

Participatory journalism and new business models: the case of Minute Media

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2025.v10i09.016 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2025.v10i09.016>

Received: 11 August 2025 / Accepted: 17 September 2025 / Published: 24 September 2025

ABSTRACT

The media industry has changed dramatically in recent years due to the digital revolution and the rapid technological developments. The new communication landscape led to significant changes, including those in the business model of media companies. In conjunction with the global economic crisis that broke out in 2008 and the resulting recession, those new realities also led to significant changes in media. Many media organizations closed, while others tried to survive with layoffs and salary cuts. However, there are also cases of media outlets that took advantage of some of the developments in the new communication landscape and managed to create a successful business model. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how the new communication landscape and one of its offsprings, participatory journalism, can offer a solution to the problem of the business model of media. Thus, we present, as a key study, Minute Media website group, which mainly covers sports events. Minute Media was first established in 2011, with fans in the role of journalists, creating journalistic content, and today it is a successful media group with offices around the world and more than 500 employees.

Keywords: participatory journalism, business model, media landscape, Minute Media

Introduction

The internet has shaped and continues to shape a completely new communication landscape. According to Leandros (2011), a new communication paradigm has begun to emerge in the global media industry, with key features being the digitization of information, the convergence of newsrooms, mobile platforms, social media and audience fragmentation. Papathanassopoulos (2011) considers the convergence of media as the most important event in the developments that have changed all the data in the field of communication (Triantafyllou 2020 & 2025). It is obvious that the ecosystem of information and journalism is changing radically and at a great

speed. New media, new ways and vehicles of information dissemination emerge, creating a completely new environment and a completely new and chaotic landscape, in which traditional assumptions and hierarchies of information are overturned, leading to the emergence of a new reality. The outbreak of the global economic crisis in 2008, combined with the revolution that took place in the media industry, completely overturned the traditional business models of media. Newspapers gradually lost their loyal audience as well as their market value, while advertising revenues decreased, forcing many media companies to either operate online or adopt subscription models (Leandros, 2013; Triantafyllou, 2020 & 2025).

Researchers in the field (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001; Leandros, 2011; Rigou, 2014; Spiteri, 2009) claim that the public played an important role in the developments and the new communication landscape. As a result, the journalist lost the role of the gatekeeper of news, which they now share with the public. Actually, the public can now interact and, in some cases, produce and distribute content. In recent years, a new disruptive technological development was added that has been radically changing the landscape of the media ever since. This is artificial intelligence, which is transforming not only journalism and labour relations, but the whole society. In some cases, journalists share this role with the machines, which can now produce journalistic content. (Triantafyllou, 2020 & 2025).

In this context, participatory journalism emerged as a potential solution for media sustainability, relying on the contribution of citizens in producing and distributing news content (Gillmor, 2006; Bowman & Willis, 2003). One of the most prominent and illustrative applications of this model is Minute Media, which expanded globally in less than fifteen years, leveraging the power of fans as content creators. This media outlet transformed fans from spectators into active protagonists, while simultaneously integrating them into the role of journalist, offering authentic and live content to its visitors. In order to reach that goal, the case study of Minute Media will serve as the primary methodological tool.

A new communication landscape

As we described before, in new communication landscape which has been shaped by internet, the audience played an important role. At the same time, the journalists lost the role of the gatekeeper of news, which is now shared with the ones who have the ability to interact and, in some cases, to produce and distribute content and by the machines, by artificial intelligence. As we also describe before, the ecosystem of information and journalism is changing radically and at a great speed. New media, new ways and vehicles for disseminating information are emerging, creating a completely new environment and a completely new and chaotic landscape, in which traditional assumptions and hierarchies of information are being overturned to give rise to a new reality. However, it should be noted that all these changes cannot be examined

independently of the overall social, economic, political and cultural changes taking place worldwide, within the context of which and in combination with technological developments, journalism is changing along with the role of the journalist. Bardoel and Deuze (2001) argue that technology is only a vehicle through which these sociocultural trends can ultimately change existing communication relations in society and cannot be considered as the determining factor in overall changes in journalism. Thus, in this chapter we will attempt to record the new communication landscape and the changes that arose, with the assumption, however, that this is all part of a broader context of changes in society and that new technologies offer new challenges, but also risks for democracy.

As Leandros (2013) states, the revolution in the field of mass media is changing everything, including the lives, work and working conditions of journalists and employees in the Press. It is a fact that the Press is facing a deep structural crisis due to the internet, which is now largely covering the needs of information, a field that was previously covered by newspapers and other media. Speaking about the changes that have taken place in the information landscape, Rigou (2014) emphasizes that they concern both the level of content production and labour relations within media organizations. Pavlik (2000) observes that technology has affected journalism in at least four broad areas: the way journalists do their job, the content of news, the organizational structure of newsrooms, and the relationships between news organizations and their audiences. That is a new reality that Anderson, Bell & Shirky (2014) call post-industrial journalism, a term that, as they explain, means that journalism is no longer organized as it used to be. On the contrary, it is entering a phase of restructuring, in which new ways of producing news prevail. Consequently, existing media organizations will lose revenue and market share, if they do not take advantage of the new working methods, processes, and potential offered by digital media. This restructuring has led to the re-examination of every organizational aspect of news production as well as to the reduction in production costs, cutbacks and layoffs, which journalists around the world are experiencing. In combination with the global economic crisis that began in 2008, media organizations closures, job losses and the flexibilization of labour relations have increased dramatically in the media industry.

However, the content of journalists' work is also changing. The journalist in the new emerging landscape is no longer just a "gatekeeper" or a media professional who writes and broadcasts, but a "multi-tool" that must simultaneously be an editor, reporter, researcher, photographer, cameraman and much more (Anderson et al. 2014; Papathanassopoulos, 2013). The journalist is now forced to constantly acquire new tools and skills in order to adapt to the changes that are taking place at a frenetic pace (Margariti, 2017). Consequently, Papathanassopoulos (2013) notes that the internet can provoke the complete liberation of the profession and contribute to the emergence of not only a new, but also a better form of journalism. On the other hand, he cites the

study by Lee-Wright, Phillips and Witsghe (2012) on the future of British journalism, which concluded that journalism has entered a downward spiral, in the sense that fewer journalists are creating more content, as a result of ongoing redundancies in newsrooms. The modern journalist is now required to have new and diverse professional skills to cope with the created scenario, as media companies are now looking for journalists who can undertake different types of work within the editorial team (multitasking) and be flexible enough to work for different media, even simultaneously (Margariti, 2017). According to Deuze (2011), the journalist of the new era, and especially of the internet, in addition to research and reporting, must make decisions about which form or forms of the medium best convey a particular issue (multimedia), consider which options the audience would have to respond to and converse with (interactivity) or even personalize some reports and, finally, connect the report with other reports, archives, sources and so on, through hyperlinks (hypertext). The dizzying pace at which journalists are forced to work in the new landscape forces them to primarily deal with the speed of publication and not to give priority to fundamental journalistic practices, such as research, critical analysis, interpretation, and cross-referencing of the news, while most of the time, primary material is not produced, but rather content is reproduced. Speed makes it difficult or even inhibits the ability to think critically, thus favouring mistakes, and due to the new conditions, journalists are now forced to give priority to speed (Deuze & Paulussen, 2002; Margariti, 2017).

All the above raise questions about the quality of information and impartiality. They even lead to a change in orientation of both journalists and those who want to become journalists. According to Papathanassopoulos (2013), the new generation of journalism and media students is being forced to reconsider their career choices as both the profession itself and traditional businesses in the sector struggle to cope with economic and technological changes and potentially the new institutional environment that is being created. Journalists must now be competitive in a demanding market, as they are required to be able to exploit many tools and services for their work. Researchers such as Clerwall (2014), Gray, Chambers & Bounegru (2012) and Bull (2010) refer to the new types of journalism that have emerged in the digital age, multimedia journalism, data journalism and robot journalism, which requires journalists to have, among other things, special IT skills. A Pew Research Center survey entitled "Newsroom employees earn less than other college-educated workers in U.S." on the qualifications that journalists now have, reports that 79% of employees in US newsrooms, in the period 2012-2016, had at least a university degree, which confirms previous claims about the acquisition of skills and knowledge by journalists, and especially by the new generation, in recent years, in order to be able to cope with the new demands of the job market and to stay in the profession or manage to enter it.

All the points that we have described demonstrate the changes that have taken place in the way that journalists are required to work in the new landscape and in the digital era as well as the

resources they must have. Knowledge of new technologies, speed of reaction and multitasking seem to outweigh the ability to search, record, write and transmit events and express an opinion. Nowadays, journalists are no longer just able to report, express their opinion, write and transmit. They must be sufficiently trained and technology literate, be aware of and able to work with both audiovisual and printed and online media and produce content at a high speed. At the same time, the changes described give a new dimension to the discussion about the definition of who is a journalist. The new landscape favours the emergence of other specialties or even the entry of citizens into the field of journalism, with all the consequences this may have in terms of quality and validity, but also in terms of employment for media professionals.

Participatory journalism

The new communication landscape has brought significant changes in the production and distribution of journalistic content. Now, there are not only the journalists and the media that create content, but also citizens and machines (artificial intelligence). As Leandros (2008) points out, the strict hierarchical model that dominated the era of mass media seems to be gradually losing its power. Though in the era of mass communication, the flow of information came from the gatekeepers of the media to the public, today citizens can easily create content in the form of text, audio and videos. Those who have access to new information and communication technologies can potentially function as journalists (Triantafyllou, 2020 & 2025).

Citizens can now play a role in developments, taking advantage of the potential of the internet and social media, which facilitate the ability of people to publicly share their knowledge, information and opinions with anyone who has also access to the internet. This new phenomenon in the media landscape has led to the birth of “participatory journalism”. This means that citizens are taking the place of journalists and are providing information by creating primary information through their personal blogs, social media accounts and mobile devices in general. These are phenomena that are not new, but, with the development of the internet and social media, they are encountered with much greater frequency (Triantafyllou, 2020 & 2025).

In essence, we are talking about participation in the production and distribution of news content and the new role of the citizen in this chain, with the possibilities that the digital age now offers. Many important events in recent years have been initially covered by citizens who happened to be there and acted as journalists, took a video or photographs of the event, posted the content on social media, and then media and professional journalists took action. Events like the September 11 attacks to the World Trade Centre in New York City, the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, the London bombings in 2005, the Arab Spring and a number of other events were covered directly by traditional media, but the first images (photographs and videos) were sent from citizens’ mobile phones (Gilmor, 2006; Rigou, 2014; Triantafyllou, 2020 & 2025). Anderson et al. (2014)

report that sometimes citizen content producers have shown that they can behave as journalists similarly to professional journalists and, as they point out, there are now many cases where the first available description and material are created by a citizen and not by a professional journalist.

Participatory journalism initially aimed at reversing the hierarchy of access, as identified by the research team at the University of Glasgow (Atton, 2009; Atton, 2002; Atton & Wickenden, 2005). Thus, while only an elite was featured by the dominant media, access was given to a larger group of voices. These practices involve first-hand testimony, while simultaneously adopting the collective and anti-hierarchical form of organization and the participatory, radical approach to journalism (Atton, 2003; Bierhoff & Schmidt, 1997; Ramirez, 2005; Schäfer, 2009). Nip (2006), attempting to explain the phases through which citizen (participatory) journalism¹ has passed, states that in the first phase, news organizations proceeded to involve the public in interactive actions and practices; in the second phase, the public themselves began to develop the initiative for journalistic and communication actions, while in the third phase, the public's involvement in the news process increased significantly, causing cracks in the until recently strictly defined dichotomy between the producer and the consumer of news. The public can now be involved in defining and shaping the agenda, not only by producing original content, but also by developing critical interventions in the agenda-setting processes of the dominant media (Siapera & Dimitrakopoulou, 2012). According to Miler-Carpenter (2019), there are four different types of citizen "journalists". Those who collaborate with journalists, when the latter do not have access to certain events, those who commit random acts of journalism and contribute to the content of the news and information surrounding an event, those who act within a community and cover issues that professional journalists do not cover, and, finally, those who verify and comment on the news (Triantafyllou, 2020 & 2025).

Of course, many questions arise, with the dominant one being what exactly a citizen journalist means and whether the production of content by the public is a form of journalism. Important issues of journalism ethics also present regarding the cross-checking of the news and the reliability of sources. Citizens are replacing professional journalists, with all the risks entailed for the impartiality and validity of information, while there is also the issue of job losses, because of the occasional decommissioning of professional journalists. As for what participatory journalism is and whether there is a definition that can describe it, scholars in the field do not seem to agree (Kin & Lowrey, 2015). Meanwhile, various definitions that have been given are being revised along the way. However, as Miler-Carpenter (2019) states, there are convergent views regarding citizens producing content. According to Miler-Carpenter, those are people without organizational ties to news organizations (they have no professional relationship and are

¹ Citizen journalism is now called participatory journalism.

not paid, unlike professional journalists, who collect and publish text, video, audio). According to Wall (2017), participatory journalism has been associated with amateur content creators who also produce at least one piece of news content. In contrast to amateur citizen content creation, professional journalists have a duty to prepare, collect and distribute the content, checking the reliability and adhering to ethical rules. Scholars have been mostly concerned about the extent to which citizens who create journalistic content adhere to journalistic and quality rules, considering that not just any citizen can be considered a journalist, but only those who work for an official news organization with the purpose of daily gathering and distributing news. As Miler-Carpenter (2019) notes, the approach used by the sociology of professions regarding the study of journalism explains how workers are united by shared values, rituals, language, behavior, and social control within an organization or within the same professional sector. Professional journalists who work for an organization conform to their organizational standards and behave in accordance with their goals and values, even if those sometimes conflict with their personal values.

According to Anderson et al. (2014), the contribution of participatory journalism to journalism is evident. However, they note that the journalist has not been replaced, but now takes on a different role in the editorial chain, which, in cases of citizen content production, constitutes mainly the verification and interpretation of information provided by citizens. Rigou (2014) points out that the increasingly frequent inclusion of amateur material in traditional professional media has brought about changes, such as the relativization of the quality of citizen-produced material, which is low-cost or even free, and, ultimately, has created pressure on the professional journalistic market. Bowman and Willis (2003) state that participatory journalism is the way citizens play an active role in the process of collecting and transmitting news, and this process aims at the independent, reliable and accurate information that democracy demands. Participatory journalism can in some cases complement the work of journalists, while in others, such as in the Arab Spring, citizens, taking advantage of the possibilities of social media, bypassed the censorship and control that had been imposed on the media and produced information about the true dimension of events.

In conclusion, just as technological development is a reality, equally is the participation of citizens in the production and distribution of news content, which is largely a result of it. In fact, there were many cases in which it has contributed, and indeed extremely successfully, to information, the traditional hierarchy of which has been overturned. Journalists and the media have now lost the exclusive role of mediator and gatekeeper of information, which they sometimes share with the public that is no longer a passive receiver, but produces news content and is sometimes a co-shaper of developments. All this, however, does not mean that the participation of citizens in the production and distribution of news content has replaced

professional journalism and the media and that citizens have replaced professional journalists. The opposite is true. The debate on certain parameters of the participation of citizens in the production and distribution of content, such as impartiality in the recording of events, quality and respect for ethical principles as well as the loss of jobs for professional journalists remains open. It is up to the media, journalists and journalistic associations themselves to define the framework for its contribution and to ensure all those characteristics that will allow citizens to contribute substantially to information and democracy (Triantafyllou 2020 & 2025).

The media business model

In recent years, especially, in the second decade of the 21st century, as Papadopoulou (2017) says, the global media landscape was found in the midst of three crises: the global economic recession, the paradigm shifts due to the technological revolution, and the crisis of public trust in the media. These three structural crises worked cumulatively and in combination, creating an extremely complex and competitive communication landscape, within which the survival of the media became a constant gamble (Papadopoulou, 2017). More specifically, the global economic recession that broke out in early 2008 swept away advertising and sales, leaving behind it hundreds of closures and countless unemployed or precariously employed journalists (Papadopoulou, 2017). Referring to the consequences of the 2008 recession in the US press and according to statistics from the American Society of News Editors, in 1989, newspaper newsrooms in the United States numbered approximately 57,000 journalists, while in 2015, this number reached 32,900. The second crisis, the technological one, has its roots in the advent of the internet, which in combination with the new technological applications radically changed the way news was produced, distributed and consumed (Papathanassopoulos, 2005; Barnett, 2009; Poulet, 2009). The technological revolution changed the terms under which the media had operated until then and constituted a huge challenge for their main sources of income (advertising and sales). The transition to the internet was a necessity for those media outlets that wanted to survive, but in the new digital environment the challenges were much greater and – contrary to what one might expect– the advantage did not necessarily characterize the media outlet with the longest presence in journalism, but the one that would show the greatest adaptability to the new conditions. Finally, the crisis of public trust in the media was the final blow for newspapers. The phenomena of fraud and corruption on the part of the Press made many readers completely discredit certain newspapers (Siles and Boczkowski, 2012). As Scott (2005) observes, most of the commercial Press had turned their back on the social mission of journalism, sacrificing the journalistic product on the altar of profit and emphasizing a homogenized content, which in many cases was based on press releases. According to a study by Jones and Saad (2016) on behalf of the Gallup Institute, Americans' trust in traditional media, in 2015, was at its lowest level since the Institute began researching the subject in 1972. This

decline, combined with the citizens' shift to online news, has resulted in newspaper circulations plummeting to unprecedented levels. These three different crises, the economic, the technological and the credibility crisis, had a combined effect, creating the conditions for a “perfect storm” for the global media landscape, which was faced with the end of certainties and was called upon to seek new and sustainable business models.

The case of Minute Media

There is a media company which is one of the best-case studies of success business models in media, which made the most of the advantages of the new communication landscape. This company is “Minute Media”, which was founded in 2011 in Tel Aviv. Its first venture was the website 90min.com, which focused exclusively on football. The innovation in terms of business models at the time was that fans acted as “journalists”, uploading articles, photos, and videos through an advanced digital platform. Initially, content was published in eleven languages, and today it is available in thirteen, allowing the website to reach an international audience from their early years (Rigou, 2014; Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2014). The success of 90min.com led to the creation of additional websites by the organization, aiming at expanding their audience across other sports. Specifically, 12Up covered American sports, DBLTAP focused on e-sports, Floor8 and The Big Lead provided entertainment and sports news, and Mental Floss offered cultural and educational content. Another notable initiative is The Players’ Tribune, founded in 2014 by Derek Jeter, which enables athletes to share their personal experiences through articles, videos, and podcasts.

The Minute Media’s success business model is based on the combination of three factors:

1. Technological innovation: The STN Online Video Platform allows fans to create and publish content easily from any device.
2. Community building: Users feel part of a global community, sharing the same passion for sports, which encourages their participation in content creation and participatory journalism.
3. Multi-level commercial exploitation: Produced content is offered in real-time and generates substantial revenue through advertisements, brand partnerships, e-commerce, and recently, the use of artificial intelligence for targeted distribution.

Today, Minute Media continues to grow as an organization and is becoming a media giant. It employs over 500 people, has offices in 12 cities worldwide (New York, London, Tokyo, São Paulo, Manila, etc.), and its valuation exceeds \$1 billion (Fischer, 2024). The company’s content reaches more than 200 million monthly users, collaborating with over 250 content distributors.

Minute Media constitutes a characteristic example of adopting participatory journalism within an organized and secure business framework. Unlike the traditional model, where the journalist acts as the sole intermediary between events and the audience, this role is reversed, and the messenger of news becomes the viewer – the audience itself. Fans produce primary information, while professional journalists act mainly as curators, verifiers, and analysts (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2014).

The platform also offers the athletes the ability to express themselves, disrupting the traditional hierarchy of information and providing the audience with more direct, timely, and authentic access to news.

Conclusion-Discussion

The financial and journalistic success of Minute Media demonstrates that participatory journalism –as a result of the new communication landscape– can serve as a viable solution for media business models, especially in an era full of digital content and social media. Activating the audience and transforming them into “journalists” reduces production costs for organizations, increases immediacy of information, and creates a strong user community supporting the platform. This model does not oppose social media but leverages them to turn citizens’ passion into a commercial advantage for organizational sustainability and profit. However, the case of Minute Media also raises important ethical issues concerning the journalism profession. First, the quality and reliability of content are not always guaranteed, as much of it comes from amateur creators and fans who may be emotionally involved and lack objectivity and reliable reporting skills. Moreover, this journalism model amplifies economic inequality in the labour market, relying on low or nonexistent compensation for content creators, which can threaten professional journalism.

Therefore, Minute Media shows that participatory journalism can be combined with a profitable business model, while emphasizing the need for institutional frameworks and journalistic oversight to ensure reliability and uphold ethical standards. While audiences can become active protagonists, achieving safe, accurate, and timely reporting requires the essential role of professional journalists. The integration of these elements can produce a highly successful business model, as exemplified by Minute Media. The case of Minute Media demonstrates that participatory journalism can be effectively combined with a sustainable and profitable business model. Through technological innovation, community building, and leveraging the passion of citizen-content creators, Minute Media has successfully transformed users into active participants and collaborators, while maintaining the professional role of journalists as curators and verifiers.

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