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What is new media? The views of 70 Hispanic experts

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Abstract

Introduction. The article analyses the uses and perceptions of the term “new media” among Hispanic communication professionals and experts in order to develop an updated definition. **Methods.** The study is based on a semi-structured interview with a sample of 70 experts in journalistic innovation, from 16 Spanish-speaking countries. This article focuses on the analysis of the answers to the question: “What is new media?”. Interviews were conducted between 2016 and late 2018. **Conclusions and discussion.** Most interviewees defined a “new medium” as an alternative, non-traditional, media ecosystem that innovates, uses new narrative formats and has a new relationship with the audience. The study also shows a tendency to use the term “new medium” to refer to non-digital publications. Based on these references, the article discusses the updated meaning of the term “new media”, in a world where digital media and social media are no longer so new.

Keywords

New media; online media; digital journalism; digital media; cyberjournalism; Spanish language.

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Translation by **CA Martínez-Arcos**
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1. Introduction

This study examines the interpretations of Spanish-speaking experts and professionals in the field of communication in relation to the term “new media”. The goal is to reach an agreement on the definition, meaning and interpretation of this term, and to identify what communication innovation experts in the Hispanic world conceive as “new media”. In a context where digital has become consolidated on news rooms and among readers, where “new” is associated with digital, and where words become global and speed can make people to assume wrong meanings, this article reflects on the interpretation of the term “new medium”, which has become so widespread and popular in the last two decades, not only in communication studies, but also in the professional world itself.

The lead author of this article encountered this terminological problem already back in 2012, while coordinating a guidebook on new media and social media (Tascón & Cabrera, 2012). She needed to define the term “new media” in the chapter titled “What is new media and social media?” (Cabrera, 2012, p. 25). Despite the popularity of that term, she noted a lack of literature on the subject, at least in the Spanish-speaking world. Existing contributions were mainly developed in English-speaking countries, where authors such as Pavlik (2001), Manovich (2002), Livingstone and Lievrouw (2009), among many others, had published studies on this concept since the late 1990s. The need for terminological clarification became more apparent to the author in 2016 while developing the Observatory of New Media in Spanish, which involved the creation of a catalogue of hundreds of digital media organisations operating in Spanish-speaking countries. On the occasion of this initiative, the first problem was once again to define what a new medium is and is not, given that this preliminary clarification was necessary to identify and register the “new media” in such Observatory.

The workaround was to establish a criterion based on a series of requirements that publications had to meet in order to be deemed as “new media”. The first criterion was their digital nature; more specifically, being configured as a digital newspaper. Now, is a blog a new medium? Is a podcast a new medium? What about chatbots? And most importantly, can a medium be a new medium without being digital?

To explore what professionals and scholars think about these issues and how they define “new media”, we carried out a qualitative research study based on interviews with experts in digital journalism, interactive communication and journalistic innovation, working in the professional and academic worlds.

One of the initial hypotheses was that the Spanish term *nuevo medio* is a bad translation of the English term “*new media*”, given that the Spanish term does not convey all the nuances associated with its meaning in English. In the English-Speaking world, the concept of “new media” encompasses a whole set of innovative communication platforms, characterised by their connection to the Internet and digital technologies, and are not necessarily linked to the journalistic field. In the Spanish-speaking world, however, the expression *nuevos medios* seems to take on a more restricted meaning, as it is usually associated with born digital journalistic media, especially those that are not associated with traditional journalistic brands. By exploring the interpretations assigned to the term “new medium” by a qualified group of interviewees, this research aims to provide, as far as possible, a clear and updated definition of the concept.

According to the historical study coordinated by Salaverría (2016) around the evolution of digital journalism in Ibero-America, the first Spanish-language born-digital newspaper - that is, not derived

from an earlier journalistic brand- was Nicaragua's *Notifax*, whose first publication dates back to 1995. In Spain, the oldest born-digital medium, among those still active, is *Hispanidad*, released on 20 March 1996. A bit earlier, *Vilaweb* was launched in May 1995, although this born-digital medium is published exclusively in Catalan (Salaverria, 2016, pp. XV-XXII). After these initial developments, over the years all Ibero-American countries have witnessed the emergence of numerous born-digital media, some of which have, in fact, achieved a high journalistic influence and a high degree of consolidation (Salaverria, 2016, pp. XXIX-XXXI). These historical data highlight that what many still call "new media" today are in fact not so new. Actually, they already have a quarter of a century of history. Why then do so many professionals and academics continue to refer to these publications as "new media"? What do they mean by that?

2. Theoretical framework

The professional world and, in particular, the academic literature has understood new media as a reinterpretation of traditional media, led by the digital technological revolution. According to this widespread interpretation, new media would be characterised by their diverse forms of access to information and their origin in the adaptation of prior media, and would be the result of an evolutionary process that is similar, to some extent, to that of living things (Scolari, 2012).

Lev Manovich, as far back as 2001, raised the question of what is *new media*? In his analysis, he questioned whether the concept only applied to internet-linked products and devices -such as websites, multimedia computers, computer games, CD-ROM and DVD, virtual reality- or whether, on the contrary, it applied to other manifestations of public communication, such as digitally-edited television programmes and compositions of images and text created with digital resources: photographs, illustrations, designs and advertisements created by computer and then printed on paper. Manovich questioned how many types of media the term new media encompassed (Manovich, 2001: 19).

In his analysis, Manovich proposes five principles or elements that, in his view, make "new media" different from traditional media:

1. Numerical representation. Information can be translated into numeric codes, so it can be manipulated or programmable.
2. Modularity. Information can be divided into modules or smaller parts that share the structure and can be independent, but also make sense as a message.
3. Automation. Default features, such as templates and cookies, are used to facilitate access to information.
4. Variability. Any of the elements can vary because they are dynamic, ephemeral and unstable.
5. Transcoding. Information can be presented by codes related to the user, to make information more understandable.

Years later, Manovich expanded and added new concepts that unravelled his conception of new media, adding related concepts such as Meta-Media, hybrid media, cultural software, interface and deep remix (Manovich, 2008). Authors such as Orihuela subsequently developed their own characterisations regarding new media, understanding for such the digitalisation of the traditional media industry. These "new" qualities were primarily reflected in interactivity, multimediality and hypertextuality. These communicative ingredients coincided with a novel quality in their handling: the production of news content was not limited to the traditional authors -writers and journalists- and instead any internet user could become an author, resulting in a new paradigm of "e-communication" (Orihuela, 2003).

Another definition of “new media” has been proposed by Gitelman, who argues that the media are “socially realised structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice” (Gitelman, 2006). This vision entwines with the technological revolution brought about by the Web 2.0 (O’Reilly, 2005), which allowed the creation and maintenance of the new mass self-communication media, in the words of Castells (2009), preceded by Boyd and Ellison (2007). The latter two authors defined social networking sites as online self-communication platforms. Castells pointed out that “It is mass communication because it can potentially reach a global audience, as in the posting of a video on YouTube, a blog with RSS links... At the same time, it is self-communication because the production of the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or contents from the World Wide Web and electronic communication networks is self-selected” (Castells, 2009, p. 88).

Campos-Freire reflects in 2008 on the emergence of social networks and the transformation of traditional media models: “This new media is already on the screens of millions of netizens as one of the main sources of entertainment and information (...) so-called social networks are a new offer of mediation, relationship, business and post-media content that is more like audiovisual media than press” (Campos-Freire, 2008, p. 287). In 2015, Campos-Freire spoke of digital meta-media: “digital meta-media develop new models of economies of attention, collaboration, participation and *likes*, new business models and virtual social capital” (2015, p. 441).

Jenkins, for his part, referred in 2009 to “transitional” media, understood as those media that are in a phase during which, in the face of disruptive changes, they adapt to the social, cultural, economic, technological, legal and legal understandings and to media policy. He also distinguished the term “attraction” media, understood as media in which consumers seek information from multiple media, such as the internet (Jenkins, 2009).

The next year, Canadian professor Logan proposed a list of 14 features that, according to him, shape the Internet as a new medium: bilateral communication, ease of access and dissemination of information, continuous learning, alignment and integration, community, media convergence, portability and time flexibility, interoperability, adherence to content, greater variety and choice, reduction of producer-consumer distance, social community, remix culture and transition from products to services (Logan, 2010). These elements fit with what we mean today by digital newspaper.

The authors of this article have also explored the elusive interpretation of the term “new media”. In her book published with Fundéu in 2012, Cabrera proposed the following definition for new media:

“According to the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, a medium of communication is an “organ created for public information”; and a derivation of this term is the concept of new media, which could be defined as providers of information access through new technologies.

The new media have their own language and their communication features and contents are different from those of traditional media (press, radio and television). Today, these new media, which could also be called digital, coexist with traditional media, influencing them more and more every day” (Cabrera Méndez, 2012, 25).

This definition refers to the coexistence of the different versions -printed and digital- that the same newspaper usually publishes in a complementary way and which requires adapting the content for the two platforms and adapting the printed medium to the characteristics of the digital one. This model is applied in cases where the new medium is a version of the traditional medium. However, when the medium is born digital this characteristic loses meaning.

Other differences between new and traditional media have been noted in another entry of the book published by Fundéu-BBVA (Cabrera Méndez, 2012, 26). According to these explanations, new media, 1) favour the non-intermediation for the publication of information; 2) accelerate the processes of content creation, publication, distribution and discussion; 3) real time replaces the periodicity of traditional media, so publishing is no longer based on a pre-set schedule, but on the occurrence of events; 4) the authorship of the contents has been democratised, i.e., publication is not exclusive to the news specialists hired by media organisations and the citizen becomes an author; 5) new media provide access to information at any time and from anywhere, as long as users have an internet connection through any digital device; 6) creation can occur in real time: space-time barriers have disappeared for the publication of information; 7) publication and distribution is based on digital technologies, can be manipulated and allow interactivity; and 8) information is live, users expand it, correct it and share it.

Similar to the concept of new media, there are multiple terms and expressions used to refer to similar realities. As Salaverría (2019) has explained, there is in fact a marked terminological instability in the field of digital media, not only in Hispanic countries, but also in the whole international academic community specialised in this field. Some Hispanic authors use the term *ciberperiodismo* (“cyberjournalism”) (Díaz Noci and Salaverría 2003), while others prefer *periodismo digital* (“digital journalism”) (López García, 2015) and *periodismo online* (“online journalism”), among other terms. When it comes to their media expressions, they use phrases such as *medios nativos digitales* (“born-digital media”) (Sanjuán Pérez et al., 2015), *cibermedios* (“digital media”) (Cabrera, 2013) and *metamedios* (“meta-media”) (Noguera-Vivó, 2016). The terminological discrepancy is, in short, huge. A review of the classifications of digital media that have been proposed since the 1990s in the Spanish-speaking world can be found in Salaverría (2017).

It is apparent, in short, that the term “new medium” is as widespread as varied. It is therefore a vague concept, which needs to be narrowed down and defined. This study, which adopts an exploratory approach, aims to identify how a qualified and relatively large group of media professionals and scholars defines this term.

3. Methods

The study is based on the use of semi-structured interviews and the subsequent qualitative analysis of the answers provided by participants. The interview questionnaire only included three questions: What is a new medium for you? How does the internet influence new media? and Which new media in Spanish do you recommend? This article only presents the analysis of the answers to the first question, while the answers to the remaining two questions have been used as a contextual reference.

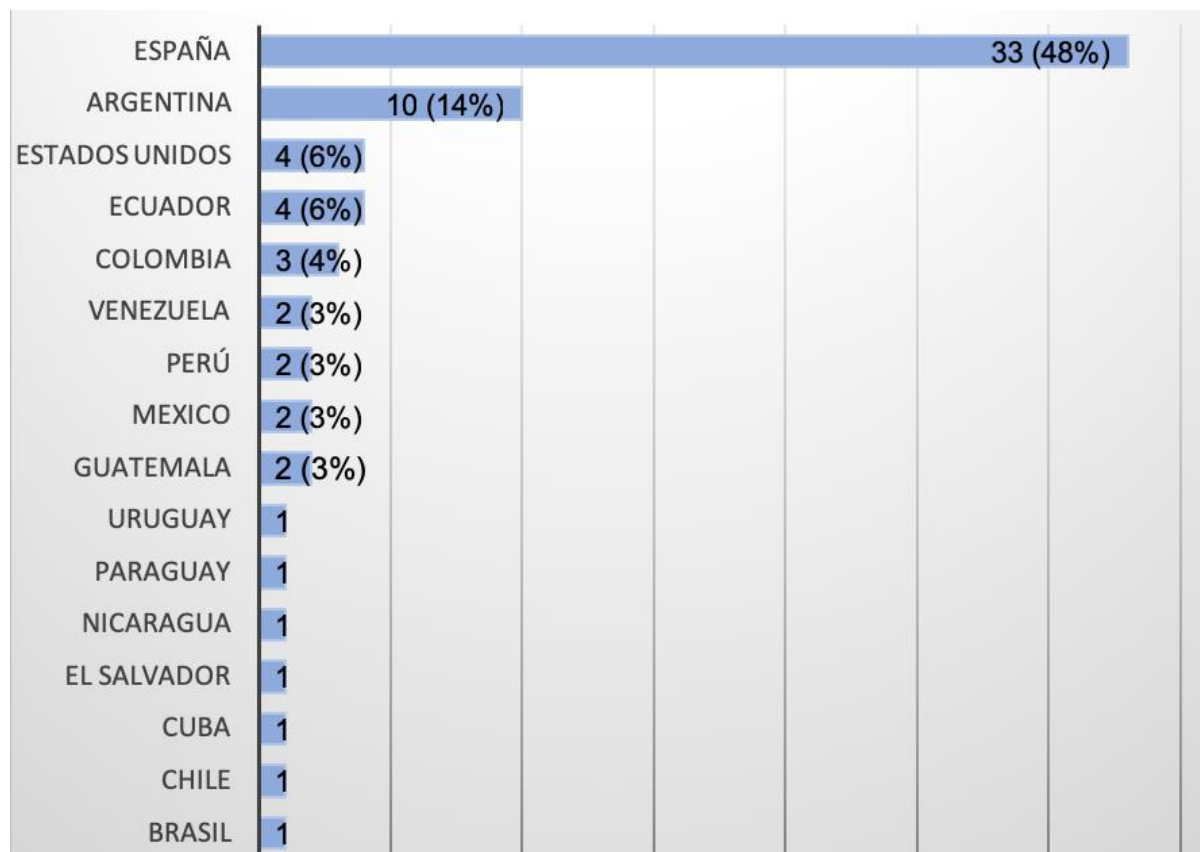
The sample is composed of 70 experts with proven professional and/or academic experience in journalistic innovation and belonging to 16 Spanish-speaking countries. Most of the interviews were recorded on video and are available on the website of the *New Media Observatory* (<http://www.nuevosmedios.es/definicion-de-nuevo-medio>). The 70 interviewees were video recorded with a mobile phone, with prior consent. Interviewees were not warned about the issues to be addressed

in the interviews in order to generate spontaneous responses and prevent interviewees from seeking external information and references to respond. They were not given any indication as to how long the answers should be.

The selection of participants focused on including people with several years of experience in the academic or professional worlds of journalism. As a selection criterion, participants had to be speakers in specialised forums. Following this procedure, speakers were selected from the following international events: international conference on social networks *Comunica2* (Gandía, 2016, 2017 and 2018); #ISOJ 2016; 17th International Conference on Digital Journalism, organised by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas (United States); the Gabriel García Márquez Journalism Award Festival (Medellín, Colombia, 2016); Ibero-American Meeting of Young and Entrepreneurial Journalism, organised by FNPI (Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, 2016); presentation of the Observatory of New Media at Casa de América (Madrid, 2017); VI Latin American Forum on Digital Media and Journalism (Mexico City, 2017); On Topic XL 2017; Annual meeting on digital content (Zaragoza); Newsgeist: Exploring the Future of News (Buenos Aires, 2018). Finally, regardless of this criterion, we selected some additional prestigious professional experts, who were visited to conduct the interview. The complete list of interviewees is provided in the annex, together with their academic or corporate affiliation and country of origin.

The interviewees come from a total of 16 Spanish-speaking countries, which are distributed as follows:

Figure 1. Interviewees' country of origin



Source: Authors' own creation

One half of the sample of experts was selected from Spain and the other one from different Latin American countries. This diversity aims to cover a wide range of countries, for a more complete and international view.

Of the interviews, 21 or 20% were conducted in 2016, 40 or 57.1% in 2017 and 20 or 22.9% in 2018. Once the interviews were recorded, all the answers were transcribed and everything relevant to the study was extracted. This material was articulated in a list of attributes that were mentioned by the experts as characteristic or necessary components of a “new medium”.

Based on these attributes, interviews were analysed to identify the frequency and degree of coincidence in the expert interpretations. A form was used to detect the percentage of matches in the responses and calculate the degree of coincidence in the possible responses, in order to develop an updated definition of the term “new medium”.

Finally, a comprehensive definition was developed based on what most experts had characterised as a new medium, followed by a discussion of the authors of this study.

4. Results

From the outset, most participants interpreted the expression “new media” in its most obvious meaning: as a newly created medium, as a new newspaper. Based on this preliminary definition, many experts added that the concept means much more.

In the interview with Professor Salaverría (2017), he points out that a new medium is more advanced than a simple digital medium:

The new adjective indicates something that is innovative, and the truth is that the newness of digital media is already beginning to fade, because they are part of the journalistic landscape of all parts of the world. At the moment, however, a new medium is no longer a digital medium; it is a medium that uses resources, technologies, forms and languages that are ahead of what other traditional media are doing. So, it seems to me that, right now, a digital medium is one thing and a new medium is something else, a little more advanced.

What is that differential element that makes new media more advanced? This is what will be analysed in this work.

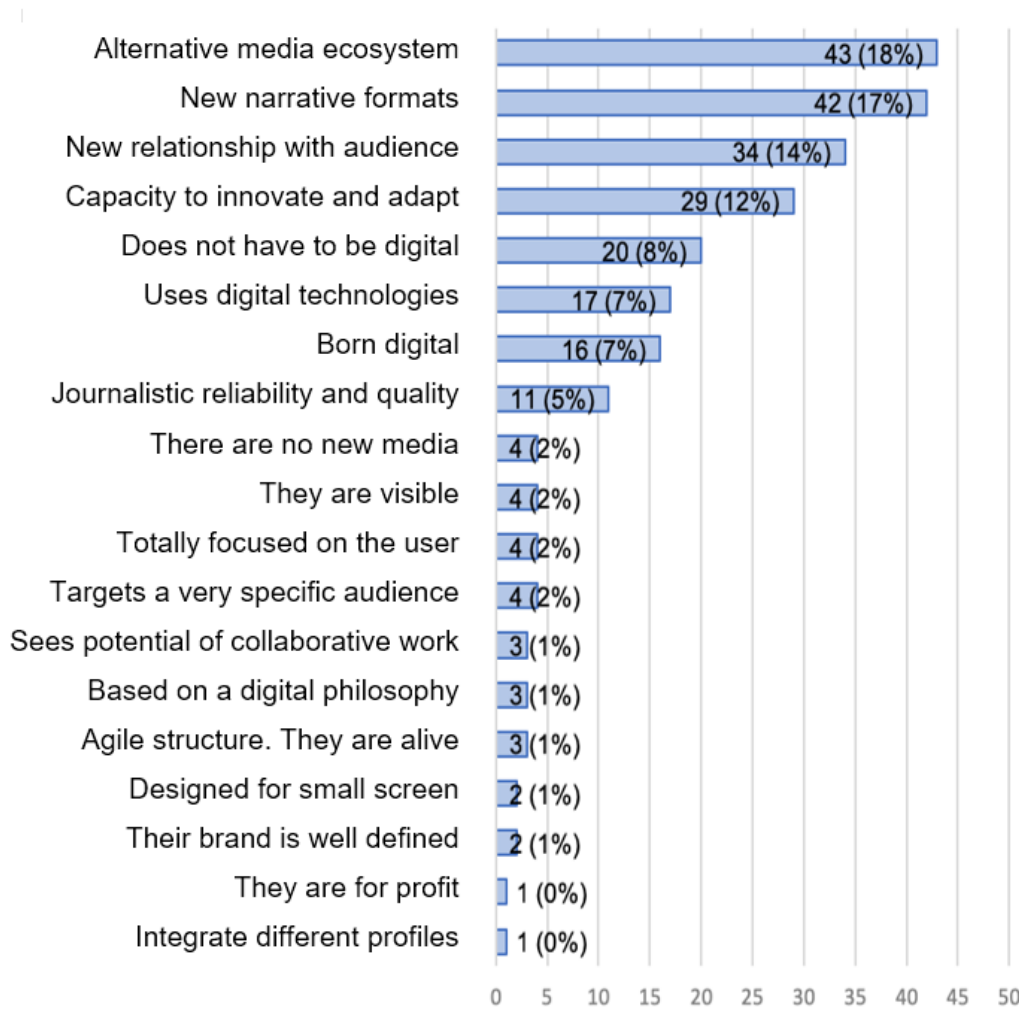
A set of features attributed to the new media was obtained from the 70 interviews. The most frequently mentioned attributes are grouped in the following list without a specific order:

- Born-digital.
- New relationship with the audience: fluid and immediate interaction. Feedback. Learns from the audience.
- Uses new narrative formats.
- Is an alternative, non-traditional, media ecosystem / new communication channel / newly created journalistic project.
- Must innovate, adapt and experiment.
- Does not need to be digital, as long as it innovates.

- Is reliable and has journalistic quality (veracity, rigour, depth).
- Has an agile structure and can implement changes immediately. It is alive.
- Uses digital technologies.
- Targets a very specific audience.
- Integrates different professional profiles that work together: journalists, designers, developers, marketers.
- For profit.
- Has visibility.
- Has a defined brand of journalistic content.
- Has a digital philosophy.
- Designed for small screen environments and agile consumption.
- Fully focused on the user/audience.
- Understands the potential of collaborative work.

Based on these attributes of the new media, pointed out by interviewees, the following table presents those parameters that all experts, or at least the vast majority of them, agreed to assign to the concept of “new medium”, according to the degree of frequency:

Figure 2: Most common answers given by experts when asked “What is a new medium?”



Source: Authors' own creation

In the responses of experts there is a high degree of coincidence when it comes to mentioning characteristics associated with six elements: 1) structure (many experts agree that new media form their own ecosystem that is different from that of the traditional media; 2) technology (many underline the digital character as a distinctive element, although others deny this; in any case, both groups regard the technological aspect as a relevant criterion); 3) form (experts highlight the importance of the use of new narratives and the high adaptation of new media to advanced devices); 4) relationship with the audience (characterised by high interactivity and clear user-based orientation); 5) internal organisation (combination of multiple professional profiles, with agile structures); and 6) content quality (it is emphasised that the content of the new media is distinctive and high-quality).

Having mentioned these attributes, it should be noted, however, that four of the interviewees believed that the new media do not exist because according to them these media are the same as traditional media. It is also interesting that, although interviewees were not asked to establish what is not new media, there were two respondents who mentioned that “new media are not replicas of traditional media brought to the internet”.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This qualitative study on the definition of the term “new medium”, based on an international sample of journalism experts, has made it possible to identify the attributes that these specialists associate with the concept of “new medium”. The study has also allowed us to offer an updated and expanded definition of the concept, which seeks to clarify the terminological ambiguity prevailing in the Spanish-speaking world around this term.

As we have seen in the international sample of the study, there have been no significant differences in the understanding of the term across countries. The opinions of the 70 experts constitute a limited and unrepresentative sample, which prevents us from making generalisations. However, it provides a clear idea from a qualified group of participants, characterised by their greater expertise and their use of professional slang associated to the term “new media”.

Based on the six general features most-mentioned by experts, we can deduce an approximate definition of “new medium”. It would be, in short, a kind of summary that brings together the aspects highlighted the most by experts:

A new medium is a journalistic organisation that is part of an alternative, non-traditional, media ecosystem that is characterised by its use of new narrative formats, by its fluid and agile interaction with the audience, by a commitment to information quality, and by its innovative character, which affects not only its contents but also its internal configuration, and has the capacity for adaptation and experimentation.

The results of the study indicate that the terms “new medium” and “cyber medium” are not absolute synonyms. The term cyber medium refers in principle only to media that operate digitally. A new medium, on the other hand, is a publication whose main feature is its innovative configuration, regardless of the platform on which it is published, although it is assumed to be digital. These are, therefore, different concepts, which sometimes apply to the same journalistic project. In this sense, it is important to note that there are some cyber media that cannot be considered new media.

Therefore, the term “new medium” does not necessarily applies to any publication that has a digital nature or to any newly created publication. According to the experts, the status of “new medium” is achieved to the extent that publication is distinguished by an innovative impulse in its forms, models and structures. This innovation, of course, is simpler and more viable to implement to the extent that the medium uses digital technology. It is this technological condition, after all, what gives the medium certain key qualitative dimensions to develop, for example, its interactive potential. It is perhaps for this reason that the correlation between the technological aspect and the status of new medium is so common.

Based on the previous conclusions, it can be argued that in the 1990s and early 2000s the use of the term “new” to refer to digital media was logical because they at that time that attribute was a novelty. However, after a quarter of a century, digital media are no longer a novelty. Therefore, the attribute of “new” associated to “digital” media no longer makes the same sense. Based on these qualified contributions, it has been found that the “new” attribute has more to do with innovation than with the status of “newly created”. Not because a medium has been recently created should it be considered a new medium. Instead, the character of “new” is linked to the medium’s innovation, adaptability and experimentation, creativity in narrative formats, in its dissemination channels and its relationship with the audience.

To use the term “new medium” only as a synonym for “digital media” is not to understand the evolution that journalism has had in the last quarter of a century; not to grasp the dimension of the change that this discipline has undergone and that has led to the use of the term in an anachronistic way. It made sense in the 1990s and the early years of the 21st century, but it has become obsolete in its digital sense. Therefore, the proposed updated and expanded definition of the concept, in accordance with all of the above, is as follows:

A new medium is a journalistic organisation that is part of an alternative, non-traditional, media system that innovates and experiments in its narrative formats, its relationship with the audience and its distribution channels.

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7. Annex 1: List of interviewees

Name	News agency or medium	Country
Alejandro Grosse	<i>La gaceta</i>	Argentina
Alejandro Piscitelli	<i>Universidad de Buenos Aires</i>	Argentina
Andrés Snitscofsky	<i>Economía feminista</i>	Argentina
Cecilia Bazán	<i>Vía País</i>	Argentina
Gabriela Brenes	<i>Chicas Poderosas</i>	Argentina

Juan Manuel Lucero	<i>Google News Lab</i>	Argentina
Mijal Labsterner	<i>Sembramedia</i>	Argentina
Olivia Sohr	<i>Chequeado</i>	Argentina
Stella Bin	<i>Red/Acción</i>	Argentina
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