

Using the online software tool *Word Cloud Generator*, which detaches the most quoted words into a messy and crowded image, one can wonder about the general trend of the articles. In doing so, it seems obvious that “media”, “community”, “audiences”, “local”, “radio” were expected keywords in the articles. In this analysis, a closer look to the smaller words may express possible insights followed by the authors. Words as “employability”, “change”, “engagement”, “phenomenon”, just to name a few possibilities, convey positive interpretations of local media as a field of study. However, this image is insufficient to sustain the general perspective of this issue.

The first article is written by Fábio Ribeiro and Luís Bonixe and it is clearly inspired by some of the latest theoretical aspects discussed, addressing the relationship that audiences seem to keep with local and regional media in Portugal. As such, the authors presents the data collected from an online survey of 139 consumers of local media, concluding the following: traditional media (printed and FM) are still the most consumed formats; the covid-19 pandemic was not decisive to increase local media consumption habits; seeking for information is the fundamental reason to follow local media; half of the sample have already interacted with broadcasters, especially to suggest ideas for journalistic approaches; in a global perspective, participants seemed pleased with the news coverage of local media towards local matters.

This special issue features an article from Brazil, thus combining a technological with a sociological approach. Nair Prata and Rafael Medeiros explored, as stated in the title, “The Migration from AM Radio to FM Radio in Brazil: Implications for Listeners and Local Broadcasters”. Starting from 2013, the Brazilian radio landscape changed significantly, as the Federal Government decide to initiative the process of migrating AM (reaching almost 90% of the territory) to FM stations in Brazil, “a major metamorphosis that has reconfigured different spheres of broadcasting in the country (...) changing their forms of production, the possibilities of broadcasting and consuming their content and even the configuration of the audience”. The authors concluded that these technical shifts are seriously compromising the faithfulness of long-lasting audiences in several regions in Brazil.

The article “Community Youth Radio in Rural Ireland”, written by Jason Murphy and Kate Bluett, looks at two youth radio projects held in a community radio station in a rural West Ireland. After a four-month execution project, the authors observed positive sides of engaging young people in an informal education scope, especially in such isolated rural region. Hence, authors were able to identify “innovative and socially conscious” approaches amongst adolescents, “however this requires a strong product focus to audio texts”. From this general remark, one might conclude that platformization and technology do now work randomly, as young people need guidance towards a deeper integration with the media.

Also in Ireland, again in the radio scope, Daithí McMahon addresses the general topic of the relevance of local Irish radio for their audiences in the article “In Tune with the Listener: How Local Radio in Ireland has Maintained Audience Attention and Loyalty”. More specifically, the author argues that local radio would only achieve sustainability and survival by achieving a truly effort of engaging with communities and audiences. This solid assessment is a result of a research combining three study cases in Ireland – *Radio Kerry* and *Beat*, from the private sector, and one public service station *RTÉ 2fm*. The decisive trigger of such analysis relies on the potential of radio stations “to endear their audiences to the brand and compete for their attention in an increasingly competitive mediascape”. Through an active role in “the formation of online communities on Facebook, by having a presence in the local community and by actively engaging with the audience”, local broadcaster develop “an important place in the lives of the people it serves and therefore must be preserved as not only an invaluable public service but as a beacon of culture and heritage”.

From Ireland to Portugal, this special issue also brings to the discussion two articles in the Portuguese framework. In this country, there is no legal regulation for the community media to operate, however this has not stopped social entrepreneurs and institutions to grasp their own media projects using the same valid concepts of local communication. This is one of the important conclusion of Miguel Midões article, entitled “Community Radios in Portugal: Mapping an Overlooked Alternative Media”. This is a comprehensive map of the community radio sector in Portugal, although as we may stress once more, there is no legal background for those projects. Following analysis and observation criteria from previous research devoted to the Third Sector scholarship, Midões organized all of those projects, almost 30, according to specific links with communities and audiences, such as: immigrants, mental health institutions, universities, musicians, just to

name a few. This article states that these media “are based on such communities or call for their involvement somehow” and “these nonprofit radio projects emerge from the will and hard work of a group of volunteers that unite towards a common purpose: creating and promoting a community-based radio”, yet confined to the most populated regions such as Oporto or Lisbon. One of the most remarkable aspects of this approach deals with the intriguing situation of a country lacking from legal background for such dynamics, whereas society manages to create specific projects to foster recognition and visibility.

Also in Portugal, the article “Facebook as a Local and Community Digital Media? Experiences Impacting on the Unemployed Audiences of the Project “REviver na Rede””, written by João Pinto and Teresa Cardoso, interestingly proposes a social media platform, Facebook, as to “impact of involving local audiences helped us achieve a valuable engagement, for instance through a prompt and assertive interaction, or a pedagogical moderation”. Using the REviver na Rede [RELiving in the Network] Project, it was “emerged as a response to a specific problem (unemployment) felt within a regional community (audience)”, the authors assessed that “Facebook can contribute to manage employability factors, like the isolation and social exclusion in unemployment” also acting “as a local and community digital media, facilitating experiences impacting on its audiences”.

Finally, a kind of meta-study towards the local media research scope. María-Cruz Negreira-Rey and Xosé López-García present the article “A Decade of Research on Hyperlocal Media: An International Approach to a New Media Model”, thus centering the debate on the hyperlocal media, an innovative approach within this issue. Following the understanding of hyperlocal media “with new informational approaches close to the citizenship, new organizational and business models”, the authors carried out a systematic literature review in Web of Science and Scopus databases where these media have been studied. After collecting almost 100 articles in high-impact journals, the authors concluded that “researchers had early on in this new media model, especially in the United States, United Kingdom, Sweden and Australia where it was studied more intensely. The works published from 2010 to 2020 exhibit an interest in the study of the transformation of the media ecosystem, the mapping and analysis of the characteristics of the media, their organizational and business models, as well as their informative production and the relationship with the audience”.

To sum up, this special issue also seeks to foster a very hot-topic research agenda in the latest years, but curiously enough, has led local media far from the general grasp of studies: disinformation. According to a very recent report from the MIT Technology Review¹, local media in the so-called “swing states” in the United States of America were the target of fake news strategies: “Data shows that during the election, disinformation was highly targeted locally, with voters in swing states exposed to significantly more online messages about voter intimidation, fraud, ballot glitches, and unrest than voters in other states”.

Fake news may hamper democracy in a local and regional level; however other menace is also at stake, due to economic constraints of media institutions. According to the data published² by Brazilian observatory *Atlas da Notícia* [The News Atlas], in May 2020, 62.6% of municipalities do not have news outlets, representing 37 million people. The “news deserts”, as defined by the organization, is a very troubling aspect in the media scope: “When comparing deserts and almost deserts with data from the United Nation’s Human Development Index, we can see a clear correlation: in more developed municipalities, a greater presence of vehicles”. Megan Garber, in *The Atlantic*³, called this phenomenon “The Threat to American Democracy That Has Nothing to Do With Trump. The disappearance of local news is a slow-moving disaster”. In Portugal, after the first lockdown in May 2020, authorities estimated that more than 30 regional media have disappeared. The Journalists’ Union claimed that “without strong and independent local media institutions, engaged in active communities about local matters, society will be weakened and national mainstream media will not be able to find those stories, as well as citizens will suffer more with the lack of information”.⁴ Here where we stand.

¹ Retrieved from <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/12/16/1014633/data-shows-swing-state-voters-more-local-disinformation/>

² Retrieved from <https://www.atlas.jor.br/desertos-de-noticia/>

³ Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/07/ghosting-news-margaret-sullivans-alarm-bell/614011/>

⁴ Retrieved from <https://www.apd.pt/imprensa-regional-por-um-jornalismo-forte-em-todo-o-pais/>

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