
Media**Trust**.Lab International Conference
“**Building Trust: Platforms, Local Media and Audiences**”

Faculty of Arts and Letters of the University of Beira Interior
18th and 19th of November 2024

**this
is a **true**
book of
abstracts.**

Livro de Resumos da Conferência Internacional do Mediatrust.Lab

/
Mediatrust.Lab International Conference
Abstract Book

Conferência Internacional
do Mediatrust.Lab
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Mediatrust.Lab
International Conference

18-19 Nov 2024
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Apresentação

Presentation

Esta será a conferência final do MediaTrust.Lab – Laboratório de Media Regionais para a Confiança e Literacia Cívicas, um projeto financiado pela FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (PTDC/COM-JOR/3866/2020) e centrada na desinformação local. “Construir Confiança: Plataformas, Media Regionais e Audiências” é o tema. Porquê? Devido à perda de confiança do público e das audiências nos meios jornalísticos e nos próprios jornalistas e à diluição de fronteiras entre estes conteúdos e outros que circulam em ambientes digitais. Todos os dias assistimos ao crescimento dos “desertos noticiosos”, da desinformação, do populismo e do evitamento das notícias. Neste sentido, as plataformas têm desempenhado um papel importante. Por isso, queremos que esta conferência seja um centro de debate estratégico sobre plataformas, media e audiências. Sempre pensado em torno da dimensão local. Nesse sentido, fazemos dele um pequeno evento, esperando que assim seja mais profícuo para o debate. Aproveite :)

This will be the final MediaTrust.Lab conference – Local Media Lab for Civic Trust and Literacy, a project funded by FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (PTDC/COM-JOR/3866/2020) and focused on local misinformation. “Building Trust: Platforms, Local Media and Audiences” is the motto. Why? Due to the loss of trust by the public and audiences in the news media and in journalists themselves and the blurring of boundaries between this content and others that circulate in digital environments. Every day we see the growth of “news deserts”, disinformation, populism and news avoidance. In this sense, platforms are playing an important role. Therefore, we want this conference to be a center for strategic debate about platforms, media and audiences. Always thinking about the local dimension. In this sense, we make it a small event, hoping that this will be more beneficial for the debate. Enjoy :)

Programa Program

**Universidade da Beira Interior
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Anfiteatro da Parada**

**University of Beira Interior
Faculty of Arts and Letters
Parade Amphitheater**

Day 1 (November 18th)

09:00 am Registration
09:30 am Open session
10:00 am Opening Conference:
**“Lights and shadows of
collaboration to reduce
disinformation”, by Bella Palomo
(Univ. Malaga, Spain)**
11:00 am Coffee break
11:30 am Session 1:
Media Literacy & Youth
01:00 pm Lunch
02:30 pm Special session
03:00 pm Session 2:
News Deserts & Local Resilience
04:30 pm Coffee break
05:00 pm Session 3:
**Local Media, Journalism
& Resilience**

Day 2 (November 19th)

09:00 am Session 4:
**Local News Production
& Consumption**
10:30 am MediaTrust.Lab session
11:30 am Coffee break
12:00 am Closing Conference:
**“News media and
fact-checkers amid an age
of platformization”, by Oscar
Westlund (OsloMet, Norway)**
01:00 pm Closing session

abstracts

Session 1

Media Literacy & Youth

MEASURING THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA EDUCATION ACTIVITIES ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' TRUST IN MEDIA

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This paper presents a thesis project investigating the effects of news media education activities in a school environment on young people's level of news literacy. The rise of social media alongside traditional news outlets (television, newspapers, radio) is expanding the media landscape, leading to information overload (Dilevko, 1998; Kajimoto & Fleming, 2020; Vraga et al., 2021). Journalists have to adapt to these changes to stand out from the amount of information available (Rebillard, 2006; Tandoc et al., 2018). The general confidence in news and politics is declining, while a fear of "fake news" increases (Bowe, 2019; Higdon, 2020; Tornero et al., 2018). Yet in a democracy, it is essential for people to have access to reliable and verifiable information, to enable them to act as empowered citizens (Swart, 2021; Tamboer, Daalmans, et al., 2022).

Mainly defined as a sub-dimension of media literacy, news literacy refers to the abilities and knowledge needed to access, analyze, and evaluate journalistic information, and the understanding of the changing informational context (Guldin et al., 2021; Maksl et al., 2017). There are various definitions of the concept covering dimensions such as knowledge of the media environment, motivation to consume news, individual news practices or on trust in the news media, which will be the focus of this paper.

News literacy scales can be used to assess citizens' attitudes and behaviors towards these informational changes. Knowing their practices helps to develop ways of teaching them how to become active citizens. School students constitute an interesting audience: studies have shown that young people tend

to overestimate their news consumption abilities (Tamboer, Kleemans, et al., 2022). They also use media differently from adults, which is reflected in their various approaches to news consumption (Swart, 2021).

This research seeks to measure the effects of news media education workshops on high school students' trust in news media. The paper rests on a case study of activities conducted in high schools in France by a journalism school. Led by journalists, these workshops engage students in the creation of a news project from scratch.

Pre- and post-questionnaires covering six aspects of news literacy were developed and deployed in high school classes. The concept of trust in the news media was questioned through a five-item Likert scale, in which students were asked to position themselves individually. The five items were selected from a pre-existing scale (Maksl et al., 2015), then adapted and translated to suit the French context. The current results show a slight positive progression for all scale items. The survey included a control group, allowing additional analysis to determine the significance of the progression difference with the evaluated group. These analyses reveal a significant difference in progression for three of the five items on the scale. This suggests that engaging students in the production of news media contents, as part of media education workshops, may play a positive role in students' level of trust.

The research will also question and explore the link between trust in the media and the motivation to consume news, as well as between trust and the ability to judge the reliability of news.

Keywords: News Literacy; Journalism; Media Education Activities; Trust

BRING YOUNG PEOPLE CLOSER TO THE JOURNALISTIC PROCESS: REFLECTIONS ON DIGITAL NEWSROOM FROM YOUNDIGITAL PROJECT

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Young audiences' incidental (Boczkowski et al., 2018) and multi-platform news consumption, fuelled by low levels of trust, have posed challenges for journalism (Newman, 2019). Digital media are the preferred platforms for engaging with news, intertwining consumption practices with producing content. These aspects have implications for conducting research with young audiences on media habits that guarantee that their experiences and knowledge are valued.

To address the challenge of capturing the relationships between youth (15-24) and news, this presentation delves into the learnings from an ongoing Portuguese project centered on youth and news, combining conventional approaches with digital participatory methods, and encompassing diverse youth demographics, such as those in Portuguese state custodial facilities for juvenile offenders. A digital newsroom, developed through co-creative participation and targeted at young people worldwide in multiple languages, was conceptualised as a research and creative expression hub. This decision emerged from various considerations, including the intrinsic affinity of younger audiences with digital media (Herrero-Diz et al., 2016), pedagogical principles of experiential learning (Dewey, 1971; Freire, 1970), the efficacy of youth co-production endeavours (Lim & Tan,

2020; Ravenscroft et al., 2020), and the potential of media creation in fostering learning and civic engagement (Dahlgren, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2006).

The platform's design process adopted a bottom-up approach to guarantee the newsroom resonated with young people's visions and needs. The team actively listened to their perspectives and preferences through interviews and engagement with diverse users, ensuring the platform's usability. Young people were invited to address issues and topics of interest aligned to the 2030 Agenda.

Preliminary results show that this media participatory approach can bring young people closer to the journalistic process, cementing their engagement with news and civic practices, strengthening their resilience to disinformation, and exposing them to perspectives and realities different from their own.

Keywords: Digital Citizenship, Digital Newsroom, Journalism, News, Youth

RESILIENT JOY: HOW JOURNALISTS USE HUMOR TO COPE ENGAGE WITH TROUBLED AUDIENCES

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In order to perform their normative function of keeping audiences informed, journalists need to navigate a host of challenging working conditions: ranging from precarious work to emotional labor in the coverage of tough topics in the newsroom. Scholarship has reflected the novel mechanisms journalists have employed to do this, ranging from the implementation of artificial intelligence to collaboration with audience partners. Yet there is an older form of working resiliency that has received less attention within scholarship: humor. Through the lens of joy as a news value (Parks, 2021), this study draws on interviews with 21 journalists from across the United States to explore how they manifest humor as a means to build on audience trust and enhance the journalist-audience relationship.

In Parks (2021) framework, joy has eight pillars—generosity, gratitude, forgiveness, acceptance, humor, perspective, etc.—that not only describe the work of journalism, but motivate it. Indeed, Perreault (2023) argued that the opportunity to serve the audience proved to be essential in both motivating journalists to enter the field and also encouraging them to stay in the field. Service-oriented professional roles and the opportunity to build authentic emotional connections with the audience help journalists navigate their career and—even when the coverage is dark—circumscribes journalists attention to their mission within the field (Perreault & Mellado, 2024).

In this study, we postulate that these eight joyful pillars, in journalism, are better understood as three “clusters” of support for newswork: altruistic joy—other-oriented joy, introspective joy—joy emerging from journalists reflections on what news offers them, and finally, resilient joy—joy manifested to help journalists and their audiences cope with the wider world.

Journalists relationship with the audience has been increasingly frayed—particularly in the US—as a result of attacks from far-right politicians, disinformation by bad actors, the expansion of information disseminators from outside of journalism and, worth acknowledging, journalists own challenges in adapting to shifts in the audience (Nelson, 2021). Indeed, as Nelson (2021) argues, journalists conceptualization of the audience often says more about journalists than about their audience; the tools employed by journalists to understand their audience often offer far less insight into the public than journalists imagine.

But perhaps the tools that journalists best need to connect with their audience aren't new ones, but old ones. The findings from this study suggest that humor operates as a central hub of resilient joy, offering journalists the means to enrich their relationships with their audience while maintaining their the stability of their normative mission.

Keywords: joy, emotional labor, audience hostility, humor

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN DISINFORMATION AND MEDIA LITERACY IN PORTUGAL

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In recent years, the rise of disinformation has emerged as a significant challenge to media ecosystems worldwide, and Portugal is no exception. Misinformation has surged due to the “financial situation and vulnerability of the Portuguese media ecosystem,” a reality that has compromised the ability of traditional media outlets to effectively combat the spread of falsehoods (Digital News Report, 2023). Despite this increase in misinformation, public trust in journalists remains remarkably high in Portugal, with 40% of the population expressing trust in journalists, the highest rate in the European Union. However, while considerable attention has been placed on the roles of media organizations, digital platforms, and audiences in addressing disinformation, the role of the public relations (PR) industry has been largely overlooked (Edwards, 2021).

This presentation explores the crucial yet often underexamined role that public relations professionals play in both the proliferation and mitigation of disinformation in Portugal. It argues that PR practitioners are positioned at the intersection of corporate communication, media relations, and public trust, making them key actors in the disinformation landscape. However, the public relations industry’s involvement in combating fake news has been insufficiently recognized in academic discourse and policy discussions. By focusing solely on the roles of media organizations and audiences, the broader communication ecosystem is not fully addressed, leaving a significant gap in strategies to combat misinformation.

Argument: This presentation argues that the public relations industry in Portugal has a dual

role in the disinformation debate: both as a potential contributor to the spread of false narratives and as a critical player in mitigating misinformation through strategic communications and media literacy initiatives. The argument put forward is that the fight against disinformation cannot be effective without integrating PR professionals into media literacy efforts and broader anti-misinformation strategies.

Conceptual and Methodological Framework: The presentation draws upon a combination of public relations theory, media literacy frameworks, and disinformation studies. It examines how PR navigates the challenges posed by misinformation in a financially vulnerable media landscape. The study employs a content analysis of public relations strategies and campaigns in Portugal that have either contributed to or sought to counteract misinformation.

The research explores the ethical implications of PR practices, especially in situations where organizations might be tempted to manipulate information to protect their reputations. By incorporating media literacy concepts, the study also evaluates how PR professionals can serve as cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1984) between media platforms and the public, fostering a more informed and critically engaged audience.

Expected Results: The study anticipates identifying key areas where the PR industry can be more effectively integrated into disinformation countermeasures, such as through collaboration with journalists and media outlets, as well as public education initiatives.

In conclusion, this presentation calls for greater recognition of the public relations industry’s role in shaping media narratives and combating disinformation.

Keywords: public relations, media relations, disinformation

abstracts

Session 2

News Deserts & Local Resilience

OVERVIEW OF THE CRITICAL INFORMATION NEEDS AND ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL MEDIA WITH THEIR AUDIENCE IN 27 EU COUNTRIES

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Local media represent an important and relevant ingredient of democratic societies, due to their essential role in providing information to local communities. On the one hand, they satisfy critical information needs to local audiences so that they can make informed decisions (Friedland et al, 2012; Usher et al, 2023). On the other hand, they engage with local audiences more directly and thus build more trusting relationships and social cohesion within community (Shearer et al., 2024, Wenzel, 2020, Gulyas and Baines 2020).

The present contribution investigates whether local media provide sufficient public interest news, and whether they engage with their respective audience in Europe, relying on the results of the report “Uncovering news deserts in Europe: risks and opportunities for local and community media in the EU”, recently published by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) in the context of the Local Media for Democracy project (LM4D). It defines news deserts as geographic or administrative areas, or a social community, where it is difficult or impossible to access sufficient, reliable, diverse information from independent local, regional and community media (Verza et al, 2024).

The LM4D research specifically addressed the risks of news desertification across the EU through five indicators (granularity of infrastructure, market and reach, safety of local journalists, editorial independence, and social inclusiveness), which leaned on the renowned

methodology of the Media Pluralism Monitor, a holistic tool aimed at detecting the risks to media pluralism and media freedom in Member States and candidate countries (CMPF, Bleyer-Simon et al, 2024). The LM4D indicators were evaluated by local researchers situated in each of the 27 EU countries. The social inclusiveness indicator, specifically, dealt with coverage and representation of minorities, prominent media reporting on marginalized groups, while expanding on the relevance for local journalism of active engagement with the public (Hess and Waller, 2016; Dalman Eek & Lepoutier, 2023; Torre et al, 2024) and of addressing the critical information needs of the communities served by the news services (Friedland, 2023, Bisiani et al, 2021). The results at the variable level showed that the one on engagement, as well as the one on critical information fulfillment, presented the lowest aggregate risks, suggesting decent connection of local journalism with local communities across Europe.

Based on this, the contribution will provide a missing comparative analysis on the relationship between local media and critical information needs and engagement, in Europe. Finally, it will give suggestions for future research such as the necessity for more specific case studies into the relationship between audience and local media that target engagement and critical information needs as well as building an informal network for improving the local information and the status of local media in the current media systems in Europe.

Keywords: news deserts; local media engagement; critical information needs, local media for democracy; media pluralism monitor.

THERE WILL BE NEWS: CAN JOURNALISM STUDENTS COVER THE NEWS DESERT GAP?

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According to the News Deserts Europe 2022: Portugal Report (Jerónimo et al., 2022), “out of the 308 existing municipalities, 166 (53.9%) are news deserts or semi-deserts or at risk of becoming ones” (p. 20). Data from the same report also shows that “over a quarter of Portugal’s municipalities are in some type of news desert, which means they don’t have frequent or satisfactory news cover” (p. 20). On the other side of the Atlantic, in Brazil, Atlas Notícias report shows that “for the first time since the research began to be conducted in 2017, the number of municipalities considered news deserts is lower than the number of cities that count at least one journalistic communication vehicle serving its population” (Lüdtke & Spagnuolo, 2023). Despite the contraction evidenced in the 2023 report, and which shows “an 8.6% reduction in total news deserts”, the truth is that there are still “2,712 cities and 26.7 million Brazilians without access to news about where they live” (Lüdtke & Spagnuolo, 2023).

Considering the data from both reports, in this investigation, we seek to: 1) see if, in territories considered to be news deserts, there are higher education institutions with courses in the field of communication or journalism; 2) in cases where we find these courses, register if those include any academic media; 3) when there are no higher education institutions or courses, investigate about the possibility of a lack of course offerings in some areas worsening the situation of news deserts; 4) understand whether the decrease in news deserts that has happened in Brazil, can be linked to the emergence and growth of community communication.

The hypothesis, in line with other investigations already developed, namely in the United States (Finneman et al., 2022), is that students of communication and journalism can have an essential role in mitigating so-called news deserts, either through the participation in academic media, creation of news startups or other informal ways of informing about what happens in their communities.

This research also follows some recent studies alerting that “the concept of news deserts means different things in deferent settings and contexts, and is interpreted depending on what perspective the researcher takes” (Gulyas et al., 2023, p. 287). According to the authors, “the presence of a news desert is not a simple question of a locality having or not having a local media outlet. The concept is better understood as processes affecting access and quality of local news involving places, news media outlets and production, communities, and audiences” (Gulyas et al., 2023, p. 287). In this context, we intend to see, through some case studies, if some of the territories considered to be news deserts cannot be served in terms of other sources of information, especially considering that “news deserts need to be critically questioned in relation to the concepts of news, journalism, and media, especially in the digital environment, where definitions of these key terms are often ambiguous and susceptible to changes” (Gulyas et al., 2023, p. 287).

Keywords: news deserts; journalism students; academic media; community communication.

RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL AND COMMUNITY MEDIA IN EUROPE: THE PORTUGUESE CASE

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This communication is the result of a thorough investigation into the risks and opportunities for local media and community media in the EU, specifically Portugal. It is part of the comprehensive 'Uncovering News Deserts in Europe' report (2024), promoted by the Local Media for Democracy project which examined risks and opportunities for local and community media in the 27 EU member states. Our focus on Portugal not only provides valuable insights but also highlights the main differences between this country and other European states.

News desert is considered "a geographic or administrative area, or a social community, where it is difficult or impossible to access sufficient, reliable, diverse information from independent local, regional and community media" (Verza et al., 2024, p.5). Taking into account this holistic approach to the concept, three research questions are answered: RQ1) What are the risks and opportunities for local and community media in Portugal?; RQ2) What are the best innovative local and community media practices in Portugal?; RQ3) What are the main specificities of this sector in Portugal compared to other countries?

The risks and opportunities for local and community media in Portugal were assessed through 54 indicators related, for example, to the number of media outlets, economic and political conditions, degree of social inclusiveness, the safety of journalists or existence of innovative local and community media projects. Then, a comparison is made between the findings of these indicators among all the 27 EU member states studied.

Results reveal that the highest risk for local and community media has been noted for the social inclusiveness indicator and the lowest for the safety of journalists. There is also a concern for market plurality and a low representation of marginalised groups in both public service media and private media. According to the Media Trust.Lab 2022 study on news deserts in Portugal, that was a major source for completing the indicators regarding geographical situation of the media, more than half of the municipalities can be said to be in a "news desert situation" or on the way to becoming one. Besides this, the absence of regulation regarding community media in Portugal is one of the main differences when looking at the overall state of this sector in the EU.

Keywords: Local media; community media; news deserts

FAVELA COLLECTIVES AND SOCIAL ACTION: NEW FORMS OF ACTION AND PRESENCE OF COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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The present work aims to analyze the formation, presence and performance of community communication collectives as a new form of social action in favelas and outskirts, as they have become one of the main sources of internal information, campaigning and effective action as community groups since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. They have consolidated themselves as active and emergency mobilizing components. For the analysis, a cartography will be carried out to quantify and understand the communication and mobilization collectives created in 2020. The idea is to reflect on the presence of a new structure organized and led by community media and aligned with the idea/message of mutual support mobilized by local identity. The research aims to understand how these various fronts were organized, their objectives and motivations, how they acted and established themselves as local references in combating the consequences of the pandemic. It is also intended to contextualize them by identifying similarities and differences with previously established forms of historical and collective social actions in favelas from the 1970s/80s/90s, with or without a focus on communication. The objective is still to understand whether they inaugurated a new form of community/social organization that goes beyond the favela and the pandemic period in a society marked by strong individualism and in the context of a country governed by an extreme right and which has the popular classes as enemies.

Keywords: community communication, collectives, mobilization, favela, Covid-19

abstracts

Session 3

Local Media, Journalism
& Resilience

SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE OF LOCAL MEDIA: LESSONS LEARNED FROM “OLD DOGS” AND “NEW GUNS”

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Crises recur cyclically in journalistic work and media existence. As many scholars showed, disruption brings “the changing dynamics in the journalistic field seen as a form of disruption, upsetting familiar ways of doing things” (Røe Mathisen, 2023: 8). If we add to this bleak outlook the tendency of local media to be fragile (Jenkins & Nielsen, 2020), the consequences for their existence can be fatal, leading to the emergence of local news deserts (Waschková Císařová, 2023). A typology of disruptions can be sketched along a typical view of media development oriented towards economics and technology: cutbacks, downsizing, weakening traditional business model; digital changes which affect workflow, user preferences or audience behaviour (Røe Mathisen, 2023).

However, media and journalists manage and survive crises and repeatedly find ways to adapt to the changing conditions of their existence. So let’s turn the argument around, re-orientate it (Eide & Sjøvaag, 2016) – not to dwell on disruptions, but to look at how resilience and sustainability are built. More particularly, how journalists respond to changes in their working environment, their practices, norms and values (Finneman et al., 2023), when „disruption provides a powerful vocabulary of motivation and justification for change” (Røe Mathisen, 2023: 10). Moreover, how the sustainability of local media is created through this resilience. Journalists’ resilience can be seen as thinking about ““under what conditions” a society can remain open and operational despite a very complex situation. The experience that a [medium] is not powerless, even if it is also in crisis, is a starting point for possible unexpected and creative solutions” (Koubová & Baronová, 2023: 415).

Resilience among journalists can be for example demonstrated through team dynamics, reaffirming commitment, exploring personal development and self-reflection (Ramos & Suizo, 2024).

In view of the above, the aim of my text is to focus on how local journalists build their resilience, their media sustainability, and how they perceive crises that affect their journalistic work.

My paper is based on two sets of qualitative data, in-depth interviews: (1) 33 interviews with local newspapers’ journalists in 2019 and 2020; (2) 15 interviews with local journalists from both newspapers and online local media collected from March to August 2024. This sample allows me both to reflect the shift in perceptions of crises, resilience and sustainability over time among identical interviewees, often experienced journalists (“old dogs”), but also to capture the views from younger journalists who have recently launched their online projects (“young guns”).

Mine findings show, consistently with other research (Finneman et al., 2023; Ramos & Suizo, 2024), that journalists’ resilience is built on their constant adaptation to emerging obstacles; on the support of teamwork; self-reflection of precariousness and repeated attempts to resolve the precarity of their journalistic work. In addition, the findings show that different journalistic strategies vary by media type (print versus online), age and length of experience in the field (e.g. younger journalists are more self-reflective and open to innovation and cooperation). Moreover, local media sustainability must be actively built, with investment and innovation in mind.

Keywords: local medium; local journalist; disruptions in journalism; sustainability; resilience

THE LAW ON ACCESS TO ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS AS A RESOURCE FOR LOCAL JOURNALISM

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The oversight of local governmental actions, from the perspective of decentralized journalism, has always evidenced news construction dependent on sources linked to political elites. The process of data opening and digitalization of administrative processes has brought a new demand to governmental management, which still lacks in meeting the legislative and operational requirements for fulfilling the main objective proposed by the EU of opening and making public data available to any citizen. This convergence between citizens and administrative processes has the potential to also reach the journalistic field. For local journalism, it offers an alternative means of scrutinizing municipal executive power and a way for journalists to consult, analyze, and contextualize governmental actions for the public, based on existing data – but not always made available on websites. The Law on Access to Administrative Documents (LADA), beyond promoting government transparency, is an instrument that reinforces local journalists in their struggle for access to sources.

Based on a survey of information access requests to the 23 municipalities that constitute the Intermunicipal Community of Beiras and Serra da Estrela and the Intermunicipal Community of Beira Baixa, and drawing from the analysis of reports made available by the Commission for Access to Administrative Documents (CADA), this study aims to understand how LADA, in force since 1993, can be useful to local journalism, fostering journalistic agendas and coverage based on local governmental data, and further explore the frequency with which local media resort to this watchdog instrument.

Preliminary results indicate how local media can leverage the potential of governmental information as a resource to build a relationship of independence from sources and improve the performance of local administrations.

Keywords: Local journalism; Sources; Digital transformation; Local administration; Watchdog

HOW LOCAL NEWS IS LOST IN THE SHUFFLE: SOURCE BLINDNESS AND OTHER PERCEPTIONS IN THE AGE OF PLATFORMIZED LOCAL NEWS

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According to the Digital News Report Portugal 2024, “more than 8 in 10 accesses to online news (84%) were made indirectly, and only 16% occur through a direct visit to the news brand’s website”. The report indicates that since 2015, direct access “has been losing relevance”, mainly due to search engines, which represent “almost 30% of accesses”, and, to a lesser extent, also due to social networks, which represent “one-fifth” (Cardoso et al., 2024, p. 86). Considering these data, but also studies that indicate that “collapsed information environments lead to inattentive processing of source information” (Pearson, 2020, p. 1181), in this study we seek, through the analysis of the responses given by media consumers and journalists, in different focus groups carried out during three research projects on local media at LabCom, at the University of Beira Interior (“Citizens’ agenda: journalism and civic participation in Portuguese media”; Remedia.Lab - Regional Media Lab & Incubator; MediaTrust.Lab – Local Media Lab for Civic Trust and Literacy), to understand to what extent local media may be going through a process of “source blindness”. This effect “is defined as a state whereby individuals fail to consider source information when processing news content. Due to social media design features, users fail to connect source information to related content” (Pearson, 2020, p. 1183). This study follows on from other work already carried out, which sought, on the one hand, to analyse perceptions about authorship and unverified content in a context of platformization of news (Morais & Jerónimo, 2023) and, on the other, levels of media literacy, namely the ability to identify news sources and their importance in combating disinformation (Morais & Rodrigues, 2024). In addi-

tion to gathering data from three particular research projects in the national context, since they were developed with a focus on local media, this study also emerges as a way to help combat disinformation, presenting data that result from specific experiences. On the other hand, if it is true that “knowledge of sources is not the only issue related to avoiding misinformation” (Pearson, 2020, p. 1182), it is also true that there are “experiments that suggest when heuristics - such as appearance - are equal, individuals show little discernment between high- and low-credibility sources (Flanagin and Metzger, 2007; Pearson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2018). This study also arises considering that “in today’s context of disinformation and misinformation, the ultimate jeopardy is not unjustifiable regulation of journalism, but that publics may come to disbelieve all content – including journalism” (Berger, 2018, pp. 9-10).

Keywords: source blindness; local media; platforms; journalists; audiences

BEYOND VERIFICATION: THE EVOLVING ROLE OF FACT-CHECKING ORGANISATIONS IN MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION FOR YOUTH

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While the majority of studies in disinformation have remained focused on the circulation of hate-speech or fake news in online spaces, relatively scant attention has been given to understanding the role of the dominant mode of production i.e. capitalism in enabling this framework. A dialogue between production studies and studies of disinformation has proven to be extremely useful in achieving an understanding of the production and circulation of disinformation (Ong and Cabañes 2019). Generally disinformation has been regarded as a negative externality generated by the specific business model followed by most social media platforms. However the focus on a 'specific' business model distracts from the fact that the monopolizing drive of capital is a structural tendency within capitalism. Those media houses that are not acquired directly by one of the largest corporation are forced to compete within the highly consolidated 'attention economy'. Faced with growing demand for content, journalists who are increasingly under stress for deadlines rely on 'editorial subsidies' from PR practitioners (Jackson and Moloney 2015). On the other hand, within an intensified competition environment for 'engagement' within social media platforms, the need to cut down on production costs become a necessity. It is within this production environment that we find the emergence of 'viral' and 'clickbait' media as a financially viable practice. I argue that producers of networked disinformation, whatever their motives, thrive in this environment of media disinvestment. In some countries like Australia's

News Media Bargaining Code and Canada's Online News Act purported to respond to this structural disinvestment and accompanying problems by forcing platforms to share revenue with news companies. The results have hardly been encouraging.

The paper seeks to understand how 'Big Tech' has promoted the use of its own engagement metrics as a standard in the measurement of 'impressions' and therefore a determinant in the flow of ad revenues. In particular I attempt to identify how Big Tech platforms have sought to reshape and restructure the flow of capital investment through their engagement with independent media houses and journalists. I demonstrate how platforms discursively amplify 'independence' primarily in terms of freedom from upfront capital investment, but dilute concerns regarding structural concerns about dependence on algorithmic visibility. At the same time I demonstrate flaws in the approaches taken by countries like Canada and Australia, and recommend that policymakers need to focus on the promotion of engagement metrics and if they entail monopolistic practices.

Keywords: Education; Fact-checking; Media and Information Literacy (MIL); Misinformation; Policies; Training; Youth

abstracts

Session 4

Local News Production
& Consumption

FRAGILE, HANDLE WITH CARE: (IN) SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL MEDIA AND (IN)SECURITY OF LOCAL JOURNALISTS IN TIMES OF NEWSROOM SUCCESSION AND INTER-GENERATIONAL HANDOVER OF OWNERSHIP

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When the existence of an entire medium depends on a sole owner, such an arrangement can create a very fragile working environment, both in terms of the sustainability of the medium and the security of journalists in the newsroom. However, this is often the ownership arrangement in the case of local media owned by individual entrepreneurs (Hess and Waller, 2017). This type of individual owners, entrepreneurial owners (Deuze and Witschge, 2020) or pioneers (Hepp and Loosen, 2019), create a specific information ecology within these environment: on the positive side, they offer the continued survival of the local information infrastructure, and often also a guarantee the information's independence; on the negative side, this form of ownership leads to uncertainty in their long-term functionality,

fragility in their existence and the possible intertwining of commercial and journalistic lines of production in one person (Deuze and Witschge, 2020). In these circumstances, both the entrepreneurs themselves and their colleagues in the newsroom may feel insecure or experience precarious working conditions (Örnebring, 2018).

Moreover, these potential threats to the sustainability of the medium and the safety of journalists are even more acute in the specific circumstances of entrepreneurial succession and inter-generational handover of ownership. For example, Ruiz and Porter in the analysis for National Trust for Local News, based on a survey with 103 local publishers, came to the conclusion that one of the most important sustainability threats is that publishers don't have a succession plan or struggle with finding new interested owners. More interestingly then, the circumstances of entrepreneurial ownership of local media are still generally rather unexplored, with authors looking more at the impact of globalised or chain ownership (Hess and Waller, 2017).

Therefore, our aim is to focus on how local journalists perceive their job security and their medium sustainability with regard to entrepreneurial ownership, potential entrepreneurial succession and inter-generational handover of ownership.

The paper is based on comparative qualitative data, stemming from 63 in-depth interviews collected between March and August 2024 with local journalists from U.S. (24), Canada (10), Czechia (17), and Estonia (12).

Our findings show the fragility and vulnerability of local media organisations because of their entrepreneurial ownership. Interviewees respond to the potential ownership handover in two ways:

(1) in some cases, owners also worked as journalists – in these cases, journalists mainly considered the possible conditions of the

handover, its reasons and consequences. They acknowledged that with their departure, the news may no longer be published.

(2) At other times, the owners may work separately, but journalists were implicitly or explicitly aware of the possible consequences of a change of ownership for their own job security: they considered potential newsroom succession one of the key stressors in their job. Perhaps most noteworthy, is that these two findings were consistent across local news environments, despite a range of national media systems.

Keywords: local news; local journalist; (in) sustainability; (in)security; entrepreneurial succession

WHY DO PEOPLE ACCESS NEWS? AN EXPLORATORY LOOK AT A SURVEY IN FLORIANÓPOLIS

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Contemporary journalism, especially local journalism, faces challenges of public distrust and declining readership. In Brazil, this has led to newspaper closures and increased so-called “news deserts”. Understanding journalism consumption habits, identifying the most important topics for the population, recognizing the reasons why people access (or avoid) news, and determining how people would like to engage (or not) with news in environments of infodemia are fundamental questions for developing strategies to restore the credibility and trust of local journalism with its audiences.

In an effort to seek answers to these questions, the Laboratory of Practices for Local Journalism in Service of the Public (LocalJor), located in Florianópolis, Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), Brazil, interviewed 604 city residents through a questionnaire administered between May and June 2024. The sample of respondents is representative, with characteristics similar to those of the total population in terms of territorial distribution, age (among those over 18), gender, education level, and income range, according to the 2022 IBGE Census data. The confidence level is 95%, with a maximum margin of error of 4%.

This study focuses on the open-ended question: “Why do you consume news in your daily life?”, and proposes a methodological approach to help us understand the directions in which the responses lead us.

The methodology consists of an automated analysis of the responses, based on the identification of key variables (motivation, territory, subject, emotion, frequency, source, social

interaction, reliability, access mode, and purpose), and the development of subcategories for each of them. This analysis will be compared to a manual analysis performed later, to evaluate the technique and also for potential deepening of the findings.

The development of variables was based on reading the responses and with the aid of artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT and Claude. Categorization was performed using a Python script, utilizing text analysis libraries. The program associates keywords with each category and variable, and when it finds these words, it verifies whether the response can be assigned to each category.

This categorization helps us understand what the inhabitants of Florianópolis expect to find when they consume news, assisting in identifying the necessary characteristics for a local news outlet willing to engage with these people’s desires and needs. Additionally, the responses help us understand if there is a connection between the reasons for consuming news and the characteristics of the city and the local media, and whether existing journalism is capable of meeting these expectations.

Preliminary findings show preference (46 responses) as the primary motivation, followed by necessity (40); the predominant category in purpose is general knowledge (174); and, finally, in the territory variable, local news appears in first place (95), followed by the international category (42). These data suggest a pattern of news consumption that is both unpretentious and strongly connected to the local context where people live, rather than to the national or regional panorama. This preference for local content may indicate a significant opportunity for local journalism to reconnect with its audience.

Keywords: Local Journalism; news consumption; audience survey; text analysis.

PROJECT (UN)DESERT THE NEWS IN LISBON: THE CASE OF A COMMUNITY JOURNALISM PROJECT IN UNDERREPORTED TERRITORIES

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This communication shares findings and insights of the community journalism project “(Un)desert the News” (Projeto “Narrativas” in Portuguese), promoted by a Portuguese local newspaper partnered with academia and funded by the European Journalism Fund at the end of 2023. Its goal was to unveil news deserts in Lisbon, engage the communities of three underreported territories within journalistic practices and work with them, in a participatory way, in stories about their communities. Another scientific goal was to measure their perception of the role of journalism in society before and after the project.

A preliminary content analysis of the media representation of three traditionally marginalised territories in Lisbon - Mem-Martins, Chelas and Casal da Boba - in two general newspapers between 2022 and 2023 revealed that their presence was residual and only related to negative news, such as crime or poor infrastructures, comparing to the vibrant cultural dynamics of these territories. We considered them news deserts, although peripheries of the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, taking into account the definition of the concept proposed by the European report “Uncovering news deserts in Europe” (Verza et al., 2024): “a geographic or administrative area, or a social community, where it is difficult or impossible to access sufficient, reliable, diverse information from independent local, regional and community media”.

Then, working with influencers of these

communities, we gathered a group of young people willing to work with journalists on stories and established pop-up newsrooms in the territories in total immersive exercises. These included workshops about creativity, information gaps and misinformation issues; collected assignment ideas for development; collaboration on imagining and co-creating formats to engage the community; assignment meetings; and co-creation of journalistic pieces in teams of one journalist and one “local reporter”.

In the end of the project, more than 40 articles were made with 26 “local reporters” from the communities, eight journalists and two researchers. Findings from questionnaires applied to the 26 local reporters before and after the project revealed that they moved from a total indifference to journalism to a more comprehensive approach of journalism’s power in their lives and territories.

Keywords: community media, local media, participatory journalism, community journalism

UNIVERSITY RADIOS, COMMUNITY RADIOS: CHARACTERISTICS AND PRACTICES IN PORTUGAL

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The phenomenon of university radios is part of the broadcasting sector in Portugal. Despite little research into the role of university radios in Portuguese educational institutions, we are led to believe that they appear as a radio laboratory, which allows students to explore and develop their skills in dealing with radio.

In most cases, university radios are run by communication students, who create authored programs and other radio content to be broadcast. The concept of university radios is similar to the phenomenon of community radios, because they have a common communication objective with the community (in this case the university community), they are non-profit, the participants are volunteers, they enhance learning about the medium and there is a democratization in the accessibility of the medium (Midões, 2021). The only factor that distinguishes them is that university radios are provided for in the Portuguese Radio Law, with available frequencies “reserved for the provision of program services aimed at university populations” (Radio Law, 2001).

In this study, the intention is to present the existing university radio stations in the portuguese context and identify some of their main characteristics, in which a large part of the data refers to the content analysis of each university radio station. As well as emphasizing the study of two university radio projects at the University of Beira Interior - RUBI and “Rádio Universidade”, in particular, to study the reason for their emergence, their objectives, management and presentation of the elements that are part of it.

Keywords: university radios, university community, community radios, RUBI

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