

Beyond the local: Experiences and expectations of professionals and students on regional journalism

Más allá de lo local: experiencias y expectativas de profesionales y estudiantes sobre el periodismo regional

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Abstract

The Venezuelan crisis has particularly weakened the regional media ecosystem, where journalism faces systematic harassment. This study examines the challenges perceived by local journalists in their communities, within the framework of an online training program promoted by Medianálisis (August 25–September 21, 2025), with the majority of participants being professional journalists and advanced students of social communication from across the country. The analysis is contextualized within the conceptual shift from regional journalism to local journalism—physical, identity-based, and cultural proximity—given the social need to preserve local identities within a framework of cultural globalization. This qualitative research explores perceptions, experiences, and expectations using two instruments: a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) matrix completed in collaborative groups and an individual questionnaire administered to 264 journalists regarding specific challenges. The data were processed using artificial intelligence to identify emerging patterns. The findings reveal tensions between economic and employment insecurity and potential digital opportunities, underscoring the importance of community journalism in strengthening community networks during times of crisis.

Keywords: regional journalism, community journalism, media crisis, journalists.

Resumen

La crisis venezolana ha precarizado especialmente el ecosistema mediático regional, donde el periodismo enfrenta hostigamiento sistemático. Este estudio examina los retos y desafíos percibidos por periodistas locales en sus comunidades, en el marco de un programa formativo en línea impulsado por Medianálisis (25 de agosto-21 de septiembre de 2025), con participación mayoritaria de periodistas profesionales y estudiantes avanzados de comunicación social de todo el país. El análisis se contextualiza en la transición conceptual del periodismo regional al de proximidad —cercanía física, identitaria y cultural—, ante la necesidad social de preservar identidades locales en un marco de globalización cultural. La investigación, de carácter cualitativo, explora percepciones, experiencias y expectativas mediante dos instrumentos: una matriz FODA (Fortalezas, Oportunidades, Debilidades, Amenazas) completada en grupos colaborativos y un cuestionario individual aplicado a 264 periodistas sobre desafíos específicos. Los datos se procesaron con apoyo de inteligencia artificial para identificar patrones emergentes. Los hallazgos revelan tensiones entre precariedad económica/laboral y potenciales oportunidades digitales, subrayando la relevancia del periodismo de proximidad para fortalecer tejidos comunitarios en contextos de crisis.

Palabras clave: periodismo regional, periodismo de proximidad, crisis mediática, periodistas.

Introduction

Given the uneven distribution of the crisis's impact in Venezuela, there arises a need to analyze the state of journalism across different regions, evaluate its evolution, and explore pathways for its recovery. Within the framework of the training program "Trends and Challenges of Regional Journalism," conducted by Medianálisis from August 25 to September 21, 2025, journalists and advanced communication students from throughout the country were consulted regarding the challenges and trends they perceive in their localities.

The purpose of this research was to characterize the perceptions of journalists and students concerning the challenges of regional journalism, as well as the weaknesses, strengths, threats, and opportunities they identify within the Venezuelan context. A decade ago, Medianálisis initiated a systematic study of the journalism situation in Venezuela; between 2015 and 2019, annual surveys were conducted with an average of 365 journalists—51% of whom were women—in the eight most populous cities of the country. During these five years, the progressive impoverishment of information professionals was documented, as was their low level of unionization and the increasing pressure to alter or omit verified information. As noted in the report: "Although a plural editorial line slightly predominates, it is not sufficient. Given the significant expressions of self-censorship, the information disseminated in the public space scarcely guarantees access to accurate, transparent, and plural data for citizens" (Carrasco, 2020).

Since those surveys were conducted, the situation in the country has significantly worsened, as nearly all international indices and indicators on freedom of expression and the press attest. Therefore, this research evaluates experiences and expectations directly from the voices of information professionals in the regions: the most pressing problems perceived, the new challenges identified, and the alternatives proposed to overcome them.

Conceptualization of regional journalism

The term "regional" encompasses various meanings: in anthropology, it emphasizes the cultural; in geography, it pertains to the natural space; in legal contexts, it defines political and administrative units. In the global-local landscape, it becomes a diffuse concept that is prone to misunderstandings. The journal *Ámbitos* from the University of Seville (No. 66, Fall 2024) dedicates its edition to regional and local journalism, highlighting the recent growth of studies on this theme, particularly driven by the developments and impacts of news deserts. Specifically, it underscores that proximity journalism provides specific, relevant, and essential information for citizens' daily lives, while simultaneously strengthening the sense of community and acting as a watchdog over local power.

As early as 2003, Martínez Juan defined online local journalism as that which addresses various journalistic themes from the perspective of proximity to the citizen. Onieva Mallero (2025) further clarifies that the terms local/regional journalism or proximity journalism are used interchangeably, although "proximity journalism" is more precise than "local or regional press."

Rivas-de-Roca (2025) points out that local information has gained strength in response to the global communicative standardization. It serves as an alternative that satisfies the social need for indigenous identity in the face of the cultural homogenization brought about by globalization. This information is characterized by its territorial rootedness, drawing in an audience that feels interested, identified, and impacted by its content.

In essence, proximity journalism is defined as a specialized form of information that addresses the needs and interests of citizens in their immediate surroundings (whether contiguous or not). Rivas-de-Roca (2025) indicates that it supports civic participation by contributing to community identity and making users feel connected to a group defined by geographical and cultural elements.

Local journalism in global times

A decade later, Caldevilla (2013) highlighted the controversy surrounding local journalism: some predicted its annihilation by national/international media, while others anticipated its expansion to potential audiences through digitalization.

In light of the breakdown of space-time barriers, local, regional, or proximity journalism retains its essential role in understanding the immediate environment. There has been a shift from the traditional concept of regional/local journalism to that of proximity journalism, recognizing that proximity transcends physical contiguity to encompass identity and cultural communion—an understanding reaffirmed by the rise in studies on news deserts.

In the Venezuelan context, the media ecosystem has undergone an acute—almost dramatic—process of precarization and contraction over the past decade, framed by economic crisis, restrictions, harassment, repression, and violations of freedom of expression. Given the breadth and complexity of this regional evolution, the characterization is limited to three milestones of the 20th century and two from the current century.

Historical milestones of regional journalism in Venezuela

The data from 1946 and 1986 is drawn from the study *40 Years of Social Communication in Venezuela: 1946-1986*, conducted by the School of Social Communication at the UCV in commemoration of its 40th anniversary, which provides comprehensive quantitative and qualitative information regarding the communication development in the country during that period (Díaz Rangel, 1988). For the close of the last century, the memories submitted to the CDCH-UCV from a research project led by Torrealba (2013) are referenced. The dawn of the

millennium is addressed through a synthesis of the media situation at the close of the first decade of the 21st century, utilizing key contributions from Marcelino Bisbal (2007) and Rafael Quiñones (2011).

This is concluded with a synthetic characterization of the contemporary media landscape developed by Espacio Público through its Media Map. Correa and González (2024) document the transformations within the media system between two data collection moments (2021 and 2023), explaining the increase in restrictions on access to information. Their findings reveal a total decline in media outlets—both private and public—a drastic reduction in radio and television stations, limited expansion of websites, and a severe contraction of print media. This trend of reduction and contraction within the media system persists.

Preliminary findings from ongoing field studies conducted by Medianálisis verified that in Falcón, 49 out of 62 media outlets registered by Espacio Público remain operational (19 have disappeared, a 39% decrease); in Cojedes, 38 out of 44 (14 have closed, a 37% decrease); and in Yaracuy, 26 out of 28 (7 are non-existent, a 27% decrease). These data corroborate the increase in reported news deserts by IPYS.

Between 2005 and August 2025, 330 radio stations closed (with 242 in the last decade): 17 in the provincial sector (1946), 154 (1986), 525 according to Bisbal (2010—most in provincial areas), and 431 AM/FM (2023, with only 15 in the Capital District). Regional television stations: 8 (1986), 30 (1998), 91 (2011), 51 (2023). Regional newspapers: 14 (1946), 61 (1986), 90 (2007), 24 (2023); only 11 states retain at least one print outlet according to the Media Map.

It is crucial to highlight that Venezuelan print media did not transition to the digital realm out of ecological awareness or technological conviction: centenary regional newspapers disappeared due to the actions of the Alfredo Maneiro Editorial Complex.

In provinces with the highest closures of media outlets, personal initiatives from journalists are emerging on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or mass messaging applications: these are informal efforts, often operated from homes, typically by 1-2 individuals, with limited reach. They differ from the digital spring (starting in 2014), which was characterized by the formal creation and migration of media. Seven such outlets have registered in Cojedes; in Falcón, some have succumbed to institutional pressures, exacerbating restrictions on the right to information and the professional duty to inform.

These new "media-persons" represent a topic pending systematic research to document and integrate into the reconstruction of the Venezuelan media system—a task that is urgent and indispensable to undertake.

Methodology

The methodology employed was primarily qualitative, aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of journalists and communication students regarding the state of journalism in their localities.

The population surveyed participated in the training program "Trends and Challenges of Regional Journalism," conducted by Medianálisis between August and September 2025. Participants who completed the training programs came from nearly all states in the country, with 70% being women and 56% under the age of 35. Those who did not complete the process were from Carabobo, Monagas, Guárico, and Vargas. The greatest participation was from Mérida, Táchira, and Zulia, which can be attributed to the educational and journalistic traditions of these regions. Conversely, there was lower participation from journalists in the eastern, central, and southern parts of the country, likely due to Medianálisis's historical focus predominantly in western Venezuela.

The research was based on two data collection tools: a SWOT matrix created in groups and an individual questionnaire.

A questionnaire containing an open-ended question was distributed to the 341 registrants in the program regarding the challenges they face in practicing journalism in their regions. This form was available from August 25 to August 31, 2025, yielding 263 anonymous responses—only the state of residence was requested. For analysis, eight regions were defined: Andes (Mérida, Táchira, Trujillo); Zulia-Falcón; Central-West (Lara, Yaracuy, Portuguesa); Plains (Barinas, Cojedes, Apure); East (Anzoátegui, Sucre, Nueva Esparta, Delta Amacuro); South (Bolívar, Amazonas); Central (Aragua, Miranda); and the Capital Region.

The SWOT matrix was developed over two Master Classes, each lasting two hours. The first, on August 26, included 170 synchronous participants; the second, on September 18, had 124 participants. During these sessions, group dynamics were conducted in Zoom breakout rooms, with clear instructions regarding the purpose of the activity. In August, participants discussed the weaknesses and strengths of regional journalism; in September, the threats and opportunities. This qualitative technique facilitated open discussion, consensus-building, and the collective identification of internal and external factors impacting journalistic work. Group agreements, with designated rapporteurs, were recorded in Google Forms.

Both instruments specified that the data would be utilized for academic research, with results to be shared upon completion.

Data analysis was performed using AI (ChatGPT 5/GPT-5, paid Plus version), processing the substantial volume of open-ended questionnaire responses and differentiating results by regions. A similar procedure was applied for the SWOT analysis. In both cases, generalized patterns and emerging trends were identified and manually verified to ensure analytical rigor.

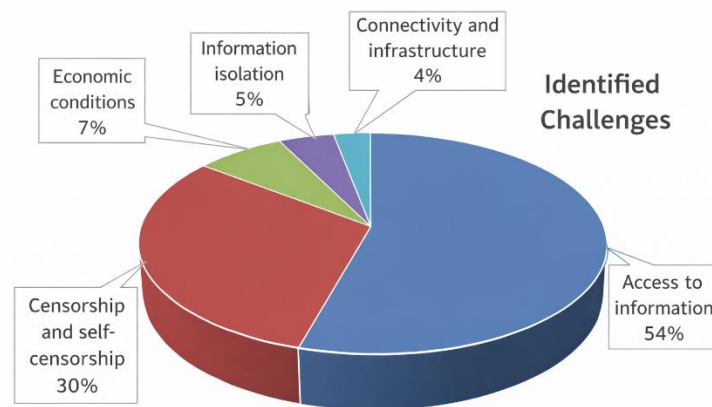
Results and discussion

To identify the challenges perceived by journalists and communication students, an open-ended question was included in the Google Form distributed to the 341 registrants in the Medianálisis virtual classrooms. The form ensured anonymity, only requesting the state of residence. A total of 263 responses were received from 19 federal entities and 6 from the Capital District.

The responses were extensive, detailed, and testimonial in nature. This significant volume was processed using ChatGPT 5 (GPT-5, paid Plus version). The prompt used was: "In this Excel, you have the responses from a survey completed by participants in Medianálisis virtual classrooms regarding the challenges of regional journalism in Venezuela. Analyze the responses, identifying overlapping points and data of interest, especially less conventional challenges. Exclude responses from the Capital District to prioritize perceptions from the interior of the country. Determine the five main or most prominent challenges."

The primary challenge identified across nearly the entire country relates to Access to Information, as illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 1
Primary challenges identified



By region, Access to Information accounts for over 50% of the responses. A journalist from Yaracuy notes that not only do official spokespersons fail to fulfill their duty to inform, but they also limit communities' rights by threatening to withdraw benefits: "...the main challenge is confronting government control policies that often prevent access to official sources and even to affected individuals. There are cases (though not universal) in communities where people limit their speech to avoid jeopardizing the state's benefits."

This institutional opacity is reflected in the systematic refusal of institutions and official representatives to provide data, even in response to formal requests. This information wall not only complicates professional practice but also generates disillusionment, as indicated by a journalist in Cojedes: "Institutional opacity makes access to information difficult and demotivates the search for verified data."

To this institutional silence are added mechanisms of censorship and self-censorship. In Bolívar, a journalist describes: "Intimidation, threats, and harassment—both physical and digital—by armed groups, local authorities, or collectives occur when certain topics are covered."

Consequently, censorship, lack of access to information, and the duty to inform are experienced with a constant fear of persecution, retaliation, and criminalization, making safety and risks a recurring theme. In the Llanos region, a journalist expresses fear because "sources feel intimidated during interviews, as it has happened that after providing declarations about community needs, government sympathizers visit the source to intimidate and, in some cases, threaten them." Another journalist lists their primary challenge as: "Maintaining contact with sources

despite the existing fears." Even in Zulia, it is emphasized: "Any topic addressed can invite government retaliation." Terms like retaliation, persecution, and criminalization reflect the intensity of journalistic practice in the regions.

This dimension is particularly significant in the South, Central-West, and Zulia-Falcón regions. An Andean journalist asserts: "In the country's regions, journalism is practiced with fear and precariousness." Another adds: "The intimidation! The persecution! Anything said through a note, video, or photo can be turned against you."

Economic precariousness affects both journalists and regional media. A participant from Lara states: "The economic crisis has reduced opportunities for training and stable employment in regional media." In Táchira, journalism is considered altruistic: "The media survive more out of vocation than salary." Journalists from the East and South emphasize that economic conditions are critical, forcing many to emigrate. In the East, one journalist is blunt: "I believe the primary challenge is to continue existing as a journalist without being compelled to seek alternative employment to mitigate personal risks and the urgency of generating more income."

Moreover, regional media lack resources, forcing journalists to work with personal equipment that is often on the brink of obsolescence. They also lack vehicles, making transportation a significant obstacle for coverage, especially in the Andean states: "In my region, it is the lack of data, lack of transportation that doesn't allow us to reach the scene, difficulties like power outages when writing." Infrastructure failures—energy, fuel, and connectivity—severely impair the professional duty to inform. A participant from Zulia summarizes: "Without power, without Internet, and without sources, informing in Zulia has become an act of resistance."

Another highlighted element is the disconnection from the national ecosystem, which several participants confess. Local topics rarely reach capital media, fostering a sentiment of professional marginalization or regional invisibility. Below is a selection of quotes that evidence this marginalized informational agenda:

- "There is little appreciation for local journalism, often considered 'lesser' compared to national reporting."
- "Low dissemination outside our borders, and sources fear to tell what is happening to the media for fear of being affected."
- "Being close to Caracas means that the capital becomes the information center, and both national and regional/local authorities only report what suits their agendas or goals."
- "Generally, people prefer national media for information and sometimes turn to international agencies for accuracy, ignoring local news sources."

The analysis also recorded emerging challenges in regional journalism that were not predominantly mentioned but reveal concerning issues: a professional ethical crisis, loss of public trust, concerns over "*palangrismo*" (the practice of manipulating information for economic survival) and sensationalism—all detrimental to the credibility of the profession. There is a rejection of the rise of informal digital platforms and the inclusion of new public spokespersons such as influencers, described as "intruders" without training who generate content lacking journalistic rigor.

Regional analysis of journalism challenges

In the regions, participants identified key elements: In the Andes (Mérida, Táchira, Trujillo), institutional opacity and lack of response from local entities predominate. Censorship is perceived both politically and editorially, especially in traditional media. Economic precariousness emerges strongly, along with a lack of transportation that limits journalistic coverage.

In Zulia-Falcón, severe infrastructural deterioration is reported: electrical outages, Internet disruptions, and equipment obsolescence affecting informational continuity. The difficulty of accessing public spokespersons predominates—leading to frustration and institutional distrust—along with ethical concerns regarding professional rigor, misinformation, and risks to journalists' safety.

In Central-West (Lara, Yaracuy, Portuguesa), there is a shared visibility issue of regional topics compared to national ones, akin to Falcón in its loss of rigor and "*palangrismo*" as economic survival tactics. Combined fears of reprisals/persecutions coexist with concerns for civic engagement. In Portuguesa, long distances and fuel shortages are notably highlighted.

In the Llanos (Cojedes, Apure, Barinas), access to information takes on a particular dimension: community fears of declaring information. Long distances and fuel scarcity complicate coverage, compounded by national invisibility of regional news, as seen in Central-West.

In the East, infrastructural failures in electricity mirror those in Zulia-Falcón, while urgency for training in the digital ecosystem and combating misinformation emerge as significant challenges. Security and risks also surface as critical issues.

In the Central region (Aragua, Miranda; with no participants from Carabobo), regional invisibility intensifies in relation to the capital, with editorial/political pressure predominating: "Being near Caracas makes the capital the center of information, and both national and regional/local authorities only report what suits their agendas." Few active media outlets face hurdles in community broadcasting stations to avoid impacting public decisions.

After analyzing the regions, an AI assistant was consulted: "Although I asked you to exclude the Capital District, now focus solely on this area. What do we have? Is it similar to the rest, or are there noticeable differences in perceptions of challenges?"

In the capital, issues of information overload emerge: journalists feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of messages, press releases, and circulating misinformation—contrasting sharply with the scarcity experienced in the interior regions. The AI generated a comparative table between provincial and capital perceptions.

Table 1
Comparative table of provincial and capital perceptions

Compared Dimension	Interior of the Country	Capital District
Infrastructure / connectivity	Severe failures (internet, electricity, mobility)	Marginal mentions; not a priority
Informational isolation	High perceived invisibility	None; rather, an excess of information
Censorship and physical fear	Direct threats and self-censorship due to local pressure	Editorial control and media polarization
Disappearance of media outlets	Very frequent (closures, migration to social networks)	Not reported; greater digital diversification
Unmentioned non-conventional challenges	Ethics, trust, intrusiveness	Information overload, demotivation, audience fragmentation

However, the tendency of the AI assistant to generate compelling phrases absent from the original material becomes evident once again. The AI produces expressions that are hard to resist.

2. Censorship and Self-Censorship

- Also recurrent, but with a distinct emphasis: **editorial pressure and self-restraint in national media**, rather than direct fear of local reprisals.
- The impact of **political polarization and self-censorship** along editorial lines is mentioned.

3. "It's not that you can't publish, it's that you know it won't be aired if it upsets someone."

"Censorship in Caracas is exercised subtly: they take you off the air or change the programming."

In the Capital District, with only 6 responses, issues such as censorship, self-censorship, and access to information (common nationally) dominate, alongside difficulties arising from information volume and abundance. A Caracas journalist notes: "The challenges stem from the quantity of information that leads to misinformation. Day after day, new media emerge, and in some cases, in the race to break a story, they may compromise their investigative rigor, resulting in a loss of the news's veracity. Another key factor challenging journalism, and it's no secret, is censorship, along with digital blockages of different portals due to political pressures, coupled with the exposure of journalists. Additionally, economic conditions make it impossible to sustain media work, leading to operations being conducted 'on a shoestring' or out of 'love for the craft.'"

To move beyond the identified issues, the training program included two synchronous group consultations via Zoom. Participants organized into breakout rooms to develop a SWOT matrix for regional journalism. Using data uploaded into Google Forms, a map of Strengths and Weaknesses was constructed, as well as Threats and Opportunities.

Table 2
SWOT matrix

Strengths	Weaknesses
Proximity to communities and local sources Territorial trust and hyperlocal identity Operational creativity and resilience Social organization as informational input Knowledge of the territory	Limited or denied access to official sources Censorship and self-censorship Information overload Labor and technical precariousness Editorial vulnerability due to local pressures
Opportunities	Threats
Interest in training and capacity building Creation of networks and alliances Existence of resources (open data, repositories) Tools and digital resources New forms of financial sustainability and business models	Censorship, punitive frameworks, and reprisals Persistent institutional opacity Coordinated misinformation and propaganda Poor infrastructure Structural precariousness and talent drain

In the responses regarding *Strengths*, the idea of proximity clearly dominates all mentions: "closeness to community sources," "closeness to the source," "connection with the community." This proximity fosters trust: communities trust local media and journalists, sharing information that does not circulate through formal channels.

Furthermore, the ability of small teams in provinces to find solutions amid electrical cuts or connectivity issues is highlighted ("we all have a Plan B"), along with the scarcity of equipment or complicated/distant travel. Local knowledge enables better explanations of problems, anticipates impacts, and detects early warning signs. The notion of "closeness and direct contact" constitutes the majority of references—over 60% in the base document.

It is not surprising that Access to Information, Censorship, and Self-Censorship are the most frequently mentioned *Weaknesses*, along with direct threats from political/governmental actors, and media vulnerability to these pressures. The precarization of media and journalists is recognized: low salaries necessitating multiple jobs, lack of updated equipment. Additionally, they face the dual challenge of confronting not only opacity and institutional silence but also the overabundance of misinformation and unverified information.

The identified *Weaknesses* also manifest as concrete Threats to regional journalism. Censorship not only persists but generates adverse consequences, such as digital blockages, legal action, systematic harassment, and restrictive legal frameworks that limit informative work. Simultaneously, the country faces a deeply entrenched culture of secrecy, characterized by systematic informational silences from official sources.

Information overload is perceived as both an internal *Weakness* and an external *Threat*, with deliberate campaigns aimed at discrediting media, sowing widespread confusion, and progressively eroding public trust in journalism. Other significant Threats are closely linked to the weakened national infrastructure, evident in frequent blackouts, prolonged power outages, recurring connectivity failures, fuel rationing, and an overall collapse of essential services. For regional press, a particularly serious *Threat* lies in the irreversible loss of local expertise, caused by the massive closure of independent media and the exodus of journalists in search of other opportunities.

Among the *Opportunities*, there is a sustained and clear demand for specialized training programs in fact-checking, data journalism, open data management, and digital security. Participants also propose enhancing collaborative networks and strategic alliances with universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), while advocating for the creation of hyperlocal correspondent networks. They likewise suggest exploring mixed financial sustainability models, which could include local memberships, targeted grants for specific projects, and the diversified offering of journalistic services. In this context, open data resources emerge as an effective lever to navigate through information opacity in the short term.

Notably, neither in the *Strengths* nor in the *Opportunities* did journalists identify the potential of Venezuelan communities that have migrated over the past decade. Despite many of these communities abroad maintaining strong connections, and even formal organizations anchored to their places of origin, this element is absent in the responses from both journalists and student participants.

Conclusions and recommendations

Investigating, documenting, and characterizing the media and informational situation in Venezuela is an urgent task. Presently, it is imperative to act with the available knowledge and the inherent responsibilities: to study in depth, to investigate rigorously, and to develop well-founded strategic plans.

This document presents an initial approach to the perceptions that journalists have in 2025 regarding journalism in the Venezuelan regions. This perspective reveals that journalism is undergoing a profound crisis; there is a marked disconnection between the national agenda and local agendas, while censorship, self-censorship, and barriers to accessing information emerge as the most serious and persistent problems. However, notable Strengths and Opportunities are also identified, among which stands out the unwavering commitment of journalists—despite low pay, persecution, and lack of stable employment sources—to continue studying, striving to produce more and better journalism, actively engaging with ethical issues, and critically reflecting on these fundamental aspects.

Numerous pending tasks demanding immediate attention lie ahead. It is essential to deepen studies on the realities of journalists and media, but it should also be an absolute priority to analyze how citizens experience this complex situation, what role information plays in the development of their daily lives, how they engage with it, and how they construct their reference social present from these informational flows.

A final methodological consideration deserves emphasis. This research began under the assumption of the utility of artificial intelligence for analyzing responses to open-ended questions. The AI employed proved useful in certain aspects and partially shortened the research path, but it also generated complacent and attractive phrasing that likely drew from external contexts, even though it was explicitly instructed to work exclusively with the provided documentation. This behavior limited its reliability to a partial extent, but did not completely negate its contribution.

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Note: Data collection in the field was conducted with the support of social communicators Elsa Cecilia Piña and Mariángel Durán. The data processing using artificial intelligence was carried out by Mariángel Durán.