

Journalism in spite of everything

Interview with Esther Alonso, eldiario.es¹

Following the decision of the Socialist Party to abstain in a confidence vote on the Popular Party government, the same prime minister who governed the country with a majority for the past four years will stay in power. Mariano Rajoy, who has been implicated in several cases of corruption within his own party, will continue as Spain's prime minister thanks to the abstention of the Socialist Party deputies. Spain appears to be one of the most corrupt countries in Europe and it is in this context that the online newspaper eldiario.es was launched in 2012, in the midst of the worst economic crisis the country has ever experienced. Eldiario.es is a digital newspaper that defines itself as an online media newspaper that provides "information and analysis with a focus on politics and the economy in their broadest sense: on how they affect people rather than how they affect the parties or the markets", explains Esther Alonso, Marketing and Development director at the newspaper. Eldiario.es works independently (more than 70 per cent of the company that edits eldiario.es belongs to the journalists who write for it) to give a voice to the many people in Spain who are suffering the consequences of a media that is becoming less and less plural.

Eldiario.es is proving to be a sustainable business model for journalism, having established itself as an authoritative and reliable source for its readers. Can you explain what the key to eldiario's success is, and to what extent your model

1 | This interview took place in November 2016.

could be reproduced in other European countries? What is its audience profile and what is making readers trust your content?

Our key to success is a unique business model based on the support of our community of readers. 20,000 people (“socios”) make financial contributions to eldiario.es in order to strengthen our editorial and financial independence. But there is no paywall: our “socios” do not pay to read the content, they pay for it to circulate freely and thus have a social impact. They pay to belong to a community of citizens who share values like equality, democracy, social justice, and more importantly, independent journalism. Our model could easily be implemented in other European countries. I see no reason why it would not work outside Spain. There are examples of other digital media outlets that are experimenting with similar models in Europe and America, for instance The Texas Tribune, Tiempo Argentino, and Ojo Público in Perú.

As regards gender, 53 per cent of our readers are men and 47 per cent are women. And 52 per cent of our readers are aged between 24 and 44. They trust our content because we deliver what we promised to deliver: independent journalism based on values like transparency and honesty. Their expectations are fulfilled.

The information most mainstream newspapers and journals provide on Europe tends to focus on the EU institutions and the austerity measures imposed on member states. What type of stories do you think should be covered in order to communicate more and more effectively about Europe and the EU? Do you think a shared European agenda is needed? If so, how should journalists go about creating such an agenda?

I think the general public might be interested in a deeper analysis of why and how certain decisions are being taken at the EU level, and what the alternatives to those decisions might be. In addition I would like to believe that readers would enjoy content with a focus on social values that informs people about the impact European policies have on the citizens. As regards creating a shared European agenda, it is important for each media outlet to ask itself this question first and find its own agenda before addressing the task of creating a common one.

Although nowadays there are examples of good media platforms, newspapers and video formats operating around Europe, it seems they still lack the capacity to connect and cooperate with similar platforms beyond the national level. How would eldiario.es and its readers benefit from collaboration with similar media platforms? And what challenges does establishing these synergies pose?

Bringing voices together is a good practice that enriches your content as a media outlet and gives your readers a more comprehensive perspective on certain topics. At eldiario.es we warmly invite collaborators and other media projects that share our values to publish on our site. When it comes to cooperation between media projects beyond the national level, one of the main challenges is to agree on the mission and purpose of the collaboration, as well as to find the right balance between the different members of a network in terms of the level of participation. Once these challenges have been met the next step is to develop the collaboration to the point where it is mature.

Economic crisis, unemployment, new forms of government, migration... Many of the issues the Continent faces affect most European countries. Yet we lack the capacity to establish transnational movements that can provide effective solutions. What do you think should be the role of journalists and media platforms in the process of challenging the status quo in Europe? And what can the media do to help restore trust in the European project?

Nowadays there are media projects like eldiario.es that focus on social values and new forms of government and democracy and that are generating content on these shared issues. Media platforms can cover these issues provided this is consistent with their editorial line. Restoring trust in the European project is a complex task that should not be performed by media platforms alone. I believe there are other social agents that should be part of this process, and we the citizens are one of them.

Online media can use new narratives and participative formats, beyond commentaries, to help restore their readers' trust in the European Project. For example media outlets can host online debates with members of the EU parliament and/or other institutions, and invite the public to participate by asking questions on social networks. Another idea might be to launch a blog and invite different European media partners to submit posts.

The journalists of Hungary's leading daily, Nepszabadsag, are facing the newspaper's demise and have expressed doubts about the official explanation that it was closed for purely financial reasons. How do you keep eldiario.es independent, and what pressures from power structures are you exposed to?

Our editorial independence is a result of the financial independence our socios give us. These 20,000 "socios" are our partners in crime, and they make our project viable and sustainable. They shield us from pressure from power structures and we thank them for supporting independent journalism. We do the journalism we know we have to do and no pressure from above can stop us from doing this. We do investigative journalism and publish exclusives that sometimes expose political or economic power structures unconditionally and without restrictions.