

Graft-digging editor joins Spain's online media race

October 8 2015, by Patrick Rahir



Pedro J. Ramirez , pictured in Madrid on December 10, 2013, launches a new web-only publication, El Espanol

One of Spain's most prominent and controversial journalists has launched a major online newspaper, the latest in a range of websites shaking up the Spanish media in politically volatile times.

Pedro J. Ramirez, or "Pedro J." as he is known, was fired last year as

founding editor of Spain's second biggest-selling newspaper El Mundo, after breaking a series of political corruption stories.

Now, less than three months ahead of a general election, the 63-year-old is back in the fray at the helm of a new web-only publication, El Espanol.

Backed by millions of euros (dollars), its beta site went online Wednesday ahead of its full launch next week.

It could be a fresh headache for conservative Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, whom Pedro J. relentlessly criticised in print.

One of Ramirez's top recent scoops was to publish a text message of support sent by Rajoy to the chief suspect in a corruption scandal engulfing his Popular Party.

The disclosure raised calls for the premier to resign in 2013.

Ramirez's dismissal from El Mundo months later was seen by his defenders as politically driven.

A little less than two years on, he has gathered 18 million euros to launch El Espanol—including his five-million severance payment from El Mundo and 3.6 million raised through crowd-funding.

He vows it will be "an indomitable newspaper that does not flinch in denouncing abuse of power".

A flamboyant figure in colourful ties and braces, Pedro J. may resemble an old-school editor steeped in ink, but he says he doesn't believe in the future of print.

He points to El Confidencial, an online newspaper founded in 2001 that now has turnover of more than nine million euros a year—all of it from advertising.

Digital switch

Digital [media](#) are flourishing in Spain, financed by advertisers or subscriptions and staffed largely by journalists laid off from traditional media in the economic crisis.

"The switch to digital media is complete," said Juan Luis Manfredi, a journalism lecturer at the University of Castile-La Mancha.

"The newspapers used to treat their online versions as a by-product. Now the order of things has changed: first comes the online, mobile and tablet edition, then the paper one if needed."

He cites the example of ElDiario.es, a left-leaning online newspaper launched at the height of Spain's crisis in 2012, which publishes a magazine every three months.

Now it is one of "the top five Spanish media in terms of revenues, number of visitors and influence," said Manfredi.

With El Diario and El Confidencial, "we now have two big media that are profitable and are working very well."

Spanish-speaking readers who don't want to go to a newsstand can find news online for a range of tastes: from the left-leaning sites Publico and InfoLibre to the right-wing VozPopuli.

VozPopuli revealed a recent high-profile court probe against Rodrigo Rato, the Spanish former head of the International Monetary Fund.

September 28 saw the launch of another site, Bez.es, with capital of half a million euros.

It aims to "contribute to the strengthening of democracy through dialogue and analysis", said one of its founders, Juan Zafra.

Many other titles have popped up online as the atmosphere heats up ahead of December's general election.

"We'll see how many of them make it to 2017," said Manfredi.

Pedro J. forecasts his site, on a recipe of subscriptions and advertising, can survive for three years before it has to start turning a profit.

"There is no doubt he is the most influential Spanish journalist of the past 30 years" said Manfredi.

"But he is quite volatile and very controversial. You never know which way he is heading."

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Citation: Graft-digging editor joins Spain's online media race (2015, October 8) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-10-graft-digging-editor-spain-online-media.html>

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