COMUNICAÇÃO E SOCIEDADE

SPECIAL

COMMUNICATION AND FREEDOM

COMUNICAÇÃO E LIBERDADE

Thematic Editors | Editores Temáticos
Luís António Santos & Liziane Guazina

Directors | Diretoras
Madalena Oliveira & Sandra Marinho

Title | *Título*: Communication and Freedom | *Comunicação e Liberdade*

Contents | *Sumário*

Varia | *Varia*   *179*

Introductory Note: Communication and Freedom

Nota Introdutória: Comunicação e Liberdade

Luís António Santos
Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal

Liziane Guazina
Faculdade de Comunicação, Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, Brazil

The realisation that freedom is a supreme value has deep roots in the history of philosophical and political thought. Nevertheless, both because of the breadth of the idea of "acting freely", from thought as a form of action, and because of the dynamism of societies, where every day new challenges destabilise what was once thought to be certain, the terms in which the freedom is experienced (or not) remain unsettling. In the field of communication, the global assumption (less universal than Human Rights suggest, however) of the principle of freedom of expression has also not been enough to guarantee that the scenarios of restriction have been overcome.

The Reporters Without Borders ranking (see https://rsf.org/pt-br/ranking) reveals some very worrying realities in countries where censorship and attacks on journalists (in some cases murder, in others imprisonment or violence) keep the value of freedom of expression on a blurred horizon. While the figures regularly published by organisations of this kind are alarming enough, new forms of limitation and new vulnerabilities are also questioning the fullness of this principle. There can be no doubt that the blessings of communication technologies — which have widened access to information and democratised the production of content — are now accompanied by other risks and threats to the fundamental freedoms of thought, opinion, creation, expression and action.

Hate speech, which has become a critical issue in the context of social networks, is one of the areas where the problem of freedom of expression is discussed as an ethical dilemma (Gorenc, 2022). The same goes for the phenomenon of disinformation, in particular fake news, a territory where there seems to be a little more acceptability in defining limits to freedom (Mathiesen, 2019). Often identified with the social media context (Shu et al., 2020), the problem of disinformation, which is recognised as a threat to democracy (Iosifidis & Nicoli, 2021; Trottier et al., 2020), has to do with the fact that it no longer corresponds to a kind of deprivation of the right to be informed, but rather a violation of freedom through the perversion of the information conveyed.

In times of explicit censorship or in regions where there are still regimes of formal control over communication and information flows, the limit to freedom stems from silencing strategies that translate into "you can't say" or the inhibition of disclosure. However, what makes the feeling that freedom is still a fragile value disturbing is that it is now less a matter of assumed censorship and more a matter of manoeuvres of distortion, noise generation and subversion, including as a political communication strategy

by public authorities to influence the public agenda, stimulate polarisation and create identification with audiences (Recuero, 2024). In addition to the subtle deliberate action of deception under the guise of truth, there are a number of other facts that contribute to the shattering of free thought and suggest a necessary return to the emblematic work *Sobre a Liberdade* (On Liberty) by John Stuart Mill (1859/2023). The debate on freedom as an ethical principle from the field of communication therefore involves understanding new variables: (a) the serious economic constraints and precariousness that affect journalistic companies in particular, with obvious effects on the slimming down of editorial staffs and, consequently, a critical condemnation of the standardisation of thought, or even the extinction of thought; (b) the disengagement of citizens, in many circumstances denouncing a lack of media literacy; (c) the emergence of authoritarian digital populism and the viral traffic of information; (d) the platformisation and algorithmisation of choices; and (e) the rate of urgency applied to practically all human activities, condemned to the dictatorship of the clock.

The relationship between communication and freedom has been understood as one of the fundamental pillars of democratic life, the production of knowledge and social coexistence itself. That's why the end of dictatorships — such as the one that lasted in Portugal until 1974 (in many ways similar to the one that lasted in Brazil until 1985) — has a very particular significance for the field of communication and the media. The end of the Estado Novo represented not only the end of prior censorship, but also the beginning of higher education in journalism and an important movement of the newspaper and radio markets, first, and television almost 20 years later. The extinction of the "blue pencil" gave way to new hope for the expansion of thought, creativity and criticism.

The establishment of the democratic regime in Portugal paved the way for an experiment in freedom that completed half a century of history in 2024. Revolutionary on many levels, the change experienced since April 1974 had a particularly significant impact on the field of communication. The media landscape was transformed to finally follow the development trends promoted by technology. At the same pace as the so-called developed world, Portugal is therefore no longer oblivious to the multiple dimensions in which communication is constituted as a battleground for freedom.

Organised on the pretext of the commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, this special thematic volume of *Comunicação e Sociedade* brings together eight texts that, from different geographies and from different angles, put the relationship between communication and freedom into perspective. Opening the volume, Marcio Martins Calli, Kátia Lerner and Fábio Castro Gouveia discuss the reconfigurations of journalistic praxis in a media ecosystem in which new social and digital actors and algorithmic functions intervene. Based on interviews with journalists from five regions of Brazil, the authors seek to understand how newsroom routines have been transformed, concluding that time imperatives and the logic of information platformisation have led journalists to give up their autonomy in terms of editorial decisions.

Focusing on the history of the 25th of April itself, Helena Lima and Ana Isabel Reis' approach reconstructs the role of radio in the revolution, recalling the moments in

the early hours of 1974 when Rádio Clube Português became the command post of the Armed Forces Movement. In a text that recalls the episodes that led to the surrender of Marcello Caetano's government, the researchers from the University of Porto point out that the innovative nature of Rádio Clube Português at the time, with hourly news broadcasts for both mainland Portugal and overseas, may have contributed to the choice of this station, which the regime's forces tried to silence several times.

Also on communication strategies during a revolution is the article by Leila Nachawati Rego, who analysed images of banners and posters put up by activists in Kafranbel, a town in northern Syria. Considering that these communicative elements became "a powerful tool for storytelling and resistance during the Syrian uprising" (p. 58), the author — an expert in conflict and media studies — points out that "the mobilizations and revolutionary processes that unfolded in the region were driven by a strong aspiration for free expression" (p. 50). She concludes, on the other hand, that "use of humor, satire, and global references illustrates a strategic effort to resonate with diverse audiences and emphasize universal themes" (p. 59).

With regard to another political context — that of Brazil between 2017 and 2022, whose presidents were Michel Temer first, following the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, and Jair Bolsonaro later — a group of researchers from Belo Horizonte tried to identify social mobilisations for freedom of artistic expression. Using as a reference "89 instances of censorship, attempted censorship, artist intimidation, or repression of artistic expression" (p. 70), Maiara Orlandini, Bruna Silveira de Oliveira, Marina Mesquita Camisasca and Fernanda Nalon Sanglard analysed the manifestations of reaction, which they classified into four categories: campaigns, street protests, alternative actions and hashtags. Despite the adverse political scenario, according to the authors, Brazilian society has shown a capacity for resistance favoured by the popularisation of the internet, which offers "innovative opportunities" such as "hashtag activism" (p. 81).

In an analysis of the Brazilian media system, Ana Beatriz Lemos da Costa and Jairo Faria Guedes Coelho emphasise the importance of the freedoms of the press, expression and opinion and identify the factors that favour them and those that can compromise them. In this context, they consider that the implementation of normative and regulatory mechanisms has the potential to "promote the expansion of freedoms", while the "increased ownership concentration and ideological coercion (…) result in a retraction of these freedoms" (p. 102). In a text in which they return to the concepts of accountability, transparency and participation, the authors place particular emphasis on issues of media financing, considering that "the financing structures of media institutions play a crucial role in maintaining this balance between responsibility and capture" (p. 102). They therefore argue that "a balance between financial independence and constraints on commercial exploitation is essential to ensure that consumer and citizen freedoms are respected" (p. 102)

The article "Digital Platforms for Participatory Politics as a Space for Dialogue Between Citizens and Public Representatives" has a special focus on freedom of

participation in content creation. Based on an exploratory analysis of interactions on the digital platform Osoigo.com, "an online portal promoting participatory politics and accessible to the general public" (p. 113), Elizabet Castillero-Ostio, Álvaro Serna-Ortega and Andrea Moreno-Cabanillas, from the University of Málaga in Spain, sought to understand the interactions between citizens and public representatives. The results point to a great diversity of issues addressed by citizens to politicians from across the ideological spectrum, although with evidence of formulations with a left-wing bias. With a particular focus on social issues, citizens' questions also reveal an interest in economic matters. As for the politicians' responses, the authors' work emphasises a tendency to adopt "a moderate, balanced and consistent tone" (p. 128).

Also about platforms, but from a regulatory perspective, Marina Silva's article problematises the activity of big tech, while at the same time exploring the concepts of the attention economy and freedom of expression. At a time when algorithms are making decisions on behalf of users, in an "environment driven by automation" (p. 140), the author notes that there is a "relentless pursuit of our attention" (p. 141). The relationship between the way attention is directed and the way we express ourselves, as well as the worsening phenomena of disinformation, polarisation and hate speech, are for Marina Silva reasons that justify an understanding according to which, although it may mean "to establish clear boundaries for freedom of expression" (p. 143), the regulation of digital media in democratic states is "essential to ensuring that platforms operate responsibly" (p. 146).

After articles focussing on freedom to exercise creativity, freedom of the press, freedom of expression, freedom of opinion and freedom of participation, in the text signed by Lurdes Macedo, Nuno Bessa Moreira and Vanessa Ribeiro Rodrigues, we find the most frequent invocation of freedom of thought. The authors analyse the literary and critical career of Jorge de Sena, "an intellectual outlawed by the autocratic Portuguese regime" (p. 154), whose thought was not given significant expression in the media. Mapping the content "by or about Sena, across various media over more than 80 years" (p. 154), the empirical work of this approach suggests that the media have created "narratives about Sena that offer limited insight into his intellectual journey — and even less into his ideas on the PS(I)CC [Portuguese-speaking (inter)cultural community]" (p. 166).

The relationship between communication and freedom has different nuances that mobilise references from different fields. In this volume, there is a cross-section of contributions that call on approaches from history, journalism studies, the political economy of the media and media studies in their relationship with the study of conflicts or literary studies. However, far from exhausting the pretexts for why freedom will always be a sensitive topic in the field of communication sciences and social and humanistic studies in general, the articles in this volume signal at least some of the critical points that a free society should not be able to ignore.

Translation: DeepL Machine Translation (DeepL Pro licensed to CECS)

References

Gorenc, N. (2022). Hate speech or free speech: An ethical dilemma? *International Review of Sociology, 32*, 413–425. https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2022.2133406

Iosifidis, P., & Nicoli, N. (2020). *Digital democracy, social media and disinformation*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429318481

Mathiesen, K. (2019). Fake news and the limits of freedom of speech. In C. Fox & J. Saunders (Eds.), *Media ethics, free speech, and the requirements of democracy* (pp. 161–179). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203702444

Mill, J. S. (2023). *Sobre a liberdade* (P. S. Gomes, Trans.). Ideias de Ler. (Original work published 1859)

Recuero, R. (2024). *A rede da desinformação: Sistemas, estruturas e dinâmicas nas plataformas de mídias sociais*. Editora Sulina.

Shu, K., Wang, S., Lee, D., & Liu, H. (2020). *Disinformation, misinformation, and fake news in social media. Emerging research challenges and opportunities*. Springer.

Trottier, D., Kloza, D., Kuželewska, E., Terzis, G., & Konstantinou, I. (2021). *Disinformation and digital media as a challenge for democracy*. Intersentia.

Biographical Notes

Luís António Santos is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Sciences at the University of Minho, and an integrated member and deputy director of the Communication and Society Research Centre. His research interests include the changes taking place in journalism, new content production platforms (namely social networks), public service media and sound and radio studies.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7062-0307
Email: lsantos@ics.uminho.pt
Address: Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade – Instituto de Ciências Sociais – Universidade do Minho – Campus de Gualtar – 4710-057 Braga

Liziane Guazina is a professor at the Faculty of Communication at the University of Brasilia, a permanent researcher in the Postgraduate Programme in Communication at the same university and a collaborating researcher in the Postgraduate Programme in Communication at the Federal University of Mato Grosso. She is the coordinator of the research groups Observatório do Populismo do Século XXI and Cultura, Mídia e Política,

both certified by National Council for Scientific and Technological Development. She is also a researcher at the National Institute of Science and Technology on Disputes and Informational Sovereignty. Her research interests include communication and politics, political journalism, public communication and communication and gender.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4765-6918

Email: lguazina@unb.br

Address: Faculdade de Comunicação – Universidade de Brasília – Campus Universitário Darcy Ribeiro – Asa Norte – Brasília-DF – CEP 70910-900

THEMATIC ARTICLES | *THEMATIC ARTICLES* ⊙

In Search of Lost Credibility: Reflections on the Reconfigurations of Journalistic Praxis in the Age of Mediatisation

Marcio Martins Calil
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Informação e Comunicação em Saúde, Instituto de Comunicação e Informação Científica e Tecnológica em Saúde, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Conceptualisation, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Kátia Lerner
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Informação e Comunicação em Saúde, Instituto de Comunicação e Informação Científica e Tecnológica em Saúde, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Conceptualisation, methodology, project administration, supervision, writing – review & editing

Fábio Castro Gouveia
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciência da Informação, Instituto Brasileiro de Informação em Ciência e Tecnologia & Escola de Comunicação, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Project administration, supervision, writing – review & editing

Abstract

This paper reflects on the reconfiguration processes that have reshaped journalistic praxis in newsrooms, particularly in response to the growing competition from new social actors who produce, circulate, and consume news on social media platforms within the context of a mediatised society. These transformations present significant theoretical, epistemological, ethical, and professional challenges for journalism researchers as they intersect with issues such as the fight against disinformation, the concepts of truth and post-truth, discursive symbolic power struggles, and the evolving dynamics of journalistic production and the circulation of information in the digital public sphere. To guide our reflections and explore the strategies journalism must adopt in today's media ecosystem to preserve its authority, credibility, and role as a public truth-teller, we contextualise the historical evolution of newsroom news production processes and perspectives on the influence of mediatisation. This is complemented by insights from interviews with journalists working at leading Brazilian print and online newspapers, examining the physical and cultural changes in newsroom routines over the past few decades.

Keywords

journalism, mediatisation, disinformation, symbolic power, gatekeeping

Em Busca da Credibilidade Perdida: Reflexões Sobre as Reconfigurações da Práxis Jornalística na Era da Midiatização

Resumo

Este trabalho busca refletir sobre os processos de reconfiguração pelos quais a práxis de produção jornalística da notícia nas redações vem passando diante da concorrência com novos atores sociais que produzem, fazem circular e consomem notícias das plataformas sociais, no contexto da sociedade contemporânea midiatizada. Essas transformações trazem desafios

teóricos, epistemológicos, éticos e profissionais para os pesquisadores do campo do jornalismo, pois são atravessadas por questões como o combate à desinformação, a verdade, a pós-verdade, as disputas do poder simbólico discursivo e as novas dinâmicas de produção jornalística e da circulação dos enunciados na esfera pública digital. Para conduzir as reflexões e auxiliar no entendimento de possíveis estratégias que o jornalismo precisa lançar mão no atual ecossistema midiático para manter sua autoridade, credibilidade e protagonismo de enunciador público da verdade, contextualizamos as transformações históricas nos processos de produção da notícia na redação jornalística e perspectivas sobre a influência do fenômeno da midiatização, complementando com resultados de entrevistas com jornalistas que trabalham em alguns dos principais jornais impressos/online do Brasil sobre as mudanças físicas e culturais da rotina das redações nas últimas décadas.

Palavras-chave
jornalismo, midiatização, desinformação, poder simbólico, *gatekeeping*

1. Introduction

Journalism has historically been a subject of scholarly research and is widely recognised as a significant agent in producing meaning, building trust (or distrust) in social institutions, and positioning itself as an advocate of public interest and the "eyes and ears" of society. It has been portrayed as the fourth estate and a political representative of the citizenry. Among the social institutions that assert hegemonic discourse in the public sphere regarding truth in modern times, journalism stands out. It has achieved legitimacy as a key institution for interpreting and explaining events in the world.

In recent years, the practice of journalistic production has undergone significant reconfiguration, driven by competition with social actors who produce, disseminate, and consume news on digital platforms at an unprecedented scale, speed, and reach, and by the cultural shifts brought about by the mediatisation of society. This evolving landscape is marked by the vast amount of information circulating on the internet and journalism's intensifying efforts to reclaim its prominence and hegemony as a key arbiter in defining and articulating the truth.

These transformations have posed theoretical, epistemological, ethical, and professional challenges for journalism researchers. To address these issues, the first part of this article examines the role of journalism in contemporary debates surrounding disinformation, truth, post-truth, and struggles over discursive symbolic power, highlighting central concepts such as "authority", "credibility", and "trust". The article then delves into theoretical discussions on the historical transformations of news production processes, with a focus on Western contexts in general and Brazil in particular. It concludes by exploring the reconfigurations of newsroom practices shaped by the evolving dynamics of journalistic production and the circulation of statements within the digital public sphere.

Finally, we explore Latin American and European perspectives on the theory of mediatisation, enriched by insights from interviews conducted with journalists from some of Brazil's leading print and online newspapers. These interviews shed light on the transition

of newsroom routines over recent decades, moulded by the phenomenon of mediatisation. Through this analysis, we aim to contribute to an understanding of the strategies journalism employs in the contemporary media ecosystem to sustain its central role as a public enunciator of truth.

2. Journalism, Trust and Truth

To legitimise its values, practices, and discourses surrounding truth, Albuquerque (2013) argues that journalism assumes an explicitly political role as an agent committed to defending freedom of expression and serving as a tool for citizenship. It holds government authorities accountable for their actions, aligning with the notion of the "fourth estate" as the "eyes and ears" of society. According to the author, this model predominates in Brazilian journalism, with a unique feature: it also functions as a moderator of the other three independent branches of government — the executive, legislative, and judiciary — a role that gained prominence following the end of Brazil's military regime in 1985.

Implicitly, journalism can be understood as mediating communication processes while asserting an inherently technical role through the concept of "journalistic objectivity and impartiality", which "identifies journalists' emotional and political detachment from the events they cover is essential for producing reliable information" (Albuquerque, 2013, p. 6). However, this "distance" has gradually diminished, as seen prominently during Brazil's coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, journalism has sought to establish a closer emotional and political connection with its audience by adopting more humanised approaches. Reporters and anchors increasingly express opinions, emotions, and reactions in their storytelling and live event coverage. These shifts are particularly evident in television journalism but can also be observed in the headlines and content of print and online newspapers.

Regarding trust and truth, Waisbord (2018) observes that journalism employs specific rules and norms inherent to the field as a strategy to validate its information as truthful. However, despite these ongoing efforts to present the truth of events, the author highlights that truth in journalism is not an inherent or unilateral attribute but rather a collectively constructed process. In other words, the concepts of "truth" and "news" are influenced by how news is used, not only by journalism but also by alternative sources accessible to consumers. These sources may bypass the filtering, selection, and decision-making processes traditionally associated with journalistic standards.

In the contemporary context, various authors describe the current era as "postmodernity" (Lyotard, 1979/2009), the "post-truth era" (Harsin, 2018), or "late modernity" (Giddens, 1991). Harsin (2018) underlines that journalism is one of the institutions increasingly questioned regarding its authority to define and distinguish the truth, as well as its institutional trust, credibility, and the presumed impartiality and objectivity it claims. This situation has become even more pronounced since 2015 and 2016, events marked by the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump, respectively.

According to Harsin (2018), the epistemological fiduciary crisis, defined by a growing distrust in socially and historically authorised truth-tellers, is one of the public issues of the post-truth era. He defines post-truth as a socio-political condition that encompasses both dishonesty and a crisis regarding reliable authorities. Harsin identifies two key public problems of post-truth: epistemic, which involves false knowledge and competing truth claims, and ethical-moral, which refers to the conscious disregard of factual evidence or the intentional, strategic use of lies.

In other words, as Cesarino (2021) points out, "post-truth is an epistemic condition where any statement can potentially be contested by anyone, at a very low cost" (p. 77), primarily impacting the scientific community and other expert systems. This issue is further exacerbated by the current communication landscape, characterised by an overwhelming abundance of information, which complicates the process of accessing reliable sources to guide actions. The World Health Organization has described this phenomenon as an "infodemic".

To address the competition for attention with the thousands of new digital actors on the internet and reclaim discursive prominence over the truth, we are discussing the necessity for journalistic media to reconfigure itself not only structurally — resulting in issues such as job insecurity, work overload, and a decrease in the number of professionals in newsrooms — but also culturally. This reconfiguration involves a shift in strategies in response to the speed, reach, and dynamism of social media in today's mediatised society.

3. Historical Trajectories in the Construction of News

Journalism has undergone transformative processes before, both in terms of praxis and concept. Like any social practice, journalism can be analysed as part of a historical construction shaped by the interactions and contextual shifts of each era. Examining the periodisation of the transformations in journalistic news production processes and the institution of journalism itself provides valuable insights, such as understanding the loss of credibility and public recognition that journalism faces today.

Academic studies on the history of journalism reveal that, throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th century, the Western press was typically characterised by opinionated content, close ties with politics, and a journalistic style that resembled literary expression — passionate, pamphleteering and often biased in favour of the institutional groups that funded the newspapers (Hjarvard, 2012; Pereira & Adghirni, 2011; Ribeiro, 2000).

Before evolving into independent business entities, newspapers served as communication and dissemination tools for various social institutions, such as trade unions, associations, and, particularly, political parties from the 19th century onwards. This period, described by Danish researcher Stig Hjarvard (2012) as the "system of the party press" (p. 71), saw newspapers, despite having a news-oriented presentation, format, and content, often lacking independent journalistic editorial boards.

For Hjarvard (2012), the press's first step toward gaining autonomy as an institution — and the ensuing professionalisation of journalistic activity, which led to its primarily

commercial development — was its transformation into a cultural institution. This shift occurred when newspapers adopted the *omnibus* concept of collective readership (i.e., for everyone) and began covering topics from various social spheres, extending beyond political interests to include areas such as art, family, health, and more.

This association between the press and advertising, which began in the 19th century in both the United States and Europe, facilitated the popularisation of the print media and the development of corporate newspapers, aligning with the growth of the market economy, particularly in the United States. This process contributed to the transformation of the printed press, giving rise to the so-called "penny papers" (Schudson, 1981). These newspapers adopted a neutral and impartial tone, shifting from an opinionated profile to a more informative and objective one, characterised by textual and graphic reformulation, rationalisation, and standardisation, all driven by an industrial logic of cost optimisation.

In Brazil, these transformations towards corporate journalism began to gain significant momentum only in the 1950s. Prior to this, the press remained closely tied to political groups and reliant on State funding. Ribeiro (2000) notes that by adopting American models and techniques for structuring news — such as the use of the lead and the concept of the "inverted pyramid" — the press aimed to present itself as favouring "objective" and "impartial" information, distancing itself from the personal and opinionated commentary that had previously prevailed. This shift implied that the application of these editorial techniques would ensure neutrality in the reporting of facts.

Ribeiro (2000) also identifies a crisis in the Brazilian press during this period, driven by the concentration of newspaper companies and the closure of numerous newspapers and magazines, once again influenced by political and economic factors. Politically, much of this crisis stemmed from the rise of conservative forces in Brazil, a situation exacerbated by the military dictatorship in the 1960s, which imposed censorship on newspapers and manipulated advertising funds to favour newspaper companies that were aligned with the regime.

Driven by a new market logic but still subject to censorship controls and restrictions, this emerging newspaper model endured through the military dictatorship. One significant innovation in newsrooms during this period was the specialisation of editorials — a process that, according to Silva (2017), unfolded throughout the 1970s and became more pronounced in the 1980s, aligning with civil society's redemocratisation movements and strengthening coverage of health and education issues.

The process of redemocratisation marked a new chapter for Brazilian journalism, with professionals adopting a distinct role as guarantors of democracy. They began to provide public utility services, addressing readers' and consumers' complaints and demands on topics such as employment, housing, security, education, health, and quality of life. Journalism now asserted its leading role in articulating the truth and advocating for citizens' rights.

4. Reconfigurations and Perspectives on Journalistic Praxis

Following this brief overview of journalism's historical transformations, we now shift our focus to structural changes in journalistic practice. This involves examining the influences and transitions brought about by digital convergence in newsrooms, as well as its repercussions on journalistic praxis and the job market for journalism professionals, which began to consolidate and raise critical questions from the 1990s onwards.

Pereira and Adghirni (2011) provide a chronological account of the four types of journalism proposed by Brin et al. (2004)[1] and suggest that we are currently experiencing the effects of the fourth type: "communication journalism" (1970s/1980s). This type is characterised by the diversification and subordination of information based on the preferences of the target audience, which is evident in the present-day "hunt" for clicks and likes, influenced by trending topics on social media. Changes in the socio-economic landscape, the increased concentration of content within a few media companies, precarious working conditions for professionals, and a reduction in newsroom jobs characterise these effects.

For Deuze and Witschge (2016), there is a new journalistic system in which, in principle, journalists have more autonomy and individuality to negotiate their employment contracts in newsrooms. However, there are fewer salary offers, generally lower, and job instability, which reflects the deterioration of working conditions in traditional media companies. This scenario is made explicit through interviews with journalists, which we will present below.

Although the authors recognise the social relevance of the role of journalistic work in newsrooms, they highlight the need to move beyond the centrality of newsrooms, extending to other paid fronts of the profession. They argue that journalists do not necessarily have to be employed by a traditional news organisation to be recognised as part of the journalistic system.

This movement away from newsrooms, along with the instability and precariousness of newsroom jobs, can be analysed both as a cause and a consequence of some of the new scenarios and perspectives shaping the reconfiguration of journalistic praxis. Despite the reconfiguration of new spaces for reorganising journalistic work due to the development of information and communication technologies in contemporary mediatised society, the traditional journalistic market continues to grapple with the concentration and monopoly of large media companies. These companies are "connected in large conglomerates of platforms that monopolise the circulation of information worldwide" (Figaro, 2021, p. 24), which continue to attract advertising resources from the internet and monetising data collection, all under the logic of capitalist exploitation and neoliberal precepts (Figaro, 2021; Figaro & Silva, 2020).

---

[1] The other three are: (a) broadcast journalism in the 17th century, "with the aim of transmitting information from sources directly to their audience" (p. 43); (b) opinion journalism in the early 19th century, serving political struggles; and (c) information journalism in the late 19th century, following the "model of collecting news on current affairs" (p. 44).

The current climate of insecurity and instability in newsroom jobs is one of the outcomes of the new scenarios and perspectives that have emerged from transformations within the newsroom environment. One such transformation is that various public and private organisations, which for decades served as sources and provided characters for traditional journalism stories, have started to create and manage their own communication channels with society, primarily using new digital technologies. By either hiring directly from their staff or outsourcing communication consultancies, professionals who once worked for these companies now create content that is directly disseminated and shared by the organisations. This shift eliminates the need for the traditional press release and the anxiety associated with the expectation that newsrooms will filter (gatekeeping) and circulate information from these organisations through conventional media outlets.

In other words, outside newsrooms, traditional journalistic sources — companies and individuals — have become the primary subjects of their information, driven by the emergence and widespread use of new information technologies, particularly the popularisation of social media platforms. With these new digital technologies, ordinary citizens can search for information more quickly online and navigate through news websites without being confined to them for consumption. As a result, they can access specialised sources directly, bypassing the need for mediation by the press (Robalinho et al., 2020).

Emphasising the media's diminishing unquestioned status as an inherent aspect of society, Couldry (2010) cautions that this once immutable position will face growing scrutiny from various social actors in the emerging media landscape. Here, the conflict between competing forces — media corporations, commercial interests, governments, and civil society — will intensify, reshaping and dividing the producer-consumer dynamic in the digital realm.

This new digital media space brings with it not only shifts in media consumption and circulation patterns, new communication tools, and discursive clashes between traditional and emerging actors but also becomes a defining feature of our contemporary social reality, where almost everything, at all times, is influenced by digital technologies. This is the concept and phenomenon of mediatisation processes.

5. Mediatisation

Contemporary researchers in mediatisation studies agree on the phenomenon's dynamic, process-driven nature, focusing on new forms of mediation and social interactions that extend beyond technical communication devices to shape social life.

The phenomenon permeates our daily lives, with the ubiquitous presence of media in the so-called "mediatised society". This presence manifests in various forms and across different times, spreading territorially and shaping new social geographies. It impacts most social institutions — such as justice, politics, education, the family, and the press — and transforms citizens' everyday lives, altering relationships, values, and the culture of the social web. Mediatisation studies aim to reflect on the extent to which the

media influences society and vice versa. These reciprocal effects frame the concept of "mediatisation" as an ongoing process rather than a closed, finished concept.

França (2020) views both the phenomenon and the concept of "mediatisation" as a new socio-cultural environment that introduces novel patterns of mediation and interaction, thereby enabling new forms of perception and cognition:

> the phenomenon refers to the changes in the technical-communicative landscape that have been unfolding since the final decades of the 20th century and, notably, in the early years of the 21st century. The concept, on the other hand, pertains to the various approaches and interpretations of these changes and is inherently plural, as the treatments are diverse and not always convergent. (p. 25)

The researcher makes a theoretical distinction between the definitions of "mediation" and "mediatisation", drawing on the perspective presented by Muniz Sodré (2002) in his book *Antropológica do Espelho* (Anthropology of the Mirror). In this work, the author describes the concept of "medium" (mediatisation) as the fourth bios of a new era, one that is not only cultural but existential. In other words, beyond the instrumental dimension of communication (bridging) and the circulation of information (technomediation), mediatisation is characterised by "a new way of the subject's presence in the world, an *ethos* of its own, new forms of interaction between individuals, with the media serving as the shaper of perceptions and cognitions; new forms of socialisation" (França, 2020, p. 28). In this sense, (techno)mediations and the emphasis on communication studies from a technological perspective tend to shape, and even reinforce, a "media-centric" viewpoint embedded within the traditional field of study known as "media theory", "with a focus on authors specifically addressing the development of communication technologies" (França, 2020, p. 36). In contrast, theories of mediatisation highlight the relationship between "technical media and culture/society". Hepp (2014) assists in this distinction by differentiating "mediation" as a concept that theorises the communication process as a whole, while mediatisation focuses on theorising media-related change.

Research and theoretical perspectives on the concept of "mediatisation", trans-media interactional relationships, and the transformations in communicational media and their social and cultural influences can be approached from both institutionalist and socio-constructivist traditions (Hepp, 2014). In this context, the media may be seen either as a semi-independent institution that exerts influence over other institutions or as being shaped by them while simultaneously providing "a common arena for public discussion" (Hjarvard, 2014, p. 42). This space enables institutions to advocate for their interests and allows their members to engage in debates and make decisions on matters of shared concern (Hjarvard, 2014).

The institutional tradition examines the interrelations and influences exerted by media institutions — traditionally mass media — as an autonomous (or semi-autonomous) social institution on other social institutions (Hepp, 2014). Meanwhile, the socio-constructivist tradition, "rooted in symbolic interactionism and the sociology of

knowledge", is more interested in everyday communication practices, "especially related to digital media and personal communication – and focuses on the changing communicative construction of culture and society" (Hepp, 2014, pp. 47–48).

European approaches to mediatisation generally aim to recover the historical dimensions of the concept, exploring its role in the domains of politics, science, and religion, as well as its effects on individuals and society (Carvalho, 2017). Particular attention is given to the transformations in traditional mass media models, especially following the exponential rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s and the shift from public communication frameworks to private commercial models. This focus reflects an effort to integrate both diachronic and synchronic perspectives on the mediatisation of societies (Hepp, 2014).

European studies also focus on the mediatisation of society, characterised by the pervasive presence of media in everyday life, and how it becomes reliant on a so-called "media logic"[2], especially within mass media, shaping a new communication landscape and influencing, for instance, journalistic news production processes — the subject of this article.

From this perspective, the mediatisation of culture and society is a process defined by duality: the media become "integrated into the operations of other social institutions" (Hjarvard, 2014, p. 36) while simultaneously consolidating their status as a semi-autonomous institution. The author challenges concerns raised by some researchers regarding the over-reliance of institutions on the media — whether negative or positive — arguing that any analysis must take into account the specific contexts of the media-institution relationship.

> Mediatisation is not a universal process that characterises all societies. It is primarily a development that has accelerated particularly in the *last years of the 20th century in modern, highly industrialised societies* — such as those in Europe, the USA, Japan, and Australia, and so forth. As globalisation progresses, more and more regions and cultures will be affected by mediatisation, but there may be considerable differences in the influence mediatisation exerts. (Hjarvard, 2012, p. 65)

Hepp (2014) emphasises the significance of investigating the mediatisation of everyday life, focusing on areas such as consumption, religion, politics, and education. He explores how the evolution and transformation of communicative practices in society contribute to a changing communicative construction of reality, encompassing both classical mass media and new media of the internet and mobile communication.

Because it implies quantitative as well as qualitative aspects, Hepp (2014) suggests the two traditions — the institutionalist and the socio-constructivist — are open to each other for further development of the mediatisation approach from a transmedial perspective. "In times of the increasing 'mediation of everything', different media are in

---

[2] "The term *media logic* is used to recognise that the media have particular *modus operandi* and characteristics (specificities of media) that come to influence other institutions and culture and society in general, as they become dependent on the resources that the media both control and make available to them" (Hjarvard, 2014, p. 36). The definition proposed by Hjarvard was later critiqued in the debate surrounding the concept, and the author sought to clarify in subsequent works that he was not working from a homogenising logic, instead recognising the distinctiveness of the media.

their entirety involved in our changing communicative construction of culture and society. This is the point we should focus on" (Hepp, 2014, p. 61).

The "mediation of everything" (Livingstone, 2009) refers to a phase in which media pervade every aspect of life, shaping interactions both among individuals and between individuals and society. Hepp (2020) highlights that this pervasive influence, whether beneficial or detrimental, is more prominent than ever in human history. This is particularly evident in the role of digital media, which has evolved beyond a mere communication tool to become a continuous, omnipresent, and expanding source of data generation involving both objects and people. Hepp asserts that we are now experiencing the era of *deep mediatisation* — the advanced stage in the digitalisation of mediatisation — in which "all elements of our social world are intricately related to digital media and their underlying infrastructures" (Hepp, 2020, p. 5).

Considering the effects of algorithms and the contemporary digital media ecosystem, Carlón (2022) calls for a research focus on the dynamics of meaning and product circulation, which he identifies as a new paradigm. He also emphasises the heterogeneity of media bodies and the emergence of new enunciators. The Argentinian scholar underscores the importance of studying the autonomy of circulation — whether private, public, or intimate — of digitalised discourses and meanings, which now operate in non-linear ways and are structured within a hypermediated and hyperlinked network.

To support his analysis, Carlón graphically distinguishes three key layers of mediatisation: (a) *traditional mass media* (television, radio, cinema, and newspapers), which maintain control over their programming, editorial policies, time, space, and voices; (b) *internet-based social networking platforms* (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, blogs, and news portals), which enable content sharing and host new enunciators — many of them non-institutional — reshaping public spaces and influencing symbolic power relations and configurations, while also redirecting the circulation of meanings; and (c) the *underground* layer (platforms like WhatsApp, Zoom, and Skype), which facilitates the private and intimate exchange of meanings.

Traditional journalism is positioned within the first zone of mediatisation identified by Carlón (2022) — the *mass media*. To preserve its enunciative prominence and enable the multidirectional circulation of its meanings and products within the ecosystem of the new digital public sphere, it is undergoing significant structural and cultural reconfigurations. The following sections present some of the outcomes and aspects of this evolving scenario, drawn from interviews conducted with journalists working in mass media newsrooms.

6. Investigating Newsroom Reconfigurations: Methodology, Testimonies, and Discussion

We conducted eight semi-structured interviews[3] with journalists — five men and three women — from some of the leading print and online media outlets across Brazil's

---

[3] Approved by the National Research Ethics Committee (CONEP) - CAAE: 64944322.0.0000.5241.

five regions. Seven interviews were conducted via Google Meet and one via WhatsApp. Six of the participants have been working in newsrooms since before 2004, a pivotal year marked by the creation of Facebook, widely recognised as one of the first major social networking platforms to significantly impact the media ecosystem. The remaining two interviewees are young professionals under the age of 30, representing a generation inherently familiar with new digital communication technologies.

The interviews explored various aspects of the newsroom environment, infrastructure, and news production processes, focusing on everyday contexts and realities. Topics included meetings, methods of story prospecting, relationships with sources, the timing of news gathering, conducting interviews, writing stories, and other related activities.

We aimed to understand how these processes have been reconfigured and adapted in response to competition from new players on digital platforms and the contemporary mediatised context. An adaptation that takes place within a scenario where media outlets' online formats are increasingly pressured to gain prominence and visibility, driven by the immediate access to and circulation of news via mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, etc.). We also examined the transformations in news production brought about by the integration of new information and communication technology tools into the newsroom workflow, particularly social networking platforms. These changes were analysed through the lens of mediatisation, considering its influence on newsroom practices and dynamics.

The *time-space* dynamic is a recurring theme in the testimonies of all the journalists interviewed, particularly concerning the simultaneous scarcity and acceleration of time. This phenomenon, driven by the prioritisation of online journalistic content, has significant implications for various aspects of the profession. It affects the capacity for thorough discussion and in-depth analysis of topics, the processes of investigating and researching news, dialogue with sources and interviewees, as well as the evolving narrative structures and grammar of stories. As a result — an opinion widely shared among newsroom professionals — this accelerated and constrained context has a direct impact on the quality of journalistic output. This decline is further exacerbated by existing challenges, such as precarious working conditions, reductions in newsroom staff, and the increasing workload imposed on journalists.

> Newsrooms today have significantly fewer professionals. I remember when I started, the newspaper office was bustling with people. Over time, there's been substantial downsizing, and the teams have become much smaller. Things have changed a lot. Back then, I was solely a reporter for one outlet. Now, with the introduction of integrated newsrooms, I produce content for four different outlets. Essentially, I'm doing the work of four people — if you'll excuse the expression — while being paid for just one. (Journalist 8, October 12, 2023)

> In my department, we've had to stop doing agenda meetings because they didn't fit into our production routine. Today, we produce 90% of our

> content for the website, and we have a very high audience target — 300,000 pageviews a day — which is extremely high. Sometimes, we even have to sacrifice better-quality research because we need to publish things on the site that will generate clicks. This whole process of listening to everyone, going through two people for reviews, proofreading for errors and everything else is something that's falling by the wayside. This directly affects the quality of the content, doesn't it? (Journalist 5, July 20, 2023)

The compression and disconnection of time and space in journalistic work have significantly impacted newsroom professionals, particularly in relation to their work schedules. In many of the newsrooms where the interviewed professionals work — spanning print and/or online media — traditional agenda meetings, previously characterised by fixed start and end times and in-person discussions, have transformed into ongoing, virtual interactions throughout the day. This shift is driven by the continuous influx of story demands and updates through internal online communication platforms, such as Google Docs, which all newsroom journalists are required to access. Additionally, for media outlets with online portals, the expectation from superiors to investigate and publish news can arise at any moment, thanks to mobile communication.

On the other hand, time is compressed both for research and for writing and posting stories. There is less opportunity for contact and information exchange with sources over time, a practice that has been common for decades and built mutual trust between journalists and their sources. The so-called "exclusive information", which could generate more in-depth stories by consulting various individuals, is increasingly replaced by the online journalistic "scoop" at any cost, driven by a "headline criterion" (Signates, 2011). This prioritises publishing first-hand, immediately, and ahead of competitors, often without proper verification, allowing for corrections and updates throughout the day if necessary or convenient.

The journalistic criterion of periodicity — the concept of the periodical — is reconfigured internally within the newsroom's news production process, where the notion of deadlines and the closing of the newspaper edition is literally dissolved in time and space. Externally, this reconfiguration is reflected in changing social habits and temporalities, such as the practice of going to the newsagent's early in the morning to buy the usual newspaper or waiting for copies to be delivered to subscribers at a specific time, often while reading the day's edition over breakfast before heading to work.

> It's not a matter of right or wrong, but rather because communication has changed. Back in 2003, when we received a story, we had ample time to conduct thorough research. It was a detailed investigation. The key difference now is that, as reporters, we used to go out onto the streets every day. We would leave the newsroom and head into the field. The interviews I conduct nowadays are done via Google Meet, over the phone, or even just through WhatsApp or email. (Journalist 3, July 31, 2023)

> Production, for example, is brutal for those working on websites. It's brutal because there's a strict timeframe to complete a story. People are monitoring how many stories each reporter has written in the five hours they've been there: "oh, so-and-so? They've only written two stories? But so-and-so wrote eight, that's not right". There's the morning editor, the afternoon editor, the editor-in-chief, and the area editors, but it's the owner who's closest to the area editor, and they keep an eye on all the websites. So, if they spot something on a competitor's website that's not on theirs, they call or visit the newsroom to apply pressure. "What's going on? Haven't you seen this yet?". This creates a stir and puts reporters under immense pressure, almost causing a sense of desperation. (Journalist 2, August 20, 2023)

> It wasn't as easy to communicate before; we didn't have video calls to hold [agenda] meetings. Today, we have WhatsApp, and each newsroom has its own groups so that we can talk early on. The schedule has also changed. In the past, the first agenda meeting was at 11 am. Now, when I wake up at six in the morning, the executive editor is already there talking about what's on the agenda. And why so early? Because we realise that people want to consume first thing in the morning, so if we miss that timing, if we don't act quickly, we won't reach those people. (Journalist 3, July 31, 2023)

The issue of *subject roles* also comes up in the interviews, highlighting that specific traditional roles that once existed in newsrooms, such as the copy editor and agenda setter, are no longer present. Even the role of the layout artist is now quite limited, as modern software allows reporters to edit and post the text and photos of their stories themselves, from anywhere, directly onto the media outlet's online platforms. Nowadays, everyone in the newsroom — editors, bureau chiefs, reporters, and social media teams — has become a potential agenda-setter and gatekeeper, as they are required to monitor the social media profiles of digital actors, such as politicians, artists, influencers, or current internet trends on a daily basis.

On the other hand, despite the "downsizing" of newsroom staff and the resulting work overload for journalists, the incorporation of new professionals into social media teams — now an almost indispensable element of contemporary newsroom dynamics — has become part of journalistic production practices. However, this addition does not compensate, in terms of job numbers, for the bustling newsrooms of the past, which were once "crammed" with professionals working across two or even three shifts a day.

Over the past few decades of transformations and transitions in traditional news media newsrooms, the most experienced journalists have been compelled to adapt their practices to the advent of the internet, emerging technologies, new communication tools, the proliferation of social media platforms, and the pervasive influence of algorithmic logic in contemporary mediatised society. Conversely, younger professionals, particularly those from generations Y and Z, enter newsrooms with this digital logic of

mediatisation and technological advancements already embedded in their personal and professional practices.

> So, I add the title and the subtitle, write the text, select the photo, write the photo caption, and insert links within the text that reference the topic. I handle everything related to the subject. It's all the reporter's responsibility. Now, imagine this: we upload four or five stories a day to the portal alone. Just think about all the details we have to manage. (Journalist 8, October 12, 2023)

> Writing for print is one thing, and writing for digital is another, so it's important to adapt in order to convey information effectively while also ranking well on Google. For me, adapting to these changes is relatively easy because I recognise this as the future. I started at the newspaper with more of a print-focused mindset, but then it transitioned to digital. I can adjust more easily, but perhaps it's harder for older colleagues, right? (Journalist 5, July 20 2023)

> I think we were better prepared [before social media]. But I'm not the type to say, "oh, things were so much better in my day". I don't even like that, you know? I don't want to claim that things were better back then. I believe we're adapting to the changes inherent in our profession. (...) The internet is such a profound revolution. If we don't embrace it, radio and traditional media will disappear. But they won't because they'll inevitably exist on the internet. (Journalist 7, October 02, 2023)

Amid the infodemic circulating within the digital public sphere of the internet, one of the central objectives in the symbolic contest of journalistic narratives is to capture attention, publish quickly, and be read first. To keep pace with the dynamism and speed of new digital social actors — and in response to competition among media outlets — online journalism, shaped by algorithmic logic and platformisation, has begun to loosen some of the traditional standards of news structuring. This shift impacts the historical framework of journalistic professionalism, objectivity, and impartiality. A notable indicator of this ongoing relaxation is the transformation of the journalistic lead.

The traditional lead serves the purpose of introducing and capturing the reader's attention from the very first paragraph of a story. In its formal structure, writing guides (Folha de S. Paulo, 1992; Martins, 1997) and scholars (Wolf, 1985/2005) promote, among other principles, a style that values direct speech, avoids redundancy, and incorporates the traditional five "w's": *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*. However, with the emergence of new algorithmic logic and data-driven marketing intelligence in news circulation, the editorial framework governing the lead — and news in general — has taken on new dimensions.

> We have to adapt everything because sometimes, online, in order to do SEO [search engine optimisation] properly, as I mentioned earlier, to reach the

reader, we end up repeating a lot of words in digital content. We really have to because if you don't, we won't appear on Google. (Journalist 3, July 31, 2023)

You have to create a title that's eye-catching but not overly sensational because Google uses keywords that help make the content more discoverable. So, it's a series of details we need to consider when publishing a story on the web. (Journalist 8, October 12, 2023)

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is a strategy managed by social media professionals and monitored through audience metrics systems on social media platforms and news portals. Its goal is to optimise a page's (or story's) content for search engines, ensuring it ranks on the first pages of search results and is easily retrievable by readers. This increases the likelihood of clicks and encourages readers to remain on the website for longer, ultimately generating higher monetisation. Google Analytics and Chartbeat are examples of website and social media platform monitoring software used by newsrooms. These tools provide real-time reports on user behaviour and traffic patterns.

Among these optimisation strategies are the use of links, hashtags, and the repetition of keywords. To some extent, this contradicts certain aspects of the traditional news structuring model and established criteria for newsworthiness. Real-time delivery has become prioritised, often at the expense of accuracy and thorough verification. The primary focus shifts to "chasing" click-through rates and likes, aiming to keep the reader engaged on the media outlet's page for as long as possible.

7. Final Considerations

As a result of the interviews, we inferred that the shift in the time-space relationship within the newsroom, along with changes in the praxis of news production, has led to significant implications for traditional journalistic criteria such as newsworthiness, the grammatical structuring of stories, the elimination of certain jobs, and the relationship with journalistic sources. These shifts are particularly pronounced due to the prioritisation of online journalistic content, which, according to the interviewees, has compromised the quality of journalism.

To adapt to the new era of platformisation in journalism (van Dijck et al., 2018), day-to-day editorial decisions in traditional newsrooms are now increasingly influenced by data provided by metrics software. This data often dictates the suitability and updating of headlines and online news based on user tracking and monitoring information, as well as trending topics on the platforms. As a result, newsroom professionals, under constant pressure from the immediacy and real-time demands of information, have gradually relinquished their editorial autonomy. Previously guided by journalistic canons of news selection and traditional newsworthiness criteria, this shift has led to the emergence of a hybrid newsroom model: one that blends traditional journalism with platformisation (van Dijck et al., 2018).

This scenario within the contemporary media ecosystem of a mediatised society has significant consequences for the mediating role of traditional news media and the routine of news production in the newsroom. As information — whose enunciation and dissemination had previously been controlled and monopolised by the newsroom — begins to spread rapidly and exponentially across social media platforms, it does so without the traditional barriers, filters, or editorial canons and protocols of journalistic practice. New digital social actors and algorithmic functions increasingly influence this shift.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

Acknowledgements

References

Albuquerque, A. de. (2013). Em nome do público: Jornalismo e política nas entrevistas dos presidenciáveis ao Jornal Nacional. *E-Compós*, *16*(2), 1–21.

Brin, C., Charron, J., & De Bonville, J. (2004). *Nature et transformations du journalisme. Théorie et recherches empiriques*. Les Presses de l'Université de Laval.

Carlón, M. (2022). ¿El fin de la invisibilidad de la circulación del sentido de la mediatización contemporánea? *DeSignis*, (37), 245–253. https://doi.org/10.35659/designis.i37p245-253

Carvalho, C. A. de. (2017). *Midiatização e textualidades: Dimensões teóricas e aplicações empíricas*. PPGCOM UFMG.

Cesarino, L. (2021). Pós-verdade e a crise do sistema de peritos: Uma explicação cibernética. *Ilha: Revista de Antropologia*, *23*(1), 73–96. https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-8034.2021.e75630

Couldry, N. A. (2010). Mídia tem futuro? *Matrizes*, *4*(1), 51–64. https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160. v4i1p51-64

Deuze, M., & Witschge, T. O. (2016). Que o jornalismo está se tornando. *Parágrafo*, *4*(2), 6–21.

Figaro, R. (Ed.). (2021). *Discurso jornalístico e condições de produção em arranjos econômicos alternativos às corporações de mídia*. Centro de Pesquisa em Comunicação e Trabalho.

Figaro, R., & Silva, A. F. M. (2020). A comunicação como trabalho no capitalismo de plataforma: O caso das mudanças no jornalismo. *Contracampo*, *39*(1), 101–115. https://doi.org/10.22409/contracampo. v39i1.38566

Folha de S. Paulo. (1992). *Novo manual de redação*. Folha de S. Paulo.

França, V. (2020). Alcance e variações do conceito de midiatização. In J. Ferreira, P. G. Gomes, A. F. Neto, J. L. Braga, & A. P. da Rosa (Eds.), *Redes, sociedade e pólis: Recortes epistemológicos na midiatização* (pp. 23–44). FACOS-UFSM.

Giddens, A. (1991). *As consequências da modernidade* (R. Filker, Trans.). Editora UNESP. (Original work published 1991)

Harsin, J. (2018). *Post-truth and critical communication studies*. Oxford Research Encyclopedias.

Hepp, A. (2014). As configurações comunicativas de mundos midiatizados: Pesquisa da midiatização na era da "mediação de tudo". *Matrizes*, *8*(1), 45–64.

Hepp, A. (2020). *Deep mediatization*. Routledge.

Hjarvard, S. (2012). Midiatização: Teorizando a mídia como agente de mudança social e cultural. *Matrizes*, *5*(2), 53–91. https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v5i2p53-91

Hjarvard, S. (2014). *A midiatização da cultura e da sociedade*. Editora Unisinos.

Livingstone, S. (2009). On the mediation of everything: ICA presidential address 2008. *Journal of Communication*, *59*(1), 1–18.

Lyotard, J. (2009). *A condição pós-moderna* (R. C. Barbosa, Trans.). José Olympio. (Original work published 1979)

Martins, E. (1997). *Manual de redação e estilo*. O Estado de S. Paulo.

Pereira, F. H., & Adghirni, Z. L. (2011). O jornalismo em tempo de mudanças estruturais. *Intexto*, *1*(24), 38–57.

Ribeiro, A. P. G. (2000). *Imprensa e história no Rio de Janeiro dos anos 50* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro].

Robalinho, M., Borges, S., & Pádua, A. (2020). *Dráuzio Varella e Atila Iamarino: Uma análise dos canais do YouTube dos influenciadores digitais como fontes de informação na pandemia da Covid-19. Comunicação & Inovação*, *21*(47), 22–38. https//doi.org/10.13037/ci.vol21n47.7298

Schudson, M. (1981). *Discovering the news: A social history of American newspapers*. Basic Books.

Signates, L. (2011). As fontes assumem o furo: Fraturas e alternativas na prática jornalística ante as redes sociais. In J. F. Maia (Ed.), *Gêneros e formatos em jornalismo* (pp. 181–186). Editora PUCGoiás.

Silva, T R. N. (2017). *Jornalistas e fontes: Uma relação em movimento. Temas, vozes e silêncios na Saúde de O Globo (1987-2015)* [Doctoral dissertation, Instituto de Comunicação e Informação Científica e Tecnológica em Saúde].

Sodré, M. (2002). *Antropológica do espelho: Uma teoria da comunicação linear e em rede*. Vozes.

van Dijck, J., Poell, T., & De Waal, M. (2018). *The platform society*. Oxford University Press.

Waisbord, S. (2018). Truth is what happens to news, on journalism, fake news, and post-truth. *Journalism Studies*, *19*(13), 1866–1878. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1492881

Wolf, M. (2005). *Teoria das comunicações de massa* (K. Jannini, Trans.). Martins Fontes. (Original work published 1985)

Biographical Notes

Marcio Martins Calil holds a PhD in Health Information and Communication from the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation's Institute of Scientific and Technological Communication

and Information in Health, a master's degree in Communication and Territorialities from the Federal University of Espírito Santo, and is a civil servant at the Federal Institute of Espírito Santo.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5938-9642

Email: marciomcalil@gmail.com

Address: PPGICS - Programa de Pós-Graduação em Informação e Comunicação em Saúde Expansão do Campus: Av. Brasil, 4036 - sala 210 - Manguinhos, Rio de Janeiro - Brasil CEP: 21040-360

Kátia Lerner has a PhD in Sociology and Anthropology (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) and is a researcher at the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation's Institute of Scientific and Technological Communication and Information in Health.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3655-9677

Email: katia.lerner@icict.fiocruz.br

Address: PPGICS - Programa de Pós-Graduação em Informação e Comunicação em Saúde Expansão do Campus: Av. Brasil, 4036 - sala 210 - Manguinhos, Rio de Janeiro - Brasil CEP: 21040-360

Fábio Castro Gouveia holds a PhD in Biological Chemistry (Education, Management, and Dissemination of Biosciences) from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and is a technologist at the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, on loan to the Brazilian Institute of Information in Science and Technology, Brazil.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0082-2392

Email: fgouveia@gmail.com

Address: PPGCI - Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciência da Informação do convênio Ibict/Eco-UFRJ: Rua Lauro Muller, 455 - 4° andar - Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro - Brasil CEP: 22290-160

Armed Forces Movement Command Post Here: The Radio-Voice of Freedom

Helena Lima
Centro de Investigação Transdisciplinar Cultura, Espaço e Memória, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal
Conceptualization, investigation, methodology, project administration, validation, visualization, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Ana Isabel Reis
Centro de Investigação Transdisciplinar Cultura, Espaço e Memória, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal
Conceptualization, investigation, methodology, project administration, validation, visualization, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Abstract

On the 50th anniversary of the April 25 1974 Revolution in Portugal, radio recovered the first sounds of freedom. The choice of radio as the broadcasting vehicle was no coincidence, and there are several reasons for this choice. In the Portuguese information landscape of that decade, radio was a privileged medium, given the high rate of adult illiteracy. Radio was ubiquitous, and its popularity is evidenced by its penetration rate of approximately 88%, with over a million more radio receivers than television sets in 1974 (Cristo, 2005; Ferreira, 2013). For their part, the military relied on the cooperation of journalists, technicians, and broadcasters to transmit the passwords that initiated the military movement that overthrew the Estado Novo. Through the radio microphones, they communicated the revolution to the population and announced the surrender of Marcelo Caetano's Government. Transformed into a command post, it was responsible for selecting some of the sound symbols that identify April 25. This theme seeks to reconstruct the key events that marked the dawn of the revolution and the subsequent moments. The methodology adopted combines scattered information published and broadcast over the last 50 years with an analysis of radio reports from that period.

Keywords

radio, April 25, revolution, sounds, journalism

Aqui Posto de Comando do Movimento das Forças Armadas: A Rádio-Voz da Liberdade

Resumo

Nos 50 anos do 25 de Abril de 1974, em Portugal, a rádio traz à memória os primeiros sons da liberdade. A escolha da rádio para veículo de transmissão não foi por acaso e várias razões podem explicar esta opção. No campo informativo português daquela década era um meio privilegiado, dada a elevada taxa de analfabetismo adulta. A rádio era ubíqua e a sua popularidade evidencia-se pela taxa de penetração, de aproximadamente 88%, sendo que em 1974 havia mais de um milhão de recetores de rádio que televisores (Cristo, 2005; Ferreira, 2013). Pelo seu lado, os militares contaram com a conivência de jornalistas, técnicos e locutores das emissoras para transmitirem as senhas que deram início ao movimento militar que derrubou o Estado Novo.

Foi através dos microfones da rádio que comunicaram a revolução à população e anunciaram a rendição do Governo de Marcelo Caetano. Transformada no posto de comando, é responsável pela escolha de alguns dos símbolos sonoros que identificam o 25 de Abril. O tema aqui apresentado procura fazer a reconstrução dos passos que marcaram a madrugada da revolução e os momentos que se seguiram. A metodologia adotada cruza informações dispersas que foram sendo publicadas e emitidas nos últimos 50 anos e a análise das reportagens radiofónicas feitas naquele período.

Palavras-chave
rádio, 25 de Abril, revolução, sons, jornalismo

> Let the poem be a microphone and speak
> one of these nights, suddenly at three or so,
> so that the moon bursts and sleep shatters,
> and we finally wake up in Portugal.
> — Manuel Alegre, *País de Abril — Uma Antologia*

1. Introduction

Various authors acknowledge the pivotal role of the media in the Portuguese Revolution of 1974, with radio being particularly crucial to the unfolding of events. The military themselves recognise its importance to the operation's success. Due to its unique characteristics, Rádio Clube Português (RCP) was selected as the communications hub, thus serving as the command post for the Armed Forces Movement (MFA). The military coup was planned and organised in conjunction with the radio, and the initial green light to the movement was given through its microphones. Subsequently, the radio became the command post for all planned actions, functioning simultaneously as a means of internal communication between the insurgents and as a channel from the military to the Portuguese population. Various radio broadcasts kept the people informed of unfolding events from the early hours of April 25 until the regime's surrender at the Carmo Barracks in Lisbon and throughout the following days.

At this time, radio still held a central position in the national media landscape. In a country with a high illiteracy rate, radio retained its audience even as television began to enter Portuguese homes gradually. Television's secondary status can also be explained not only by the population's low purchasing power but also by its broadcasting constraints.

Initially, Salazar did not recognise the value of radio, and only later did it become a powerful propaganda tool for the Estado Novo. The regime controlled both private and public radio broadcasts to effectively use them within its propaganda machinery (Cordeiro, 2007; R. Santos, 2022b). During Marcelo's rule, this trend led to an intensification of censorship (Cristo, 2005; Ferreira, 2013; Ribeiro, 2002; Vieira, 2010). Despite this, in the final phase of the regime, a "new radio" emerged, more outspoken and "more focused on life" (Cristo, 2005, p. 23). This shift began to assert itself as evening programmes became the new prime time.

The professionals involved in these programmes were complicit in the preparations for the revolution, and radio was used to transmit passwords, messages, and communiqués that marked the early hours of April 25 and the days that followed. Two songs broadcast on different radio stations set the revolution in motion: "E Depois do Adeus" (And After the Farewell) on Emissores Associados de Lisboa served as the signal to advance, which was subsequently confirmed by "Grândola, Vila Morena" (Grândola, Swarthy Town) on Rádio Renascença. The MFA's first communiqué was read over the microphones of the RCP, which was seized by the military and served as the command post for the revolution. From RCP, the population was kept informed about the unfolding events. The role played by the radio stations was due not only to the situation at the time but also to the connections between the military and the broadcasters. Men and women who actively participated in preparing and executing the revolution made a decisive contribution to selecting the sound symbols of April 25.

On the streets, radio reporters captured the sounds and voices marking a new chapter in Portugal's history: the popular demonstrations, slogans, conversations, the release of political prisoners, the arrest of agents from the International and State Defence Police, the shootings and episodes of tension or confrontation, and ultimately, the moments leading to the surrender of Marcelo Caetano's Government.

Radio demonstrated some of its greatest attributes, agility and ubiquity, reaffirming its role in reporting as it closely followed the unfolding of the revolution, recording every moment step by step. The function of radio during those days is acknowledged not only by the military, politicians, and journalists (Maia, 1999; Ribeiro, 2002; Vieira, 2010) but is also audible in the changes in programming and information that resulted from this situation (R. Santos, 2022a).

Despite the substantial but dispersed amount of information, few studies thoroughly examine the role of radio in the Revolution of '74. We propose to present a study focused on this topic. To this end, a preliminary study was conducted (see Reis & Lima, 2014), which cross-referenced data obtained from listening to radio reports from April 25 1974, interviews, testimonies, debates, documentaries, and reports published and broadcast in recent years, along with relevant bibliographic sources.

The research presented here builds upon previous work, drawing from reference bibliography, new publications and recently acquired data. Some of this new information emerged from the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of April 25, which yielded additional data and revelations. Consistent with earlier studies, we have sought to integrate various testimonies from reports, new works and the analysis of the recordings from April 25. We believe that analysing the sequence of events on the radio provides a clearer understanding of how the professionals and the military collaborated. On the other hand, examining the spoken voice helps us grasp the role of radio reporting in capturing the sounds of April, extending beyond the military dimension.

2. Radio in the Dictatorship

At the beginning of the 1970s, Portugal was a predominantly rural and illiterate society (Ribeiro, 2005). According to the 1970 census data from the National Institute of Statistics, the adult illiteracy rate was approximately 25%. Radio was the most popular medium at the time, with a penetration rate of around 88%, and there were over a million more radio sets than television sets (Cristo, 2005; Ferreira, 2013). In 1969, radio broadcasting reached more than 45% of the population daily, while 65% listened to the radio at least once a week (R. Santos, 2017a). Television had not yet penetrated all Portuguese homes in the 1970s, and its broadcasting schedule covered only part of the day.

The Portuguese radio landscape was centred around three major national broadcasters: Rádio Clube Português (RCP), a private station owned by the Botelho Moniz family and closely aligned with the regime; Emissora Nacional (EN), a public broadcaster; and Rádio Renascença (RR), a Catholic broadcaster. Additionally, there were several smaller radio stations located in the capital and throughout the country.

In the 1960s, Portuguese radio began to exhibit signs of transformation, which would be consolidated at the beginning of the following decade and which helped set the stage for the events at the dawn of the revolution. One significant development was the introduction of 24-hour continuous broadcasting and the widespread practice of broadcasting news on the hour, initially pioneered by RCP and later adopted by other national broadcasters. Cristo (2005) refers to it as the "new" radio, which was more engaged with "what happens outside its walls" and adopted an active attitude towards reality, more "observant, curious and critical, a radio with a soul" (p. 23). This "new" radio was characterised by young people from Rádio Universidade, a laboratory for new broadcasters who sought to innovate and adopted a more informal tone closer to the listener.

Rádio Universidade played an important role, as it was where many announcers and journalists started their careers. Many of these individuals moved on to national broadcasters, bringing with them a belief in a new approach to radio that laid the groundwork for developments in the following decades (Reis, 2022; R. Santos, 2017b). In the 1970s, EN and RCP conducted several experiments in the field of information that "broke from usual conventions" and were considered innovative (Serejo, 2001, pp. 71–72). These experiments included, for example, the novel news concept introduced by Luís Filipe Costa at RCP. By innovating in language and format, the broadcast schedule was adapted to accommodate breaking news outside of regular news programmes[1]. At RR, independently produced information programmes (Serejo, 2001) were often "temporarily" suspended because they were seen as "part of an effort to produce content that was close to journalism, often addressing the social situation metaphorically" (Andringa, 2008, p. 9).

Controlled by the authorities, EN stagnated (S. C. Santos, 2013) and experienced a decline in audiences. The most significant programmes were from private radio stations, which was reflected in the growing number of RR and RCP listeners[2]. It was on RR, the

---

[1] Interview with Luís Filipe Costa, featured on the programme *Provedor do Ouvinte* (Ombudsman), broadcast on Antena 1 on July 24, 2020.

[2] In the early 1970s, Emissora Nacional's audience share dropped from 60% to 50.1%, overtaken by Rádio Clube Português, which rose from 45% to 50.5%. Rádio Renascença also saw significant growth, increasing from 20% to 39% (Ferreira, 2013).

"least submissive" broadcaster (Ribeiro, 2002, p. 33), and RCP that some of the programmes now regarded as benchmarks emerged: *Limite* (Limit), *Página 1* (Page 1), *PBX*, *Meia Noite* (Midnight), and *Em Órbita* (In Orbit), which are etched in the memory of the young generation from that era (R. Santos, 2012). These programmes did not cater to large audiences but targeted a more restricted, informed public that sought to hear and interpret what had bypassed censorship. This focus explains, according to Cristo (2005) and Ferreira (2013), why these programmes did not significantly raise public awareness of the country's situation. However, Rogério Santos (2012) argues that programming with a closer connection to the public (such as the *PBX* on RCP and *Página 1* on RR), which addressed social and political issues, created gaps in opinion and led to the partial or complete suspension of certain programmes and their creators in the final phase of the Estado Novo. This breakaway by young journalists has not gone unnoticed. According to Rogério Santos (2022a), in March 1974, the Casa da Imprensa awarded Adelino Gomes for his participation in the programme *Limite*. The ceremony itself became a moment of resistance, marked by the interventions of the journalist, the participants, and the jury.

Rogério Santos (2022a) reports on various instances that reflect the defiant nature of the radio station, including the suspension and control of programmes, the dismissal of journalists, and the challenges faced by censorship and administrations in "restoring order". The author even argues that "radio was at the root of the country's political transformation" well before the dawn of April 25 1974 (R. Santos, 2012, p. 15).

This irreverence did not mean that radio was exempt from censorship; like television, it was controlled not so much by the blue pencil but by "preventive measures" that ensured control and self-censorship. Dissenting voices did not reach the microphones, the President of the Council appointed the presidents of the public media, and the boards were composed of individuals close to the regime (Ferreira, 2013), even in private organisations such as RCP. All the stations served as propaganda vehicles for the Estado Novo; they were the "voice of the owner" (Cristo, 2005; Ferreira, 2013; S. C. Santos, 2013; Serejo, 2001), although the forms of control could differ markedly. This is particularly true for EN, the State-controlled radio station, whose rule led to its stagnation and difficulty in competing with other broadcasters (R. Santos, 2022).

In addition to radio administrations' obedience, broadcast control through censorship was carried out in various ways. From 1945 onwards, the National Information Secretariat was the institution responsible for propaganda, public information, mass communication, tourism, and cultural policy under the Estado Novo. The Secretariat was tasked with training executive staff at radio stations and was also responsible for training the censors who were part of the censorship committees established within the stations.

Another form of control was the requirement to send written texts, scripts, or recorded programmes to the Censorship Committee 48 hours before each broadcast. Self-censorship and the careful selection of announcers for live broadcasts also contributed to the tight control of broadcasts (Cristo, 2005).

Censorship was physically embedded within radio stations and intensified during Marcelo's rule. Interestingly, the Exame Prévio[3] censors had arrived at RR a few days before April 25 but let the revolution's password slip through.

As mentioned earlier, the evening programmes were produced by new professionals who did not align with the regime. This may have been one of the factors influencing radio stations' decisions to align with the military movement. Their opposition to the regime likely made initial contact with the movement easier. An example of this is provided by Carlos de Almada Contreiras, a Navy Captain and military officer of April 25, who recounted to RR the informal decision-making process for selecting the second password: "'it was decided under the Santa Justa lift, in that plenary that Álvaro Guerra[4] and I attended, that the song would be Grândola', he says with a smile" (Gonçalves, 2023, para. 7)[5].

EN was excluded for several reasons, the primary one being its standing as the State broadcaster. That left RCP, RR, and Emissores Associados de Lisboa (EAL) to play their roles in the revolution. The professionals at these stations made a decisive contribution to the course of events and to the selection of some of the sounds that became the symbols of April 25.

3. Radio as the Command Post of the Armed Forces Movement: A Strategic Decision

A previous study (Reis & Lima, 2014) analysed the factors that determined why radio became the broadcasting centre of the April Revolution and the sequence of events that followed. Through new research elements, it is possible to clarify some of the decisions and choices made during the revolution while also recognising that accounts of the dawn and the 25th may reveal certain contradictions. Nonetheless, the involvement of radio stations in the movement remains a key aspect of the strategy devised by the military, as testified by Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho (2014):

> radio stations and Radio-Television were considered key objectives in the operational plan. Even deemed fundamental, as through broadcast communiqués, we could psychologically motivate the masses to support the movement, which was decisively fighting in their favour and against the regime. (p. 336)

---

[3] "Exame Prévio" (Preliminary Examination) was the new name for the Censorship Commission established by the 1972 Press Law, Decree-Law No. 150/72 (Decreto-Lei n.º 150/72, 1972), which also introduced the "instructions on Preliminary Examination".

[4] A journalist for *República*, who served as the liaison between the military and the broadcasters.

[5] The accounts are contradictory: the quote is from Carlos de Almada Contreiras in *"Grândola Vila Morena", A Senha da Revolução Escolhida Debaixo do Elevador de Santa Justa* ("Grândola Vila Morena": The Password of the Revolution Chosen Under the Santa Justa Elevator), a report published on November 29, 2023, on the Renascença website. Conversely, Carlos Albino, a journalist for *República* and a member of the team of the programme *Limite*, has claimed in several interviews that he suggested "Grândola", a version corroborated by Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho in his interview with *Expresso*. "A Entrevista nos 40 Anos do 25 de Abril: 'Apesar dos Excessos, a Revolução Foi um Êxito'" (The Interview on the 40th Anniversary of April 25: Despite the Excesses, the Revolution Was a Success; Alves, 2021), even though he contradicts his earlier account in the book *Alvorada em Abril* (Dawn in April; Carvalho, 2014), where he attributes the suggestion of the song to Santos Coelho. However, the 2014 article "Não Sei Se as Minhas Netas Terão o Tal Mundo com o Que Sonhei Há 40 Anos" (I Don't Know If My Granddaughters Will Have the World I Dreamt of 40 Years Ago; Almeida, 2014) published in *Tribuna de Macau*, interviewing the Captain, mentions that Carlos Albino from Renascença suggested "Grândola, Vila Morena" to Almada Contreiras.

As mentioned, the plan excluded only EN, which would later be seized due to the need to control the radio under the political regime.

> Conquering the "regime's official broadcaster" and silencing it while using another, a private one, which had also been taken over, seemed to me, from a psychological perspective on the population, an excellent move. It symbolised both an assertion of strength and the denial of using a hateful mater's voice that such an act represented. (Carvalho, 2014, p. 336)

In this context, efforts were made within the radio station to expedite the takeover of the building. The significance of radio for the movement is underscored by a secret document, which specifies that all operational units should be equipped with radios to ensure they could "maintain perfect listening" to the RCP's Lisbon transmitters (Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril, 2014).

Given the recent history of radio stations, the April military had prior contact with announcers and journalists they knew, as well as individuals recommended by trusted third parties and recognised by the regime's opposition. The radio stations selected to broadcast the first two passwords were EAL and RR, chosen for their broadcasting reach in Lisbon. According to Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho (2014), RCP was chosen to be the voice of the revolution, a rebellious act and a direct challenge to the dictatorship. Once the radio stations were selected, the next step was to establish contacts within both stations, which did not prove hard. During the colonial war, some military personnel were already acquainted with key figures on the radio, either as comrades in arms or radio professionals. Otelo himself led the Broadcasting and Mass Communication Section of the Civil Affairs and Psychological Action Office in Guinea.

The RCP was selected not only for its modern profile but also for crucial military reasons, such as its central location, the logistical advantages of its equipment, and its ability to continue broadcasting during external power outages because it had a generator. It also had a direct-dial radiotelephone, and according to Rogério Santos (2022a), the radio's journalists used the telephone, telex, and magnetic tape recorder. In its competition with other stations, RCP was a pioneer in incorporating a direct telephone connection during Salazar's hospitalisation. Given its features, this radio station had autonomy and could continue broadcasting. Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho (2014) also emphasised the importance of the hourly news broadcasts during the early hours of the morning for mainland Portugal and the territories overseas, thus providing updates about the movements to the forces stationed in the colonies. The RCP's news model began in 1961 and continued to evolve and modernise until the end of the dictatorship, both in terms of media and formats as well as its own style (R. Santos, 2022a).

The reasons for choosing the radio stations also facilitated prior contacts between the rebels, journalists, and other station staff members at the radio. João Paulo Diniz, for instance, was the announcer for Rádio Alfabeta's (EAL) evening programme. Diniz was stationed in Bissau between 1970 and 1972, where he hosted the *Programa das Forças Armadas* (Armed Forces Programme) on the radio and served as one of the key contacts

for the military and Otelo. By the time of the Revolution, his evening programme, *1-8-0*, which had been established in 1968, had become very popular. Following negotiations about the music for the first password, "E Depois do Adeus" was chosen to avoid arousing suspicion.

The first signal from the rebels was given at 10:55 p.m. when João Paulo Diniz announced over the microphone: "five minutes to 11 p.m. With you, Paulo de Carvalho with Eurofestival 74 song, 'E Depois do Adeus', a song by José Niza". The music was broadcast to signal the various military units that had joined the movement to advance on Lisbon.

In a similar process, the confirmation password was chosen based on the history of the programme *Limite* (R. Santos, 2022a) and once again involved a series of prior contacts. Regarding this second password, recent information and interviews from various sources present conflicting accounts. The initial indication is that a journalist from *República*, who was also part of the *Limite* team, liaised between Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho and Carlos Albino. A subsequent series of conversations led to the selection of the song "Grândola, Vila Morena". At the agreed time for the second password, 00:20, Paulo Coelho, the announcer on duty that night during the programme *Limite*, played the opening segment of "Grândola, Vila Morena" by José Afonso. Given the tight censorship conditions imposed on the programme, the poems had been previously recorded by Leite de Vasconcelos.

> However, now that 25 years have passed and regarding what I was asked to do, I must state that only two civilians were aware of the process that would culminate in the April 25 password: Manuel Tomás and the person providing this testimony. Álvaro Guerra, a crucial liaison, was not involved in the execution of the password; Leite Vasconcelos, who, on his day off, lent his voice to everything that had to be said in the exact 11 minutes of the block previously submitted to censorship; the trainee announcer in the booth (whose name I wish to withhold until I locate him because he is one of those who has been lying) had no idea of what was going to happen, and there was no reason to tell him what was at stake; the studio management, which could have halted the broadcast if there had been a complaint, was under close watch. Above all, I must attest that Manuel Tomás, in addition to his complete loyalty, was a key player in the success of the little thing he was asked for - the password. (Albino, 1999, para. 8)

"E Depois do Adeus" on EAL and "Grândola, Vila Morena" on RR were the result of collaboration and coordination between the military and radio professionals. As symbols and passwords marking the start of the military coup, they represented the harmonisation of the Armed Forces' intentions and the common sense and experience of the radio station staff, who knew the best ways to elude censorship and thus ensure the success of the conspiracy. The sound symbolism of the April 25 Revolution is deeply ingrained in the Portuguese collective memory and has transcended national borders. The military march "A Life on the Ocean Wave", broadcast after the first MFA communiqué on RCP,

also became known as the "MFA anthem". José Ribeiro[6] from RCP chose the march, which served as a cue to mark the broadcast of the military communiqués.

After the two signals were aired, the military movement began, and the RCP was seized at 3:12 a.m., an operation commanded by Captain Santos Coelho.

Once RCP was taken over at 4:26 a.m., the journalist on duty, Joaquim Furtado, read out the MFA's first announcement, one of several that had been written by Major Vitor Alves (Associação 25 de Abril, n.d.). The military controlled the broadcasting, and the programme consisted of military marches interrupted by the movement's communiqués. These communiqués informed the population and appealed to them to stay at home, a request that was not well received. Radio announcers, technicians and journalists arrived.

The military outlined a completely different plan for public radio. Captains Oliveira Pimentel and Frederico de Morais were responsible for seizing EN: shortly before 4 a.m., a group of soldiers disarmed the Public Security Police guards, who offered no resistance. Captain Frederico de Morais informed the Command Post: "I inform you that we have seized TOKYO without any incident" (Serejo, 2001, p. 77). At 7 a.m., the "National Anthem" was broadcast, followed by a news programme that made no mention of the ongoing events. At 8:30 a.m., the MFA's first communiqué was read out, and then the transmission was subsequently cut off, only to be restored in the early evening.

During these movements, the RCP became the epicentre of all military broadcasting activities, with MFA communiqués transmitted through its microphones. It was also the site of the first improvised press conferences held by the captains for Portuguese media and foreign correspondents, and it was also where the government's surrender was formally announced at 8 p.m. on April 25.

The regime's forces made several attempts to cut off RCP's broadcasting, the most significant being the power cut at 8 a.m., which activated the station's generators. The station's importance in the unfolding events is underscored by both the actions of the regime's loyal forces and the choice of its microphones for reading the MFA proclamation at around 8 p.m.

In tracing the connection between radio and the April 25, 1974, movement, it is crucial to recognise that Portuguese journalists from various media outlets were deeply immersed in the events of that day. While newspapers provide a straightforward narrative of the day's memory, radio accounts present a more complex picture. A significant portion of radio journalists' work was never broadcast, with much of the day's audio captured on magnetic tape reels remaining unaired. This repository provides access to the testimonies of reporters, offering us a glimpse into the other sounds of the revolution.

4. The Revolution Through Radio Microphones

The events of April 25 are documented through reports recorded over seven hours, akin to a live broadcast. Selected excerpts from these recordings were later compiled into a 2-hour and 30-minute CD. The voices featured in these reports include journalists

---

[6] In an interview for the SIC report "Aqui Posto de Comando" (Command Post Here; Castanho, 2004), broadcast in 2004.

Adelino Gomes, Pedro Laranjeira, Paulo Coelho, and João Paulo Guerra. Alfredo Alvela from RCP was also among the reporters on duty that day. His words not only describe the unfolding events but also reflect his perspective on how he experienced the news: "an open microphone, capturing the crowd, the sounds of battle tanks moving... the only atmosphere we can convey because one man's words are nothing compared to the historical scene we are witnessing".

The severe repression of the radio during the final phase of the dictatorship led to the removal of several journalists from their programmes for political reasons. Despite this, they continued to participate in the events, as exemplified by Adelino Gomes. The journalist joined the military column and his RR colleagues who were covering the coup, as he recounted in his 2014 testimony: "I was so jealous that I dared to say: will you let me do a bit of reporting? And they handed me the microphone (...), and I stayed on to report with them" (Gomes, 2014). Thus, Adelino Gomes became one of the historical reporters of April 25.

During the recordings, the journalists recount their own actions, such as climbing into one of the moving battle tanks to accompany it to a new action scene, describing along the way what they see and hear. Other reports were recorded in locations where microphones captured spontaneous conversations, slogans, and outbursts from anonymous citizens. These sounds are arranged in chronological order and offer a glimpse into the popular perception of the events and their hopes for the future.

Despite the unexpected nature of the event and the lack of preparation for such an unprecedented situation, some professional practices were upheld. The voices of Adelino Gomes and other journalists provide answers to "what", "who", "where", "when" and "why". The interviews not only offer explanations but also confirm the information witnessed by the journalists from authorised or official sources. The report describes both the visual observations and the ambient sounds of the environment: "I'm at a loss for words for the first time in my life as a radio reporter" — Adelino Gomes says at one point. He then extends the microphone to the people around him and asks — "what do you mean by that?".

In the accounts, the reporter is constantly identified with those around him and those listening to him. The journalist oscillates between being a witness to the events and resuming his role as a reporter, seeking objective information.

Throughout the reports, the people are the most vocal: "this should have happened years ago". The reporters frequently acknowledge that they know as much as the people on the streets: "as full of curiosity as we are... as lacking in information as we are". It is among the people that journalists often seek information or cross-check different pieces of information until they can access a more official source. Adelino Gomes, while accompanying both the military and the people: "a television camera is missing here. Never in my life, as a radio reporter and journalist, have I had the opportunity to hear people truly speaking. Without constrains or shackles. 'Cool', says that young man over there. Cool, man". Later, he explained that one of his colleagues went to the nearby RR and brought four or five reels, which "were enough to record for a long time" (Lau et al., 2014).

The Captains of April and the journalists, who witnessed the events of that day unfold among the people, conducted the siege of the Carmo Barracks. The sounds we hear are a blend of reporters' accounts, the sounds of the crowd and the soldiers. The whole atmosphere surrounding the barracks is reflected in the varied sounds and descriptive tones that vividly illustrate the dramatic moments leading up to the surrender, as evidenced by the excerpts selected by the April 25 Documentation Centre (Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril, n.d.).

"Attention, Carmo Barracks, attention, Carmo Barracks, either the messenger is received immediately or else the barracks will be destroyed [popular ovation]", then Adelino Gomes reinforces Salgueiro Maia's words: "Captain Maia has ordered the forces to aim at the building; he has just issued an ultimatum stating that if the messenger colonel does not come out, the barracks will be destroyed". The journalist reports on the tension: "we are at an extremely important moment, frightening even, and I believe we have reached the climax". Meanwhile, the soldiers took their positions as the doors of the Carmo Barracks remained closed. Salgueiro Maia's voice is heard giving an order: "a blast to the top of the central balcony". Adelino Gomes echoes the captain's instructions: "a blast to the top, central balcony". At this moment, a popular voice is heard imitating the sound: "tatatatatata". The reporter concludes: "it is a moment... when everyone is surely as impressed as we are". The gunfire is heard, and another journalist remarks, "we are forced to flee because the shooting has intensified. The government loyalists have not surrendered, which is why this firefight broke out (...) our comrade from *Limite* lost a shoe". The sounds of confusion persist until he adds: "people are starting to emerge from their shelters. We do not really know what is happening... there are bullets scattered all over the ground".

One of the anticipated moments was the surrender, as reported by Adelino Gomes:

> they are going to open the doors. They have opened the doors, right now, they have opened the doors [shouts from the crowd] (...). The colonel, a messenger for the rebel forces, raises his arms and gives directions to the people there. I am going to interview the colonel: "colonel, haven't the besieged forces surrendered?".

RCP journalist Alfredo Alvela would narrate the most anticipated outcome:

> it is now 8:39 a.m. At this moment, the doors of the Carmo Barracks are opening. The battle tanks that had been stationed here start moving in front of the Carmo Barracks [voices crescendo]. The crowd erupts in loud boos. It is a highly historic moment. We are overwhelmed trying to report on what is happening.

The voices on the radio weave through the events of the April Revolution. Journalists convey the emotion of the moment through their personal accounts, the voices of the people, and the ambient sounds that vividly depict the emotion and joy of that historic day.

5. Conclusions

By collecting different historical sources, we have tried to understand how radio was interconnected with the "Carnation Revolution". Through analysing sounds, testimonies from military personnel, and accounts from individuals involved, we have reconstructed the memory of the different moments, actors, and roles played that day.

After this collection, it becomes evident that radio assumed various roles during the revolution, some aligning with the objectives of the Captains of April while also developing its own unique dynamics.

Firstly, it can be asserted that the selection of radio as the medium for initiating and announcing the revolution was influenced by the intrinsic characteristics of Portuguese radio, its progressive nature, and its support for ending the dictatorship. This is evident from its programming as well as from the profile of the professionals trusted by the military.

We can also understand how the logistical decisions regarding the passwords and their transmission were made, always keeping security considerations in mind. These aspects were crucial for communication between the soldiers and for how they publicised the movement to the population. Additionally, it is important to note that the soldiers' familiarity with the media environment and some of the professionals played a significant role. The trust established between the military and radio professionals enabled the latter to take part in the selection process.

Finally, as mentioned, the radio and its journalists had their own dynamic, with the reports and sounds of the events serving as the most evident means by which they were relevant during the first day of freedom.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

References

Albino, C. (1999, April 24). Que vasta galeria de falsos heróis. *Diário de Notícias*.

Almeida, H. (2014, April 25). Não sei se as minhas netas terão o tal mundo com o qual sonhei há 40 anos. *Tribuna de Macau*. https://jtm.com.mo/local/nao-sei-se-minhas-netas-terao-tal-mundo-qual-sonhei-ha-40-anos/

Alves, C. F. (2021, July 25). A entrevista nos 40 anos do 25 de abril: "Apesar dos excessos, a revolução foi um êxito". *Expresso*. https://expresso.pt/politica/2021-07-25-A-entrevista-nos-40-anos-do-25-de-abril-Apesar-dos-excessos-a-revolucao-foi-um-exito-0f2bb707

Andringa, D. (2008, June 25–28). *Jornalismo: Uma profissão em mudança* [Conference presentation]. VI Congresso Português de Sociologia, Lisbon, Portugal.

Associação 25 de Abril. (n.d.). *Movimentações do dia 25 de abril*. https://a25abril.pt/base-de-dados-historicos/o-dia-d/

Cristo, D. (2005). *A rádio em Portugal e o declínio do regime de Salazar e Caetano (1958-1974)*. Minerva Coimbra.

Carvalho, O. S. (2014). *Alvorada em abril*. Terreiro do Paço Editores.

Castanho, P. (2004). *Aqui posto de comando* [TV programme]. SIC.

Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril. (n.d.). *Som.* https://www.cd25a.uc.pt/pt/page/8

Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril. (2014, January 14). *Confirmação do início das operações militares.* https://www.cd25a.uc.pt/pt/page/555

Cordeiro, P. (2007). *Estratégias de programação na rádio em Portugal: O caso da RFM na transição para o digital* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade Nova de Lisboa].

Decreto-Lei n.º 150/72, de 5 de maio, Diário do Governo n.º 106/1972, 1º Suplemento, Série I de 1972-05-05. (1972). https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/decreto-lei/150-1972-230564

Ferreira, C. (2013). *Os media na guerra colonial, a manipulação da Emissora Nacional como altifalante do regime.* Minerva Coimbra.

Gomes, A. (2014, April 23). *A visão dos jornalistas no 25 de Abril.* Rádio Renascença.

Gonçalves, M. (2023, November 29). *"Grândola Vila Morena", a senha da revolução escolhida debaixo do elevador de Santa Justa.* Rádio Renascença. https://rr.sapo.pt/noticia/pais/2023/11/29/grandola-vila-morena-a-senha-da-revolucao-escolhida-debaixo-do-elevador-de-santa-justa/357262/

Lau, A., Barbosa, I., & Couto, R. (2014, April 28). *Dias 26 e 27 de abril - As reportagens emitidas.* JornalismoPortoNet. https://www.jpn.up.pt/2014/04/28/dias-26-e-27-de-abril-as-reportagens-emitidas/

Maia, M. (1999). *Aqui emissora da liberdade, Rádio Clube Português 04.26 25 de Abril de 1974.* Editorial Caminho.

Reis, A. I. (2022). Rádios "piratas" e jornalismo radiofónico na década 80: Ruturas e continuidades. In N. Ribeiro & A. I. Reis (Eds.), *História do jornalismo radiofónico em Portugal: Dos primeiros noticiários aos anos 90* (pp. 97–150). Livros ICNOVA.

Reis, A. I., & Lima, H. (2014, September 2–5). *Os militares da Revolução de Abril de 1974 e a rádio: "Aqui Posto de Comando do MFA"* [Conference presentation]. XXXVII Congresso Brasileiro de Ciências da Comunicação, Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil.

Ribeiro, N. (2002). *A Rádio Renascença e o 25 de Abril.* UCP Editora.

Ribeiro, N. (2005). *A Emissora Nacional nos primeiros anos do Estado Novo.* Quimera.

Santos, R. (2012, February 28). *A rádio não tem emissão educativa. É essencialmente distração. Da tradição à modernidade radiofónica (1961-1969)* [Conference presentation]. Colóquio "O Meio Rádio e os 75 Anos da Rádio Renascença", Lisbon, Portugal.

Santos, R. (2017a). As audiências como elemento de compreensão das tendências da rádio entre as décadas de 1940 e 1970. *Revista Portuguesa de História da Comunicação,* (0), 1–15.

Santos, R. (2017b). *Estudos de rádio em Portugal.* Universidade Católica Editora.

Santos, R. (2022a). Informação radiofónica (décadas de 1930 a 1970). In N. Ribeiro & A. I. Reis (Eds.), *História do jornalismo radiofónico em Portugal: Dos primeiros noticiários aos anos 90* (pp. 11–72). Livros ICNOVA.

Santos, R. (2022b). *"Queria dedicar este disco à minha namorada": Cultura, política e programação na rádio.* Colibri.

Santos, S. C. (2013). *Da rádio estatal ao modelo integrado, compreender o serviço público de radiodifusão em Portugal*. Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra.

Serejo, F. (2001). Rádio – Do marcelismo aos nossos dias (1968-1990). *Observatório*, (4), 65–95.

Vieira, J. (2010). *A nossa telefonia, 75 anos de rádio pública em Portugal*. Tinta-da-China.

Biographical Notes

Helena Lima is an associate professor and author of books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed articles in journals specialising in the history of journalism and related fields. She is the coordinator of the collaborative laboratory Laboratório de Criação para a Literacia em Saúde, which focuses on health literacy and communication.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3023-6412

Email: hllima@letras.up.pt

Address: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, Via Panorâmica, s/n, 4150-564 Porto — Portugal

Ana Isabel Reis is an associate professor with a PhD in Communication Sciences, specialising in Journalistic Studies, from the University of Minho. She is a researcher in radio, radio journalism, the history of radio, and radio and sound/audio on the internet.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9335-4574

Email: areis@letras.up.pt

Address: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, Via Panorâmica, s/n, 4150-564 Porto — Portugal

"The Conscience of the Syrian Revolution": Creative Resistance in the Banners From Kafranbel (2011–2018)

Leila Nachawati Rego
Departamento de Comunicación, Facultad de Humanidades, Comunicación y
Documentación, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Madrid, Spain

Abstract

This paper examines the revolutionary storytelling and communication process of Kafranbel, a town in northern Syria celebrated as "the conscience of the Syrian revolution". Known for its impactful banners, the town's production spanned from 2011 to 2018 and featured images of people holding banners with written messages, drawings, and caricatures. These banners were regularly shared on social media, reflecting a nuanced and evolving creative process. This study employs a descriptive and qualitative research methodology to analyze a dataset of images ($n = 214$) compiled and organized chronologically. Additionally, insights from nine semi-structured interviews conducted in Spanish, English, and Arabic are included in the analysis. These interviews involved residents, witnesses, and experts who have closely followed the uprising, providing a comprehensive understanding of Kafranbel's communicative efforts.

The findings highlight how Kafranbel's banners emerged and consolidated as a response to both the Syrian regime's crackdown and the threat increasingly posed by extremist groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The town's storytelling employed human-centered and persuasive elements, such as the portrayal of children and references to global struggles and icons, to engage both local and international audiences. Patterns in the banners reveal a shift in tone and language choices as the conflict intensified and the town became more desperate for help. The absence of banners during periods of intense bombing underscores the harsh realities faced by the town's residents, which culminated in the town's silence following its recapture by the Syrian regime and the assassination of journalist Raed Fares by ISIS-affiliated gunmen. This study fills a significant gap in existing research, offering a detailed analysis of Kafranbel's unique communication strategy within the broader narrative of the Syrian uprising.

Keywords
Kafranbel, Syria, revolution, media, freedom of expression

"A Consciência da Revolução Síria": Resistência Criativa nas Faixas e Cartazes de Kafranbel (2011–2018)

Resumo

Este artigo examina a narrativa revolucionária e o processo de comunicação de Kafranbel, uma cidade no norte da Síria amplamente reconhecida como "a consciência da revolução síria". Célebre pelas suas emblemáticas faixas e cartazes, a produção da cidade decorreu entre 2011 e 2018, abrangendo imagens de pessoas a segurar faixas e cartazes com mensagens escritas, desenhos e caricaturas. Estas faixas e cartazes eram regularmente partilhados nas redes sociais, refletindo um processo criativo dinâmico e em constante evolução. Este estudo recorre a uma metodologia de investigação descritiva e qualitativa para analisar um conjunto de imagens ($n =$

214) compiladas e organizadas cronologicamente. Além disso, integra na análise as perceções de nove entrevistas semiestruturadas conduzidas em espanhol, inglês e árabe. Estas entrevistas, realizadas junto de residentes, testemunhas e especialistas que acompanharam de perto a revolta, proporcionam uma visão abrangente dos esforços de comunicação de Kafranbel.

As conclusões destacam a forma como as faixas e cartazes de Kafranbel surgiram e se consolidaram como resposta à repressão do regime sírio e à crescente ameaça representada por grupos extremistas, incluindo o Estado Islâmico do Iraque e da Síria (Daesh). A narrativa da cidade recorreu a elementos persuasivos e centrados no ser humano, como a representação de crianças e referências a lutas e ícones globais, para envolver tanto o público local como internacional. A análise das faixas e cartazes revela uma mudança no tom e nas escolhas linguísticas à medida que o conflito se intensificava e a cidade se via cada vez mais desesperada por auxílio. A ausência de faixas e cartazes durante períodos de bombardeamento intenso evidencia as duras realidades enfrentadas pelos residentes, culminando no silêncio da cidade após a sua recaptura pelo regime sírio e o assassinato do jornalista Raed Fares por homens armados afiliados ao Daesh. Este estudo preenche uma lacuna significativa na investigação existente, oferecendo uma análise detalhada da estratégia de comunicação singular de Kafranbel no contexto mais amplo da revolta síria.

---

1. Introduction

For decades, the Syrian dictatorship established in 1971 kept the country largely opaque to the outside world. Situated in a strategically significant region, Syria has been marked by wars, authoritarianism, occupations, and systematic human rights violations (Álvarez-Ossorio, 2015, 2017; Ruiz de Elvira, 2011). Internal repression and strict control over foreign press rendered Syria effectively closed off, with minimal media coverage during Hafez al-Assad's regime (Badawi, 2023; Magnarella, 2017; Zarwan, 2005). The political landscape remained largely unchanged following Bashar al-Assad's ascent to power in 2000, perpetuating the authoritarian regime (El Khannoussi, 2012; Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016).

In March 2011, as Syria joined the broader Middle East and North Africa uprisings, the country attracted unprecedented international attention. This period was characterized as "the most socially mediated conflict in history" (Lynch et al., 2014, p. 3), with citizens leveraging social media to exercise freedom of speech and engage in civic activities (Adi, 2014; Brown et al., 2012; Della Ratta, 2018). As initially peaceful demonstrations transformed into an armed uprising by late 2011 in response to the regime's crackdown (Álvarez-Ossorio, 2012), various rebel factions emerged and eventually coalesced into the Free Syrian Army. This conflict resulted in the establishment of areas outside regime control, termed "liberated areas" by revolutionary and rebel groups (Alshab, 2021; Khalaf, 2015; Saleh, 2017). The intensifying conflict drew in numerous foreign powers, each advancing their strategic interests. Russia and Iran supported the Syrian regime, while the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey backed various rebel factions to counterbalance

Iran and Hezbollah (Guedes, 2019). Over time, internal tensions within the Free Syrian Army and other armed groups became evident, leading to fragmentation and conflict among the factions. Additionally, extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra emerged, each pursuing their own agendas and further complicating the already complex conflict landscape (Karim & Islam, 2016).

Amid this geopolitical struggle, local developments continued. Beginning in 2012, committees in areas outside regime control started to provide essential services and manage basic needs — roles traditionally performed by the State (Abboud, 2018; Álvarez-Ossorio & Nachawati Rego, 2023). These local councils were described as "one of the main outcomes of the Syrian revolution, reflecting both a shift in the relationship with the capital and a means to manage the transition phase" (El Omari et al., 2016, p. 4) and as "collective laboratories for Syrians who had been deprived of civil society for over four decades" (Kache, 2013, p. 104). Within this context, a revolutionary narrative emerged to document protests and challenge the official narrative (Bachleitner, 2022; Bachleitner & Matthiesen, 2021; Wall, 2015).

This paper focuses on one such "laboratory": the town of Kafranbel, which was noted for its significant media impact and prolific production of banners between 2011 and 2018. Known as "the conscience of the Syrian revolution" (Dibo, 2013; Graham-Harrison, 2018), Kafranbel's banners exemplify creative communication and story-telling during the Syrian uprising (Hubbard, 2018). Central to this phenomenon was the Kafranbel Media Center, led by journalist Raed Fares, which played a crucial role in organizing and disseminating these impactful messages. Supported by a combination of local funding and international contributions from entities such as the United States Agency for International Development, the European Union, and the National Endowment for Democracy, the Center amplified local voices and sustained resistance efforts (Al Natour, 2022). The town's relevance is further underscored by the fact that it became a target of both the regime and ISIS, particularly during the peak of its creative output (Griswold, 2014; Hurtado, 2014; *Raed Fares: Syria Radio Host Shot Dead in Idlib*, 2018). This pressure culminated in the assassination of Raed Fares and Hammud al-Jneid, key figures in Kafranbel's creative process, who were shot by gunmen affiliated with ISIS on November 23, 2018 (Hubbard, 2018). Additionally, a significant number of original posters from Kafranbel were covertly transported out of the country, primarily for exhibitions in museums and galleries across the United States, with the aim of preserving these pieces as artifacts of Syrian collective memory (Hanano, 2013).

While previous studies have documented Kafranbel's media presence (Al Natour, 2022; Sylvester, 2015; Wessels, 2015), this study fills a critical gap by providing a thorough analysis of the town's banners as a form of digital storytelling, in line with Couldry's (2008) definition of personal stories shared through digital media. Grounded in descriptive and qualitative case study methodology (Yin, 2014) and interpretive paradigm (Geertz, 1973), this study prioritizes an in-depth understanding of Kafranbel's unique context and experiences. It does not dismiss the importance of other perspectives or narratives explored in broader analyses of Syrian conflict propaganda (Badawi, 2023;

Karadjis, 2019; Scartozzi, 2015); rather, it focuses specifically on Kafranbel's creative resistance to provide a nuanced portrayal of the activists' experiences. Informed by the constructivist perspective (Crotty, 1998), this approach emphasizes how knowledge and meaning are constructed through social processes and interactions, enabling a rich and contextually embedded exploration of Kafranbel's creative resistance.

2. Literature Review

The year 2011 was pivotal in the recent history of the Middle East and North Africa (Ben Moussa, 2013; Brym et al., 2014; Howard et al., 2011). Movements questioning power structures, particularly the long-standing dictatorships that had suppressed human rights and freedoms for decades, emerged first in Tunisia and Egypt, subsequently spreading across a significant portion of the Mediterranean's southern countries. The regimes in these countries heavily relied on controlling freedom of expression and association to suppress opposition and maintain power (Ben Moussa, 2013; Howard et al., 2011). Consequently, the mobilizations and revolutionary processes that unfolded in the region were driven by a strong aspiration for free expression and association from the outset, challenging established norms (Ahmad et al., 2015; Ghannam, 2011). From Tunisia to Syria, Egypt, and Bahrain (Bonnefoy & Louer, 2021), citizens broke a communication monopoly that had been solidified over decades, using both physical and digital spaces (Khamis et al., 2012) to challenge official structures and narratives.

Several authors have examined the artistic and creative components of citizen expression that challenge official narratives (Awad & Wagoner, 2017; Ghannam, 2011). Among these contributions, the book *Street Art of Resistance* (Awad & Wagoner, 2017) stands out, exploring how street art has become a tool of resistance, offering a platform for opposition to political systems and addressing social issues worldwide. Aesthetic elements such as murals, graffiti, posters, street performances, and caricatures are analyzed in terms of their role in occupying urban spaces and presenting alternative visions of social reality.

Various studies affirm the importance of the internet and social media in amplifying the voices of those previously silenced during the uprisings of the Middle East and North Africa. Tufekci and Wilson (2012) and Haque Khondker (2011) argue that social media played a critical role, particularly in the absence of open traditional media. Others, such as Howard et al. (2011), emphasize the role of social media platforms in shaping political debates, organizing and mobilizing protests, and disseminating democratic ideas despite a strong surveillance apparatus.

In this context, Jurgenson (2012) contends that citizen journalism emerged as an institution of civil society challenging traditional structures. Espiritusanto and Rodríguez (2011) argue that, as international journalists struggled to access these areas and local media were subjected to censorship and repression, citizens turned to cameras and mobile phones to document their situations and to the internet and social media to disseminate their stories.

Engagement through social media aligns with the concept of the "economy of attention" in the digital era (Simon, 1971), which views attention as a valuable and increasingly scarce resource (Gitlin, 1980). More recently, with the advent of social media, attention has become a critical concern, particularly in relation to its commodification by digital platforms (Pedersen et al., 2021) and its significance within the context of mass media oligopoly (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

Barthes (1964/1977) and Durand (1970/1982) introduce the concept of the "rhetoric of the image", which refers to the use of images to delight, move or persuade. Barthes (1964/1977) suggests that images convey interconnected messages: a primarily linguistic message composed of words, a denoted or literal message perceived at the initial level of viewing, and a connoted or symbolic message formed by elements that allude to shared cultural knowledge between the sender and the receiver.

Exploration of new forms of communication where citizenship plays a central role and the resulting organizational and communicative changes align with the idea of "revolutions from below" proposed by Christine Sylvester (2015). Sylvester argues for a comprehensive understanding of "war as an experience" that considers the documents, voices, testimonies, and narratives of those who suffer its consequences rather than solely those who orchestrate them. She emphasizes the need for academic focus on the experiences of individuals living through war rather than the narratives of elites who initiate wars. Sylvester uses the town of Kafranbel as a key example of the "war from below". Similarly, Wessels (2015) explores the Syrian case using Sylvester's approach, highlighting Kafranbel as an example of the "war from below" narrative in a context where "views from above" are prevalent.

Moreover, several academic works focusing on the town of Kafranbel highlight its diverse and significant contributions (Al Natour, 2022; Camps-Febrer, 2013; Downey, 2015; Ramírez Díaz, 2016; Wedeen, 2013). Al Natour (2022) identifies Kafranbel as a key element in the "enduring legacy of the Syrian revolution and its causes", while Downey (2015) examines it as a remarkable example of contemporary visual culture and contested narratives in the Middle East. Ramírez Díaz (2016) explores the use of banners and slogans as communication and documentation tools in shaping a Syrian revolutionary identity. Both Wedeen (2013) and Camps-Febrer (2013) underscore its exceptional use of humor as a form of resistance against oppression. However, none of these studies provide a comprehensive compilation of Kafranbel's banners from the entire 2011–2018 period or an in-depth analysis of the narrative's characteristics and evolution over the years.

For analyzing the communicative phenomenon of Kafranbel, this study adopts a perspective that views the medium not merely as a technologically implemented channel but as a communicative instance with its own rationale. This approach departs from the traditional distinction between medium and message. McLuhan's proposition that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967) is particularly relevant to understanding Kafranbel, which, as Sylvester (2015) suggests, not only conveys its message but also embodies and experiences it presenting it to its audience in a way that seamlessly integrates sender, medium, and message.

3. Objectives

The research questions formulated at the outset of the study were grouped as follows: when and how does the communicative phenomenon of Kafranbel emerge? What are the key features of the creative process that was developed? What is the general message conveyed by the banners? What were the main or recurring themes, as well as the protagonists portrayed or caricatured? What are the key elements of the critical thinking expressed by the people of Kafranbel? What impact did this surge of creativity, showcased to the world through social networks, have on the population?

The overarching goals of our research are:

1. To describe the communication process of Kafranbel by compiling and analyzing banners that encapsulate its storytelling from 2011 to 2018. This analysis will be contextualized within the broader framework of communication during the Syrian uprising and the Arab Spring.

2. To identify key features of the storytelling crafted by the Kafranbel Media Center, with a focus on the resources and strategies employed to engage local, regional, and global audiences.

4. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive and qualitative case study methodology to offer a focused and coherent analysis of the communicative phenomenon in Kafranbel. The methodology consists of two primary components: the collection and analysis of images ($n = 214$) depicting banners created and disseminated by Kafranbel activists and semi-structured interviews ($n = 9$) with individuals who are either directly involved in or have closely observed the town's creative process (Table 1).

Interviewee	Profession/affiliation	City/country
Hasan al-Ahmad	Media activist	Kafranbel (Syria)
Laila Muharram	Journalist	Spain/Syria
Joey Ayoub	Researcher (PhD) specializing in human rights, conflict and the Middle East	Lebanon
Haizam Amirah	Researcher (PhD) specializing in (geo)politics in the Middle East for Real Instituto Elcano	Spain
Mariano López de Miguel	Researcher (PhD) specializing in conflict in the Middle East at University of Murcia	Spain
Nur al-Swehat	Researcher (PhD) specializing in conflict in the Middle East	Spain/Syria
Robin Yassin-Kassab	Activist, writer	United Kingdom/Syria
Lina Sergie (also known as Amal Hanano)	Writer, Karam Foundation	Syria/United States
Kenan Rahmani	Human rights lawyer	Syria/United States

Table 1. *Interviewees*

Grounded in the interpretive paradigm (Geertz, 1973) and case study methodology (Yin, 2014), this approach prioritizes an in-depth understanding of a specific context

and experience. The interpretive paradigm allows for a thick description that captures the symbolic dimensions of the activists' messages, while the case study methodology provides a systematic framework for examining Kafranbel's unique circumstances.

Numerous studies have examined propaganda from various factions involved in the Syrian conflict, including the regime and opposition groups (Badawi, 2023; Karadjis, 2019; Scartozzi, 2015). However, this study does not seek to explore these broader propaganda perspectives. Instead, it focuses specifically on Kafranbel's creative resistance to provide a nuanced and authentic portrayal of the activists' experiences and messages. This approach is informed by the constructivist perspective, as articulated by Crotty (1998), which emphasizes the importance of understanding how individuals construct meaning within their specific contexts. Constructivism argues that knowledge and meaning are constructed through social processes and interactions; therefore, focusing on Kafranbel's activists enables a rich, contextually embedded exploration of their creative resistance. By concentrating on this, this study aims to capture the complex and context-specific ways in which they interpret and respond to their environment rather than offering a comparative analysis of external propaganda narratives.

4.1. Data Collection and Analysis

- Image collection: the images span from 2011 to 2018, covering the phases of the Syrian uprising, the transition into war, and the regime's declaration of the "end of the war" (*Assad: The End of War on Syria Is Imminent*, 2018). This timeframe is crucial for understanding the evolution of Kafranbel's communicative strategies. The images were sourced from various online platforms, including X[1], Flickr[2], Facebook[3], and Pinterest[4], some of which are no longer accessible. They were systematically collected and organized between late 2019 and early 2020. Emphasis was placed on images with legible text, high resolution, and verified association with Kafranbel. The analysis of these images employed Roland Barthes's concept of the "rhetoric of the image" to interpret their communicative significance.

- Interview process: semi-structured interviews (Wengraf, 2001) were conducted with nine participants, including both individuals who actively participated in the creative initiatives and academic experts who have studied the uprising. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, Arabic, and English via phone and email. The first interview was conducted with Kafranbel activist Hasan al-Ahmad, a young man who had been involved in the creation and dissemination of the banners since the early days of the revolutionary process. For the second interview, we reached out to Spanish-Syrian journalist Laila Muharram, who closely followed Kafranbel's contributions. The next four interviews were conducted with academics specializing in the Middle East, all of whom were deeply familiar with the revolutionary processes in the region and their implications for the media landscape (see Table 1). The last three interviews were with experts who visited Kafranbel in 2013, a period marked by intense artistic and creative production within the context of the revolutionary process and resistance to dictatorship, to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon: Robin Yassin-Kassab, co-author of the book *Syria: Burning Country*; Lina Sergie, also known as Amal Hanano, a Syrian-American writer and founder of the Karam Foundation; and Syrian human rights lawyer Kenan Rahmani.

---

[1] Kafranbel hashtag on X: https://twitter.com/search?q=%23Kafranbel&src=typed_query&f=live.

[2] Kafranbel hashtag on Flickr: https://flickr.com/search/?text=Kafranbel.

[3] Kafranbel hashtag on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/kafrnbl and https://www.facebook.com/kefranbell.coom.

[4] Kafranbel hashtag on Pinterest: https://es.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=kafranbel.

- Linguistic considerations: the linguistic diversity of the banners, which includes English, Arabic, and occasionally other languages such as Russian or Turkish, adds a layer of complexity to the analysis. The author's proficiency in Arabic and English facilitated the interpretation and translation of the majority of materials, ensuring an accurate understanding and contextualization.

5. Results

This study resulted in a visual archive comprising 214 images shared by the town of Kafranbel between 2011 and 2018. These images primarily depict banners with messages and drawings displayed during various demonstrations by Kafranbel residents. Additionally, the collection includes images that capture the process of creating the banners and contextual elements, such as the town's destruction.

The banners featured in most of these images are typically made from A1-sized cardboard (84 x 59 cm) or 4 x 1 m fabric or paper. Most banners display manually crafted designs, including drawings or cartoons, along with messages in Arabic or English and occasionally in Turkish or Russian. Each banner is signed and dated at the bottom, often with a collective signature such as "The Occupied/Liberated People of Kafranbel", with the date provided in the day–month–year format.

The images in this archive are either free of licensing restrictions or released under a Creative Commons license, which facilitates their use and redistribution. This licensing arrangement supports the potential for widespread sharing and viral dissemination.

A database[5] has been created to organize and provide access to the images from two key periods in the history of Kafranbel's banners. This database allows for systematic analysis and retrieval of the pictures, supporting further research into the town's creative resistance and its impact.

5.1. Centrality of the Human Experience

A notable characteristic of the banners is their depiction of Kafranbel residents holding them. The analysis reveals that the final image is not just of the banner but of the people presenting it. This visual presentation aligns with Sylvester's (2015) concept of storytelling "from below", emphasizing the experiences of those directly involved in the conflict.

The inclusion of individuals — often men, but also children and some women — alongside their banners introduces personal elements such as expressions, attire, and the surrounding environment, which frequently includes the town's destruction or seasonal hardships. These aspects enrich the narrative and create a compelling, authentic portrayal of Kafranbel's resistance. While banners are sometimes shared independently, their impact is amplified when combined with images of the people holding them, making the message more relatable and poignant.

---

[5] Database: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/1fg91bwni5glqeq/h?rlkey=uwm3zcq2cnz4boaokunytdh1k&e=1&dl=0, from April 2011 to April 2014, in chronological order, and https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/8b6f202tng94lngmxgwvt/AOlHqdMCYQv6upcY_tvVcr4?rlkey=ogsl3kfl9c966g41l7q3zrtoi&e=1&dl=0, from April 2014 to December 2018, in chronological order.

The role of the Kafranbel Media Center is also pivotal. The process of designing and creating the banners was both spontaneous and professional. Led by journalist Raed Fares and artist Ahmad Jalal, the Media Center became central to the town's protest communication. As described by Kassab (personal communication, November 3, 2020):

> the work was, actually, very organic and quite spontaneous. Being in that room, that welcoming space open to everyone that served as the Media Center, meant seeing people constantly coming and going — neighbors entering and leaving, people from different backgrounds and occupations discussing ideas, joining ongoing conversations, overlapping talks that formed a very spontaneous process while simultaneously accompanied by the professionalization of the Media Center's own work.

The interplay between online and offline aspects significantly contributed to the banners' impact. The banners' offline display during protests, combined with their online dissemination, created a powerful narrative presence. Raed Fares and others interacted with activists globally, and the Media Center's work was widely shared through online channels. As Kenan Rahmani (personal communication, December 17, 2020) noted:

> [Raed] spoke with activists from different countries; we interacted through online conversations and exchanged ideas. From there, he would meet with Ahmad Jalal [one of those in charge of the drawing aspect of the banners], they would create the banner at the Media Center, and then take it to the Friday protest, where the image was captured and later disseminated worldwide through online channels.

Occasionally, images included not only the final banners during demonstrations but also the process of their creation. For instance, pictures dated December 8, 2012, and January 16, 2012, depict Fares and Jalal smiling and engaged in creating posters, surrounded by their working materials.

5.2. The Presence of Children

Central to the humanization in Kafranbel's storytelling is the presence of children (*n* = 101). These children appear both thematically and visually in the images, shaping the narrative and impacting those who engage with it.

Since 2011, nearly 12,000 children have been verified as killed or injured in Syria — roughly one child every eight hours over the past decade — many due to bombings targeting schools and educational institutions, according to the United Nations (2021). Unlike other conflicts where children may be collateral damage, in the Syrian context, the child population was targeted explicitly from the early stages of the uprising (Allaf, 2012).

Several interviewees emphasize the central role of children in the Syrian revolutionary process and the crackdown against revolutionary towns. This is reflected in numerous posters that pay tribute to children killed in the regime and Russian airstrikes (e.g.,

November 24, 2015), sieges like Ghouta (e.g., June 20, 2014), and attacks by extremist groups (e.g., December 5, 2015). As Lina Sergie (personal communication, November 12, 2020) notes:

> in Kafranbel's posters, children are always presented with their dignity; holding a poster does not take away their dignity nor puts them at risk. What puts their lives at risk are the constant bombings [by the Syrian regime and its allies]. It is crucial to understand the context, to understand that the entire childhood of these children is marked by violence and repression, that they grow up under bombs, and hiding them, if possible, would make no sense.

5.3. Women in the Communication Process

The representation of women in Kafranbel's banners is notably sparse. Most of the images feature young or middle-aged men and children holding signs. We identified only three images where women are depicted holding banners or signs, dated March 12, 2013, April 12, 2013, and June 21, 2013.

According to Yassin-Kassab, who has firsthand experience of Kafranbel's internal dynamics, the town's conservative rural environment means that women are less visible in public spaces compared to men. He also points out that "the brutality of the regime, followed by that of others, contributed to women's diminished presence in public spaces, as they sought to protect themselves and their children" (Robin Yassin-Kassab, personal communication, November 3, 2020).

It is important to recognize, however, that while women may not be prominently featured in the images holding banners, they were actively involved in the creative and media processes within the town. According to Rahmani (personal communication, December 17, 2020), who also visited Kafranbel:

> in Kafranbel, there were women on the radio of the Center of Media as reporters, presenters, administrative workers, and announcers. Projects were created to train and empower women journalists. (...) The radio became the most listened to in the country, and Raed used to tell me: "you'll see, Kenan, it is so evident how important and beneficial this work is that soon the parents of young women will come themselves to ask me to enroll their daughters in these courses or include them in the radio work".

5.4. Persuasive Nature of the Storytelling

A key characteristic of Kafranbel's banners is their persuasive nature, which is closely tied to the human protagonism previously discussed. This persuasive quality is evident in numerous banners that include direct calls to action. For example, messages

such as "it's a revolution what's happening in Syria. Please understand us" (image from January 11, 2013) and "it's not a war, it's a genocide. Let us die but do not lie" (image from December 2, 2012) seek to garner international solidarity with the Syrian uprising. These banners challenge framings of the conflict as mere sectarian strife or civil war, which are explicitly rejected in other posters.

Additionally, banners that satirize political decisions (e.g., images from June 7, 2013, and May 10, 2013) or criticize the inaction of the international community are also designed to persuade viewers of the need for change regarding Syria's situation.

The messages on these banners are clear, direct, and straightforward. They typically consist of short phrases, often just one or two sentences, which present a reflection on the current situation in Syria and a call to action. The predominant use of indicative verb forms in the present or simple past tense describes daily realities, while imperatives are employed to appeal to various actors and audiences.

Language choice plays a crucial role in this persuasive strategy. Banners are written in Arabic or English, with occasional use of other languages such as Russian (e.g., October 3, 2015), Turkish, Kurdish (e.g., April 28, 2012), or French. This multilingual approach is intentional, targeting diverse audiences to maximize the impact of the messages.

Robin Yassin-Kassab (personal communication, November 3, 2020), who was involved in the creation of some of the banners, explains the strategic use of language:

> what was happening during the revolution and in the war determined the messages and the audience they were addressing. If the people saw that Arab governments were involved [in the conflict], they crafted their messages to be picked up by Al Jazeera or other media outlets. If there was an international event, they responded in English, taking that event into account.

Data analysis reveals a clear correlation between language use and the context of Kafranbel's banners. In the early stages of the conflict (late 2011 to early 2012), most banners were in Arabic, reflecting the local context and audience. From mid-2012 onwards, there was a noticeable shift towards English to persuade the international community to support the Syrian people's demands and condemn rights violations. As the town became more desperate for help, calls for Western intervention to counter Russian military attacks increased. In the final period, the prevalence of Arabic banners rose again, reflecting waning trust in international responses and a renewed focus on consolidating the revolutionary process locally. Despite significant support from entities such as the United States Agency for International Development, the European Union, and the National Endowment for Democracy, Kafranbel's banners maintained editorial independence, frequently critiquing Western policies and United States actions specifically.

The evolution of the banners also reflects the broader circumstances of their creation. Notably, the poignant absence of banners during the period of the town's silence in October 2018 — following its reconquest by the Syrian regime and the tragic assassination of journalist Raed Fares — highlights the impact of these significant events on Kafranbel's communication efforts.

5.5. Main Themes Drawn From the Banners

We identify the following recurrent themes: the human impact of the attacks on the town, satire directed at the regime, the involvement of geostrategic powers in Syria's fate, the international community's passivity, and its responsibility for the suffering of the Syrian people. Additionally, the mistakes of the political opposition and their effects on the revolutionary process, as well as the rejection of extremism, sectarianism, groups affiliated with al-Qaeda, and the suffering of the most vulnerable, are central to the town's storytelling.

A distinctive feature of Kafranbel's storytelling is its integration of local and global issues. The town skillfully connects its struggles to international events and celebrations. For example, Kafranbel's banners have referenced significant events such as the Boston bombings, global observances like Mother's Day, International Women's Day, and Children's Day (e.g., April 25, 2012), as well as prestigious ceremonies like the Nobel Peace Prize.

The banners also draw connections with other global struggles, expressing solidarity with movements such as those in Burma (July 10, 2012) and Ukraine (February 21, 2014). During the Boston bombings, a banner read: "the Boston bombings are a terrible scene, representing what happens daily in Syria. Accept our condolences" (April 19, 2013). Additionally, historical struggles are acknowledged, as seen in a tribute to Nelson Mandela's resistance against apartheid, which links his legacy to the Syrian people's demands and the perceived abandonment by the international community. Universal concepts like "democracy" are often depicted in striking ways, such as a caricature of democracy as a terminally ill patient connected to a blood transfusion machine.

5.6. Increasing Creativity and Sophistication

The evolution of Kafranbel's banners shows a marked increase in creativity and sophistication. Initially, the banners featured only text with simpler designs, as seen in early examples from August 26, 2011, November 25, 2011, and December 23, 2011. These early banners had thicker, less defined strokes and appeared hastily constructed.

As the revolutionary process and the regime's crackdown progressed, the banners became more elaborate and refined. They began incorporating drawings and sophisticated design elements. For example, by October 10, 2015, banners featured elaborate typography and imagery, such as a parody of the film *GoodFellas* (1990), with the subtitle "war criminals", depicting Putin, Assad, and ISIS leader al-Baghdadi. Hollywood cinema frequently served as inspiration for the banners. Iconic film references, such as *Titanic* (1997) in the banner from July 22, 2012, and *Alien* (1979) in the banner from January 3, 2014, were used to draw parallels between current events and well-known cinematic narratives.

6. Conclusions

This study provides a thorough exploration of Kafranbel's communicative phenomenon from 2011 to 2018, revealing how the town's banners became a powerful tool for storytelling and resistance during the Syrian uprising. Through a descriptive and

qualitative case study methodology, this research delves into the intricate dynamics behind Kafranbel's creative process and the broader implications of its messages.

Kafranbel's banners emerged as a reaction to the Syrian regime's crackdown and the country's oppressive media environment, leveraging the momentum of the Arab Spring to contest the regime's narrative. Initially characterized by simple text, the banners progressively integrated sophisticated visual elements and design techniques, mirroring the town's increasing expertise and strategic communication objectives.

Beyond countering regime propaganda, Kafranbel's banners addressed the threats posed by extremist groups, including ISIS, who sought to exploit the conflict's power vacuum. The banners became a crucial medium for resisting both the regime and extremist ideologies, underscoring the town's vision of a democratic and pluralistic Syria. Kafranbel's creative output represents a dual defiance against oppressive forces and a dedication to a more humane future amid a complex, multilayered conflict.

The analysis of 214 banners, complemented by interviews with nine key informants, reveals a deliberate and inventive storytelling approach. The use of humor, satire, and global references illustrates a strategic effort to resonate with diverse audiences and emphasize universal themes. Kafranbel's storytelling, marked by its thematic diversity and strategic use of language and imagery, provides valuable insights into local resistance and global communication dynamics. The banners not only document the town's struggle but also aim to inspire international solidarity and action.

Future research could further explore the interplay between local creative resistance and global communication dynamics. Comparative studies might shed light on how similar forms of creative resistance manifest in other conflict zones and their influence on international perceptions and responses. Additionally, analyzing the broader implications of such media practices could enhance understanding of their impact on global awareness and policy responses, offering a richer perspective on the role of creative media in shaping both local and international narratives.

References

Abboud, S. N. (2018). *Syria: Hot spots in global politics*. Polity Press.

Adi, M.-M. (2014). *The usage of social media in the Arab Spring*. LIT Verlag.

Ahmad, A. R., & Hamasaeed, H. H. (2015). The role of social media in the Syrian Uprising. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, *4*(2), 39–48. https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v4i2.105

Al Natour, M. (2022). Home, identity, and place in Syrian literature: Maha Hassan's Drums of Love and Ghassan Jubba'i's Qahwat Al-General. *Contemporary Levant*, *7*(1), 66–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/20581831.2022.2058717

Allaf, R. (2012, January 17). *Syrian women, backbone of the revolution*. Media Monitors Network. https://www.mediamonitors.net/syrian-women-backbone-of-the-revolution/

Alshab, A. (2021). *Centralization and decentralization in Syria: Comparison of before and after 2011* [Master's thesis, Hasan Kalyoncu Üniversitesi].

Álvarez-Ossorio, I. (2012). Syria's struggling civil society and the Syrian uprising. *Middle East Quarterly*, *19*(2), 23–32.

Álvarez-Ossorio, I. (2015). El enroque autoritario del régimen sirio: De la revuelta popular a la guerra civil. *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, (109), 157–176.

Álvarez-Ossorio, I. (2017). *Siria: Revolución, sectarismo y Yihad*. Los Libros de la Catarata.

Álvarez-Ossorio, I., & Nachawati Rego, L. (2023). Dinámicas de resistencia civil en Siria desafiando al régimen autoritario. In C. Pérez Beltrán (Ed.), *Dinámicas de protestas en el mundo árabe: Desafiando a los regímenes autoritarios* (pp. 279–308). Editorial Universidad de Granada.

Assad: The end of war on Syria is imminent. (2018, October 4). Roya News. https://en.royanews.tv/news/56959

Awad, S. H., & Wagoner, B. (Eds.). (2018). *Street art of resistance*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bachleitner, K. (2022). Legacies of war: Syrian narratives of conflict and visions of peace. *International Studies Quarterly*, *57*(1), 43–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/00108367211032691

Bachleitner, K., & Matthiesen, T. (2021). Introduction to themed section on 'Belonging to Syria: National identifications before and after 2011'. *Nations and Nationalism*, *28*(1), 117–124. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12784

Badawi, H. (2023). Pro-Syrian regime versus anti-regime outlets: A comparative critical discourse analysis. *International Journal of Management and Humanities*, *9*(10), 8–14. https://www.doi.org/10.35940/ijmh.J1619.0691023

Barthes, R. (1977). *Image-music-text* (S. Heath, Trans.). Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1964)

Ben Moussa, M. (2013). From Arab street to social movements: Re-theorizing collective action and the role of social media in the Arab Spring. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, *9*(2), 47–68. https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.166

Bonnefoy, L., & Louer, L. (2021). Le Printemps Arabe dans la péninsule Arabique. *CERI - Centre de Recherches Internationals*, (4). https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.2803

Brown, H., Guskin, E., & Mitchell, A. (2012). *The role of social media in the Arab uprisings*. Pew Research Center.

Brym, R., Godbout, M., Hoffbauer, A., Menard, G., & Zhang, T. H. (2014). Social media in the 2011 Egyptian uprising. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *65*, 266–292. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12080

Camps-Febrer, B. (2013). *Political humor as a confrontational tool against the Syrian regime; a study case: Syria, 15th March 2011 – 15th May 2012*. International Catalan Institute for Peace. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2205200

Couldry, N. (2008). Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent media environment. *New Media & Society*, *10*(3), 315–336. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444808089414

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. SAGE.

Della Ratta, D. (2018). *Shooting a revolution: Visual media and warfare in Syria*. Pluto Press.

Dibo, M. (2013, December 21). *Kafranbel: The conscience of the revolution*. SyriaUntold. https://syriauntold.com/2013/12/21/kafranbel-the-conscience-of-the-revolution/

Durand, J. (1982). Retórica e imagen publicitaria (M. T. Cevasco, Trad.). In C. Metz, U. Eco, J. Durand, G. Péninou, V. Morin, S. Du Pasquier, P. Fresnault-Deruelle, C. Metz, J. Bertin, L. Marin, & J.-L. Schefer (Eds.), *Análisis de las imágenes* (pp. 81–115). Ediciones Buenos Aires. (Trabalho original publicado em 1970)

El Khannoussi, J. (2012). Factores internos y externos de la revolución siria. *Revista Internacional de Pensamiento Político*, 7, 27–41.

El Omari, H., El Fakir, M., & Şaban, N. (2016). *The political role of local councils in Syria: Survey results*. Omran Center for Strategic Studies.

Espiritusanto, O., & Rodríguez, P. G. (2011). *Periodismo ciudadano: Evolución positiva de la comunicación*. Ariel; Fundación Telefónica.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. Basic Books.

Ghannam, J. (2011). *Digital media in the Arab world: The impact of social media on political change* (Arab Social Media Report, 10-25-11). Brookings Institution.

Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left*. University of California Press.

Graham-Harrison, E. (2018, November 23). Influential Syrian activist Raed Fares gunned down in Idlib. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/23/influential-syrian-activist-raed-fares-gunned-down-in-idlib

Griswold, E. (2014, December 4). Radio-free Syria. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/07/magazine/radio-free-syria.html

Guedes, A. M., & Costa, R. D. (Eds.). (2019). *O "grande Médio Oriente" alargado* (Vol. 1). Instituto Universitário Militar.

Hanano, A. (2013, October 18). Rising up and rising down: In Syria's little town that could, the death and resurrection of the witty, profane campaign to show the world the tragedy of civil war. *Foreign Policy*. https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/10/18/rising-up-and-rising-down/

Howard, P. N., Duffy, A., Freelon, D., Hussain, M. M., Mari, W., & Maziad, M. (2011). *Opening closed regimes: What was the role of social media during the Arab Spring?* https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2595096

Hubbard, B. (2018, November 23). Activist who used humor to highlight war is gunned down in Syria. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/23/world/middleeast/syria-fares-activist-killed.html

Hurtado, L. M. (2014, January 6). Asalto rebelde al feudo de la milicia yihadista ISIS en Siria. *El Mundo*. https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2014/01/06/52cb0e0522601dba098b457a.html

Jurgenson, N. (2012). When atoms meet bits: Social media, the mobile web and augmented revolution. *Future Internet*, 4(1), 83–91. https://doi.org/10.3390/fi4010083

Kache, A. (2013). Trajectoires de villes syriennes dans la révolution. Vers l'émergence d'une citoyenneté? *Confluences Méditerranée*, (85), 103–113.

Karadjis, M. (2019). Review of the book State Propaganda in Syria: From War Crimes to Pipelines, by N. Ahmed. *State Crime Journal*, 8(1), 167–170.

Karim, S., & Islam, M. N. (2016). Syrian crisis: Geopolitics and implications. *BIISS Journal*, 37(2), 107–132. https://biiss.org/publication-view/135035625873290448

Khalaf, R. (2015). Governance without government in Syria: Civil society and state building during conflict. *Syria Studies*, *7*(3), 37–72.

Khamis, S., Gold, P. B., & Vaughn, K. (2012). Beyond Egypt's "Facebook Revolution" and Syria's "YouTube Uprising:" Comparing political contexts, actors, and communication strategies. *Arab Media and Society*. https://www.arabmediasociety.com/beyond-egypts-facebook-revolution-and-syrias-youtube-uprising-comparing-political-contexts-actors-and-communication-strategies/

Khondker, H. H. (2011). Role of the new media in the Arab Spring. *Globalizations*, *8*(5), 675–679. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2011.621287

Lynch, M., Freelon, D., & Aday, S. (2014). Syria in the Arab Spring: The integration of Syria's conflict with the Arab uprisings, 2011–2013. *Research & Politics*, *1*(3), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168014549091

Magnarella, P. J. (2017). *Middle East and North Africa: Governance, democratization, human rights*. Routledge.

McLuhan, H. M., & Fiore, Q. (1967). *The medium is the massage*. Bantam Books.

Pedersen, M. A., Albris, K., & Seaver, N. (2021). The political economy of attention. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *50*, 309–325. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-101819-110356

Raed Fares: Syria radio host shot dead in Idlib. (2018, November 24). BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-46320355

Ramírez Díaz, N. (2016). Against all odds: Defining a revolutionary identity in Syria. In A. Douai & M. Ben Moussa (Eds.), *Mediated identities and new journalism in the Arab world* (pp. 83–99). Springer.

Ruiz de Elvira, L. (2011). Siria, el largo camino hacia la revolución. *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos*, *10*, 33–46. https://hdl.handle.net/10486/670294

Saleh, Y. A. H. (2017). *The impossible revolution: Making sense of the Syrian tragedy*. Oxford University Press.

Scartozzi, C. M. (2015). Assad's strategic narrative: The role of communication in the Syrian civil war. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, *2*(4), 313–327. https://doi.org/10.1177/2347798915610037

Simon, H. (1971). *Designing organizations for an information-rich world*. Johns Hopkins Press.

Sylvester, C. (Ed.). (2015). *Masquerades of war*. Taylor & Francis.

Tufekci, Z., & Wilson, C. (2012). Social media and the decision to participate in political protest: Observations From Tahrir Square. *Journal of Communication*, *62*(2), 363–379. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01629.x

United Nations. (2021, March 12). *Syria war: Average of one child injured or killed every eight hours over the past 10 years*. https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087212

Wall, M. (2015). Citizen journalism: A retrospective on what we know, an agenda for what we don't. *Digital Journalism*, *3*(6), 797–813. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.1002513

Wedeen, L. (2013). Ideology and humor in dark times: Notes from Syria. *Critical Inquiry*, *39*(4), 841–873. https://doi.org/10.1086/671358

Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing: Biographic narrative and semi-structured methods*. SAGE.

Wessels, J. I. (2015). Syrian masquerades. In C. Sylvester (Ed.), *Masquerades of war* (pp. 95–117). Taylor & Francis.

Yassin-Kassab, R., & Al-Shami, L. (2016). *Burning country: Syrians in revolution and war*. Pluto Press.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. SAGE.

Zarwan, E. (2005). *False freedom: Online censorship in the Middle East and North Africa*. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/11/14/false-freedom/online-censorship-middle-east-and-north-africa

Biographical Note

Leila Nachawati Rego is professor of Communication at Carlos III University of Madrid. She earned her doctorate in conflict and media studies, achieving a *cum laude* distinction for her dissertation exploring citizen communications in the context of the Syrian conflict. Her research focuses on the intersections of media, human rights, and citizen participation, with a special focus on the Middle East. She is actively involved in human rights promotion and contributes to various international media outlets.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1772-4649

Email: lnachawa@hum.uc3m.es

Address: Universidad Carlos III de Madrid C/ Madrid 126 - 28903 Getafe (Madrid)

From Censorship to Resistance: Mobilisations in Defence of Freedom of Artistic Expression in Brazil

Maiara Orlandini
Instituto de Educação Continuada, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil/Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação Social, Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil
Conceptualisation, data curation, formal analysis, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Bruna Silveira de Oliveira
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação Social, Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil
Conceptualisation, data curation, formal analysis, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, visualisation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Marina Mesquita Camisasca
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação Social, Faculdade de Comunicação e Artes, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil
Conceptualisation, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, project administration, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Fernanda Nalon Sanglard
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação Social, Faculdade de Comunicação e Artes, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil
Data curation, formal analysis, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, project administration, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Abstract

This article examines online and offline responses to attempts to censor artistic productions in Brazil between 2017 and 2022. It focuses on identifying and analysing instances of artistic censorship attempts and the mobilisations they provoked. By situating these events within the broader Brazilian political context, the study highlights new repertoires of action that enable agency and creativity in resistance efforts. It also explores how these mobilisations defended freedom of expression, a fundamental principle for fostering plurality and inclusion in public debate. The research employs content analysis, following Krippendorff and Boc's (2007) criteria, to investigate censorship mechanisms and media narratives drawing on data from journalistic websites and social media platforms. The findings reveal that opposition to censorship unfolded through four main dynamics: campaigns, street protests, alternative actions, and hashtag activism. Notably, alternative actions emerged as the most expressive form of resistance, characterised by creativity. These protests against censorship took shape through diverse artistic performances, underscoring the ongoing adaptability of artists as they challenged restrictive norms and expanded their repertoire in defence of freedom of expression.

Keywords

censorship, political mobilisation, freedom of expression, arts

Das Ações Censórias à Resistência: Mobilizações em Defesa da Liberdade de Expressão Artística no Brasil

Resumo

Este artigo explora as manifestações online e offline que surgiram em resposta às tentativas de censura a produções artísticas no Brasil entre 2017 e 2022. O foco é identificar e analisar episódios e tentativas de censura à arte, examinando as reações e mobilizações desencadeadas. Ao lançar luz sobre as influências do contexto político brasileiro, o estudo destaca os novos repertórios de ação que conferem agência e criatividade aos confrontos. Além disso, reflete sobre como essas mobilizações de resistência atuaram na defesa da liberdade de expressão, que é crucial para a promoção da pluralidade e da inclusão no debate público. Utilizando dados coletados em *sites* jornalísticos e plataformas de mídias sociais, a pesquisa emprega a análise de conteúdo nos critérios de Krippendorff e Boc (2007) para examinar os mecanismos de censura e as narrativas midiáticas sobre eles. Os resultados revelam que as manifestações contra a censura se desdobraram em quatro dinâmicas principais: campanhas, protestos de rua, ações alternativas e ativismo de *hashtags*. Notavelmente, as ações alternativas se destacaram como a categoria mais expressiva, impulsionada pela criatividade. Essas manifestações contra a censura se materializaram em diversas performances artísticas, evidenciando a constante adaptação dos artistas ao desafiar normas e expandir o repertório em prol da defesa da liberdade de expressão.

Palavras-chave

censura, mobilização política, liberdade de expressão, artes

1. Introduction

Despite democratic progress and the internationalisation of human rights — particularly those related to the defence of freedom of expression — many countries have recently experienced an anti-democratic shift marked by the erosion of fundamental rights. Brazil was no exception: following the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, the country underwent a process of "scorched earth", dismantling democratic advancements and social justice initiatives established since the end of the military dictatorship (1964–1985). The democratic gains achieved, particularly since the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, led to progressive inclusion policies that amplified the voices and visibility of historically marginalised groups, including within the cultural sphere. In response to these social transformations, conservative groups aligned with the new right perceived a loss of power as a dominant class (e.g., Rocha, 2021) and, from 2017 onwards, implemented strategies to suppress various forms of expression. These included monitoring artistic productions, exerting political influence in legislative bodies and political parties, and leveraging social media platforms and disinformation tactics to mobilise supporters.

Following the parliamentary coup against Dilma Rousseff and the subsequent inauguration of then Vice-President Michel Temer as President of the Republic, the persecution and attempted censorship of intellectuals, teachers, and artists intensified (Miguel, 2018; Sanglard et al., 2023). Since 2017, Brazil has witnessed a growing movement to

suppress scientific, journalistic, and artistic productions, with repeated attempts to curtail freedom of expression and press freedom — often culminating in the criminalisation of those involved. Many of these actions were concealed to avoid overtly resembling censorship, with the State, its representatives, and religious and political groups among the main perpetrators (Sanglard et al., 2023).

This movement to undermine diversity through the construction of anti-democratic and anti-institutional narratives, particularly online, gained momentum following the presidential election of Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right conservative politician who took office in January 2019. His campaign was marked by the use of bots and the spread of fake news (Harbath, 2018; Ruediger et al., 2021). The actions of ultraconservative and extremist groups emboldened by Bolsonaro's rise to power exposed the fragility of Brazilian democracy, which faced relentless attacks — including calls for a return to military dictatorship and the closure of the National Congress and the Federal Supreme Court. These efforts, particularly within digital environments, culminated in the attempted coup of January 2023, when the headquarters of the Three Powers were stormed following Bolsonaro's electoral defeat.

Against this backdrop of democratic regression, this article examines the mobilisations against artistic censorship in Brazil between 2017 and 2022. The study is based on research that monitors cultural productions censored and/or targeted by conservative groups that gained national prominence and sparked public debate, whether through media or social networks. The mapping was conducted using mixed methods, including data collection from social media platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, and X), monitoring Brazilian news outlets (such as *Folha de S. Paulo*, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, and the G1 portal), and applying content analysis. This process resulted in a database comprising 89 emblematic cases of artistic censorship.

Thus, this article aims to (a) examine the responses to censorship and attacks on Brazilian artists; (b) contextualise the mobilisation processes within the broader national political landscape; and (c) explore how these resistance movements defended freedom of expression, which should be recognised as a fundamental pillar for ensuring plurality and genuine inclusion in public debate (Scabin & Leite, 2021).

2. Contemporary Art Censorship: Is There Respect for Freedom of Expression?

Conflicts and symbolic disputes over the concept of "freedom of expression" in Brazil have gained increasing prominence over the past decade[1]. These disputes not only serve to justify intolerant positions — highlighting the rise of conservative groups in civil society and formal political representation who actively patrol collective and individual freedoms — but also fuel movements defending these freedoms. This paper examines various social mobilisations that have engaged in protecting freedom of expression.

---

[1] This phenomenon is also linked to the process of platformisation (Poell et al., 2020) and informational disorder (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017), where social actors appropriate specific terminologies to defend controversial viewpoints — particularly within the platformised environment — on topics that were once considered to be subjects of social consensus.

Given that this right has been subject to epistemic disputes and has polarised political groups in the country (Oliveira et al., 2022; Sanglard et al., 2021, 2023), it is crucial to understand freedom of expression as a fundamental element in building a democratic and participatory society. Accordingly, it is important to consider the State's role in ensuring the creation of opportunities for inclusive debates (Barendt, 2017; Edström & Svensson, 2016; Fiss, 1996/2022; Miguel, 2018; Sodré, 2021). The 1988 Federal Constitution is a key example, reaffirming the defence of this freedom to restore public debate and uphold the free exercise of individual autonomy (Fiss, 1996/2022).

Freedom of artistic expression, the focus of this article, is also protected by the right to culture in Brazil, as stipulated in Article 5, IX, of the Federal Constitution. Furthermore, both the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1945 Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation affirm the concept of "freedom" as a safeguard for other social objectives, such as peace and democracy (Nordenstreng, 2016).

As noted by Hal Foster (2013), contemporary society is experiencing a notable scarcity of spaces dedicated to art criticism, which conservative groups and commercial pressures have undermined. Foster argues that criticism has been hollowed out, leaving room for even pluralism to be overshadowed. Driven by power, criticism has lost its reflexive nature concerning its own claims. Consequently, works of art that challenge the *status quo* are frequently subjected to censorship and criminalisation (Sanglard et al., 2023).

Rodrigo Santos, author of the short story *Baratária* and creator of the performance *A Voz do Ralo É a Voz de Deus* (The Voice of the Drain Is the Voice of God), which was censored in 2018 in Rio de Janeiro for criticising Jair Bolsonaro (Liberal Party), states: "I really like discomfort. In some way, we need to provoke. It was a brilliant move on their part to connect it with the present, give it new meaning, and also create a record of its time" (Cavicchioli & Cruz, 2018, para. 7). The literary work by Santos recounts the story of a woman who endured torture during the military dictatorship, which involved the insertion of cockroaches into her vagina. Based on this narrative, the És Uma Maluca collective staged a performance in which one of its actresses lay on the floor surrounded by cockroaches, with audio clips of Bolsonaro's speeches emanating from a maintenance hole. As Santos emphasises, the purpose of art is to evoke discomfort and shock. Art has an impact, and its primary role is to provoke unease in the face of realities and moralities that need to be criticised (see also Miguel, 2018; Sanglard et al., 2021).

3. Collective Actions: Defending Freedom of Expression as a Rallying Cry for Political Engagement

The criminalisation of Brazilian artistic expressions, as explored in previous research, highlights how issues related to politics, religion, and sexuality can provoke censorship (Oliveira et al., 2022; Sanglard et al., 2021, 2023). Nudity and the representation of gender diversity in artworks are frequently distorted, interpreted as obscene or erotic, and, in some cases, criminalised. Political critique, particularly that which questions Brazil's

authoritarian past or involves political figures — whether elected or contesting elections — is often suppressed in an effort to silence opposing viewpoints and prevent public debate. Meanwhile, religious arguments are predominantly invoked to disguise the reinforcement of conservative and intolerant agendas, resulting in the restriction of freedom of expression under the guise of religious justification.

Censorship, or attempts at it, not only aims to stifle public dialogue but also seeks to obscure subjects and themes that are frequently underrepresented in the public sphere. However, it is precisely the political and social critiques embodied in artistic expressions that carry an inherent potential to challenge dominant systems. This underscores the relevance of the concept of "collective action" in this context. As Sanglard and Santos (2013) assert, drawing from the work *Collective Action in Organisations* by Bimber et al. (2012),

> collective action is understood as the coming together of individuals who advocate for a cause, recruit participants to protest or unite in order to gain a voice and representation before public institutions, corporations, and other entities. It can be driven by the goal of promoting public debate on a particular issue (such as health) or the necessity of gathering people to advance a shared "public good". (p. 117)

According to the authors, the proliferation and use of information technologies, coupled with the ability to develop movements in a decentralised manner without reliance on formal organisations, have brought significant changes to collective action.

Charles Tilly's (2008) approach, which views performance as a repertoire of action, provides a useful framework for understanding how artists, when confronted with censorship, can create innovative and impactful performances as a response.

By conceptualising performance as a series of symbolic and cultural actions, we can observe how those subjected to censorship often employ their bodies and artistic expressions as forms of resistance. These performances, as part of a repertoire of action against censorship, not only challenge conservative forces but also defend diverse artistic representation within society, reinforcing the necessity of debating freedom of expression.

In a broad process of reviewing and understanding the political processes of the time, Charles Tilly (2008) conceptualised the repertoire of collective action as a set of variable performances deeply shaped by local culture, traditions, and values. Focusing on the performances inherent in political mobilisations, Tilly argues that these are continuously evolving due to processes such as choice, interpretation, improvisation, and learning. The author emphasises the essential interdependence between mobilisations and institutionalised political systems. This suggests that to fully understand the dynamics of political mobilisations, it is crucial to view them as partly the outcome of transformations within institutionalised politics. Similarly, changes in institutionalised politics often reflect and influence mobilisations. In this context, the repertoire of responses to censorship takes on various forms, depending on the nature of the censorial action and vice versa.

Tilly's (2008) latest book introduces a type of political action known as "performing", which stands out by not adhering to conventional repertoires. It unfolds unpredictably, challenging traditional expectations of political confrontation. In this context, "political action as performance" redefines the conventional view of political conflict, expanding the very concept of action repertoires. Participants in such actions are continually improvising — either adapting existing routines to convey their demands or responding to the reactions of others. This spontaneity, theatricality, and improvisation infuse these confrontations with agency and creativity, resulting in a dynamic and evolving set of actions.

In this study, we analysed collective initiatives aimed at safeguarding freedom of expression, which took various forms in response to attacks and/or attempts to restrict artistic manifestations in Brazil between 2017 and 2022. We argue that contemporary mobilisations have been pivotal in shaping and influencing public opinion, both in support of censorship and in opposition to it, adopting diverse strategies and introducing new repertoires for action.

4. Methodological Procedures and Analytical *Corpus*

This article stems from a broader study aimed at documenting cases of censorship of artistic manifestations in Brazil between 2017 and 2022 (Oliveira et al., 2022; Sanglard et al., 2021, 2023). The year 2017 was selected as the starting point for data collection due to its symbolic significance in the context of Brazil's democratic recession, which began following the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016. Until then, since the end of the military dictatorship (1964–1985) and the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, instances of censorship appeared to be isolated occurrences in Brazil.

However, since 2017, there has been a marked shift, with coordinated acts of censorship, attacks, and persecution targeting artistic productions and artists — driven by ultraconservative groups exhibiting a form of moralistic hysteria (Duarte, 2018; Sanglard et al., 2023). This emerging form of censorship, along with the responses to it, warranted analysis, particularly in the context of the online public sphere, which has become a key arena for debate and mobilisation (Costa & Souza Junior, 2018). The final timeframe chosen was 2022, marking the end of President Jair Bolsonaro's term. As an ultraright-wing politician, Bolsonaro implemented anti-democratic policies and endorsed censorship and intimidation tactics against various artistic expressions throughout his administration.

The research identified 89 instances of censorship, attempted censorship, artist intimidation, or repression of artistic expression, which we will collectively refer to as "censorious practices". To document these cases, we employed research techniques that included keyword searches on Brazilian news websites such as *Folha de S. Paulo*, G1, and *O Estado de S. Paulo*, as well as on social media platforms like X and Instagram. Data collection combined manual methods with artificial intelligence, using the Python programming language to access websites via their application programming interfaces. We established three criteria for selecting the cultural productions examined: (a) artistic

manifestations targeted by conservative efforts to judge or criminalise art; (b) cases that gained national visibility in traditional media; and (c) events that triggered reactions and/or mobilisations in defence of artistic expression.

The 89 cases were classified into 18 predefined categories, which included the date and location of occurrence, the type of artistic expression involved (such as exhibitions, performances, musical and theatrical productions), and the form of censorship enacted (e.g., prior censorship, subsequent cancellation, artist arrest, material seizure, self-censorship). We also identified the agents responsible for the censorship (governments, parliamentarians, the judiciary, police, and cultural institutions), the justifications or motivations cited (sexuality, religion, or political criticism), and the individuals or groups supporting the censorship. Additionally, we examined whether physical violence was involved, whether cancellations or online attacks occurred, and the nature of responses to censorship (street protests, online campaigns, alternative actions, or hashtag activism). This article focuses on the latter category, exploring how responses to censorship unfolded.

To categorise the episodes according to the variables mentioned, we applied the principles of content analysis as defined by Krippendorff and Boc (2007) to data collected from social media platforms and journalistic narratives. After coding the material, we conducted reliability tests, obtaining a Krippendorff's alpha index ranging from 0.86 to 1[2]. All episodes were categorised and subsequently subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS Statistics, alongside a qualitative study, to explore their characteristics and nuances.

In all 89 cases of censorship of the arts identified in this study, some form of opposition emerged on the monitored social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and X). Nonetheless, in 67 of these cases[3] — amounting to 75.28% — protests extended beyond social media, evolving into street demonstrations, campaigns, alternative actions, and/or hashtag activism. These cases are detailed in Table 1.

Number	Case	Type of artistic manifestation	Date*
1	*DNA de Dan* (Dan's DNA)	Performance	July 2017
2	*La Bête* (The Beast)	Performance	September 2017
3	*Queermuseu* (Queermuseum)	Exhibition/visual arts	September 2017
4	*Não Matarás* (Thou Shalt Not Kill)	Exhibition/visual arts	September 2017
5	*Pedofilia* (Paedophilia)	Exhibition/visual arts	September 2017
6	Caetano Veloso Homeless Workers' Movement	Music/show	October 2017
7	*Faça Você Mesmo Sua Capela Sistina* (Make Your Own Sistine Chapel)	Exhibition/visual arts	October 2017

[2] Krippendorff's alpha is a coefficient that measures the level of agreement among two or more coders when categorising a set of analysis units. The closer the value is to 1, the higher the reliability.

[3] The other 22 cases, although included in the *corpus* as instances of opposition to censorship, did not reach the level of mobilisation necessary to be classified as street protests, campaigns, alternative actions, or hashtag creation. Instead, they consisted solely of isolated comments from individuals expressing their opposition to the attack on the artistic manifestation in question.

8	*História da Sexualidade* (History of Sexuality)	Exhibition/visual arts	October 2017
9	*Pequenas Igrejas Grandes Negócios* (Small Churches Big Businesses)	Theatre performance	March 2018
10	Graffiti Without a Name	Graffiti	May 2018
11	*Todos Podem Ser Frida* (Everyone Can Be Frida)	Exhibition/photography	September 2018
12	*Meninos Sem Pátria* (Boys Without a Country)	Literature	October 2018
13	Roger Waters	Music/show	October 2018
14	*A Voz do Ralo É a Voz de Deus*	Performance	December 2018
15	Banco do Brasil	Advertising piece	April 2019
16	Sawdust mat	Other	April 2019
17	*O que Pode um Casamento (Gay)?* (What Can a [Gay] Marriage Do?)	Exhibition/visual arts	May 2019
18	Jaraguá do Sul Book Fair	Literature	July 2019
19	*Coroação de Nossa Senhora das Travestis* (Coronation of Our Lady of the Transvestites)	Performance	July 2019
20	*M'Bai*	Exhibition/visual arts	July 2019
21	Show BNegão	Music/show	July 2019
22	Facada Fest	Music/show	July 2019
23	*Res Pública 2023*	Theatre show	August 2019
24	Linn da Quebrada	Music/show	August 2019
25	Calls for LGBTQIAP+ films	Cinema/audiovisual work	August 2019
26	Gramado Film Festival	Cinema/audiovisual work	August 2019
27	Léo Lins	Show	August 2019
28	Chico Buarque	Cinema/audiovisual work	September 2019
29	*Caranguejo Overdrive* (Crab Overdrive)	Theatre performance	September 2019
30	*Gritos* (Screams)	Theatre performance	September 2019
31	*Abrazo* (Embrace)	Theatre performance	September 2019
32	Avengers at the Biennale	Comics	September 2019
33	"O Riso É Risco: Independência em Risco" (Laughter Is Risk: Independence at Stake)	Cartoon	September 2019
34	*Marighella*	Cinema/audiovisual work	September 2019
35	Graffiti with Greta Thumberg	Graffiti	October 2019
36	"Colégio Loyola" (Loyola College)	Opinion article	October 2019
37	Nova Hartz Book Fair	Literature	November 2019
38	*Consciência Negra* (Black Awareness)	Exhibition/visual arts	November 2019
39	*Isso Não É Arte* (This Is Not Art)	Exhibition/visual arts	December 2019
40	*A Vida Invisível* (Invisible Life)	Cinema/audiovisual work	December 2019
41	Porta dos Fundos/Netflix	Cinema/audiovisual work	January 2020
42	*Todxs xs Santxs - #eunãosoudespesa* (All Saints - #IAmNotAToll)	Exhibition/visual arts	February 2020

43	Censored books in Porto Velho/Rondônia	Literature	February 2020
44	Festival Cannabis	Music/show	February 2020
45	*Ruína* (Ruin)	Exhibition/photography	March 2020
46	Letícia Sabatella	Cinema/audiovisual work	April 2020
47	Biographies Fundação Palmares	Literature	June 2020
48	"Charge Aroeira"	Cartoon	June 2020
49	Natura	Advertising piece	July 2020
50	*Lindinhas* (Cuties)	Cinema/audiovisual work	September 2020
51	*Um Povo Heróico* (A Heroic People)	Cinema/audiovisual work	September 2020
52	Caetano Veloso Live	Music/show	October 2020
53	Criola Graffiti	Graffiti	December 2020
54	Print	Graffiti	January 2021
55	*O Santo Inquérito* (The Holy Enquiry)	Theatre performance	March 2021
56	Capão Jazz Festival	Music/festival	July 2021
57	Neutral language	Other	October 2021
58	*Praia* (Beach)	Performance	February 2022
59	*Obra com Nu Feminino* (Work With Female Nude)	Exhibition/visual arts	March 2022
60	*Sobre Vivências* (About Lived Experiences)	Exhibition/visual arts	March 2022
61	Lollapalooza	Music/festival	March 2022
62	Culture and Human Rights Festival	Music/festival	March 2022
63	*MST no Masp* (Homeless Workers' Movement at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo)	Exhibition/photography	May 2022
64	*Sem Medo do Futuro* (Fearless of the Future)	Literature	May 2022
65	*Versa: Brados em Linhas* (Verse: Shouting in Lines)	Literature	August 2022
66	*Deslocamento* (Displacement)	Exhibition/visual arts	September 2022
67	*Gente de Bicas* (People of Bicas)	Exhibition/photography	December 2022

Table 1. *Responses to the censorship of artistic manifestations*

Note. * The date of the first identified episode of censorship is considered, although in some cases, cultural productions may have been attacked or prevented from being realised on multiple occasions.

The 67 demonstrations represent collective protests against attacks on the arts, publicised across social networks such as Instagram, X, and Facebook. Some of them promoted the creation of hashtags, while others, garnering significant attention, led to street protests against censorship, initiated campaigns, and/or even inspired alternative actions to ensure the continuation of artistic expressions despite censorship. We define "alternative actions" as gestures against censorship and in support of freedom of expression that diverge from traditional reactionary practices. In other words, these are disruptive acts designed to surprise or capture society's attention strikingly. For example,

if a theatre performance is banned from a cultural space and the artists relocate it, this is a typical or expected action. However, if the artists decide to perform in front of the same venue that banned them, in the street, this becomes both a street protest and an alternative action. In this case, the artists do not simply protest in the conventional manner (e.g., with banners or a march) but do so creatively through art and disruption. Such alternative actions align with Tilly's (2008) concept of "performing" political action presented here.

These demonstrations against censorship were categorised into four distinct types of actions in defence of freedom of expression: (a) campaign, (b) street protest, (c) alternative action, and (d) hashtag. Figure 1 quantifies the presence of these categories within the analysed *corpus*. It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusive; a single case of censorship can provoke multiple types of reactions, as illustrated in the graph below.
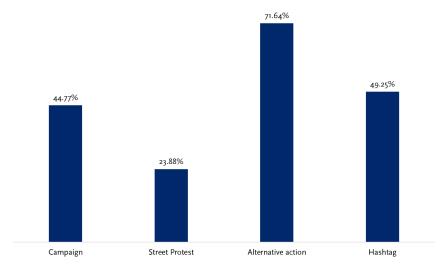
Figure 1. *Types of mobilisations against censorship*

5. Civil Society Mobilises Against Censorship

In this segment, we will examine each of the categories analysed, providing examples of cases that have been subjected to censorship attacks. To achieve this, we will draw on the information in the database compiled from traditional media outlets and discussions on the aforementioned social media platforms. This approach enables us to connect specific instances of censorship to broader social and political dynamics, in line with Charles Tilly's (2008) concept of the repertoire of collective action, which emphasises the importance of understanding specific performances within the wider context of political mobilisations.

5.1. Alternative Action

Alternative action was the most common form of mobilisation, occurring in 71.64% of cases where demonstrations against censorship took place. This type of action can be understood as a creative attempt to circumvent censorship and/or prevent it from recurring in a different context. These demonstrations, moving beyond traditional repertoires of political mobilisation, such as online campaigns or street protests, employ artistic expression itself as a means of resisting censorship.

An emblematic example of alternative action took place in 2017 with Maikon Kempinski's installation *DNA de Dan*. The artist was performing in Brasília (Federal District) on July 15 when military police unexpectedly intervened, preventing him from continuing. Arrested and charged with committing an obscene act, he also witnessed the destruction of the plastic bubble that housed the performance. *DNA de Dan* had been touring the country since 2013, and this was the first time in four years that Kempinski's work had been forcibly halted. Subsequently, the same performance was staged around lake Igapó in Londrina (Paraná). Once again, the police arrived and threatened to arrest the artist. However, this time, the audience staged a counter-demonstration, forming a protective cordon around Kempinski to prevent police intervention — an act categorised as an "alternative action". In other words, through a creative and unexpected response, the public successfully resisted the repetition of censorship.

Among the emblematic cases, the exhibition *Queermuseu: Cartografias da Diferença na Arte Brasileira* (Queermuseum: Cartographies of Difference in Brazilian Art) also sparked alternative actions. In 2017, while on display at Santander Cultural in Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul), the exhibition was abruptly shut down before its scheduled end date and without prior notice to the organisers, following intense criticism from conservative groups. It was later censored again in Rio de Janeiro by Mayor Marcelo Crivella (Republicans), prompting widespread protests both on and off social media, with expressions of support from anonymous individuals and well-known figures alike. In 2018, a crowdfunding campaign — considered an "alternative action" — successfully enabled the exhibition to be restaged, this time at Lage park in Rio de Janeiro.

Caetano Veloso's concert celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Homeless Workers' Movement in December 2017 serves as another example that led to an alternative action. The concert was eventually held in São Paulo after the artist was barred from performing at the Homeless Workers' Movement occupation in the Planalto neighbourhood of São Bernardo do Campo (São Paulo). The São Paulo judiciary, responding to a request from the Public Prosecutor's Office, imposed a R$ 500,000 fine and authorised police intervention should the ruling be defied. Authorities justified the decision by claiming that the venue (occupation) lacked the necessary infrastructure to host a concert of Caetano's scale. However, the move was widely perceived as censorship by the artist and supporters of the cause, particularly given that the occupation was already under threat of eviction.

After the event was cancelled, producer Paula Lavigne, the artist's wife and a leading figure in the movement 342 Artes, organised a second performance in São Paulo.

The show began with a speech in which she thanked the judge who had banned the concert at the occupation. According to her, the decision had unintentionally enabled the organisation of an even larger event, drawing even greater public attention to the case.

This category highlights how, through creativity, collective actions take shape as diverse performances in response to censorship. These expressions encompass a broad spectrum of actions, all guided by resistance to attempts to suppress artistic expression. This landscape underscores the ongoing adaptability and improvisation of artists and their supporters, who challenge established norms and expand the repertoire of actions in defence of freedom of expression. As artists and art advocates adjust, innovate, and defy conventional expectations, new forms of action emerge, becoming essential tools for advocating for freedom of expression and resisting censorship. This perspective aligns with Charles Tilly's theoretical framework, emphasising the repertoire of collective action as a dynamic and adaptive response to evolving practices of social control, contributing to collective actions and political activism. It highlights how political mobilisation extends beyond traditional forms — such as activism and protest — to encompass creative interventions that enhance the disruptive power of artistic expression.

5.2. Hashtags

This category applies when comments on the digital media index a word or phrase with the "#" symbol, always carrying a claim or protest content. With a frequency of 49.25%, the use of hashtags for political mobilisations has been referred to as "hashtag activism" (Gunn, 2015) and has been studied across various political repertoires (Malik et al., 2018). The core of hashtag activism lies in its ability to disseminate information and connect people around specific causes using relevant keywords. These tags serve as virtual labels that allow users to categorise and share content related to a particular issue or movement. Given the massive communication flow across social networks, hashtag activism becomes a node capable of bringing together discourses and narratives, whether supportive or opposing. In our research, when applying statistical correlation tests, hashtags appear to be associated with other forms of reaction, as shown in Table 2.

Cross-references	Pearson's chi-square *p*-value
Hashtag and street protest	0.039
Hashtag and campaign	0
Hashtag and alternative action	0.006

Table 2. *Test of association (chi-square) between categories*

Note. Table compiled by the authors, based on data from SPSS Statistics software.

To interpret Table 2, we must consider that Pearson's chi-square is a statistical test used to measure the strength of the results (Arsham, 1998). The lower the *p*-value, the stronger the evidence of the relationship between the data. A *p*-value of less than 0.05, as seen in the three highlighted cases in the table, indicates moderate evidence of a relationship and can be considered statistically significant. In contrast, a *p*-value of less than

0.01, as seen in the cross-references between hashtag/campaign and hashtag/alternative action, indicates strong evidence of a relationship. This suggests that the data cross-references are not random. In other words, there is a meaningful connection between the categories, indicating that they can be strategically aligned as tactics within a repertoire.

Social media and the nature of mobilisations may vary depending on the target of the demands. However, the literature highlights that hashtags function as collective action performances due to their low cost, rapid dissemination, and lack of reliance on a centralised formal organisation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In this study, hashtags are linked to various other forms of performance, including alternative actions, campaigns, and street protests.

In the analysed *corpus*, artists and supporters used hashtags to categorise content and facilitate users' ability to follow specific discussions on the topic. Additionally, activists employed keywords to amplify the movement's visibility, connect with external audiences, and promote messages related to bans and/or attempts at censorship. From this perspective, hashtags stood out as performing elements with a distinct repertoire compared to other categories. Nevertheless, by integrating into these protests, they emerged as essential complements within the field of struggle.

The #342Artes campaign exemplifies the use of hashtags in conjunction with other forms of reaction, in this case, a campaign. Launched in 2017, the movement — comprising artists from various fields — emerged in response to Mayor Marcelo Crivella's censorship of the *Queermuseu: Cartografias da Diferença na Arte Brasileira* exhibition in Rio de Janeiro. Beyond opposing censorship, the group also stands against the conservative wave that has been denouncing exhibitions and performances on unfounded charges since 2017. With the support of renowned artists such as Caetano Veloso, Fernanda Montenegro, and others, #342Artes leverages digital platforms to address issues including misinformation and copyright.

Another example was the attempted censorship of the Lollapalooza festival in 2022 when artists supporting candidate Lula were banned from expressing their views. The use of hashtags such as "Lulapalooza" and "LollaLivre" became a means of opposing censorship and showing support for the event and the performers, drawing on the Lula Livre campaign, which had advocated for the politician's release from prison. The Liberal Party argued that the event constituted irregular electoral propaganda, leading to a case before the Superior Electoral Court. Social media mobilisation, particularly through the creation of hashtags, played a crucial role in resisting censorship. Public figures such as Luciano Huck and Anitta spoke out against the decision, underscoring the significant role of digital platforms in public debate and challenging censorship.

Hashtag activism, as demonstrated in the cases of #342Artes and the hashtags associated with Lollapalooza 2022, represents an effective form of online mobilisation against censorship and in defence of freedom of expression. These hashtags not only serve to index content and facilitate engagement with specific discussions on relevant topics but also act as powerful tools for amplifying voices, connecting diverse audiences, and disseminating messages of resistance. Social media engagement through hashtags

not only expresses opposition to censorship but also plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and fostering critical debates on political and social issues. By integrating hashtag activism with other forms of resistance — such as campaigns, street protests, and alternative actions (as shown in Table 2) — it contributes to the development of dynamic and performative repertoires of action, reflecting the adaptability and creativity of activists in responding to contemporary challenges to freedom of expression. This phenomenon is particularly significant because the repertoires of action devised in response to censorship are strategically designed to reach diverse groups and take multiple forms (e.g., hashtag activism, campaigns, and alternative actions). In doing so, they become multifaceted instruments in the defence of plural voices and freedom of expression.

5.3. Campaigns

Online campaigns, which accounted for 44.66% of the cases, were the most visible, aiming to expand political and social influence and organised to reach the public sphere. Through these mobilisations, artists gain media attention and secure the support of other users. The campaigns vary and can be initiated by artists or collectives linked to social movements, as seen in the campaign led by *youtuber* Felipe Neto after the mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Crivella, ordered the Book Biennale to remove copies of the comic book *Avengers: The Children's Crusade* in September 2019. The justification was that the comic by Allan Heinberg and Jim Cheng, published by Marvel, contained depictions of two boys kissing and was deemed "inappropriate". However, the event organisers refused to remove the books, and in response to the attempted censorship, influencer Felipe Neto purchased copies for free distribution among attendees. Notably, this case was also coded as "alternative action".

Other campaign cases include crowdfunding initiatives, such as the *Queermuseu* exhibition — also classified as a type of alternative action — which launched a campaign to raise funds for relocating the exhibition to another venue. Through online fundraising, they managed to collect approximately R$820,000, with around 1,500 donors contributing to the campaign.

Another online campaign that mobilised a large number of people unfolded in November 2019 following an act of vandalism by federal deputy Coronel Tadeu (Social Liberal Party – São Paulo). He attacked an art exhibition launched in one of the corridors of the Chamber of Deputies in Brasília (Federal District) in honour of Black Awareness Day. The exhibition featured works depicting, among other themes, police violence against Black people. The deputy destroyed a piece that presented data on violence against Black men and women, illustrated by a cartoon by Carlos Latuff. The cartoon depicted a dead, handcuffed person wrapped in a Brazilian flag, with a policeman standing nearby holding a smoking gun. After the incident, numerous parliamentarians condemned the act. The then president of the Chamber of Deputies, Rodrigo Maia (Democrats – Rio de Janeiro), classified the episode as "serious". Deputy Orlando Silva (Communist Party of Brazil

– São Paulo) stated: "it is unacceptable, dishonourable for this House that a federal deputy has no tolerance, does not respect the history of Black people in Brazil, and does not recognise the genocide perpetrated by society against Black youth and the poor in the periphery" (*Maia Repreende Deputado que Vandalizou Exposição do Dia da Consciência Negra*, 2019, para. 12). Congresswoman Áurea Carolina (Socialism and Freedom Party – Minas Gerais) also reacted on X: "UNACCEPTABLE! MP @CoronelTadeu has just BROKEN a plaque with a cartoon by @LatuffCartoons referring to racist police violence. Coward!"

The campaigns against censorship reveal not only the resilience of these actions but also their effectiveness in raising awareness and mobilising society. The diversity of strategies adopted — from confrontation against censorship attempts to crowdfunding for banned exhibitions — highlights the richness and complexity of repertoires of action in defence of freedom of expression. The strategic use of social networks and digital platforms plays a crucial role in amplifying these campaigns, fostering connections between a broad spectrum of supporters, from public figures to engaged donors. These initiatives do more than contest specific instances of censorship; they contribute to shaping a collective narrative in defence of artistic freedom. By increasing the visibility of censored works, artists, and movements, these campaigns transcend individual resistance, becoming essential components in fostering a culture that values and safeguards the diversity of artistic expressions — an indispensable element for the vitality of a democratic and plural society.

5.4. Street Protests

Street protests, on the other hand, encompass strictly offline manifestations, characterised by mobilisations in public spaces. In many cases, these actions occur alongside online demonstrations, with in-person protests offering a way to engage with diverse audiences. In our *corpus*, street protests accounted for 23.88% of the cases analysed.

In Campo Grande (Mato Grosso do Sul), for instance, in September 2017, around 50 artists closed Treze de Maio Street in the city centre to protest against the seizure of the painting *Pedofilia* by Alessandra Cunha, an artist from Minas Gerais known as "Ropre". During the demonstration, traffic slowed, and military police were present, but the protest remained peaceful. The canvas was part of the *Cadafalso* (Scaffold) exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art. It was confiscated by the Specialised Police Station for the Protection of Children and Adolescents on charges of promoting paedophilia, which the artwork actually condemned. The painting depicted two men with exposed genitals next to a child, portrayed smaller in size, with the phrase: "machismo kills, violates, and humiliates". The artist commented on the situation via Facebook: "it's not promotion, it's a denunciation. It's a silent but colourful cry that this happens in our society". The seizure followed a police report filed by three state deputies — Paulo Siufi (Brazilian Democratic Movement), Coronel David (Christian Social Party), and Herculano Borges (Solidarity) — after heated debates in the Legislative Assembly of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

However, the various repertoires of action, whether online, offline, or a combination of both, are not limited to the defence of artistic freedom. While social movements strive to make their demands viable through campaigns and protests, opposing groups seek to attack these narratives in order to promote conservative and intolerant agendas. Street protests are no exception to this dynamic, serving as the setting for reactions from both advocates and opponents of censorship actions, underscoring the complexity and polarisation involved in the disputes over artistic freedom of expression.

An emblematic example of this dispute over repertoires occurred during the exhibition *Faça Você Mesmo Sua Capela Sistina* by artist Pedro Moraleida (1977–1999), held in October 2017 at the Palace of Arts in Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais). In this case, a group opposed to the exhibition, led by city councillor Jair Di Gregório (Progressists), mobilised in the streets of the city to denounce and call for the exhibition's censorship, accusing it of promoting pornography, paedophilia, and disrespect for Christianity. This group was able to stop traffic on Afonso Pena avenue, where the gallery is located, and also promoted protests on online platforms, publicising a video made by the councillor. In response, the day after the protests against the exhibition, a group gathered in front of the Palace of Arts to show their support for Moraleida's work. In this scenario of ambiguity and polarisation, the dispute over not only narratives but also repertoires of action stands out. After visiting the show, artist Caetano Veloso expressed his support for freedom of expression in cultural exhibitions, denouncing the attempted closure as a "prelude to oppression". The then mayor of Belo Horizonte, Alexandre Kalil (Social Democratic Party), also visited the exhibition and spoke out in favour of the right to freedom of expression, emphasising the sacredness of this right. These events illustrate the complexity of the social and cultural dynamics behind the protests and reveal the diversity of repertoires of action at play.

6. Final Considerations

Faced with the intricate web that surrounds the conflicting notions of freedom of expression in the Brazilian context, a landscape emerges in which debates are manipulated to justify intolerant attitudes, and civil society actors and political representatives rise as watchdogs of individual and collective freedoms. Simultaneously, within the public sphere, a plurality of social movements dedicated to defending freedom of expression emerges, grounded in the principles enshrined in the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, which establishes this freedom as the foundation of public dialogue and the free exercise of personal autonomy (Fiss, 1996/2022).

It is important to emphasise that while freedom of expression is considered a key element in the formation of a participatory democratic society (Edström & Svensson, 2016), it also has boundaries and limitations. It should not be regarded as an incontestable and sacred right that takes precedence over others (Habermas, 1996/2002; Kunelius, 2016). In this sense, through quantitative and qualitative analyses of reactions to contemporary artistic censorship, this work aimed to address the country's political context, discuss the overlap between these reactions and the logic of online collective actions, and reflect on the defence and limitations of freedom of expression.

The popularisation of the internet has significantly transformed the landscape of political mobilisation, distinguishing itself from offline activism. It offers innovative opportunities, primarily related to the appropriation of platform affordances, such as hashtag activism, which complements more traditional forms of mobilisation like street protests and campaigns. Online collective actions are notable for their adaptability, speed, broad reach, and ability to unite diverse demands. An analysis of the interactions between digital actions and offline resistance movements in the face of censorship reveals that contemporary mobilisations have played a crucial role in shaping public opinion, both supporting and challenging censorship. Investigating these dynamics through specific case studies provides a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between freedom of expression, collective actions, and political contexts, enhancing our comprehension of the intersection between artistic expressions and public space in Brazil.

Focusing on the period between 2017 and 2022 and examining the censorship landscape that impacted Brazilian artistic expressions, this study analysed the mobilisations against these attacks and attempts to curtail them. A total of 89 cases of censorship were identified, with 75.28% (67 cases) provoking counter-demonstrations. These responses included individual and collective protests on social networks such as Instagram, X, and Facebook, which resulted in hashtags and even in-person protests advocating for freedom of expression. The reactions were categorised into four groups: campaigns, street protests, alternative actions, and the use of hashtags, as a single case could encompass multiple forms of response. The findings reveal the complexity of the reactions to the censorship of artistic manifestations in contemporary Brazil. This multifaceted scenario indicates that disputes over freedom of expression reflect intricate and often polarised social dynamics. The interplay between artistic manifestations, popular reactions, and the digital public sphere underscores the need for a comprehensive analysis that considers the intersection of political, social, and cultural dimensions. The defence of freedom of expression is central to the preservation of a democratic and plural society. Yet, its understanding and practice require continuous reflection on the limits and challenges inherent in this fundamental principle.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

References

Arsham, H. (1998). Kuiper's p-value as a measuring tool and decision procedure for the goodness-of-fit test. *Journal of Applied Statistics*, *15*(2), 131–135.

Barendt, E. (Ed.). (2017). *Freedom of the press*. Routledge.

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, *15*(5), 739–768. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661

Cavicchioli, G., & Cruz, M. T. (2018, December 6). *Obra de arte crítica a Bolsonaro é censurada em exposição no Rio*. Apoie a Ponte. https://ponte.org/obra-de-arte-critica-a-bolsonaro-e-censurada-em-exposicao-no-rio/

Costa, M. C. C., & Souza Junior, W. (2018). Censura e pós-censura: Uma síntese sobre as formas clássicas e atuais de controle da produção artística nacional. *Políticas Culturais em Revista*, *11*(1), 19–36. https://doi.org/10.9771/pcr.v11i1.28154

Duarte, L. (Ed.). (2018). *Arte, censura, liberdade: Reflexões à luz do presente*. Cobogó.

Edström, M., & Svensson, E. (2016). Trust and values for sale: Market-driven and democracy-driven freedom of expression. In U. Carlsson (Ed.), *Freedom of expression and media in transition. Studies and reflections in the digital age* (pp. 67–74). Nordicom.

Fiss, O. M. (2022). *A ironia da liberdade de expressão: Estado, regulação e diversidade na esfera pública* (G. Binennbojm & C. Pereira Neto, Trans.). Editora FGV. (Original work published 1996)

Foster, H. (2013). Pós-crítica. *Arte & Ensaios*, *25*(25), 166–176.

Gunn, C. (2015). Hashtagging from the margins. In K. E. Tassie & S. M. B. Givens (Eds.), *Women of color and social media multitasking: Blogs, timelines, feeds, and community* (pp. 21–34). Lexington Books.

Habermas, J. (2002). *A inclusão do outro* (G. Sperber & P. Soethe, Trans.). Edições Loyola. (Original work published 1996)

Harbath, K. (2018, July 24). *Protegendo as eleições no Brasil*. Facebook Newsroom. https://about.fb.com/br/news/2018/07/protegendo-as-eleicoes-no-brasil/

Krippendorff, K., & Boc, M. A. (2007). *The content analysis reader*. SAGE.

Kunelius, R. (2016). Free speech at an intersection. Notes on the contemporary hybrid public sphere. In U. Carlsson (Ed.), *Freedom of expression and media in transition: Studies and reflections in the digital age* (pp. 35–42). Nordicom.

Maia repreende deputado que vandalizou exposição do Dia da Consciência Negra. (2019, November 20). Hora do Povo. https://horadopovo.com.br/maia-repreende-deputado-que-vandalizou-exposicao-do-dia-da-consciencia-negra/

Malik, A., Johri, A., Handa, R., Karbasian, H., & Purohit, H. (2018). How social media supports hashtag activism through multivocality: A case study of #ILookLikeanEngineer. *First Monday*, *23*(11). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v23i11.9181

Miguel, L. F. (2018). O pensamento e a imaginação no banco dos réus: Ameaças à liberdade de expressão em contexto de golpe e guerras culturais. *Políticas Culturais em Revista*, *11*(1), 37–59.

Nordenstreng, K. (2016). Liberate freedom from its ideological baggage! *Les Enjeux de l'Information et de la Communication,* (17/2), 157–161.

Oliveira, B. S., Orlandini, M. G., & Sanglard, F. N. (2022). Vilipêndio à fé? Reflexão sobre censura e repressão à arte por motivação religiosa. *Líbero,* (25/51), 52–75.

Poell, T., Nieborg, D., & van Dijck, J. (2020). Plataformização. *Revista Fronteiras, 22*(1), 2–10.

Rocha, C. (2021). *Menos Marx, mais Mises: O liberalismo e a nova direita no Brasil.* Todavia.

Ruediger, M., Grassi, A., Dourado, T., Calil, L., Piaia, V., Almeida, S., & Carvalho, D. (2021). *Desinformação on-line e eleições no Brasil: A circulação de links sobre desconfiança no sistema eleitoral brasileiro no Facebook e no YouTube (2014-2020).* DAPP/FGV.

Sanglard, F. N., Oliveira, B. S., & Orlandini, M. G. (2021). Arte que critica política que censura: Episódios de patrulhamento da crítica política. *Anais do XXX Encontro Anual da Compós, 30,* 1–24.

Sanglard, F. N., Oliveira, B. S., & Orlandini, M. G. (2023). Censura à arte como sintoma do autoritarismo brasileiro. *LARR - Latin American Research Review, 59*(1), 1–25.

Sanglard, F. N., & Santos, J. G. B. (2013). A ação coletiva muito além das organizações. *Revista Compolítica, 1*(3), 116–128.

Scabin, N. L. C., & Leite, A. L. (Eds.). (2021). *Comunicação, mídias e liberdade de expressão no século XXI: Modos censórios, resistências e debates emergentes.* Gênio Editorial; Intercom.

Sodré, M. (2021). *A sociedade incivil: Mídia, iliberalismo e finanças.* Vozes.

Tilly, C. (2008). *Contentious performances.* Cambridge University Press.

Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making.* Council of Europe.

Biographical Notes

Maiara Orlandini has a PhD in Communication from the Postgraduate Programme in Social Communication at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. She holds a degree in Journalism and a master's degree in Social Communication from the Federal University of Paraná. She is currently a volunteer researcher at the Bertha Research Group (Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais) and a post-doctoral researcher at the Media and Public Sphere Research Group (Federal University of Minas Gerais). Additionally, she is a professor and coordinator of the specialisation course in Data Journalism at the Institute of Continuing Education, Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4961-2916

Email: orlandini.maia@gmail.com

Address: Grupo EME/UFMG: Av. Presidente Antônio Carlos, 6627 - Pampulha, Belo Horizonte - MG, 31270-901 - Fafich

Bruna Silveira de Oliveira is a postdoctoral researcher in the Media and Public Sphere Research Group (Federal University of Minas Gerais), linked to the Postgraduate Programme in Social Communication at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. She holds a doctorate and a master's degree in Social Communication from the Federal University of Minas Gerais and a degree in Journalism from the Federal University of Ouro Preto. She is a volunteer researcher at the Bertha Research Group (Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais), at the LiBertha centre, which focuses on the study of censorship and freedom of expression in Brazil. She has experience and research interests in political communication, especially in discussions about the public sphere, democratic misrepresentations and extremist groups.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0163-6102

Email: bsilveira9@gmail.com

Address: Av. Pres. Antônio Carlos, 6627 - Pampulha, Belo Horizonte - MG, 31270-901, Brasil

Marina Mesquita Camisasca is a postdoctoral researcher in the Postgraduate Programme in Social Communication at the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais. She holds a PhD in History and Political Cultures from the Federal University of Minas Gerais, and a master's and undergraduate degree from the same institution. She has expertise in institutional and corporate history, with experience in writing and editing books and organising archives, memory centres, and exhibitions. She researches agrarian history, the history of republican Brazil, the history of the military dictatorship and authoritarianism. She is a member of the LiBertha group of the Bertha Research Group at the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9175-5569

Email: marinacamisasca@yahoo.com.br

Address: Av. Dom José Gaspar, 500, Prédio 13 - 3° andar - Coração Eucarístico - Belo Horizonte/MG - CEP: 30535-901

Fernanda Nalon Sanglard is a professor in the Postgraduate Programme in Communication and the Faculty of Communication and Arts at the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais. She holds a PhD in Communication from the State University of Rio de Janeiro. She is a journalist and has a master's degree in Communication from the School of Social Communication at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, with a specialisation in Marketing from the same university. She completed a post-doctorate at the Media and Public Sphere Research Group (Federal University of Minas Gerais). She worked as a reporter for the Tribuna de Minas newspaper, a member of the Juiz de Fora Municipal Truth Commission and a researcher for the Truth Commission in Minas Gerais. She is the coordinator of the centre and the LiBertha project of the Bertha

Research Group (https://grupobertha.com.br), linked to the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4335-7926

Email: nandanalon@yahoo.com.br

Address: Av. Dom José Gaspar, 500, Prédio 13 - 3º andar - Coração Eucarístico - Belo Horizonte/MG - CEP: 30535-901

Expansions and Retractions of Freedoms in the Brazilian Media System: Mechanisms of Media Accountability and Capture

Ana Beatriz Lemos da Costa
Laboratório de Políticas de Comunicação, Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, Brazil
Conceptualisation, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, project administration,
validation, visualisation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Jairo Faria Guedes Coelho
Universidade Federal do Tocantins, Palmas, Brazil
Conceptualisation, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, project administration,
validation, visualisation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Abstract

This article explores mechanisms of media capture (Schiffrin, 2021; Stiglitz, 2017) and accountability (Aznar, 2005; Bertrand, 1999/2002) alongside contributions from the political economy of communication (Bolaño, 2000; Brittos, 2022) to examine the expansion and retraction of freedoms related to the right to communication. It provides examples of how these dynamics manifest in the configuration of the Brazilian media system. The study begins by analysing how the right to communication and its implications were introduced into international debates on the construction of democratic societies in the post-World War II era. The economic, political, and socio-cognitive dimensions of these mechanisms are then related to the Brazilian context. Economically, the concentration of media ownership in Brazil has led to regulatory gaps, restricted plurality, and, more recently, reshaped communication policy dynamics through digital platforms. Politically, instances of capture have weakened accountability mechanisms and reduced social participation in Brazil's public media system. The final considerations highlight the limits and possibilities of various models of regulation, funding, and social representation in the media as strategies to counter its capture and expand freedoms.

Keywords

freedoms, media capture, Brazilian media system, media accountability, media regulation

Expansões e Retrações de Liberdades no Sistema de Mídia Brasileiro: Mecanismos de Responsabilização e de Captura

Resumo

O artigo busca apresentar diferentes mecanismos de captura (Schiffrin, 2021; Stiglitz, 2017) e de responsabilização da mídia (Aznar, 2005; Bertrand, 1999/2002), somados a contribuições da economia política da comunicação (Bolaño, 2000; Brittos, 2022), para entender movimentos de expansão e retração de liberdades relacionadas ao direito à comunicação. Para isso, mostra exemplos de como essas dinâmicas são observadas na configuração do sistema de mídia brasileiro. O estudo parte da análise de como o direito à comunicação e seus desdobramentos foram inseridos na agenda dos debates internacionais para a construção de sociedades democráticas no pós-Segunda Guerra Mundial. Em seguida, buscamos relacionar as dimensões

econômicas, políticas e sócio-cognitivas desses mecanismos com a realidade brasileira. No primeiro caso, mostramos como a concentração da propriedade de mídia no Brasil impacta nas lacunas regulatórias, na limitação da pluralidade e, mais recentemente, por meio de plataformas digitais, na reconfiguração da lógica das políticas de comunicação no país. Na sequência, veremos de que maneira a captura política se reflete no arrefecimento de mecanismos de responsabilização, *accountability* e participação social no sistema de mídia público do Brasil. As considerações finais apontam para limites e possibilidades de diferentes formas de regulação, de financiamento e de representação social na mídia para recuo de capturas e expansão de liberdades.

Palavras-chave
liberdades, capturas da mídia, sistema de mídia brasileiro, responsabilização da mídia, regulação da mídia

1. Introduction

This study explores various mechanisms of accountability and potential sources of media capture, with a focus on the exercise of freedom within participatory democracy. In this framework, citizens not only have the right to vote and to be elected but also to engage in public debate freely. This freedom is integral to the right to communication, which is enshrined in the guarantees of freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

After World War II (1939–1945), the international political arena began to define a set of rights to support the establishment of democratic states. Among these rights is the right to communication, which is outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos, 1948). Article 19 of the Declaration states: "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".

This article demonstrates that the right to communication encompasses multiple dimensions. It includes freedom of opinion, which necessitates a plurality of viewpoints to either adopt one or form new perspectives. It also covers freedom of expression, which involves the ability to seek and receive information and ideas, as well as the capacity to express these ideas across various environments and dissemination channels.

These dimensions align with T. H. Marshall's (1950/1967) proposal, which asserts that the right to communication spans the three dimensions of citizenship. The first is civil citizenship (freedom of expression), the second is political citizenship (the right to information), and the third is social citizenship (the right to communicate). Various international agreements and declarations on the right to communication, adopted at different times and in diverse contexts, also reflect evolving interpretations that have emerged in response to new social issues and technological advancements.

According to Venício Artur de Lima (2010), freedom of expression pertains to individual autonomy and the fundamental human right to voice and communicate one's thoughts. In contrast, freedom of the press relates to the collective right of society and/or organisations to make journalistic information and entertainment content publicly

available. In essence, freedom of the press allows the pursuit, articulation, writing, documentation, and transmission of matters of public interest through media channels. In this regard, the writings compiled by the Hutchins Commission (Comissão Hutchins, 2020; Leigh, 1974) laid the foundation for the emergence of a theory centred on the social responsibility of the media. This theory suggests that media institutions play a vital role in defending citizens' rights within democratic societies.

However, the increasing concentration of media ownership has resulted in the uneven distribution of communication flows within society. In an effort to address this issue, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation established a commission in 1976 chaired by Irishman Sean MacBride. The commission's objective, outlined in the *MacBride Report* published in 1981, was to examine the communication challenges faced by modern societies, considering technological advancements. The aim was to issue recommendations for a new world communication order that would reduce barriers and promote peace and human development. The report concluded that the right to communicate should extend beyond merely receiving information, acknowledging that demands for free exchange, access, and participation in communication surpassed the principles previously recognised by the international community (MacBride, 1981/1983).

Although the inclusion of the right to communication in the list of human rights has been acknowledged for some time, discussions on the need to implement public communication policies only later gained prominence on the international agenda. This shift occurred with the rise of the cultural industry in the mid-20th century, which brought attention to the unequal flow of information, mirroring the economic disparities observed between nations.

In this regard, the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil (Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil de 1988, 1988), for example, incorporated international guidelines related to individual freedoms. The Constitution distinguishes individual freedom of expression of thought, prohibiting anonymity (art. 5, Section IV), from freedom of expression in intellectual, artistic, scientific, and communication activities, regardless of censorship or licensing (art. 5, Section IX), and from freedom of journalistic information (art. 220, §1). Furthermore, in the section addressing social communication, §5 of Article 220 asserts that the media must not be subject to monopoly or oligopoly, either directly or indirectly. In addition to prohibiting ownership concentration, Brazilian legislation underscores the importance of regional diversity and independent production (art. 221, Section III). However, in practice, as this article will demonstrate, this ideal is not reflected in Brazil's media system. These policies highlight the need for the development of decentralised and diverse media, which would facilitate genuine and direct public participation and also stress the importance of representing the interests of women, children, young people, the elderly, national, ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic minorities, as well as people living in remote areas.

The concept of "accountability" is closely linked to ideas of responsibility, not only in organisational contexts but also as a personal virtue at the professional level. When exercised collectively, particularly in the realm of communication, accountability can

manifest in several dimensions: legally (through laws and regulations), within the professional environment (driven by deontological principles, moral sanctions, and peer scrutiny), and in the interactions between the public and news contents and other devices (Christians, 1989).

Thus, transparency and participation are crucial allies of accountability. Transparent access to information refers to the availability of public interest data held by the State or by public and private organisations, such as the media. There is ongoing debate within the field of communication, particularly journalism, regarding the full scope of the term. It is argued that transparency not only involves making data and information accessible to the public but also entails a set of strategies aimed at rebuilding public trust through "openness" (Christofoletti, 2021). For this reason, transparency is also closely tied to the concept of "objectivity":

> the phrase that makes transparency a renewed objectivity has its roots in the field of journalism, where being objective has value and meaning. In general, the media supports the use of transparency and accountability instruments in governments, but the media companies themselves are resistant to implementing internal policies that would allow the public to monitor and debate them. (Christofoletti, 2021, p. 188)

Regarding participation — a crucial element in the triad alongside accountability and transparency, which defines ethical responsibility in media content production and distribution — several dimensions are required to create more effective connections between content producers/issuers and consumers/receivers. Nico Carpentier (2011, 2015) outlines these dimensions in the AIP model (access, interaction, and participation), which considers the connections between people, organisations, technologies, and content at these three levels. This perspective also prompts a critical examination of the limitations of participation since

> both access and interaction still remain vital for participatory processes, as participation requires to have access and interaction, but participation is, at the same time, more than 'mere' access and interaction, because of its focus on the redistribution of power. (Carpentier et al., 2019, p. 21)

As such, it is important to examine the role of the structures and circumstances that shape the scenarios, as well as the dynamics between the actors, in order to develop tools that can foster accountability, transparency, and participation within media institutions.

Various authors (e.g., Aznar, 2005; Bertrand, 1999/2002; Coelho, 2019; Fengler et al., 2022; Paulino, 2008) have examined different accountability mechanisms, both internal and external to media organisations, that promote accountability, transparency, and participation within the media. These instruments can be implemented through heteroregulation, which involves laws or other legal norms; self-regulation, which occurs voluntarily without being mandated by legal norms; or co-regulation, which combines both normative and voluntary actions. These tools contribute to expanding freedoms, as will be discussed later in this paper.

Nevertheless, in most countries, particularly in the private media sector, these mechanisms are often underdeveloped. In Brazil, several factors contribute to the persistence of a media structure dominated by oligopolies. These include the challenges of consolidating diverse media systems that uphold the principle of complementarity between public, private, and State-run media, the difficulties in implementing mechanisms for public participation, and the limited representation of segments of the population that are excluded from media discourse.

One of the most notable limitations to press freedom, which has recurred cyclically throughout history, is the rise of dictatorial regimes that impose prior censorship on the media. These governments employ various methods, including the assassination of journalists, for example. In contemporary societies, where networked communication adds further complexities, this phenomenon is less overt but equally dangerous. Building on these risks, scholars have developed the concept of "media capture" since the early 2000s, primarily referring to the various pressures journalists face as a result of government actions:

> in the case of the media, the notion of "capture" helps explain how soft censorship takes hold. In 2006, the economists Tim Besley and Andrea Prat used the notion to explain how the media in nominally democratic countries were still not at liberty to do proper investigative and accountability reporting and to function as a fully free and independent entity. Although the old-fashioned censor marking up newspapers with red ink no longer existed (at least in the societies they studied), it had been replaced by softer forms of pressure on journalists. (Schiffrin, 2021, p. 5)

These pressures on press freedom, also defined by media capture, stem not only from the government but also from other societal actors. According to Stiglitz (2017), "media capture occurs when one or more of the parties that the media are supposed to be monitoring on behalf of society 'captures' or takes hostage the media so that they fail to perform their societal function" (p. 10). The author identifies four types of capture that different societal actors can exert over the media: (a) through ownership, (b) through financial incentives, (c) through censorship, and (d) through cognitive influences. We align these categories with Stiglitz's (2017) notion of "capture" which retracts press freedoms, and we extend this concept to encompass the broader right to communication.

Regarding captures related to media ownership, several mechanisms used by economic agents (whether from the market, the State, or other civil society actors) serve as tools to retract freedoms. These include concentration and cross-ownership, both vertical and horizontal (Lima, 2004).

Captures within the context of financial incentives encompass budgetary, regulatory, and marketing strategies aimed at controlling the maintenance of services and structures provided by media organisations.

As for censorship, this mechanism can manifest in varying degrees of explicitness, not only through authoritarian governments but also within business models where power structures are less open to dialogue.

When these captures occur systematically within society, they foster a culture of content production and dissemination shaped by individual and editorial decisions influenced by the cognitive capture of professionals and organisations based on coercive tools and self-censorship practices.

These capture mechanisms can be classified into three dimensions: economic, political, and socio-cognitive.

The economic dimension refers to the actors (the State, the market, and other societal agents) who mobilise the resources (financial, material, human, technological) at their disposal.

From the perspective of the political economy of communication, César Bolaño (2000) explored the trajectory of information within the capitalist mode of production, drawing on his interpretation of Karl Marx's *Capital*, particularly in the post-World War II context, when the cultural industry began to play a central role in mediation. Bolaño proposed the existence of three functions performed by these companies, whether public or private, within the social dynamic. The first one is the propaganda function, which highlights the role of the media in mediating the relationship between the State and the ideological reproduction of the system. The second is the advertising function, which refers to the mediation between the media and capitalist relations. This function is seen in the process of converting the audience into a commodity for commercial advertisements, the primary source of funding for content produced within the cultural industry. Lastly, the cultural industry's connection with the public is realised through the programme function, whereby the symbolic goods (Bourdieu, 1996/1997) produced by the media capture the public's attention, fulfilling their psychosocial needs.

From the articulation of these functions and the strategic actions of the institutions, we can observe the presence of barriers to entry as the primary characteristic of this dynamic (Bolaño, 2000). In the cultural industry, some of these methods aim to prevent potential competitors from entering the market or to eliminate the possibility of existing competitors achieving leadership. This creates significant technical, financial, political, and cognitive advantages for certain groups.

Brittos (2001) expands on Bolaño's concept, identifying two types of barriers specific to the television market that contribute to the formation of oligopolies. These barriers help companies secure privileged positions by gaining and retaining audience loyalty while shielding themselves from competitors (Brittos, 2022): aesthetic-productive barriers and political-institutional barriers.

The aesthetic-productive barrier involves factors that distinguish communication products, such as specific standards, aesthetic styles, and production models. It is through this barrier that industry leaders vie for the attention of the audience. The political-institutional barrier, on the other hand, relates to the regulatory context, considering the rules and procedures adopted within the system, as well as disputes over the enactment of laws and decisions in administrative and supervisory processes, among others.

From this perspective, we can establish a dialogue between the functions of the cultural industry, the corresponding barriers to entry, and the forms of capture. In this sense,

we believe that the propaganda function closely aligns with what Stiglitz (2017) describes as capture through self-censorship, which can occur either through official means or for ideological reasons, often by the media and professionals themselves.

The advertising function reflects financial capture, where audience ratings or the advertisers sponsoring programmes or media outlets can influence the bias of the content produced.

Finally, the programme function is linked to cognitive capture, where the aesthetic choices in the production of messages shape the public's perceptions of social reality. This can narrow worldviews and, consequently, reduce the representation of diverse cultural or informational expressions, with significant repercussions for democracy itself.

On the other hand, aesthetic-productive barriers contribute to both cognitive and financial capture. Aesthetic standards play a crucial role in the symbolic power of communication products, ensuring audience attention and loyalty and generating audience-based merchandise for the sale of advertisements. The revenue generated from the latter, in turn, provides the resources to produce more content, reinforcing existing advantages.

The aesthetic-productive dimension, when combined with the socio-cognitive dimension, involves the ways in which content producers and audiences act in accordance with the ethical, moral, deontological, and organisational values established within these communication environments.

Political-institutional barriers, in turn, are also mirrored in financial and political capture. These barriers contribute to the formation of clientelistic relationships and electronic coronelism (Aires & dos Santos, 2022), given the historical connections between media owners in Brazil, who influence political and regulatory decisions.

In this context, a form of cognitive capture and censorship is also evident, as media coverage often frames attempts to regulate communications in the country as acts of censorship (Lima, 2004). This distorts the notion that regulatory mechanisms are intended to expand freedom of expression and press. More recently, digital search services and social networks have amplified this cognitive capture, misrepresenting the State's efforts to regulate digital platforms as censorship of these services. The very existence of these barriers to entry contributes to property-based capture, as they lead to a concentrated market structure dominated by oligopolies, which, in turn, reinforce the other forms of capture.

This analysis is significant because media systems are social constructions embedded within the capitalist system and thus subject to capture, preventing them from fulfilling their social function, or what Stiglitz (2017) refers to as the "fourth estate". However, the presence of these captures does not negate the potential for checks and balances through instruments of social accountability, such as hetero-, self-, and co-regulation (Aznar, 2005).

With respect to the argument that the internet has the potential to democratise markets (Stiglitz, 2017), we contend that the emergence of new platforms operating as digital monopolies has contradicted these expectations. We maintain that the internet alone would not result in decentralisation or the dismantling of capture. Since technologies are subject to economic and political disputes, they fall within the logic of market appropriation

and concentration, with the capacity to both expand and retract freedoms. Moreover, the extensive use of data through artificial intelligence tools and algorithmic boosts has introduced new dimensions of cognitive capture, fostering greater engagement in hate speech and anti-democratic values. Nonetheless, depending on how these tools are employed, they also hold the potential to enhance dialogue.

That said, the figure below (Figure 1) illustrates how movements occur in the expansion and retraction of freedoms essential for exercising the right to communication. Freedoms — such as those of expression, information, demonstration, and representation — are framed within rights, including the right to communication. This dimension of freedoms and rights expands with the implementation of media accountability mechanisms (promoting values such as accountability, transparency, and participation) through self-, hetero-, and co-regulatory frameworks. Conversely, this same space retracts when capture mechanisms come into play, whether economic (such as ownership concentration), political (such as clientelism), or cognitive (such as coercion within newsrooms).
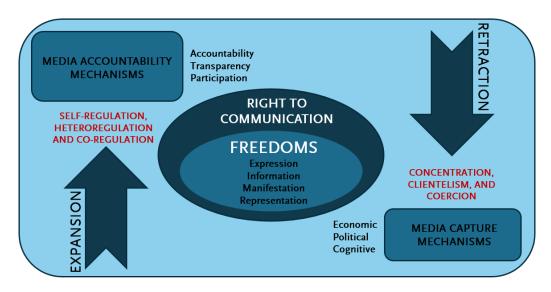
Figure 1. *Movements of expansion and retraction of freedoms and the right to communication*

In this article, we examine mechanisms related to both media capture and accountability, considering the media's various forms of expression. First, we discuss how media concentration in Brazil leads to the retraction of freedoms and rights and how the presence or absence of regulatory instruments can shape the development of greater media accountability. In the second part, we analyse the role of public communication within this context, focusing on the creation and capture of the Empresa Brasil de Comunicação (EBC) and how shifts in the political landscape can drive movements of expansion or retraction of freedoms.

2. Economic and Political Capture and the Challenges of Concentration in Brazil's Media System

As discussed, while guarantees of freedom of expression and the right to communication imply a plurality of voices in the media system, financial and political-ideological capture, driven by an oligopolistic market structure, results in aesthetic-productive and political-institutional barriers. These barriers manifest as cognitive capture, power imbalances, and restricted expressiveness, affecting the lives of various social groups.

Mastrini and Becerra (2006, 2008), in studies exploring ownership concentration in the cultural industries of Latin America, highlight the challenge of defining the term "concentration" in such studies. They also discuss the political and economic characteristics of infocommunication products that contribute to the formation of oligopolistic markets.

Economically, infocommunication products share features with other consumer goods but are distinguished by their immateriality, stemming from their symbolic nature. This characteristic means they are not consumed or destroyed upon use, enhancing their use value. Additionally, the value of cultural transactions lies in novelty, requiring significant investment in developing new products. However, reproduction costs are low compared to original production costs. As a result, these products favour economies of scale, driving companies toward monopolistic or oligopolistic market structures (Mastrini & Becerra, 2008).

In addition to economies of scale, another strategy for companies is to adopt economies of scope through segmentation. To achieve this, they need to control a range of products or market segments, increasing their chances of success. However, this results in higher barriers to entry for potential new competitors, as entering the market requires substantial initial investments. This competitive pressure on dominant positions drives companies to expand markets both locally and internationally. This strategy has been adopted by Brazil's leading communications company, represented by the Globo group, which leverages its dominant position and political influence to maintain its leadership in free-to-air television, subscription-based television channels, and, more recently, its vice-leadership in the pay streaming market, following the market leader Netflix.

Globo's hegemony, built on the centralisation of telecommunications under the military regime in the 1970s and replicated during the implementation of pay-television in the 1990s, now faces challenges with the arrival of transnational internet-based groups. This competition has intensified, particularly in streaming services, with GloboPlay emerging in 2015 to contend with international players.

This loss of leadership encompasses power struggles in defining sectoral policies and regulating communications within the country, which is governed by a regulatory framework dating back to 1962. The situation is compounded by outdated foundational regulations, fragmented subsequent legislation, and an excess of regulatory measures through ministerial decrees and ordinances (Souto & Del Bianco, 2022). Additionally, the absence of mechanisms to regulate the convergent environment and the recent changes in the "logic of communication policies" further contribute to the complexity of the situation (Bolaño, 2007).

Despite the rise in video consumption through online platforms and the growth of internet usage in Brazil, linear television — both free-to-air and pay-television — still accounts for 70% of the audience share for videos watched at home in Brazil (Kantar Ibope Media, 2023a). Furthermore, television is present in over 95% of households (Nery, 2023), while the internet is present in 80% (Núcleo de Informação e Coordenação do Ponto BR, 2023). Television also holds advantages in terms of consumption, as access to content on free-to-air television differs from that distributed on the internet, which requires the purchase of connected devices, payment for network access, and subscriptions to specific video applications.

These advantages of television over other media contribute to its dominance in advertising revenue within the country despite the increasing loss of revenue to the internet. Of the total R$101,608,818 invested in media advertising, from January to June 2024, free-to-air television received R$4,193,874 (39.5%), while the internet earned R$4,051,137 (38.2%; Cenp, n.d.). Although there is no official data on how these advertising funds are distributed among media outlets, it is understood that the largest share goes to the audience leader, Globo, which had a peak audience share of 27% on average in October 2023, while Record had 7%, Band had 2%, and Rede TV! had 0.9% (Kantar Ibope Media, 2023b).

When analysing the distribution of advertising funds across different media outlets, the Media Ownership Monitor Brasil (2017) survey identified a high risk of audience concentration and ownership concentration in the allocation of advertising revenue. The survey reveals that the 50 media outlets with the largest audiences in the country belong to 26 media groups, 19 of which are based in the metropolitan region of São Paulo, demonstrating regional concentration.

The risk of concentration is exacerbated by the presence of "news deserts", reflecting a low plurality and diversity of information, resulting in cognitive capture. The survey results show that 63.1% of municipalities in the northern part of the country have no news coverage at all. Additionally, several regions lack television broadcasters, while the number of retransmission stations is almost 10 times the number of television broadcasters[1]. This phenomenon explains the reproduction of content generated in other regions, contrary to the principle of regionalisation of production outlined in the Federal Constitution, as discussed in the introduction section.

As a result, Mielke et al. (2023) describe a scenario of concentration both in traditional media and the digital environment, with various forms of capture emerging. The authors highlight economic and cognitive capture, particularly influenced by the historical ties between the media, political power, and the interests of economic and religious groups that perpetuate unequal, patriarchal, and racist discourses. They further argue that the business model of digital platforms on the internet poses a threat to the diversity of viewpoints and ways of life, as well as to the development of technologies that could advance democracy and social and environmental justice.

---

[1] According to Agência Nacional de Telecomunicações (n.d.), in November 2023, Brazil had 24,913 television retransmission stations, while the number of television broadcasters stood at 2,920.

The close ties between politicians, their families, and economic interests within media ownership groups in Brazil have led to the phenomenon of "electronic coronelism" (Aires & dos Santos, 2022), a term derived from "coronelismo" (Leal, 1975/2012) and applied to the context of media regulation in the country.

Beyond the instances of electronic coronelism, political, property, and financial capture, along with political-institutional barriers in the country, Souto and Del Bianco (2022) also identified what is referred to as "liberal capture"[2] (Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014). Analysing regulatory measures implemented during President Jair Bolsonaro's Administration for broadcasting between 2019 and 2021, the authors observed that these regulatory actions were directed towards favouring corporate broadcasters. According to their findings,

> this communication policy supports the electronic media business by enhancing its profitability while aligning with political, economic, and religious interests. It maintains the regulatory fragmentation characteristic of Brazilian broadcasting legislation. (Souto & Del Bianco, 2022, p. 108)

Here, we examine how these types of liberal captures relate to political-institutional barriers, as well as financial and political captures, which result in the subjugation of actors and sectors such as public, educational, and community communication. This is compounded by the rise in religious proselytism, even within spaces intended for public communication (Souto, 2023).

This situation signifies a deepening mismatch between technologies and communication regulation (Costa, 2022), highlighting major regulatory asymmetries between increasingly convergent services. Furthermore, there is a lack of an independent authority to oversee the audiovisual sector, leading to consequences such as human rights violations, unethical behaviour, a lack of media accountability mechanisms, and the indefinite renewal of radio and television licences, with insufficient compensation for the provision of public services.

In addition, due to the competition between traditional services and social media and content platforms, a new logic has emerged in communication policies in the country. This logic sees the inclusion of ultra-liberals alongside the so-called "conservative", "progressive", and "liberal" groups (Bolaño, 2007). In other words, digital monopolies are reluctant to accept any form of State or even public regulation, benefiting from their operation on a supranational scale. This reinforces the need to establish rules and safeguards for national productions, protect local culture and promote democratic values.

---

[2] The concept highlights how national media systems become intertwined with the combined economic and political interests of privileged groups. In Latin America, these groups adapted and repositioned themselves during the process of political re-democratisation — which most countries in the region experienced — instituting neoliberal policies from the 1980s through the early 21st century (Guerrero & Márquez-Ramírez, 2014). As the authors observe, despite political liberalisation and a noticeable diversification in journalistic coverage from that period onward, the model often preserved established local power structures. It also facilitated the expansion of economic and marketing advantages while maintaining the enduring ties between media groups and the State — a defining feature of Latin American history (Souto & Del Bianco, 2022).

The coexistence of "new and old actors" (Costa, 2022) calls for media education measures, the promotion of plurality, content that fosters citizenship, the fight against disinformation, participation mechanisms, and the consolidation of a public system that complements both the commercially operated and State-owned systems. The following section further explores this, highlighting the existence of economic, political, and cognitive capture.

3. Citizenship, Social Participation and Captures in the Brazilian Public Media Service

Although the Brazilian media system is characterised by private concentration, the development of broadcasting in the country is also deeply rooted in a public model with educational and cultural objectives. This intention was evident when the first radio station, Rádio Sociedade do Rio de Janeiro, was inaugurated in 1923 by Edgard Roquette-Pinto, with a programme that prioritised educational, cultural, and scientific content. Years later, in 1936, the station was donated to the Ministry of Education, with the State assuming responsibility for safeguarding this heritage.

In the case of television, the country's leading broadcaster in terms of cultural and educational content, TV Cultura[3], was initially founded by private initiative and later sold to the São Paulo state Government, which currently manages it through the Padre Anchieta Foundation. Other initiatives for the creation of educational radio and television stations, such as university-run stations, emerged in the 1960s following the establishment of legal mechanisms that facilitated such concessions (Coelho, 2019; Pieranti, 2018).

In addition to these, a large number of local radio stations linked to community associations have been operating under authorisation since 1998, when Law 9.612 (Lei n. 9.612, 1998) was enacted, establishing the Community Broadcasting Service in Brazil. According to the law, these "low-power, restricted coverage" stations aim to broadcast content that promotes the integration of local communities and "provide opportunities for the dissemination of ideas, cultural elements, traditions, and social habits of the community" (art. 3, Section I).

The law also outlines principles of financial and administrative autonomy for these broadcasters and permits alternative forms of funding, such as sponsorship or cultural support (Lei n. 9.612, 1998). Despite these provisions, which theoretically ensure greater independence for these radio stations, the Brazilian community radio landscape shows an influence of commercial, political, and religious interests (Ferreira, 2005), particularly in the form of proselytism[4].

---

[3] TV Cultura first began broadcasting in 1960, with the concession of a second channel from the Diários Associados group, which had already operated TV Tupi, Brazil's first television channel. In 1969, the channel was acquired by the Padre Anchieta Foundation, an institution managed by the São Paulo government, with representation from various sectors of São Paulo society and direct funding from the state's citizens.

[4] The original text of the law, in Article 4, Paragraph 1, prohibited any form of proselytism (efforts to convince or convert individuals to a particular religious or political belief, for example). In 2018, however, the Supreme Court ruled that this provision was unconstitutional, thereby allowing religious proselytism on community radio in the name of freedom of expression (Ventura et al., 2021).

Television stations with community and educational principles, as well as other public broadcasters, are also provided for in Brazilian legislation; however, their method of transmission is restricted to pay-television channels. These spaces were initially guaranteed by Law 8.977/1995 (Lei n. 8.977/1995, 1995), known as the "Cable Law", which allocated eight basic channels for free use, including community and educational television, as well as channels linked to the local and national legislative, executive, and judicial powers[5].

However, community and public values are not only expressed through broadcasting stations and subscription-based channels. Much of this content is also broadcast and made available through other unregulated means (Peruzzo, 2010), both traditional and local (such as community radio and loudspeaker trucks, for example) and via the internet (e.g., web radio and television servers, as well as video and audio repositories).

In this context, a range of initiatives aimed at promoting public-interest content — whether cultural, educational, or informative — can be observed. These initiatives also present opportunities for developing mechanisms that foster financial and administrative autonomy, thus enabling the expression of public interest through citizen representation and participation.

In 2007, as part of a mobilisation[6] that brought together social movements in the field to advocate for the creation of a nationwide public television[7], based on the merger of institutions managing State-funded broadcasters[8], the Federal Government established EBC. One of its key objectives was to manage a National Public Communication Network[9]. With the enactment of the law that created EBC (Lei n. 11.652/2008, 2008), the term "Public Broadcasting Service" was used for the first time in Brazilian legislation to describe an institution responsible for providing this type of service nationwide.

Over the past 15 years, a number of academic studies in the field of communication have sought to understand the creation and development of EBC as the operator of the national public communication system in Brazil (e.g., Bucci & Vannuchi, 2021; Paulino & Silva, 2013; Pieranti, 2018; Valente, 2009). Several mechanisms were put in place during its establishment to ensure the company's autonomy from State economic and political interests, including (a) the creation of a Contribution for the Promotion of Public Broadcasting[10] to provide alternative funding; (b) the establishment of two internal

---

[5] These provisions were upheld even after the subsequent amendments introduced by Law 12.485/11 (Lei n. 12.485/11, 2011), which regulates various pay-television services, or conditioned access services.

[6] The "1st Public Television Forum" took place in May 2007, convening organisations and social movements advocating for the democratisation of communication. One of the outcomes was a letter outlining agendas related to the creation of a national public television and the reinforcement of regional public broadcasters.

[7] This aligns with the provisions of Article 223 of the Brazilian Constitution, which calls for the complementary of private, State, and public broadcasting systems (Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil de 1988, 1988).

[8] Empresa Brasil de Comunicação was created through the merger and transformation of Radiobrás and Associação de Comunicação Educativa Roquette Pinto, with the objective of providing public communication services on behalf of the State (Lei n. 11.652, 2008).

[9] According to the Empresa Brasil de Comunicação website (https://www.ebc.com.br/veiculos/rncp), on November 20, 2023, the network included 68 television stations and 39 radio stations.

[10] This contribution is to be paid by telecommunications companies; however, a significant portion of the funds collected is either held in court or has been withheld by the Executive.

accountability and social participation mechanisms (an Ombudsman[11] and a Board of Trustees[12]); and (c) a fixed term for the company's CEO.

Between 2008 and 2016, EBC's Ombudsman and Board of Trustees worked in collaboration, facing a series of conflicts with the company's Board of Directors. They publicised debates related to EBC's strategic objectives as a public communication entity, driving changes in the processes and content broadcast by its outlets[13].

This period saw an enhanced expression of EBC's participation mechanisms, both administratively and in media terms. This can be exemplified by the content produced by the Ombudsman and the Board between 2011 and 2015, including (a) the Ombudsman's analyses of received demands, published in weekly radio and television programmes, as well as in a web column; along with monthly, bimonthly, biannual, and annual reports; and internal newsletters (Coelho, 2019); (b) the Board, which broadcast its meetings via web streaming and published meeting minutes, strategic planning documents, resolutions, recommendations, press releases, and a weekly magazine (Strozi, 2019).

Following the change in leadership of the Brazilian Federal Executive in 2016, with the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the ascent of governments advocating the extinction or privatisation of EBC, a series of attacks were directed at the company and its accountability and social participation mechanisms. These included the abolition of the Board of Trustees and the undermining of debates in the Ombudsman's Office.

In addition to these actions, the following are particularly noteworthy: the termination of the mandate of EBC's CEOs; attempts to privatise the company; retaliation against journalists for content published; the unification of TV Brasil's programming (a public broadcaster) with NBR (a government broadcaster); and the appointment of military personnel with no connection to the communications sector to strategic positions within the company.

It should be noted that governmental influences on EBC's organisational culture have always been present to some degree (Bucci & Vannuchi, 2021). However, with the rise of neoliberal and far-right governments, these influences evolved into institutionalised forms of capture. In response, civil society movements advocating for the democratisation of communication, alongside EBC employees, former members of the now-defunct Board, and representatives from academia, united in efforts to defend both EBC and public communication in Brazil.

In this context, the Frente em Defesa da EBC emerged, launching social media campaigns and parliamentary initiatives since 2016 to raise awareness among the public and political figures about the importance of EBC in upholding the principles of public communication in the country. Another key initiative, Ouvidoria Cidadã da EBC, was

---

[11] The general ombudsman is appointed for a two-year term to internally review the content broadcast by the company through administrative and media products.

[12] Empresa Brasil de Comunicação's Board of Trustees was composed of 22 members (15 representing civil society), with strategic advisory and deliberative functions for the company. In 2017, it was replaced by an Editorial and Programming Committee, with less representation and fewer responsibilities, which had not been effectively installed as of this writing.

[13] An example can be found in the adoption of a religious diversity track for TV Brasil, as reported by Viula and Paulino (2015).

established to address gaps in the company's social control, accountability, and participation mechanisms.

With regard to the attacks on the company's employees, the facts and data confirm explicit government interference in content, as well as threats to journalists and other professionals. In response to these attacks, company employees published four reports (Comissão de Empregados da EBC et al., 2022; Em Defesa da EBC, n.d.) between 2018 and 2022 documenting cases of censorship and/or government interference in EBC content and processes. These reports documented a total of 986 cases of censorship, government interference (both direct and indirect), government overreach, and irrelevant agendas during this period.

> However, journalists responsible for compiling these reports argue that the actual numbers are higher, as many professionals do not report their experiences out of fear of reprisals or because they do not perceive these acts as censorship or government overreach but as commonplace within the company. (Paixão, 2021, p. 82)

These attacks have weakened the debates held in the Ombudsman's Office, the only social participation mechanism currently still functioning within the company. Since 2018, the reports produced have shown less critical content (Nitahara & Luz, 2021), alongside a reduction in media spaces dedicated to Ombudsman discussions (Coelho & Paulino, 2019). By 2023, these issues remain unresolved, as even with Lula da Silva's return to the presidency of the Republic — the same leader who established the institution 15 years ago — EBC continues to face persistent challenges related to its public service mandate[14].

The EBC case highlights the impact of self-, hetero-, and co-regulatory mechanisms on expanding or restricting communication-related freedoms and rights. The involvement of social actors has played a crucial role in shaping norms aimed at positioning the company as a national public broadcasting service provider, at least in principle.

In practice, this mobilisation proved insufficient to prevent the capture orchestrated by key social actors. The influence of political agents is particularly evident, as shifts in power within the Federal Executive played a decisive role not only in the company's formation but also in its capture, encompassing economic, political, and cognitive dimensions.

4. Final Considerations

Considering these dynamics of expanding and retracting freedoms — linked on one side to accountability mechanisms fostering transparency and participation and on the other to the economic, political, and socio-cognitive aspects of media capture — we offer some reflections to inform debates on the subject.

First, we highlight the significance of freedoms associated with the right to communication (such as freedom of the press, expression, and opinion) in shaping modern societies. This includes the establishment of normative and regulatory mechanisms that define the conduct of media institutions. The ways in which these mechanisms are

---

[14] As argued in the public note from the Front in Defence of EBC and Public Communication (Frente em Defesa da EBC e da Comunicação Pública, 2023).

implemented — whether imposed by the State or initiated voluntarily by civil society — help delineate the boundaries of rights and freedoms. Economically, regulation sets limits on capital while ensuring service provision with both freedom and responsibility. Politically, formal regulation can curb government influence while fostering citizen participation in decision-making. In the socio-cognitive realm, regulatory frameworks can promote the representation of diverse individual and collective expressions in both content production and consumption.

In this context, the implementation of external mechanisms such as regulatory bodies, awareness campaigns, and audience groups, along with internal mechanisms like codes of ethics, participatory councils, and ombudsman services, has the potential to promote the expansion of freedoms within society. Conversely, increased ownership concentration and ideological coercion, driven by systemic barriers, naturally result in a retraction of these freedoms. The financing structures of media institutions play a crucial role in maintaining this balance between responsibility and capture. A balance between financial independence and constraints on commercial exploitation is essential to ensure that consumer and citizen freedoms are respected. State institutions must focus on using public budgets in ways that serve the public interest, while public media should explore diverse and sustainable funding models to preserve their autonomy[15].

Moreover, efforts to enhance media accountability and mitigate capture must include awareness-raising initiatives. Within media institutions, fostering a culture of responsibility involves engaging professionals through ethical guidelines and audiences through critical evaluation of published content. These relationships should also extend to content-sharing platforms among users who are not media professionals. In such cases, information and media literacy[16] should be promoted in both formal educational environments and community-based initiatives.

Finally, by setting out parameters to identify accountability and capture mechanisms in specific media contexts, we aim to contribute to the development of analytical models that engage with diverse realities. Through this contribution, we hope to pave the way for international discussions on the topic.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

[15] Some of these alternatives are already stipulated by law. Still, in practice, they are not implemented as they should be, as seen with the Contribution for the Promotion of Public Broadcasting, a tax levied on telecoms and other service providers to support Empresa Brasil de Comunicação. Other alternatives include monetisation through social media (such as TV Cultura's YouTube channels, for instance), crowdfunding, or the implementation of cultural promotion projects.

[16] According to Souza and Valle (2021), this form of literacy "can be defined as a learning process that incorporates critical thinking, ethical reflection, and argumentation, and fosters conscious decision-making among citizens" (p. 111), taking into account the relationship between these citizens and both the technological tools they use and the content they consume and produce across various platforms.

References

Agência Nacional de Telecomunicações. (n.d.). *Estações de TV FM e OM*. Retrieved November 28, 2023, from https://informacoes.anatel.gov.br/paineis/outorga-e-licenciamento/estacoes-de-tv-fm-e-om

Aires, J., & dos Santos, S. (2023). Coronelismo eletrônico não é uma metáfora: Categorização da radiodifusão brasileira. *E-Compós*, *26*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.30962/ec.2621

Aznar, H. (2005). *Comunicación responsable: Deontología y autorregulación de los medios*. Ariel.

Bertrand, C. J. (2002). *O arsenal da democracia: Sistemas de responsabilização da mídia* (M. L. Loureiro, Trans.). Edusc. (Original work published 1999)

Bolaño, C. R. S. (2000). *Indústria cultural, informação e capitalismo*. Hucitec.

Bolaño, C. R. S. (2007). *Qual a lógica das políticas de comunicação no Brasil?* Paulus.

Bourdieu, P. (1997). *Sobre a televisão* (M. L. Machado, Trans.). Jorge Zahar. (Original work published 1996)

Brittos, V. C. (2001). *Capitalismo contemporâneo, mercado brasileiro de televisão por assinatura e expansão transnacional* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade Federal da Bahia].

Brittos, V. C. (2022). *Estudos culturais, economia política da comunicação e o mercado brasileiro de televisão*. CLACSO.

Bucci, E., & Vannuchi, C. (2021). A EBC à mercê do governo - Qualquer governo. *E-Legis – Revista Eletrônica do Programa de Pós-Graduação da Câmara dos Deputados*, *14*(36), 211–226.

Carpentier, N. (2011). *Media and participation: A site of ideological-democratic struggle*. Intellect.

Carpentier, N. (2015). Differentiating between access, interaction and participation. *Conjunctions*, *2*(2), 7–28. https://doi.org/10.7146/tjcp.v2i2.23117

Carpentier, N., Melo, A. D., & Ribeiro, F. (2019). Resgatar a participação: Para uma crítica sobre o lado oculto do conceito. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, *36*, 17–35. https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.36(2019).2341

Cenp. (n.d.). *Painel 2024 – Jan a jun – 325 agências (263 matrizes e 62 filiais)*. Retrieved January 3, 2025, from https://www.cenp.com.br/cenp-meios-relatorios/painel-janeiro-a-junho-2024

Christians, C. (1989). Self-regulation: A critical role for codes of ethics. In E. E. Dennis, D. M. Gilmor, & T. L. Glasser (Eds.), *Media freedom and accountability* (pp. 35–54). Greenwood Press.

Christofoletti, R. (2021). Transparency, innovation, and journalism. In M. Luengo & S. Herrera (Eds.), *News media innovation reconsidered* (pp. 187–201). John Wiley & Sons.

Coelho, J. F. G. (2019). *Ombudsman e comunicação pública no Brasil e Portugal* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade de Brasília]. Repositório Institucional da UnB. https://repositorio.unb.br/handle/10482/35794

Coelho, J. F. G., & Paulino, F. O. (2019). Ombudsman e comunicação pública: A atuação da Ouvidoria da EBC nos seus primeiros 10 anos de existência. *Revista Brasileira de História da Mídia*, *9*(1), 61–79.

Comissão de Empregados da EBC, Ouvidoria Cidadã da EBC, Sindicatos dos Jornalistas do DF, SP e RJ, & Sindicatos dos Jornalistas do DF, SP e RJ. (2022). *Censura censura censura: 4ª Edição do dossiê de censura e governismo na EBC*. https://fenaj.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Dossie-Censura-e-Governismo-EBC-4a-Edicao-FINAL.pdf

Comissão Hutchins. (Ed.). (2020). *Uma imprensa livre e responsável: Comissão de liberdade de imprensa* (M. C. Ramos & F. O. Paulino, Trans.). Insular.

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Expansions and Retractions of Freedoms in the Brazilian Media System... · Ana Beatriz Lemos da Costa & Jairo Faria Guedes Coelho

Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil de 1988, https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicao.htm

Costa, A. B. L. da. (2022). *Velhas e novas barreiras, novos e velhos atores: Descompasso entre tecnologias e regulação das comunicações no Brasil* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade de Brasília]. Repositório Institucional da UnB. https://repositorio.unb.br/handle/10482/44582

Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos, December 19, 1948, https://e4k4c4x9.delivery.rocketcdn.me/pt/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2023/10/PT-UDHR-v2023_web.pdf

Em Defesa da EBC. (n.d.). *Dossiê*. Retrieved January 3, 2025, from https://emdefesadaebc.wordpress.com/?s=dossie

Fengler, S., Eberwein, T., & Karmasin, M. (Eds.). (2022). *The global handbook of media accountability*. Routledge.

Ferreira, G. S. N. (2005). Rádio comunitária e poder local: Um estudo das relações entre os poderes locais e as novas emissoras legalizadas da região Noroeste do estado de São Paulo. In P. S. Fidalgo (Ed.), *Actas do III Congresso da Sopcom, VI Congresso da Lusocom e II Congresso Ibérico* (Vol. 2; pp. 205–215). Universidade da Beira Interior.

Frente em Defesa da EBC e da Comunicação Pública. (2023, September 5). *Nota pública: Oito meses de governo sem comunicação pública*. Em Defesa da EBC. https://emdefesadaebc.wordpress.com/2023/09/05/nota-publica-oito-meses-de-governo-sem-comunicacao-publica/

Guerrero, M. A., & Márquez-Ramírez, M. (2014). The 'capture' of media systems, policies, and industries in Latin America: Concluding remarks. In M. A. Guerrero & M. Márquez-Ramírez (Eds.), *Communication policies in Latin America* (pp. 293–304). Palgrave Macmillan.

Kantar Ibope Media. (2023a). *Inside video 2023*. https://www.kantarmedia.com/reports/inside-video-2023

Kantar Ibope Media. (2023b, November 22). *Audiência de TV PNT TOP 10 | 13/11 a 19/11/23*. https://kantaribopemedia.com/conteudo/dados-rankings/dados-de-audiencia-pnt-top-10-com-base-no-ranking-consolidado-13-11-a-19-11-2023/

Leal, V. N. (2012). *Coronelismo enxada e voto. O município e o regime representativo no Brasil*. Companhia das Letras. (Original work published 1975)

Lei n. 8.977, de 6 de janeiro de 1995. (1995). https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/L8977.htm

Lei n. 9.612, de 19 de fevereiro de 1998. (1998). https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/l9612.htm

Lei n. 11.652, de 7 de abril de 2008. (2008). https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2007-2010/2008/lei/l11652.htm

Lei n. 12.485/11, de 12 de setembro de 2011. (2011). https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2011-2014/2011/lei/l12485.htm

Leigh, R. D. (Ed.). (1947). *A free and responsible press: A general report on mass communication*. University of Chicago Press.

Lima, V. A. de. (2004). *Mídia. Teoria e política*. Perseu Abrano.

Lima, V. A. de. (2010). *Liberdade de expressão x Liberdade de imprensa: Direito à comunicação e democracia*. Publisher Brasil.

MacBride, S. (1983). *Un solo mundo, voces multiples: Comunicación e información en nuestro tiempo* (E. Zagury, Trans.). Fondo de Cultura Económica. (Original work published 1981)

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Expansions and Retractions of Freedoms in the Brazilian Media System... · Ana Beatriz Lemos da Costa & Jairo Faria Guedes Coelho

Mastrini, G., & Becerra, M. (2006). *Periodistas y magnates. Estructura y concentración de las industrias culturales en América Latina*. Prometeo.

Mastrini, G., & Becerra, M. (2008). *Los dueños de la palabra: Acceso, estructura y concentración de los medios en la América latina del siglo XXI*. Prometeo.

Marshall, T. H. (1967). *Cidadania, classe social e status* (M. P. Gadelha, Trans.). Zahar Editores. (Original work published 1950)

Media Ownership Monitor Brasil. (2017, October). *Mídia*. https://brazil.mom-gmr.org/br/midia/

Mielke, A. C., Pasti, A., Nobrega, C., Cunha, C. V. da, Guimarães, F. L., Mendes, G., Fernandes, I. V., Valente, J., Gallas, L., Bandeira, O., Pinto, P., Evangelista, R., & Terso, T. (2023). *Quem controla a mídia? Dos velhos oligopólios aos monopólios digitais*. Veneta.

Nery, C. (2023, November 9). *Em 2022, streaming estava presente em 43,4% dos domicílios com TV*. Agência IBGE. https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-noticias/2012-agencia-de-noticias/noticias/38306-em-2022-streaming-estava-presente-em-43-4-dos-domicilios-com-tv

Nitahara, A., & Luz, C. R. M. (2021). O desmonte da participação social na EBC. *Revista Eptic*, *23*(2), 22–37.

Núcleo de Informação e Coordenação do Ponto BR. (2023). *TIC domicílios: Pesquisa sobre o uso das tecnologias de informação e comunicação nos domicílios brasileiros 2022*. Comitê Gestor da Internet no Brasil.

Paixão, M. (2021). *Radiodifusão pública à brasileira: As mudanças feitas na EBC de 2016 a 2020* [Final course work, Universidade de São Paulo].

Paulino, F. O. (2008). *Responsabilidade social da mídia: Análise conceitual e perspectivas de aplicação no Brasil, Portugal e Espanha* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade de Brasília]. Repositório Institucional da UnB. http://repositorio.unb.br/handle/10482/5175

Paulino, F., & Silva, L. M. (Eds.). (2013). *Comunicação pública em debate: Ouvidoria e rádio*. Editora Universidade de Brasília.

Peruzzo, C. (2010, June 8–11). *Rádios comunitárias no Brasil: Da desobediência civil e particularidades às propostas aprovadas na CONFECOM* [Conference presentation]. Encontro Anual da Compós, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Pieranti, O. P. (2018). *A radiodifusão pública resiste: A busca por independência no Brasil e no Leste Europeu*. FAC Livros.

Schiffrin, A. (Ed.). (2021). *Media capture: How money, digital platforms, and governments control the news*. Columbia University Press.

Souto, A. C. M. (2023). *A política de comunicação do Governo Bolsonaro para a radiodifusão: Do discurso de desburocratização aos interesses efetivos em jogo* [Master's thesis, Universidade de Brasília].

Souto, A. C. M., & Del Bianco, N. R. (2022). Política para a radiodifusão no governo Jair Bolsonaro: Do discurso liberal aos indícios de captura do Estado. *Revista Rumores*, *16*(32), 107–128. https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-677X.rum.2022.200122

Souza, K. de J., & do Valle, M. G. (2021). Alfabetização midiática e informacional: Uma revisão sistemática da literatura. *Pesquisa em Foco*, *26*(2), 109–122. https://doi.org/10.18817/pef.v26i2.2725

Stiglitz, J. E. (2017). Toward a taxonomy of media capture. In A. Schiffrin (Ed.), *In the service of power: Media capture and the threat to democracy* (pp. 9–17). Center for International Media Assistance.

Strozi, G. G. (2019). *Vida e morte do Conselho Curador da EBC* [Master's thesis, Universidade de Brasília]. Repositório Institucional da UnB. https://repositorio.unb.br/handle/10482/38504

Valente, J. C. L. (2009). *TV pública no Brasil: A criação da TV Brasil e sua inserção no modo de regulação setorial da televisão brasileira* [Master's thesis, Universidade de Brasília]. Repositório Institucional da UnB. http://repositorio2.unb.br/jspui/handle/10482/5468

Ventura, A. C. R., Júnior, E. E. M., & Curado, H. B. (2021). Proselitismo religioso em rádios comunitárias - ADI 2566 de 2018. *Dignitas - Revista Internacional do Instituto Brasileiro de Direito e Religião*, *2*(1), 91–106.

Viula, R., & Paulino, F. O. (2015). A TV de todos os santos está no ar: O debate sobre diversidade religiosa na Empresa Brasil de Comunicação. *Anuário Unesco/Metodista de Comunicação Regional*, *19*, 215–229.

Biographical Notes

Ana Beatriz Lemos holds a doctorate (2022) and a master's degree (2017) in Communication from the University of Brasilia, and a degree in Social Communication — Advertising (2005) and Journalism (2010) from the University of Brasilia. She is currently a federal external control auditor — Federal Court of Auditors, working in the area of communications inspection. She was a visiting researcher at the Erich-Brost Institute for International Journalism at the Technical University of Dortmund, Germany, and a post-doctoral fellow at the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education, in the context of the project *Communication and Democracy: Media Accountability, Public Service Media, Internet Access and the Right to Information in Germany and Brazil*, from July to December 2023. She has a postdoctoral fellowship funded by the PROBRAL Programme Edital n 14/2019. She has experience in communications and press relations. She is a researcher at the Communication Policy Laboratory at the University of Brasilia. She is the national coordinator of Working Group 3 — Media Industries of the Brazil Chapter of the Latin Union of Political Economy of Information, Communication and Culture. She is a member of the project *Information Integrity in Brazil and Germany: Regulation, Policies and Media Education* (CAPES-DAAD, 2025-2028). She researches the following topics: democracy, right of access to information, regulation of communications, communication policies, audiovisual platforms, political economy of communication and political economy of the internet..

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7178-9297

Email: anabialemos@gmail.com

Address: Campus Universitário Darcy Ribeiro ICC Norte - Instituto Central de Ciências Norte - Asa Norte, Brasília, Distrito Federal, 70910-900, Brasil

Jairo Faria Guedes Coelho holds a PhD from the Postgraduate Programme in Communication at the University of Brasilia (2019). He was a visiting researcher (2017) at the Communication and Society Research Centre at the University of Minho, in Portugal, as a sandwich doctoral fellow of the Foundation for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel, in the context of the project *Políticas de Comunicação, Radiodifusão Pública e*

Cidadania: Subsídios Para o Desenvolvimento Sócio-Cultural em Portugal e no Brasil. He was a visiting researcher (2023) at the Erich-Brost Institute for International Journalism at the Technical University of Dortmund, Germany, as a postdoctoral fellow of the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education, in the context of the project *Communication and Democracy: Media Accountability, Public Service Media, Internet Access and the Right to Information in Germany and Brazil.* He is a member of the research groups Comunicação Comunitária e Cidadania (University of Brasilia) and Comunicação Midiática e Movimentos Sociais (São Paulo State University). He has worked as a university lecturer in Social Communication at the University of Brasilia (2014 to 2019) and Journalism at the Federal University of Tocantins (2024). He graduated in Social Communication/Journalism from the University of Brasília (2009). She completed her master's degree at the same institution (2013), with a dissertation entitled *Ouvidoria na TV: A Experiência dos Canais Privados Colombianos* (TV Ombudsman: The Experience of Colombian Private Channels). He is a student on the Theatre degree course at the Federal University of Tocantins.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3913-6744

Email: jairofaria@gmail.com

Address: Campus Universitário Darcy Ribeiro ICC Norte - Instituto Central de Ciências Norte - Asa Norte, Brasília, Distrito Federal, 70910-900, Brasil

Digital Platforms for Participatory Politics as a Space for Dialogue Between Citizens and Public Representatives

Elizabet Castillero-Ostio
Departamento de Comunicación Audiovisual y Publicidad, Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación, Universidad de Málaga, Málaga, Spain
Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, software, supervision, validation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Álvaro Serna-Ortega
Departamento de Comunicación Audiovisual y Publicidad, Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación, Universidad de Málaga, Málaga, Spain
Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, software, supervision, validation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Andrea Moreno-Cabanillas
Departamento de Comunicación Audiovisual y Publicidad, Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación, Universidad de Málaga, Málaga, Spain
Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, software, supervision, validation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Abstract

Civic participation in the digital age has changed the dynamics of the internet, allowing users not only to consume information but also to contribute and collaborate in the creation of content. Online platforms for political participation aim to strengthen the quality of democracy and bridge the gap between institutions and citizens by facilitating dialogue with political representatives. The overall objective is to understand the dynamics of citizen participation in Spain through the digital platform Osoigo.com. The research adopts a quantitative approach, analysing interactions in order to identify patterns in communication, content, sentiment and the relationship between questions and answers. The scope is exploratory, addressing descriptive, correlative and inferential aspects through the use of data mining techniques and statistical analysis. The sample is purposively selected based on the popularity of the queries. The main findings show the diversity and plurality of the Spanish political landscape reflected on the platform, with gender inequality and a leftist bias among question recipients. The geographical distribution of questions suggests a general balance, with more attention given to public representatives at the national level, with the exception of right-wing politicians, who receive more regional questions. There is no statistically significant relationship between the sentiment of questions and answers, suggesting that politicians do not adapt their emotional tone to citizens but maintain a consistent emotional response pattern.

Keywords

citizen participation, digital platform, participatory politics, freedom of participation, accountability

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Digital Platforms for Participatory Politics ... · Elizabet Castillero-Ostio, Álvaro Serna-Ortega & Andrea Moreno-Cabanillas

Plataformas Digitais Para a Política Participativa: Espaços de Diálogo Entre Cidadãos e Representantes Públicos

Resumo

A participação cívica na era digital transformou a dinâmica da internet, permitindo aos utilizadores não apenas consumir informação, mas também contribuir e colaborar na criação de conteúdos. As plataformas digitais online dedicadas à participação política visam fortalecer a qualidade democrática e reduzir a lacuna entre as instituições e os cidadãos, facilitando o diálogo com os representantes políticos. O objetivo geral é compreender a dinâmica da participação cidadã em Espanha através da plataforma digital Osoigo.com. A investigação adota uma abordagem quantitativa, analisando as interações para identificar padrões de comunicação, conteúdo, sentimento e a relação entre perguntas e respostas. O estudo é de caráter exploratório, abordando aspetos descritivos, correlativos e inferenciais por meio de técnicas de extração de dados e análise estatística. A amostra é selecionada intencionalmente com base na popularidade das consultas. As principais conclusões revelam a diversidade e pluralidade do panorama político espanhol refletidas na plataforma, com desigualdades de género e uma tendência de esquerda entre os destinatários das perguntas. A distribuição geográfica das perguntas sugere um equilíbrio geral, com maior atenção voltada para os representantes públicos a nível nacional, exceto no caso dos políticos de direita, que recebem mais perguntas regionais. Não se observa uma relação estatisticamente significativa entre o sentimento das perguntas e das respostas, o que sugere que os políticos não ajustam o tom emocional das suas respostas ao sentimento dos cidadãos, mas mantêm um padrão emocional consistente nas suas respostas.

Palavras-chave

participação cidadã, plataforma digital, política participativa, liberdade de participação, responsabilização

1. Introduction

1.1. Citizen Participation in the Digital Era

The evolution of the internet, from web 1.0 to web 2.0, has radically changed the way users engage with the digital medium. This shift marks a significant change in the dynamics of internet users, enabling them not just to consume information but also to participate and collaborate in content creation. Interactivity is a key feature of this new scenario, allowing for bidirectional communication and virtual dialogue (Aced Toledano, 2013; Guillory & Sundar, 2014). This empowers web users to contribute more actively and collaboratively. Information and communication technologies have been essential in the implementation and operation of web 2.0, providing vital infrastructure for connectivity, data storage, information management, and online communication. The two elements have significantly altered our virtual interactions.

Digital technologies have not only progressed but have also transformed into valuable resources that promote collaboration, enhance participation, and empower citizens (Cabero Almenara, 2014; Cabero-Almenara et al., 2019). As defined by Reig Hernández

(2011, 2012), technologies of empowerment and participation (TEPs) are utilized to encourage civic engagement in political or social affairs, facilitating recognition of individuals' circumstances within their community and resulting in public actions and/or advocacy that empowers (Zambrano Farias & Balladares Ponguillo, 2017). The optimal employment of virtual technologies is intended to enhance online involvement, thereby reinforcing the digital identity required by the information society (Pinto Santos et al., 2017). TEPs are a selection of tools and technological resources intended to empower individuals and communities to engage actively and significantly in decision-making processes, advocate for their rights, express opinions, and influence their environment. These resources facilitate active participation in social, political, and economic spheres. This is achieved by enabling and empowering individuals to utilize these resources. In doing so, TEPs foster an inclusive and equitable society. Thus, the technologies associated with web 2.0 adopt a social rather than an individualistic approach, enabling collective learning and enhancing individual capacity for interaction and collaboration, ultimately leading to knowledge creation (Cabero-Almenara et al., 2019).

The internet, web 2.0 and TEPs have changed the way citizens express their political and social demands, redefining the concepts of "participation" and "democracy" (Burgos, 2020; Luvizotto, 2016). Political participation, a crucial element of modern democracies (Torcal et al., 2006), typically relates to civic engagement that aims to affect public decision-makers (Verba et al., 1995) or political results (Brady, 1999), either directly or indirectly.

Political engagement can take on various forms, both conventional and unconventional, such as voting, signing petitions, participating in political mobilisations and protests or contacting parties and their representatives (Torcal et al., 2006; Verba et al., 1995). These practices of political participation have become more diverse in the context of the network society, occurring in different scenarios that are independent of classic political structures or public institutions (Burgos, 2020). The digital environment has been shown to have a direct and significant impact on the creation of new platforms for political communication and participation, as well as the intensification of political engagement (García Guitián, 2016). Empowered prosumers now have the capacity to reform and democratize the current systems of communication, politics, and society (Gil García, 2015). In the context of "political prosumption", the prosumer in political communication (Hershkovitz, 2012) is able to partake, generate content, and express opinions and ideas via the internet (Scolari, 2008).

The online realm facilitates a more open and accessible public engagement on matters of concern, encouraging shared discussion through a collective process (Schäfer, 2015). However, within the realm of online public discourse, where a variety of political information is disseminated, and numerous debates occur, the establishment of a systemic link that connects political dialogue among citizens with resultant political decisions is essential. Such decisions are clearly influenced by the thoughts of these publics (Dahlgren, 2005), and if this link is absent, it may lead to disinterest and scepticism among the populace (Masip et al., 2019).

1.2. Online Platforms for Citizen Political Participation

There are various options for citizens' electronic political participation, including social networks, websites, and online forums, which may include special digital platforms. These platforms offer dedicated spaces for dialogue between political representatives and citizens, independent of institutional settings (Castellanos Claramunt, 2022). The aim is to enhance the quality of democracy, narrow the divide between institutions and the reality experienced by citizens, and promote actions with increased interactivity, diversity, and reliability, with the individual at the heart of political conversation (Sánchez-Villar, 2019). These internet-based initiatives aid in fostering political discourse, informing and empowering the user community, and establishing communication channels with political leaders and institutions (Santini & Carvalho, 2019). They promote objective evaluations and utilize clear, concise language while avoiding jargon, colloquialisms, and ornate phrasing. Technical terms are introduced and explained when first employed. Footnote styles and citation methods follow academic standards, while sentence structure and terminology are consistent throughout the document. The writing style uses passive voice and avoids subjective evaluations unless clearly marked as such, promoting a balanced and objective approach.

In addition to the positive aspects mentioned above, cyberspace provides further advantages for political participation. Flexibility is a key benefit as it overcomes space-time limitations (Strandberg & Grönlund, 2018). Furthermore, it fosters a more diverse public sphere (Leetoy et al., 2019), which could result in higher levels of potential political engagement. Thanks to civic technologies, political actors are achieving higher levels of transparency and accountability in citizen empowerment (Magallón Rosa, 2014). These cyber platforms bridge the gap in information and communication between citizens and the political elite (Aguirre Sala, 2013), allowing for direct relationships among all actors involved in the political process.

Conversely, the online space may have disadvantages focused upon the possible absence of authentic dialogues (Annunziata et al., 2021; Coleman & Moss, 2012; Graham, 2010; Hartz-Karp & Sullivan, 2014; Manosevitch, 2014), which leads to less engagement from more susceptible groups (Annunziata, 2020) and hindered access to digital technologies. This phenomenon of digital marginalisation affects those who are unable to afford electronic devices or internet connectivity, thereby limiting the representation of online participation on virtual platforms (Desouza & Bhagwatwar, 2014; Oliveira & Rodegheri, 2012; Sampaio, 2012; Sampaio et al., 2010; Santini & Carvalho, 2019; Saylan, 2009; Welp, 2008). Another obstacle arises from the dominance of these spaces as channels of political influence. The understanding of their functioning restricts access to an audience with high levels of education, financial resources, and political concern (Balla, 2012; Mambrey et al., 1999; Mendonça & Amaral, 2014; Ribeiro et al., 2013; Sani, 2004; Santini & Carvalho, 2019; Solop, 2001; Strandberg, 2008; Tettey, 2001; Westholm, 2002), leading to an incomplete representation of society's opinions. This can lead to a further problem, where influential opinions or radical viewpoints could dominate over milder or less expressive perspectives.

Although web 2.0 has facilitated dialogical processes (Martínez Rodríguez, 2011), many of these platforms do not encourage bidirectional communication between users and institutions or political figures. As a result, citizens are restricted from actively engaging in political decisions (Steinmann et al., 2005).

These digital platforms for political activity have various typologies. Considering the findings of Santini and Carvalho (2019), who conducted a review of studies on the subject, six models of virtual political participation can be distinguished depending on whether they are proposals made by citizens or institutions and the linearity of the communicative flow. The models are as follows:

- Pre-participatory, which comprises government initiatives with monological and informative communicative structures.

- Downward participation, communication originates from institutions and involves bidirectional but asymmetrical communication, with a focus on public bodies seeking public opinion on a particular issue.

- Upward participation refers to spaces managed by social sectors with the intention of gathering popular actions that influence specific political issues, such as signing petitions or raising funds for citizen-initiated legislative projects, among others.

- Deliberate downward participation is another form of participation. Asymmetric vertical and horizontal communication is implemented through online forums and government-managed participatory budgets.

- Deliberate upward participation is similar but overseen by social sectors, allowing citizens to communicate horizontally and provide feedback to the public administration.

- Collaborative participation is also an option. Platforms for the creation and management of joint projects between the social sector and the government are characterized by bilateral communication close to symmetry.

Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés (2017) offer an alternative classification of participatory political platforms based on transparency and monitoring criteria from social initiatives, which distinguishes five types:

- Accountability platforms: citizens monitor political actions to ensure accountability of authorities, providing spaces where political work is informed, clarified and evaluated by the public.

- Social and political connectivity platforms: online meeting venues that encourage citizen political participation in decision-making processes, including legislative processes.

- Collaborative journalism platforms: hybrid management portals that bridge citizens and journalists, aiming for transparency and informational accuracy.

- Platforms for promoting public debate: platforms that promote inclusive debate and reflection through transparency.

- Platforms for open and transparent governance: platforms involving citizens and promoting transparency to showcase the actions and administration of government officials to prevent political corruption.

1.3. The Politicians' Listening Portal: Osoigo.com

In this instance, the Osoigo.com platform, an online portal promoting participatory politics and accessible to the general public, aligns with proposed classifications as a

virtual environment fostering upward deliberate political engagement and accountability. The platform's management is independent and represents citizen sentiment, with no affiliations to political parties or public institutions. Sponsored by third-sector organisations with the aim of promoting political participation, the platform enables objective dialogue among citizens, political leaders, and social associations.

It presents a representative option for connecting citizens with political representatives from six countries — Spain, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Argentina, and Peru — as of 2023. As a platform facilitating dialogic communication, it enables the populace to express their political concerns and channel their online requests. It provides a mechanism for social listening to address social demands and issues transparently and directly for political leaders. Participation is voluntary for both citizens and political figures, with queries originating from the citizenry to the political actors. The questions that receive approval for publication are those that have attained a specific number of supports, a figure defined by the platform. In addition, political responses are rated by the registered user community and categorized as the latest, most supported, or most read. As of November 2023, there are 903,262 participants, 426 politicians, 2,161 registered associations, seven institutions, 51 parties and 26,000 questions raised, of which 11,349 are active, with 7,070 responses.

Additionally, the website complements its primary function of posing questions to the political entity with the "Ágora" section for public debates and surveys.

Santini and Carvalho's (2019) study analysed 179 online citizen participation initiatives worldwide, concluding that a significant proportion of these platforms were promoted and managed by public administrations. The study highlights the implementation of a downward communicative model which restricts effective online participation. The present study examines the Osoigo.com platform as a notable example of its role and impact as an online platform promoting citizen participation in social and political issues. The platform provides a two-way communication structure that facilitates discussions among political stakeholders, with an emphasis on initiatives from the governed rather than public administrators. Although the initiative is present in numerous countries, this analysis concentrates exclusively on Spain, where the endeavour began. This country has reached a stage of maturity that can yield substantial data and more rigorous conclusions.

2. Objectives

The primary goal of this investigation is to comprehend the dynamics of citizen participation in Spain via the digital platform Osoigo.com. To this end, interactions between citizens and public representatives are studied to identify prevalent patterns in communication, content, sentiment, and question-answer relationships, among others. Consequently, we intend to obtain an all-inclusive understanding of how citizens engage in this particular context.

Five secondary objectives (SO) derived from the main objective are proposed:

- SO1: analyse the profile of public representatives to whom inquiries are directed, identifying patterns based on their political affiliation and ideology.

- SO2: explore trends in the themes of questions and their geographical scope, establishing variations based on the ideology of the recipients.

- SO3: evaluate the content and sentiment of questions posed by citizens.

- SO4: evaluate the content and sentiment of responses provided by politicians.

- SO5: investigate whether there is a correlation between the sentiment of questions and that of responses to identify patterns in communication between citizens and politicians in this particular context.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Methodological Approach and Scope

This research adopts a quantitative approach, utilizing numerical methods and tools to collect and analyse data. The decision to use a rationalist framework is supported by the requirement to organize the phenomenon and the potential to generalize the findings to a wider population. The quantitative methodology is appropriate for subjecting data to statistical analysis, enabling a numerically grounded examination of interactions between citizens and public representatives on the Osoigo.com platform.

The proposed methodological framework primarily comprises an exploratory component. Investigating the dialogical phenomenon between citizens and public representatives establishes a theoretical and practical base for subsequent research and specifies an analytical approach to these interactions. However, it is noteworthy that the research comprises multiple approaches. While exploration takes precedence, the research also entails descriptions, correlations, and inferences to examine diverse aspects of the investigated phenomenon. This will enable a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of citizen participation in this specific context.

3.2. Sample

This study analyses all citizen participation queries on the Osoigo.com platform from April 2014 to November 2023. It ensures comprehensive coverage of all queries received, providing a balanced view of the platform's performance. The analysis has a longitudinal component, which is completed from the inception of the platform. The 11,349 questions posed during the study period received a total of 7,070 responses from 426 public representatives belonging to 51 different political parties.

However, as some dimensions of the proposed analysis require manual measurement, it is not feasible to address the entire population. Therefore, a sample must be defined. Considering a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, the research requires the evaluation of 371 interactions.

A deliberate sampling type based on question popularity was chosen to ensure that the questions in the sample are an accurate representation of citizen interests. The portal's internal metrics provide an understanding of the universe, which enables the messages to be ordered according to the stated purpose.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis Techniques and Tools

Data mining techniques have been utilized to acquire information from interactions. The extraction of data from the Osoigo.com website is performed through web scraping tools that analyse HTML code. This tool can automate and simplify the process, although the researchers have manually defined certain variables in the analysis as the said tools cannot determine them due to their subjective nature.

On the contrary, statistical procedures are used to conduct data analysis. Since all variables included in the research are numerical or can be converted to numerical form, this approach is utilised in a variety of statistical, numerical, and mathematical analysis tools.

- Descriptive statistical analysis is utilised throughout the research to contextualise sections, introduce variables, and offer straightforward descriptions of the phenomena observed. Mostly performed using standard spreadsheet software.

- Independence tests, specifically the chi-square test, were conducted to determine any dependency relationship between questionnaire recipients' ideology and addressed theme and to identify any relationship between the sentiment of queries and corresponding responses. These evaluations were undertaken using the R programming language.

- Graphical frequency analysis was also conducted. Word frequency and repetition can be visually illustrated using word clouds. They have been utilized to demonstrate the political affiliation of respondents and the frequently used words in interactions. This analysis was conducted using the R programming language (*wordcloud* library).

- The extent of positive or negative sentiment implied by questions and responses was measured using sentiment analysis and sentiment evolution techniques. They are analysed using the R programming language (*syuzhet* library) and meaningcloud software.

- Inter-group variance analysis assesses the behaviour of a contrast variable in relation to classification groups, evaluating sentiment shifts based on the query topic. In addition, these methods facilitate comprehension of the mean sentiment progression throughout message composition. RAW Graphs software and the R programming language are used for this analysis.

- Data flow analysis is also conducted. The objective of this tool is to measure the correlation between the sentiment of question formulation and the corresponding response of public representatives using alluvial diagrams and contour plots. Conducted through the utilization of the R programming language, SPSS software, and RAW Graphs software.

3.4. Analysis Structure and Measured Variables

The findings are categorized into five phases, each dedicated to analysing a specific dimension of interaction. The first phase focuses on defining the profile of surveyed individuals, including variables such as the politician's name, party affiliation, ideology, and gender. The second phase involves categorizing questions based on topic and scope,

distinguishing between economic or social nature and international, national, regional, or local context. In the third and fourth phases, sentiment analysis is applied to both questions and answers, assessing prevailing terms, sentiment values, and their development. Finally, the fifth phase establishes a connection between question sentiment and response using sentiment analysis variables.

4. Results

As previously stated, the analysis has been structured in five phases with the intention of providing a holistic evaluation of the research subject.

4.1. Profile of the Recipients of the Questions

In a global context, 371 questions were analysed and directed towards a diverse group of 156 politicians on this platform. This highlights the broad range of public representatives involved in citizen participation processes. Among them, prominent figures include Pedro Sánchez (Partido Socialista Obrero Español; PSOE), Pablo Casado (Partido Popular; PP), Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos), Pablo Iglesias (Podemos), and Santiago Abascal (Vox), among others.

The presence of 29 political parties among the sampled questions is a noteworthy aspect of the data. These organisations cover the broad political spectrum in Spain, ranging from nationally recognised parties to local groupings. PSOE is the most frequent recipient of the formulated questions, receiving 77 questions or 20.75% of the total, closely followed by Podemos with 70 questions, equating to 18.86% (see Figure 1 for the full graphical representation).

Figure 1. *Treemap of the political parties to which the questions are addressed*

When categorising recipients based solely on ideology, left-wing representatives account for a clear majority of 56.87% (*n* = 211) of the questions, while centrist party representatives receive 29.91% (*n* = 111), and right-wing representatives only 13.22% (*n* = 49).

However, when analysing the gender of the subjects, it is evident that male politicians predominate. Specifically, of the 371 questions posed, 248 (66.84%) were directed towards male politicians, whilst 123 (33.16%) were directed towards female politicians.

Further examination of gender differences among recipients showed that the highest similarity between men and women occurs in questions posed to right-leaning public

representatives. In this category, of the 49 questions, 25 were directed towards men (51.02%) and 24 towards women (48.98%). In contrast, the greatest disparity is observed in queries posed to centrist politicians, whereby 83.78% (93 out of 111 questions) are directed towards male politicians. Such a trend undermines gender equality in politics.

4.2. Thematic Classification and Geographical Coverage of Questions

As outlined in the methodology, inquiries are categorised according to the ministerial portfolios of the Spanish Government, alongside three supplementary classifications: "personal matters" for individual questions, "politics and agreements" for inquiries related to agreements or political matters, and "other issues" for any remaining unclassified queries. The categories of most interest among citizens are as follows: the subcategory covering personal questions (16.98%; *n* = 63), the subcategory comprising questions that do not fall into any other category (11.32%; *n* = 42), and the subcategory dealing with health (8.89%; *n* = 33). The last column of Table 1 presents the overall distribution.

Categories	Left	Centre	Right	Total	Total %
Economic affairs	3	7	1	11	2.97
Foreign affairs	11	5	0	16	4.31
Consumer affairs	2	0	0	2	0.54
Culture and sport	2	4	1	7	1.88
Social rights	12	2	3	17	4.59
Education	8	6	4	18	4.86
Treasury	1	1	1	3	0.81
Gender equality	2	0	1	3	0.81
Inclusion and migrations	5	3	2	10	2.69
Industry	0	1	0	1	0.27
Home affairs	1	0	1	2	0.54
Justice	10	4	1	15	4.04
Democratic memory	1	0	0	1	0.27
Other issues	14	22	6	42	11.32
Personal matters	40	19	4	63	16.98
Territorial policy	15	7	4	26	7.01
Politics and agreements	16	9	2	27	7.27
Public health	23	4	6	33	8.89
Social security	19	3	0	22	5.93
Work	11	9	2	22	5.93
Ecological transition	6	4	4	14	3.78
Transport and mobility	8	1	6	15	4.04
University	1	0	0	1	0.27
Total	211	111	49	371	100

Table 1. *Distribution of the thematic content of queries based on the recipient's ideology*

It is pertinent to examine how these questions align with the receiver's ideological leaning, recognizing the potential impact of varying question numbers based on politicians' ideologies (see Table 1's first four columns). After filtering out personal questions, the categories that display the most pronounced inter-ideological contrasts are "social security" and "social rights". In these categories, left-leaning representatives receive 86.36% ($n = 19$) and 70.58% ($n = 12$) of the directed questions, respectively. In particular, the proportion of questions regarding social security is significantly higher than the average of 66.84% of questions targeted at left-wing politicians.

To statistically evaluate the correlation between the ideology of the recipients and the themes tackled in the questions, the chi-square test of independence is employed between the two categorical variables. The initial four columns of Table 1 act as the contingency table.

The statistical procedures carried out yield the following outcomes: chi-square = 71.439; df = 44; $p = 0.005532 < 0.05$. As the chi-square value grows, the potency of proof against the null hypothesis, which proposes no correlation between variables, also intensifies. Therefore, the observed frequency distribution in the contingency table varies from the distribution anticipated when assuming the variables are independent. As the *p-value* is significantly less than 0.05, it is concluded that there is ample and significant statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis and support the proposition of dependence between the variables.

In addition to the thematic classification of queries, we have categorized them based on whether they pertain to economic or social topics. It is important to point out that some questions ($n = 94$) cannot be classified into either category. Out of the 277 categorized queries, 59 are related to economic matters. There were no discernible differences in relation to recipient ideology. This can be observed from the percentages in close proximity to the mean. None of the values deviate beyond 5.73% (left: 19.87%, $n = 32$; centre: 27.02%, $n = 20$; right: 16.66%, $n = 7$). Additionally, social issues are the subject of 69.38% of the categorizable inquiries, and a similar trend of uniformity between ideologies is evident (see Figure 2, chart on the left).
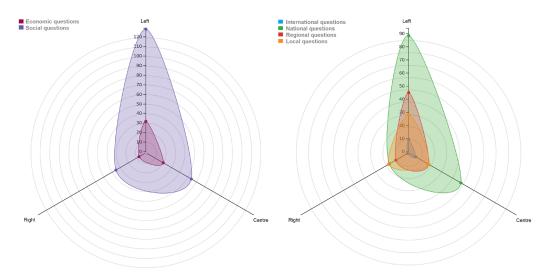
Figure 2. *Radar chart on the nature of queries and their geographical scope*

The geographical extent of the inquiries necessitates evaluation. Once queries that lack a precise geographical context are removed, it is apparent that a significant portion of the issues concern national subjects (50%; $n = 159$). Next in frequency are regional topics (24.21%; $n = 77$), followed by local matters (20.75%; $n = 66$), and finally, issues regarding international concerns (5.04%; $n = 16$). Similar to differences in questions of an economic or social nature, there is a balanced distribution among recipients of different ideologies. However, the only exception to this trend lies in regional questions posed to right-wing politicians, which exceed the expected average by 106.29% based on the overall distribution of questions (see Figure 2, right chart).

4.3. Content and Sentiment of the Questions

Once the structural context has been developed, it is essential to delve into the specific dimension related to the formulation of the questions.

The first step in carrying out this process is to identify the most recurrent words in the citizen participation messages analysed. After refining their content, a descriptive analysis shows that the most frequent words are "partido" (party; 127 occurrences in a total of 371 questions), followed by "ciudadanos" (citizens; 83 occurrences), "gracias" (thanks; 77 occurrences) and "España" (Spain; 73 occurrences). The graphical representation of the frequency of these words is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. *Word cloud of the formulated questions*

The study of sentiments shows that the questions were predominantly formulated positively. Of the 371 questions, 179 (48.24%) were phrased in a very positive or positive way, while only 96 (25.88%) were phrased in a negative or very negative way. The remaining 96 questions (25.88%) have a neutral sentiment. Considering that the sentiment scale ranges from -100 (very negative) to 100 (very positive), the resulting average polarity of the questions is 13.25.

When the sentiment analysis is categorised according to the topics addressed by the questions, there are differences between the groups. On the one hand, there are two blocks of questions with an average sentiment below -20: "treasury" and "democratic memory". On the other hand, the questions on "university", "consumer affairs", and "culture and sport" show very favourable sentiments in their wording. The detailed breakdown of the individualised analysis can be seen in Figure 4. In addition, it should be noted that the questions are mostly formulated in subjective language (64.69%; *n* = 240) and are not ironic (95.41%; *n* = 354). The formulation of objective questions is less frequent (35.31%; *n* = 131), and the use of irony is almost negligible (4.59%; *n* = 17).
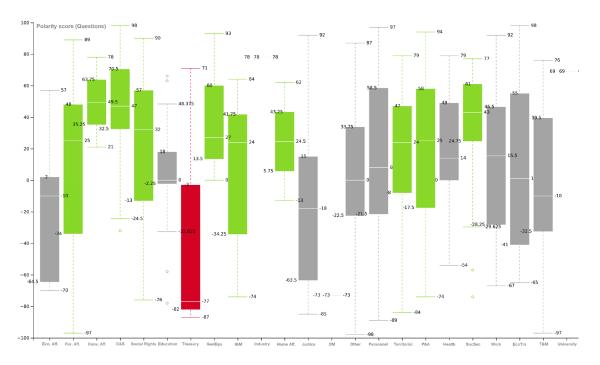
Figure 4. *Box plot on the sentiments of questions by domains*

Following on from the analysis of question-wording, the trend of sentiment progression across the entire set of questions posed is measured. Thus, an evolutionary analysis is performed to visualise the average change in the emotional tone of the messages as they unfold. As shown in Figure 5, there is a clear trend in the emotional progression of the messages. They begin with a predominantly neutral tone. Then, as the messages progress and citizens present their arguments, there is a shift towards a more negative approach. By the end, they return to a positive tone, typically aiming to maintain a cordial relationship or to convey optimism at the end of the question.
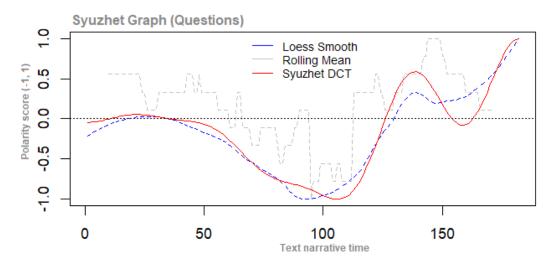
Figure 5. *Graph showing the evolution of sentiment in question formulation*

4.4. Content and Sentiment of Responses

In this case, the most frequent words in the answers are "política" (politics — with 260 occurrences in a total of 371 questions), "partido" (party — with 207 occurrences), "nuestro" (our — with 181 occurrences) and "ciudadanos" (citizens — with 146 occurrences). The recurrence of the use of certain terms is, therefore, much higher than in the case of questions, suggesting a standardisation of the answers given. The graphical representation of the frequency of these words is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. *Word cloud of the answers given*

The concentration in the lexicon used in the answers is also reflected in the sentiment with which the texts are formulated. The messages given by politicians are much less polarised than the questions and tend to focus on positive sentiments (55.79%; *n* = 207) and neutral sentiments (28.03%; *n* = 104). The presence of responses with very positive or very negative sentiments is much lower. While highly polarised responses account for 6.46% (*n* = 11+13) of the questions, they account for only 1.61% (*n* = 3+3) of the answers.

The resulting average polarity score of the sentiment analysis for the responses is 20.29 (on a scale between -100 and 100), which is 7.04 points higher than the average of the questions. This positive component in the wording can be seen in the distribution of sentiments based on the area to which the question belongs. There is no category whose average is negative (below -20 on the scale). The topics with lower scores are "justice" and "gender equality". On the contrary, the most positive sentiments can be observed in responses to questions related to "education", "university", and "home affairs" (see Figure 7).
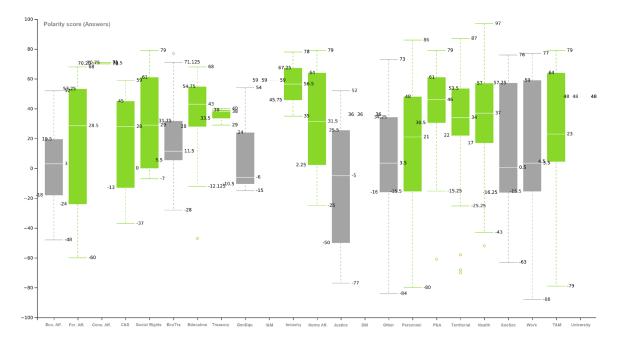
Figure 7. *Box plot of sentiments of responses by domain*

The distribution of subjectivity or objectivity in the wording of the message is much more pronounced than in the questions. Almost all the answers are written in a subjective tone (90.56%; *n* = 336). On the other hand, it is also noticeable that the vast majority of messages use non-ironic language (93.53%; *n* = 347), with the use of irony being very rare. At the same time, it is possible to assess whether the public representative agrees or disagrees with what the citizen has expressed. Most of the time (84.36%; *n* = 313), the politician disagrees with the reasoning given in the request.

In summary, responses generally exhibit less internal variation, lack polarization and feature a notable concentration of subjective, non-ironic messages. The sentiment analysis of politicians' messages reveals a stable trend, consistently leaning towards positive values, as depicted in Figure 8.
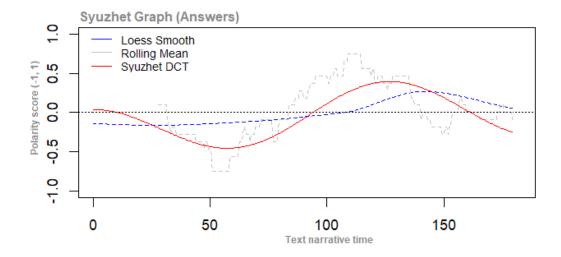
Figure 8. *Graph showing the evolution of sentiment in response formulation*

4.5. SENTIMENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In order to explore potential links between questions and answers, a section is introduced to assess the sentiment of dialogues individually. The initial step involves a general analysis to visually represent the distribution of sentiments in citizen-politician interactions, as depicted in Figure 9. The predominant clusterings are in the upper right quadrant, indicating positive sentiment values for both questions and answers.
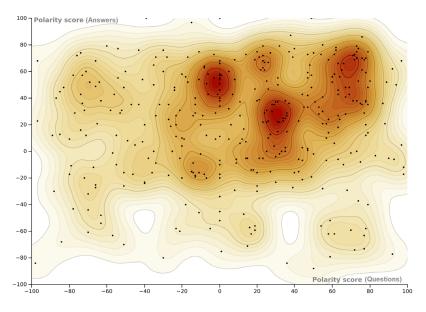
Figure 9. *Contour plot of the sentiment of the interactions*

The second step involves a detailed numerical exploration of the relationship between the two messages to identify sentiment analysis patterns in responses based on question wording. The results are summarized in Table 2, indicating no significant connection between response polarity and specific questions. Politicians maintain a consistent positive sentiment pattern in their answers across all question categories (ranging from 45.45% to 64.45%). Although positive answers are more frequent when the question sentiment is positive, the difference is insufficient to establish causality. Figure 10 visually represents this observed phenomenon. Finally, using Table 2 as a highly detailed contingency table, a test of independence between the sentiment of the questions and the answers is performed. In this case, based on the observations made, independence between the variables is expected a priori. The resulting statistics from the test are chi-square = 33.379; df = 25; p = 0.1219 > 0.05. Therefore, there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The variables are independent. To visualize the relationships individually, refer to the Appendix and Figure A1.

Polarity score (questions)	Total	Total %	Polarity score (answers)	Total	Total %
(-) NEG (-100, -80)	11	2.97	(-) NEG (-100, -80)	1	9.09
			NEG (-80, -20)	2	18.18
			NEU (-20, 20)	3	27.27
			POS (20, 80)	5	45.45
			POS (+) (80, 100)	0	0.00
NEG (-80, -20)	85	22.91	(-) NEG (-100, -80)	0	0.00
			NEG (-80, -20)	17	20.00
			NEU (-20, 20)	24	28.24
			POS (20, 80)	44	51.76
			POS (+) (80, 100)	0	0.00
NEU (-20, 20)	96	25.88	(-) NEG (-100, -80)	0	0.00
			NEG (-80, -20)	17	17.71
			NEU (-20, 20)	33	34.37
			POS (20, 80)	45	46.87
			POS (+) (80, 100)	1	1.05
POS (+)(20, 80)	166	44.74	(-) NEG (-100, -80)	2	1.21
			NEG (-80, -20)	17	10.24
			NEU (-20, 20)	38	22.89
			POS (20, 80)	107	64.45
			POS (+) (80, 100)	2	1.21
POS (80, 100)	13	3.5	(-) NEG (-100, -80)	0	0.00
			NEG (-80, -20)	1	7.70
			NEU (-20, 20)	6	46.15
			POS (20, 80)	6	46.15
			POS (+) (80, 100)	0	0.00

Table 2. *Distribution of sentiments in interactions*
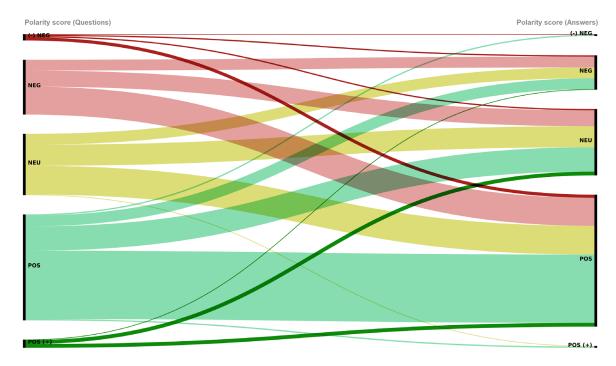
Figure 10. *Sankey diagram on the feeling of the interactions*

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Confirming the contributions of previous studies (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2017; Santini & Carvalho, 2019), citizen participation in online platforms has emerged as a crucial phenomenon for the interaction between politicians and the public. This study, which focuses on the dynamics of questions and answers between citizens and public administrators on a specific platform for promoting debate and public discussion, has provided a comprehensive view of the studied phenomenon. It has also identified some patterns and trends that can help to understand better the communicative dynamics between the actors involved in the political process in such virtual spaces, an area that has not been sufficiently explored.

First, it has been observed that this platform for citizen participation reflects the diversity and plurality of the Spanish political landscape, both at the national and regional levels. This is in line with one of the purposes of these participatory portals (Leetoy et al., 2019; Sánchez-Villar, 2019). Questions were posed to a range of 156 different politicians from 29 political parties across the ideological spectrum, highlighting a broad representation. The parties with the highest presence of questions were the PSOE and Podemos, closely followed by the Unión, Progreso y Democracia, Partido Popular and Ciudadanos. A significant number of questions were also addressed to representatives of regional parties in the Basque Country, such as Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea-Partido Nacionalista Vasco and Euskal Herria Bildu.

On the other hand, there is a gender gap among the recipients of the questions, with male politicians dominating the majority of the questions. This gender gap is particularly noticeable among the centrist parties, where only 16.22% of the recipients are women.

This may indicate a lack of visibility or recognition of women in the political sphere, as well as a possible gender bias on the part of citizens.

There is a noticeable left-leaning bias in the questions asked, reflecting a majority interest in this political sector or a greater demand for accountability from its public representatives. There is also a statistically significant relationship between the ideology of the recipients and the topics of the questions. This suggests that citizens choose politicians on the basis of issues that interest or concern them. Topics that show a greater proportional difference between questions addressed to left and right-wing politicians include social security and social rights, possibly indicating a higher sensitivity or demand by the public for left-wing representatives in these areas. The overall thematic classification of questions shows considerable interest in personal issues, followed by uncategorised questions and questions related to health.

In terms of content, the questions can be divided into two broad categories: economic and social. The majority of questions fall into the social category, indicating a greater concern or interest on the part of citizens in issues relating to coexistence, justice, equality or culture. No statistically significant relationship was found between the ideology of the recipient and the type of question (economic or social), suggesting that internet users choose politicians based on factors other than their economic or social profile, such as specific issues, personality or popularity.

The geographical spread of questions is also relevant for the analysis of interactions. The geographical distribution of questions suggests a general balance, with the majority of questions relating to national issues indicating a higher level of attention or demand from the population for public representatives with competencies or responsibilities at the national level. However, there is a notable presence of regional and local questions, highlighting the diversity and plurality of the Spanish political landscape. There is a notable exception in the questions addressed to politicians of different ideologies, with right-wing representatives receiving the highest number of regional questions, which may be related to the influence of nationalist or regionalist parties in this political spectrum.

In terms of the wording of the questions, they are characterised by the frequent use of words reflecting citizens' interest or concern about the political and social context of the country. The majority of questions express positive or neutral feelings, indicating a respectful, cordial or hopeful attitude of citizens towards public representatives. However, some topics generate negative feelings, such as "treasury" or "democratic memory", revealing dissatisfaction with the management of these issues. The questions have a dynamic emotional structure, starting with a neutral tone, changing to a negative tone when presenting arguments, and ending with a positive tone when closing the question. This may indicate users' intention to establish a formal connection, express their opinions or demands, and maintain a cordial relationship with politicians. Questions are predominantly written in a subjective and non-ironic tone, suggesting that citizens prefer to express their opinions or arguments directly and personally. This emotional pattern in the structuring of questions provides valuable information about the communicative dynamics in these citizen participation platforms.

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Digital Platforms for Participatory Politics ... · Elizabet Castillero-Ostio, Álvaro Serna-Ortega & Andrea Moreno-Cabanillas

As for the answers given by the politicians, they are characterised by the frequent use of words that, in addition to reflecting an interest in the socio-political context of Spain — similar to that of the citizens — seek to promote their own image or that of their organisation. The answers mainly express positive or neutral feelings and show a more stable and less dynamic emotional structure than the questions. This may indicate an intention to maintain a moderate, balanced and consistent tone throughout the message. There is a tendency to begin and end with a positive tone and to remain in the middle as the response develops. The use of irony is very rare and may be related to politicians' attempts to avoid misunderstandings or conflicts with citizens. The responses show a high level of disagreement with the questions, reflecting a divergence of opinions or interests between citizens and public representatives. This may create a sense of frustration or disappointment among citizens participating in the platform, leading to disaffection and cynicism, as noted by Dahlgren (2005) and Masip et al. (2019).

Finally, it was confirmed that there is no statistically significant relationship between the sentiment of the questions and that of the answers. This suggests that politicians do not adapt their emotional tone to that of citizens but maintain a consistent and independent emotional response pattern. Overall, there is a predominance of a positive and, above all, neutral tone in both questions and answers. The communicative style of the citizens tends towards a more general distribution of tones, which is reflected in the emotional pattern in the course of the questions. This can create a sense of disconnection or lack of empathy between citizens and public representatives, as politicians do not respond in line with the sentiments expressed by citizens in their demands.

The significant political engagement generated on this platform demonstrates that such digital spaces facilitate citizen participation, as suggested by Eisenberg (2006) and Orozco and Ayala (2014). Considering that cyberpolitics (Baggiolini & Castro-Rojas, 2016) has forced the structuring of messages according to the digital reality in which we live, it has also led to changes in the expression and evaluation of citizens' emotions in political matters (Cazorla et al., 2022). Therefore, studies of a communicative nature that focus on sentiment analysis — essential for measuring citizens' emotions, attitudes and opinions in the political arena — are crucial for understanding the level of participatory politics in each country today.

It is hoped that this research will contribute to advancing knowledge about citizen participation and political communication in the digital realm, as well as improving the quality and effectiveness of these political interaction spaces that facilitate direct dialogue between citizens and public representatives.

References

Aced Toledano, C. (2013). *Relaciones públicas 2.0. Cómo gestionar la comunicación corporativa en el entorno digital.* UOC.

Aguirre Sala, J. (2013). Nuevos alcances de la participación ciudadana a través de las redes sociales. *Culturales, 1*(2), 119–150.

Alonso-Muñoz, L., & Casero-Ripollés, A. (2017). Transparencia y monitorización en el entorno digital. Hacia una tipología de las plataformas impulsadas por la ciudadanía. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, *72*(8),1351–1366.

Annunziata, R. (2020). El impacto de los presupuestos participativos online en el tipo de proyectos. Un análisis de la experiencia de BAElige. *Revista del CLAD. Reforma y Democracia*, (77), 157–186.

Annunziata, R., Arena, E., & Basualdo Franchino, U. (2021). ¿Giro digital? Desafíos de los presupuestos participativos argentinos frente a la pandemia de COVID-19. *Política. Revista de Ciencia Política*, *59*(1), 59–80. https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-5338.2021.61609

Baggiolini, L., & Castro-Rojas, S. (2016). Las redes de la política: Universo narrativo, campañas y microrrelato en Twitter. *Inmediaciones de la Comunicación*, *11*, 159–180. https://doi.org/10.18861/ic.2016.11.11.2621

Balla, S. (2012). Information technology, political participation and the evolution of Chinese policymaking. *Journal of Contemporary China*, *21*(76), 655–673. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2012.666835

Brady, H. (1999). Political participation. In J. P. Robinson, P. R. Shaver, & L. S. Wrightsman (Eds.), *Measures of political attitudes* (pp. 737–801). Academic Press.

Burgos, E. (2020). *Ciberactivismo, ejercicio de la ciudadanía y participación política en internet*. Abediciones.

Cabero Almenara, J. (2014). Nuevas miradas sobre las TIC aplicadas en la educación. *Andalucía Educativa*, *81*, 1–6.

Cabero-Almenara, J., Torres-Barzabal, L., & Hermosilla-Rodríguez, J. (2019). Las TIC y la creación de una ciudadanía crítica e-digital. *Education in the Knowledge Society*, *20*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.14201/eks2019_20_a22

Castellanos Claramunt, J. (2022). Transparencia y participación ciudadana: La lucha contra la corrupción como eje vertebrador del proceso democrático. *Revista Española de Transparencia*, (15), 107–129. https://doi.org/10.51915/ret.220

Cazorla, A., Montabes, J., & López-López, P. (2022). Medios de comunicación, información política y emociones hacia partidos políticos en España. *Revista Española de Ciencia Política*, (58), 83–109. https://doi.org/10.21308/recp.58.03

Coleman, S., & Moss, G. (2012). Under construction: The field of online deliberation research. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *9*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2011.635957

Dahlgren, P. (2005). The internet, public spheres, and political communication: Dispersion and deliberation. *Political Communication*, *22*(2), 147–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600590933160

Desouza, K. C., & Bhagwatwar, A. (2014). Technology-enabled participatory platforms for civic engagement: The case of U.S. cities. *Journal of Urban Technology*, *21*(4), 25–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/10630732.2014.954898

Eisenberg, J. (2006). Internet, democracia y república. *Revista Interamericana de Educación de Adultos*, *28*(1), 175–192.

García Guitián, E. (2016). Democracia digital. Discursos sobre participación ciudadana y TIC. *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, (173), 169–193. https://doi.org/10.18042/cepc/rep.173.05

Gil García, J. (2015). Cuando el 15M envejeció a los medios de comunicación: Emergencia de prosumidores y desarrollo de nuevos modelos mediáticos. *Aposta. Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, (66), 9–37.

Graham, T. (2010). The use of expressives in online political talk: Impeding or facilitating the normative goals of deliberation? In E. Tambouris, A. Macintosh, & O. Glassey (Eds.), *Electronic participation, lecture notes in computer science* (pp. 26–41). Springer.

Guillory, J., & Sundar, S. (2014). How does web site interactivity affect our perceptions of an organization? *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *26*(1), 44–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2013.795866

Hartz-Karp, J., & Sullivan, B. (2014). The unfulfilled promise of online deliberation. *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*, *10*(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.191

Hershkovitz, S. (2012). Masbirim Israel: Israel's PR campaign as glocalized and grobalized political prosumption. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *56*(4), 511–530. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211142936

Leetoy, S., Zavala Scherer, D., & Sierra Caballero, F. (2019). Tecnopolítica y ciudadanía digital. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, *16*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2019i0.7462

Luvizotto, C. K. (2016). Cidadania, ativismo e participação na internet: Experiências brasileiras. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, *30*, 297–312. https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.30(2016).2499

Magallón Rosa, R. (2014). Tecnologías cívicas y participación ciudadana. *Revista de Estudios de la Juventud*, (105), 53–79.

Mambrey, P., Neumann, H., & Sieverdingbeck, K. (1999). Bridging the gap between Parliament and citizen – The internet services of the German Bundestag. *Parliamentary Affairs*, *52*(3), 480–492. https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/52.3.480

Manosevitch, I. (2014). The design of online deliberation: Implications for practice, theory and democratic citizenship. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, *10*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.197

Martínez Rodríguez, J. B. (2011). Participación política, democracia digital y e-ciudadanía para el protagonismo de adolescentes y jóvenes. *Revista Electrónica Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado*, *14*(2), 19–33.

Masip, P., Ruiz-Caballero, C., & Suau, J. (2019). Active audiences and social discussion on the digital public sphere. Review article. *El Profesional de la Información*, *28*(2), e280204. https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2019.mar.04

Mendonça, R. F., & Amaral, F. de L. (2014). Deliberação online em consultas públicas? O caso da Assembleia Legislativa de Minas Gerais. *Revista de Sociologia Política*, *22*(49), 177–203. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-44782014000100010

Oliveira, R. S. de, & Rodegheri, L. B. (2012). Ciberdemocracia: Análise dos desafios e possibilidades de iniciativa popular via internet no Brasil. *Sociedade e Cultura*, *15*(1), 121–133. https://doi.org/10.5216/sec.v15i1.20678

Orozco, M., & Ortiz-Ayala, A. (2014). Deliberación: Actividad política en internet y redes sociales en Colombia. *Panorama*, *8*(15), 91–100.

Pinto Santos, A. R., Cortés Peña, O., & Alfaro Camargo, C. (2017). Hacia la transformación de la práctica docente: Modelo espiral de competencias TICTACTEP. *Pixel-Bit. Revista de Medios y Educación*, (51), 37–51. https://doi.org/10.12795/pixelbit.2017.i51.03

Reig Hernández, D. (2011, October 11). *TIC, TAC, TEP y el 15 de octubre*. El Caparazón (2007). https://dreig.eu/caparazon/tic-tac-tep/

Reig Hernández, D. (2012). *Socionomía: ¿Vas a perderte la revolución social?* Deusto.

Ribeiro, L., Costa, A., Costa, L., & Ribeiro, M. (2013). Desigualdades digitais: Acesso e uso da internet, posição socioeconómica e segmentação espacial nas metrópoles brasileiras. *Análise Social*, *48*(207), 288–320. https://doi.org/10.31447/AS00032573.2013207.02

Sampaio, R. C. (2012). Quão deliberativas são discussões na rede? Um modelo de apreensão da discussão online. *Revista Sociologia Política*, *20*(42), 121–139. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-44782012000200010

Sampaio, R. C., Maia, R. C. M., & Marques, P. J. A. (2010). Participação e deliberação na internet: Um estudo de caso do orçamento participativo digital de Belo Horizonte. *Opinião Pública*, *16*(2), 446–477. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-62762010000200007

Sánchez-Villar, J. M. (2019). Los blogs como herramientas sociales de comunicación política: Periodismo ciudadano y opinión pública 2.0. *Communication & Society*, *32*(1), 39–55. https://doi.org/10.15581/003.32.1.39-55

Sani, G. (2004). Verbete "participação política". In N. Bobbio, N. Matteucci, & G. Pasquino (Eds.), *Dicionário de política* (p. 954). Editora UNB.

Santini, R. M., & Carvalho, H. (2019). Plataformas online de participação cidadã: Meta-síntese e avaliação crítica de seus impactos sociais e políticos. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, *36*, 163–182. https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.36(2019).2350

Saylan, I. (2009). Internet: "A gateway to democracy? A comparative analysis of Turkish and Italian e-government experiences". *AmmeİdaresiDergisi*, *42*(3), 141–162.

Schäfer, M. S. (2015). Digital public sphere. *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, *15*, 1–7.

Scolari, C. (2008). *Hipermediaciones. Elementos para una teoría de la comunicación digital interactiva*. Gedisa.

Solop, F. I. (2001). Digital democracy comes of age: Internet voting and the 2000 Arizona democratic primary election. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *34*(2), 289–293. https://doi.org/10.1017/S104909650100052X

Steinmann, R., Krek, A., & Blaschke, T. (2005). Can online map-based applications improve citizen participation? In M. Böhlen, J. Gamper, W. Polasek, & M. A. Wimmer (Eds.), E-*Government: Towards electronic democracy. TCGOV 2005. Lecture notes in computer science* (pp. 25–35). Springer.

Strandberg, K. (2008). Public deliberation goes on-line? An analysis of citizens' political discussions on the internet prior to the Finnish parliamentary elections in 2007. *Javnost – The Public*, *15*(1), 71–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2008.11008965

Strandberg, K., & Grönlund, K. (2018). Online deliberation. In A. Bächtiger, J. Dryzek, J. Mansbridge, & M. Warren (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of deliberative democracy* (pp. 93–113). Oxford University Press.

Tettey, W. J. (2001). Information technology and democratic participation in Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *36*(1), 133–153. https://doi.org/10.1163/156852101300143127

Torcal, M., Montero, J. R., & Teorell, J. (2006). La participación política en España: Modos y niveles en perspectiva comparada. *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, (132), 7–41. https://doi.org/10.18042/45507

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Harvard University Press.

Welp, Y. (2008). América Latina en la era del gobierno electrónico. Análisis de la introducción de nuevas tecnologías para la mejora de la democracia y el gobierno. *Revista del CLAD. Reforma y Democracia*, (41), 173–192.

Westholm, H. (2002). e-DemocracyGoesAhead. The internet as a tool for improving deliberative policies? In R. Traunmüller & K. Lenk (Eds.), *Electronic government. EGOV 2002, 2456* (pp. 240–247). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-46138-8_39

Zambrano Farias, F. J., & Balladares Ponguillo, K. A. (2017). Sociedad del conocimiento y las TEPs. *INNOVA Research Journal*, *2*(10), 169–177. https://doi.org/10.33890/innova.v2.n10.2017.534

Appendix

Below, Figure A1 provides a detailed breakdown of the individual connections within the alluvial diagram.
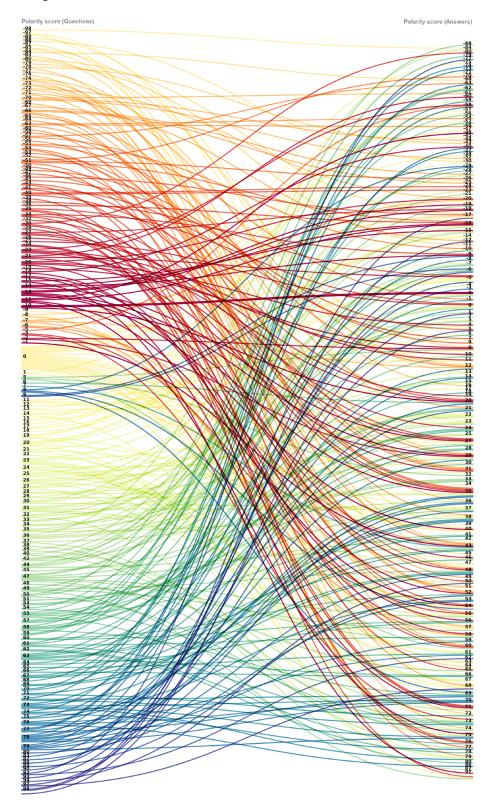
Figure A1. *Detailed alluvial diagram*

Biographical Notes

Elizabet Castillero-Ostio is a lecturer and researcher in the Department of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising in the Faculty of Communication Sciences at the University of Malaga. She holds a PhD in Strategic Management in Communication from the University of Malaga, a degree in Advertising and Public Relations and a master's degree in Strategic Management and Innovation in Communication. She is currently participating in the following competitive research projects: *Observatorio de los Gabinetes de Comunicación de Andalucía, Lobby y Comunicación en la Unión Europea. Análisis de Sus Estrategias de Comunicación* and *Comunicación y Grupos de Interés en Andalucía. Estrategias de Comunicación Para la Participación Ciudadana en Sociedades Inclusivas.* Her main current lines of research focus on public relations and political and institutional communication. She is the author of more than 30 academic publications and a researcher in two innovative education projects.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0546-7262

Email: ecastillero@uma.es

Address: Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación. Universidad de Málaga, Campus de Teatinos, c/ León Tolstoi, nº 4, 29010 Málaga (España)

Álvaro Serna-Ortega is a lecturer in the Department of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising at the Faculty of Communication Sciences. He is a contract researcher in the research project *Lobby y Comunicación* funded by the State R&D&I Programme (CSO2016-79357-R). He is also a PhD student in the Inter-University Doctorate Programme in Communication at the Universities of Cadiz, Huelva, Malaga, and Seville, specialising in Advertising and Public Relations. He holds a degree in Advertising and Public Relations and a master's in Strategic Management and Innovation in Communication. His research interests include political communication, international relations, and organisational communication.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5374-4722

Email: amso@uma.es

Address: Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación. Universidad de Málaga, Campus de Teatinos, c/ León Tolstoi, nº 4, 29010 Málaga (España)

Andrea Moreno-Cabanillas is a contract researcher in training (FPU 2019) at the Department of Advertising and Audiovisual Communication at the University of Malaga. She holds a PhD in Communication from the Universities of Cadiz, Huelva, Malaga, and Seville, specialising in Advertising and Public Relations. She earned her undergraduate degree in Advertising and Public Relations from the University of Malaga and a master's degree in Teacher Training for Secondary Education and Vocational Training from the University of Murcia. She has authored over 50 papers, presented at conferences and published in various outlets. Her research focuses on interest groups and lobbies in the

European Union, and she has conducted funded research stays at Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil) and RMIT University (Australia).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1169-1607

Email: amorenoc@uma.es

Address: Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación. Universidad de Málaga, Campus de Teatinos, c/ León Tolstoi, nº 4, 29010 Málaga (España)

At the Digital Crossroads: The Attention Economy, Freedom of Expression, and Platform Regulation — Challenges and Prospects for Solutions in the European Union

Marina Maria Soares Silva
Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal

Abstract

This article presents a literature review examining issues emerging from the contemporary digital landscape, with a particular focus on the complexities of digital platforms. These platforms often operate under business models that employ strategies deemed detrimental, either by excessively capturing users' attention or facilitating the unrestricted circulation of harmful content. In this context, there is an urgent need for reflection and the development of regulatory frameworks to foster a safer and fairer online environment. However, a critical question arises: how will major technology companies (*big tech*) commit to imposing limits on content dissemination when such interactions are integral to their business models? This study explores key themes, including the attention economy and freedom of expression, offering a critical analysis of these concepts within the digital sphere. Additionally, it examines European Union legislation that has been in force since 2024, providing a regulatory perspective on addressing these challenges. The analysis highlights the social consequences of the attention economy and the complexities involved in regulating digital platforms.

Keywords
attention economy, freedom of expression, digital platform regulation

Na Encruzilhada Digital: Economia da Atenção, Liberdade de Expressão e Regulação de Plataformas — Análise de Problemáticas e Perspectivas de Solução da União Europeia

Resumo

Este artigo conduz uma revisão bibliográfica explorando problemáticas decorrentes do cenário digital contemporâneo. Destaca-se a complexidade associada às plataformas digitais, as quais possuem modelos de negócios que frequentemente adotam estratégias consideradas prejudiciais. Ao capturar excessivamente a nossa atenção ou ainda ser espaço para livre circulação de conteúdos nocivos, estamos diante de um momento de reflexão e criação de regras que possam estabelecer uma realidade online mais segura e justa. No entanto, de que forma as chamadas *big techs* (gigantes tecnológicas) irão se comprometer em estabelecer limites nas publicações, já que estas interações estão interligadas com seu modelo de negócio? Este trabalho percorre por temas fundamentais, como a economia da atenção e a liberdade de expressão, oferecendo uma análise crítica desses conceitos no âmbito digital. Além disso, foram incluídos alguns artigos de legislação da União Europeia, obrigatórios desde 2024, proporcionando uma perspectiva regulatória sobre o enfrentamento desses desafios. Dessa forma, foi possível

observar, por exemplo, consequências sociais causadas pela economia da atenção e direções complexas para a regulação das plataformas digitais.

Palavras-chave
economia da atenção, liberdade de expressão, regulação de plataformas digitais

1. Introduction

With the advent of online applications and services, the internet has undergone a profound transformation, becoming an integral part of daily life. Companies such as Google and Facebook (now Meta) have created a highly efficient data ecosystem, capturing both who we are and what we like. In this digital environment, attention has become a valuable asset, particularly as advertising constitutes a major source of revenue. Digital platforms, including social media and search engines, monetise users' attention by displaying targeted advertisements informed by data on their behaviour and interests (Cooke, 2018; Patino, 2019). Large corporations have invested millions in researching human impulses, intentions, decision-making processes, and the factors influencing consumer choices (Willians, 2018/2021).

Far from being a tool used sporadically, the internet has permeated nearly every aspect of daily life. It is no longer merely a source of information; it has become a space where we work, seek entertainment, and interact with individuals worldwide, establishing a virtual presence that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. This continuous engagement with the internet reshapes the way we live, redefining our relationships, daily activities, and the very structure of contemporary society. As Lins (2013) observes, "the internet is no longer a network that we access but a network that involves us" (p. 14).

Immersed in the digital sphere, we are now able to express our ideas and opinions on an unprecedented scale. Social media, in particular, play a crucial role in amplifying freedom of expression, offering individuals a global platform for diverse forms of sharing. However, the widespread dissemination of harmful and offensive discourse has become a pressing concern, as illustrated by the numerous xenophobic comments identified by researcher Valle-Nunes (2020):

> Brazilians only come to Portugal because they are too dumb to learn another language. As they speak more or less Portuguese, we have to put up with these dumb people who are as worthless as mud. It's a shame that the Eastern European countries are already better off than this make-believe country — those are people who truly work and take pride in it. (p. 139)

In a similar context, Alice Nderitu, a United Nations adviser on the prevention of genocide, highlights the gradual dehumanisation of certain groups. This phenomenon has historically culminated in major genocides, such as those suffered by the Tutsis in

Rwanda and the Jews during the Second World War. Her observation underscores how the seed of hatred is sown through narratives that dehumanise and marginalise, ultimately leading to devastating consequences. Reflecting this concern, in June 2023, the United Nations issued a warning about "the link between hate speech and genocide" (Organização das Nações Unidas, 2023, para. 1), identifying social media as key platforms for the dissemination of such narratives. Consequently, effective content management in digital spaces has become imperative to safeguard the integrity of these platforms as channels for responsible expression.

In the not-so-distant past, specifically in 1996, John Perry Barlow — an influential figure in the creation of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, an organisation dedicated to safeguarding freedom of expression — penned *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace*. This proclamation championed absolute and unrestricted freedom of expression in the digital space, rejecting any form of government control (Patino, 2019). However, the proliferation of hate speech and the circulation of false or harmful content online has sparked debates on the need for regulatory limits to safeguard individuals' safety and dignity. In this context, digital platforms face the challenge of balancing the promotion of their services and the protection of freedom of expression with the imperative to curb the spread of problematic content (P. R. Costa, 2020). This issue has sparked debate and reflection, prompting a critical reassessment of Barlow's initial stance, as the evolving nature of cyberspace and contemporary challenges call into question the feasibility of absolute digital freedom without consideration of its inherent responsibilities and consequences. In *In Search of Politics*, Bauman (1999) argues that security is a gift of civilisation, but attaining it requires relinquishing some degree of freedom. To what extent should limits on expression be imposed in the interest of collective security? Who should define and enforce these boundaries? More importantly, how will the so-called big tech companies commit to setting restrictions on content, given that such interactions are deeply embedded in their business models? How does the attention economy shape this landscape? These are questions that do not lend themselves to straightforward or entirely definitive answers but serve as a foundation for the theoretical discussion explored in this article.

Therefore, given that these challenges are of public interest and that the moderation policies and effectiveness of content removal on these platforms remain questionable, we propose a discussion on the attention economy, freedom of expression, and key European Union (EU) initiatives for the regulation of digital media.

2. The So-Called "Attention Economy"

Companies, social media, content producers, and other actors are constantly competing to attract and retain our attention. This is achieved through strategies designed to create engaging and captivating content, capturing the public's interest amid an overwhelming flow of information. A "war" has emerged to seize readers' attention: who will

claim the most user time? The longer a company can keep a user distracted and engaged with its content, the greater the likelihood of generating interactions, clicks, and conversions — ultimately translating into revenue. This is the key challenge for organisations, which, by understanding their audience and navigating an "excess of stimuli [and] information", generate a form of attention economy (Han, 2010/2014; Patino, 2019; Willians, 2018/2021).

The widespread accessibility of devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers has placed a plethora of information and entertainment at our fingertips. However, this constant connectivity has also led to a notable rise in distractions (Willians, 2018/2021). One of the primary ways technology diverts our attention is through incessant notifications. Whether from emails, text messages, or app updates, these frequent interruptions fragment our focus, making it harder to concentrate on important tasks. As a result, we often find ourselves instinctively checking our devices, even when engaged in activities that demand our full attention (Willians, 2018/2021).

Thus, social media and other digital platforms are intentionally designed to be engaging and addictive. Features such as endless scrolling, likes, shares, and comments foster a continuous pursuit of instant gratification, keeping users engaged for longer than they initially intended. At present, the global average time spent online per day is 6 hours and 37 minutes (wearesocial & Meltwater, 2024). This dynamic can create a cycle of procrastination, ultimately leading to reduced productivity (Willians, 2018/2021).

James Willians (2018/2021), an Oxford researcher and former Google employee, argues that strategic distractions are a key component of the attention economy, serving as a "smokescreen" for significant social and political issues. In some cases, these distractions function as political tools, with the author citing the controversial content of Donald Trump's social media account on X as an example.

Another strategy used to capture attention is the exploitation of emotions. A study analysing 100 million articles shared on Facebook (Lineham et al., 2023) found that headlines with strong emotional appeal, as well as those that suggest group belonging — such as "only people like this will understand" — are particularly effective at driving engagement. Emotions play a crucial role in the attention economy, shaping what captures the audience's interest and how messages are received. Understanding these dynamics is essential for assessing the psychological and social impact of the strategies used in the competition for attention online.

Every aspect of the digital environment is designed to minimise users' opportunities for contemplation or reflection. From algorithms that filter content to advertisements, posts, and even personalised recommendations, these elements increasingly make decisions on users' behalf, fostering an environment driven by automation. In this context, the attention economy emerges as a dominant paradigm, with organisations investing heavily in strategies to capture and retain user attention amid an oversaturated information landscape and relentless competition (Patino, 2019; Willians, 2018/2021).

We can envision this relentless pursuit of our attention as a multi-layered structure mirroring the complexity of human skin. On the surface, while undeniably significant, this process is remarkably time-consuming, often depriving us of goals, exercise, sleep, and other essential daily activities. At a deeper level, these layers directly shape our personality, as the constant search for validation and acceptance in the digital sphere often drives behaviours we might otherwise avoid (Willians, 2018/2021). This process profoundly influences our emotions, sometimes provoking indignation, and its effects extend beyond the individual, creating a ripple effect that permeates society as a whole (Willians, 2018/2021). The attention economy, therefore, is deeply intertwined with how we express ourselves.

3. Is Self-Expression in Online Bubbles and Social Media a Prelude to Real-World Consequences?

The rise of cyberspace has facilitated social progress by making access to information faster and more readily available worldwide. This has contributed to a form of democratisation in communication, granting countless users a voice and the freedom to express themselves (Bittencourt, 2020). With this broad avenue for expression, it is often assumed that individuals have been emancipated simply by having a smartphone connected to the internet at their fingertips.

The transformation of the digital landscape extends beyond opinions on politics, fashion, music, education, and consumer goods; such opinions have now evolved into professions. Advertising, once dominated by television, has migrated to Instagram stories, where each short post offers an opportunity for exposure — its value is determined by audience size and engagement levels. This shift underscores the vast range of functions cyberspace now accommodates, transcending entertainment to enable the professionalisation of digital influencers and content creators. Additionally, cyberspace fosters communities dedicated to noble causes, such as animal rights and social justice, serving as a platform for exposing crimes, injustices, and corruption.

On the other hand, the online environment is a breeding ground for disinformation, polarisation, and hate speech. The study "Stoking the Flames: The Influence of Press and Government Rhetoric on Far-Right Anti-Migrant Engagement" (Ahmad et al., 2023) by researchers from the organisation HOPE Not Hate presents an alarming scenario, revealing a surge in far-right anti-immigrant groups on the messaging app Telegram. These groups not only exploit but actively manipulate media coverage as a platform for discussions often laced with racist rhetoric. The study also highlights how government statements are misappropriated to advance extremist agendas, with the interplay between media narratives and official discourse serving as a powerful tool for these groups.

In Portugal, in mid-2021, the project *#MigraMyths - Desmistificando a Imigração* (#MigraMyths – Demystifying Immigration) published a diagnostic report titled *Discurso de Ódio e Imigração em Portugal* (Hate Speech and Immigration in Portugal; A. P. Costa,

2021), which examines social media polarisation and the rise of anti-immigration narratives — an issue of concern both online and offline. For instance, in June 2023, a Brazilian man was assaulted in a café in Braga after being asked about his nationality and identifying himself as Brazilian (*Brasileiro Agredido em Braga. "Chutou a Minha Cara e as Minhas Costelas"*, 2023). However, as Valle-Nunes (2020) highlights, the online environment facilitates the rapid and widespread dissemination of xenophobic discourse. The researcher analysed comments on newspaper Facebook pages and found a proliferation of xenophobic statements. By focusing on news comment sections related to the rise in Brazilian immigration, the study underscores the broader social issue and the role of Facebook pages as moderators of these discussions.

Another pressing concern in the virtual world is the unrestricted circulation of disinformation. Disinformation "violates the notion of freedom of expression" (Oliveira & Gomes, 2019, p. 111) by discrediting traditional news media, legitimising extremist theories, and misleading citizens into making decisions based on falsehoods. In this way, disinformation itself becomes a tool against freedom of expression (Oliveira & Gomes, 2019). Hannah Arendt (1972/1995) was unequivocal in stating that the opposite of truth "is neither error nor illusion nor opinion, no one of which reflects upon personal truthfulness, but the deliberate falsehood, or lie" (p. 40). Lies often gain traction due to ideological biases and serve as instruments of manipulation to advance specific agendas. Thus, the spread of disinformation not only distorts the pursuit of truth but also erodes people's ability to engage in informed and meaningful discourse, ultimately threatening the fundamental pillars of a free and democratic society (Oliveira & Gomes, 2019).

Another critical aspect to consider when analysing online content is the existence of structured divisions, such as categorised sections, that shape users' experiences. This is particularly evident on social media platforms and search engines, where personalised algorithms curate and present content based on users' behaviour, data, browsing history, and interactions (Cardoso et al., 2018; Cooke, 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). These algorithms continuously refine users' profiles by supplying them with information — whether beneficial or harmful — as well as opinions and perspectives that reinforce their pre-existing beliefs, thereby restricting their exposure to diverse content (Cardoso et al., 2018).

Some authors refer to these divisions as "filter bubbles" or "echo chambers", which function as mechanisms that perpetuate misinformation (Cooke, 2018; Patino, 2019; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). When individuals are immersed in a filter bubble, they may remain unaware of information or viewpoints that challenge their own, leading to a narrow and polarised perception of reality. This phenomenon can exacerbate societal polarisation, making it more difficult to foster constructive dialogue and mutual understanding between groups with differing perspectives (Cooke, 2018).

The belief that the Earth is flat (Novais, 2019) exemplifies how such ideas find fertile ground on social media, websites, and even dedicated conferences. This phenomenon

underscores the internet's role in amplifying fringe theories, enabling them to reach a wider audience through digital tools. Online engagement within these communities often transcends geographical boundaries, allowing once-marginal ideas to gain global traction. This not only illustrates the dissemination potential of these theories but also highlights the significant influence of social networks in shaping and expanding communities that challenge established scientific knowledge (Patino, 2019). As Patino (2019) observes, "the dependency that emerges, the effects of information bubbles, imbalance, and the spread of fake news and counter-realities are also (...) inherent products of the platforms' economic model" (p. 117).

In Brazil, experts suggest that violent attacks in schools can be fuelled by offensive content found on websites (Iory & Mariano, 2023). One such case involved a 13-year-old boy who killed a teacher and injured three others at a school in São Paulo. The teenager had posted content related to his violent intentions and was active in groups that used extremist hashtags. According to researcher Letícia Oliveira, who monitors Nazi cell activities on the internet and was cited in the report, there is an online community that idolises mass shooters, which has been expanding and promoting itself primarily through hashtags within a restricted digital bubble. Attacks like the one in São Paulo break this bubble, allowing the content to spread more widely.

On the other hand, there is still no theoretical consensus on the definition of these concepts (Arguedas et al., 2022; Bruns, 2021). Arguedas et al. (2022) argue that filter bubbles are algorithmically generated echo chambers, as the information delivered to users is tailored without active choice. Echo chambers, in contrast, are shaped more by user preferences. The authors pose the question: "what is the relative importance of active users' choices versus algorithmic filtering in determining the diversity of sources people access?" (Arguedas et al., 2022, p. 11). It remains unclear how rigidly echo chambers and filter bubbles isolate users from diverse content (Arguedas et al., 2022; Bruns, 2021).

As previously mentioned, beyond the issues of bubbles and hate speech, this online dynamic exacerbates the challenges of disinformation, accelerating the spread of biased and harmful narratives. Addressing these challenges requires a cautious and critical approach to mitigate their negative impact on the digital public sphere (Silveira et al., 2017). These factors underscore the need to establish clear boundaries for freedom of expression and implement comprehensive digital media regulation.

4. European Union Initiatives for Digital Media Regulation

The regulation of the digital environment raises several key questions, including user data protection (Rosa, 2019), the effectiveness of platform self-regulation, the establishment of fairer competition, the criteria for reporting or removing content, the scope of regulation, appropriate penalties, and the role of public opinion in this process. These issues, still far from being fully answered, are at the heart of the European Media

Freedom Act – Proposal for a Regulation and Recommendation (European Commission, 2022). This initiative sets out a series of articles aimed at establishing clearer guidelines for the development of digital media, which has expanded largely without regulation. The legislation primarily seeks to uphold media pluralism, ensure transparency in economic resources, and promote high-quality journalism.

In addition, the EU has established the Digital Agenda For Europe (Petit et al., 2024), with objectives stating that "at least 80 % of all adults should have basic digital skills and there should be 20 million ICT specialists employed in the EU, with women taking up such jobs" (p. 2). The agenda also aims to support the creation of secure digital services and markets, as well as to strengthen cybersecurity.

Despite the challenges of regulation, particularly concerning freedom of expression, the EU has sought to create a fairer digital environment through initiatives such as the action plan eEurope 2005: An Information Society for All (Commission of the European Communities, 2002) and the recently approved set of rules for digital services (January 2022): the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act (European Economic and Social Committee, 2021).

The Digital Services Act (União Europeia, 2022) was published in October 2022. Since then, the EU has been requesting information from big tech companies under its framework, including Amazon (Comissão Europeia, 2023d), AliExpress (Comissão Europeia, 2023a), Meta (Comissão Europeia, 2023c), and TikTok (Comissão Europeia, 2023b). Among its various regulatory provisions, the regulation particularly emphasises:

> in particular, the concept of "illegal content" should be defined broadly to cover information relating to illegal content, products, services and activities. In particular, that concept should be understood to refer to information, irrespective of its form, that under the applicable law is either itself illegal, such as illegal hate speech or terrorist content and unlawful discriminatory content, or that the applicable rules render illegal in view of the fact that it relates to illegal activities.

> Illustrative examples include the sharing of images depicting child sexual abuse, the unlawful non-consensual sharing of private images, online stalking, the sale of non-compliant or counterfeit products, the sale of products or the provision of services in infringement of consumer protection law, the non-authorised use of copyright protected material, the illegal offer of accommodation services or the illegal sale of live animals. In contrast, an eyewitness video of a potential crime should not be considered to constitute illegal content, merely because it depicts an illegal act, where recording or disseminating such a video to the public is not illegal under national or Union law. (União Europeia, 2022, art. 12)

In this area of regulation, a fine line is being drawn in an attempt to clearly distinguish between illegal content and content that, while depicting illicit activities, is not itself unlawful under applicable laws. Regarding the direct issue of freedom of expression, the regulation repeatedly emphasises the obligation to uphold the "right to freedom of expression and of information". However, it does not explicitly define each concept.

Another noteworthy aspect is the set of guidelines governing the platforms' business model, which can be linked to the previously discussed concept of the "attention economy". The regulation aims to safeguard freedom and rights, including expression, as well as "the right to private life, data protection, the right to non-discrimination, the rights of the child and consumer protection" (União Europeia, 2022, art. 81). These rights, however, may be jeopardised by the very way in which the platforms operate:

> Such risks may arise, for example, in relation to the design of the algorithmic systems used by the very large online platform or by the very large online search engine or the misuse of their service through the submission of abusive notices or other methods for silencing speech or hampering competition. When assessing risks to the rights of the child, providers of very large online platforms and of very large online search engines should consider for example how easy it is for minors to understand the design and functioning of the service, as well as how minors can be exposed through their service to content that may impair minors' health, physical, mental and moral development. Such risks may arise, for example, in relation to the design of online interfaces which intentionally or unintentionally exploit the weaknesses and inexperience of minors or which may cause addictive behaviour. (União Europeia, 2022, art. 81)

Those mentioned above and other major technology companies had until mid-March 2024 to comply with the established regulations. Failure to meet these obligations could result in prosecution by the EU Court of Justice, with penalties proportionate to the severity of the non-compliance. In July of the same year, X (formerly Twitter) was accused by the EU of violating this regulation, particularly in relation to key aspects such as advertising transparency and account authenticity (F. Costa, 2024). The platform remains under investigation amid suspicions that its owner, Elon Musk, has manipulated content on X to favour the far right in Europe (Ramos, 2025).

Regarding disinformation content, Portugal took a significant step in July 2021 by implementing the Carta Portuguesa de Diretos Humanos na Era Digital (Portuguese Charter on Human Rights in the Digital Age) through Law No. 27/2021 (Lei n.º 27/2021, 2021), marking a milestone in the country's digital regulation. This charter aims to combat online disinformation by introducing concrete measures to address the issue. Among its provisions is the possibility of reporting organisations engaged in disinformation to the Portuguese Regulatory Authority for the Media. Additionally, the charter supports institutional fact-checking by official bodies. Additionally, the charter provides institutional support for fact-checking by official organisations and the establishment of quality seals,

offering official endorsement and recognition to reliable institutions that play a crucial role in fostering accurate information and curbing the spread of fake news.

5. Final Considerations

This article has explored the literature to gain insights into the complexities of online interactions while also outlining some of the strategies proposed by the EU to address these evolving challenges. Despite the clarity of the evidence presented, the fundamental questions raised at the outset remain unanswered.

The theory presented highlights the increasing dominance of the attention economy as a powerful instrument, particularly in the commercial strategies of tech giants that shape the online landscape. This mechanism now appears to dictate their business models, often taking precedence over fundamental social values, raising concerns due to its harmful effects across various societal domains. These impacts extend beyond the excessive distraction caused by digital devices to include the creation of information bubbles that shape — and at times distort — perceptions of reality.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that filter bubbles are an integral part of the intricate dynamics of the attention economy. They shape how content is presented to users, profoundly affecting the diversity of perspectives and the nature of interactions on digital platforms. Driven largely by personalised algorithms, these bubbles curate information in a way that reinforces users' pre-existing views. This not only influences individual perceptions but also fosters polarisation and the emergence of echo chambers, where ideas are continuously reinforced in a self-perpetuating cycle.

The urgency of addressing freedom of expression online has also been highlighted. The regulation of digital media by democratic states has become essential to ensuring that platforms operate responsibly. While instances of xenophobia and hate crimes serve as notable examples, they represent only a fraction of the broader issue. Many problematic situations and crimes originate in the virtual sphere before manifesting in the real world.

The EU, for its part, is charting complex paths for regulating these platforms, with measures that seem strict, even if certain details, such as penalties for non-compliance, remain unclear. This legal development reflects a growing awareness of the challenges in cyberspace and aims to establish regulatory mechanisms that uphold information integrity and protect human rights amid the digital revolution. On the other hand, are big tech companies truly willing to adapt their business models and comply, or are they mobilising human and financial resources to once again harness technology to their exclusive advantage?

In spite of a wealth of evidence and reflections, the article acknowledges the ongoing gaps in understanding these complex phenomena, underscoring the need for further research. Thus, this paper not only seeks to broaden the scope of the discussion but also aims to stimulate it, pinpointing areas that demand deeper exploration. Among these is the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of platform self-regulation, a topic requiring more

comprehensive analysis to grasp its full implications. Additionally, the instrumentalisation of the attention economy as a smokescreen for pressing social issues presents another area that warrants further investigation.

Another important point which deserves deeper investigation concerns the practical cases involving disinformation and hate speech. The complexity of these situations calls for a comprehensive analysis to uncover nuances and patterns that can guide the development of more effective prevention and mitigation strategies.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

References

Ahmad, M., Carter, R., Deo, A., Hermansson, P., & Malik, M. (2023). *Stoking the flames: The influence of press and government rhetoric on far-right anti-migrant engagement*. HOPE not hate. https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Stoking-the-Flames.pdf

Arendt, H. (1995). *Verdade e política* (M. de L. Pereira, Trans.). Relógio D'Água. (Original work published 1972)

Arguedas, A. R., Robertson, C. T., Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K. (2022). *Echo chambers, filter bubbles, and polarisation: A literature review*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/echo-chambers-filter-bubbles-and-polarisation-literature-review

Bauman, Z. (1999). *Em busca da política* (M. L. S. de Araújo, Trans.). Zahar. (Original work published 1999)

Bittencourt, R. N. (2020). Déficit democrático e política eleitoral da desinformação. *Revista Espaço Acadêmico*, *20*(225), 196–202.

Brasileiro agredido em Braga. "Chutou a minha cara e as minhas costelas". (2023, June 12). Notícias ao Minuto. https://www.noticiasaominuto.com/pais/2340273/brasileiro-agredido-em-braga-chutou-a-minha-cara-e-as-minhas-costelas

Bruns, A. (2021). Echo chambers? Filter bubbles? The misleading metaphors that obscure the real problem. In M. Pérez-Escolar & J. M. Noguera-Vivo (Eds.), *Hate speech and polarization in participatory society* (pp. 33–48). Routledge.

Cardoso, G., Baldi, V., Pais, P., Paisana, M., Quintanilha, T., & Couraceiro, P. (2018). *As fake news numa sociedade pós-verdade: Contextualização, potenciais soluções e análise*. OberCom.

Comissão Europeia. (2022, September 16). Lei Europeia da Liberdade dos Meios de Comunicação Social — Proposta de regulamento e recomendação. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/pt/library/european-media-freedom-act-proposal-regulation-and-recommendation

Comissão Europeia. (2023a, November 6). Comissão envia pedido de informações ao AliExpress ao abrigo do Regulamento dos Serviços Digitais. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/pt/news/commission-sends-request-information-aliexpress-under-digital-services-act

Comissão Europeia. (2023b, November 9). Comissão envia pedidos de informações à TikTok e ao YouTube ao abrigo do Regulamento Serviços Digitais. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/pt/news/commission-sends-request-information-aliexpress-under-digital-services-act

Comissão Europeia. (2023c, November 10). Comissão envia pedidos de informações à Meta e à Snap ao abrigo do Regulamento Serviços Digitais. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/pt/news/commission-sends-request-information-aliexpress-under-digital-services-act

Comissão Europeia. (2023d, November 15). Comissão envia pedido de informações à Amazon ao abrigo do Regulamento Serviços Digitais. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/pt/news/commission-sends-request-information-aliexpress-under-digital-services-act

Commission of the European Communities. (2002, June 21–22). *eEurope 2005: An information society for all*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2002:0263:FIN:EN:PDF

Cooke, N. A. (2018). *Fake news and alternative facts - Information literacy in a post-truth era*. ALA Editions.

Costa, A. P. (2021). *Discurso de ódio e imigração em Portugal*. Casa do Brasil de Lisboa.

Costa, F. (2024, July 12). UE acusa X de infringir Lei dos Serviços Digitais. *Público*. https://www.publico.pt/2024/07/12/mundo/noticia/ue-acusa-x-infringir-lei-servicos-digitais-2097396

Costa, P. R. (2020). Uma cartografia do ódio no Facebook: Gatilhos, insultos e imitações. *Comunicação Pública*, *15*(29), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.4000/cp.11367

European Economic and Social Committee. (2021). *Digital services act and digital markets act*. https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/digital-services-act-and-digital-markets-act

Han, B.-C. (2014). *A sociedade do cansaço* (P. Tamen, Trans.). Relógio D'Água. (Original work published 2010)

Iory, N., & Mariano, L. (2023, April 5). *Ataques em escolas: Antes restrito à 'deep web', conteúdo extremista contribui para aumento de casos*. O Globo. https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2023/04/ataques-em-escolas-antes-restrito-a-deep-web-conteudo-extremista-contribui-para-aumento-de-casos.ghtml

Lei n.º 27/2021, de 17 de maio, Diário da República n.º 95/2021, Série I de 2021-05-17 (2021). https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/lei/27-2021-163442504

Lineham, L., Rayson, S., & Chiu, H. W. (2023, November 4). *100m articles analyzed: What you need to write the best headlines*. BuzzSumo. https://buzzsumo.com/blog/most-shared-headlines-study/

Lins, B. F. E. (2013). A evolução da internet: Uma perspectiva histórica. *Caderno ASLEGIS*, *48*, 11–45.

Novais, V. (2019, November 15). *Terraplanistas. Eles continuam a espalhar a mensagem de que a Terra é plana, da evangelização pelo YouTube às conferências de crentes*. Observador. https://observador.pt/especiais/terraplanistas-eles-continuam-a-espalhar-a-mensagem-de-que-a-terra-e-plana-da-evangelizacao-pelo-youtube-as-conferencias-de-crentes/

Oliveira, A. S., & Gomes, P. O. (2019). Os limites da liberdade de expressão: Fake news como ameaça a democracia. *Revista de Direitos e Garantias Fundamentais*, *20*(2), 93–118. https://doi.org/10.18759/rdgf.v20i2.1645

Organização das Nações Unidas. (2023, June 18). *ONU marca Dia Internacional de Combate ao Discurso de Ódio*. https://news.un.org/pt/story/2023/06/1816157

Patino, B. (2019). *A civilização do peixe vermelho*. Gradiva.

Petit, A., Wala, Z., Ciucci, M., & Martinello, B. (2024, April). *Uma agenda digital para a Europa*. Parlamento Europeu. http://europarl.europa.eu/erpl-app-public/factsheets/pdf/pt/FTU_2.4.3.pdf

Ramos, G. A. (2025, January 18). *Bruxelas adota novas medidas de investigação sobre a rede X*. RTP Notícias. https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/bruxelas-adota-novas-medidas-de-investigacao-sobre-a-rede-x_n1628234

Rosa, R. M. (2019). *Unfaking news – Como combater a desinformação*. Media XXI.

Silveira, A., Sanchotene, C., & Lavarda, S. (2017). Quando as notícias mais compartilhadas são falsas: A circulação de boatos durante a semana do impeachment no Facebook. *Comunicação & Informação*, *20*(3), 99–112. https://doi.org/10.5216/ci.v20i3.46950

Valle-Nunes, L. H. (2020). As redes sociais e a construção dos antagonismos: A imigração brasileira em Portugal representada em comentários do Facebook. *Matraga - Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da UERJ*, *27*(49), 100–116. https://doi.org/10.12957/matraga.2020.44154

União Europeia. (2022, October 27). Regulamento (UE) 2022/2065 do Parlamento Europeu e do Conselho de 19 de outubro de 2022 relativo a um mercado único para os serviços digitais e que altera a Diretiva 2000/31/CE (Regulamento dos Serviços Digitais). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R2065

Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Council of Europe.

wearesocial & Meltwater. (2024). *Digital 2024: Global overview report*. https://www.meltwater.com/en/global-digital-trends

Willians, J. (2021). *Liberdade e resistência na economia da atenção: Como evitar que as tecnologias digitais nos distraiam dos nossos verdadeiros propósitos* (J. L. Silva, Trans.). Arquipélago Editorial. (Original work published 2018)

Biographical Note

Marina Maria Soares Silva holds a master's degree in Marketing and Strategy and is currently a PhD candidate in Communication Sciences at the University of Minho. She is affiliated with the Communication and Society Research Centre, where her doctoral research explores the phenomenon of disinformation and the role of education in mitigating its effects.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1114-2795

Email: marinamaria.soares@gmail.com

Address: Universidade do Minho, Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057 Braga, Portugal

Jorge de Sena, Freedom of Thought in the Media and the Portuguese-Speaking (Inter)Cultural Community

Lurdes Macedo
Centro de Investigação em Comunicação Aplicada, Cultura e Novas Tecnologias, Universidade Lusófona, Porto, Portugal
Conceptualisation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing

Nuno Bessa Moreira
Centro de Investigação Transdisciplinar Cultura, Espaço e Memória, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal/Centro de Investigação em Comunicação Aplicada, Cultura e Novas Tecnologias, Universidade Lusófona, Porto, Portugal
Conceptualisation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing

Vanessa Ribeiro-Rodrigues
Centro de Investigação em Comunicação Aplicada, Cultura e Novas Tecnologias, Universidade Lusófona, Porto, Portugal
Conceptualisation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing

Abstract

Jorge de Sena (1919–1978), recognised as one of the most versatile Portuguese intellectuals of the 20th century, left a legacy that, as some scholars argue (Baltrusch, 2019; Santos, 2019), warrants deeper investigation to fully understand his impact on Portuguese-language cultural heritage. Outlawed by the Salazar regime, Jorge de Sena built an extensive body of work across Portugal, Brazil, and the United States, asserting his intellectual independence from an early age by resisting political affiliations, social patronage, and literary trends. While this defiance clashed with the oppressive regime that denied him a place to live in Portugal, it also enabled him to propose forward-thinking ideas, such as establishing a Portuguese-speaking (inter)cultural community. Thus, based on the observation that Jorge de Sena's views on this community remain largely overlooked and have yet to be systematically explored and disseminated, we hypothesise that the media, through their treatment of this intellectual figure, are partially responsible for this lack of recognition. To test our hypothesis, we mapped, read, analysed, and interpreted various media content by or about Jorge de Sena from 1942 to the present, dividing this period into two phases: before and after April 25, 1974. Firstly, it is evident that during the dictatorial period, Sena consistently expressed his freedom of thought in the works he produced. Secondly, texts about Jorge de Sena written by other authors emphasise his life journey more than his intellectual contributions and legacy.

Keywords

Jorge de Sena, media, freedom of thought, Portuguese-speaking (inter)cultural community

Jorge de Sena, Liberdade de Pensamento nos Média e a Comunidade (Inter)Cultural de Língua Portuguesa

Resumo

Jorge de Sena (1919–1978), um dos mais multifacetados intelectuais portugueses do século XX, deixou um legado que, de acordo com certos autores (Baltrusch, 2019; Santos, 2019), merece ser explorado mais aprofundadamente para que seja apurada a dimensão do seu contributo para o património da cultura da língua portuguesa. Autor proscrito pelo regime de Salazar, com vasta obra produzida entre Portugal, Brasil e Estados Unidos, demonstrou desde cedo a sua

liberdade de pensamento, recusando sacrificá-la a filiações políticas, apadrinhamentos sociais ou correntes literárias. Se, por um lado, essa liberdade foi incompatível com uma pátria ditatorial que lhe usurpou o lugar de pertença, por outro, permitiu-lhe fazer propostas inovadoras à época, como a constituição de uma comunidade (inter)cultural de língua portuguesa. Assim, a partir da constatação de que o pensamento de Jorge de Sena sobre esta comunidade permanece sob um espesso manto de esquecimento, encontrando-se ainda por sistematizar e divulgar, é proposta a hipótese de caber aos média, e ao tratamento que deram e continuam a dar a este intelectual, uma parte da responsabilidade por esse desconhecimento. Para testar a nossa hipótese, procedemos ao mapeamento, leitura, análise de conteúdo e consequente interpretação de vários conteúdos nos média, da autoria de, ou sobre, Jorge de Sena, desde 1942 até aos dias de hoje, dividindo esse período entre antes e após o 25 de Abril de 1974. Primeiro, constata-se que durante o período ditatorial, Sena nunca deixou de exprimir a sua liberdade de pensamento nas peças que assinava. Depois, textos sobre Jorge de Sena da autoria de outros enfatizam mais o seu percurso de vida do que o seu pensamento e o seu legado intelectual.

Palavras-chave
Jorge de Sena, média, liberdade de pensamento, comunidade (inter)cultural de língua portuguesa

1. Introduction

> You can steal all that's mine:
> my ideas, words, images,
> my metaphors, themes, motifs,
> my symbols and preeminence
> in suffering the pains of a new language.
> —Jorge Sena, "Camões Dirige-se aos Seus Contemporâneos"

"You can steal all that's mine" is the opening verse of "Camões Dirige-se aos Seus Contemporâneos" (Camões Addresses His Contemporaries; Sena, 1988b), written by Jorge de Sena[1] (1919–1978) in 1961. According to Jackson (2020), this verse can be interpreted as both a self-referential lament and a prophecy. The author explains that, while living in Brazil due to the political circumstances of the Estado Novo, Sena saw himself as an author with an intellectual destiny similar to that of Camões, his idol and subject of study. Both were marginalised, "stolen from" by their contemporaries and forced into exile. However, both also had a promising future ahead in the Portuguese language culture, with their works receiving posthumous recognition for their significance and originality. Half a century after the end of the dictatorship that led to Sena's expatriation and 45 years since his death, it is important to agree with Jackson (2020) that such recognition, in his case, is at the mercy of a Portugal that "remains uncertain about how to interpret this figure, compass, and voice of immense denunciation" (p. 162).

It is true that in certain academic and intellectual circles — particularly in Portugal, Brazil, and the United States — the recognition of Sena's poetic and fictional work is

---

[1] Henceforth Sena.

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Jorge de Sena, Freedom of Thought in the Media and the Portuguese-Speaking... · Lurdes Macedo, Nuno Bessa Moreira & Vanessa Ribeiro-Rodrigues

unquestionable. However, as some authors have demonstrated (e.g., Baltrusch, 2019; Jackson, 2020; Santos, 2019), other crucial aspects of his intellectual legacy remain overlooked. The various interdependencies between Portugal, Brazil, the former colonies, and the diasporas, along with their implications for the construction of the Portuguese-speaking (inter)cultural community[2] — concerns that were voiced by Sena in numerous texts and public speeches throughout his career — are elements that shape a framework of thought yet to be explored (Cunha et al., 2018; Macedo, 2023; Macedo & Moreira, 2024).

In this sense, the verses in the epigraph illustrate the issue this article aims to address: Sena's thinking on the PS(I)CC, which is in many ways anticipatory and innovative, remains invisible despite the debate that this community has generated and in which other authors have been notable.

It is worth underlining that the name proposed for this community cannot be directly attributed to Sena, as it arises from the interpretation of various works produced by the author throughout his intellectual journey. Out of scientific caution, the PS(I)CC defended by Sena should not be confused with the idea of "Lusophony", which often generates tensions and fractures. As Macedo and Moreira (2024) note, during the period in which Sena defended his ideas, the controversial notion of "Lusophony" had not yet been integrated into the lexicon of the Portuguese language. In fact, the authors question whether "Lusophony" would have deserved the author's full support had he taken part in the debates it provoked; on the one hand, the proposals he put forward do not correspond linearly to the idea of "Lusophony", on the other hand, this notion has sparked heated controversies in Portugal, Brazil, and the Portuguese-speaking African countries, whose cultural autonomy Sena advocated. Secondly, as Macedo and Moreira (2024) also argue, the author proposed the PS(I)CC gradually, aligning with its temporality and historicity, taking as his starting point the possibilities of common acceptance of one cultural heritage based on its size and diversity, in a period prior to globalisation, which introduced the notion of "interculturality". This justifies the prefix "inter", placed in parentheses in the adjective of this community, which Sena envisioned based on its cultural possibilities.

Among the texts that contributed to the proposal of the PS(I)CC, one of the most significant is "Possibilidades Universais do Mundo Luso-Brasileiro" (Universal Possibilities of the Luso-Brazilian World; Sena, 1988a) written at an unknown date between 1959 and 1965. In this work, Sena advocates for cultural and linguistic dialogue between Portugal and Brazil. At the same time, he anticipates the independence of the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, asserting the potential of a community of language and culture emerging from the European colonial empires, which was less susceptible to the risks of identification with the "fears of Euro-American capitalism" (Sena, 1988a, p. 195), as it provided favorable conditions for preserving cultural diversity.

In this context, one question arises: what factors have led to the obscurity of Sena's thoughts on the PS(I)CC, a crucial element of his intellectual legacy?

---

[2] Henceforth PS(I)CC

The first observation concerns the fact that Sena did not systematise his ideas on the PS(I)CC, nor did he foster the connections necessary for such a task. The absence of systematisation, with his ideas scattered across various texts and public speeches, partly accounts for the limited knowledge of his reflections on this community. It is important to emphasise, however, that this study is not intended to systematise Sena's thoughts on the PS(I)CC — a task that is both urgent and to which we aim to contribute, but one that we have only just begun.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that, in the author's own words, although through the voice of Camões, the ideas might have been stolen from him. In this regard, it is important to highlight that Boschi (2022), in his analysis of the precursors of the community of Portuguese-speaking countries, does not include Sena, overlooking the pioneering vision in "A Comunidade de Estados Portugueses" (The Community of Portuguese States), published in the opposition newspaper *Portugal Democrático* in August 1960. This omission confirms the prophecy in the following lines from the poem previously cited: "and then you can refuse to quote me,/you can suppress me, ignore me, and even/acclaim other thieves, luckier than you". At the same time, the notion of intellectual usurpation conveyed in these verses reflects a world where messages born of freedom of thought are silenced under dictatorship and only gain visibility in a democracy if mediated within the public discursive sphere. Indeed, the media are a key part of a culture, and through their role in informing, they shape the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and the creation of community (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014), possessing the power to either make people and ideas visible or render them invisible.

As Sena was an intellectual outlawed by the autocratic Portuguese regime, his ideas could not be prominently featured in the media of the time due to the presence of "an ideological and repressive apparatus based on a poorly elaborated legislative framework, often subject to arbitrary interpretation, enacted by a series of agents and pressure mechanisms, which could even involve Salazar's direct interference" (Lima, 2013, p. 114).

Therefore, the research presented in this paper seeks to test the hypothesis that one of the reasons Sena's thoughts on the PS(I)CC remain obscured is partly linked to the treatment this academic received in the media from the beginning of his career in 1942 to the present day. To test this hypothesis, we mapped the content identified in this research, by or about Sena, across various media over more than 80 years (see Table 1), analysing and interpreting its content critically.

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Jorge de Sena, Freedom of Thought in the Media and the Portuguese-Speaking… · Lurdes Macedo, Nuno Bessa Moreira & Vanessa Ribeiro-Rodrigues

	DATE	CONTENT	GENDER	MEDIUM	COUNTRY
BEFORE APRIL 25, 1974	1942, May	"Poemas de África, de António de Navarro" (Poems from Africa, by António de Navarro)	Critical review	*Aventura*, Issue 1	Portugal
	1942, May	"Ambiente, de Jorge Barbosa" (Atmosphere, by Jorge Barbosa)	Critical review	*Aventura*, Issue 1	Portugal
	1942, February	"Porto Grande (S. Vicente de Cabo Verde)" (Porto Grande [São Vicente, Cape Verde])	Short story chronicle	*O Mundo Português*, Issue 98	Portugal
	1944, May	"A Ilha que Perdeu o Equador" (The Island That Lost the Equator)	Short story chronicle	*O Mundo Português*, Issue 125	Portugal
	1960, August	"A Comunidade de Estados Portugueses" (The Community of Portuguese States)	Opinion article	*Portugal Democrático*, Issue 39	Brazil
	1968, April	Various	Various	*O Tempo e o Modo*, Issue 59	Portugal
	1972, July 16	"Jorge de Sena Disse Aquilo que Disse" (Jorge de Sena Said What He Said)	Interview	*Notícias*	Mozambique
	1972, July 19	Interview with Jorge de Sena	Interview	Rádio Clube de Moçambique	Mozambique
AFTER APRIL 25, 1974	1974, December 28	"As Eleições" (The Elections)	Opinion article	*Diário Popular*	Portugal
	1976, September 9	Interview with Jorge de Sena	Interview	RTP	Portugal
	1977, May 6	Interview with Jorge de Sena	Interview	*Diário Popular*	Portugal
	1977, June 2	Interview with Jorge de Sena	Interview	*Diário de Notícias*	Portugal
	1978, June 16	*A Ideia e a Imagem, Especial Jorge de Sena* (The Idea and the Image, Jorge de Sena Special)	Television magazine	RTP	Portugal
	2005	*O Escritor Prodigioso* (The Prodigious Writer)	Documentary	RTP	Portugal
	2009, September 12	"Póstuma Reconciliação com Jorge de Sena" (Posthumous Reconciliation With Jorge de Sena)	News article	*Diário de Notícias*	Portugal
	2018, October 11	"A Liberdade na Vida e Obra de Jorge de Sena" (Freedom in the Life and Work of Jorge de Sena)	Essay	Comunidade Cultura e Arte	Portugal
	2019, November 2 to 9	*Especial Jorge de Sena: O Século de um Intelectual Indispensável* (Jorge de Sena Special: The Century of an Indispensable Intellectual)	Eight articles and essays	*Público*	Portugal

Table 1. *Mapping of the content analysed in the media for this research*

Since Sena championed freedom of thought throughout his intellectual journey and was a self-declared opponent of the Portuguese dictatorial regime, a stance he encapsulates in the verses "in understanding others, in daring/to fight, to judge, to penetrate/recesses of love where you are impotent", we also compared the results across two distinct periods: before and after April 25, 1974.

It is important to note that this work is not intended as a comprehensive or detailed bibliographical review of Sena's views on freedom. As Picchio (2012) points out, this is an issue in Sena's work that takes on complex and varied contours expressed through multiple media that a broader study would need to fully define. This article aims to highlight key moments in an intellectual trajectory where freedom of thought was both present and central. In this regard, it is also crucial to emphasise the deep connection between Sena's thought and poetry, as evidenced in his lines from the poem "Quem a Tem" (Those Who Have It), written in 1956 while he was still in Portugal: "I will not die without knowing/the colour of freedom" (Sena, 1958/2023, lines 1–2).

2. Jorge de Sena and the Portuguese-Speaking (Inter)Cultural Community in the Media Under the Dictatorial Regime

From a very young age, Sena demonstrated a keen interest in the culture of the Portuguese colonial territories. This interest was rooted in his early experiences of contact with those territories and Brazil. According to Lourenço (1987), Sena

> joined the Naval School at the age of 17 (...). First in his class, on October 2 1937, he set sail on the school ship Sagres (...) — a voyage that lasted until February of the following year, providing him with his first contact with Africa (Cape Verde, São Tomé, Angola), Brazil, and the Canary Islands, and, above all, with the sea. (p. 7)

By analysing the early years of Sena's intellectual journey, it is possible to highlight his interest in the colonies of the time. His first critical review, focused on works by African poets or poets connected to Africa, was published in 1942 in Issue 1 of the journal *Aventura* (Macedo & Moreira, 2024). This was followed by the extent to which the colonial experience and imagery inspired him to write short story chronicles[3] such as "Porto Grande (S. Vicente de Cabo Verde)", first published in Issue 98 of *O Mundo Português* in February 1942, and "A Ilha que Perdeu o Equador", about São Tomé and Príncipe, which was published in Issue 125 of the same periodical in May 1944[4].

From an early stage, Sena proved to be an intellectual with extensive cultural knowledge, remarkable erudition, and an exceptional ability to stay abreast of publishing developments. Thus, as Macedo and Moreira (2024) observe, Sena's engagement in critical literary reviews appears a natural choice, given that this textual genre focuses on literary contemporaneity, enabling him to merge an informative approach with a hermeneutic perspective. The authors further highlight that this genre was relatively shielded from censorship, which was particularly active at the time, thereby allowing Sena to exercise his freedom of thought.

---

[3] A name assigned to them by Macedo and Moreira (2024), reflecting their hybridity between the short story and the travel chronicle.

[4] These narratives were combined with "Atlântico" (Atlantic) written in 1960, forming a triptych titled "Duas Medalhas Imperiais, com Atlântico" (Two Imperial Medals, With Atlantic), included in the collection *Andanças do Demónio* (Wanderings of the Demon), published the same year.

Sena's literary criticism debut involved reviews of *Poemas de África* (Poems From Africa) by António de Navarro and *Ambiente* (Atmosphere) by Cape Verdean author Jorge Barbosa. In his review of *Poemas de África*, Sena commends the author's originality, underscoring the need for a renewed perspective on Africa, devoid of the instrumentalisation characteristic of the prevailing literary canon.

> Navarro is a poet who offers us the world, not through the poetic understanding of its existence, but through the comprehension of an inner poetic expression shaped by his existence in the world (...). However, this book is not merely the work of an admirable poet. These are "poems from Africa". And has Africa ever been treated poetically in our context? (p. XLVII)

Sena also highlights the theme of freedom, asserting that the author of *Poemas de África* refuses to be imprisoned at a time of "fearful imprisonment within the freedom obtained" (p. XLVII).

Regarding *Ambiente* by Jorge Barbosa, Sena begins by affirming the validity of the title, stating that "the book indeed provides us with an atmosphere, and the author is identified with it in his poetry" (p. XLIX). He then confronts us with the existential condition of the intellectual in the colonies, a figure embodied by the Cape Verdean poet (Macedo & Moreira, 2024). Sena anticipates not only chronologically but also ontologically that Barbosa's belonging to the Cape Verdean milieu is not questioned, nor does it lead to rootlessness, but rather manifests itself through a conflict inherent to insularity. The literary critic resonates with the poet's aims, interpreting his *maladaptation* as a "protest of solidarity" with the people of his archipelago, unveiling the "mystery of coexistence", materialised in a lyrical response to the issue of colonial oppression: "His poetry draws closer to the Cape Verdean people and (...) points out, one by one, the prisoners of a dry land" (p. XLIX).

The chronicle stories about the Portuguese island colonies in Africa should be discussed due to their denunciatory nature. It is no coincidence that, in the first story, Porto Grande (S. Vicente de Cabo Verde), Sena describes his arrival and departure from this location, removing any mystery about what occurred *in medias res*. Upon arriving in this territory, the narrator occupies a privileged position of observation, perched at the top of the mast, a panoramic vantage point where he experiences a sense of freedom. When departing, there is a fleeting yet striking and significant reference to the encounter between two ethnic groups, leaving the outcome suspended: "on the quayside, on the last day, a Creole and frail woman with a child on her lap, whose blonde hair shone from a ship that had come from the North, said to me – But take it, take it... – and stretched out those blue eyes to me in a ragged, dark little body" (Sena, 1942/1960, p. 196). Sena's prose conveys a restrained but moving sympathy for the desperation of that mother, who embodies the struggles of the Cape Verdean people, a plight the author subtly denounces between the lines.

In the short story "A Ilha que Perdeu o Equador", the atmosphere grows progressively denser, becoming increasingly oppressive. The visit to São Tomé lasts only a day,

but the intensity of the narrative heightens due to its testimonial tone. Nature is both overwhelming and inhospitable. There is a stark contrast between São Tomé as the land once imagined in childhood atlases — a place of freedom — and the metaphorical image of the "sunless dawn" that marks the moment of arrival.

These texts from the early 1940s demonstrate Sena's independent position and his anti-colonial denunciation. He was an intellectual who distanced himself from trends and refused to align with any literary movements or political ideologies. This posture, which persisted until his exile in Brazil in 1959, as Lourenço (1998) suggests:

> indeed, Jorge de Sena was not alone. (...) For those who, without being apolitical, wished to remain independent of any party, the situation was agonising: either they collaborated with Ferro's "politics of the spirit", or they endured the spirit of Stalinist politics. That was the situation Jorge de Sena faced until he went into exile in Brazil in August 1959. (pp. 140–142).

In fact, Sena voluntarily went into exile in Brazil to escape the political persecution he would have faced after his involvement in a failed coup attempt. Not by design, he had written, in the 1956 poem above, the lines: "I cannot be other than/of this land of my birth/while belonging to the world" (Sena, 1958/2023, lines 3–5). It was in exile that he experienced his first years of freedom in adulthood, which enabled him to broaden his horizons and professionally reinvent himself, exchanging engineering for a career in teaching literature and ultimately earning a doctorate in Literature.

During these six years, his intellectual activity intensified, coinciding with a strengthening of his civic engagement as an opponent of the Estado Novo regime. In addition to being a member of the board of the Portuguese Democratic Unity until 1961, he also contributed to the editorial board of the newspaper *Portugal Democrático* until 1962, where he regularly published articles on political and cultural thought. It was precisely during this time that Sena, drawing on his previous career and his experience of cultural immersion in Brazil, began to develop a structured approach to the concept he referred to as the "Luso-Brazilian community"[5].

According to Silva (2011), *Portugal Democrático* published a total of 37 texts by Sena, which "reflect the multiple forms of political intervention considered by the writer" (para. 3). However, a more contextualised and in-depth interpretation of these texts reveals that, in addition to their political stance opposing the Estado Novo and colonialism, they also convey a cultural dimension rooted in what Sena referred to as "Luso-Brazilian cultural and linguistic unity". Of particular note is "A Comunidade de Estados Portugueses", published in Issue 39 in August 1960. Sena had begun writing this piece while still in Portugal, but it had been further developed during his time in Brazil. Arguing that it was essential to resolve the colonial tensions threatening Portugal's future and that of "the territories that depend on our homeland", he called on the democratic opposition to undertake this task. He emphasised that the restitution of freedoms and guarantees was

---

[5] In the present day, with the necessary post-colonial re-contextualisation and updating, we should consider it as PS(I)CC.

an essential condition to avert an "incalculable disaster" (Sena, 1960/2011, p. 95). In his portrayal of Portugal at the time and its political leaders, the thinker argues that Salazar's removal would not be sufficient for the country to revert to progress, nor would the dismantling of the totalitarian state's mechanisms of repression suffice for the various social, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups across the Portuguese territories to achieve a fraternal understanding. Instead, it would be necessary to rethink the entire system that forcibly united these peoples and propose new solutions. Sena proceeds to scathingly criticise the imperial mythology propagated as a strategy to legitimise Salazar's power and justifies the impossibility of "keeping the immense Portuguese world united and submissive" (Sena, 1960/2011, p. 96) through colonialist paternalism or by military force. In his view, the Portuguese Army, rather than preparing for a lost war, should take on the mission of ensuring "within a totally democratic structure, the very urgent formation of the Community of Portuguese States" (Sena, 1960/2011, p. 97). After outlining nine points for the political organisation of this community of sovereign states, Sena proposed its constitutional foundations, including in Article 5.º the election of a president of the Community by universal and direct suffrage in all the countries represented. Notably, Article 18.º, which granted participating countries the right to secede and to unite with others thereafter, safeguarded conditions that would promote "the realisation of the Luso-Brazilian Community", a concept Sena consistently framed within the cultural matrix of his thought. The author concludes the text by reaffirming the freedom, dignity, and representativeness of all peoples within the "Comunidade de Estados Portugueses", underscoring the need to anticipate the future in light of the new directions of the world. This would allow Portugal, "on the brink of disaster", to rise again "not for what it was or thinks it is, but for what it really is and can become" (Sena, 1960/2011, p. 104).

In 1965, Sena travelled with his family to the United States to teach at the University of Wisconsin, fearing the consequences of the 1964 military coup in Brazil. This transition presented him with ambivalence: the opportunity to teach and disseminate Portuguese-Brazilian culture in the United States was counterbalanced by the restriction of his activities to the academic world and the emigration circle. He sought to compensate for this through extensive correspondence with fellow Portuguese and Brazilian intellectuals. According to Sá (2019), it was this very correspondence that allowed him to make his voice heard in Portuguese literary circles. Perhaps this is also why, in April 1968, *O Tempo e o Modo – Revista de Pensamento e Ação* took the risk of bringing him to light in its Issue 59, acknowledging in the "Nota de Abertura" (Opening Note) that the homage paid by those who considered it a privilege to be Sena's contemporaries was worth the resulting unpopularity they might face. In that issue, which featured Sena on the cover, more than 100 pages were dedicated to him, including the aforementioned "Nota de Abertura", articles and essays by António Ramos Rosa, Luís Francisco Rebelo, Eduardo Lourenço, and João Rui de Sousa, unpublished poems by the author — including "Em Creta com o Minotauro" (In Crete With the Minotaur) — a piece with fragments from the then unpublished novel *Sinais de Fogo* (Signs of Fire), a study with a survey of 39 poets (answered by 23) on Sena's place in Portuguese literature and culture, and an in-depth interview with the honoured author.

All the pieces explore Sena's freedom of thought, but only the interview evidences his ideas about the PS(I)CC. Sena refers to the lack of international interest in Portuguese-language literature as "the painful legacy of a language trapped in the silence of itself, and now emerging from it above all because of the international importance of Brazil" (Sena, 1968, p. 427), and goes on to suggest that Portuguese and Brazilian literatures are "within one culture and one language" (p. 427).

In 1970, as a full professor, he moved to the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he held management positions in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and the Comparative Literature Programme. In 1972, the year marking the fourth centenary of the first publication of *Os Lusíadas*, he received several invitations to speak at international conferences. This led to an extended working trip across various countries, culminating in a stay in Mozambique during three weeks in July, followed by a brief visit to Angola. His arrival in Mozambique, where the poetry magazine *Caliban*, with which Sena collaborated, had just been banned by the Colonial Administration, coincided precisely with the official commemorations of the fourth centenary of the first publication of Camões' epic in that colony, taking place under the auspices of the General-Governor. Invited by the Coimbra Alumni Association, Sena took part in an alternative programme to these commemorations (Mendonça, 2024), giving four lectures in Lourenço Marques and one in Beira, and participating in a poetry soiree in what, according to Cunha et al. (2018), was a true anti-regime event. During his time in Mozambique, two of the interviews he gave to the media stand out: the first was published in the daily newspaper *Notícias* on July 16; the second was recorded by Rádio Clube de Moçambique three days later but was censored before it could be broadcast.

In *Notícias*, he drew attention to "a problem to be solved first and foremost" (p. 10). Despite the fact that the Portuguese language was, at the time, one of the six most widely spoken in the world and was expected to be in the top four by the end of the 20th century, "the magnitude and weight of our language are largely ignored in the world" (p. 10). This problem had its root causes in aspects that the professor from Santa Bárbara, with his natural freedom of thought, did not shy away from listing in a disruptive way. Stating that "many people in Portugal are still not convinced [that] languages belong to those who speak them and those who write them — not to grammarians" (p. 10), Sena seeks to launch a debate on the appropriation of the "cultured norm" of the Portuguese language by a culturally centralist Portugal.

To Rádio Clube de Moçambique, Sena suggests that the fact that Portugal and Brazil had turned their backs on each other culturally and that the cultural production of the then colonies was not recognised in the metropole were also causes for the "culture of the language" to remain in the shadows internationally. In his view, these circumstances did not preclude, for instance, the organisation of anthologies featuring writers and poets from all Portuguese-speaking regions, the recognition of Rui Knopfli, born and residing in Mozambique, as one of the greatest Portuguese-language poets of his time, or the acknowledgement of Eugénio Lisboa, also born and living in Mozambique, as one of the finest literary critics of his generation. Throughout the interview, Sena employs

metaphors and rhetorical techniques to highlight what he saw as remedies for such deep-rooted issues: demythologising the historical past by re-establishing the "culture of language" on a foundation of scientifically grounded history, reinterpreting Camões through his literary value to move beyond the manipulated readings that focused on the glorification of Portuguese overseas expansion, and fighting both Portuguese and Brazilian cultural nationalisms to ensure the realisation of the PS(I)CC.

3. Jorge de Sena and the Portuguese-Speaking (Inter)Cultural Community in the Media Within a Democratic Context

After the Carnation Revolution on April 25, 1974, and following 15 years of exile, Sena, the anti-fascist critic and *persona non grata* under the autocratic Estado Novo regime and a staunch advocate for the self-determination of peoples oppressed by Portuguese colonialism, longed for a role in the construction of democracy. He yearned to finally experience the "colour of freedom" in his country, as expressed in the conclusion of the 1956 poem above: "but even though they hide everything/and would have me blind and dumb/I shall not die without knowing/the colour of freedom" (Sena, 1958/2023, lines 11–14). According to Picchio (1998), the verses of this poem represent, from the outset, an "enlightening light (…) following the isotopy of the search for freedom, that colour of freedom which, come what may, would not fail to hurt and disappoint him, albeit amid inevitable joys" (para. 19).

Mécia de Sena — the author's wife and a key figure in the dissemination and editorial promotion of his work — stated that Sena had not anticipated the revolution of April 25, 1974. However, "after it occurred, he expected to be asked to help, but realised that there was no room for him" (Pontes, 2005, 00:62:00). Mécia further asserts that Sena was overwhelmed by disillusionment, as he waited for years to return to the country, only to be excluded once again.

In an opinion article titled "As Eleições", published in *Diário Popular* on December 28, 1974, Sena defended the upcoming elections for the Constituent Assembly (scheduled for April 25, 1975) as a crucial moment to legitimise and institutionalise the revolution and pluralist democracy, passionately advocating for its values, with freedom being a central one. To this end, Sena argued that the Armed Forces Movement[6] and its programme were vital to this ongoing democratic process, although he cautioned against the dangers of an excessive appropriation of this programme. Sena also condemned those who, under the guise of democracy, sought to exploit it by advocating a return to authoritarian governments. Furthermore, he expressed concern about individuals within the AFM who did not fully trust in democracy, positioning himself alongside those both inside and outside the movement who were fighting for it, for all political freedoms, for decolonisation, and for justice.

In this article, Sena calls for the participation of the people and underscores the importance of expressing one's views through voting, acknowledging that the right wing

---

[6] Henceforth AFM.

can be conservative without being reactionary, just as not all of the progressive left wing is communist. Sena rejects the notion of the left and the right wings as homogeneous, impermeable blocks, highlighting instead the diversity within each of them.

In an interview with RTP1 on September 9, 1976[7], the writer told journalist Joaquim Furtado that, when the April Revolution took place, he was among those who delivered "the speech of the occasion" (00:02:18) to the Portuguese community living in California, explaining what was happening in Portugal. He went on to explain why he did not return after the revolution: "I didn't come because nobody called me; secondly, because I have a permanent position [in the United States, as a full professor]; and thirdly, because I wouldn't ask anyone" (00:07:03). Sena clarified that during his first visit to Portugal after the revolution, in July 1974, he deliberately refrained from visiting friends in the new government "to make it clear that I wasn't coming to Portugal to rock the boat" (00:07:36). In this critical tone, Sena reinforces his free and independent spirit, tinged with bitterness, in a discursive style typical of him: transparency, freedom of thought, and a sense of injustice at the insufficient recognition of his artistic and intellectual merit, despite his self-taught journey: that of the engineer who became a poet.

On May 6, 1977, during an interview with João Alves Costa for the *Diário Popular* in Lisbon, Sena, on his way to Italy to receive the Poetry Prize in Catania, took the opportunity to stress that the distinction was awarded by a jury that recognised his merits, rather than being the result of his participation in a competition. He clarified that he had only entered a literary competition once to highlight his stance as an opponent of the Estado Novo. When João Alves Costa asked how he felt about the international honour he had received, Sena unapologetically responded as was typical of him: "to a certain extent, it serves as a reward for the national honours that I neither have nor seek" (p. 28).

Regarding the possibility of settling in Portugal, Sena said: "that is not my concern, and I no longer believe — in fact, I have never believed — that Portugal would ever consider it" (p. 28). In this piece, the writer explains why he accepted the Commendation of the Order of Prince Henry the Navigator, awarded by the President of the Republic: "by accepting the Commendation of the Order of Prince Henry, I expressed my solidarity with the other emigrants distinguished alongside me" (p. 28). This position, which aligns him with those who, like him, were emigrants, coexists with a certain regret at never having been invited by official entities to return to Portugal. It also resonates with the discourse found in the interview given to *Diário de Notícias* on June 2, 1977, conducted by Manuel Poppe. The journalist pointedly remarks that Sena was living outside Portugal and employed by a foreign university. Sena argues that intellectual and ideological independence often carries the risk of exclusion and that the price of this freedom is being denigrated and, consequently, condemned to oblivion and invisibility.

> There is one thing that is unforgivable in Portugal, and that is total independence. The price of independence in Portugal is extremely high. In Portugal,

---

[7] The writer stopped in Portugal on his way to Italy to take part as a guest in an international writers' congress in Grado, in 1976.

one has to belong to some group, whether it's a major political party or a name-based faction. If you don't belong to any of these, you're lost. (Sena, 1977, para. 1)

In this testimony, we also see how Sena viewed poetry and literature as forms of expressing his freedom since, for him, these discourses were socially and politically committed, even if they did not imply a definite party stance.

One of Sena's last public speeches in Portugal took place on June 10, 1977, during the celebrations of the Day of Portugal, Camões, and the Portuguese Communities in the city of Guarda, at the invitation of the then President of the Republic, General Ramalho Eanes. In his famous "Guarda Speech", he highlighted the Portuguese language as "one of the six great languages of the world", emphasising that Camões was the language's greatest poet and one of the greatest ever, even though the rest of the world was unaware of it. This was a clear reference to the lack of recognition of the significance of "Portuguese language culture" on the global stage. Further on, he mentioned freedom as a key concept in both his personal life and his work. He then went on to discuss and praise the diversity of Portuguese communities around the world, denouncing not only Lisbon's old centralism but also the historically and psychoanalytically explainable lack of a framework for the Portuguese people to deal with freedom itself. Sena suggested that it is in Camões — and in understanding *Os Lusíadas* in all its breadth and depth — that we should seek to transform this situation and resolve the challenges in the process of building national identity in the post-25 April period. He argued that interpreting and accepting the contradictions of the country's history and of human nature itself, as Camões did in his work, must be done with a sense of freedom and justice. It should be noted that Sena's public speech received some coverage in the national media[8], although it was overshadowed by the speeches of politicians during the same commemorations. In the local press, specifically in *Jornal da Guarda*, there was no mention of Sena's presence or his speech in the coverage of the June 10 celebrations in the city.

4. Posthumous Tributes and the Ritualisation of Memory

Sena passed away a year after delivering that speech, in California, United States, without receiving due recognition for his work and without reconciling with the country that had proscribed him. Vieira (2020) observes that, on June 4, 1978, the Portuguese press could not ignore his passing: "Jorge de Sena's death was noisy" (p. 69) — making front-page headlines, inspiring editorials, leading television news bulletins, and prompting a special programme on RTP. Analysing this coverage, Vieira notes that the media portrayed a narrative suggesting that the country had not distanced itself from Sena, as "at least the intellectual and political elite recognised by the newspapers and represented in the press were unanimous in their praise of the poet's work and the significance of Sena's public engagement" (p. 82). Nonetheless, "this does not diminish the legitimacy of

---

[8] *Diário de Notícias* June 13, 1977.

the sense of injustice regarding the critical silence surrounding Jorge de Sena's work, nor does it lessen the 'heartache' for the homeland that his friends speak of" (p. 82).

An analysis of the special magazine programme *A Ideia e a Imagem*, broadcast by RTP on June 16, highlights the focus on his "difficult life" while his genius was acknowledged by figures such as Fernando Guimarães, Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, and Agustina Bessa Luís. However, his extensive and diverse intellectual output is described by several as little read or known. Óscar Lopes, his brother-in-law, chooses to focus more on personal aspects of Sena's career, highlighting his exceptional abilities and the contradictions in his personality, ultimately concluding that the celebrated figure was much more talked about than truly understood. In the second part of the programme, Álvaro Manuel Machado, its creator, observes that the essayistic dimension of Sena's work was largely unknown and warranted further study for a better understanding of his intellectual legacy.

In 2005, RTP aired the documentary *O Escritor Prodigioso* by Joana Pontes, which weaves a narrative that recovers Sena's life and work. Biography, personality traits, and modes of poetic production are evoked through archival footage and testimonies from people who were close to him, such as Fernando Lemos, Hélder Macedo, Eduardo Lourenço, and João Bénard da Costa.

In September 2009, the writer's remains were transferred from the United States to the Prazeres Cemetery in Lisbon. Regarding this event, *Diário de Notícias* reported that both Eduardo Lourenço and the then Minister of Culture, José Pinto Ribeiro, referred to it as "an act of reparation and reconciliation" that ended "his condition as an exile from our country" ("Póstuma Reconciliação com Jorge de Sena", 2009, para. 2). The article also suggested that Sena's return to Portugal would foster renewed interest in his legacy: the Editora Guimarães would be reissuing his complete works, following José Saramago's remark on "the oblivion that had befallen the writer, particularly among younger generations" ("Póstuma Reconciliação com Jorge de Sena", 2009, para. 7).

The article published in 2018 on the Comunidade Cultura e Arte website, "Liberdade na Vida e Obra de Jorge de Sena", emphasises that the author, with "a certain revolutionary spirit, opposing the amorphous and repressive structures of the Estado Novo (...), elevates the phenomenon, the occurrence, and the impact of freedom to the pinnacle of his life and work" (para. 1).

However, in 2019, the centenary of Sena's birth, the absence of media attention to his life and work seemed particularly odd. In November, *Público* newspaper dedicated a *Special Issue* to him, featuring eight articles and essays[9]: Jorge de Sena: *O Século de um Intelectual Indispensável*. In his opening text on November 2, "Jorge de Sena: O Gigante Indigesto da Cultura Portuguesa" (Jorge de Sena: The Unpalatable Giant of Portuguese Culture), journalist Luís Miguel Queirós (2019) highlights this silence in both the public media sphere and in academia.

---

[9] For this analysis, we considered only the articles published between November 2 and 9, 2019, as other articles from 2020 and 2021 were later associated with the main page of this Special Issue, featuring the name of Jorge de Sena.

> Jorge de Sena was born exactly one hundred years ago, on November 2, 1919. Judging by the little visibility his centenary celebrations have received so far — if any celebrations can even be said to have taken place — it seems that his friend Eduardo Lourenço may have been premature when, in April 1968, he predicted in the magazine O Tempo e o Modo: "And the time is near, or has already arrived when the neglected figure of our literature will receive the belated flowers of admiration, with double the reward". (Queirós, 2019, p. 2)

In this article, Queirós (2019) argues that "the fierce and profoundly human Minotaur of Portuguese literature remains untamed" (p. 2), suggesting that, despite the numerous academic studies on his work, "the polyhedral and monumental work has yet to find a reconciled global interpretation and the undisputed position it holds in 20th-century Portuguese culture" (p. 2).

The remaining articles in this *Special Issue* address various facets of the author. "O Poeta em Sena" (The Poet in Sena) praises the "dominant role that poetic creation played in his entire body of work" characterised by his "extreme (sometimes excessive) love for humanity and its dignity" (Frias, 2019, para. 5). "O Poeta Não É um Fingidor" (The Poet Is Not a Pretender) asserts that Sena has the "determination to explore the new world introduced by Pessoa" (Martins, 2019, para. 5), concluding that he was the critic who most contributed to the understanding of this figure of Portuguese modernism. "Um 'Realismo que Não Recua': A Ficção de Jorge de Sena" (A "Realism that Does Not Retreat": The Fiction of Jorge de Sena) highlights the intellectual "in his almost boundless excess" (Pereira, 2019, para. 1), depicting Sena as a poet who couldn't resist prose fiction, which was primarily testimonial in nature. In "O Crítico Prodigioso" (The Prodigious Critic), Meirim (2019) explores the breadth of Sena's critical work, in which "it is possible to recognise the persistent practice of (...) 'elucidating', 'correcting', 'disproving' and 'analysing' (...) [because] Sena spoke about everything, everyone, and in the manner he felt was right" (para. 1). "Jorge de Sena, Antologista" (Jorge de Sena, Anthologist) also highlights "the silence surrounding Jorge de Sena throughout this centenary of his birth" (Vasconcelos, 2019, para. 2), recalling that the author's extensive *corpus* was partly dedicated to denouncing the policies of the Estado Novo and was always guided by the advocacy of freedom of thought. "Jorge de Sena e o Brasil" (Jorge de Sena and Brazil) examines the scholar's complex but productive relationship with Brazil, from which he proposed "action plans to foster closer ties between the two countries, combating (...) mutual prejudice and ignorance" (Silvestre, 2019, para. 8), validating his vision of the first steps towards the construction of the PS(I)CC. Finally, António Araújo's "A Política em Sena" (Politics in Sena) highlights the contradictions in his personality and trajectory, in which a structured political thought was lacking, despite his declared anti-fascism and anti-colonialism, especially evident in his proposal "A Comunidade de Estados Portugueses". In this text, Sena defended the self-determination of colonised peoples within a Commonwealth-style framework.

In 2001, the Jorge de Sena Chair and the Postgraduate Programme in Vernacular Languages at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro established the journal *Metamorfoses*, which is still published in his honour. Additionally, this university launched a pioneering initiative in 2010, led by Professor Gilda Santos and a group of personalities, combining scholarly interest with the goal of making Sena's work more accessible to the general public: the *Ler Jorge de Sena* project. This digital platform is dedicated to exploring the hermeneutics and heuristics of Sena's multifaceted oeuvre, extending beyond literature. *Ler Jorge de Sena* stands as one of the largest digital repositories dedicated to a Portuguese-language author, serving both as a valuable research resource and a platform for promoting the life and work of this "prodigious writer".

5. Conclusions

This research has aimed to shed light on the reasons why Sena's ideas on the PS(I)CC, a foundational aspect of his intellectual legacy, have remained obscured. By tracing his intellectual journey over time, including the posthumous reception of his work, the study mapped and analysed key media pieces authored by or about Sena. This approach tested the hypothesis that the media's treatment of the scholar contributed to the persistent invisibility of his thinking on the PS(I)CC.

Sena boldly exercised his freedom of thought openly and through direct speech, both in specialised press outlets and those opposed to the regime. He put forward proposals for building a democratic, post-imperial Portugal, realising its fullest potential through its language and culture, thereby contributing significantly to the formation of the PS(I)CC, envisioned as including other Portuguese-speaking countries and diasporic communities worldwide. His proposals emerged most clearly during his Brazilian exile but trace back to the early stages of his intellectual career, where colonial territories and their cultures already featured prominently in his critical writings. The significance of Sena's early literary criticism and his first African-themed short-story chronicles lies in the germination of an inclusive idea of freedom, anticipating what would later be framed as the PS(I)CC. Though he did not use this term in his early texts, he stressed the necessity of coexistence. However, this aspect of his thinking has received limited academic attention and even less media coverage. Media narratives about Sena tend to centre on his life story and the lack of recognition he endured rather than highlighting his visionary proposals grounded in intellectual freedom.

During the dictatorial period, paradoxically, Sena expressed his freedom of thought about the PS(I)CC most effectively in the media. Between 1974 and 1978, his media presence centred on Portugal's democratic reconstruction and his frustration at being unable to participate in it. After his death, media narratives shifted toward his personality, life story, or legacy, rarely addressing the substance of his thought.

With their framing mechanisms that highlight or suppress specific aspects, the media have functioned as agents of (in)visibility in the public discourse, constructing narratives about Sena that offer limited insight into his intellectual journey — and even less into his ideas on the PS(I)CC.

Sena was a traveller in search of freedom, much like Camões, the poet he celebrated through his writings. Both could have been stripped of everything except their freedom of thought and their love for a language and culture, which Sena envisioned as a united community.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

References

Baltrusch, B. (2019). Sobre o poético e o político em Jorge de Sena. *Santa Barbara Portuguese Studies*, 7, 1–16.

Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge.* Anchor Books.

Boschi, C. (2022). Antecedentes históricos da CPLP – Primórdios da comunidade. In L. B. da Silva Moreira & R. F. Tavares (Eds.), *Nos 25 anos da CPLP. Estudos em homenagem a José Aparecido de Oliveira e Ricardo Arnaldo Malheiros Fiuza* (pp. 31–55). Academia Mineira de Letras; Editora Del Rey.

Cunha, L., Macedo, L., & Cabecinhas, R. (2018). Flows, transits and (dis)connection points: Contributions toward a critical Lusophony. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 34, 165–182. https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.34(2018).2942

Jackson, K. D. (2020). A grande peregrinação de Jorge de Sena. *Revista Língua-Lugar*, (2), 156–171.

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). *The elements of journalism: Revised and updated.* Three Rivers Press.

Lima, H. (2013). Meios de censura e formas de condicionamento do jornalismo na ditadura portuguesa. *Media & Jornalismo*, 12(23), 105–117.

Lourenço, J. F. (1987). *O essencial sobre Jorge de Sena.* INCM.

Lourenço, J. F. (1998). Nem eu delicadezas vou contando. Sobre a fortuna de Jorge de Sena nos anos 40. In *Jorge de Sena 20 anos depois. O colóquio de Lisboa* (pp. 141–158). Câmara Municipal de Lisboa; Edições Cosmos.

Macedo, L. (2023, March 30). Jorge de Sena em entrevista à Rádio Clube de Moçambique (19/07/1972). Desmitificar o passado e ultrapassar o nacionalismo para edificar uma cultura da língua portuguesa. *Ler Jorge de Sena.* http://www.lerjorgedesena.letras.ufrj.br/ressonancias/jorge-de-sena-em-entrevista-a-radio-clube-de-mocambique-19-07-1972-desmitificar-o-passado-e-ultrapassar-o-nacionalismo-para-edificar-uma-cultura-da-lingua-portuguesa/

Macedo, L., & Moreira, N. B. (2024). Jorge de Sena de olhos postos em África para uma comunidade (inter) cultural de língua portuguesa: Início de um itinerário intelectual. In C. Camponez & M. Oliveira (Eds.), *Anuário internacional de comunicação lusófona 2023/2024* (pp. 16–35). CECS; Lusocom; Sopcom.

Mendonça, F. (2024). Metamorfoses de Camões na Costa Austral do Índico. *Camões, Revista de Letras e Culturas Lusófonas*, 28, 103–111.

Picchio, L. S. (2012, February 16). Jorge de Sena e a cor da liberdade. *Ler Jorge de Sena*. http://www.lerjorgedesena.letras.ufrj.br/ressonancias/24-jorge-de-sena-e-a-cor-da-liberdade/

Pontes, J. (Director). (2005). *O escritor prodigioso*. Laranja Azul.

"Póstuma reconciliação com Jorge de Sena". (2009, September 12). *Diário de Notícias*. https://www.dn.pt/artes/livros/postuma-reconciliacao-com-jorge-de-sena--1359832.html/

Sá, A. C. (2019). Acordar os vizinhos: Sobre os exílios de Jorge de Sena. *Eutomia*, *25*(1), 125–141.

Santos, G. (2019). Jorge de Sena entre nós. *Metamorfoses – Revista de Estudos Literários Luso-Afro-Brasileiros*, *16*(3), 22–26.

Sena, J. (1960). *Andanças do demónio*. Guerra & Paz. (Original work published 1942)

Sena, J. (1977, June 2). A independência em Portugal paga-se com a vida [Excerto citado em Livrologia, "A independência em Portugal paga-se com a vida"]. *Diário de Notícias*.

Sena, J. (1988a). *Estudos de cultura e literatura brasileira*. Edições 70.

Sena, J. (1988b). *Metamorfoses*. Edições 70.

Sena, J. (2011). A comunidade de estados portugueses. In J. F. Lourenço (Ed.), *Rever Portugal, textos políticos e afins* (pp. 95–104). Guimarães Editora. (Original work published 1960)

Sena, J. (2023). *Fidelidade*. Assírio & Alvim. (Original work published 1958)

Silva, D. M. (2011, January 29). Jorge de Sena e o Portugal Democrático. *Ler Jorge de Sena*. http://www.lerjorgedesena.letras.ufrj.br/ressonancias/jorge-de-sena-e-o-portugal-democratico/

Vieira, I. E. (2020). "Fazem cá um barulho com a morte do gajo!": A morte de Jorge de Sena na imprensa portuguesa. In G. Santos, L. Ruas, & T. C. Cerdeira (Eds.), *Sena & Sophia: Centenários* (pp. 69–82). Bazar do Tempo.

Biographical Notes

Lurdes Macedo holds a PhD in Communication Sciences with a focus on Intercultural Communication from the University of Minho, as well as a post-doctorate in Communication for Development from the same institution. She is currently a researcher at the Centre for Research in Applied Communication, Culture, and New Technologies and serves as an assistant professor at Universidade Lusófona — Centro Universitário do Porto, where she has been teaching since 2008. Macedo has also taught at the Escola Superior de Educação de Viseu and Universidade Politécnica de Maputo. Her primary research interests include intercultural communication, communication and culture for development, female participation in development processes, cultural identities, and the Portuguese-speaking cultural space. She was involved in multiple projects at the Communication and Society Research Centre, focusing on intercultural communication between 2009 and 2022. Additionally, she co-coordinated the project *Vozes em Rede: Participação de Mulheres em Processos de Desenvolvimento* (2022–2023) at the Centre for Research in Applied Communication, Culture and New Technologies.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1577-1313
Email: lurdes.macedo@ulusofona.pt
Address: Universidade Lusófona, Centro Universitário do Porto, Rua Augusto Rosa, 24, 4000-098 Porto, Portugal

Nuno Bessa Moreira was born in Porto in 1976. He graduated in History from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto in 1999. In 2004, he completed his master's degree in Modern History with a thesis on Cardeal D. Henrique (1539–1578). In February 2013, he passed public exams for his PhD in History, supervised by Professor Armando Luís de Carvalho Homem, focusing on *Revista de História* (1912/1928), a periodical journal directed by Fidelino de Figueiredo. In 2016, he completed the National Defence Course and defended his final research paper in public exams.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5689-0282
Email: p5679@ulusofona.pt
Address: Universidade Lusófona, Centro Universitário do Porto, Rua Augusto Rosa, 24, 4000-098 Porto, Portugal

Vanessa Ribeiro-Rodrigues holds a PhD in Communication Studies for Development, focusing on the intersection between social documentary and journalism to provide visibility to socially oppressed groups in alignment with public counter-spheres. She is an integrated researcher at the Centre for Research in Applied Communication, Culture and New Technologies, an assistant professor at Universidade Lusófona – Centro Universitário do Porto, where she has been teaching since 2014, and an invited assistant professor at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra. She has also taught at the University of Minho. A documentary filmmaker and writer, her main areas of research include media studies, narrative studies, journalism and human development, public counter-spheres, activism, and media literacy. She is currently collaborating on two research projects funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology: *FEMglocal* and *YouNDigital*.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7261-017X
Email: vanessa.rodrigues@ulusofona.pt
Address: Universidade Lusófona, Centro Universitário do Porto, Rua Augusto Rosa, 24, 4000-098 Porto, Portugal

Book Reviews | *Leituras* ◉

Radical Communication. Depatriarchalize, Decolonize and Green Media Culture Book Review

Recensão do livro *Comunicação Radical. Despatriarcalizar, Descolonizar e Ecologizar a Cultura Mediática*

Bárbara Tomiatti Giancola
Facultat de Ciències Humanes i Socials, Universitat Jaume I, Castelló, Spain

Andrés, S. de, & Chaparro, M. (2022). *Comunicación radical. Despatriarcalizar, decolonizar y ecologizar la cultura mediática*. Gedisa.

The concept of "radical communication" represents a significant development within the field of communication sciences, advocating for a paradigmatic shift characterized by an insurgent approach to reorienting the communication domain. It extends beyond a mere symbolic transformation, encompassing a comprehensive restructuring of the political and economic systems towards regenerative frameworks that actively instigate changes vis-à-vis the prevailing model. The presented book engages in a dialogue enriched with discerning perspectives and reflections, combining both theoretical and practical insights to propose a communicative approach rooted in authenticity and a profound connection with innate human sentiments. Emphasizing the importance of multi-epistemic cooperation, oral traditions, and essential re-humanizing elements, it explores avenues to reconstruct communication practices. Within this framework, decoloniality, feminism, pacifism, and ecology emerge as foundational pillars, providing the intellectual foundation for the formulation of pathways leading to a conscientious, transformative, and reoriented communication model. This model seeks to cease collaboration with ecocide and disrupt the prevailing logics of violent domination.

As a foundational point for conceptual contemplation, Susana de Andrés and Manuel Chaparro delineate communication as the interrelation of knowledge, constituting a vital process deeply enmeshed within the fabric of nature. Their proposition calls for a reevaluation of the intricate connections between humanity and its surroundings, emphasizing the pivotal role communication plays at the heart of ecosystemic collapse. Seeking to reintegrate voices, gestures, consciousness, silences, and hearts, they advocate for a radical epistemology, embracing the purest essence of its meaning. The authors craft a cohesive and sensitive reading structure that prompts a reconsideration of the postmodern conception of time, progress, and the construction of urbanized spaces, wherein the absence of physical and digital realms conducive to dialogue is notably evident. Following Freire's (1967/2009) perspective, communication, akin to problematizing education committed to liberation, asserts its dialogical nature. Conversely, its denial results in a form of silencing, not necessarily characterized by an absence of response but rather indicative of a deficiency in critical discernment — a process that can fuel affective polarization and strain interpersonal relationships.

They advocate for what may be considered one of the most radical actions in contemporary times: the intentional disconnection of mobile devices and screens. This act is proposed to embrace and celebrate the diverse qualities that render each individual unique, fostering mutual encouragement and relinquishing the anthropocentric belief that compels the defense of Mother Earth. Expanding upon this perspective, the work endeavors to transform this belief into an inclusive worldview, aligning with the advocacy of native rights activist Casey Camp-Horinek (2024), who asserts, "we are nature defending itself". The narrative, drawing inspiration from this *ethos*, seeks to honor and respect *Gaia* at every juncture. The conveyed messages exhibit a seamless and coherent expression, employing metaphors rooted in natural elements — integral to the framework of "rhizomatic communication". This approach unfolds through allegorical connections with forests, mycelia, rivers, and pollinating agents.

The book features a prologue written by Agustín García Matilla, a professor of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising at the University of Valladolid, and Eloísa Nos Aldás, a professor of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising at the Jaume I University. They underscore their commitment to viewing communication as an end rather than merely a means, emphasizing an integral and holistic perspective. The prologue advocates for the rediscovery of ancestral knowledge and champions communication that aligns with cultures of peace, shedding light on narratives perpetuated in the dichotomy of "good" and "bad" people — a pretext used to justify militaristic actions while neglecting transformative efforts. The book delineates a radical shift in communication, prioritizing what is essential in the landscape of urgency, and underscores the imperative to nurture hope in endeavors deemed worthwhile. This perspective underscores the feasibility of implementing all proposed ideas and emphasizes the need to communicate from novel vantage points guided by alternative logics and narratives. The book, grounded in both conceptual and empirical foundations, is structured into three main sections.

The initial section, dedicated to decolonization, provides a distinctive examination of the process of constructing imaginaries that originated with the violent conquest — an influence persisting on a global scale to the present day. This imposition, perpetuating a developmental and technological narrative, shapes the narratives of civilizations. Decoloniality calls for a conscious imperative to reclaim narratives and transcend them into alternative storytelling, tackling the theme with inherent complexity. The section delves into the historical moment of Europe's arrival in *Abya Yala* and other continents, establishing connections to elucidate how this context initiated a legitimization process for the right to barbarism, justifying slavery, genocide, and cultural pruning. Furthermore, it addresses the exploitation of natural resources beyond the satisfaction of basic needs.

Colonization exerts direct consequences on life and influences modes of thought, action, and communication. In line with the text, the decolonization process entails cultivating awareness, fostering dissidence, and promoting resistance. It underscores the necessity of uprooting knowledge and beliefs whose application lacks a foundation in the common good, fails to embrace epistemological and ontological diversity, and neglects the manifold responses to global challenges. The work critiques the paradigm of

scientific communication for carrying androcentric Eurocentric biases, along with other hegemonic discourses, and highlights education as an ongoing process for transmitting values and practical knowledge for life. This process should unfold within an ethical framework that prioritizes experiential learning in society.

The second part of the book delves into the depatriarchalizing theme, with ecofeminism emerging prominently due to its cross-cutting nature and its proposition of transformative keys for a feminist, critical, liberating communication committed to social improvement for all beings. Given the comprehensive scope of this movement, certain concepts are highlighted, including the prevailing culture of commodified happiness, emotional control, and issues related to mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. In this context, the ethics of care is presented as one of the solutions that advocates for an ethical revolution to halt the destructive military-industrial model. It calls for an educommunication approach focused on non-violence, promoting social justice, and fostering positive peace. In the same vein, the *comunicación transgresora* (transgressive communication) for social change (Nos Aldás & Farné, 2020) proposes alternatives to structures perpetuating the structures of violence promoting values such as recognition of intersectionality, plural narratives and inspiring examples of equality that invite to action. This form of communication encourages trust, openness to vulnerability, humanity, emotions, and peaceful coexistence.

In the third and concluding part, the book delves further into the theme of greening. The proposition commences with the care, training, and recognition of an entirely renewed taxonomy of communication professionals, conceptualized as individuals who transform connections, facilitate cooperation, and are acknowledged for a role that can genuinely yield fruitful outcomes in fostering healthy communication for society. The reflection on the socio-environmental sustainability model calls for a global ecocommunication summit capable of charting paths toward the redesign of communication and information, which, through cooperative efforts, can implement strategies to curb systemic environmental collapse.

Highlighting the role of emotions in communicative transmission and raising awareness through the spread of messages in alternative ways is an invitation to bridge the gap between sensory reality and emotions. The automatic and reactive communication resulting from this distance reflects a loss of perspective. Beyond individual transformations, collective efforts are imperative to break away from agendas dictated by capitalism. This stands as a crucial and pressing condition to initiate the opportunity to reclaim foundational communication. Achieving this necessitates network action and the formulation of legal divestment strategies to reduce the influence of commercial media that privatize space and technologies. It emphasizes the importance of media and channels that share knowledge and experiences, promoting a stance against being driven solely by consumption.

It is relevant to emphasize that the intention is not to propagate a technophobic discourse but rather to emphasize the urgency to define how, when, and to what extent

virtual communication can redefine relations and remove the sense of subject from the human being, transforming it into numbers, data, and objects. Nor does it leave suggest that reducing the use of information and communication technology could mean a setback. In counterpoint to this argument, it shows that, through the disconnection of the screens, it is possible to evolve from other perspectives since it is not exclusively an economic issue but one of life, health, harmony, and recovery of natural principles.

Communication, in its essence, is cosmic and multi-sensory, which, by means of symbols, acts through organic links and traces nodes of connection with the environment, allowing compassion and connection to exist where there were previously barriers. Moreover, all the movements involved in life on planet Earth extend far beyond the inter-human and the human. Expanding this individual vision of being and internalizing the worldview of cooperation and interrelationship between everyone and the Whole is something that can surely facilitate radical communication and bring more meaning to existence.

In conclusion, *Comunicación Radical* (Radical Communication) is a reading that provides critical vision, necessary reflections, and deep knowledge. In addition to instigating the thirst for revolution in how we look at communication and what it permeates – in other words, everything. A book made and commented on by people from the academy who make the legacy of many and many others who thought beyond their century alive on every page. A recommended reading for students, teachers, researchers and individuals from civil society, inviting anyone who feels the call to read it. It is a timeless proposal, with knowledge that literally expands the notion of time from chronos, getting closer to kairós, the time that cannot be used for control or consumption. Words that can captivate the reader through curiosity, passion, or chance. After so much in-depth knowledge, perhaps we can expand our consciousness beyond mere causality.

References

Camp-Horinek, C. (2024, June 12). *Resilience, adaptation, and seeing nature as ourselves* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSp4ApoCk-I

Freire, P. (2009). *La educación como práctica de la libertad* (L. Ronzoni, Trans.). Siglo XXI. (Original work published 1967)

Nos Aldás, E., & Farné, A. (2020). Comunicación transgresora de cambio social: Epistemologías performativas y eficacia cultural. *Convergencia, 27,* 1–26. https://doi.org/10.29101/crcs.v27i0.12720

Biographical Note

Bárbara Tomiatti Giancola is a PhD candidate in International Studies in Peace, Conflicts, and Development at the Jaume I University, postgraduate in Transpersonal Psychology at the International University of Peace, master's in Communication With Social Purposes at the Valladolid University and has a degree in Public Relations at the Cásper Líbero College. She is a researcher in Education and Communication for

Peace at the Jaume I University — United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization chair in Spain and a doctoral researcher at the School of Communication and Arts of the São Paulo University in Brazil.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2713-2284

Email: al419984@uji.es

Address: Avinguda de Vicent Sos Baynat, s/n, 12006 Castelló de la Plana, Castelló, España

VARIA | *VARIA* ◉

The (Non-)Intersectional Communication of Technological Activist Institutions Promoting Gender Equality in Information and Communication Technologies in Portugal

Micaela Cabral
Laboratório de Comunicação e Artes, Universidade da Beira Interior, Covilhã, Portugal
Conceptualisation, data curation, investigation, methodology, visualisation, writing – original draft

Sónia de Sá
Laboratório de Comunicação e Artes, Universidade da Beira Interior, Covilhã, Portugal
Supervision, writing – review & editing

Carla Cerqueira
Centro de Investigação em Comunicação Aplicada, Cultura e Novas Tecnologias, Universidade Lusófona, Porto, Portugal
Supervision, writing – review & editing

Abstract

The digital gender gap is deeply rooted in historical and social inequalities. In Portugal, public policies have aimed to reduce this disparity by focusing on education and employment. However, these policies often fail to address the social complexity of the issue, such as limited access to quality technological devices and low technological literacy among women from diverse geographical and socio-economic backgrounds. This study analyses the communication strategies of technological activist institutions that promote gender equality in information and communication technologies in Portugal, adopting an intersectional perspective. Focusing on the Instagram posts of four institutions — Portuguese Women in Tech, As Raparigas do Código, Geek Girls Portugal, and Women in Tech Portugal — between January and June 2023, the analysis reveals that, despite notable efforts by these organisations, significant challenges remain in achieving intersectional communication. The study concludes that institutions should reassess and broaden their communication strategies to incorporate an intersectional approach, ensuring continuous and diverse representation. Decentralising activities and promoting online events are identified as critical strategies for increasing participation and reducing inequalities.

Keywords

intersectional communication, gender, information and communication technologies, technological activism, digital inclusion

A Comunicação (Não) Interseccional de Instituições de Ativismo Tecnológico que Atuam na Promoção da Igualdade de Gênero nas Tecnologias da Informação e da Comunicação em Portugal

Resumo

A brecha digital de gênero tem raízes profundas em desigualdades históricas e sociais. Em Portugal, políticas públicas têm tentado reduzir essa disparidade, focando-se na educação e

emprego, mas, frequentemente, falham ao não considerar a complexidade social do problema, como a falta de acesso a aparatos tecnológicos de qualidade e a baixa literacia tecnológica entre mulheres de diferentes contextos geográficos e socioeconômicos. Este trabalho busca analisar a comunicação das instituições de ativismo tecnológico, que atuam na promoção da igualdade de gênero nas tecnologias da informação e da comunicação em Portugal, sob uma perspectiva interseccional. Focando nas publicações do Instagram de quatro instituições (Portuguese Women in Tech, As Raparigas do Código, Geek Girls Portugal e Women in Tech Portugal), entre janeiro e junho de 2023, a análise revela que, embora haja esforços perceptíveis por parte das instituições de ativismo tecnológico em Portugal, ainda existem desafios consideráveis na promoção de uma comunicação interseccional. Conclui-se que as instituições devem revisar e expandir suas estratégias de comunicação, para incorporar uma abordagem interseccional, garantindo representação contínua e diversa. Descentralizar atividades e promover eventos online são estratégias importantes para ampliar a participação e reduzir desigualdades.

Palavras-chave
comunicação interseccional, gênero, tecnologias da informação e da comunicação, ativismo tecnológico, inclusão digital

1. Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) play a central role in contemporary society, influencing various aspects of life, including the economy, culture, education, and social interactions. The European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles emphasises that technologies have the potential to transform lives, creating opportunities to enhance socialisation and improve access to health, culture, and education (European Commission, 2022). However, while ICTs offer significant benefits to those who master them, they also expose and, in some cases, exacerbate existing societal inequalities by creating digital divides (Ragnedda, 2017). These digital divides can be categorised into dimensions of access, use, and appropriation, intersecting with socio-economic factors such as education, gender, and class.

This paper focuses on the concept of the "digital gender gap", which can be defined as "the disparity between men and women regarding technologies, distinguishing between mere access and the actual use and appropriation of these resources" (Pérez-Escoda et al., 2021, p. 506). The impact of the digital gender gap is evident not only in the economy and unequal access to ICTs but also in the limited representation of women as producers of these technologies. In Portugal, this issue is further exacerbated by historical and cultural factors, such as gender stereotypes that have been perpetuated for decades, relegating women to restricted social roles centred around caregiving and the household (Fonseca et al., 2023).

Given the importance of ICTs for socio-economic development, technological activist institutions working to promote gender equality in the sector in Portugal have developed alternative strategies to those proposed by the Portuguese Government, which focus on technical qualifications and initiatives aimed at increasing skilled labour while overlooking existing social markers (Fonseca et al., 2023). Institutions such as Portuguese Women in

Tech, As Raparigas do Código, Geek Girls Portugal, and Women in Tech Portugal have emerged as digital platforms dedicated to promoting gender equality in ICT through empowerment, the development of digital skills in accessible and safe spaces, and the deconstruction of gender stereotypes at various stages of life.

Since communication is a powerful tool that shapes and reflects social dynamics, including power relations and the fight against inequalities, the effectiveness of institutions largely depends on their use of communication strategies that engage and include women from diverse backgrounds. In this context, when we refer to intersectional communication, we aim to understand how the communication strategies and practices of these institutions may be contributing (or not) to the effective inclusion of women in all their diversity. It is crucial to identify whether the communication employed by these institutions takes into account social markers and systems of oppression that intersect with gender, such as race and age, when creating their posts on Instagram, the digital social network on which they maintain the most active presence.

Promoting gender equality in ICT is a multifaceted task that requires collaboration between government, civil society, and technological activism institutions. Incorporating intersectionality as a guiding principle in these efforts is essential to ensure that digital inclusion initiatives are effective and inclusive of all women. This paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate on the importance of adopting intersectional communication in promoting gender equality in ICT by technological activist institutions in Portugal.

2. Cyberfeminism and Access to Public Space Via Digital Social Networks

The democratisation of communication on digital social networks, facilitated by ICTs, has transformed the way we interact. Tools for "posting, sharing, and communication, oriented towards a collective structure" (Amaral, 2012, p. 133) have played a significant role in the development of new communication models.

Recuero (2014) underlines that these tools generate new stimuli for conversation processes, enabling "collective, asynchronous or synchronous, public conversations that can engage a large number of actors, which we refer to here as network conversation" (p. 123). According to the author, the new models of conversation in digital spaces differ from traditional ones because they allow discourse to be amplified and modified by various social groups across different spaces and times, collaboratively enhanced in new contexts, thereby creating new opportunities for social transformation.

In this sense, Chadwick (2017) attributes the characteristic of hybridity to cyberspace — the digital environment where content is shared, produced, and decentralised — as it is not possible to "ontologically" separate the online from the offline (Abreu, 2017, p. 136). In cyberspace, old and new technologies intertwine and complement each other, breaking down physical, geographical, and cultural barriers. According to Babo (2018), cyberspace is a space for sharing that, thanks to its hybridity, mobilises collective actions capable of impacting the public sphere.

The communication channels made hyperconnected by media convergence mean that, in cyberspace, real life merges with online life, and the private with the public (Santaella, 2004, 2010). In *O Poder da Identidade* (The Power of Identity), Castells (1996/2018) discusses the dynamics of network mobilisation and the formation of groups united by shared values, which manifest through virtual communities that inhabit new social spaces for the construction of diverse realities.

The feminist movement has begun to use cyberspace to extend its reach, disseminate its cause, raise awareness among women, and access places it previously could not, thus giving rise to cyberfeminism. According to Brandt and Kizer (2015), the internet has made activism more accessible, with cyberspace becoming a conduit for social justice, where the conversational model plays a key role in its popularisation.

Cyberfeminism is an "aesthetic and political" movement that reshaped feminist discourse by placing gender inequalities in technology and science at the forefront of its demands (Martinez, 2019). The first cyberfeminist manifesto was written in 1991 by Australian artists from the VNS Matrix group (Timeto, 2019). However, it was Donna Haraway's (1991) *Cyborg Manifesto* that outlined the two main approaches of the movement. The first critiqued the hybridisation of women and machines, aiming to deconstruct gender asymmetries related to the female body. The second focused on challenging gender stereotypes in the technology market, which was dominated by men, particularly in positions of power.

It was in the 2000s, however, with the popularisation of digital technologies for domestic use, that cyberfeminism began addressing social issues. Its actions developed a networked dynamic, connecting points of contact both in the streets and online, highlighting the movement's need to adapt (Boix & Miguel, 2013; Reis & Natansohn, 2021). This new dimension gave rise to demands that had previously been silenced within the feminist movement, bringing issues such as the struggles of Black women and the rights of trans women into the public sphere. Digital social networks now provide a platform for marginalised and silenced minorities to speak out and resist (Ferreira & Lima, 2020; Ribeiro, 2017).

The subjects of this study exemplify the shift towards political, social, and cultural engagement through cyberfeminism. Most of them aim to share technological knowledge with other women, empower them, foster their development, and populate new social and economic spaces made possible by the "fourth wave" of the feminist movement (Lamartine & Cerqueira, 2023). Although there is no consensus on the existence of a fourth wave, its emergence is linked to the widespread use of digital social networks as platforms for collective mobilisation and the inclusion of an intersectional perspective in feminist agendas.

3. The Importance of Intersecting the Debate

The fourth wave of the feminist movement encompasses demands that have already been part of previous waves. As such, a complete separation between the past and the present is not feasible. However, its digital reach stands as one of the main distinguishing features of the current movement (Lamartine & Cerqueira, 2023). Through digital activism, it is possible to promote mobilisations whose fluidity in cyberspace enables

the engagement of thousands of people (Reis & Natansohn, 2021). Martins and Nunes (2019) argue that "it is in this way that the internet plays a crucial role in enabling women to build their political action in the public sphere, providing an effective means to disseminate information and create empowering spaces" (p. 122).

An essential characteristic of the fourth wave is its emphasis on diversity in shaping more inclusive narratives. This comprises addressing identity struggles that challenge racism, ableist discourse, and ethnocentrism — issues that continue to silence and marginalise women affected by these intersecting oppressions. The goal is to broaden representation within feminist discourses, fostering and amplifying the diverse voices and demands that persist (Cerqueira & Magalhães, 2017).

The concern to increase the representation of invisibilised women brings back the concept of "intersectionality", widely defended by authors from the Black feminist movement. In a North American context, authors such as Audre Lorde (1984/2019), Angela Davis (1981/2016), and bell hooks (1984/2019) questioned the inefficient dynamics that ignored the racial markers, gender stereotypes, and class privileges within and outside feminist movements. Another important contribution came from Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who coined the term and proposed an approach that examines how the interaction between gender and race overlaps through intersecting "avenues".

In the Global South, particularly in Brazil, authors like Lélia Gonzalez (1988) and Beatriz Nascimento (1974), two prominent figures in the Brazilian Black feminist movement, have enriched the debate by exploring the impact of intersecting gender and class dynamics on the lives of racialised women (Casemiro & Silva, 2021). From a more contemporary perspective, Akotirene (2019) highlights the importance of valuing and reclaiming the cultural heritage of Black communities, asserting that "the methodological articulation proposed by Black feminists, currently called intersectionality, recovers lost ancestral baggage" (p. 25).

Incorporating the concept of "intersectionality" to ensure the inclusion and representation of all people requires the fourth-wave feminist movement not only to grasp its principles but also to approach it from a methodological and critical perspective. Framing intersectionality in this way can help identify existing inequalities and propose alternatives for transformative change (Collins & Bilge, 2021). Akotirene (2019) argues that this is the only path to altering the dominant power structures that persist and enabling a "discursive rescue" systematically denied by markers such as gender, race, sexuality, and other forms of social difference.

In particular, with regard to promoting gender equality, "intersectionality" appears as a central concept, without which it is not possible to achieve truly significant results for all people (Parry et al., 2018). For Zimmerman (2017), the fourth-wave feminist movement opposes the silencing of marginalised people. It creates a dynamic that enables political visibility through the promotion of diversity and inclusion, which are also essential principles for achieving gender equality.

Despite the importance of using digital social networks as spaces for horizontal communication, acceptance, and empowerment, it is crucial to train women so that they

are not just consumers of these technologies but also active producers. The interactions between machines/technology and humans follow patterns designed to exclude anything that doesn't conform, creating a relationship that favours those who dominate the technologies. Therefore, all women must assume strategic positions of power by fully engaging with and utilising these technologies.

4. The Use of Intersectionality to Combat Digital Gender Gaps

Despite the widespread use of ICT in the European Union, those who initially had the most access to these technologies were predominantly young White males (Lapa & Vieira, 2019). The binary concept of man and woman, where the former was always considered superior to the latter, created a hierarchy that marginalised women in the field of technological sciences.

In Portugal, gender stereotypes, which were perpetuated in school textbooks and advertising for years, have reinforced the idea that technology is a male-dominated field. Fonseca et al. (2023) highlight that the Estado Novo dictatorship, which ruled the country for nearly 50 years, played a key role in the continuation of these stereotypes and the delay in implementing truly inclusive gender policies. As the authors note, "Portuguese women, therefore, lived in a state of legal inequality compared to men, with unequal status within the family and the couple, as well as in terms of political, social, labour, and cultural rights" (Fonseca et al., 2023, p. 105). It was only after the fall of the fascist regime on April 25, 1974, that the gradual process of women's emancipation in the country began.

The legacy of gender inequality in Portuguese society is reflected in cyberspace and is evident at various levels of society. In the economy, the shortage of qualified labour affects the ability to meet the growing demand for technology professionals, which can impact not only the country's economic development but also its digitalisation capacity (Cruz-Jesus et al., 2017).

In addition to the economic issue, the lack of diversity in ICT production means that technologies are shaped by the perspectives of those who created them, perpetuating patterns in a field that remains predominantly male (Albusays et al., 2021). As a result, technological solutions are often biased, reproducing discourses that, instead of fostering inclusion, exclude those who do not conform to certain standards.

An example of this logic is the study by Carrera and Carvalho (2020), which aimed to understand the concept of "family" as interpreted by search engine algorithms. By entering the terms "family", "black family", and "white family" into search engines, the authors analysed more than 2,500 images. They discovered that Black women were more often depicted alone or as single mothers[1] compared to White women. This reinforces the image of racialised women as isolated. When searching for "family", the majority of images were of White families (woman, man, and child[ren]). In essence, the algorithm upholds Whiteness as the hegemonic norm, relegating Black women to a condition of solitude.

---

[1] When Black women were not depicted alone, they were portrayed in the role of caregiver or mother, often without the presence of a partner.

Algorithms are designed to replicate the patterns established by their creators. By analysing these patterns, we can better understand how factors such as gender and race shape these dynamics and influence the development and use of ICTs. This relationship is so pronounced that it also exerts a subjective influence on how this inequality impacts the emotional well-being and self-esteem of individuals, especially women (Natansohn, 2013). The socio-cultural impact of this androcentric approach to technology has marginalised women, positioning them as outsiders and contributing to the digital gender gap.

The digital gender gap reflects the historical inequality between women and men, encompassing disparities in access to and the development of digital ICT skills. Castaño (2008, 2019) categorises this gap into three dimensions: access, the use of technological tools, and the production of technologies. In Portugal, public policies addressing the digital gender gap have largely focused on education and employment initiatives (Silveirinha, 2011), often overlooking the underlying social causes of the issue — such as limited access to technological devices, poor-quality connectivity, and low levels of technological literacy influenced by gender or geolocation (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2015). Within this context, recent years have witnessed the rise of cyberfeminist organisations in Portugal dedicated to tackling gender inequality in ICT; they are the core focus of this study.

5. Methodology

This research aims to determine whether the posts produced by technological activist organisations working to reduce digital gender gaps in Portugal exhibit intersectional characteristics. In order to address this, the study poses the following question: is intersectionality reflected in the posts of these organisations? A mixed content analysis (Bardin, 1977/2006) was conducted on all posts made during the first half of 2023 (from January 1 to June 30) on the Instagram accounts of Portuguese Women In Tech, As Raparigas do Código, Geek Girls Portugal, and Women In Tech Portugal. These private technology activist organisations collaborate with the National Digital Skills Initiative e.2030, Portugal INCoDe.2030, the primary governmental initiative promoting gender equality in ICT in Portugal. Data was manually collected on July 17 and 18, 2023, and organised into a database created in Excel.

We chose to analyse Instagram because it is the digital social network most used by the organisations analysed. With over one billion users worldwide (Sprout Social, 2019), the platform was created for users to share photographs and videos with their network of followers. Its main characteristic is the valorisation of visual content.

The content was analysed in two stages. First, all the posts were mapped to identify the main themes addressed by these institutions. This analysis was not part of the initial plan, but during the pre-analysis phase, the need for it became apparent. The thematic survey provided valuable insights into how intersectionality is linked to these themes. Second, we examined whether, beyond gender — which is known to be a focus of these institutions — other factors were considered, such as:

- Race: we sought to determine whether non-White women, particularly Black women, are represented in the posts primarily through images.

- Age: we aimed to identify whether (a) there are posts targeted at teenagers; and (b) there are posts aimed at women over 50 who wish to learn programming or work in technology.

- Geolocation: we investigated whether (a) there are online training courses, events, and activities; and (b) there are physical training courses, events, and activities organised in cities outside Lisbon and Porto.

The selection of these categories is guided by Corrêa et al. (2018), who assert that "the intersection between multiple subjugated identities is fundamental to understanding the social place occupied by individuals in their communicative exchanges, in shaping their identities, and in recognising the identities of others" (p. 154). This perspective reinforces the recognition that gender inequality in ICT is a multifactorial issue, impacting girls and women differently according to their respective social and economic contexts.

6. Results and Discussions

6.1. Content Analysis

A total of 380 posts were analysed, encompassing 788 images, 20 of which were videos (see Table 1). Four posts from Women In Tech Portugal were excluded because, although they appeared in its feed, they had been collaboratively posted by other accounts and not directly by the account itself.

#	Account	Number of posts
1	Portuguese Women In Tech	111
2	As Raparigas do Código	30
3	Geek Girls Portugal	90
4	Women In Tech Portugal	153
	Total	384

Table 1. *Number of posts and images analysed per account*

The distribution of content (see Figure 1) was categorised into five groups: (a) commemorative, for posts on special dates; (b) informative, aimed at promoting events, training, or content that added value in educating the target audience; (c) empowering, consisting of motivational and encouraging messages; (d) representative, featuring images of women in positions of success or power, as well as visuals from events; and (e) partnerships, focused on promoting and thanking partners or sponsors.
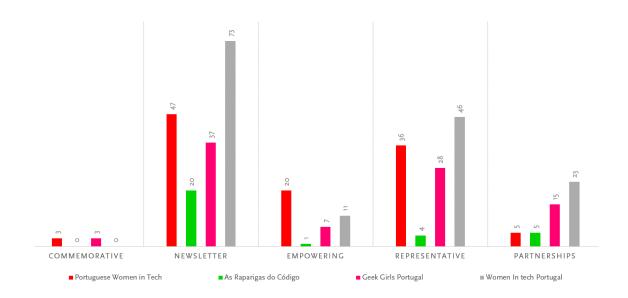
Figure 1. *Distribution of content by category*

The four profiles analysed focus their posts primarily on informative and representative content. As Instagram is a platform that fosters direct interaction with users (Carvalho, 2018), representative content plays a key role. By sharing photographs of women engaging with technology, these profiles aim to spark curiosity and interest among other women, thereby challenging gender stereotypes. Deconstructing such stereotypes in ICT is one of the primary objectives these profiles identify as essential to reducing the digital gender gap in the sector.

Creating content that captures users' interest is crucial for generating engagement, which can be measured through comments, likes, live messages, and shares. These interactions serve as indicators of relevance, influencing the platform's algorithm (Phua et al., 2016). It is essential to employ simple, accessible language that is also rich in information tailored to the target audience to maximise engagement.

In the example shown in Figure 2, a post from the @raparigasdocodigo account provides information about professions in the technology field. Using simple, straightforward language, it outlines the primary functions and skills required for the role. The caption text not only complements the image by directing users to a link with additional information but also addresses potential uncertainties among followers by acknowledging that "with so many options available in the IT world, it can be difficult to know which is the best path to choose". This validation of doubt adds value by fostering a connection with the profile's followers. Furthermore, this and similar posts from the analysed account exemplify efforts to make the internet a more democratic space through the dissemination of information (Reis & Natansohn, 2021).

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

The (Non-)Intersectional Communication of Technological Activist Institutions ... · Micaela Cabral, Sónia de Sá & Carla Cerqueira

Figure 2. *Instagram post by @asraparigasdocódigo*

Source. Retrieved from *Com tantas opções disponíveis no mundo de IT pode tornar-se difícil saber qual o melhor caminho escolher* [Photograph]), by As Raparigas do Código [@asraparigasdocodigo], 2023, Instagram. (https://www.instagram.com/p/CoXEKipLYHi/?img_index=5)

Note. Translation "Cybersecurity Analyst. Functions: Develops and updates new and/or existing security systems. Identifies vulnerabilities in the system. Continuously monitors activity within and outside the infrastructure to respond to potential issues accordingly. Skills: Excellent communication skills and critical thinking. Knowledge of system and network administration. Proficiency in programming". "asraparigasdocodigo: With so many options available in the IT world, it can be challenging to know which path to choose. In this post, you can explore different careers in IT, their roles, and the skills needed to succeed. Join our community, where you'll find mentors working in some of these areas and get all your questions answered. Link in bio".

While the content and representations are used to democratise access and facilitate engagement for girls and women, our analysis revealed an interesting linguistic pattern. Despite operating in the Portuguese context, the majority of the content posted by some accounts was in English. Specifically, Portuguese Women In Tech posted 74% of its content exclusively in English, without translation; As Raparigas do Código posted 100% of its content in Portuguese; Geek Girls Portugal posted 58% in English; Women In Tech Portugal posted 90% in Portuguese. In the case of Geek Girls Portugal, the content was posted in English primarily when the corresponding event or activity was conducted in English. Women In Tech Portugal, while using English in its images, provided Portuguese translations in the caption space in 90% of cases, ensuring accessibility for its audience.

We associate the use of English with two main factors: first, the internationalisation of these accounts within the European Union, which facilitates networking and knowledge exchange, and second, the prevalence of English in materials, documents, and programming languages, making it the dominant language in this field. However, despite 64.2% of Portuguese people aged 18 to 69 speaking English (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2023), the choice of English may still pose an additional barrier for those who wish to enter this area but lack full proficiency in the language.

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

The (Non-)Intersectional Communication of Technological Activist Institutions ... · Micaela Cabral, Sónia de Sá & Carla Cerqueira

6.2. Intersectionality in Posts

6.2.1. Gender and Race

In this category, we analysed only the images in the posts to identify individuals with phenotypes other than White, focusing particularly on the representation of Black women. The identification process involved examining the photos for physical traits characteristic of people of African descent. This focus is significant for two reasons. First, it relates to Portugal's immigration trends, especially since the 2000s, which have seen an influx of immigrants primarily from Portuguese-speaking countries, including Brazil (Vieira et al., 2020) — a group historically impacted by colonial legacies and structural racism. Second, highlighting the presence of Black women is crucial for challenging the notion of Whiteness as a universal standard (Kilomba, 2019). Addressing the experiences of marginalised women reveals an even greater necessity to adopt an intersectional lens in our analysis, incorporating factors such as race, class, religion, and nationality alongside gender (Crenshaw, 2002).

The data analysed (Figure 3) revealed that the Women In Tech Portugal account was the most diverse in this regard, with 22% of its posts featuring women with phenotypes other than White. It was followed by Portuguese Women In Tech with 14%, As Raparigas do Código with 13%, and, lastly, Geek Girls Portugal with 11%.
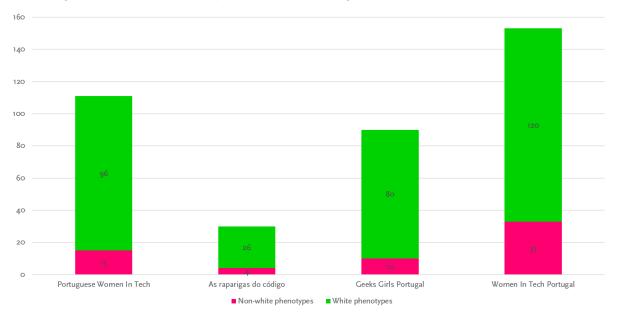
Figure 3. *Representation of women with non-White phenotypes x White phenotypes in posts*

According to the example in Figure 4, Black women are portrayed in leadership roles, challenging the stereotype that they only occupy marginal positions in society. Deconstructing the notion that only White men can hold positions of power is crucial for breaking down gender stereotypes and encouraging girls and women to envision themselves in such roles. Another noteworthy aspect of Women In Tech Portugal's posts is the

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

The (Non-)Intersectional Communication of Technological Activist Institutions ... · Micaela Cabral, Sónia de Sá & Carla Cerqueira

portrayal of Black women alongside other non-White women, avoiding the stereotype of the "only Black person" (Corrêa & Bernardes, 2018, p. 207). In other words, the image of a single Black woman among White women was not used to create a false sense of diversity, except in posts specifically celebrating an individual woman's contributions.

Figure 4. *Instagram post by @witportugal*

Source. Retrieved from *Starting 2023 with 3 ways to develop your leadership skills [Photograph], by Women in Tech Portugal* [@witportugal], 2023, Instagram.
(https://www.instagram.com/p/Cm8nvYolA92/?img_index=2)

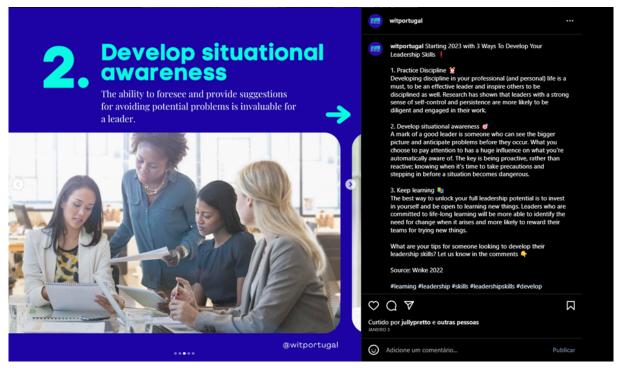However, we found limited diversity on the other pages, except on commemorative dates such as International Women's Day, celebrated globally on March 8. On this occasion, the Portuguese Women In Tech, As Raparigas do Código, and Geek Girls Portugal accounts posted illustrations. While we recognise the importance of diversity in body and racial representation on such commemorative dates, it is crucial to explore the limitations of these representations further.

The data analysis indicates that women with non-White phenotypes are underrepresented on these pages. When they are depicted, however, they often occupy leading roles or share leadership with other women. The continued invisibility of non-White women reflects the persistent inequalities present in society.

6.2.2. Gender and Age

The discourse across the four pages analysed centres on including women in technology, promoting gender equality, and ultimately increasing diversity in a job market still dominated by men. However, upon examining the content, we found limited diversity in terms of the age range of the target audience represented. The content predominantly

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

The (Non-)Intersectional Communication of Technological Activist Institutions ... · Micaela Cabral, Sónia de Sá & Carla Cerqueira

targets young women and young adults who are either beginning their careers or considering a shift towards the technology sector. This aligns with Instagram's primary audience, making such communication appropriate for this demographic.

We sought to identify visual elements targeting women over 60 to determine if these accounts also represent them. We found that they are primarily on the Women In Tech Portugal account but almost always in the role of speakers sharing their expertise. In other words, they are depicted in positions that convey credibility and trust, which reinforces the stereotype that age equates to wisdom while excluding the possibility that older women could also be in a learning environment.

Regarding children and young people in particular (Figure 5), we identified five publications featuring images of teenagers participating in activities specifically designed for them. While we recognise the importance of protecting the image of individuals under the age of 18, we also noted a lack of textual references or activities specifically targeted at teenagers.
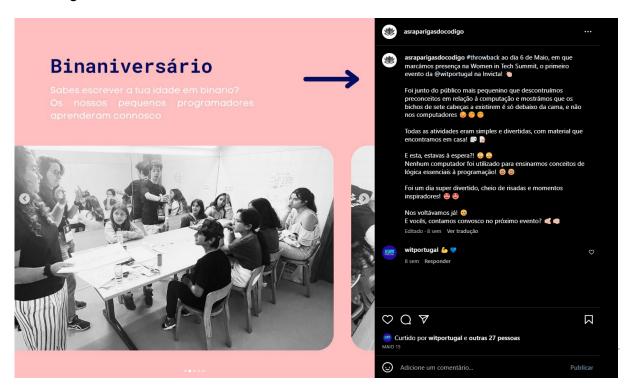

Figure 5. *Post for children and young people*

Source. Retrieved from *#throwback ao dia 6 de Maio, em que marcámos presença na Women in Tech Summit, o primeiro evento da @witportugal na Invicta!* [Photograph], by As Raparigas do Código [@ asraparigasdocodigo], 2023, Instagram. (https://www.instagram.com/p/CsRyWXJszQ9/?img_index=2)

Note. Translation: "Binaniversary. Can you write your age in binary? Our little programmers learned how with us!"; "asraparigasdocodigo: #Throwback to May 6, when we joined the Women in Tech Summit, the first @witportugal event in the Invicta! With the youngest participants, we challenged stereotypes about computing and showed that the only monsters are under the bed — not in computers. All activities were simple and fun, and used materials easily found at home! Surprised? No computers were needed to teach logic concepts essential for programming! It was a fantastic day, filled with laughter and inspiring moments. We'll be back soon! What about you? Will we see you at the next event?".

Narrowing the digital gender gap requires challenging the stereotype that technology is predominantly a male domain. These social roles are deeply entrenched in the stereotypes perpetuated by patriarchal societies (Alozie & Akpan-Obong, 2017) and are among

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

The (Non-)Intersectional Communication of Technological Activist Institutions ... · Micaela Cabral, Sónia de Sá & Carla Cerqueira

the underlying factors contributing to the issues discussed here. They also reinforce "sectoral segregation and discrimination of women in ICT professions and sectors" (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019, p. 187). Masculine-coded environments persist, where women are frequently discouraged from participating and often deemed incapable.

The movement to challenge this paradigm must begin in schools, where girls first develop their skills and interests. Consequently, the lack of diversity in terms of representation or the absence of activities aimed at children and young people suggests that the accounts fail to address the age gap in their action plans or Instagram posts.

Examining the generational divide is crucial to understanding how ICTs are integrated into the routines of different age groups. Those born before the advent of the internet are considered "digital immigrants" and often face greater difficulty adapting to technological advancements. Conversely, individuals born after the creation of the internet, referred to as "digital natives", typically find it easier to navigate and utilise the internet (Ballano et al., 2014). This distinction is significant, as proficiency in using the internet and ICT is closely linked to a willingness to adopt new technologies in everyday life, which can, in turn, enhance the quality of life and foster greater autonomy (Berkowsky et al., 2017).

6.2.3. Gender and Geolocation

Among the publications that provided the location of events or training sessions, 27% were held in Lisbon and/or Porto, 8% were conducted online, and 14% took place in other cities. Notably, Coimbra and Aveiro, two other major cities in the country, featured among these locations. Only one activity was identified as taking place in a town in the interior of the country, at a secondary school (see Figure 6).
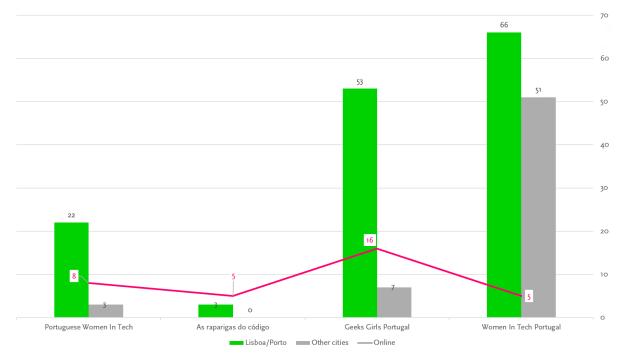

Figure 6. *Cities hosting events*

The scarcity of face-to-face events in smaller cities or the interior of the country excludes a portion of the population unable to afford or manage the long distances separating these areas from major metropolises. However, while in-person events may not reach rural areas, Geek Girls Portugal and Portuguese Women In Tech provide a significant portion of their mentoring and training remotely, theoretically enabling women from across the country to access the content. Additionally, these resources are made available free of charge.

Nevertheless, access to the network and tools provided is not sufficient; one must also know how to use them. Active participation in both the consumption and production of content requires addressing various levels of digital exclusion, such as skills, literacy, and engagement (Castaño, 2008; van Dijk & van Deursen, 2014). Therefore, even if websites offer online training, it is important to question and further explore the effectiveness of such training.

7. Conclusions

This exploratory study aimed to determine whether intersectional communication is employed by technology activism organisations working to promote gender equality in ICT in Portugal. An analysis of the Instagram posts from four such institutions revealed that, while efforts are made to include women of different races, ages, and geographical locations, these initiatives are still insufficient to foster truly intersectional communication.

An analysis of the posts from technology activism institutions in Portugal revealed limited diversity in the representation of women with non-White phenotypes. Women In Tech Portugal stood out as the most diverse, with 22% of its posts featuring non-White women. This institution was particularly notable for portraying Black women in leading roles, challenging stereotypes of marginalisation, and emphasising the importance of diverse representations in deconstructing social imaginaries and encouraging the inclusion of women in positions of power.

In contrast, the other institutions analysed (Portuguese Women In Tech, As Raparigas do Código, and Geek Girls Portugal) displayed less racial diversity in their posts, with percentages of 14%, 13%, and 11%, respectively. This lack of diversity, with the exception of commemorative dates like International Women's Day, highlights a limited representation that requires further development and expansion. It underscores the need for a more consistent and ongoing effort to include non-White women in their content.

Analysing age revealed that the majority of posts lack specific content aimed at girls and women over 60, suggesting a potential gap in the inclusion of various age groups in discussions about technology and female empowerment. This aspect is crucial for fostering intergenerational inclusion and ensuring that women of all ages feel represented and encouraged to engage in the technology sector.

Regarding geolocation, most events and activities promoted by the institutions were concentrated in Lisbon and Porto, highlighting a geographical centralisation that could limit the involvement of women from other regions. Decentralising activities and

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

The (Non-)Intersectional Communication of Technological Activist Institutions ... · Micaela Cabral, Sónia de Sá & Carla Cerqueira

offering online events could help expand the reach and participation of women in diverse locations, thereby addressing regional inequalities in access to ICTs.

The discussion of these results suggests that, despite significant efforts by technology activism institutions in Portugal, there are still considerable challenges in achieving truly intersectional communication. The inclusion of women from various races, age groups, and geographical locations is crucial for a more comprehensive and effective approach to addressing gender inequalities in ICT.

Therefore, technology activism institutions in Portugal should reconsider and broaden their communication strategies to incorporate a strong intersectional approach. This would involve the continuous and diverse representation of women across races and ages, as well as the decentralisation of activities. Such changes are essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable environment where all women can develop and thrive in the ICT sector.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

Acknowledgements

References

Abreu, C. (2017). Narrativas digifeministas: Arte, ativismo e posicionamentos políticos na internet. *Revista Brasileira de Pesquisa (Auto)biográfica*, *2*(4), 134–152. https://doi.org/10.31892/rbpab2525-426X.2017.v2.n4.p134-152

Akotirene, K. (2019). *Interseccionalidade*. Polén.

Albusays, K., Bjorn, P., Dabbish, L., Ford, D., Murphy-Hill, E., Serebrenik, A., & Storey, M.-A. (2021). The diversity crisis in software development. *IEEE Software*, *38*(2), 19–25. https://doi.org/10.1109/MS.2020.3045817

Alozie, N. O., & Akpan-Obong, P. (2017). The digital gender divide: Confronting obstacles to women's development in Africa. *Development Policy Review*, *35*(2), 137–160. https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12204

Amaral, I. (2012). Participação em rede: Do utilizador ao "consumidor 2.0" e ao "prosumer". *Comunicação e Sociedade*, *22*, 131–147. https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.22(2012).1278

As Raparigas do Código [@asraparigasdocodigo]. (2023, February 7). *Com tantas opções disponíveis no mundo de IT pode tornar-se difícil saber qual o melhor caminho escolher* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CoXEKipLYHi/?img_index=5

Babo, I. (2018). Redes, ativismo e mobilizações públicas. Ação coletiva e ação conectada. *Estudos em Comunicação*, *1*(27), 219–244.

Ballano, S., Uribe, A. C., & Munté-Ramos, R.-À. (2014). Young users and the digital divide: Readers, participants or creators on internet? *Communication & Society*, *27*(4), 147–155. https://doi.org/10.15581/003.27.4.147-155

Bardin, L. (2006). *Análise de conteúdo* (L. Reto & A. Pinheiro, Trans.). Edições 70. (Original work published 1977)

Berkowsky, R. W., Sharit, J., & Czaja, S. J. (2017). Factors predicting decisions about technology adoption among older adults. *Innovation in Aging*, *1*(3), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igy002

Boix, M., & Miguel, A. (2013). Os gêneros da rede: Os ciberfeminismos. In G. Nathanson (Ed.), *Internet em código feminino: Teorias e práticas* (pp. 15–38). La Crujía Ediciones.

Brandt, J., & Kizer, S. (2015). From street to tweet. In A. Trier-Bieniek (Ed.), *Feminist theory and pop culture* (pp. 115–127). Sense Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-061-1_9

Carrera, F., & Carvalho, D. (2020). Algoritmos racistas: A hiper-ritualização da solidão da mulher negra em bancos de imagens digitais. *Galáxia*, (43), 99–114. https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-25532020141614

Carvalho, G. (2018). Redes sociais e influenciadores digitais - Uma descrição das influências no comportamento de consumo digital. *Revista Brasileira de Pesquisas de Marketing*, *11*(3), 288–299.

Casemiro, D., & Silva, N. (2021). Teorias interseccionais brasileiras: Precoces e inominadas. *Revista de Ciências do Estado*, 6(2), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.35699/2525-8036.2021.33357

Castaño, C. (2008). La segunda brecha digital y las mujeres. *Telos: Cuadernos de Comunicación e Innovación (digital)*, (75), 1–11.

Castaño, C. (2019). Revolución tecnológica y acceso de las mujeres al espacio público. *Revista Tiempo de Paz*, *134*, 43–51.

Castells, M. (2018). *O poder da identidade* (K. B. Gerhardt, Trans.). Paz & Terra. (Original work published 1996)

Cerqueira, C., & Magalhães, S. (2017). Ensaio sobre cegueiras: Cruzamentos intersecionais e (in)visibilidades nos media. *ex æquo*, (35), 9–20. https://doi.org/10.22355/exaequo.2017.35.01

Chadwick, A. (2017). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford University Press.

Corrêa, L., & Bernardes, M. (2018). Quem tem um não tem nenhum: Solidão e sub-representação de pessoas negras na mídia brasileira. In L. G. Corrêa (Ed.), *Vozes negras em comunicação: Mídia, racismos, resistências* (pp. 203–220). Autêntica.

Corrêa, L., Guimarães-Silva, P., Bernardes, M., & Furtado, L. (2018). Entre o interacional e o interseccional: Contribuições teórico-conceituais das intelectuais negras para pensar a comunicação. *Revista Eco-Pós*, *21*(3), 147–169. https://doi.org/10.29146/eco-pos.v21i3.20198

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, *1*,139–167.

Crenshaw, K. (2002). A interseccionalidade na discriminação de raça e gênero. In *Cruzamentos: Raça e género* (pp. 7–19). Unifem.

Cruz-Jesus, F., Oliveira, T., Bacao, F., & Irani, Z. (2017). Assessing the pattern between economic and digital development of countries. *Information Systems Frontiers*, *19*(4), 835–854. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-016-9634-1

Davis, A. (2016). *Mulheres, raça e classe* (H. Candiani, Trans.). Boitempo. (Original work published 1981)

European Commission. (2022). *European declaration on digital rights and principles for the digital decade*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023C0123(01)

Ferreira, G., & Lima, J. (2020). Ciberfeminismo: Feministas tecem uma nova rede. *Diversitas Journal*, *5*(3), 2263–2296. https://doi.org/10.17648/diversitas-journal-v5i3-1209

Fonseca, I., Barreiros, B., & Pires, C. (2023). Challenges of women's digital inclusion in the Portuguese context. *International Conference on Gender Research*, *6*(1), 104–111.

Gonzalez, L. (1988). Por um feminismo afrolatinoamericano. *Revista Isis Internacional*, 9, 133–141.

Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of Nature*. Routledge.

hooks, b. (2019). *Teoria feminista: Da margem ao centro* (R. Patriota, Trans.). Perspectiva. (Original work published 1984)

Instituto Nacional de Estatística. (2023, October 17). *Inquérito à educação e formação de adultos 2022*. INE.

Kilomba, G. (2019). *Memórias da plantação: Episódios de racismo cotidiano*. Editora Cobogó.

Lamartine, C., & Cerqueira, C. (2023). Entre ciberfeminismo e artivismo: Feminismo em Portugal no Dia Internacional Para a Eliminação da Violência Contra as Mulheres. *Vista*, (11), e023005. https://doi.org/10.21814/vista.4460

Lapa, T., & Vieira, J. (2019). Divisões digitais em Portugal e na Europa. Portugal ainda à procura do comboio europeu? *Sociologia Online*, *21*, 62–82.

Lorde, A. (2019). *Irmã outsider: Ensaios e conferências* (S. Borges, Trans.). Autêntica. (Original work published 1984)

Martinez, F. (2019). Feminismos em movimento no ciberespaço. *Cadernos Pagu*, (56), 1–34. https://doi.org/10.1590/18094449201900560012

Martins, M., & Nunes, M. (2019). Ciberativismo aliado ao movimento feminista: Uma análise da experiência do aplicativo penha. *Mediação*, *22*(29), 111–130.

Nascimento, M. B. (1974). Por uma história do homem negro. *Revista de Cultura Vozes*, *68*(1), 41–45.

Natansohn, G. (2013). *Internet em código feminino: Teorias e práticas*. La Crujía Ediciones.

Parry, D., Johnson, C. W., & Wagler, F. (2018). Fourth wave feminism: Theoretical underpinnings and future directions for leisure research. In D. Parry (Ed.), *Feminisms in leisure studies* (pp. 1–12). Routledge.

Pérez-Escoda, A., García-Ruiz, R., & Lena-Acebo, F. J. (2021). Digital gender gap and digital competence among university students. *Aula Abierta*, *50*(1), 505–514. https://doi.org/10.17811/rifie.50.1.2021.505-5014

Phua, J., Jin, S. V., & Kim, J. (2016). Gratifications of using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat to follow brands: The moderating effect of social comparison, trust, tie strength, and network homophily on brand identification, brand engagement, brand commitment, and membership intention. *Telematics and Informatics*, *33*(1), 176–187. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2016.06.004

Ragnedda, M. (2017). *The third digital divide: A Weberian approach to digital inequalities*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315606002

Recuero, R. (2014). Curtir, compartilhar, comentar: Trabalho de face, conversação e redes sociais do Facebook. *Revista Verso e Reverso*, *XXVIII*(68), 114–124.

Reis, J. S., & Natansohn, G. (2021). Do ciberfeminismo... aos hackfeminismos. In G. Natansohn (Ed.), *Ciberfeminismos 3.0* (pp. 51–66). Labcom.

Ribeiro, D. (2017). *O que é lugar de fala?* Letramento.

Santaella, L. (2004). *Navegar no ciberespaço: O perfil cognitivo do leitor imersivo*. Paulus.

Santaella, L. (2010). *A ecologia pluralista da comunicação: Conectividade, mobilidade, ubiquidade*. Paulus.

Segovia-Pérez, M., Figueroa-Domecq, C., Fuentes-Moraleda, L., & Muñoz-Mazón, A. (2019). Incorporating a gender approach in the hospitality industry: Female executives' perceptions. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 76, 184–193. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.05.008

Silveirinha, M. (2011). Mulheres, tecnologia e comunicação: Para além das receitas. *Media & Jornalismo*, 10(18), 62–83.

Sprout Social. (2019). *Edition XV: Empower & elevate*. https://media.sproutsocial.com/uploads/Sprout-Social-Index-2019.pdf

Timeto, F. (2019). Por uma teoria do ciberfeminismo hoje: Da utopia tecnocientífica à crítica situada do ciberespaço. *Porto Arte*, 24(40), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.22456/2179-8001.95974

van Deursen, A., & van Dijk, J. (2015). Internet skill levels increase, but gaps widen: A longitudinal cross-sectional analysis (2010-2013) among the Duch population. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(7), 782–797. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.994544

van Dijk, J. A. G. M., & van Deursen, A. J. A. M. (2014). *Digital skills: Unlocking the information society*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137437037

Vieira, R., Marques, J., Silva, P., Vieira, A., & Margarido, C. (2020). *Migrações, minorias étnicas, políticas sociais e (trans)formações. Mediação intercultural e intervenção social*. Edições Afrontamento.

Women in Tech Portugal [@witportugal]. (2023, January 3). *Starting 2023 with 3 ways to develop your leadership skills* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/Cm8nvYoIA92/?img_index=2

Zimmerman, T. (2017). Intersectionality: The fourth wave feminist Twitter community. *Atlantis*, 38(1), 54–70.

Biographical Notes

Micaela Cabral is a PhD candidate in Communication Sciences at the University of Beira Interior. She holds a master's degree in Strategic Communication, Advertising, and Public Relations from the same institution. Currently, she is a research grant recipient from the Foundation for Science and Technology. Her research focuses on gender equality policies in information and communication technologies in Portugal, technological activism, network communication, and strategic communication.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0261-3679

Email: micaela.larbac@gmail.com

Address: Laboratório de Comunicação e Artes – LABCOM, Universidade da Beira Interior, Covilhã, Portugal

Sónia de Sá is a lecturer at the University of Beira Interior, where she researches television and new media, gender studies, and the representations of minorities, particularly Roma communities, Black women, and the LGBTQ+ community.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0964-3630

Email: soniasa@ubi.pt

Address: Universidade da Beira Interior — Rua Marquês D'Ávila e Bolama 6201-001 Covilhã

Carla Cerqueira is a lecturer at the Universidade Lusófona, Centre for Research in Applied Communication, Culture, and New Technologies (Porto, Portugal).
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6767-3793
Email: carla.cerqueira@ulusofona.pt
Address: Rua Augusto Rosa, nº 24, 4000-098 Porto - Portugal

"I Learn Here What I Don't Learn Anywhere Else": An Analysis of an Online Healthcare Community

Aldina Margato
Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal/Instituto Superior Miguel Torga, Coimbra, Portugal
Conceptualisation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, writing – review & editing

Jorge Vieira
Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal
Conceptualisation, methodology, writing – review & editing

Abstract

This article aims to analyse the dynamics underlying communication within an online health community focused on carers, titled "Vencer Autismo" (Overcoming Autism). The community's central platform was a Facebook page, supported by a weekly live programme moderated by moderators. A qualitative research approach was adopted, employing digital ethnography and interviews. The empirical study spanned over nine months, from September 2022 to May 2023, with the primary phase consisting of ten weeks of digital ethnography, followed by 10 interviews. The analysis of the relationships between identified elements revealed that the knowledge shared within the community is viewed as rare by its members. This knowledge is based on lived experiences, with an emphasis on practical learning, testing, and irreverent discourse. Regular interactions were found to strengthen relationships, while the sense of inclusion served as a unifying force. Trust, another key theme, was found to be volatile—and in constant development — reliant on minimal factors such as moderators refraining from commenting on topics outside their expertise. Transparency emerged as a shared value within the community. The role of moderators was also recognised, with their participation justified in ensuring that interactions remain respectful.

"Aprendo Aqui o que Não Aprendo em Mais Lado Nenhum": Análise de uma Comunidade Online na Área da Saúde

Resumo

Este artigo procura analisar as dinâmicas que sustentam a comunicação de uma comunidade online na área da saúde focada nos cuidadores, intitulada "Vencer Autismo", que tinha como epicentro uma página do Facebook e um programa semanal em direto gerido por moderadores. A pesquisa privilegia a abordagem qualitativa: etnografia digital e entrevistas. O trabalho empírico decorreu durante nove meses, de setembro de 2022 a maio de 2023, tendo como fase determinante a etnografia digital realizada durante 10 semanas, a que se seguiram 10 entrevistas. A sucessiva cadeia de relações entre os elementos identificados permitiu descobrir que o conhecimento que ali se adquire é considerado raro pelos seus membros, se sustenta na

experiência vivida, notando-se a valorização do aprender a fazer, da prova, a par do discurso irreverente, mas também que o contacto regular beneficia as relações e que o sentimento de inclusão atua como agregador. A confiança, outra das coordenadas estudadas, revela-se volátil — e ocorre num processo em construção — e depende de fatores mínimos, como o facto de os moderadores recusarem pronunciar-se sobre assuntos que não dominam. A transparência surge como o aspeto consensual. O papel dos moderadores é reconhecido e justificado também pela garantia da não civilidade das participações.

Palavras-chave
comunidade online, participação online, inteligência coletiva, inclusão online, confiança nas redes sociais

1. Introduction

Online communities have become a key part of everyday communication, influencing various aspects of daily life, from personal and family matters to professional and niche interests. Their growth has been significantly enhanced by the rise of social media platforms (SMPs), which enable instantaneous connections between individuals sharing common interests or goals.

It is possible to identify various types of online communities, each based on different platforms and serving distinct purposes and values. Several studies have explored the unique characteristics of specific communities (Xie et al., 2021), their benefits (Hwang & Foote, 2021; Weld et al., 2024), and their potential drawbacks (Weld et al., 2024). Some research also highlights the epistemological potential and innovative features of these communities, such as the creation of knowledge that goes beyond common sense or established scientific frameworks (Zaslow, 2012).

This research aims to explore the dynamics of an online health community created to support carers, with a focus on two key aspects: information acquisition and trust-building. Digital ethnography formed the primary methodological approach, from which six categories emerged and were further developed through interviews: "participation", "interactivity", "knowledge", "sharing", "credibility", and "trust".

The article is based on the premise that analysing an online community is a qualitative social research approach that offers insights into how people participate and interact digitally, sharing fragments of their lives and exchanging opinions to generate knowledge (Vilches et al., 2023).

An online community provides access to people's spontaneous and unfiltered behaviours, which are part of daily life and foster strong bonds between participants. These can be studied by analysing interactions, the intensity, and the quality of communication (Vilches et al., 2023), all while adhering to Goffman's (1974) view that people construct and reconstruct the course of interactions. As Kozinets (2020) emphasises, online communities are a unique social phenomenon where personal and intentional choices are made and materialised through connections formed at various levels.

Within health communities, the sub-theme of "carers" provided an opportunity to analyse the credibility of knowledge and the establishment of trust. The Facebook page of the Vencer Autismo (Overcoming Autism) community was selected for its diverse content in various formats because it was managed by the founders and for its weekly programme that allowed for live interaction. This Facebook page served as the community's focal point, with its activities extending to a website, private WhatsApp groups addressing specific autism issues, live talks, and workshops.

This article is structured in six sections. Following the introduction, a literature review is provided on online communities, the evolving conceptions of such communities, and studies focused on health and carer-related communities. The third section describes the online community under study, while the fourth outlines the methodology and procedures used. Interviews were conducted to explore themes in greater depth. The fifth section presents the findings, and the sixth offers conclusions and suggestions for future research.

2. Online Communities

With the expansion of SMPs — marked by the launch of Facebook in 2004 — the development of online communities has flourished. These communities can take various forms, such as forums, social media pages, websites, blogs, or WhatsApp groups (Amado, 2014).

The growth of online communities has been enhanced by the performance of algorithms in SMPs. These algorithms determine what we see in an SMP by prioritising content shared by friends over other perspectives, helping us find information with a sense of familiarity (Gillespie, 2014). On the positive side, algorithms offer a privileged means of gaining knowledge, facilitate participation in social and political discourse, and help us connect with our audiences. According to Gillespie (2014), algorithms have become essential to knowledge acquisition, though they may also obscure influential interests in the cognitive process.

The GlobalWebIndex platform (Mander & Koch, 2020) reports that online communities have become an increasingly trusted source of information, with this trust growing among young digital natives. The *Era of We* report highlights that they place greater trust in news shared within a community context than in traditional media spaces.

Online communities have been studied across various scientific fields. A search on the Perish platform (conducted in May 2024), which retrieves articles from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar in chronological order while identifying keywords and authors, revealed that the first 20 results fall under the categories of "health", "IT", "education", "psychology", "management", and "marketing". Thus, this research incorporates interdisciplinary contributions that align with its objectives.

Online communities are increasingly diverse in their objectives and motivations. What unites them is their ability to help participants find practical solutions (Liu et al.,

2020). In the Vencer Autismo community, we observed relational dynamics and, above all, the benefits for users in terms of information, knowledge, and trust.

Rheingold (1993), a pioneer in conceptualising and analysing so-called "virtual" communities, studied the WELL community and argued that an online community possesses a coherent identity shaped by several key characteristics: people meeting in an online environment, engaging in public discussions over a sustained period, and sharing emotions. He viewed connectivity as a space that enables emotional exchange and debate with the potential to generate knowledge.

The history of online communities entered a new phase with the introduction of the concept of "communities of practice" and its expansion into the digital sphere as online communities of practice. Coined by Wenger (1998), the term "communities of practice" emphasises the importance of interaction and experience-sharing in fostering a conducive environment for learning from others, based on the premise that knowledge emerges through sharing. This concept has been particularly influential in professional and educational contexts.

Preece (2001) highlighted the importance of online communities for their members, as they enable interaction and information exchange, with their success hinging on socialisation and usability. Sociability encompasses objectives and policies, while usability includes dialogue, support, information, and accessibility. Subsequent studies — such as Ridings and Gefen (2004), Hwang and Foote (2021), and Xie et al. (2021), among others reviewed in the literature — have identified purpose, people, policies, dialogue, support, and ease of navigation as key factors in member satisfaction. According to Ridings and Gefen (2004), the primary motivations for participating in online communities include exchanging information, seeking support, building friendships, and engaging in recreational activities.

Online communities, whether more or less specialised, can be seen as spaces for sharing information. Lévy (2000) argues that they create the conditions for the emergence of "collective intelligence", which he defines as a body of knowledge shared through memory and based on mutual recognition, leading to learning. The community is crucial because it serves as a site of continuous negotiation. Collective intelligence thus emerges as a powerful strategy for problem-solving in the age of internet proliferation (Lévy, 2000). Alongside Lévy, Castells (2002), Tapscott and Williams (2006), Surowiecki (2014), and Malone and Bernstein (2022) have also explored the concept, incorporating this interpretative framework.

Kozinets (2020) argued that the complex world of online communities not only reflects lived experiences but also becomes a unique social phenomenon. Their complexity arises from the fact that they are chosen by individuals, sometimes temporarily and to varying degrees. These communities are "transnational and local" spaces (Rokka & Moisander, 2009). Echoing Bauman (2000), Kozinets advocates for the liquid, unstable, and unpredictable nature of these communities. Researchers highlighting the potential for knowledge-building include authors like Benkler (2006), who believes that sharing

can provide autonomy and freedom, and Gorbis (2013), who suggests that online communities can incorporate structural axes for the future.

2.1. The Interactive Consumer

To frame what is considered structural in online communities, Bruns (2014) highlights the concept of "produsage", which suggests that the consumer is also a producer — a "prosumer". This idea, introduced by Toffler (1980), predicted that technological advancements would lower the barriers between consumer and producer, placing greater value on participation and collaboration. Bruns (2014) argues that consumers are not simply passive; they are also producers of information. Their role is flexible, allowing them to contribute to and modify content, constantly adapting within a collaborative model.

Bruns' (2014) assumption forms the foundation of his concept of the "online community". He distinguishes an online community from an online group, along with other audience categories, by considering the level of interaction and shared values. In a group, the connection is often centred around a specific topic, with weak cohesion and minimal participation demands. In contrast, the online community is characterised by a core group of highly engaged users who share strong values, practices, and knowledge. Bruns (2014) also identifies additional layers or cores of participants who, as they become more distant, show less commitment. Thus, the community adopts a more complex structure, comprising both a centre and a periphery. The online community is seen as another element of the fragmented public sphere, made up of a network of publics, highlighting the advantage of representing a group united by shared interests with its own rules and practices.

Bruns and Bahnisch (2009) analysed the dynamics of online communities, explaining that the structure based on levels of participation makes it easier for less committed individuals to contribute. Another key characteristic is the equal opportunity for participation, irrespective of ability, allowing each user to make a meaningful contribution. In terms of emotions, they highlight how the shared generation of content fosters a sense of ownership among participants. The authors recommend that website and RSO managers respect these dynamics of online communities. They suggest, among other things, being as open as possible to new users, encouraging the community to differentiate between good and bad content, and, as the community defines its values and objectives, promoting the emergence of leaders. They also stress that communities evolve, and it is important to support and encourage these changes.

Regarding the concept of "consumer", Couldry (2004) argues that the new media ecosystem has blurred the distinction between consumer and citizen. The productive consumer must be understood within the broader framework of public space, connection, and participation. In the context of new media, participation takes on new dimensions. Carpentier (2020) distinguishes three categories: "access", "interaction", and "participation" itself. Access refers to the possibility of being heard, representing the opportunities created for communication to take place. While readers may be given a voice, they do not influence what is produced or how. The second level, interaction, involves

the articulation of socio-communicative relationships within the media sphere, enabling content co-production in groups or communities. However, the final decision remains in the hands of media organisations. Participation, in contrast, implies that citizens are not only interlocutors and co-producers but also co-decision makers and creators. This new consumer also navigates an economy in which attention has become both scarce and fluid. Individuals consume and interact across platforms, influenced by emerging technologies and algorithmic changes (Myllylahti, 2019). Additionally, the spaces where media engagement occurs must be considered. As the traditional division of time between work, home, and leisure becomes less rigid, media consumption increasingly takes place in hybrid time (Kowalski & Jung, 2021).

A study by Hwang and Foote (2021) on participation in Reddit communities found that engagement in smaller communities offers additional benefits, including increased knowledge, trust, and support. Trust, in turn, is influenced by familiarity with other community members and shared interests, as evidenced in an analysis of participation in two hyperlocal, community-produced newspapers (Gonçalves et al., 2024).

Small communities are often centred around highly specific topics and a singular purpose. Even if members engage at varying levels, the community retains a distinctive character that enhances the potential for interaction. In these niche spaces, expectations are high, as participants seek high-quality information, often associated with the presence of experts. Consequently, these communities are also perceived as more effective (Hwang & Foote, 2021).

2.2. Knowledge and Trust

In the health domain, access to information and the establishment of trust are crucial, highlighting the need to understand motivations, knowledge acquisition processes, and the perceived added value of participation. To explore these aspects, we draw on studies related to health communities, particularly those focusing on carers. Two case studies from Portugal (Guilherme, 2013; Pestana, 2010) found that the primary motivation for joining a health-related community was obtaining and exchanging information. One of the key benefits identified was the opportunity to ask specific questions to strangers in a dedicated space (Pestana, 2010). Similarly, Ridings et al. (2022) emphasise that virtual communities provide access to specialised information. This factor fosters a sense of closeness among members, particularly in health-related discussions, ultimately contributing to the development of trust.

A study by Lupton (2016) on a community focused on pregnancy and motherhood highlights the significance of detailed information alongside other key aspects such as immediacy, regularity, entertainment, personalisation, practicality, professionalism, reassurance, impartiality, and opportunities for user participation and content creation. Similarly, an analysis of a community of mothers with children with sensory disorders concludes that collaborative communication fosters a distinct form of knowledge — one

that is neither purely medical nor simple advice. Instead, it enables the emergence of a new epistemology grounded in the sharing of lived experiences (Zaslow, 2012).

In addition to the advantage of specialised and distinctive knowledge, some studies have highlighted the role of emotional support. A survey of an amyotrophic lateral sclerosis community (Guilherme, 2013) found that emotional support often takes precedence over informational motivation during participation, even though community members may not consciously recognise this. This conclusion aligns with research on knowledge sharing in online mothers' communities (Xie et al., 2021), which found that emotional support is sometimes more essential than information. Xie et al.'s (2021) review of studies on mothers' communities further concludes that mothers primarily value experience-based accounts and tend to accept what is most popular within the community.

With regard to credibility, several studies highlight key factors that contribute to its establishment in online communities, including the reliability of information sources, presentation style, and supporting evidence (Zhao et al., 2024). Another perspective emphasises the importance of perceived usefulness. Higher-quality information, combined with consumer comprehension, enhances credibility. As a result, consumers rely not only on indicators of the source's expertise and the digital "word of mouth" system but also on their perception of the information's usefulness. Perceived usefulness significantly influences information adoption and serves as a key motivator for acceptance (Gerashi et al., 2023).

One of the key factors in consolidating communities is the sense of trust, which develops through relationships with others and the ability to include them in a shared frame of reference (Matos-Silva et al., 2012). Trust becomes particularly significant when members recognise organisations and professionals as credible sources (Zhao et al., 2024). Research also suggests that the presence of moderators can play a crucial role in fostering trust, while humour can serve as a tool for negotiating it (Lovatt et al., 2017). Additionally, the *Digital News Report Portugal* (Cardoso et al., 2024) highlights transparency as the most important factor for trust in news media, with 79% of Portuguese respondents identifying it as essential.

3. Vencer Autismo Community

The Vencer Autismo community was founded in 2010 by a couple with an autistic daughter. Associated with a non-governmental organisation, it operated through a website and a Facebook page, which served as platforms for hosting talks and workshops. This research focused on the activity of its Facebook page, which had 240,000 followers in 2022.

At the start of this analysis, the community regularly broadcasted the *Café Vencer* (Overcoming Café) programme, providing an opportunity to observe live interactions among members. The live programme was moderated by the community manager, who holds a degree in Business Management, alongside professionals in education and psychology.

The website's managers were contacted and informed about the ongoing research, particularly the non-participant observation, and were open to collaborating. One edition of the weekly programme publicised the study and encouraged participation. Confidentiality

and the coding of all collected information were ensured at every stage of the research to prevent any form of identification and to safeguard personal data. All participants remained anonymous, with their names never disclosed — only numerical identifiers were used. It is worth noting that the group was open access at the time, allowing anyone to join without providing any personal information.

The page's popularity was evident not only from its number of followers but also from external recognition. In 2022, its founder was invited by a member of the European Parliament to visit the European Parliament and share their experience. By mid-2023, the community had adopted a parallel subscription-based format.

The Portuguese Association for Autism Developmental Disorders (https://www.appda-lisboa.org.pt/) describes autism as a developmental disorder of the nervous system, characterised by a wide range of symptoms that are often not immediately identified in childhood. Key indicators include deficits in social and emotional reciprocity, limited sharing of interests, emotions, and affections, as well as difficulties in understanding and using language. In other words, autism involves challenges in communication and social interaction, which, according to the association, can vary in severity. Parental involvement is crucial in navigating diagnoses and accessing therapies through the National Health Service, though interviewees noted that available support may be insufficient.

According to one of the interviewees, a carer of an autistic child, institutional and educational support is scarce.

> Our son was referred to the National Health Service and began receiving speech or occupational therapy. But it is far from sufficient. The health services and the state provide too little. That is why these groups are so active. (Interviewee 3)

This analysis focuses on communication dynamics and does not aim to explore the medical dimension or institutional support.

4. Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative methodology, combining digital ethnography and interviews. Initially, all forms of communication on the Vencer Autismo Facebook page were monitored for nine months, from September 2022 to May 2023. This phase served as an exploratory process of documentation, followed by a more detailed application of digital ethnography over 10 weeks. The analysis was concluded when it was determined that the collected data had reached saturation (Burrell, 2017). After this stage, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted — two with moderators and eight with community members — allowing us to validate findings and explore private aspects in greater depth.

We observed and documented all communication formats, including content and interactions. The initial phase of the research aimed to identify the most strategically relevant "fieldwork" for analysis, following one of the steps proposed by Burrell (2017).

Over 10 weeks, from October 1 to December 8, we conducted a detailed data collection through non-participant observation of the dynamics. The guiding principle of this work was an openness to the nuances of what is referred to as "digital culture", particularly the creative commons and other modes of digital sharing and collaboration (Pink et al., 2015). This analysis focused on an open-access Facebook page, which may have influenced participants to maintain a certain level of decorum in their interactions.

During the exploratory phase, special attention was given to key figures, online traces — textual, graphic, and other audiovisual elements — interactions, and consociality, that is, what is shared (Kozinets, 2020). The data collection process considered emerging languages and symbols, routines and rituals, storytelling approaches, the sharing of beliefs, values, and power dynamics, as well as connections to other platforms, online initiatives, popular videos, and announcements.

When designing the interviews, we first evaluated which model would be most suitable for exploring topics that are both broad and subjective. Following Braun and Clarke (2006) and Ferreira (2014), we defined two methodological paths: prioritising thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and adopting the comprehensive interview approach (Ferreira, 2014).

A total of 10 interviews were conducted via Zoom, the first two with the main moderators. The remaining interviewees were invited through the Facebook page and the weekly programme. Parents — particularly mothers — grandparents, and teachers of autistic pupils agreed to participate. Their professional backgrounds include teaching, technical assistance, administration, and engineering (Table 1). All interviewees were informed about the confidentiality of their responses, and informed consent was obtained.

Interviewees	Age	Occupation	Region	Relationship
Interviewee 1	50 years old	Management	North	Father
Interviewee 2	33 years old	Communication	North	Acquaintance
Interviewee 3	43 years old	Engineering	North	Father
Interviewee 4	44 years old	Technical Assistant	Centre	Mother
Interviewee 5	38 years old	Engineering	Centre	Mother
Interviewee 6	54 years old	Teaching	Madeira	Acquaintance
Interviewee 7	58 years old	Technical assistance	Centre	Grandmother
Interviewee 8	42 years old	Technical Assistant	Lisbon	Mother
Interviewee 9	34 years old	Administration	Centre	Nephew
Interviewee 10	39 years old	Teaching	Algarve	Acquaintance

Table 1. *Description of the Interviewees*

The main themes of the interviews emerged from digital ethnography. The questions were structured around six dimensions of analysis — "participation", "interactivity", "knowledge acquisition", "sharing", "credibility", and "trust" — which were grouped in pairs. During the conversation, the approach was to allow the interviewee time to feel comfortable and to assess their connection to the topics.

5. Findings

5.1. Monitoring the Vencer Autismo Facebook Page

The initial analysis of the page highlighted the frequent use of blue heart emojis and prayer symbols, as well as a preference for sharing personal experiences through comments. Exchanges between members also revealed that some parents had created separate WhatsApp groups to address specific issues, aiming to facilitate urgent responses. The moderators' role in leading the weekly Café Vencer broadcast stood out, particularly their empathy towards members. Notably, newcomers to the programme were generally well-received.

From October 1 to December 8, 2022, the page's activity was monitored using an editorial calendar, broken down by the number of posts made each week, the breakdown of production, and post categories. It was concluded that there was almost daily posting (Table 2). In other words, the page user obtained information at a regular pace. The days with the highest number of posts were Wednesday, when the *Café Vencer* event takes place, followed by Thursday and Friday. Sunday had the fewest posts. In the breakdown by post category, the most common was the announcement of activities (Table 3 and Figure 1), followed by messages from the team running the page, especially the founder. Their narratives are based on personal testimonies and feature storytelling.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
0	1	1	0	3	1	0
0	1	1	3	2	2	0
0	1	2	2	3	3	0
0	2	1	1	2	2	0
0	1	1	2	2	2	0
0	1	1	2	2	1	1
2	3	0	3	1	1	0
0	1	3	2	1	2	0
1	1	0	2	0	1	1
0	1	1	2	1	0	0

Table 2. *Number of posts*

10 weeks	
Number of posts	**Categories**
80	Internal activity announcements: *Café Vencer*, free and paid lectures, workshops
	External announcements
	Weekly programmes
	Explanations about autism/graphics
	Videos featuring the team
	Other: funny videos, surveys, and photo shoots

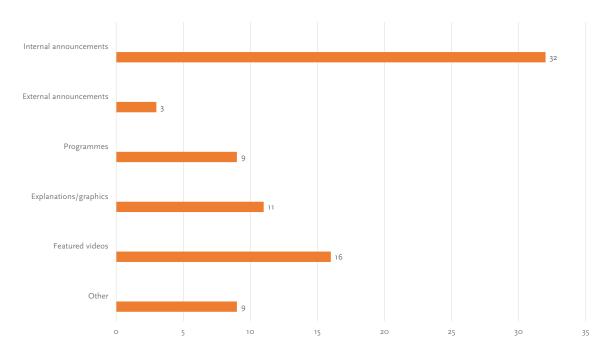**Table 3.** *Breakdown of production*

Figure 1. *Breakdown of categories over 10 weeks*

The communication on the Vencer Autismo website also employed straightforward, informative narratives (Figure 2), frequently addressing autism-related issues in a question-and-answer format. According to the interviews, design professionals were hired for this purpose. As a result, there was an effort to simplify the message while also making it engaging and light-hearted, thereby reducing any negative connotations associated with the topic.

Figure 2. *Example of a graphic announcement*

Source. Retrieved from *Sabemos que algumas crianças podem ter atraso na fala e que muitas desenvolvem esta competência mais tarde do que a média* [Photograph], by Vencer Autismo [@associacaovencerautismo], 2022, Facebook. (https://www.facebook.com/associacaovencerautismo/posts/ pfbid037YznrAogaPcHoPTMJ2qpXGoKzNFh2YkhkvGp8Aevj42UxM99D363pmcwGwd4Zn5fl)

Note. Translation: "Q. How to stimulate speech? A. Speech development progresses in several stages. We need to assess which stage of communication your child is currently at. It is important not to anticipate what our child wants and instead allow them the space to attempt communication with us".

5.2. Analysis of the *Café Vencer* Programme

Simultaneously, a detailed analysis was conducted of 10 editions of the *Café Vencer* programme, which aired between October 12, 2022 and January 4, 2023. The programme addressed questions submitted throughout the week, as well as those that emerged during the live broadcast (Figure 3).

Greetings ➡ Question ➡ Answer ⬌ Interaction ⬌ Suggestions

Figure 3. *Stages of the programme*

The moderators and other participants provided the answers. The moderators were identified as "Moderator 1" and subsequent numbers, while participants were also assigned a numerical designation, such as "Participant 1". The moderators rotated throughout the sessions, though they always worked in pairs. The most regular technician, who holds a degree in Educational Sciences, was occasionally paired with a psychologist. The founder of the website and other professionals associated with the organisation also participated. The programme starts with a welcome note addressing the participants by name, and the initial minutes are used to encourage conversation. If someone shares their location, others often mimic this behaviour, and it becomes apparent that participants come from various regions of the country, ranging from Covilhã to Porto, as well as from abroad, including England and Switzerland. A rule of the programme is that no questions go unanswered. During the survey, only one question remained unanswered.

Concerning the moderators' positions, they were careful not to comment on controversial topics, such as medication and the use of cannabis. They refrained from offering answers in scientific areas outside their expertise: "I have no knowledge, no studies. I also don't have the experiences of others to share on this subject" (Moderator 1). A notable example occurred when a mother claimed that coffee helped calm her son down, which sparked a debate within the group. Some parents agreed, asserting a cause-and-effect relationship, while others disagreed. During the broadcast, the moderators openly admitted that they didn't know the correct answer (Moderator 1 and Moderator 2).

The relationship between likes and comments was also analysed, revealing that those who engaged with a like were more likely to participate in the conversations, indicating a higher level of involvement (Figure 4).
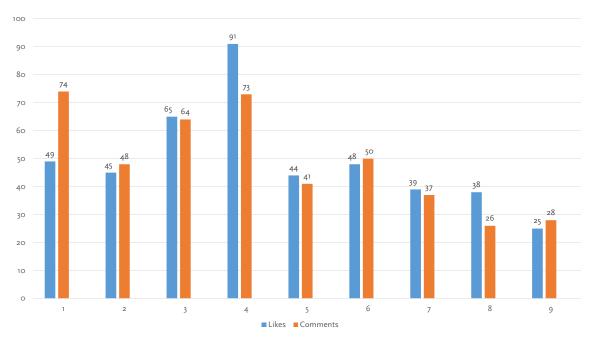
Figure 4. *Participant reactions*

Participants' involvement in the community was clearly visible through their regular comments on various posts, demonstrating the active participation of many members in different ways. As one of the moderators mentioned: "X never misses a *Café* [*Vencer*]" (Moderator 1).

From the content of the conversations, it is evident that some participants had previously attended lectures and participated in workshops, reflecting a connection to in-person events. The comments were almost always accompanied by emojis, with the most frequently used symbols being the blue heart, the faith symbol, and the gratitude symbol, which added an emotional layer to the verbal expressions.

In terms of content, the testimonies shared by the moderators about their experiences generated the most comments, indicating that they play a key role in driving communication. The programme that attracted the most attention was the one featuring the founder's daughter, a young autistic girl who, despite her condition, successfully entered university, serving as an inspiring example of resilience and achievement.

The main focus of communication centred on practical strategies for addressing everyday challenges, such as getting a child to take a bath. Regular participants contributed additional information to that provided by the moderators, creating a second layer of insight. As Bruns (2014) proposed, different levels of participation can be identified. The topic of aggression sparked strong engagement, with the discussion of dramatic themes generating intense participation that reflected identification and empathy: "my son is like that too. I would try to keep him away from that colleague" (Participant 1).

The posts made by moderators who have lived through the challenges of autism generate the highest levels of participation, particularly when they share personal experiences.

This reaction aligns with the concept proposed by philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1976) in *Phénoménologie de la Perception* (Phenomenology of Perception). The sharing of concrete cases and the subsequent problem-solving were other key features of the broadcasts. Lastly, it is worth noting the expression of gratitude, as one participant remarked: "they helped me a lot, they said things I hadn't thought of, so good! I even feel lighter and more energised. Very, very grateful" (Participant 2).

5.3. Analysing the Interviews

Regarding the main reasons for participating in this community, replies varied from the need for support and the search for knowledge to the immediate response for problem-solving. The first two reasons had already been highlighted in a study on the amyotrophic lateral sclerosis community (Guilherme, 2013), which concluded that, initially, participants' motivation is to seek knowledge. However, over time, emotional support becomes more significant and even outweighs the initial drive for information. Analysing the interviews, however, allowed us to expand the "support" dimension. For the participants, companionship, acceptance, understanding, a sense of belonging, and respect were crucial: "socialising with other parents was very important; we are not alone. We feel that nobody understands us, and there is a common ground for understanding" (Interviewee 3), and "often, these parents have nobody to talk to about these problems. They feel alone" (Interviewee 6).

Some carers have distanced themselves from friends and family due to their children's behaviour, which is often perceived as socially unacceptable. They speak with pain about the lack of understanding from their family and friends. It is precisely this understanding and sense of inclusion that they find within the community: "for parents who find it difficult to keep friends who are unwilling to engage with their autistic child or those who have self-censored, it was reassuring to feel understood" (Interviewee 8).

At the same time, they mentioned having learned strategies for dealing with prejudice: "this participation has helped me fight the [autism] stigma" (Interviewee 4). One of the interviewees also valued the respect he felt: "having people there who respect autism is the most important thing I take away from this participation" (Interviewee 5).

The positive tone of the programme reflects a perspective on autism that deserves praise. Several parents mentioned that the programme has given them hope and a sense of encouragement in the face of their difficult situation: "people feel lost, but then we offer ways to approach things, and hope begins to emerge" (Interviewee 3); "they talk about hope at the end of the tunnel" (Interviewee 4).

Regarding interaction, most members acknowledge that they listen more than they speak. As Carpentier (2020) points out, participation can occur at different levels, ranging from simple access to reaction and active participation with impact. However, they feel compelled to intervene whenever they identify with one testimony and believe they can offer help. Another aspect they value is the quick response to problems, as in the context of autism, a question can arise at any time.

When analysing the "knowledge" category, the way it is communicated stands out, with participants praising the use of simple, concrete language and useful information drawn from experience and focused on solutions: "we're talking about simple, practical knowledge. It's not theoretical. The advantage is that it presents a range of solutions for our child" (Interviewee 9); "it's very important to hear 'I've been there'" (Interviewee 8); "I've been there, done this and that, and it worked" (Interviewee 3).

The fact that some suggestions differ from the guidance provided by conventional sources — such as doctors and therapists — appeals to certain community members. The alternative approach is seen as knowledge beyond the obvious: "it's more than complementary information. Everything I've learned and been able to put into practice has come from Vencer Autismo. There is so much sharing among parents that the information is invaluable" (Interviewee 3).

> We learned how to stay calm during a tantrum. I learned that it was important for the child to accept me, that they needed to build a relationship with me, and that this required time. Also, the solutions might not be conventional. (Interviewee 6)

"There doesn't have to be a politically correct approach to dealing with these issues" (Interviewee 6).

Further to the topic of knowledge, the interviewees primarily highlight the practical aspects of the methods, emphasising that the knowledge gained is often very specific and rare: "we learn from the experience of others, but in a very subtle way, from small things" (Interviewee 10).

> I found knowledge there that I hadn't seen anywhere else. It's useful knowledge, teaching you how to do things. This kind of knowledge comes from group meetings and the sharing of experiences. Nowadays, the habit of gathering has been lost, but these meetings can be incredibly productive in terms of learning. (Interviewee 6)

He also adds that he appreciates the freedom parents have when it comes to making choices: "it's a space for parents to reflect and apply the teachings in their own way. It provides a sense of comfort" (Interviewee 6).

The issue of credibility, along with trust in the information, seems to be grounded in the founder's personal experience and the practical application of the teachings. However, trust was the aspect that interviewees reflected on the most. Notably, they highlighted initial scepticism and the perception of the process as ongoing: "I began to trust when exchanging information with other parents started making sense. And then, of course, when we confirmed the results. The results give you confidence" (Interviewee 8); "there was initial mistrust. We [with her husband] analysed it. I also take part in two other parent' groups" (Interviewee 5).

Some respondents appreciated that the moderators acknowledged not knowing everything. They also highlighted the authenticity and transparency of the information, particularly the moderators' clarity regarding which lectures and workshops required payment. "the moderators don't give opinions on medication. They don't try to influence. They don't speak with absolute certainty. Their suggestions may or may not work. They convey authenticity effectively" (Interviewee 4).

> First, I had a look and analysed the page. I realised they project authenticity. They make themselves available to help and respond, which is reassuring because they understand what we're feeling. Support, help, clarification, and guidance contribute to trust. (Interviewee 10)

In the final part of the analysis, the results of the digital ethnography were combined with the key insights from the interviews (Table 4), leading to the conclusion that the greatest added value for this community lies in knowledge based on detailed and concrete procedures derived from lived experience — knowledge not readily available elsewhere. However, acquiring this knowledge cannot be separated from psychological and emotional dimensions, such as support and a sense of inclusion.

	Netnography	Interviews
Participation	Support and help	Counteracting the isolation of dealing with this issue
	Personalised greetings	Always welcomed
	Reporting their experiences	Experiences paired with strategies
	Everyday problems	Immediate response
		Helps deal with prejudice
		Listening more than participating
		Lively approach to autism
Interactivity	Clarify doubts	When it impacts the individuals
	Validating testimonies	Moderators' friendliness and empathy
	They ask what topics individuals want to see addressed	Gaining skills
Knowledge	Simple language	Feasible, accessible solutions
	Useful information	Teaching how to do
	Identification with the problem	Unconventional answers
	Very special episodes	Solutions for concrete problems
		Confirming results

Sharing	Emotional situation	Surprise information
	Teaching how to do	Can be done through other channels (e.g. WhatsApp)
	Led by autistic people	Replicating leaders
Trust	Limited questioning	Initial mistrust. Trust as a process under construction
	Personal experience of the founders	Accounts of lived experience and overcoming with proof
	Behaviour of the moderators	They do not comment on non-scientific topics
	Controversial topics viewed with caution	Moderators do not comment on topics relating to other treatments
		They do not judge anyone
		Uncivilised discourse is gently excluded
	Combination with lectures and workshops	Quick explanation of prices
Credibility	Clear information	Easy confirmation from other sources

Table 4. *Relationship between digital ethnography and interviews*

This research has provided clues for other themes to explore in the future. One of them concerns how the moderators dealt with "inappropriate speech". Initially, the moderators responded by explaining that the space was not suitable for such comments. If the individual insisted, the moderators would downplay the participation.

6. Conclusion

This study suggests that lived experience serves as a "glue" for the communication established within this online health community led by carers. This aspect is crucial in two respects: first, lived experience forms the foundation of the community's appeal, shared knowledge, and collective understanding; second, it provides the basis for the unique information that is discovered and developed within the group. For community members, one of the key benefits of participation is access to a type of knowledge they cannot find in other sources, such as medical or psychological information. This knowledge is practical, detailed, concrete, and solution-oriented, offering quick responses. It is also delivered in clear, easily understandable language and with an engaging approach, which fosters a sense of hope.

This research concludes that the cognitive aspect cannot be separated from the psychological and emotional dimensions, particularly those related to support and acceptance by others. These two factors are evident in the interview responses. In addition to the emotional support — stemming from the sense of identification with shared challenges — and the mitigation of loneliness, the element of inclusion plays a key role. Peer acceptance, often described in an intimate tone during the interviews, underscores the significance of these online communities for their members. Within these online spaces,

community members are free from stigma and prejudice and are able to navigate the socialisation challenges posed by their children's behaviour. Whether through support or inclusion, emotion and knowledge are interwoven, working in tandem.

The engaging activity on this page, particularly through consistent and well-timed posts, captures and maintains the attention of community members, acting as a unifying force. Constant accessibility, highlighted by the moderators' responsiveness, is deemed essential for the smooth operation of the online community. The use of straightforward language, visually clear graphic materials, and humorous narratives enhance communication effectiveness.

Building trust emerges as a flexible, adaptable process that relies on the convergence of several factors. It is tested with every new response. When in doubt, members turn to alternative methods to verify the information. For instance, community members appreciate that the moderators openly acknowledge when they lack expertise on a certain topic, prioritising transparency and providing swift explanations to alleviate uncertainties and prevent mistrust.

It is also worth noting some subtle aspects that members perceive as added value, such as the sense of freedom in choosing strategies for working with autistic family members or students and their preference for applying knowledge "outside the box". This approach gives them the feeling of transcending the obvious and conventional.

This analysis has opened up a potential area for future research, particularly regarding the role of moderators, the models to adopt in order to avoid uncivilised discourse, and the significance of the sense of inclusion within specific communities.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

References

Amado, P. M. R. (2014). *Participação ativa no desenvolvimento de comunidades online* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade de Aveiro].

Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Polity Press.

Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*. Yale University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Bruns, A. (2014). Beyond the producer/consumer divide: Key principles of produsage and opportunities for innovation. In M. A. Peters, T. Besley, & D. Araya (Eds.), *The new development paradigm: Education, the knowledge economy and digital futures* (pp. 51–65). Peter Lang.

Bruns, A, & Bahnisch, M. (2009). *Social media: Tools for user-generated content: Social drivers behind growing consumer participation in user-led content generation. Volume 1 - State of the art*. Smart Services CRC Pty.

Burrell, J. (2017). *The fieldsite as a network: A strategy for locating ethnographic research*. Routledge.

Cardoso, G., Paisana, M., & Pinto-Martinho, A. (2024). *Digital news report Portugal 2024*. Obercom.

Carpentier, N. (2020). Media and participation. In J. Servaes (Ed.), *Handbook of communication for development and social change* (pp. 195–216). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2014-3_47

Castells, M. (2002). *The internet galaxy: Reflections on the internet, business and society*. Oxford University Press.

Couldry, N. (2004). The productive 'consumer' and the dispersed 'citizen'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *7*(1), 21–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877904040602

Ferreira, V. S. (2014). Artes e manhas da entrevista compreensiva. *Saúde e Sociedade*, *23*(3), 979–992. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-12902014000300020

Gerashi, M. K., Bakhshnezhad, R., & Nosrati, S. (2023). The effect of information quality and source credibility on information adoption in online communities. *New Marketing Research Journal*, *12*(4), 151–176. https://doi.org/10.22108/nmrj.2023.135304.2777

Gillespie, T. (2014). The relevance of algorithms. In T. Gillespie, P. J. Boczkowski, & K. A. Foot (Eds.), *Media technologies: Essays on communication, materiality, and society* (pp. 167–193). The MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9042.003.0013

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis. An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.

Gonçalves, A., Grupillo, A., & Victor Melo, P. (2024). Participação e confiança na comunicação comunitária: Os casos do Vela Notícias e do Jornal da Aldeia. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, *45*, e024004. https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.45(2024).4813

Gorbis, M. (2013, November 11). *Revitalizing communities through magic, awe, and inspiration*. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/revitalizing_communities_through_magic_awe_and_inspiration

Guilherme, I. T. (2013). *Apoio a doentes e cuidadores em comunidades virtuais de saúde: O caso da comunidade online ELA Portugal* [Master's thesis, Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa].

Hwang, S., & Foote, J. D. (2021). Why do people participate in small online communities? *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *5*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1145/3479606

Kowalski, T., & Jung, B. (2021). Hybrid time as a critical new variable in media consumption – Context of the attention economy. *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze*, *64*(2), 9–21. https://doi.org/10.4467/22996362 PZ.21.008.13473

Kozinets, R. V. (2020). *Netnography: The essential guide to qualitative social media research*. SAGE.

Lévy, P. (2000). *Collective intelligence: Man's emerging world in cyberspace*. Perseus.

Liu, X., Min, Q., Wu, D., & Liu, Z. (2020). How does social network diversity affect users' lurking intention toward social network services? A role perspective. *Information & Management*, *57*(7), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2019.103258

Lovatt, M., Bath, P. A., & Ellis, J. (2017). Development of trust in an online breast cancer forum: A qualitative study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *19*(5), e175. https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.7471

Lupton, D. (2016). The use and value of digital media for information about pregnancy and early motherhood: A focus group study. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, *16*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-016-0971-3

Malone, T. W., & Bernstein, M. (2022). *Handbook of collective intelligence*. The MIT Press.

Mander, J., & Koch, J. (2020). *The era of we*. Globalwebindex; Reddit.

Matos-Silva, M. S., Abreu, R. A. S., & Nicolaci-da-Costa, A. M. (2012). Como satisfazer nossas necessidades de interagir online em diferentes níveis de intimidade? Um estudo sobre a comunicação nas comunidades virtuais. *Interações em Psicologia*, *16*(2), 217–226. https://doi.org/10.5380/psi.v16i2.24662

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1976). *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Gallimard.

Myllylahti, M. (2019). Paying attention to attention: A conceptual framework for studying news reader revenue models related to platforms. *Digital Journalism*, *8*(5), 567–575. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1691926

Pestana, S. (2010). *Saúde web 2.0 – O papel das comunidades virtuais de doentes na área da saúde: Um estudo de caso para Portugal* [Master's thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa].

Pink, S., Horst, H., Lewis, T., Hjorth, L., & Postill, J. (2015). *Digital ethnography: Principles and practice*. SAGE.

Preece, J. (2001). Online communities: Usability, sociability, theory and methods. In R. Earnshaw, R. Guedi, A. van Dam, & T. Vince (Eds.), *Frontiers of human-centered computing, online communities and virtual environments* (pp. 263–277). Springer.

Rheingold, H. (1993). *The virtual community: Finding connection in a computerized world*. Addison-Wesley Longman Publishing.

Ridings, C. M., & Gefen, D. (2004). Virtual community attraction: Why people hang out online. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *10*(1), Artigo JCMC10110. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2004.tb00229.x

Ridings, C. M., Gefen, D., & Arinze, B. (2002). Some antecedents and effects of trust on virtual communities. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, *11*(3–4), 271–295. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0963-8687(02)00021-5

Rokka, J., & Moisander, J. (2009). Environmental dialogue in online communities: Negotiating ecological citizenship among global travellers. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *33*(2), 199–205. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2009.00759.x

Surowiecki, J. (2014, May 18). *The collective intelligence of the web*. The New Yorker. https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/the-collective-intelligence-of-the-web

Tapscott, D., & Williams, A. D. (2006). *Wikinomics: How mass collaboration changes everything*. Portfolio.

Toffler, A. (1980). *The third wave*. William Morrow.

Vilches, M., García, S., & Román, J. (2023). La producción de discursos sociales en entornos digitales: La comunidad digital como metodología de investigación social. *Teknokultura, Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales*, *20*(2), 183–194. https://doi.org/10.5209/tekn.83473

Weld, G., Zhang, A. X., & Althoff, T. (2024). Making online communities 'Better': A taxonomy of community values on Reddit. *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, *18*(1), 1611–1633. https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v18i1.31413

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Language, learning, and meaning*. Cambridge University Press.

Xie, J., He, Z., Burnett, G., & Cheng, Y. (2021). How do mothers exchange parenting-related information in online communities? A meta-synthesis. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *115*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106631

Zaslow, E. (2012). Revalorizing feminine ways of knowing: The challenge to biomedical epistemology in an online mothers' health communities. *Information, Communication & Society*, *15*(9), 1352–1372. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.638653

Zhao, Y., Zhang, L., Zeng, C., Chen, Y., Lu, W., & Song, N. (2024). Factors influencing online health information credibility: A meta-analysis. *Aslib Journal of Information Management*. Publicação online antecipada. https://doi.org/10.1108/AJIM-05-2023-0155

Biographical Notes

Aldina Margato is a PhD student in Communication Sciences at the University Institute of Lisbon. She is a member of the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology. She has contributed to European projects such as the Iberian Digital Media Observatory, *Com-Boost – Public Value* and *Communicational Boost of European Funds* and *Decoding Algorithms*. She is also a guest lecturer on the Journalism degree programme at the Instituto Superior Miguel Torga. With over 20 years of experience as a journalist, she was the deputy editor for "Culture and Society" at *Jornal de Notícias* and collaborated with *Expresso* for two years. She holds two degrees, one in Philosophy and the other in Journalism, along with a master's in Journalism and Communication from the University of Coimbra.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8908-1975

Email: aldina_margato@iscte-iul.pt

Address: CIES-Iscte, Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia, Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Edifício 4, Sala 125, Av. das Forças Armadas, nº40, 1649-026 Lisboa

Jorge Vieira is an assistant professor at the University Institute of Lisbon. He holds a PhD in Sociology and serves on the board of the Master's programme in Communication, Culture, and Information Technologies, as well as the Lab for Innovation in Academy. He is a member of the scientific committee for the Department of Sociology and the

PhD programme in Communication Sciences. In addition to his teaching and academic management roles, he conducts research as an integrated researcher at the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology, participating in various national and international projects. In 2017, he was awarded the Paquete de Oliveira Award – the National Excellence Award for Doctoral Theses in Portuguese Universities.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1130-3731

Email: jorge_vieira@iscte-iul.pt

Address: CIES-Iscte, Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia, Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Edifício 4, Sala 125, Av. das Forças Armadas, nº40, 1649-026 Lisboa

Fabulations of the Anthropocene in Dark Ambient Playlists on YouTube

Marcelo Bergamin Conter
Departamento de Comunicação, Faculdade de Biblioteconomia e Comunicação, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil
Conceptualisation, formal analysis, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, supervision, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Ana Christina Cruz Schittler
Departamento de Artes Visuais, Instituto de Artes, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil
Formal analysis, data curation, investigation, writing – original draft

Paulo Henrique Costa Albani
Instituto Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Alvorada, Brazil
Formal analysis, data curation, investigation, writing – original draft

Abstract

YouTube hosts numerous dark ambient apocalyptic playlists created by amateur musicians. These playlists often feature static images or animated GIFs depicting ruined cities, typically devoid of human presence. The accompanying soundtracks, produced using audio editing software, are characterised by low-pitched drones, minimal dynamic and melodic variation, and an absence of percussive elements. While Murray Schafer (1977/2001) highlighted the problem of noise pollution in contemporary society, we pose a different question: how do the sounds of apocalyptic dark ambient playlists imagine the future? What fabulations of the future emerge from these artistic expressions? We argue that these works do not offer solutions to impending catastrophes; rather, they reflect the complexity of the present and our inability to confront it. We propose to examine the production of signs arising from these material relationships. Our analysis focuses on user comments on these YouTube playlists, which reveal the affective responses of listeners compelled to share their listening experiences. Some describe feelings of loneliness, melancholy, or paradoxical emotions such as simultaneous joy and sadness, while others relate the audiovisual experience to personal memories. We conceptualise the interaction between the comments, visuals, and sounds as expanded listening, that is, a communicative process that generates signs and constructs dystopias of the past, present, and future in relation to the anthropocene.

Fabulações do Antropoceno em *Playlists* de *Dark Ambient* no YouTube

Resumo

Encontram-se no YouTube diversas *playlists* de *dark ambient* apocalíptico, produzidas por músicos amadores. Na trilha visual, imagens estáticas ou *gifs* animados apresentam cidades em ruínas, geralmente sem presença humana. As peças musicais que integram a trilha sonora são compostas por meio de software de edição de áudio, compondo a textura sonora por meio de drones graves, pouca variação dinâmica e melódica e ausência de elementos percussivos. Se Murray Schafer (1977/2001) chamava atenção para a poluição sonora que acometia o tempo presente, aqui provocamos de forma diferente: como os sons das *playlists* de *dark ambient* apocalípticas imaginam o porvir? Que fabulações de futuro emergem dessas expressões artísticas? Partimos da premissa de que nestas expressões não constam respostas para as catástrofes que virão — pelo contrário, elas expressam a complexidade do tempo presente em nossa incapacidade de lidar com elas. Propomos observar a produção sígnica que decorre destas relações materiais. O nosso método de análise observa os comentários postados pelos usuários nas *playlists* publicadas no YouTube. Os comentários expressam afetos dos espectadores das *playlists*, que se sentiram impelidos a compartilhar sua experiência particular de escuta. Por vezes, expressam que as músicas lhes geraram sensação de solidão, ou de melancolia, ou até sensações contraditórias como alegria e tristeza ao mesmo tempo; em outras, conectam a experiência audiovisual com momentos passados da própria vida. Compreendemos o agenciamento criado pela soma dos comentários, do vídeo e das sonoridades como escutas expandidas, isto é, produção de comunicação, de signos que fabulam distopias do passado, presente e futuro em conexão com a temática do antropoceno.

Palavras-chave

fabulação, *dark ambient*, semiótica, YouTube, antropoceno

1. Introdução

The COVID-19 pandemic and the need for seclusion, which forced us to study and work from home for extended hours in front of our computers and mobile phones, have led to various behavioural changes. Of particular relevance to this study is the impact on certain music listening practices. In an effort to make home working and study environments more comfortable, many have turned to playlists published on YouTube by often anonymous users. With this in mind, we conducted a study on long-form YouTube playlists, engaging with the concept of ambient music in a broad sense — beyond its categorisation as a specific genre (Eno, 1978) — to explore the processes of signification occurring in contemporary music listening practices. Our approach is informed in particular by the liner notes of *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* by Brian Eno (1978), in which he states that "ambient music must be able to accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular; it must be as ignorable as it is interesting" (para. 5).

Among the various genres that circulated during this period, dark ambient particularly caught our attention. The music within this genre incorporates several sonic elements that align with the three recurring qualities of ambient music identified by

Adkins (2019): fragility, noise, and atmosphere. In summary, Adkins suggests that one of the distinguishing features of ambient music is the presence of residual sounds from the phonographic reproduction of analogue media, such as the noise of worn magnetic tapes and scratched vinyl records. The dark ambient pieces we examined, however, are composed using digital editing software, creating a sound texture through low-pitched drones, minimal dynamic and melodic variation, and an absence of percussive elements. Additionally, they incorporate noises reminiscent of horror or science fiction films, which accounts for the use of the adjective "dark". The YouTube playlists feature extended instrumental pieces that intensify the atmosphere of desolation. The accompanying visuals often depict Soviet-era cities located in inhospitable regions due to extreme cold or similar imagery that aligns with speculative representations of the anthropocene[1] (Moore, 2016/2022), late capitalism, and labour precarity (Crary, 2013/2016). These playlists, published from 2020 onwards, bear titles such as *You're the Last Person on Earth During Nuclear Winter (Playlist)* — Figure 1; *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)* — Figure 2; *Lost in an Empty Place | Dreamcore, Emptycore Playlist* (Figure 3); and *Ground Zero | 2 Hours Post Apocalyptic Lo-Fi Dark Ambient Mix* (Figure 4). The imagery recurrently features abandoned buildings, deserted cities, and extreme weather conditions such as heavy snowfall and storms.
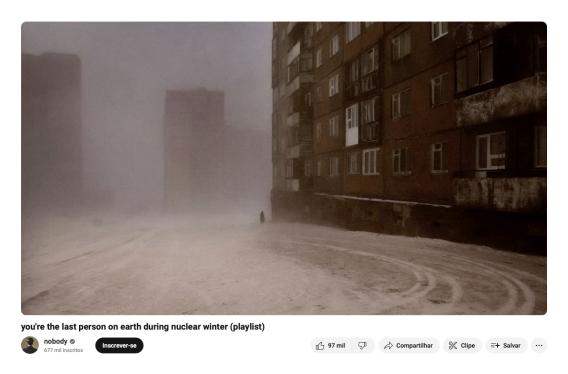

Figure 1. *You're the Last Person on Earth During Nuclear Winter*

Source. Retrieved from *You're the Last Person on Earth During Nuclear Winter (Playlist)* [Video],
by nobody [@nobodyplaylists], 2022, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9mQ-yXtlo4)

---

[1] Biologist Eugene F. Stoermer coined the term "anthropocene". It has been widely used since chemist Paul Crutzen popularised it, aiming to acknowledge that human interference with the Earth's surface has been so profound that we have moved beyond the holocene and entered a new geological era — one in which humanity is the primary driver of changes in the Earth's climate and geology.

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Fabulations of the Anthropocene in Dark Ambient Playlists on YouTube · Marcelo Bergamin Conter, Ana Christina Cruz Schittler & Paulo Henrique Costa Albani

Figure 2. *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)*

Source. Retrieved from *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)* [Video],
by Iron Cthulhu Apocalypse [@IronCthulhuApocalypse], 2019, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRzQuPvLjdU)

Figure 3. *Lost in an Empty Place | Dreamcore, Emptycore Playlist*

Source. Retrieved from *Lost in an Empty Place | Dreamcore, Emptycore Playlist* [Video],
by m3ta [@m3ta_], 2022, YouTube.
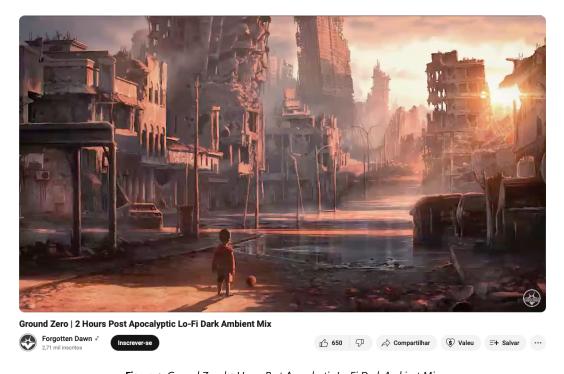(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYjFfoH_9aw)

Figure 4. *Ground Zero | 2 Hours Post Apocalyptic Lo-Fi Dark Ambient Mix*

Source. Retrieved from Ground Zero | 2 Hours Post Apocalyptic Lo-Fi Dark Ambient Mix [Video],
by Forgotten Dawn [@ForgottenDawn], 2020, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luQsVA3E5PE)

These cases sparked curiosity because, unlike other background music genres popular on YouTube — such as lo-fi hip hop (Landarini, 2021; Winston & Saywood, 2019) — dark ambient does not offer escapism. Instead, it creates a sonic and visual immersion that invites the listener into fabrications of dystopian futures, presents, and pasts, using sounds that heighten these reflections, such as low-frequency drones and noises reminiscent of twisting metal.

Dark ambient playlists also stand out by creating a distinct point of view for the listener (i.e., "you are the last person on Earth during a nuclear winter"). This suggests the emergence of a new mode of listening to ambient music, one that bears similarities to Brian Eno's (2013) approach: "immersion was really the point: we were making music to swim in, to float in, to get lost inside" (p. 95). In the case of *Music for Airports*, Eno wanted to make

> a kind of music that prepares you for dying—that doesn't get all bright and
> cheerful and pretend you're not a little apprehensive, but which makes you
> say to yourself, "Actually, it's not that big a deal if I die". (p. 96)

Aware of the semiotic power of the works mapped, we propose to investigate how users interpret dark ambient playlists, articulating their experiences through comments posted on the YouTube pages where these materials are made available. Our objective is to understand the affective semiosis of the contemporary dark ambient sounds through

the concept of expanded listening (Lucas, 2022) and to identify signs of dystopian fabrications that emerge in such listening translated into comments, drawing on Santaella's (2019) language matrices as a reference. We begin with the premise that the expanded listening of dark ambient, as expressed in YouTube comments, does not offer solutions to climate catastrophes. Rather, it reflects the complexities of the present and our inability to confront these crises, potentially serving as a means of affective engagement with the challenges posed by the anthropocene. In the following sections, we outline our methodological approach and theoretical framework before presenting the analysis of our *corpus*.

2. Expanded Listening, Semiotic Matrices, and Digital Ethnography

We propose to examine the sign production that emerges from the material relationships between dark ambient playlists, the YouTube interface, and the expressions of listeners/users in the comments section. This will be approached through two methodological stages: the first, based on digital ethnography, involves the selection and mapping of comments; the second, grounded in semiotics, combines Lucas' (2022) concept of "expanded listening" with Santaella's (2019) semiotic matrices.

Digital ethnography is understood as the study of individuals, groups, or cultures within their environment over an extended period (Skågeby, 2010). Drawing inspiration from Taís Severo's (2020) dissertation on the clashes between trans audiences on Reddit, we adopted a digital ethnographic approach as lurkers, observing interactions in the comments of the selected playlists. Following Hine (2000), Severo (2020) argues that in digital ethnography, "the researcher should neither accept texts as direct truth nor dismiss them as distorted accounts. On the contrary, they need to use their competence to interpret texts as cultural artefacts belonging to a context" (p. 125). We also acknowledge that algorithms, platform rules, and YouTube channel owners influence which comments gain prominence. Filters can be applied to exclude obscene language, political statements, specific keywords, and other content, causing certain comments to be held for approval before publication (YouTube Help, n.d.). However, these decisions are not solely at the discretion of the "sender" — the channel owner or YouTube programmers — since their choices about what passes through the filters are shaped by prevailing assumptions about public reaction, which influences the approach and intensity of the filter settings. Finally, from a digital ethnographic perspective, these comments are validated as expressions of a virtual community composed of anonymous users from diverse nationalities and perspectives. Users engage by approving or disapproving of each other's comments through "like" and "dislike" buttons and by replying to one another.

With this in mind, we proceeded to the second stage: developing a method for analysing the selected comments, guided by Lucas' (2022) concept of "expanded listening". In his thesis, the author argues that individual listening experiences remain inaccessible unless they are translated into other signs — whether verbal, visual, or otherwise. Thus, our perception of these experiences is shaped by the signs that arise within the broader

context of the work and the meaning-making processes of interpreting minds that generate interpretants. As he states, "if listening becomes communicable, it is because we can also investigate the production of this communicability" (Lucas, 2022, p. 15).

Therefore, it is through the comments posted by YouTube users that we investigate the interpretants produced by listening to these sounds. We aim to understand the singularities that emerge from these experiences, acknowledging that each dark ambient listening is immersed in a specific territory, exploring subjectivities in sound construction while also recognising that listening and its meanings are produced collectively. Although the comments are published under pseudonyms to preserve user anonymity, we have blurred their names in the images extracted from YouTube.

Also, as Lucas (2022) suggests, it is crucial to recognise that user comments are *translations of listening*, not *transmissions of listening*. In other words, the author argues that we cannot access someone else's listening directly, only the signs that emerge from that listening.

Finally, to interpret these comments both as the result and link in a chain of translation and to understand the qualities, forms, or laws that regulate their existence, we draw on Santaella's (2019) schematisation of the three matrices of language and thought to comprehend how the comments are organised. Santaella divides these matrices into sound, visual, and verbal, recognising the predominance of signs in firstness, secondness, and thirdness, respectively. In this context, we recognise that the instrumental music tracks within the playlists, due to their sonic nature, can surprise, sensitise, and develop qualisigns. The visual elements, on the other hand, present sinsigns that directly evoke the imagery of dystopian futures, science fiction, and speculative fiction, owing to their visual nature. Finally, the verbal matrix enables us to understand the signs that emerge from the comments. As we have noted, these comments are expressions of expanded listening, resulting from the relationship between interpreting minds and audiovisual material, where we recognise the predominance of legisigns, arguments, narratives, and dystopian fabrications. They are, therefore, translations of listening into written text.

Just as in Peirce's (2017) work, Santaella's (2019) matrices form secondary triads from each element within the primary triad, and this process continues further. The verbal matrix, in turn, unfolds into description, narration, and dissertation.

Description in the verbal matrix refers to the "pure and simple indication of what appears of a thing, of the notes that in themselves reveal something" (Mora, 1969, as cited in Santaella, 2019, p. 292). There is here a treatment of the qualities, a deepening into the object itself. Narration, in contrast, is characterised in verbal discourse as the linguistic recording of events or situations.

> However, action only occurs where there is conflict — effort and resistance
> between two things. Action generates reaction, and interaction produces
> the event, the fact, and the experience. (Santaella, 2019, p. 322)

Narration can be understood as events unfolding in a sequence, connected either in the present or the future. The dissertation, in contrast, presents a field of formulations that are anchored by law in the verbal; they require a creative becoming and the ability to link ideas, descriptions, and narratives. It involves a constant semiosis with *reasoning*, a blending with description and narration; here, the *concepts* of fact are standardised as *universal*. In Santaella's (2019) verbal matrix, the dissertative grouping stands as the most fitting for categorising and subcategorising thirdness signs, pushing reasoning and their treatment to the extreme.

It is through these categories of the verbal matrix that we analyse the translations of listening expressed in the comments. However, before doing so, we must situate the political, cultural, historical, and intellectual contexts that underpin the fabulatory processes in these comments, as we will explore below.

3. The Anthropocene and Dystopian Fabulations

The anthropocene represents a potential new era in which humanity is seen as a geological agent. While there is disagreement on the exact timeline[2], we will approach the anthropocene as an overarching concept that encompasses the changes related to climate change. These alterations are frequently highlighted in the media, documentaries, and science fiction films. However, the dominant perspective tends to be rooted in corporatist and conservative ideologies. Stengers and Pignarre (2005) argue that capitalism functions as a form of cosmopolitics, one that captures the power to think and act autonomously. On television, in international agreements (such as the 2015 Paris Agreement — COP 21, and the reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; gov.br, n.d.), catastrophe is always projected into a future that never quite arrives. When it does unfold in the present, it is framed as a mere preview of what is to come, despite the undeniable reality that we are already living through the tragedies foreseen — as evidenced by the intensifying floods, wildfires, desertification, epidemics, and other calamities.

Donna Haraway (2016/2023) critiques the term "anthropocene" for attributing responsibility for the global environmental crisis to all humans. She argues it should instead focus on specific social groups, particularly the privileged and powerful. Haraway also challenges the human-centred view of the term, which positions humans as the main agents of change. She contends that transformation is a result of complex interactions between humans, non-humans, ecosystems, and other species.

The author also highlights the importance of fabulations in this context, as they allow us to perceive the world differently, one that is more sensitive to non-human and more-than-human agents cohabiting the planet (Haraway, 2016/2023). The way stories are told shapes the world, a process the author links to the concept of "sympoiesis" — the continuous production of the world through alliances and compositions, becoming "with" in the presence of others, together with others, never alone.

---

[2] There are debates in academia about the time frame of this era, ranging from sedentarism (the start of plantations) to the first nuclear tests. There are also disputes over its name, with terms like capitalocene, chthulucene, and manthropocene (highlighting the role of patriarchy) being proposed (cf. Moore, 2016/2022).

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Fabulations of the Anthropocene in Dark Ambient Playlists on YouTube · Marcelo Bergamin Conter, Ana Christina Cruz Schittler & Paulo Henrique Costa Albani

In light of this, Haraway (2016/2023) introduces the concept of "chthulucene" as a resistance to the cynicism and defeatism that characterise the anthropocene and capitalocene. Since we know who has been responsible (anthropos/capitalism), we can also understand what can be done. The chthulucene invokes non-modern peoples, indigenous groups, fictional beings (particularly tentacled creatures and underworld dwellers, mycorrhizal organisms), the persistence of life in inhospitable places, interdependent relationships, science fiction, scientific facts, and alternative possibilities for composition.

From the outset, we argue that the dark ambient playlists we have mapped in this text operate on the basis of proposals similar to those of Haraway (2016/2023). More specifically, the playlists' fabrications evoke her concept of *SF*, which includes science fiction, string figures, speculative fabulation, and others. These concepts question the boundaries between reality and fantasy, the relationships between humans and non-humans, and the constructions that shape these relationships with technology. They also develop a critical perspective on the issues and challenges posed by the pragmatism surrounding dark ambient, as well as the already "established" norms in our listening practices. This offers a space for critical reflection on power relations and the possibilities for social transformation. We shall explore what narratives of the anthropocene emerge in the users' comments below.

4. Dystopian Fabulations in Dark Ambient Expanded Listenings

The analysis centres on the comments gathered during our digital ethnography, conducted on the playlists of the videos *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)*, *Songs for an Empty World[3]*, and *You're the Last Person on Earth During Nuclear Winter (Playlist)*. Drawing inspiration from the semiotic matrix in Santaella's (2019) framework, with a particular focus on the verbal matrix, we developed a similar structure to analyse the fabulation processes that unfold in the comments published on dark ambient videos.

As we will demonstrate, some fabulations are structured through iconicity, which we term "fabulatory descriptions"; others through indexicality, or "fabulatory narratives"; and, finally, through symbolism, which we refer to as "fabulatory dissertations". It is important to note that no comment we analyse will be exclusively descriptive, narrative, or dissertative. This is because these categories are cumulative: a dissertation includes description and narration, while narration comprises description. Furthermore, the comments, as we will observe, shift between these categories.

We will proceed by organising the comments, beginning with those in which descriptions play the most significant role in translating listening, followed by those dominated by narration, and finally, those that focus on the dissertation. Fabulatory descriptions align with Santaella's (2019) understanding of the qualisign across all semiotic modalities and submodalities, particularly the iconic and the rhematic, while remaining within the verbal matrix, meaning they are translated and expressed textually. The

3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1tYe3TkhTc.

emphasis on descriptions aims to capture the sensations, emotions, and surprises that arise in the listener's interaction with dark ambient playlists. As demonstrated in the comments (Figure 5 and Figure 6), the mood of sadness or melancholy evoked by the sound pieces in the playlists has a positive impact on many listeners.

Figure 5. *Sometimes it feels kind of nice to listen to...*

Source. Retrieved from *You're the Last Person on Earth During Nuclear Winter (Playlist)* [Video],
by nobody [@nobodyplaylists], 2022, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9mQ-yXtl04)

Figure 6. *I prefer "sad" ambient music*

Source. Retrieved from *You're the Last Person on Earth During Nuclear Winter (Playlist)* [Video],
by nobody [@nobodyplaylists], 2022, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9mQ-yXtl04)

Several comments, such as these, translate users' emotional reactions without explicitly linking these emotions to the apocalyptic themes of the playlists. This suggests a need for further research on the topic, as it may reflect broader challenges of the present time. For this study, however, we focus on comments where references to the anthropocene are more explicitly articulated. Our initial expectation was to find discussions about the sound properties of the musical pieces. Instead, what we encountered in abundance were comments expressing users' emotional responses to listening or fabulating dystopian scenarios, as we will explore below.

Another intriguing finding was the prominence of the visual score, which captured significant attention from many users. A considerable number of comments focus solely on the images (Figure 7). Given that these playlists are often used as background sound for other activities, one might expect a general disregard for the visuals.

Figure 7. *I love desolate places...*

Source. Retrieved from *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)* [Video],
by Iron Cthulhu Apocalypse [@IronCthulhuApocalypse], 2019, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRzQuPvLjdU)

Once again, we observe the contradiction of finding pleasure in images of desolation. Beyond the three brief comments mentioned, there are also longer ones (Figure 8) in which users attempt to articulate more complex observations.

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Fabulations of the Anthropocene in Dark Ambient Playlists on YouTube · Marcelo Bergamin Conter, Ana Christina Cruz Schittler & Paulo Henrique Costa Albani

Figure 8. *This is atmospheric music...*

Source. Retrieved from *You're the Last Person on Earth During Nuclear Winter (Playlist)* [Video],
by nobody [@nobodyplaylists], 2022, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9mQ-yXtlo4)

Note. Translation: "This is an otherworldly atmospheric piece, carrying notes of despair and sadness, yet also
a glimmer of hope that lingers in the hearts of those still alive on Earth. Update: by the way, I forgot to add
that the music reminded me of the film 'Dead Man's Letters' — its atmosphere fits perfectly".

The author of the comment begins by expressing conflicting emotions — at times despair and sadness, at others a sense of hope for humanity — and concludes by drawing a parallel between the playlist's atmosphere and that of *Dead Man's Letters* (Konstantin Lopushansky, 1986). This Soviet film envisions a dystopian future in the aftermath of nuclear conflict, making its themes closely aligned with those explored in the analysed work.

In the comments in Figure 9, we once again observe a contradictory expression of emotions. The author describes feelings of melancholy and despair yet also perceives a strange beauty in desolation — an outlook reminiscent of Spinoza's (1677/2017) perspective, which acknowledges fear as a form of joyful passion.

Figure 9. *This music resonates with me...*

Source. Retrieved from *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)* [Video],
by Iron Cthulhu Apocalypse [@IronCthulhuApocalypse], 2019, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRzQuPvLjdU)

There is still no construction of a sequential narrative with cause and effect, only a composition of qualitative elements, as one would expect from descriptions. The grouping of these symbolic elements allows the reader to establish relationships and,

in doing so, to fabulate. We find many similar cases in which users make this act their focal point, dissecting scenarios they have fabulated themselves, imagining themselves moving through fictional spaces and temporalities. These descriptions emerge from such qualities.

The author of the comment in Figure 9 reflects on the sensations evoked by sound in a way that resonates with the concept of "spasm" (Guattari, n.d., as cited in Berardi, 2020). He describes what would be the end of the world, emphasising sensations of collapse, which he attributes to capitalism, associating it with destruction and hopelessness while simultaneously proposing resistance. For Berardi (2020), "[in] spasm, sound collapses into noise, into a tangle of inaudible voices. And music is the vibrational quest for a potential conspiracy that transcends the limits of order" (p. 143). We can thus relate the notion of spasm to the comment in Figure 9, where the contradiction between chaos and equilibrium persists — hope is salvaged amid disorder, reinforced by positive affirmations that link past, present, and future.

When commentators start to weave narratives based on their listening experience, the descriptions will operate as a *sequentiality* to enhance or ground the *progression* of the "shots", "frames", and "moments" within the narrative. It is interesting to observe how listeners possess the capacity to craft narratives that are, in a sense, translations of their engagement with playlists, sometimes even alluding to narrative forms from other media, such as fictional cinema. The comment in Figure 10 serves as a good illustration of this.

This is exactly what I felt while living in Russia. Morning. Lots of snow, very cold. You're alone with your old backpack, going to school through the streets. Loneliness. The only person you can see is a sad grandpa repairing his Volga, Niva, or some other soviet car. The sadness and tiredness in his eyes, the things he's been through. The world feels so depressed, you realize how short our lives are. You hear someone's mom screaming at their child to wake up. The sound is coming through a window so it's very unclear. You finally arrive at school and study while watching the city slowly waking up through the snow. Same at the night, but you can see people's windows in those high soviet buildings. Everybody's tired, watching TV, drinking tea or something else. You think of life again, about all your decisions and the future.

Figure 10. *This is exactly what...*

Source. Retrieved from *You're the Last Person on Earth During Nuclear Winter (Playlist)* [Video], by nobody [@nobodyplaylists], 2022, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9mQ-yXtl04)

This narrative has a certain degree of cinematism (Eisenstein, 2002): the passage that observes "sadness and tiredness" in the eyes, for example, insinuates a close-up. There is a cumulative descriptive dimension, as there is in all semiotic phenomena, but here, narrative is predominant over descriptive elements.

We were also struck by the fact that the narrative proposes the description of a past personal experience. In the comment in Figure 10, a "sad" Soviet gentleman is imagined repairing his old car. The author of the comment feels the need to fabulate an ordinary event that took place in the past.

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Fabulations of the Anthropocene in Dark Ambient Playlists on YouTube · Marcelo Bergamin Conter, Ana Christina Cruz Schittler & Paulo Henrique Costa Albani

More common than fabulations derived from images of the past are narratives that imagine dystopian and apocalyptic times, usually projecting bleak futures (Figure 11).

Figure 11. *You sit up...*

Source. Retrieved from *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)* [Video],
by Iron Cthulhu Apocalypse [@IronCthulhuApocalypse], 2019, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRzQuPvLjdU)

The fabled future is described in detail by referring to "ash and torn buildings", but it is important first to highlight a building that is seen, or perhaps even a path to follow without much purpose in a *destroyed, grey, empty world*. In another similar comment (Figure 12), the author of the comment addresses the reader as if they shared in the dystopian fable, again with a certain degree of cinematism.

Figure 12. *Unknown transmission received...*

Source. Retrieved from *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)* [Video],
by Iron Cthulhu Apocalypse [@IronCthulhuApocalypse], 2019, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRzQuPvLjdU)

The following comments (Figure 13, Figure 14, Figure 15, Figure 16, Figure 17, and Figure 18) are predominantly fabulatory essays. These include analyses, critiques, and arguments about the catastrophes but begin to move away from simple descriptions or narratives inspired by the playlists. In other words, as listeners shift towards symbolism in their comments, they distance themselves from the sensations evoked by the listening experience itself, moving instead towards a discussion about humanity's role on Earth.

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Fabulations of the Anthropocene in Dark Ambient Playlists on YouTube · Marcelo Bergamin Conter, Ana Christina Cruz Schittler & Paulo Henrique Costa Albani

@▓▓▓▓▓ há 1 ano

I think: its because our generation was born into a World, where capitalism has won. Our lifes has absolutly no other sence then consuming and our future is most sertain ends in a devastating war. We dont realize it. We feel it.

Figure 13. *Its because our generation...*

Source. Retrieved from *You're the Last Person on Earth During Nuclear Winter (Playlist)* [Video],
by nobody [@nobodyplaylists], 2022, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9mQ-yXtlo4)

▓▓▓▓ há 13 dias

Hopefully mankind will experience this soon. Time to let the world renew itself without such a destructive parasite inhabiting it!

Figure 14. *Hopefully mankind...*

Source. Retrieved from *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)* [Video],
by Iron Cthulhu Apocalypse [@IronCthulhuApocalypse], 2019, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRzQuPvLjdU)

▓▓▓▓ há 2 semanas

Creo que falta poco para que nuestra sociedad cambié de una forma radical y desconocida.

Figure 15. *I believe there is little...*

Source. Retrieved from *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)* [Video],
by Iron Cthulhu Apocalypse [@IronCthulhuApocalypse], 2019, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRzQuPvLjdU)

Note. Translation: "I believe that there is little time left for our society to change in a radical and unknown way".

▓▓▓▓ há 3 semanas

Alas, peace on earth.

Figure 16. *Alas...*

Source. Retrieved from *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)* [Video],
by Iron Cthulhu Apocalypse [@IronCthulhuApocalypse], 2019, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRzQuPvLjdU)

▓▓▓▓ há 3 semanas

What are we doing to prevent this? Is it even possible to do so? Or, is this a path that is ultimately unavoidable due to proliferation issues coincidental with old - sometimes ancient - cultural resentments and animosities leading inexorably toward their eventual usage? Alternatively, can humans jettison old cultural, religious, economic, and political interpretations of our shared global reality in favour of something more compassionate and sustainable and in sync with the Earth's limitations? What if less is more?

Figure 17. *What are we doing...*

Source. Retrieved from *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)* [Video],
by Iron Cthulhu Apocalypse [@IronCthulhuApocalypse], 2019, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRzQuPvLjdU)

▓▓▓▓ há 1 ano (editado)

So true. We will destroy life here before enough of us get it.

Figure 18. *So true...*

Source. Retrieved from *Songs for an Empty World* [Video],
by Cryo Chamber [@cryochamberlabel], 2020, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1tYe3TkhTc)

There seems to be a tone of self-deprecation in several of these comments, with our species being viewed as a great parasite on Earth whose annihilation would restore peace to the planet, as seen in the comment in Figure 19.

Figure 19. *As of today...*

Source. Retrieved from *Nuclear Winter (Multiple Dark Ambient Hours)* [Video],
by Iron Cthulhu Apocalypse [@IronCthulhuApocalypse], 2019, YouTube.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRzQuPvLjdU)

In these comments, we highlight associations made through listening that link the idea of the end of the world to humanity as the main agent, suggesting that the apocalypse will be the result of either capitalism or our parasitism (uncontrolled extraction of natural resources). However, although these arguments emerge from listening, they express little or no direct connection with the music on the playlists' soundtrack, especially when compared to the descriptions of the videos and images in the visual track.

Nonetheless, these provocations, which point towards a hypothetical context, allow us to understand that the concerns raised by the listeners converge on common themes. These are the translations of a semiosis of collective listening, which overlaps with other expressions of expanded listening we explored earlier (description and fabulatory narrative), linking sensations to processes of meaning-making.

5. Final Considerations

Analysing the comments above, it is evident that there are different ways of engaging with the themes suggested by dark ambient playlists or even apocalyptic issues such as world wars and climate crises. One noteworthy observation is that the comments analysed reveal at least two distinct reactions to potential dystopian futures: the "defeatist" reaction, which views possible disasters as inevitable outcomes, and the "reactive" one, which attempts to formulate escape routes or solutions to these problems. It is interesting to highlight that these lines of thought are contradictory. Still, both stem from listening to the same material, thus demonstrating the production of affective semiosis in contemporary ambient music.

When we set out to analyse the comments through an adaptation of Santaella's (2019) matrices of language and thought, we expected that they would progressively offer more complex interpretations of the sounds. However, the findings revealed a different situation: comments that offer analytical observations about the musical tracks at the dissertative level are rare. In contrast, when the comments do address the sounds, they rarely engage with apocalyptic themes. It's important to note once again that these

categories are not rigid or mutually exclusive: a single comment can encompass all of these categories simultaneously. Our focus was on identifying which category predominates in each commentator's translation of the listening experience. As the analysis demonstrated, the fabulatory descriptions conveyed the sensations, emotions, and affections that the sounds evoked in listeners; the narratives constructed imaginary urban scenarios, spaces, and structures through the sequential arrangement of fabulatory descriptions; and the dissertations offered symbolic reflections on the future of the Earth and humanity in the face of catastrophes, through the accumulation of narratives and descriptions rearranged into general laws. In cases where the interpretation of phenomena is predominantly in firstness and secondness (description and narration), we found more comments addressing planetary crises reactively. Meanwhile, in the symbolic category, the comments tended to reflect a more fatalistic position, suggesting that nothing can be done to prevent the impending catastrophes.

Many of the comments, which primarily included fabulatory narratives, evoked elements common to science fiction cinema. The possibility of the end of the world, whether in the distant or near future, for a variety of reasons — whether entirely fictional or based on verifiable events in nature not caused or provoked by humanity, is a common theme in films such as *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998), *The Day After Tomorrow* (Roland Emmerich, 2004), *2012* (Roland Emmerich, 2009), *The War of the Worlds* (Byron Haskin, 1953), and series such as *The Walking Dead* (Frank Darabont, 2010) and *The Last of Us* (Bruce Straley and Neil Druckmann, 2013). This recurring theme likely influences users' perceptions when listening to these playlists, as it offers a simulation of the extra-diegetic cinematic soundtrack for these dystopian events, bringing them into the playlist viewer's everyday life. Additionally, the way the context is structured in the comments appears to resemble a film sequence, almost as if describing a series of shots. The various effects commonly used in the dark ambient genre, such as drones, samples, and others, create a sound texture that evokes suspense and tension — elements frequently found in science fiction films and series. Given that these representative sounds of suspense and terror are already embedded in cinema, we can consider the agencies arising from the connection between horror cinema, suspense, and dark ambient. Musicians and users likely encountered these cinematic experiences before being introduced to the musical genre, leading to the natural association between the two.

It is not possible to ascertain definitively through our research method. However, we believe that this phenomenon may stem from a functionalist music-listening culture that has developed on YouTube. Playlists often come with titles that suggest how the music should be consumed (music for work, to relax, to sleep, to work out, to study, etc.), a trend notably seen in lo-fi hip hop playlists. Titles like *You're the Last Person on Earth During Nuclear Winter* or *Songs for an Empty World*, paired with images like those

presented earlier in this article (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4), already prime the listener to associate the music with specific meanings.

In this way, the comments analysed seem rooted in pre-existing listening habits, reflecting how listening is never a solitary or individual experience. Rather, it is always shaped by cultural practices that influence interpreting minds. Consequently, the act of listening occurs through signs and results in signs. As Lucas (2022) conceptualises it, all the comments we studied represent expanded listening.

Finally, it is important to highlight the intrinsic association between contemporary music, the anthropocene, the fabulations developed by science fiction, and the multiple forms of affect perceived through listening to the playlists and the accounts in the comments analysed. We recognise that many of the comments' authors are likely unaware of the concept of the "anthropocene" and the onto-epistemological paradigm shifts it implies. However, the result of the agency — promoted by the relationship between the playlists and the translation of listening into text — reflects the symptoms denounced by the anthropocene as a theoretical-speculative tool for understanding the world we inhabit and the way we live and express ourselves within it.

Fabulating, as we saw with Haraway (2016/2023), is also fabricating the world. In this way, dark ambient proves to be a powerful form of communication and cultural expression, as it captures and conveys the concerns of modern society, triggering reflections on the current context and stimulating debates on the potential consequences of an uncertain future. The relationship we have established between semiotics, affections, expanded listening, and the anthropocene reinforces the need to break with the objectification of non-human agents and to understand the agency of semiosis in an increasing sense of concrete reasonableness, in the ability of signs in firstness to surprise, captivate, and create meaning (Grupo de Pesquisa em Semiótica e Culturas da Comunicação, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to consider that listening to these sounds plays a fundamental role in shaping the sounds of the future, leading us to rethink the implications and challenges of the end times.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Fabulations of the Anthropocene in Dark Ambient Playlists on YouTube · Marcelo Bergamin Conter, Ana Christina Cruz Schittler & Paulo Henrique Costa Albani

References

Adkins, M. (2019). Fragility, noise and atmosphere in ambient music. In M. Adkins & S. Cummings (Eds.), *Music beyond airports: Appraising ambient music* (pp. 119–146). University of Huddersfield Press.

Berardi, F. (2020). *Asfixia: capitalismo financeiro e a insurreição da lingaugem* (H. do Amaral, Trans.). Ubu.

Crary, J. (2016). *24/7 - Capitalismo tardio e os fins do sono* (J. Toledo Jr., Trans.). Ubu. (Original work published 2013)

Cryo Chamber [@cryochamberlabel]. (2020, April 11). *Songs for an empty world* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1tYe3TkhTc

Eisenstein, S. (2002). *O sentido do filme* (T. Ottoni, Trans.). Jorge Zahar. (Original work published 1942)

Eno, B. (1978). *Ambient #1 music for airports* [Album]. E.G. Records; Polydor; PVC.

Eno, B. (2013). Ambient music. In C. Cox & D. Warner (Eds.), *Audio culture: Readings in modern music* (pp. 94–97). Bloomsbury.

Forgotten Dawn [@ForgottenDawn]. (2020, July 3). *Ground Zero | 2 hours post apocalyptic lo-fi dark ambient mix* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luQsVA3E5PE

gov.br. (n.d.). *Relatórios especiais do IPCC*. Retrieved December 22, 2023, from https://www.gov.br/mcti/pt-br/acompanhe-o-mcti/sirene/publicacoes/relatorios-do-ipcc

Grupo de Pesquisa em Semiótica e Culturas da Comunicação. (2020). *Semiótica crítica e as materialidades da comunicação*. Editora da UFRGS.

Haraway, D. (2023). *Ficar com o problema: Fazer parentes do chthuluceno* (A. L. Braga, Trans.). N-1 Edições. (Original work published 2016)

Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual ethnography*. SAGE.

Iron Cthulhu Apocalypse [@IronCthulhuApocalypse]. (2019, November 25). *Nuclear winter (multiple dark ambient hours)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRzQuPvLjdU

Landarini, S. (2021). *"Sou só uma pessoa triste": Fluxos sonoros sensoriais no lofi hip hop* [Master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro].

Lucas, C. B. (2022). *Escutas expandidas e a produção comunicacional de escutas musicais* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul].

Moore, J. W. (Ed.). (2022). *Antropoceno ou capitaloceno? Natureza, história e a crise do capitalismo* (A. Xerxenesky & F. S. Silva, Trans.). Elefante. (Original work published 2016)

m3ta [@m3ta_]. (2022, October 28). *Lost in an empty place | dreamcore, emptycore playlist* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYjFf0H_9aw

nobody [@nobodyplaylists]. (2022, August 6). *You're the last person on earth during nuclear winter (playlist)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9mQ-yXtl04

Peirce, C. S. (2017). *Semiótica* (J. T. C. Neto, Trans.). Perspectiva.

Santaella, L. (2019). *Matrizes da linguagem e pensamento: Sonora, visual, verbal*. Iluminuras.

Comunicação e Sociedade, special vol., 2025

Fabulations of the Anthropocene in Dark Ambient Playlists on YouTube · Marcelo Bergamin Conter, Ana Christina Cruz Schittler & Paulo Henrique Costa Albani

Schafer, R. M. (2001). *A afinação do mundo: Uma exploração pioneira pela história passada e pelo atual estado do mais negligenciado aspecto do nosso ambiente: A paisagem sonora* (M. T. Fonterrada, Trans.). Editora Unesp. (Original work published 1977)

Severo, T. (2020). *IN/VISIBILIDADES: A constituição dos mundos trans nos transgender studies e nas comunidades do Reddit* [Master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul].

Skågeby, J. (2010). Online ethnographic methods: Towards a qualitative understanding of virtual community practices. In B. Daniel (Ed.), *Handbook of research on methods and techniques for studying virtual communities: Paradigms and phenomena* (pp. 410–428). Information Science Reference.

Spinoza, B. (2017). *Ética* (T. Tadeu, Trans.). Autêntica Editora. (Original work published 1677)

Winston, E., & Saywood, L. (2019). Beats to relax/study to: Contradiction and paradox in lofi hip hop. *IASPM Journal*, 9(2), 40–54. https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871(2019)v9i2.4en

YouTube Help. (n.d.). *Learn about comment settings*. Retrieved March 20, 2024, from https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/9483359?hl=en

Biographical Notes

Marcelo Bergamin Conter is a professor of Communication Theories at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. He holds a PhD in Communication from the Postgraduate Programme in Communication at the same institution.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1413-8903

Email: marcelo.conter@ufrgs.br

Address: Av. Paulo Gama, 110 - Bairro Farroupilha - Porto Alegre - Rio Grande do Sul - Brasil. CEP: 90040-060

Ana Christina Cruz Schittler is a recipient of a scholarship from the Institutional Scholarship Programme for Scientific Initiation (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Sul Notice 12/2023). She holds a degree in Business Administration/Systems Analysis from Faculdades Rio-Grandenses. She is also a Visual Arts undergraduate student at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3674-5061

Email: anacshtlr@gmail.com

Address: Paulo Gama, 110 - Bairro Farroupilha - Porto Alegre - Rio Grande do Sul - Brasil. CEP: 90040-060

Paulo Henrique Costa Albani is a recipient of a scholarship from the Institutional Scholarship Programme for Scientific Initiation - High School (Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Sul Notice 12/2023). He is currently in his 4th year of the Audio and Video Production Technical Course at the Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Sul - Alvorada Campus.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6850-2727
Email: paulo.albani@aluno.alvorada.ifrs.edu.br
Address: Rua Prof. Darcy Ribeiro, 121 - Campos Verdes, Alvorada - RS - Brasil. CEP: 94834-413

"The Same Rigour, the Same Pluralism": An Analysis of the "Transatlantic Partnership" Between *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* Newspapers

Thaís Braga
Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal

Abstract

This paper is based on the premise that, through journalistic discourse, socially shared meanings and symbolic power disputes can be recognised. It aims to identify and understand how normative commitment manifests within Portuguese-Brazilian journalistic discourse. The normative perspective is examined here, as its traditional association with democracy in the United States does not necessarily apply to all societies. For this analysis, a broader case study was conducted, focusing on the editorial published jointly by *Público* (Portugal) and *Folha de S. Paulo* (Brazil) on July 9, 2020. Under the theoretical-methodological framework of discourse studies, critical discourse analysis was applied. The results indicate that Portuguese-Brazilian journalistic discourse spans five key axes: digital information, the idealisation of journalism as an advocate of democracy, migration issues, the Portuguese language, and European objectives. Broadly, *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* are collaborating to strengthen their position in the journalistic field. However, despite their aspiration for an alliance between Portugal and Brazil, the political and institutional particularities of each country undermine this ideal. The case also highlights strategies adopted by traditionally printed newspapers to reaffirm their journalistic credibility, particularly in the face of digital media and misinformation.

Keywords

critical discourse analysis, Brazil, democracy, meta-journalism, Portugal

"O Mesmo Rigor, o Mesmo Pluralismo": Análise da "Parceria Transatlântica" Entre os Jornais *Público* e *Folha de S. Paulo*

Resumo

Com base na premissa de que, por meio do discurso jornalístico, é possível reconhecer os sentidos socialmente partilhados, bem como as disputas simbólicas de poder, este artigo objetiva identificar e compreender de que maneira o compromisso normativo se manifesta no discurso jornalístico luso-brasileiro. A perspectiva normativa é aqui revista, pois sua tradicional associação à democracia dos Estados Unidos da América não se aplica a todas as sociedades. A partir de um estudo de caso mais amplo, selecionou-se o editorial publicado conjuntamente pelos jornais *Público* (Portugal) e *Folha de S. Paulo* (Brasil), em 9 julho de 2020, para a análise do fenômeno. Sob o guarda-chuva teórico-metodológico dos estudos do discurso, aplicou-se a técnica da análise crítica do discurso. Os resultados mostram que o discurso jornalístico luso-brasileiro atravessa cinco eixos: a informação digital; certa idealização do jornalismo como defensor da democracia; as questões migratórias; a língua portuguesa; e os objetivos europeus. De maneira alargada, *Público* e *Folha de S. Paulo* unem-se para ampliar a sua força no campo jornalístico. Entretanto, por mais que se almeje uma irmandade entre Portugal e Brasil, as particularidades político-institucionais de cada país abalam a fantasia criada. O caso também aponta para

estratégias que os jornais tradicionalmente impressos têm adotado para reafirmar sua qualidade noticiosa, sobretudo diante dos mídia digitais e da desinformação.

Palavras-chave

análise crítica do discurso, Brasil, democracia, metajornalismo, Portugal

1. Introduction

At its core, journalistic discourse invites the audience to observe society from within, as both newspapers/journalists and the audience are inherently part of it (V. França, 1998). News production, however, is shaped by public events — that is, issues of interest to the community — which are influenced by a complex set of professional, organisational, technological, political, economic, and cultural factors (Belair-Gagnon, 2019; Deuze & Witschge, 2018). News, as a symbolic construction, is not a mirror but rather represents a given reality; for this reason, it is a site of ongoing struggle (Couldry & Andreas, 2017; Martins, 2017). This perspective positions journalism as a provisional entity since its institutionalised practices form part of a web of overlapping and/or conflicting discourses (Carlson, 2016). The acceptability of any representation will depend on a broader cultural understanding of valid expressive forms, which are always open to contestation.

It is therefore important to understand the discursive environment in which journalism takes place — its conditions of production, the actors involved, and the interpretative processes that directly impact the quality of communication — especially in countries like Brazil and Portugal, which have historical ties, where cultural and political power networks have not only been maintained but have also multiplied (T. França & Padilla, 2019; Vargas et al., 2017). However, both countries are currently positioned as semi-peripheral (Borges & Afonso, 2018), occupying ambiguous spaces within the global economic system. The former, once a Portuguese colony, acts in a somewhat imperialist manner towards South American and African countries; the latter, once an imperial power, is seen as a "subaltern coloniser", oppressed within European politics (Scalabrin Müller et al., 2023).

Without attempting to generalise the results, this paper[1] aims to identify and understand how normative commitment manifests itself in Luso-Brazilian journalistic discourse. Based on a broader case study, the newspapers *Público* (Portugal) and *Folha de S. Paulo* (Brazil) were selected to analyse the phenomenon. Given that both newspapers offer digital subscription sharing (https://login.folha.com.br/assinatura/jornalpublico), it is possible to identify how social meanings are constructed around similar themes, as well as the strategies used by newspapers that traditionally produce print editions to reaffirm their strength in the journalistic field (Bourdieu, 2005). This premise aligns with Franklin's

---

[1] This paper is partly the result of the thesis *Narrativas Jornalísticas Sobre o Dia do Fogo na Amazônia (2019- 2020): O Caso da* Folha de S. Paulo *(Brasil) e do* Público *(Portugal)* (*Journalistic Narratives About the Day of the Fire in the Amazon [2019-2020]: The Case of* Folha de S. Paulo *[Brazil] and* Público *[Portugal]*), developed as part of the PhD in Communication Sciences at the Communication and Society Research Centre, University of Minho. A preliminary version of this article was discussed in the Journalism and Society Working Group at the "XIII Sopcom Congress", held in Braga between January 24 and 26, 2024.

(2012) observation: rather than disappearing, newspapers that traditionally produce print editions have shown themselves to be increasingly integrated into the changes imposed by the digital environment and have been adapting editorially and financially to accommodate innovations in media technologies and changing market requirements.

Initially, the normative nature of journalism and its relationship with democracy will be discussed. The methodological procedures will then be presented, with an emphasis on the technique of critical discourse analysis, which will be used to examine the editorial jointly published by the newspapers *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* on July 9, 2020. Through this work, we aim to contribute to journalism studies, particularly to comparative Portuguese-Brazilian analyses. *Folha de S. Paulo* is a centennial newspaper with an extensive bibliography documenting its trajectory, marked by various political and editorial positions. On the other hand, *Público*, which has been in operation for just over three decades, emerged in a context of freedom after the Carnation Revolution (1974) as the result of an endeavour primarily planned by journalists who had previously been associated with the newspaper *Expresso*. In agreement with Moisés de Lemos Martins (Carvalho, 2019), the mere sharing of the Portuguese language holds little value unless common projects and efforts are developed. In this regard, the challenge posed by Oliveira and Paulino (2017) has been addressed: to understand what is common to Portuguese and Brazilian journalism, acknowledging that the socio-cultural environments are distinct.

2. (Meta)Journalism and Democracy: A Critical-Normative Perspective

One of the main characteristics of journalism, from a communication perspective, is its normative awareness (Carlson et al., 2018). Rooted in the idea of the social construction of reality, adherence to a universal standard of behaviour grants meaning and legitimacy to journalistic practice without assuming that news is inherently indispensable to democratic societies. The emphasis on "consciousness" conceptualises the norm as a complex and reciprocal arrangement between ideal and practice, reconciling what has been accepted as dogma with what is fluid and subject to transformation by various forces. This understanding enables journalism studies to navigate between what McNair (1998) terms the normative paradigm (which expresses the ideal or how things are supposed to be) and the critical paradigm (which focuses on things as they are and the gaps between the real and the ideal).

Initially, the normative perspective emerges as a counterpoint to communism, where the media serve as tools to suppress democracy. Subsequently, it is framed as a means of combating other threats, notably international terrorism, sometimes linked with religious fundamentalism or other "extremist" or revolutionary movements (McQuail, 2010). From a historical standpoint, in discussions on the rise of the nation-state and nationalism, Carey (2007) is frequently cited for arguing that the origins of journalism are the same as the origins of republican or democratic forms of governance — no journalism, no democracy.

Normative communication theory explains how public discourse should be structured to enable a community or nation to address its challenges (Christians et al., 2009). In other words, it seeks to explain how certain forms of public discourse — such as journalistic discourse — contribute to sound collective decision-making. Its core feature is the relationship between a society's conception of democracy and the concrete roles of actors in public discourse. In this context, democracy is understood as popular sovereignty, defined by two fundamental criteria: equality and freedom.

Hanitzsch (2019) notes that most normative roles attributed to journalists stem from the belief that journalism contributes to the proper functioning of democracy. Accordingly, the media are expected to monitor and inform the public about relevant events and their contexts; offer commentary, guidance, and advice on complex issues; facilitate access, expression, and political participation; foster shared awareness; and serve as a critic and watchdog, holding the powerful to account. Similarly, Thomas (2019) views journalism as both central to democracy and an agent of both social control and social change.

For Martins (2010), journalism, as a discursive practice, constitutes the foundation of the wider public space, making collective experience and discourse inseparable. The author argues that journalism's *raison d'être* lies in fostering citizenship and constructing public memory — both of which are justified as essential training for a more sustained practice of civic participation. Moreover, journalism upholds values fundamental to the democratic order, such as freedom, social justice, equity, and the public good.

Traquina (2005) asserts that democracy is inconceivable as a system of government without freedom. In this context, journalism plays a crucial role in informing the public without censorship and, within the division of power among government branches, assumes the responsibility of acting as a watchdog. From a normative perspective, journalistic freedom serves citizens who seek to be sufficiently informed to fulfil their civic duties. By default, and in principle detached from political affiliations, newspapers should prioritise presenting facts over opinions to serve their readers effectively.

The normative nature of journalism forms the basis of its professional identity; that is, it distinguishes journalists from other professionals in the industry and defines the way in which other journalists and different forms of journalism are assessed, criticised and judged (Mesquita, 2023). However, it is an understanding open to interpretation, and its rules and norms change according to ideological constructions and cultural contexts. Hanitzsch (2019) points out that the normative paradigm of journalism is articulated within Western notions of democracy, which emphasise freedom and individual liberty. Thomas (2019) emphasises that his considerations about utility as the normative anchor of journalism are restricted to a democratic structure of government. The relationship between journalism and democracy indeed stems primarily from the United States between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (Hallin & Giles, 2005). However, "journalism has developed beyond the stage where one country can ever again assume to have found the right paradigm for all other countries" (Josephi, 2013, p. 445).

Schudson (2011) does not deny the importance of journalism for democracy; on the contrary, its role is fundamental to democratic theories of the profession. However, he argues that journalism alone does not represent or create democracy. Similarly, Zelizer (2017) contends that while journalism has historically been necessary for democracy, the reverse is not necessarily true, as the idea of democracy as journalism's lifeline has not been consistently supported in practice. This does not negate the fact that being a journalist in democratic societies is generally less dangerous than in non-democratic regimes; however, the author suggests that journalism has, to some extent, flourished even in places where democracy has not.

According to McQuail (2010), the normative paradigm of journalism presumes a certain kind of normally functioning "good society" — one that is democratic, liberal, plural, consensual, orderly, and also well-informed. In this view, social inequality is not essentially problematic or even unjust as long as tensions and conflicts can be resolved by existing institutional means. However, the author acknowledges that this perspective is based on an idealised view of Western society — the so-called "Western way of life" — and therefore fails to account for the contradictions faced by developing or Third World countries.

Albuquerque (2005, 2019b) concurs that, in the final decades of the 20th century, the American journalism became an almost universal benchmark against which journalism in other countries is assessed. In most cases, this influence is viewed positively, as it is associated with values such as professionalism, independence, and democracy. In the empirical model proposed by Brüggemann et al. (2014), Portugal is classified within a Western media system alongside Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland, and the United States. However, this classification does not extend to countries such as Brazil.

These distinctions reinforce the need to reflect on what journalism is — in a critical/descriptive sense — and what journalism should be — in a normative sense. While recent studies have analysed the discursive production of the newspapers *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo*, here we break new ground by adopting a metajournalistic approach — that is, journalism about journalism — to critique the codes, conventions, and circumstances of its construction (Deuze, 2001, 2003). This type of discourse appears to have gained traction in the digital environment, where the ability and willingness to reflect publicly on oneself and to engage in open self-criticism are generally welcomed. Journalism becomes "meta" when it examines its practices within a news product, such as in editorials or the specialised press. Contemporary forms of asserting journalistic authority have also emerged, such as podcasts (Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau, 2022). A journalist's self-perception — particularly regarding their social role and relative power — shapes their interactions with other public actors (Moon, 2021), ultimately leading to a reinterpretation of the normative nature of journalism over time. Similarly, meta-journalism contributes to the stabilisation of the field, as discourse and experiences help journalists make sense of the world and position themselves within it (Perreault, Perreault, & Maares, 2022; Perreault, Tandoc, & Caberlon, 2023).

In the following section, we critically analyse the proposal by the newspapers *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo*, beginning with the editorial published on July 9, 2020. First, we present the research method.

3. Methodological Procedures

This study forms part of a broader qualitative research project and is grounded in discourse analysis methodology. Discourse analysis represents an overarching framework that encompasses various epistemological approaches (Guimarães et al., 2020). The analytical framework has evolved continually, reflecting the dynamic nature of the discipline, which regards discourse as a material entity in constant motion. In particular, this study engages with critical studies that view discourse as a complex socio-cognitive event involving social actors within a specific context (time, place, and circumstances). The objective is not only to understand the text itself but also to situate it within its broader environment (van Dijk, 2017).

The "transatlantic partnership" between *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* is framed as a case study, as it exemplifies journalistic production and offers insights into Portuguese-Brazilian society in a descriptive, in-depth, and non-confirmatory manner (Gerring, 2004). A non-probabilistic sampling of typical cases was employed, with the editorial entitled "Carta aos Leitores do *PÚBLICO* e da *Folha de S. Paulo*" (Letter to the Readers of *PÚBLICO* and *Folha de S. Paulo*) being selected for analysis. As a complementary data collection technique, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with journalist and university professor Joaquim Fidalgo, who played a key role in the creation of *Público*, and with Vinícius Mota, the current editorial secretary of *Folha de S. Paulo*. This technique proved valuable as it involved a limited number of participants while providing rich, detailed information (Guion et al., 2011).

Critical discourse analysis was employed (see Table 1), with the assumption that the construction of journalistic discourse structures can influence specific mental models and generic representations of the audience (van Dijk, 1998, 2015). Based on general schematic superstructures — that is, excerpts strategically positioned (according to journalistic hierarchy, codes, and conventions) in the editorial signed by Manuel Carvalho and Sérgio Dávila, the respective directors of *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* at the time — the following section will discuss the semantic macrostructures, which represent the overall meaning of the discourse. The fifth and sixth paragraphs of the editorial were excluded, as they contained repeated information, and the framing falls outside the scope of this study. Thus, it was determined that the normative commitment manifests in the Portuguese-Brazilian journalistic discourse along five axes: digital information, a certain idealisation of journalism as an advocate for democracy, migration issues, the Portuguese language, and European goals.

	SUPERSTRUCTURES	MACROSTRUCTURES
Subheadline	"Unrestricted access to digital editions"	Digital information
First paragraph	"It is an original gesture — the first transatlantic partnership"	Idealisation
	"Although an immense ocean separates us, there is also a language, a culture, and a shared set of values that unite us"	
	"Commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and our dedication to human rights"	
Second paragraph	"Journalism grounded in rigour, independence, pluralism, the rejection of sensationalism, and a commitment to public service"	
Third paragraph	"Large communities of Portuguese people living in Brazil and Brazilians living in Portugal"	Migration
Fourth paragraph	"The global reach of the language of Camões or Machado de Assis, or the culture that this shared language promotes"	Portuguese language
	"European challenges, environmental risks, pandemic crises, and threats to democracy"	European goals

Table 1. *Superstructures and macrostructures of "Carta aos Leitores do* PÚBLICO *e da* Folha de S. Paulo*"*

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. DIGITAL INFORMATION

The last decade of the 20th century marked the digital transition for *Folha de S. Paulo*, which evolved from being a traditional newspaper producing printed editions to a media group offering content across multiple formats and platforms through the Universo On-Line (UOL) portal. UOL is a holding company controlled by Luiz Frias, the current publisher of *Folha de S. Paulo* (Aguiar, 2016). *Público*, on the other hand, has been offering its content online since 1995. The digital trajectories of both newspapers became interconnected in 2014 when *Público* began presenting a Brazilian version of its website (https://www.publico.pt) on the UOL domain. During this period, it was possible to access the website at https://www.publico.uol.com.br. The connection between the two was further solidified with the introduction of shared digital subscriptions in 2020.

The current joint initiative between *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* reinforces Franklin's (2012) argument that newspapers are not confined to publishing print editions, nor are they on the brink of disappearing. While both newspapers continue their print runs, they are also demonstrating their influence in the digital space with the creation of podcasts and active social media profiles. Both newspapers rank among the audience leaders in their respective countries within the daily publications segment. According to the Índice Verificador de Comunicação, in July 2023, *Folha de S. Paulo* was the most consumed newspaper in Brazil, with 796,088 paid copies, of which more than 94% (752,019) were digital subscriptions. Meanwhile, data from the Associação Portuguesa para o Controlo de Tiragem e de Circulação reveals that in the second quarter of 2023, *Público* had a digital paid circulation of 47,227 copies, compared to a print circulation of 10,256 (just over 21% of its digital circulation).

O'Sullivan et al. (2017) highlight that the materiality of the printed object and the cultural structures surrounding it serve as a foundation that fosters innovation, enabling

newspapers to coexist with digital media. In line with this, Mesquita (2023) argues that the production of information by various social actors — which, prior to the widespread use of information and communication technologies, was the exclusive domain of journalists and newsrooms (Deuze & Witschge, 2018) — compels traditional media to produce journalism aligned with normative values, thereby promoting social change and transformation. This demonstrates that *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* are keen to compete for the audience, particularly the digital one, by differentiating themselves based on specific principles. While internet access limitations persist, the sharing of digital subscriptions is not a drawback but rather an asset for both newspapers — elevating them to an international or at least Luso-Brazilian level, especially in a space where misinformation[2] tends to be more prevalent. The argument for internationalisation may be contested, as journalist and university professor Joaquim Fidalgo notes that cosmopolitanism is a core characteristic of *Público* — with international events often highlighted in the headlines across all segments (economy, politics, society, culture, sport, etc.) since its inception in 1990. Similarly, *Folha de S. Paulo* relies on news agencies and some correspondents to stay informed on major global events.

For the Portuguese newspaper, access to *Folha de S. Paulo*'s content may be valuable not only for its audience but also for its journalists, who gain a channel of information sources within the Brazilian newspaper. This is particularly relevant for covering broader issues affecting both Portugal and Brazil — such as environmental concerns — especially when human and financial resources are limited. For the Brazilian newspaper, sharing digital subscriptions is symbolically significant, setting it apart from its national competitors. Since its founding in 1921, *Folha de S. Paulo* has sought to engage with readers from the urban middle class, including civil servants, small shopkeepers, and segments of the working class, maintaining an urban focus in contrast to newspapers like *Estadão*, which historically aligned with the agrarian oligarchy (Souza, 2019). Even today, ownership concentration within family groups remains a defining feature of the Brazilian media system, with *Folha de S. Paulo* controlled by the second generation of the Frias family (Azevedo, 2006). The partnership with *Público* aligns it more closely with normative journalism and socially engaged practices. Mesquita (2023) argues that even in less democratic contexts or developing democracies — such as Brazil — the civic function of journalism, its ethical commitments to democracy, plurality, and access to information, and its adherence to professional roles and norms remain prevalent. Thus, the Portuguese-Brazilian initiative does not remove *Folha de S. Paulo* from internal competition but rather strengthens its position, allowing it to frame national and international issues from a European perspective.

---

[2] The term "fake news", popularised during the 2016 American presidential election, has a broad scope, encompassing both fabricated news circulating on social media and the general discrediting of the press (Quandt et al., 2019). In this study, following L. Wu et al. (2019), we adopt the term "misinformation" in a broad sense to include all false or inaccurate information shared on social media, regardless of whether it was intentionally created.

4.2. Idealisation

The reference to the originality of sharing digital subscriptions reaffirms the normative commitment of *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo*. In a landscape marked by the proliferation of online content sources — many of uncertain reliability and veracity — self-reflection and transparency in the journalistic production process serve as distinguishing factors in the information market (McNair, 2017). However, there is also a romanticised portrayal of these newspapers as advocates for democracy. Acknowledging that journalism and democracy are not necessarily synonymous (Hanitzsch, 2019; McQuail, 2010; Schudson, 2011; Thomas, 2019; Zelizer, 2017), Nerone's (2013) critique is pertinent: the emphasis on journalism's normative character verges on fantasy, as norms idealise what perfect agents do in ideal conditions. In this regard, Eldridge (2017) argues that by presenting themselves through idealised archetypes and celebrated values — almost as "heroes" and representatives of "good" — journalists project their "dominant vision" as their best offering to the public.

Folha de S. Paulo has had different owners throughout its centenary history. In the first decades after its founding in 1921, it remained relatively insignificant. It was not committed to democracy, even supporting the 1964 military coup and maintaining an acquiescent and discreet stance until nearly the end of the dictatorship (Albuquerque, 2019a). Ideologically, the newspaper aligned with the business-military pact to counter communist ideas (Dias, 2012). This position shifted between 1983 and 1984 when *Folha de S. Paulo* joined the Diretas Já campaign — a popular movement advocating for the reinstatement of direct presidential elections. However, this transformation was driven by strategic considerations: its owners at the time, Octavio Frias de Oliveira and Carlos Caldeira Filho, recognised that the newspaper's success depended on a democratic regime. Consequently, it repositioned itself as a voice of resistance during the democratic transition process.

When *Folha de S. Paulo* joins *Público* and publicly declares its commitment to democracy, it is important to recognise that its primary commitment may, in fact, be to its own interests. Despite claiming to be non-partisan, independent, and pluralistic, the Brazilian newspaper adopts specific positions when covering certain topics (Paixão Marcos, 2018), particularly when it comes to internal affairs. Regarding former President Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2021), *Folha de S. Paulo* was notably critical, especially in its coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Alongside other media outlets (g1, UOL, *O Globo*, *Extra*, *Estadão*), it consolidated data on cases and deaths after the federal government made it more difficult to access such information. However, its criticism of the Workers' Party governments, which held power from 2003 to 2016, contributed to the animosity that ultimately played a role in the 2018 presidential elections, in which Bolsonaro emerged victorious.

Público's normative commitment is stronger despite the fact that the Portuguese newspaper is also linked to private capital through the group Sociedade Nacional de Estratificados (Sonae)[3]. This is because the idea of creating a daily newspaper originated

---

[3] Público Comunicação Social S.A. is part of the Sonaecom sub-holding.

from a group of journalists already working at the weekly *Expresso*, who aimed to modernise the press in Portugal, following the example of other European countries. In other words, the values came from within (the professionals) to the outside (the investors). Furthermore, the context provided by the Carnation Revolution — which ended Salazarism (1933–1974) in Portugal and, unlike in Latin America or Spain, was not the result of a planned elite agreement (Rezola, 2008) — confirms the reliability of *Público*'s normative discourse. When interviewed, Joaquim Fidalgo stated that the leader of Sonae at the time, Belmiro Mendes de Azevedo, saw *Público*'s independence as a beneficial arrangement — much like his perspective on *Folha de S. Paulo*'s commitment to democracy. However, the separation between journalism and profit was clearly established from the outset:

> in the newspaper's first edition, a joint statement was published — our Magna Carta — formally outlining the roles of both journalists and investors. Mr. Belmiro de Azevedo told us that there were people within the Sonae group who were annoyed by some of the uncomfortable stories we were publishing. He responded by saying that he could not interfere in *Público*'s work. The only thing he asked was that both sides be given a voice — we could "badmouth" the group, but we also had to hear their version of the facts. In this regard, it was an exemplary case, although many people had doubts about it. (Joaquim Fidalgo, personal communication, October 21, 2020)

Still within this "idealisation" category, when referring to the Atlantic Ocean — symbolising that physical distance does not impede the closeness between Portugal and Brazil — both *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* evoke memories of historical overseas expansions. Although this historical memory may be more visibly evident from the Portuguese side, it is crucial to remember that this socio-historical context encompasses the genocide of Indigenous peoples, the transatlantic slave trade, the transfer of the Portuguese court to Brazil in 1808, and the atypical process of Brazil's independence (Scalabrin Müller et al., 2023). The attempt to strengthen ties between the two countries, without adequately acknowledging that this relationship is shaped by the social, political, and economic consequences of a colonial past, challenges the normative commitment advocated by the periodicals. After all, Brazilian journalists face greater vulnerability than their Portuguese counterparts — despite the generally precarious environment in which journalists work, marked by bureaucratic dynamics in newsrooms, deadlines, and relationships with sources. While the 2023 edition of the World Press Freedom Ranking[4] places Portugal as the ninth safest country for practising journalism, with strong freedoms allowing journalists to report without restrictions — though some may face threats from extremist groups — Brazil ranks 92nd. In terms of environmental coverage, journalists from Third World or developing countries face higher risks of imprisonment, murder, assault, threats, kidnapping, self-exile, lawsuits, and harassment compared to those covering other topics

---

[4] Refer to https://rsf.org/pt-br/ranking.

(Freedman, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, while Portuguese journalists dealt with the challenges of remote working (Miranda et al., 2021), their Brazilian counterparts (particularly women journalists) were directly targeted by former President Bolsonaro through insults, humiliation, and vulgar threats (Nicoletti & Flores, 2022). Thus, the political/institutional context of each country puts the normative stance of Portuguese-Brazilian journalism to the test.

4.3. Migration

As previously mentioned, international journalism is one of *Público*'s defining characteristics, with the newspaper often spotlighting events in the United States — considered the epicentre of international news (H. Wu, 2000) — and other key European centres. When interviewed, Joaquim Fidalgo noted that Brazil does not fully align with the typical concerns of the Portuguese newspaper. In its early years, when Brazil was nearing the end of its military dictatorship, *Público* focused on the Brazilian cultural scene, particularly driven by telenovelas. Today, however, there is more emphasis on political and economic issues rather than cultural ones. As Fidalgo explained, "the growing number of Brazilians in Portugal has led to increased interest, not because it is Brazil, but because it is what is most present in the daily lives of the Portuguese" (personal communication, October 21, 2020).

T. França and Padilla (2019) highlight that there has been a steady flow of migrants from Brazil to Portugal since the late 1970s. The most recent wave of immigration began in 2016, driven by Portugal's economic recovery, in contrast to Brazil's political and financial crisis, which started with the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016). According to 2022 data from the Immigration and Borders Service, Portugal had 781,915 regular immigrants, with Brazilians forming the largest community, numbering 239,744 (30.7% of all foreign residents). In line with Thomas (2019), it could be argued that the collaboration between *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* helps people navigate the world around them. However, since the economy plays a significant role in determining international news coverage (H. Wu, 2000), it is plausible that the economic advantages linked to immigration, along with cultural proximity — as will be discussed below — explain the Portuguese interest in the Brazilian audience.

On the Brazilian side, the exodus of citizens may also drive an interest in understanding developments in Portugal and Europe — particularly since, in the first decade of the 21st century, Brazilian migration was largely directed towards the United States (Assis, 2021). However, this engagement appears more reactive than proactive. When interviewed, *Folha de S. Paulo*'s editorial secretary, Vinícius Mota, stated that the newspaper's primary references are dailies in the United States and the United Kingdom. The partnership with *Público* provides an opportunity to expand its audience, as competition in the journalistic field extends beyond readership to include strategies for attracting and retaining that audience (Bourdieu, 2005). Just as the Portuguese-Brazilian partnership strengthens *Folha de S. Paulo* domestically, it also enhances its international prestige — establishing it as a benchmark for Brazilian journalism — through *Público*.

4.4. Portuguese Language

The mention of key figures in Portuguese-Brazilian literature, such as Camões and Machado de Assis, reinforces the notion of a shared culture bound by an intangible heritage: the Portuguese language. Notably, linguistic ties and colonial history are cultural factors that shape the international flow of news (Sakurai, 2017). However, Portuguese-Brazilian journalistic practices and approaches are shaped by their respective national contexts (Novais et al., 2013). This means that journalism in both countries is the product of distinct institutional, social, and cultural experiences, making it impossible to speak of a "deterritorialised" or translocal Portuguese-speaking journalistic community. Consequently, the idea of a "transatlantic partnership" is challenged. It is worth noting that the orthographic agreement — implemented in 2015 — standardises spelling (but not pronunciation) across Portuguese-speaking countries. However, criticism of this measure, particularly in Portugal, challenges the notion of a shared linguistic understanding. A recurring argument against the agreement is the perceived loss of Portugal's linguistic prestige, as if it is synonymous with Portugal's subjugation to Brazil, given that most of the changes affect European Portuguese (Ninitas, 2020). Additionally, São Paulo city, home to over 11 million people according to the 2022 census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics[5], has a Portuguese-speaking population larger than that of Portugal itself.

Público and *Folha de S. Paulo* talk about "creating ties, bringing Brazilians and Portuguese closer together, heirs to the same language and a common cultural root", but for the Portuguese newspaper, the language issue is a sensitive point. In its opinion articles, *Público* includes the message "the author is a columnist for PÚBLICO and writes according to the new spelling agreement" at the end of the text, which signifies agreement with the orthographic spelling agreement. However, when a columnist does not adhere to the instrument, this phrase is omitted. This stance contradicts not only *Público*'s normative commitment but also one of the European objectives, which is to respect the wealth of cultural and linguistic diversity.

4.5. European Goals

By committing themselves to addressing contemporary social challenges, *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* align themselves with the European values agenda, which centres on a fundamental issue: the proper functioning of democracy. However, drawing direct parallels between Brazil and Portugal in this regard is not feasible. Despite the growth of the Chega party in Portugal, led by André Ventura, who challenges formal democratic norms and advocates for changes to the current constitutional system (Serrano, 2020), it remains uncertain to what extent Portuguese public institutions are destabilised by one political leadership that expresses itself predominantly through social media. The normative commitment of both newspapers is clearly at odds with Ventura's populist stance, given his frequent harassment of immigrants and Roma communities.

---

[5] https://www.ibge.gov.br/cidades-e-estados/sp/sao-paulo.html.

However, as discussed earlier, Brazil does not have a pluralistic media landscape but rather oligopolies that were formed during the authoritarian period (Avritzer, 2020) — with *Folha de S. Paulo* being one of them. Albuquerque (2005, 2019b) asserts that Brazil has appropriated the rhetoric and journalistic practices of the United States — seen as an example of Western democracy — adapting them (rather than adopting them) to its own cultural environment. In the author's view, Brazilian democracy was once considered the most solid in South America, having developed a network of accountability systems involving institutions from all three branches of government (the Public Prosecutor's Office, the media, and civil society organisations), as well as positive developments in the Brazilian press towards more autonomous and investigative practices. However, the parliamentary coup against elected President Dilma Rousseff revealed that, as a product of history, there is no guarantee that the balance of power underpinning Western democracies will endure indefinitely. The government of former President Jair Bolsonaro, marked by the widespread sentiment that everything was permissible and open to oppressive violence (Barretto Filho, 2020), exemplifies Brazil's instability.

5. Final Considerations

This paper aims to identify and understand how normative commitment manifests itself in Luso-Brazilian journalistic discourse. Based on a critical analysis of the editorial jointly signed by *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* to announce the offering of joint digital subscriptions, five key themes were identified: digital information, a certain idealisation of journalism as an advocate of democracy, migration issues, the Portuguese language, and European objectives. Overall, the two newspapers are aligning to strengthen their position in the journalistic field. However, despite Portugal and Brazil's aspirations towards a brotherhood — that is, an ideal Luso-Brazilian society inspired by democratic theories — the political and institutional particularities of each country undermine this fantasy.

The relatively recent positioning of *Folha de S. Paulo* as an advocate of democracy (to the extent of collaborating with other media outlets to challenge the misinformation spread by former President Jair Bolsonaro during the pandemic) does not erase its past, when it colluded with the military dictatorship, nor its present, which centres around the interests of the Frias family, the newspaper's owners. The partnership with *Público* elevates its international prestige. Still, caution is needed to ensure that the pursuit of high-quality journalism does not veer into arrogance, particularly when critiquing domestic affairs. In contrast, the fact that *Público* was founded after the Carnation Revolution lends greater credibility to its commitment. Nonetheless, it is evident that the interest in Brazil, to some extent, challenges national pride, as illustrated by the controversial adherence to the orthographic agreement by Portuguese journalists.

In order to understand the journalistic field, it is crucial to consider the level of autonomy within it and, within that, the independence of individual media outlets (Bourdieu, 2005). The Portuguese-Brazilian distinctions do not undermine the normative commitment of *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo*. On the contrary, they highlight the significance

of examining newspapers that traditionally publish printed editions to understand the strategies they employ to reaffirm their journalistic quality, particularly in the context of digital media and misinformation. Focusing on the printed edition allows for more straightforward comparisons between different socio-cultural contexts.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

References

Aguiar, S. (2016). *Territórios do jornalismo: Geografias de mídia local e regional no Brasil*. Editora PUC-Rio; Vozes.

Albuquerque, A. de. (2005). Another "Fourth Branch": Press and political culture in Brazil. *Journalism*, *6*(4), 486–504. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884905056817

Albuquerque, A. de. (2019a). Journalism and multiple modernities: The *Folha de S. Paulo* reform in Brazil. *Journalism Studies*, *20*(11), 1546–1562. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1528881

Albuquerque, A. de. (2019b). Protecting democracy or conspiring against it? Media and politics in Latin America: A glimpse from Brazil. *Journalism*, *20*(7), 906–923. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917738376

Assis, G. D. O. (2021). "Estar aqui, estar lá": Novas configurações familiares e afetivas na migração de brasileiros para Europa. *Simpósio Gênero e Políticas Públicas*, *6*, 1212–1229. https://doi.org/10.5433/SGPP.2020v6.p1212

Avritzer, L. (2020). A crise da democracia e a ascensão do populismo de direita no Brasil. In A. C. Pinto & F. Gentile (Eds.), *Populismo - Teorias e casos* (1st ed., pp. 145–156). Edmeta.

Azevedo, F. A. (2006). Mídia e democracia no Brasil: Relações entre o sistema de mídia e o sistema político. *Opinião Pública*, *12*(1), 88–113. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-62762006000100004

Barretto Filho, H. T. (2020). Bolsonaro, meio ambiente, povos e terras indígenas e de comunidades tradicionais. *Cadernos de Campo (São Paulo - 1991)*, *29*(2), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9133.v29i2pe178663

Belair-Gagnon, V. (2019). Sociology of news work. In T. P. Vos & F. Hanusch (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of journalism studies* (pp. 1–8). John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118841570.iejs0031

Borges, R., & Afonso, A. (2018). Why subaltern language? Yes, we speak Portuguese! Para uma crítica da colonialidade da língua na mobilidade estudantil internacional. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, *34*, 59–72. https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.34(2018).2935

Bourdieu, P. (2005). The political field, the social science field, and the journalistic field. In R. Benson & E. Neveu (Eds.), *Bourdieu and the journalistic field* (pp. 29–47). Polity Press.

Brüggemann, M., Engesser, S., Büchel, F., Humprecht, E., & Castro, L. (2014). Hallin and Mancini revisited: Four empirical types of Western media systems. *Journal of Communication*, *64*(6), 1037–1065. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12127

Carey, J. W. (2007). A short history of journalism for journalists: A proposal and essay. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, *12*(1), 3–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X06297603

Carlson, M. (2016). Metajournalistic discourse and the meanings of journalism: Definitional control, boundary work, and legitimation. *Communication Theory*, *26*(4), 349–368. https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12088

Carlson, M., Robinson, S., Lewis, S. C., & Berkowitz, D. A. (2018). Journalism studies and its core commitments: The making of a communication field. *Journal of Communication*, *68*(1), 6–25. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqx006

Carvalho, C. A. (2019). Moisés de Lemos Martins: "O português é uma língua não só de comunicação, mas também de culturas, pensamento e conhecimento". *MATRIZes*, *13*(1), 93–106. https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v13i1p93-106

Christians, C. G., Glasser, T. L., McQuail, D., Nordenstreng, K., & White, R. A. (2009). *Normative theories of the media: Journalism in democratic societies*. University of Illinois Press.

Couldry, N., & Andreas, H. (2017). *The mediated construction of reality*. Polity Press.

Deuze, M. (2001). Understanding the impact of the internet: On new media professionalism, mindsets and buzzwords. *EJournalist*, *1*(1).

Deuze, M. (2003). The web and its journalisms: Considering the consequences of different types of newsmedia online. *New Media & Society*, *5*(2), 203–230. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444803005002004

Deuze, M., & Witschge, T. (2018). Beyond journalism: Theorizing the transformation of journalism. *Journalism*, *19*(2), 165–181. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916688550

Dias, A. B. (2012). *O presente da memória: Uso do passado e as (re)construções de identidade da* Folha de São Paulo*, entre o "golpe de 1964" e a "ditabranda"* [Master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Paraná]. DSpace. http://hdl.handle.net/1884/27381

Eldridge, S., II. (2017). Hero or anti-hero? *Digital Journalism*, *5*(2), 141–158. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2016.1162105

França, T., & Padilla, B. (2019). Imigração brasileira para Portugal: Entre o surgimento e a construção midiática de uma nova vaga. *Cadernos de Estudos Sociais*, *33*(2), 207–237. https://doi.org/10.33148/CES2595-4091v.33n.220181773

França, V. R. V. (1998). *Jornalismo e a vida social: A história amena de um jornal mineiro*. Editora UFMG.

Franklin, B. (2012). The future of journalism: Developments and debates. *Journalism Studies*, *13*(5–6), 663–681. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2012.712301

Freedman, E. (2020). In the crosshairs: The perils of environmental journalism. *Journal of Human Rights*, *19*(3), 275–290. https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2020.1746180

Gerring, J. (2004). What is a case study and what is it good for? *American Political Science Review*, *98*(2), 341–354. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055404001182

Guimarães, G. T. D., Paula, M. C., & Hirai, W. G. (2020). Discourse analysis applied to qualitative research: Methodological perspective in debate. *New Trends in Qualitative Research*, 4, 40–54. https://doi.org/10.36367/ntqr.4.2020.40-54

Guion, L. A., Diehl, D. C., & McDonald, D. (2011). *Conducting an in-depth interview*. University of Florida.

Hallin, D. C., & Giles, R. (2005). Presses and democracies. In G. Overholser & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *Institutions of American democracy: The press* (pp. 4–16). Oxford University Press.

Hanitzsch, T. (2019). Journalistic roles. In T. P. Vos & F. Hanusch (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of journalism studies* (pp. 1–9). John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118841570.iejs0029

Josephi, B. (2013). De-coupling journalism and democracy: Or how much democracy does journalism need? *Journalism*, *14*(4), 441–445. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884913489000

Martins, M. de L. (2010). Jornalismo e sonho de comunidade. In M. Oliveira (Ed.), *Metajornalismo - Quando o jornalismo é sujeito do próprio discurso* (pp. 9–13). Grácio Editor. http://hdl.handle.net/1822/30049

Martins, M. de L. (2017). *A linguagem, a verdade e o poder: Ensaio de semiótica social*. Edições Húmus.

McNair, B. (1998). *The sociology of journalism*. Arnold.

McNair, B. (2017). After objectivity? Schudson's sociology of journalism in the era of post-factuality. *Journalism Studies*, *18*(10), 1318–1333. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1347893

McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's mass communication theory*. SAGE.

Mesquita, L. (2023). Collaborative journalism and normative journalism: Lessons from Latin American journalism. *Anàlisi*, 68, 27–44. https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3541

Miranda, J., Fidalgo, J., & Martins, P. (2021). Jornalistas em tempo de pandemia: Novas rotinas profissionais, novos desafios éticos. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 39, 287–307. https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.39(2021).3176

Moon, R. (2021). When journalists see themselves as villains: The power of negative discourse. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *98*(3), 790–807. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699020985465

Nerone, J. (2013). The historical roots of the normative model of journalism. *Journalism*, *14*(4), 446–458. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884912464177

Nicoletti, J., & Flores, A. M. M. (2022). Violência contra jornalistas no canal de Jair Bolsonaro no Youtube. *Brazilian Journalism Research*, *18*(1), 4–35. https://doi.org/10.25200/BJR.v18n1.2022.1438

Ninitas, M. S. (2020). "Troca de galhardetes". Para o estudo da violência verbal na polémica sobre o acordo ortográfico em Portugal. *Revista de Estudos da Linguagem*, *28*(4), 1873–1912 . https://doi.org/10.17851/2237-2083.28.4.1873-1912

Novais, R. A., Moreira, S. V., & Silva, L. (2013). Brothers in arms? Portuguese and Brazilian journalistic worlds compared. *Brazilian Journalism Research*, *9*(1), 76–95. https://doi.org/10.25200/BJR.v9n1.2013.486

Oliveira, M., & Paulino, F. O. (2017). Serviço público de média em Portugal e no Brasil: Problemas e desafios da pesquisa comparada. *Sur le Journalisme, About Journalism, Sobre Jornalismo*, *6*(2), 56–67. https://doi.org/10.25200/SLJ.v6.n2.2017.317

O'Sullivan, J., Fortunati, L., Taipale, S., & Barnhurst, K. (2017). Innovators and innovated: Newspapers and the postdigital future beyond the "death of print". *Information Society*, *33*(2), 86–95. https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2017.1289488

Paixão Marcos, P. S. M. (2018). Linha editorial no jornalismo brasileiro: Conceito, gênese e contradições entre a teoria e a prática. *Revista Alterjor*, *17*(1), 90–108.

Perdomo, G., & Rodrigues-Rouleau, P. (2022). Transparency as metajournalistic performance: *The New York Times' Caliphate* podcast and new ways to claim journalistic authority. *Journalism*, *23*(11), 2311–2327. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884921997312

Perreault, G., Perreault, M. F., & Maares, P. (2022). Metajournalistic discourse as a stabilizer within the journalistic field: Journalistic practice in the Covid-19 pandemic. *Journalism Practice*, *16*(2–3), 365–383. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1949630

Perreault, G., Tandoc, E., & Caberlon, L. (2023). Journalism after life: Obituaries as metajournalistic discourse. *Journalism Practice*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2023.2202642

Quandt, T., Frischlich, L., Boberg, S., & Schatto-Eckrodt, T. (2019). Fake news. In *The international encyclopedia of journalism studies* (pp. 1–6). John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118841570.iejs0128

Rezola, M. I. (2008). The military, 25 April and the Portuguese transition to democracy. *Portuguese Journal of Social Science*, *7*(1), 3–16. https://doi.org/10.1386/pjss.7.1.3_1

Sakurai, T. (2017). Cultural factors in the flow of international news: A review of the literature. *SHS Web of Conferences*, *33*, Article 00008. https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20173300008

Scalabrin Müller, M., Cabecinhas, R., & Santos Silva, D. (2023). Cultural journalism in Brazil and Portugal. *Brazilian Journalism Research*, *19*(1), e1546. https://doi.org/10.25200/BJR.v19n1.2023.1546

Schudson, M. (2011). *The sociology of the news*. W. W. Norton and Company.

Serrano, E. (2020). Populismo em Portugal. *Media & Jornalismo*, *20*(37), 221–239. https://doi.org/10.14195/2183-5462_37_12

Souza, S. M. B. de. (2019). *Jornalismo e mobilidade: Características do app do jornal* Folha de S. Paulo [Undergraduate monograph, Universidade Federal do Tocantins]. Repositório UFT. http://hdl.handle.net/11612/1905

Thomas, R. J. (2019). Helpfulness as journalism's normative anchor: Addressing blind spots and going back to basics. *Journalism Studies*, *20*(3), 364–380. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1377103

Traquina, N. (2005). *Teorias do jornalismo: Porque as notícias são como são*. Insular.

van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. SAGE.

van Dijk, T. A. (2015). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton, & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (2nd ed., pp. 466–485). Wiley Blackwell.

van Dijk, T. A. (2017). *Discurso, notícia e ideologia: Estudos na análise crítica do discurso*. Edições Húmus.

Vargas, C., Sarmento, C., & Oliveira, P. (2017). Cultural networks between Portugal and Brazil: A postcolonial review. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *23*(3), 300–311. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1056175

Wu, H. (2000). Systemic determinants of international news coverage: A comparison of 38 countries. *Journal of Communication*, *50*(2), 110–130. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02844.x

Wu, L., Morstatter, F., Carley, K. M., & Liu, H. (2019). Misinformation in social media. *ACM SIGKDD Explorations Newsletter*, *21*(2), 80–90. https://doi.org/10.1145/3373464.3373475

Zelizer, B. (2017). *What journalism could be*. Polity Press.

Biographical Note

Thaís Braga holds a PhD in Communication Sciences. She is a journalist at the Universidade Federal do Pará and a collaborating researcher at the Communication and Society Research Centre. She is also a member of the research groups Hermenêutica e Comunicação — HERMENECOM, Narrativas Contemporâneas na Amazônia Paraense — NARRAMAZÔNIA, and Mídia e Violência: Percepções e Representações na Amazônia (Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2505-7367
Email: thaislcbraga@gmail.com
Address: Universidade do Minho, Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057 Braga, Portugal