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**BLOGPOST Media landscape Mexico: "Too little independent quality journalism"**

Yesterday was the kick-off for the 2018 World Cup in Russia. The German team will be on the pitch for the first time this Sunday. Their opponent is Mexico. A country we associate with spicy food, tequila, mariachi music and pre-Columbian cultures, but also with corruption and violence. But what role does the media actually play in this Latin American country? We spoke with Fernando del Collado about the current situation of the Mexican press and the challenges it faces in times of dramatic print declines. The TV presenter and journalism lecturer also gives concrete tips on how PR representatives can make contact with Mexican journalists.

TREIBSTOFF: Could you give us a sense of the media landscape in Mexico?

DEL COLLADO: The current media landscape is bad, mainly for journalists and those who work with them. By 2008, when the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) stopped publishing figures on print runs, circulation and employment in the Mexican press, there had already been a drastic reduction in print media. At that point, the country's newspapers had dropped below 1 million total copies in circulation per day (694,775). These statistics also showed that the total number newspapers and magazines in operation was less than 500

Today, the landscape has narrowed even further. Print newspapers and magazines continue to lose out in the face of exponential growth by digital platforms; as such, a country with more than 120 million inhabitants is home to media with total print runs that fall short of a million. Many media are going through a difficult economic situation, which affects both their employees and partners. Media outlets that are not experiencing financial difficulties are those that receive advertising revenue from the government - and do not criticize those in power.

The current situation is also very bad due to continued violence against journalists. I think it is already quite well-known: Mexico was last year the deadliest country in the world to practice journalism, as documented by the international non-governmental organization Reporters Without Borders. Neither authorities nor the media have taken concrete actions to stop violence against journalists. The unions are divided and have faded into the background.

The outlook for media outlets in Mexico is also grim because there is a close and damaging relationship between media, journalists and powerful political and economic actors. In large communication consortiums, it is difficult to find journalistic research or editorials that investigate the economic sector's behaviour, and this is likely due to a fear of losing advertising revenue. It is true that there are outstanding examples of journalistic work that contrasts with this unhealthy relationship between the media and those with political and economic power, but these few examples are still a far cry from journalism that unmask these powerful actors, and could still be much more independent and critical.

TREIBSTOFF: What are the challenges and opportunities?

DEL COLLADO: The foremost challenge is to create independent, higher-quality journalism. At the same time, this period of crisis presents an opportunity to regain the confidence of citizens in journalism and journalists. The challenge is also to establish

journalism that is economically viable and sustainable, and which will restore greater dignity to the journalistic profession. The content must be solid and pertinent enough to generate its own sales and interest. I suspect that the better the quality of the journalism, the greater acceptance it will obtain and the greater dividends it will generate.

TREIBSTOFF: Are there any cross-cultural differences that need to be taken into account?

DEL COLLADO: Yes. Compared to Germany, education levels, literacy and access to cultural activities vary greatly, and the consumption of news and media is different as a result. News as entertainment is part of the media culture and has gained prominence in Mexico. The very close interlinking of journalists and the Mexican media on one hand and political and business interests on the other also presents a major difference with Germany. I have the impression that the closeness of the Mexican media to business and political power reaches levels of overt and unabashed flattery.

TREIBSTOFF: What is the best way for PR professionals to contact Mexican journalists?

DEL COLLADO: Get in touch with them directly or through journalists' organizations. This would eliminate filters that may be imposed by media, editors and media managers. I would not recommend contacting Mexican journalists through the authorities, government press offices or official bodies. I consider it easier to conduct a direct, personalized search through the various mechanisms that online social networks provide. Today it is easy to contact us via social networks; these are, without a doubt, of universal significance.

TREIBSTOFF: Which impact does the rise of mobile communication have on the Mexican media?

DEL COLLADO: A lot. The mobile phone is the main tool that Mexicans use to view social networks, interact with one another and access information online. The Mexican media should direct efforts towards making smartphone-based news consumption more attractive, and should promote interaction with their audience. And they are. Just in 2017, the consultancy group IAB Mexico presented their Study of Media and Device Consumption among Mexican internet users, which had been developed by Kantar Millward Brown. The "accelerated" growth of smartphones stood out in particular, having changed the "dynamics of media consumption in the Mexican market." In total, 81 per cent of internet users reported using a smartphone to access the internet, surpassing online access through computers for the second consecutive year. The IAB explained that 47 per cent of internet users did not leave home without their mobile devices, whereas that figure for the previous year was only 36 per cent. In the year of the study, it found that 71.5 million Mexicans, or some 60 per cent of the population, are internet users.

It should also be noted that the communications market in Mexico is among the three or four largest in the Americas, alongside the United States, Brazil and Canada. The telecommunications industry, regulated by Cofetel (the Federal Telecommunications Commission), under the ministry of communications, has seen solid growth in the mobile sector. It is estimated that the total number of mobile lines in Mexico, at around 57 million, is almost three times that of fixed lines. Already in 2009, the ITESM (Institute of Technology and Higher Education of Monterrey) reported that more than 25 million users, and 78 per cent of personal computers with internet access, had access to broadband internet. Since then, the number of hosts in Mexico has reached approximately 7.6 million, placing it at number eight in the world ranking.

TREIBSTOFF: In terms of social media, which channels are primarily used in Mexico?

DEL COLLADO: Facebook is the most widely used social network. In Mexico, it is a means to communicate among friends, spread ideas, discuss personal matters and exchange points of view. Facebook is also used to get information, but it is not a social network where people search for news or media. Instead, Twitter is a popular network for gathering information and is the preferred social network among Mexican journalists for disseminating information, reports and exclusive news. Instagram is also a popular network, but it serves more for spreading personal matters and making friends. Last May, the newspaper Excelsior published a survey carried out by the Centre for Research and Innovation in Information and Communication Technologies (INFOTEC), which confirmed that Facebook remained the leading social network among Mexicans, with 95 per cent of respondents using it, which would be equivalent to roughly 66.5 million users if extrapolated to all of Mexico's internet users. YouTube came in second on the list with 72 per cent, followed by Twitter with 66 per cent, Instagram with 59 per cent and Snapchat with 31 per cent.

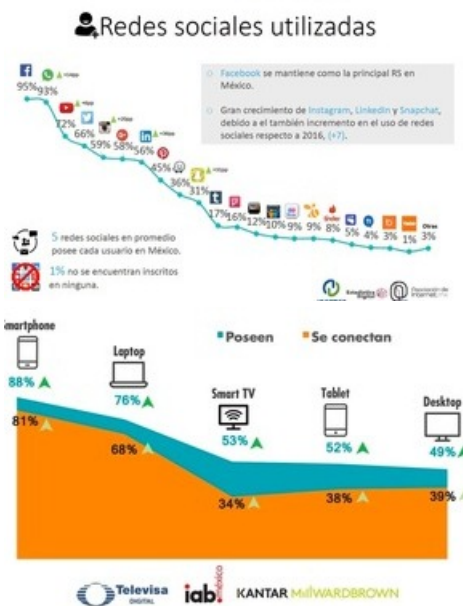
TREIBSTOFF: Is Fake News also a topic in Mexico? How do the media deal with this phenomenon?

DEL COLLADO: Yes, "fake news" is an issue that has affected the credibility of Mexican journalism, so it has also become a key issue for the media. There is no visible strategy on the part of the media to confront "fake news," nor to strengthen controls among employees or their mechanisms for collecting, processing and disseminating news. The Mexican media depend on isolated and independent initiatives to raise awareness about fake news, because they do not create their own mechanisms or undertake their own campaigns.

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