Based on the OJD data, digital media are classified according to their profitability and distribution.

The OJD (2015) provides basic definitions regarding technical standards of control of electronic media.

- Page view: set of files sent to a user as a result of request received by the

server. When the page consists of several frames, all of them will, for the purposes of calculation, be considered as a unitary page.

- Visit: an uninterrupted sequence of pages served to a valid user. If the user does not make requests for pages over a period of time (30 minutes) the following request will be the beginning of a new visit.

- Unique browser: Total unique combinations of an IP address and an additional identifier. Media may use cookies or log-in identifier.

- Duration pageview: Cumulative time in seconds of all page views (on visits two or more page views) divided by the total number of page views.

- Duration of the Visit: Time in seconds of all visits of two or more page views divided by the total number of visits of two or more page views.

- Domestic traffic: Audience or broadcast for Spain based on IP addresses recorded by the measurement system.

Method III. Case study:

This method consists of an analysis of RTVE business model in comparison with the values obtained from methods I and II. Also, the feasibility of immersive journalism is studied.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Quantitative analysis of digital media audited by OJD Interactive:

The media outlets were classified according to the online media business model proposed by Aguado and Castellet

(2013):

1. Payment Models: print version with additional services (advertising, subscription and sales). The following media outlets were placed in this category: La Razón and Infolibre.

2. Paid subscription models that offer a quality version: El Diario.

3. Models of payment for access to content: Efe and Europa Press.

4. Open and free models similar to the digital native media strategies: RTVE, Público, Diario Crítico, Esdiario, The Objective, Diariosigloxxi, Gentedigital y España Exterior.

The efficiency of each online business model type was also analysed.

#### **www.publico.es**

Publico started publishing as a print title, a fact that is evident in the organization of content, but the crisis which hit the media in this decade guided its way to the digital version which is now maintained exclusively. The online version runs such exclusive digital media sections as the online television, photo-gallery and the section dedicated to user participation. Publico has also adapted its narrative to the characteristics of the Internet and has a specialized section on Wikileaks content.

Publico offers free content, a special library as well as the regular subscription.

#### **www.eldiario.es**

Eldiario.es is a digital medium which specialises in politics and economics and defends its social values: journalistic independence, public transparency, human rights, social justice, equal opportunities. It is open to citizen democracy. Its content is published under a free license.

The main source of income is advertising complemented by the financial contribu-

tions of its partners. So it can be considered as a mixed model and this outlet would be classified in the second group of media offering a quality version subscription.

The differential advantages to those who paid 5 euros per month in modalities of biannual or annual payments are:

- Advancement of information and analysis and opinion prior to access.
- Elimination of commercial advertising on their pages.
- Recognition in the community. [www.eldiario.es](http://www.eldiario.es) offers contributors to open their own account on the platform.
- Meetings outside the network, which the company performs regularly to share ideas, criticisms, contributions on the editorial direction of [eldiario.es](http://eldiario.es). Members can raise issues and share opinions face-to-face.
- Promotions and discounts on selected services and cultural activities.

### **[www.larazon.es](http://www.larazon.es)**

La Razón is the only large printed title with a digital version which appears on the OJD Interactive list. This paper corresponds to the first qualified group of business models raised from a print edition with additional services and whose financial viability comes from combination of advertising, subscriptions and sales of printed copies.

### **[www.diariocritico.com](http://www.diariocritico.com)**

Diario Crítico offers free access and subscription content. Its strategy is based on differentiating its content into thematic sections: national, international, economy, sports, entertainment, TV, press, Entrepreneurs 2020 and Educa 2020. The Diario Crítico headquarters is in Madrid. This digital medium is composed of nine titles and has its own production company.

### **[www.esdiario.com](http://www.esdiario.com)**

Esdiario.com is a registered trademark of El Semanal Digital. Esdiario.com uses a mixed content strategy based on exempt from payment subscription and advertising. Income is generated through the website which is organized in thematic sections: home, Spain, world, economy, media, sports, lifestyle and opinion. In addition to OJD, the publication is audited by Comscore and Google Analytics.

### **[www.infolibre.es](http://www.infolibre.es)**

Infolibre combines free content with advertising and digital access subscription, which charges a euro per day, six euros per month and fifty-five euros per year. It also offers the combination of digital and paper for eight euros a month.

This mixed formula allows the digital media mark its ideological line and offer greater diversification of its content, which is organized into a lot of thematic sections: Politics (government, Parliament, PP, PSOE, IU, Justice, Health, 15M), Economics (trade unions, business, banking, consumer, employer, markets, energy), World (Europe, USA, Latin America, Africa and Asia), Culture (books, film, music, theater), Media (newspapers, radio, TV, internet), Opinion (columns, blogs, surveys, chats), Library, Libreleaks, Truth or lie, Action and Infolibre area is reserved for the subscribers only.

### **[www.theobjective.com](http://www.theobjective.com)**

The Objective specializes in photojournalism and reinforces the quality of its content both for its multimedia, for the usability of the web. The images are complemented by investigative reports and comments from reviewers. It has no advertising inserts.



### **[www.diariosigloxxi.com](http://www.diariosigloxxi.com)**

Diario Siglo XXI is defined as “a general media of Spanish digital communication” and an “independent publisher which does not belong to any economic, political or media groups and which is based on the plurality of ideas and opinions and openness to participation” (Diario Siglo XXI, 2016).

It is a model of free access to informative content with little amounts of advertising. The statistics of Diario Siglo XXI are certified by Google Analytics and Awstats. The publication is represented in Google PageRank and Alexa. Diario Siglo XXI also has its own tech-tools providing complete statistics.

### **[www.gentedigital.es](http://www.gentedigital.es)**

Gente Digital is a social and lifestyle magazine. It is published free of charge, printed in color and circulated nation-wide. It also covers local events.

The business model is maintained by advertising in the print and digital versions. Blogs published by the actual users of the website are very important for the latter.

Below are the cases of news agencies. Their business models are mixed: selected content is available to the public, but for the rest one needs to pay for access.

### **[www.efeempresas.es](http://www.efeempresas.es) and [www.efefuturo.es](http://www.efefuturo.es)**

It's Spain's first information agency. Two sections of Efe are included into OJD Interactive: the channel dedicated to companies and new technologies.

### **[www.europapress.es](http://www.europapress.es)**

OJD audits all online content of the Europa Press agency, which is organized in different thematic sections based on location and the hybridization of content on the Internet: Chance (social), TiC Portal (technology and communication), culture and Leisure, info Salus, Social EP, Notimérica, Tourism, Motor, Disconnecting, Impulse, Campus Live and the version in Catalan Aldia.

### **[www.españaexterior.com](http://www.españaexterior.com)**

This digital publication is oriented at Spanish readers living abroad. It offers specialized sections on emigration and outdoor activities that are complemented by news, economy and content on the Spanish autonomous regions. It is a free access website which is mainly financed through public funding.

**Table 1: TOTAL NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRAFFIC FEBRUARY 2016: Global digital news and current affairs media.**

TITLE	Classification	Sub-Classification	Unique Browser (avg)	Unique Browser	VAR.%	Visits	Average duration	Pages
PUBLICO.ES	News and information	Global news and current affairs	503.973	8.274.329	-8,30	18.095.673	00:05:44	37.490.361
EUROPAPRESS	News and information	Global news and current affairs	373.255	8.097.498	-3,88	12.496.010	00:07:55	25.667.346
ELDIARIO.ES	News and information	Global news and current affairs	446.149	6.916.954	-12,03	16.407.329	00:05:06	36.227.172
LA RAZON	News and information	Global news and current affairs	258.137	3.717.514	-7,64	9.154.092	00:02:31	18.605.438
DIARIOCRITICO.COM	News and information	Global news and current affairs	18.565	445.985	-2,98	602.433	00:03:51	1.278.225
EUROEFE.COM	News and information	Global news and current affairs	34	771	6,79	1.206	00:03:44	2.877

**Table 2: TOTAL NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRAFFIC FEBRUARY**  
2016: Digital news media of general interest.

TITLE	Classification	Sub-Classification	Unique Browser (avg)	Unique Browser	VAR.%	Visits	Average duration	Pages
ESDIARIO.COM	News and information	News of general interest	67.130	1.308.820	-0,18	2.204.996	00:01:52	4.259.226
INFOLIBREES	News and information	News of general interest	87.935	1.264.660	-1,12	3.004.932	00:02:06	5.112.067
EFE.COM	News and information	News of general interest	31.032	729.930	-14,53	995.731	00:08:28	1.927.854
THEOBJECTIVE.COM	News and information	News of general interest	20.441	503.273	7,01	622.252	00:00:44	1.363.005
DIARIO SIGLO XXI	News and information	News of general interest	4.242	107.194	1,02	136.375	00:00:36	185.746
GENTEDIGITAL.ES	News and information	News of general interest	2.957	73.399	5,50	91.024	00:01:20	143.527
EFEMPRESAS.COM	News and information	News of general interest	1.476	38.341	-5,70	46.271	00:03:04	96.924
EFFUTURO.COM	News and information	News of general interest	1.315	34.508	6,29	40.528	00:01:41	83.229
ESPAÑAEXTERIOR.COM	News and information	News of general interest	304	7.204	-19,95	9.479	00:01:30	16.481

Table 3: TOTAL NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRAFFIC FEBRUARY 2016:RTVE.

TITLE	Classification	Sub-Classification	Unique Browser (avg)	Unique Browser	VAR. %	Visits	Average duration	Pages
RTVE.ES	Entertainment	Broadcast	1.884.481	19.193.320	-3,29	93.937.776	00:08:48	363.249.629
RTVE.ES - APP MÓVIL	Entertainment	Broadcast	160.601	1.043.282	-11,26	7.285.699	00:12:15	47.425.769
RTVE.ES - APP TABLET	Entertainment	Broadcast	147.072	915.115	-10,66	7.010.630	00:17:33	92.675.939

### 3.2. Interactive Strategy of RTVE.ES: combination of web, mobile apps and tablets:

Radio Televisión Española is the only digital medium with OJD auditing for all versions of its interactive content, whether broadcast via smart TVs, the web or mobile apps and tablet.

The RTVE's department of content and transmedia validates publicly generated online content, retransmission through the web and interactivity generated in forums and social networks by digital audiences. In "RTVE a la carta" content, games and conversations are created around fiction programming produced by Radio Spanish Television that cater to the demand for more targeted audiences. Audiovisual products evolve in terms of interactivity with its viewers.

### 3.3. Medialab: differentiation by content and technology:

Immersive journalism news are produced to allow spectators to experience a live news broadcast thanks to the visual technology of 360 degrees. Collaborative work among journalists, media companies and media professionals can produce the first pieces of immersive journalism carried out in Spain, thanks to collaboration among Spanish media professionals.

The laboratory of immersive journalism, mentored by the team Designit and The App Date, shows the main features of virtual reality and helps to understand the



potential of this medium in generating new narratives, from script recording to consumption.

## 4. Discussion and conclusions

- It is necessary to classify and audit digital media content based on the types of content provided such as entertainment, news, sound, image and multimedia audiovisual animation.

- Most of "general information" media analyzed and audited by OJD correspond to a free and open content models. They follow similar strategies to the digital native media.

- RTVE is a clear leader with its wide array of thematic sections, channels and media. It reached 93,937,776 visits to its 363,249,629 web pages in February. In addition, it is the only digital medium in Spain which collects an audience data for its mobile apps (7,285,699 visits) and tablets (7,010,630 views). In total, RTVE digital has around five hundred million page views per month.

- The profitability of online news production requires business models based on digital advertising or combined online and offline marketing strategies.

- The independence of journalistic production is based on online subscribers or crowdfunding contributions.

- The formulas that combine free content with paid subscription (El Diario) and payment for access to content (EuropaPress and Efe) offer more chances of survival to the media outlets offering quality news.

- The quality of content differentiation

should also be reinforced by the development of technologically supported consumer oriented mobile screens.

- The multimedia model of Radio Spanish Television is the only example of a platform which offers its digital content on all devices: on computer screens, mobile and tablet.

- In case of public media, the combination of public-private funding is necessary for development of innovative formats of presenting information.

- Immersive journalism is a creative solution which is currently being launched. Its success depends on the scalability of projects and cost reduction in audiovisual production.

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