

Informational Sovereignty: The Commercial and Geopolitical Risk of Newsroom Dependency on Third-Party Infrastructure in Latin America

JUAN ORTIZ-FREULER¹
University of Southern California, USA

This article reveals significant market consolidation within the digital infrastructure of Latin American media. Extending the political economy of media literature from ownership to control over underlying infrastructure, it uses a newly constructed database of over 400 data points to analyze the online infrastructure of 18 media outlets across 6 Latin American countries, focusing on 11 key elements of the media stack. Findings indicate that dominant players, such as Alphabet and Meta, pose the greatest commercial risks to the analyzed media. Meanwhile, the U.S. government emerges as the greatest geopolitical risk, with 50–100% of providers across the analyzed elements operating under U.S. law, exposing Latin American media with similar infrastructural profiles to U.S. government policy. The article places these challenges in conversation with historical calls for a New World Information and Communication Order, which underlines that a robust understanding of media autonomy requires infrastructural autonomy.

Keywords: digital infrastructure, online journalism, media dependency, political economy of media, Non-Aligned Movement, New World Information and Communication Order

This article maps the infrastructural dependencies of Latin American news media websites on third-party technology providers to evaluate whether these dependencies represent commercial or geopolitical risks. I situate the challenge of infrastructural dependency at the intersection of three literatures: the crisis affecting the media sector and its democratic impacts (Ananny, 2018; Pickard, 2023), the centralization of the Internet and its effects on communication power (Farrell & Newman, 2019; Ortiz-Freuler, 2023; Winseck, 2017), and decades-old demands for rebalancing global information flows (Masmoudi, 1979) that persist in contemporary Latin American scholarship on media concentration

Juan Ortiz-Freuler: ortizfre@usc.edu
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and dependency (Mastrini & Becerra, 2017). At this intersection, the infrastructural turn in media studies (Hesmondhalgh, 2021) meets the decolonial turn in Internet studies (Couldry & Mejias, 2021).

Recent scholarship has expanded the concept of media capture to “media environment capture” (Ferrari Braun & Cath, 2026, p. 5; Seignani et al., 2025, p. 806), recognizing that big tech’s influence extends beyond direct ownership to encompass influence over the entire information environment journalism requires to function. Drawing on control point analysis (DeNardis, 2012), I document structural concentration across critical infrastructural layers to extend classical political economy debates about media ownership to the backend technologies that now mediate digital journalism (Bizberge et al., 2023). The key practical contribution is a replicable framework to map how infrastructural dependencies create commercial and geopolitical vulnerabilities for online media. Theoretically, the article contributes to debates on platform dependency by revealing how the media stack is a layered structure across which the exercise of power can become compounded, underlining how advancing informational sovereignty might require policies focusing on narrower risk diversification goals in the short term.

Background

The news media is traversing a crisis that can be observed from multiple perspectives and is not particular to Latin America (Newman et al., 2025). Data from the United States show that over the past decades, revenue and circulation of newspapers collapsed by over 60%, while a similar percentage of newsroom jobs were slashed (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Meanwhile, the Internet’s capacity to protect the existing media ecosystem or create a sociotechnical alternative that protects people’s right to be informed is largely determined by its design and usage (McChesney, 2013). The Internet protocol was designed to route messages effectively regardless of potential disruptions occurring between the sender and receiver (Abbate, 1999). However, economies of scale and network effects have fueled market consolidation at every layer of the Internet stack, undermining the robustness of the network architecture and its ability to advance those goals. At the data storage and processing layer, Amazon, Microsoft, and Google control two-thirds of the global cloud computing market (Widder & Kim, 2025). This consolidation contributes to exacerbating geographic inequalities in other layers: International Internet bandwidth in Latin America is almost entirely connected to the United States and Canada, where these cloud companies are based (Cicileo & Gayo, 2024). Moreover, content platforms like Amazon, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft were responsible for half of the new international bandwidth installed from 2020 to 2024, often through private cables, and now consume 50% of the U.S.-Latin American bandwidth (TeleGeography, 2025).

At the regional level, these structural dynamics are reflected in comparative country studies produced by Observacom, which document persistently high levels of concentration across multiple layers of the Internet ecosystem in Latin America, including connectivity markets and the use of dominant search engines as gateways to news and information (Observacom, n.d.).

These power dynamics are not particular to the region or our times. A 1980 report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) quantified inequalities in access to

information technologies, noting that North America and Europe together controlled almost 75% of sound and television broadcasting systems and receivers (UNESCO, 1980, p. 127). The report argued that the disparities hindered communication between rich and poorer nations (p. 55) and that “the version of world events . . . and the picture of life in developing countries shown to viewers in Europe or North America may be distorted or culturally biased” (p. 108). Shortly after the report was released, albeit for unrelated reasons, the United States and United Kingdom withdrew from and defunded UNESCO, crippling the forum (Leffler & Westad, 2010, p. 473). A group of global majority countries, however, continued to uphold the agenda. They were part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)² and argued that a laissez-faire approach in the information sector would result in monopolization and recreate forms of colonial dependence (NAM, 1983). They also criticized the conceptualization of the right to information without access to the technological means to exercise that right (Nordenstreng, 2012).

The power dynamics documented in the UNESCO report continue to resonate today, particularly among decolonial Internet scholars (Aouragh & Chakravartty, 2016). This historical perspective challenges the notion of Internet exceptionalism by shifting focus from specific technological arrangements to the broader dynamics of information flows, revealing what remains constant over time: unequal power relations.

In the 21st century, these power dynamics limit the options of Latin American governments and businesses to a handful of U.S. companies. While the United States continues to pressure peripheral countries to align with its technological standards (Department of State, 2025), China has become the main trade partner for most countries in Latin America (Roy, 2023). Chinese information service provision within the region is likely to increase (Winseck, 2017), creating a challenging geopolitical scenario for Latin America, particularly for information-heavy industries like the media. This article contributes to the political economy of media literature by offering a control point analytical framework that shows how infrastructural power can shape information flows and the center-periphery relations.

Literature Review

To show how power is exercised through Internet infrastructure, this article examines an information system that predates and has adapted to the Internet: news (Boczkowski, 2005). Given the scale of the media crisis, public debate has moved beyond discussing whether the traditional business of media is in a crisis. For many, it is time for governments to protect the existing media ecosystem. This may include a combination of direct government subsidies and a restructuring of media (Mastrini & Becerra, 2017; Pickard, 2023). It may also involve regulation to ensure Internet platforms share revenue with media outlets, a model that is gaining traction in Australia, Canada, and beyond (Papaevangelou, 2024). Others argue that governments should safeguard the goals the media was tasked with helping achieve (an informed public) within a sociotechnical environment that might no longer support traditional

² NAM was initiated by the leaders of India, Egypt, and Yugoslavia in 1956. It called for coordinated resistance against attempts by Washington and Moscow to encroach on the autonomy of other countries. Its agenda included calls for a New World Information and Communication Order (Padovani & Nordenstreng, 2005).

newsrooms (Ananny, 2018). In Latin America, these governance debates are further complicated by political polarization, weak regulatory frameworks, and the legacy of struggles for media democratization that date to the 1970s (Bizberge et al., 2023; Gómez, 2022). This article aims to inform this debate as it intensifies across Latin America rather than to resolve it.

It contributes to discussions on the media's growing dependence on third parties. Some of this work focuses on "last-mile" infrastructures. Nielsen and Ganter (2022) dissect the ties between publishers and consumer-facing platforms such as Google and Facebook. Meanwhile, Simon (2022) analyzes how AI service providers can entrench the power big tech holds over journalism. Subsequent literature started to map the broader infrastructural ecosystem that supports the news media: Sjøvaag et al. (2024) discuss undersea cables, Internet exchange points, cloud services, and data centers using Norway as a case, while Ferrari Braun and Cath (2026) focus on the latter two in the broader context of Europe.

Musiani et al. (2016) refer to this growing interest in infrastructure as an infrastructural turn: The resources once devoted to developing global governance mechanisms are now directed toward exercising unilateral control over key elements of local physical networks. Whereas decades ago, the Internet was conceptualized as a "dumb" network with "intelligent" edges, the topography has shifted. Intermediating infrastructure can shape traffic patterns. The field of media studies is going through its own infrastructural turn (Hesmondhalgh, 2021) as it acknowledges the shift from offline to digital is reverberating in journalism.

Change makes power dynamics more visible, and more scholars began to offer decolonial perspectives. Couldry and Mejias (2021), Ricaurte et al. (2024), Valente and Grohmann (2024), and others foregrounded the bodies, territories, and cultures affected by information technologies. Their narrative challenges previous imaginaries, which presented information systems as disembodied and operating outside of the physical dimension, as denoted by the term *cyberspace*.

This conceptual rematerialization of information systems also fueled a body of research focused on the geopolitical impacts of the Internet. Particularly relevant to this article are those assessing the willingness of governments to leverage their control over critical Internet infrastructure to coerce adversaries (Ortiz-Freuler, 2023). As the world's economy becomes platformized, control over a shrinking group of companies increasingly allows the United States (and China) to onshore governance powers.

As noted by Rolf and Schindler (2023), corporate goals are often organically aligned with or favored by government action. However, when this is not the case, powerful governments often leverage their legal power to force the hand of key multinational companies and advance national interests abroad. Farrell and Newman (2019) describe this as weaponized interdependence. Governments deploy this strategy in varying shades, the United States being a prominent example: The U.S. Treasury Department leverages the centrality of U.S. companies within the Internet to deploy unilateral cybersanctions that lock adversaries out of critical systems. Over the two decades following 9/11, sanctions designations surged by 933% (U.S. Treasury Department, 2021).

Another body of research focuses on the reactions to this weaponization (Ortiz-Freuler, 2025). The European Union is embracing a policy of derisking (Brizna et al., 2024) to ensure a plurality of vendors in critical sectors, and the United States promotes a decoupling strategy to reduce dependence on China (Zhang, 2023). Although political statements and judicial actions have challenged U.S. overreach, Latin America broadly lacks policies aimed at preventing technological dependencies from undermining national autonomy (Becerra & Waisbord, 2021; Lehuedé, 2024).

This article seeks to inform debates about the extent to which this policy vacuum constitutes an economic and geopolitical risk for the region. It builds on a long tradition of Latin American political economy of media scholarship that has documented persistent patterns of media ownership concentration, regulatory asymmetry, and dependency in media systems (Bizberge et al., 2023; Bolaño et al., 2012; Mastrini & Becerra, 2017), as well as ongoing work examining Internet and platform concentration in the region (Global Media and Internet Concentration Project [GMICP], n.d.; Observacom, n.d.). I extend these debates deeper into the infrastructural layers that underpin digital journalism while considering their implications in a context of intensifying geopolitical competition.

Definitions and Conceptual Framework

In mediated communication, there are actors operating various elements of the channel between the emitter and the receiver (Eco, 1994, p. 90). This article offers a macrolevel evaluation of whether the infrastructure intermediaries underlying the Latin American news ecosystem represent a commercial and geopolitical risk to the ecosystem. In this section, I specify how Musiani's (2022) approach to analyzing power dynamics through the study of infrastructures can be deployed to interrogate the autonomy of the media industry in Latin America.

This control point analysis expands critiques previously articulated by the NAM in the 1980s, which stated communication infrastructure dependencies were being leveraged for geopolitical purposes. While the NAM focused on broadcast media and news agencies, this article shows how similar dynamics affect digital infrastructure.

The Internet is an intricate web of interconnected systems, making it difficult to fully trace the precise ways in which power is wielded over and within it (Aguerre et al., 2024). Nonetheless, both governments and companies exercise narrow forms of control over information flows (Flew, 2024). This realization led David Clark (2012) and Laura DeNardis (2012) to assert that power brokers are reestablishing their influence by identifying, nurturing, and managing crucial levers within the network, which these scholars refer to as points of control (Clark, 2012; DeNardis, 2012).

I use control point analysis (Clark, 2012; DeNardis, 2012) to evaluate whether third parties can limit the ability of journalists to reach their audience. Within this system, a point of control arises when a single entity can exert influence over a sizable portion of any of the intermediating technologies, thereby affecting the performance of the channel. While related, a point of control differs from monopoly power. Monopoly power focuses on market dominance and pricing leverage within a defined market, while control points identify infrastructural positions where a single actor can interrupt flows regardless of market

structure. A point of control can exist even in areas lacking a formal market. Clark (2012), for example, discusses the Border Gateway Protocol (BGP) decisions executed by engineers based on technical needs, rather than market pricing. Meanwhile, DeNardis (2012) discusses the power exercised by the Domain Name System (DNS) root zone file through which domain names are managed and which is a natural monopoly under the control of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Conversely, a dominant market player may have a point of control but be unable to exploit it if switching costs are low or if its own governance structures inhibit its ability to act over it.

This analysis builds on Nechushtai's (2018) concept of infrastructural capture while extending it beyond platform-media relationships to encompass the broader media stack, including hosting, payment systems, and other technologies on which digital news depends. In line with Simon's (2022) approach, I refer to control, which means "effecting actions, and/or ordering, shaping, or limiting another agent's capability to act and defining the framework of their possible actions" (p. 1839). I prefer the term "control" because it denotes both the existence of a spectrum and a dynamic relation, while "capture" suggests a more static state.

This article therefore contributes to a growing body of scholarship extending the focus of the political economy of media literature from media ownership to the backend infrastructural layers that enable digital newsrooms to operate. Political economy is deployed as an explanatory lens across three dimensions. I first document structural concentration by mapping which firms control critical infrastructural layers. I then identify control points where this infrastructural ownership translates into potential leverage over information flows. Lastly, I discuss these dependencies in the context of broader center-periphery power asymmetries and governance challenges (Bizberge et al., 2023; Gómez, 2022; NAM, 1979), extending Latin American political economy scholarship on media concentration and dependency (Bolaño et al., 2012; Mastrini & Becerra, 2017) to digital infrastructure. This approach refines decolonial critiques by identifying precise technical layers where infrastructural control can constrain media autonomy to support the claim that informational sovereignty e.g., and journalistic autonomy require observing the existence and behavior of various infrastructural providers across several layers of a rapidly evolving media stack.

Methods

The method developed in this article contributes to media studies by sharpening the lens through which we observe power dynamics in the news ecosystem. It complements previous studies on consolidation of media ownership (Arsenault & Castells, 2008; Birkinbine & Gómez, 2020) by offering a "zoom in to the technical components of digital infrastructure" that support digital journalism (Musiani, 2022, p. 791).

The mapping presented in this article expands on methods developed by Flensburg and Lai (2020) and Sjøvaag et al. (2024). To assess infrastructural dependency in Latin America, I first identify key measurement sites, defining them more narrowly than these scholars (excluding, e.g., Internet exchange points and undersea cables), but digging deeper around the edges (including payments, advertisers, and others). While websites appear as a unit, they are an ensemble of technologies developed

and often operated by specialized third parties. To narrow the focus, I concentrate on critical elements, defined as those necessary for an organization to operate autonomously.

Building on the existing literature, I identified 11 critical components of this infrastructural ensemble, illustrated in Figure 1. For clarity, I represent these elements as integral parts of the channel they support.

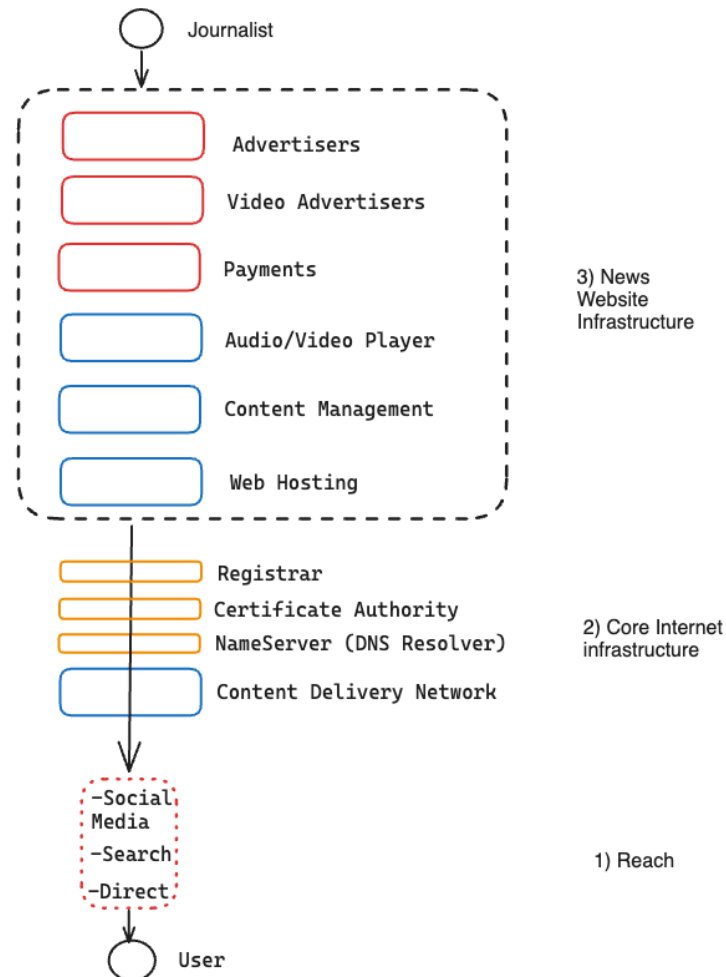


Figure 1. Critical elements of a digital news media ensemble.³

³ The selection and presentation of elements benefited from background interviews with three engineers overseeing the backend operations of three major news media companies who requested to remain anonymous.

Elements

Reach

This section focuses on the last-mile intermediaries that connect the public with news. I use data from Similarweb (<https://www.similarweb.com/>), a leading traffic analytics company, to evaluate the proportion of traffic each website receives in the form of direct traffic, search traffic, paid search traffic, social networks,⁴ e-mail, and referral from third-party websites. Similarweb employs various signals, including direct measurement from the assessed websites and partnerships with third parties that collect similar data (Similarweb Knowledge Center, n.d.).

Core Internet Infrastructure

This section includes four elements generally used by high-traffic websites. The first is content delivery networks (CDNs), a distributed storage service that maintains copies of original content in locations closer to users. CDNs have become essential to the Internet architecture, where content is rarely delivered from the original hosting service. Data for this element were collected from SimilarTech (<https://similartech.com/>), a website associated with Similarweb. The other three elements consist of the name server (or domain name system [DNS] resolver) that translates the user-friendly string of letters we typically associate with a website's address into a numerical format that enables machines to locate the requested information. The certificate authority, in turn, is responsible for validating the identity of websites, ensuring users and browsers can trust that a website is indeed what it claims to be. Lastly, registrars are responsible for assigning domain names (like Amazon.com).

News Website Infrastructure

The core elements allow a newsroom to operate online. Among the service provision elements (bottom three within this section, in blue) are Web hosting (server space, services, and file maintenance), content management systems (CMSs; a central interface for publishing and editing content), and the audio/video player (rendering MP3, JPG, PNG files for Web browsers). Among the elements associated with revenue (top three in this section, in red) are payments (intermediaries that handle subscriptions), advertisers (managing targeted ads aimed at reaching specific customer segments), and video advertisers (managing video-focused ads).

Data Collection

Having defined the sites, data for each of the elements were collected by consulting the information available for each media outlet. This task was primarily performed by introducing the URL of each media outlet into specialized databases, including Similarweb, SimilarTech, and WhoIS, as shown in Table 1. When more than one provider was mentioned for a service, both were introduced. Missing data

⁴ Similarweb includes YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Reddit, and other smaller channels within this category.

were logged in as such. After a thorough preliminary scoping, a structured form with preloaded options was used. This helped eliminate typing errors and accelerate the data collection process. Random manual checks were performed on the source code of the websites to confirm consistency in cases where providers are visible. Data were collected between May 10 and May 17, 2024. A raw file is made available for reuse and replication.⁵

Table 1. Data Sources.

Element	Layer	Source
Media website URL	Background	<i>DuckDuckGo search + Wikipedia check</i>
Advertiser	3) News Website Infrastructure	<i>SimilarTech</i>
Payments	3) News Website Infrastructure	<i>SimilarTech</i>
Video Advertiser	3) News Website Infrastructure	<i>SimilarTech</i>
Audio/Video player	3) News Website Infrastructure	<i>SimilarTech</i>
Content Management	3) News Website Infrastructure	<i>SimilarTech</i>
Web Hosting	3) News Website Infrastructure	<i>SimilarTech</i>
Registrar	2) Core Internet Infrastructure	<i>WhoIS</i>
Certificate Authority	2) Core Internet Infrastructure	<i>Open URL and manually click on the browser lock icon on the URL bar (Firefox)</i>
DNS Resolver (primary)	2) Core Internet Infrastructure	<i>WhoIs</i>
CDNs	2) Core Internet Infrastructure	<i>SimilarTech</i>
Traffic Source	1) Reach	<i>Similarweb</i>

Sample

The sample follows a purposive and exploratory case selection strategy aimed at examining infrastructural dependencies among news organizations for which website-based digital operations constitute a central channel of news production and distribution. I selected 18 digital news media outlets from six Latin American countries: Argentina (Infobae, La Nacion, Clarin), Brazil (Globo, Uol, Brasil 247),

⁵ Underlying data: <https://drive.proton.me/urls/SGDSYKQK8M#2CSLrNrWP1vD>.

Colombia (El Tiempo, Semana, El Espectador), Mexico (El Universal, Uno TV, Record),⁶ Peru (RPP, La Republica, El Comercio), and Uruguay (El Pais, El Observador, Montevideo Portal). These were selected based on a criterion of representativity and prominence, as defined in collaboration with two regional experts. I cover almost 70% of the Latin American population with a selection of leading news media companies from Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina. Some of the selected outlets, like Argentine Infobae, are being read across the continent. This strategic focus on prominent outlets is justified by their role in shaping regional information flows and setting infrastructural precedents, though it does not capture the full diversity of Latin American media ecosystems. Uruguay and Peru are small in population, one is on the Pacific and the other on the Atlantic Ocean, and there are large development differences between them, thus playing the role of offering contrasts in terms of media infrastructure. Future research could expand the sample to countries like Chile (commercially closer to China) or Guatemala (with a lower income and a much smaller population).

Results and Analysis

For each element, I analyze results first at the aggregate level, then examine variance across outlets. An interactive graph is available for readers to disaggregate information for specific outlets or providers (Ortiz-Freuler, 2026). Following the flow proposed in Figure 1, I structure the analysis into three sections. The graphs are best interpreted as cross-sections of the channel between the journalist and the public, where dominance by a few actors might indicate there is a point of control that can be leveraged to limit the ability of sending a message through the channel.

Reach

As shown in Figure 1, there is a gap between the public and the media that must be bridged. Readers can access content directly by typing the website's address into a browser or indirectly through various intermediaries. Figure 2 shows that, on average, the sampled media outlets rely on third parties for over 50% of their reach.⁷

⁶ While Televisa is Mexico's largest media conglomerate, *televisa.com* has low traffic (Mexico rank ~3,000) compared with selected outlets (rank < 150). *Nmas.com.mx*, controlled by a Televisa subsidiary, is within range and should be included in future research. *Record* was included to explore whether sports-focused outlets exhibit different infrastructural patterns; however, no major differences were noted.

⁷ E-mail referrals and some platforms strip referral links, so traffic might be undercounted.

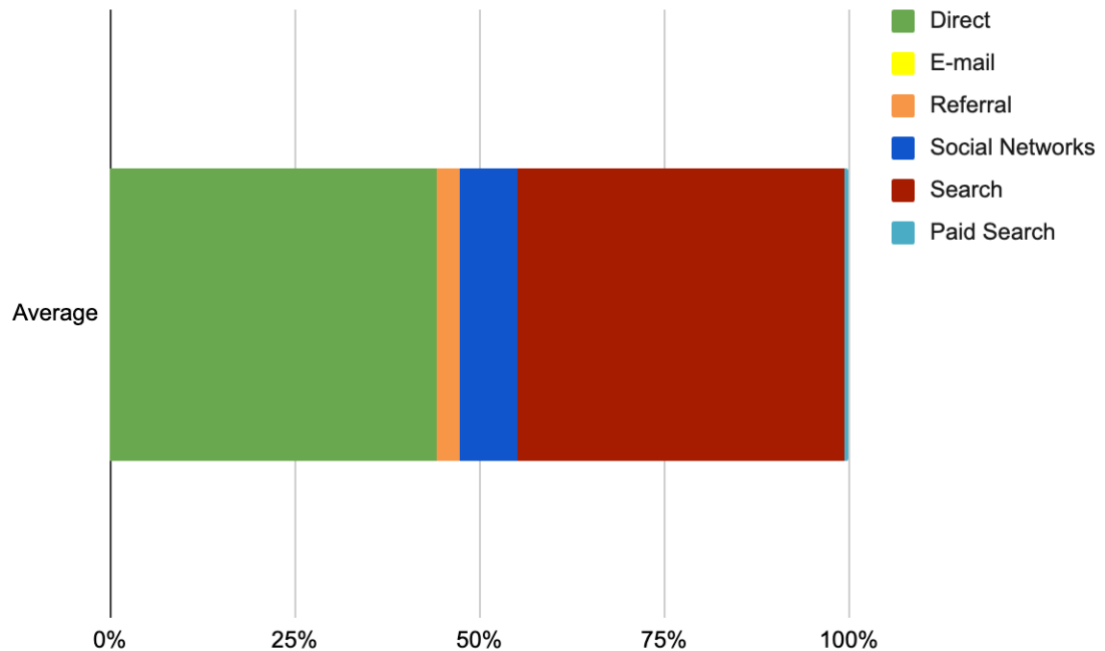


Figure 2. Cross section of the reach segment of the communication channel: Average proportion of traffic received by selected Latin American media outlets, categorized by source.

On average, search accounted for 44.4% of the traffic to the selected media, while direct traffic contributed 44.1%. The variance among these outlets for search was notable, ranging from 30.4 to 64.4%. The finding that search and social media play a key intermediation role is aligned with global user survey data collected by the Reuters Institute (Newman et al., 2025). In turn, social media represented an average of 7.8% of traffic referrals, ranging from 4.3% to 14% across outlets. Together, search and social networks accounted for over 51% of traffic to the selected media.

From a commercial perspective, search engines and social networks present significant challenges because of market consolidation and inherent conflicts of interest. Google has dominated the search market in Latin America for the past five years, controlling between 88 and 96% in the selected countries, while its global market share averages around 90% (StatCounter, 2026a).⁸ The market of social networking sites is dominated by Meta. Across the selected countries, if we combine Meta's Facebook with its sister platform, Instagram, they hold between 59 and 86% of the market, while YouTube (owned by Alphabet) is at 5–34% (StatCounter, 2026b).⁹ The degree of dependency on Alphabet and Meta can be

⁸ StatCounter collects traffic data directly from websites. These figures are in line with data disclosed during antitrust investigations (Competition and Markets Authority, 2025; *United States v. Google LLC*, 2024).

⁹ In line with estimates derived from Pew surveys in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico (Poushter, 2024).

considered a point of control between the public and media outlets (Poell et al., 2023). This control can be consequential. For instance, when Facebook altered its curation algorithm in 2018, some media outlets reported traffic drops of up to 20 percentage points (McNally & Bastos, 2025; Vogelstein, 2018).

These companies face significant conflicts of interest, as they are primarily funded by advertising and thus compete with the very media they distribute (Geradin & Katsifis, 2020). Advertising accounts for approximately 80% of Alphabet's revenue and 98% of Meta's (Alphabet, 2024; Meta, 2025). Since Google displays content snippets directly in search results, users often do not click through to publishers' websites; estimates suggest that 60–75% of searches end without a click (Iliadis & Ford, 2023; Natividad, 2022). Meanwhile, according to a study by the Pew Research Center published in 2025, the percentage of clicks on links in pages with AI summaries was just 1% (Chapekis & Lieb, 2025). The lack of click-throughs means users are not exposed to the ads run by the outlets that generated the content, but rather to ads on Google (or Facebook), which curated it. This challenge fueled many newspapers' demand for revenue-sharing mechanisms, including the snippet tax.

Meta and Alphabet have leveraged this point of control during negotiations. In Spain and Germany, where newly established rules required revenue sharing, Alphabet directed its Google News branch to remove local media outlets from its app. Consequently, some affected outlets in Spain experienced a 30% drop in traffic (Saiz García, 2022). Similarly, Facebook pressured the Australian government by removing the pages of media outlets, which was followed by a 20 percentage-point decrease in traffic to news sites (Bailo et al., 2021).

Observing the data through a geopolitical lens, risk increases significantly, as all the leading technology companies managing popular social media and search engines in the region are legally based in the United States. The algorithms that shape the reach of information on these platforms affect political processes. Research indicates that modifications to what users are exposed to can influence voter turnout (Corbyn, 2012). These companies actively shape the information landscape about conflicts, such as in Palestine and Ukraine (Taha, 2020). YouTube deplatformed Russian media outlets like RT and Sputnik, while Facebook removed their pages, and Apple blocked their apps (Hearns-Branaman, 2024).

Concerns with social media and search companies can be grounded in their ability to deplatform newspapers, without needing to address the opaque dynamics of algorithmic demotion. Given their documented role in surveillance programs and public affirmation of support for U.S. government and military initiatives (Rev, 2020), trust in how they wield their geopolitical power is limited. For instance, EU courts have repeatedly ruled that U.S. companies are unable to safeguard EU citizens' personal data from espionage when stored in the United States (Tracol, 2020).

In short, the ability, effectiveness, and willingness to leverage the reach portion of the channel as a point of control exemplify how U.S. infrastructure could be deployed to advance geopolitical goals.

Core Internet Infrastructure

Commercial risks are notably high only for the CDN element within this cross section. In contrast, geopolitical risk is elevated across all elements.

As shown in Figure 3(a), two elements initially emerge as problematic from a market perspective. The first is the certificate authority. Let's Encrypt, a U.S. nonprofit that provides free certificates for transport layer security (Aas, 2014), is used by 50% of outlets in the sample. However, due to low switching costs and the option for websites to have more than one provider (DigiCert, 2017), Let's Encrypt does not appear to have established an effective point of control.

The second problematic element is CDNs, where Akamai (20%), Amazon (17.5%), Cloudflare (22.5%), and jsDeliver (25%) hold significant shares of the market. This is a segment where most media outlets (13) had more than one provider, while only three relied on a single provider. Although media outlets can theoretically make their content available through their primary server, these servers typically lack the capacity to handle the volume of traffic the media receives. Therefore, if a CDN decides to restrict service, it can lead to a website crash.

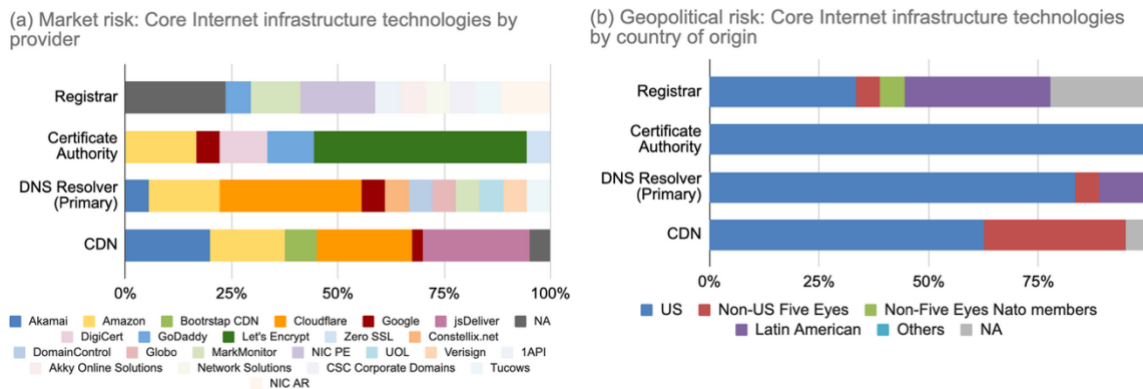


Figure 3. Cross section of the core infrastructure segment.

From a geopolitical perspective (Figure 3b), within this segment, all elements except the registrar are predominantly controlled by companies subject to U.S. law. The certificate authority shows complete control at 100%, while CDNs are mostly under U.S. jurisdiction at 65% (with the remainder subject to UK law, a member of the Five Eyes alliance led by the United States). In the case of the DNS resolver, the United States can exercise its jurisdiction directly over 85% of the market within this cross section of the channel, with an additional 5.6% managed by a Canadian company, also part of the Five Eyes alliance. Taken together, they create the structural conditions under which U.S. authorities could exercise jurisdictional leverage that functions as a point of control within this cross section of the channel.

In the case of the DNS resolver, in 2021, the United States demonstrated its willingness and ability to leverage its jurisdiction over it to shut down media from Iran. Specifically, it instructed Verisign

to seize the domains used by Iranian media ending in .com and .net, as well as .tv (Hashemzadegan & Sabooripour, 2023). The .tv, while formally assigned to the Pacific Island of Tuvalu, is in practice managed by Verisign, a U.S. publicly traded company, which complied with the U.S. seizure order. In the context of the sample under analysis, Verisign is providing services to the Uruguayan outlet Montevideo Portal.

In the case of CDNs, Badiei (2022) noted that in March 2022, a Ukrainian representative requested Cloudflare and Amazon cease serving Russian Web resources. Additionally, in 2019, following a string of U.S. sanctions against Iran, Amazon Web Services effectively blocked Iranians (including unaffiliated civilians) from relying on its infrastructure, which analysts referred to as “a potentially crippling blow” for many businesses (Motamedi, 2019, para. 2). The United States, therefore, not only has formal control over the infrastructure but has also been proven willing to leverage it to exert economic pressure on adversaries.

Website Infrastructure: Cost-Defining Platforms and Service Provision

Figure 4 reveals that market risks are low, while geopolitical risks remain elevated.

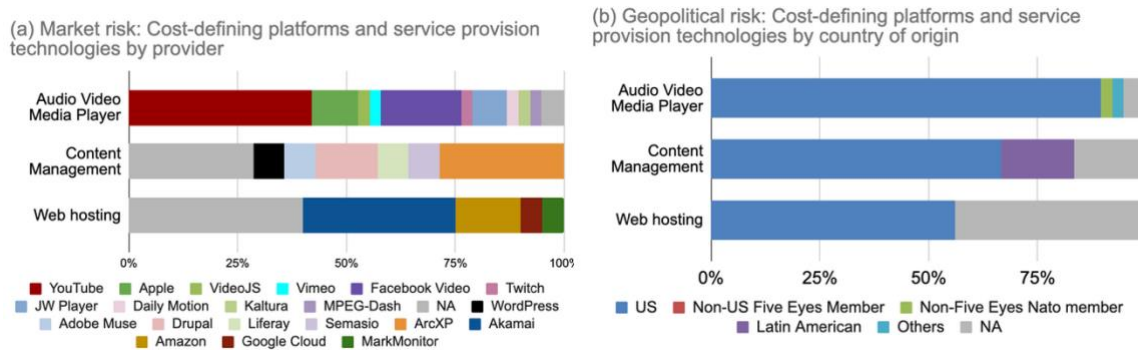


Figure 4. Cross section of the cost-defining infrastructure.

CMSs are crucial for news delivery, supporting newsrooms from the initial draft of an idea to its final publication online. Historically, WordPress has been a dominant player. However, in the 2020s, Jeff Bezos’s Arc XP entered the market and has become the most widely used provider among the sampled media outlets ($n = 4$). Initially developed for the *Washington Post*, which is also owned by Bezos, Arc XP has since been made available to third parties.

Bezos could leverage his substantial resources to implement anticompetitive strategies through Arc XP, akin to those used by Amazon (Khan, 2017). For instance, Arc XP could offer services below the market cost to undercut competitors, while intelligence gathered by Arc XP might be used to penetrate the targeted advertising sector or apply discriminatory pricing against businesses that threaten its interests (Froomkin, 2022; Sharma et al., 2024). Consequently, market consolidation and vertical integration in this segment could enable market leaders to shape the circulation of ideas by creating barriers for competitors.

From a geopolitical perspective, risks are particularly high: Nearly all identified providers in this segment are subject to U.S. law. CMSs are a particularly challenging element because they are difficult to replace. For instance, lockouts like those imposed on Iranian users of GitHub (Fan et al., 2024) and the announced, but later retracted, restrictions to access Adobe accounts in Venezuela (Hall, 2019) can result in substantial information loss or sideline media operations for extended periods. Consequently, the U.S. government could limit access to CMSs, hindering local media’s ability to inform citizens and audiences abroad about regional events.

Website Infrastructure: Access to Revenue

As shown in Figure 5, advertisement elements represent the biggest risk from both a market and a geopolitical perspective.

In Figure 5(a), half of the sampled media ($n = 10$) accept payments, and within this subset, many rely on multiple vendors. A similar pattern emerges with video advertising: While the market is more consolidated, most media companies ($n = 16$) also use more than one vendor. In terms of advertising, many outlets engage multiple vendors, but concentration is high, with Facebook, Alphabet, and Microsoft present in over 50% of the sampled outlets.

Moreover, although many outlets use multiple vendors for their advertising operations, nearly all depend on Google Ad Manager (GAM) as their primary ad server. GAM manages ad creatives and orchestration, coordinating technologies on the page and facilitating payment requests from other providers. Consequently, while numerous providers may engage with the website, few would be able to operate effectively without GAM.

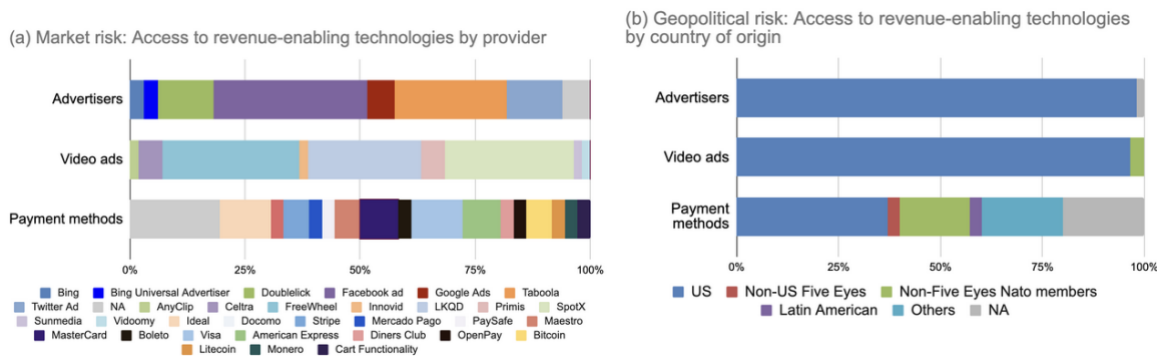


Figure 5. Cross section of the revenue-enabling infrastructure.

Advertising has traditionally been a primary revenue source for the media. However, relying on Alphabet and Meta as infrastructure providers poses a risk, as both companies depend heavily on advertising revenue themselves (Alphabet, 2024; Meta, 2025). This conflict of interest might explain accusations that Google abuses its control over digital infrastructure to strengthen its position in advertising markets (Geradin & Katsifis, 2020). A notable example is Google’s Accelerated Mobile Pages,

which the company initially claimed was intended to enhance user experience. However, researchers suggest 'the main outcome was an increase in Google's control over traffic patterns (Jeffries, 2020).¹⁰

Under a geopolitical lens (Figure 5(b), the consolidation is higher. The advertising sector is completely controlled by U.S. companies. Additionally, 75% of companies managing payment systems in the sample operate under U.S. jurisdiction or that of its closest allies. These elements are particularly vulnerable to sanctions. For instance, following the invasion of Ukraine, Meta, Alphabet, and Twitter implemented demonetization measures against Russian media outlets (Hearn-Branaman, 2024). Similarly, payment processors like Visa and Mastercard suspended their services to Russian media (Shagina, 2022).

Discussion: From a New World Information and Communication Order to Technologies for Active Nonalignment

Dependence on technologies governed by U.S. law ranges between 50 and 100% across all analyzed cross sections of the communication channel. As highlighted for each segment, the commercial and geopolitical risks are not theoretical; they have materialized in real-world scenarios involving U.S. adversaries such as Venezuela, Iran, and Russia, where both public and private sectors were targeted through multinational companies. Thus, the tools have been shown to be effective against large countries, and the U.S. government has shown it is willing to leverage them in geopolitical contests, materializing what Aouragh and Chakravartty (2016) refer to as "infrastructures of empire" (p. 565). That is, if the U.S. government decides its geopolitical goals require these tools to be deployed against Latin American companies, it could significantly hinder the media's ability to reach their audiences. Sanctions designations have increased by 933% since 2000 (U.S. Treasury Department, 2021), with the addition of UN officials to the target list in 2025 signaling a lowering threshold for the use of sanctions.

Acknowledging these risks, some scholars are recovering lessons from 20th-century nonalignment strategies (Fortin et al., 2024). The debates fueling the NAM agenda resemble current concerns. The declaration of 1973, for example, called for the "reorganization of existing communication channels which are a legacy of the colonial past, and which have hampered free, direct and fast communications between [countries]" (NAM, 1973, p. 87). By 1976, NAM operationalized these principles through a Center for Science and Technology Cooperation and a Press Agencies Pool aimed at achieving "balanced and equitable distribution of news" (NAM, 1976, pp. 78, 134). By 1979, Tunisian Information Minister Mustapha Masmoudi (1979) articulated that "information must be understood as a social good and a cultural product, and not as a material commodity" (p. 183). The 1979 Declaration dedicated nine pages to addressing information asymmetries (NAM, 1979, pp. 86–97), while the 1980 McBride-UNESCO report synthesized these concerns elegantly: "The structures of communication are no more neutral than the messages transmitted by the media. Deciding on the infrastructures and technologies to be used is as much based on value judgements as the selection of news" (UNESCO, 1980, p. 32).

¹⁰ Google continued the agenda under Core Web Vitals (Walton, 2024).

While contemporary nonalignment must reckon with a geopolitical landscape involving multiple centers of power and platform-mediated dependencies (Winseck, 2017), NAM principles could become a focal point for coordination between various affected actors. These principles call for solidarity and protective measures against undue pressure from centers of power and the multinationals operating as their conduits. While nonalignment might not directly resolve all the challenges outlined in this study, it can foment a plurality of perspectives on the role of digital infrastructures and, with it, coordination around new technological imaginaries.

Limitations

The first limitation is in scope: This article does not analyze the infrastructure underlying apps. App stores represent a crucial point of control, through which Apple and Alphabet exercise considerable influence worldwide. Another limitation is breadth: The sample consists of 18 media outlets across six countries. While many are among the most prominent in the region, smaller outlets often depend on a narrower set of technologies, with some migrating entirely to platforms like Facebook Pages. More comprehensive coverage of these contrasts would be essential for fully comprehending the information ecosystem. Connected to this challenge is timing: Technologies are regularly tested and replaced, meaning there is a degree of dynamism that a static snapshot cannot capture. There are missing data in some cross-sections, such as Web hosting, which could be addressed through surveys and interviews with media workers.

These limitations indicate that scholarly, commercial, and policy discussions about the risks of infrastructural dependency would benefit from more regular and longitudinal measurement to track changes over time. Developing tools to collect these data without relying on third parties would reduce the opacity. Future work would also benefit from incorporating additional infrastructural elements (e.g., consent management platforms or audio advertising systems), expanding the sample, complementing quantitative mapping with interviews or surveys of newsroom technical staff to triangulate results, and developing an operational typology of risk that more clearly distinguishes among potential, probable, and actualized risk. These approaches would allow for a clearer assessment of how specific infrastructural dependencies evolve and how they affect the autonomy of media organizations, beyond existing debates over media ownership.

Conclusion

This article extends the political economy of media scholarship from ownership concentration to infrastructural control, demonstrating how backend dependencies create commercial and geopolitical vulnerabilities for Latin American news media. Drawing on control point analysis, it connects debates on Internet centralization, the media sector's existential challenges, and longstanding concerns about informational dependency articulated by the NAM and Latin American scholars. These historical grievances remain relevant today.

Several effective points of control were identified. Commercially, the reach cross-section is particularly problematic, with Google and Meta commanding significant market shares, competing for

advertising space, and employing opaque algorithmic curation systems and abusive negotiating tactics. Geopolitically, between 50 and 100% of service providers across these elements operate under U.S. law, leaving Latin American media vulnerable to U.S. government policies. This exposure is concerning given the U.S. government's ability and willingness to leverage its jurisdiction over U.S. multinationals, as evidenced by a 933% rise in sanctions designations since 2000 (U.S. Treasury Department, 2021). Together, these factors suggest that while in the early 2020s, these points of control were being weaponized against countries like Iran, Russia, and Venezuela, there remains a plausible risk that such control points could be leveraged by the United States in future geopolitical negotiations involving Latin American actors.

The first contribution of this article is conceptual. It expands discussions on media freedom by providing an infrastructural lens that shows how a wide variety of actors and dynamics beyond media ownership can shape the ability of journalists to circulate news. In doing so, it also expands the locus of debates on platform dependency beyond Meta and Alphabet, showing how points of control can emerge in different layers of the media stack, including some that are rarely included in conversations on platform power, such as CMSs and CDNs. Since points of control can emerge in various layers of this stack, the exercise of power can move. Thus, even if media companies negotiate distribution deals with Alphabet and Meta, they remain exposed elsewhere.

The second contribution is to reframe digital sovereignty to include risk diversification. Full infrastructural autonomy might be technologically unfeasible in Latin America in the short term, but risk diversification should be on the political agenda: ensuring no single jurisdiction or corporation can unilaterally disrupt the circulation of information.

The third contribution is a historical perspective that challenges narratives of Internet exceptionalism. This article shows the NAM has been arguing since the 1970s that infrastructural autonomy is a prerequisite for people to exercise their right to be informed. As tensions between sectors and territories increase, the principles underlying nonalignment offer a historical reference point for thinking about policy options and their strategic deployment.

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