

III JOURNALISM STUDIES SYMPOSIUM

connecting to the human

UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA, LISBON

11 MAY 2026

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen

Cardiff University
School of Journalism



SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM

9:15 - Registration

10:00 - 11:30 Opening session

Catarina Duff Burnay (FCH Dean)

Alexandra Lopes (Director Of CECC)

Keynote: Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, Cardiff University School of Journalism

Introducing “Boutique Media”: Connecting with the Human through Epistemic and Affective Authority

Chair: Ioli Campos

11:30 - 13:00 Paper Sessions

Session 1 – The Human Audience, chair: Jessica Roberts, UCP

Room: 416

Beyond metrics: (Mis)attuning in the datafied relationship between journalism and audiences// Julie Vulpius, Roskilde University

Connecting to people from national and linguistic minorities: Public service media programs in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland//Liane Rothenberger, University of Bamberg & Steffen Grütjen, Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt

Who cares, and how? Exploring the interactions and expectations between marginalized news subjects and journalists who cover them//Emma Verhoeven, University of Antwerp

Relational journalism: Reconnecting journalists, communities, and the self//Timon Ramaker, Ede Christian University of Applied Sciences

Session 2 – Journalistic Practices, chair: Catarina Valdigem, UCP

Room: 414

Future Problems, Present Challenges: Exploring journalistic practices and the role of journalism in reporting persistent social issues// Jasmijn Kruijt, Linda van den Heijkant, Jeroen Jonkman, Toni van der Meer, & Theo Araujo, University of Amsterdam

Journalistic values in the age of the televised news reconfiguration in digital ecosystem: The case of News Bulletins in Romania//Roxana Chivu, University of Bucharest

New routines and norms in German newsrooms: How the demands of digital media put pressure on local journalism//Andrea Czepek & Melanie Hellwig, Jade University of Applied Sciences

Under pressure: Journalistic practices and newsroom routines in crisis coverage//Sandra Förster, Denise Voci, & Matthias Karmasin, University of Klagenfurt

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 15:30 Paper Sessions

Session 3 – AI in Journalism, chair: Ioli Campos, UCP

Room: 416

Human-machine agreement in detecting disinformation: Limits of AI sentiment analysis in social media debate//Katarína Fichnová, Łukasz Wojciechowski & Michal Radošinský, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava.

Journalism in the era of AI campaigns: Hungarian journalists' perspective on using AI in the light of the 2026 elections//Kata Horvath, UCP

Let data speak: Data storytelling in the era of big data and AI//Tomáš Hána, Charles University

Soft news, artificial intelligence, students, and “human” journalism//Mateusz Sobiech & Karolina Burno-Kaliszuk, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University

Session 4 – Confronting Challenges and Social Issues, chair: Nelson Ribeiro, UCP

Room: 414

Compassionate communication as a response to journalistic sensationalism: An Italian case study on the role of families impacted by crime//Diana Garrisi, Cardiff University

Information disorder in contemporary political communication on social media//Katarína Fichnová, Łukasz Wojciechowski & Michal Radošinský,

Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava

Media necropolitics and humanitarian journalism//Changiz Mahmoudzadeh Varzi, UCP

Sunshine or Suffering? The impact of valence and human presence in news visuals of heatwaves on emotional and risk perceptions of climate change//Linda van den Heijkant & Christel van Eck, University of Amsterdam

15:30 – 16:00 Coffee break

16:00 – 17:30 Paper Sessions

Session 5 – Human Journalists, chair: Manuel Carvalho Coutinho, UCP

Room: 416

Shielding the messenger: The role of civil society organisations protecting journalists from online harassment and hate//Susana Sampaio-Dias, University of Portsmouth & Maria João Silveirinha, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

Take that, Janet Malcolm!: An apology for befriending a source//Russell Frank, Pennsylvania State University

Witnessing from within: The role of human presence and first-person journalism in Bisan Owda's reporting on the conflict in Gaza//Maria Simonato, UCP

Going independent in gaming media: From one place of precarity to another//Ian Farrugia, UCP

Session 6 – Human Perceptions, chair: Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, Cardiff University

Room: 414

“With no media, I know nothing”: How people get local information in news deserts//Luísa Torre & Pedro Jerónimo, University of Beira Interior

Journalism under prolonged war: Information fatigue and the human scale of local news//Tanya Gordiienko, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy

Reconnecting journalism through transparency: Funding appeals and human resilience in Portuguese alternative media//Cátia Ferreira & Carla Ganito, UCP

Authority over truth: A discursive analysis of the identity of fact-checking in Portugal//Luis Pedro Rodrigues, UCP

Keynote:

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, Cardiff University

Introducing “Boutique media”: Connecting with the human through epistemic and affective authority

Wahl-Jorgensen is a Professor in the School of Journalism, Media and Culture at Cardiff University, and President-Elect-Select of the International Communication Association.

From 2021 to 2026, she was University Dean of Research Environment and Culture, leading institutional initiatives to enhance the research culture, including work to design and implement a sector-leading plan for enhancing research culture, chairing committees and working groups relating to research culture, designing institutional research culture fund, and leading conversations with government, funders and sector organisations on research culture.

As a researcher, she is focused on the relationship between citizenship, media and emotion - and how it is affected by rapid technological change and innovation. In recent years she has carried out extensive research on the experiences of local news entrepreneurs, including in the coronavirus pandemic. She is currently developing a new research project on the authority of news influencers, with a focus on epistemic and emotional sources of legitimacy.

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Session 1 – The Human Audience

Beyond metrics: (Mis)attuning in the datafied relationship between journalism and audiences// Julie Vulpius, Roskilde University

Connecting to people from national and linguistic minorities: Public service media programs in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland//Liane Rothenberger, University of Bamberg & Steffen Grütjen, Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt

Who cares, and how? Exploring the interactions and expectations between marginalized news subjects and journalists who cover them//Emma Verhoeven, University of Antwerp

Relational journalism: Reconnecting journalists, communities, and the self//Timon Ramaker, Ede Christian University of Applied Sciences

Beyond metrics: (Mis)attuning in the datafied relationship between journalism and audiences

Author: Julie Vulpius, Roskilde University

Abstract:

The relationship between audiences and journalism is undergoing profound change in the digital era. The abundance of digital media choices, the growing role of platforms, and the increasing reliance on audience data challenge long-held ideas about news and journalism while incrementally reshaping the audience-journalism relationship. To remain relevant, journalism providers increasingly embrace audience-centrism yet struggle to meaningfully connect to audiences as human beings. Audience analytics, A/B testing, personalization, recommender systems and generative AI promise deeper understanding and more closeness but tend to translate the lived, affective, and situational experiences of news audiences into manageable proxies such as clicks or time spent (Groot Kormelink & Costera-Mejler 2019). This paper argues that the current moment calls for concepts that can articulate meaningful connection in journalism beyond both (a) normative ideals about what audiences should be and (b) metricized assumptions about what audiences are (cf. Swart et al. 2022). While existing concepts such as engagement, news repertoires, and audience-centrism offer important insights into audience behavior, they often fall short of capturing the processual, relational, and affective dimensions through which audiences and journalism adjust (or fail to adjust) to one another over time (Loosen & Schmidt 2012; Peters & Schröder 2018).

The paper introduces attuning as a heuristic concept for understanding the evolving relationship between audiences and journalism as a process of gradual alignment and misalignment, which involves cognitive, affective, sensory, situational, biographical and infrastructural circumstances and events. The framework is motivated by two established but insufficiently connected strands of research: (1) audience-oriented scholarship showing that news use is paradoxical, often non-deliberate, and deeply shaped by mood, identity, social belonging, fatigue, and overwhelm (Ytre-Arne & Moe 2021; Manell & Meese

2022; Swart et al. 2022, Park 2025); and (2) newsroom and journalism practice scholarship that focus on the datafication of audiences and new technological and organizational actors (Lewis & Westlund 2014, Tandoc jr. 2019) that shape journalism's epistemic resources. Together, these literatures point to a central tension: journalism increasingly tracks audiences while struggling to understand them in a thick, human sense and this contribute to insufficient or solipsistic responses to audience needs.

Attuning refers to a communicative-relational process in which (i) audiences develop orientations toward news as a way of maintaining public connection, and (ii) news organizations attempt to understand and respond to audiences through editorial, technological, and commercial strategies. The process is asymmetrical: audiences typically seek orientation to the public world, not loyalty to a particular news brand, whereas news organizations pursue economic viability through audience consumption. Yet attuning is also mutually shaping: audiences' possibilities for meaningful public connection are conditioned by the socio-technical environments news organizations and platforms build, while those environments are continually adjusted in response to audience traces.

The framework draws conceptual inspiration from scholarship on attunement in developmental psychology (attunement as sensitive responsiveness to another's internal state) and from STS/media studies where the concept draw attention to the "orchestration of people and things rather than merely to individuals" and helps describe practitioners' ability to "recognize and resonate with the particular circumstances" (Bagge-Petersen, 2021, p. 103) that make up the everyday lifeworld of intended audiences. This process of 'knowing' and responding to can lead to well-attuned or misattuned outcomes, the latter when designers or institutions respond to imagined needs rather than lived ones. In relation to the audience-journalism relationship, misattunement becomes a diagnostic term for situations where newsroom strategies pursue connection (for example with notifications, personalization, frictionless design) while overlooking audience experiences of agency, trust, and emotional sustainability such as fatigue, guilt, overwhelm, news avoidance).

Analytically, attuning contributes three moves. First, it reframes “engagement” as an ambiguous signal rather than a stable indicator of value: the same click may express curiosity, obligation, anxiety, boredom, or compulsion. Second, it centers the human costs of datafication: when metrics become the dominant epistemic interface to audiences, newsrooms risk confusing measurable behavior with meaningful connection, and optimizing for short-term attention at the expense of long-term connection, trust, and wellbeing. Third, it offers a vocabulary for examining how AI intensifies epistemic distance: segmentation models, recommender systems, and generative AI “personas” can further abstract audiences into synthetic representatives, hardening institutional assumptions (e.g., “more time spent is always better”) while appearing user-centric (Author 2023).

Methodologically, the paper positions attuning as a heuristic that can structure empirical work across empirical sites (audience interviews/diaries, newsroom ethnographies, product studies, interface critique) by asking: What kinds of audience “inner states” are made legible or illegible? What organizational incentives shape responsiveness? Where do audiences experience journalism as supportive orientation versus intrusive capture? Where does “human connection” become operationalized into engagement KPIs?

References

Bagge-Petersen, C. (2021). Minority report on mobile health technologies An ethnographic exploration of mHealth innovation’s troubled attuning to children and young people that live with chronic illness [Doctoral dissertation, University of Copenhagen].

Groot Kormelink, T., & Costera Meijer, I. (2020). A User Perspective on Time Spent: Temporal Experiences of Everyday News Use. *Journalism Studies*, 21(2), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2019.1639538>

Lewis, S. C., & Westlund, O. (2015). Actors, Actants, Audiences, and Activities in CrossMedia News Work: A matrix and a research agenda. *Digital Journalism*, 3(1), 19–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.927986>

Loosen, W., & Schmidt, J.-H. (2012). (Re-)discovering the Audience: The Relationship between Journalism and Audience in Networked Digital Media. *Information, Communication and Society*, 15, 867-887. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.665467>

Mannell, K., & Meese, J. (2022). From Doom-Scrolling to News Avoidance: Limiting News as a Wellbeing Strategy During COVID Lockdown. *Journalism Studies*, 23(3), 302–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.2021105>

Peters, Chris & Schrøder, Kim. (2018). Beyond the Here and Now of News Audiences: A Process-Based Framework for Investigating News Repertoires. *Journal of Communication*. 68. 1079-1103. 10.1093/joc/jqy060

Swart, Joëlle & Groot Kormelink, Tim & Meijer, I. & Broersma, Marcel. (2022). Advancing a Radical Audience Turn in Journalism. Fundamental Dilemmas for Journalism Studies. *Digital Journalism*. 10. 8-22. 10.1080/21670811.2021.2024764

Tandoc, Edson. (2019). Analyzing Analytics: Disrupting Journalism One Click at a Time. 10.4324/9781138496538.

Westlund, O., & Lewis, S. C. (2014). Agents of change and continuity: The dynamics of editorial liveness in the era of social media. *Digital Journalism*, 2(1), 10–26.

Ytre-Arne, B., & Moe, H. (2021). Doomscrolling, Monitoring and Avoiding: News Use in COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown. *Journalism Studies*, 22(13), 1739–1755. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1952475>

Connecting to people from national and linguistic minorities: Public service media programs in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland

Authors: Liane Rothenberger, University of Bamberg & Steffen Grütjen, Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt

Abstract:

Media offers for national and minority language populations have seen an unstable trajectory over time. Whereas the establishment of national standardized languages dominated in the 18th and 19th centuries and also influenced the media landscape in the emerging nation-states (Sierp, 2008), developments in the second half of the 20th century led to a new level of awareness of how media can contribute to the distribution and preservation of minority languages. This is also acknowledged by political institutions like the EU (e.g. European Parliament, 2001; Council of Europe, 2024) and national bodies that, however, remain reluctant to formulate strict specifications that would then have to be enforced and complied to.

Whereas minority language media of Spain and UK have been quite well studied (e.g. Lema Blanco & Meda González, 2016), our study focuses on public service media (PSM) in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland as an under-researched area in journalism studies and systematizes its programs directed at national and linguistic minorities. It is by these broadcasting contributions that diversity of national voices is acknowledged and that media connect to medially underrepresented people, languages, and cultures, creating a prerequisite for a plural public sphere in democratic societies (Cormack, 1998). However, it is without saying that some critics rightly doubt the effectiveness of the media and see active citizenship among minorities as a necessary requirement (Zabaleta et al., 2014).

ARD¹'s offers in Germany address North, East, and Sater Frisians, Danes, Wends, and Sorbs. In Austria, ORF's programs are aimed at the Slovenian ethnic group, the Burgenland Croats, the Czechs, Slovaks, Roma, and Hungarian

¹ ARD = Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland; ORF = Österreichischer Rundfunk; RTR = Radiotelevision Svizra Rumantscha.

minorities. In Switzerland, RTR focuses on the Romansh and Grisons Romansh communities.

Our presentation a) systematizes the services offered by the PSM, b) highlights their country specific media law framework, and c) provides an overview over the main topics covered. Table 1 presents some relevant programs.

Title	Broadcaster	Format	Target Audience
Druha snědaň	MDR	News Podcast	Sorbian
Frasch for Enarken	NDR 1 Welle Nord	Radio Report	Frisian
Grænzenlos	NDR	Series of Documentaries	Danish
Romano Dikipe	ORF 2	TV Magazine	Roma
Telesguard	RTR (SRG)	Newscast	Romansh/ Grisons Romansh

Table 1: Examples of media content directed at minority language communities

Even though PSM provide the structural environment for producing the programs, connecting to the minority groups is only possible with journalists rooted in these groups and act as mediators in these linguistic cultures. Zabaleta et al. (2014) show that it is not easy to recruit journalists with these competencies. They conclude for the Frisians: “very few media outlets, very few major news organizations and very few journalists exist to serve the communication and information needs of the speaking community” (Zabaleta et al., 2014, p. 289). Even though AI-based translations facilitate mutual communication, they are not sufficient for building ties and bonds into these communities so that they feel seen, heard and represented in public communication.

We examine the need for the PSM minority programs against the backdrop of the public value concept (Mothes & Prinzing, 2025) in the democratic-corporatist media model. Building on this, we see the role of the mass media in conveying minority relevant information and fostering integration. In our outlook, we

critically question the appropriateness of the PSM minority programs—after all, significantly larger linguistic minorities are hardly provided with own formats.

References

Cormack, M. (1998). Minority Language Media in Western Europe. Preliminary Considerations. *European Journal of Communication*, 13(1), 33-52.

Council of Europe (2024). European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. <https://rm.coe.int/collected-texts-charter-4th-edition-en/1680b26fa0>

European Parliament (2001). European Parliament resolution on regional and lesser-used European languages.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52001IP0770>

Jakubowicz, K. (2004). Persons belonging to national minorities and the media. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 10(4), 291-314.

Lema Blanco, I. & Meda González, M. (2016). Linguistic diversity and Communication rights: the role of community media in the promotion of regional or minority languages in Europe. *Radio, Sound & Society Journal*, 1(1), 26-41.

Who cares, and how? Exploring the interactions and expectations between marginalized news subjects and journalists who cover them

Author: Emma Verhoeven, University of Antwerp

Abstract:

Journalism can foster social cohesion by providing fair, humanizing coverage of marginalized groups (Reimer et al., 2023). Giving voice to these groups disrupts the “othering” of marginalized individuals and even reduce discriminatory attitudes (Ayoub & Garretson, 2017; Lee & Hicks, 2022; Schemer, 2012). Yet one important question remains unanswered: how do people who share deeply intimate stories experience their interactions with journalists? And how do journalists experience those same interactions? After all, discrimination and systems of oppression create barriers that may discourage engagements with journalists. One important exception is the study by Palmer (2018), who shows how news subjects navigate being featured in the news based on 83 in-depth interviews. Her findings refute the idea of news subjects as entirely lacking agency, but also highlight journalists’ power in shaping their narratives. Still, Palmer’s study involves American participants from non-marginalized groups, who are less likely to be misrepresented and face fewer repercussions after being featured in the news (Panis et al., 2019).

This project analyzes the experiences and expectations of LGBTQIA+ and racialized news subjects – people featured and named – in Belgian news, as well as the journalists who report on them. As media coverage on LGBTQIA+ and racialized topics is often leveraged in culture war discourses in Belgium and beyond, these are highly polarized topics and these news subjects face backlash and even death threats.

Theoretically, this work is anchored in the ethics of care to contribute to a “journalism of care”. Coined by Hayashi (2016), the concept presents feminist care ethics as an alternative journalistic ethos. These rely on four key principles: attentiveness to others’ needs, responsibility to act on those needs, competence in delivering care, and responsiveness to those being cared for (Noddings, 1984). In journalists’ relation to news subjects, these principles require active listening,

considering long-term impact, increasing cultural literacy, and checking quotes with news subjects (Robinson, 2023). In her theory on trust building by journalists, Robinson (2023, p. xviii) highlights the need for audiences to trust news and proposes a paradigm that calls “not on authority but on authenticity, prioritizing not storytelling but connection”. Care ethics offer an alternative framework that does not ask “are we objective?”, but rather “are we being responsible to marginalized communities?”

During this presentation, I will share the preliminary findings of the first empirical study in this project. It focuses on news subjects’ experiences and motivations to interact with journalists, the consequences they faced after being featured in the news, and which expectation they have of journalism regarding care. These same aspects are also analyzed from the journalists’ perspectives, adding the layer of which boundaries journalists draw between care and professional conduct (Carlson & Lewis, 2015).

Methodologically, I conduct in-depth interviews with marginalized news subjects and the journalists who cover them. This study aims to recruit 30 ‘dyads’, or linked pairs, across Dutch-speaking and French-speaking Belgium. The sample is drawn from adult news subjects based in Flanders, featured in domestic news. One pilot interview with a dyad of a news subject and corresponding journalist has already been conducted. These interviews are separated – i.e., I do not interview them together, which could potentially hinder interviewee’s willingness to speak freely. For this presentation, I aim to have completed interviews with at least 5 dyads.

During the interview, the news stories they created or are featured in are used as a prompt to recall the experience. The news subject or journalist goes over the story and thinks aloud about their experiences (Charters, 2003). A topic list is used to discuss their experiences with journalists/news subjects, their motivations to appear in the news, the consequences of media appearances, and their expectations regarding care.

The interviews are audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. I also write analytical memos after each session. Subsequently, I apply reflexive thematic

analysis to the transcripts to find recurring “meaning based patterns, evident in explicit (semantic) or conceptual (latent) ways” (Braun et al., 2019, p. 848), through an inductive and iterative coding process. By combining the perspectives of news subjects and journalists, this study identifies gaps in understandings and expectations of journalistic processes, and tries to identify strategies to remedy them.

References

- Ayoub, P. M., & Garretson, J. (2017). Media context and global changes in attitudes toward homosexuality. *Comparative Political Studies*, 50(8), 1055–1085.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., & Terry, G. (2019). Thematic analysis. In P. Liampuong (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in health social sciences* (pp. 843–860). Springer Singapore.
- Carlson, M., & Lewis, S. C. (Eds.). (2015). *Boundaries of journalism: Professionalism, practices and participation*. Routledge.
- Charters, E. (2003). The use of think-aloud methods in qualitative research. *Brock Education Journal*, 12(2).
- Hayashi, K. (2016). A journalism of care. In C. Peters & M. Broersma (Eds.), *Rethinking journalism again: Societal role and public relevance in a digital age* (pp. 146–160). Routledge.
- Lee, T.-T., & Hicks, G. R. (2022). Testing the effects of news media diet on attitudes toward LGT equality. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 69(10), 1703–1720.
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. University of California Press.
- Palmer, R. (2018). *Becoming the news: How ordinary people respond to the media spotlight*. Columbia University Press.

Panis, K., Paulussen, S., & Dhoest, A. (2019). The representation of ethnic minorities in Flemish non-fiction programmes. *Media and Communication*, 7(1), 13–21.

Reimer, J., Albert, V., & Loosen, W. (2023). On society's reachability, representability, and ability for dialogue: Exploring the interrelation between journalism and social cohesion. *Journalism*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849231172372>

Robinson, S. (2023). *How journalists engage: A theory of trust building, identities, and care*. Oxford University Press.

Schemer, C. (2012). The influence of news media on stereotypic attitudes toward immigrants in a political campaign. *Journal of Communication*, 62(5), 739–757.

Relational journalism: Reconnecting journalists, communities, and the self

Author: Timon Ramaker, Ede Christian University of Applied Sciences

Abstract:

In many democratic societies, journalism is facing a profound legitimacy crisis. Audiences turn away from news they experience as distant, polarizing, or irrelevant, while journalists themselves report growing pressure, emotional exhaustion, and loss of meaning in their work. Against this backdrop, engaged journalism has gained prominence as a response that seeks to rebuild trust through participation, dialogue, and reciprocity. Yet engagement risks becoming instrumental: a strategy to win clicks, loyalty, or data, rather than a rethinking of what journalism is and whom it serves.

This presentation proposes a relational approach to journalism that both deepens and reframes engaged journalism (Robinson, 2023). It argues that journalism is not merely a practice about relationships with audiences, but fundamentally a practice of relationships: between journalists and the people they report on, between journalists and their publics, and—crucially—between journalists and themselves, as well as with colleagues and professional communities. Drawing on a relational-ethical framework based on the ethics of care approach of Joan Tronto (2013), a relational interpretation of journalistic autonomy (Ramaker, 2025) and especially the work on presence and relationality by the Dutch philosopher Andries Baert (2025), this presentation shows how journalism can be reoriented as a normative, relational practice aimed at serving democratic life through presence, attentiveness, and responsibility.

The core claim is threefold.

First, journalists are never neutral observers outside society. They are always already embedded in social worlds, histories, and value-laden contexts. Rather than treating this subjectivity as a flaw to be minimized, a relational approach understands it as a form of professional capital. Journalists' experiences, moral intuitions, emotions, and motivations—often rooted in a sense of injustice or care—can function as starting points for inquiry. The challenge is not to

eliminate subjectivity, but to work with it journalistically: through reflexivity, transparency, verification, and dialogue.

Second, journalism is relational work, not merely content production. Much contemporary engagement focuses on audience interaction as a tool added to existing routines. A relational approach shifts the perspective: the relationship itself becomes guiding rather than instrumental. Inspired by relational ethics and theories of care and presence, the presentation distinguishes between weak relationality—where relationships are used to achieve predefined goals—and strong relationality, where attentiveness to the other and the situation shapes what questions are asked, which stories are told, and how responsibility is understood. In strong relationality, listening is not a technique but a professional orientation; trust is not managed but cultivated over time.

Third, relational journalism includes the relationship of journalists with themselves and with each other. Journalism involves intense emotional labor (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020): encountering suffering, conflict, anger, and moral ambiguity. When this labor remains unacknowledged, it undermines both well-being and professional judgment. A relational perspective highlights the importance of self-knowledge, emotional literacy, and collegial reflection as conditions for journalistic autonomy. Independence is not the absence of influence, but the cultivated capacity to make well-considered judgments in complex situations—often in conversation with peers.

Building on these premises, the presentation positions relational journalism as an enrichment of engaged journalism. Where engaged journalism rightly emphasizes reciprocity and participation, a relational approach adds depth by foregrounding normativity, care, and professional self-reflection. Engagement is thus not primarily about metrics or formats, but about ethical presence: doing justice to people as subjects rather than objects, and to journalism as a democratic practice rather than a transactional service.

By reframing journalism as a relational practice, this contribution invites conference participants to reconsider engagement not as an add-on, but as a

reorientation of the profession toward the people it is meant to serve—and toward the journalists who serve them.

References

Baart, A. (2025). *Iemand voor iemand. Handboek presentie [Somebody to somebody. Handbook Presence Theory]*. Boom.

Pantti, M., & Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2021). Journalism and Emotional Work. *Journalism Studies*, 22(12), 1567–1573. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1977168>

Ramaker, T. (2025). *Journalistiek onder druk. Versterken van autonomie door reflectie [Journalism under pressure. Strengthening autonomy through reflection]* [PhD Thesis]. Universiteit van Amsterdam.

Robinson, Sue (2023). *How journalists engage. A theory of trust building, identities and care*. Oxford University Press.

Tronto, J. C. (2013). *Caring democracy: Markets, equality, and justice*. New York University Press.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2020). An Emotional Turn in Journalism Studies? *Digital Journalism*, 8(2), 175–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1697626>

Session 2 – Journalistic Practices

Future Problems, Present Challenges: Exploring journalistic practices and the role of journalism in reporting persistent social issues// Jasmijn Kruijt, Linda van den Heijkant, Jeroen Jonkman, Toni van der Meer, & Theo Araujo, University of Amsterdam

Journalistic values in the age of the televised news reconfiguration in digital ecosystem: The case of News Bulletins in Romania//Roxana Chivu, University of Bucharest

New routines and norms in German newsrooms: How the demands of digital media put pressure on local journalism//Andrea Czepek & Melanie Hellwig, Jade University of Applied Sciences

Under pressure: Journalistic practices and newsroom routines in crisis coverage//Sandra Förster, Denise Voci, & Matthias Karmasin, University of Klagenfurt

Future Problems, Present Challenges: Exploring Journalistic Practices and the Role of Journalism in Reporting Persistent Social Issues

Authors: Jasmijn Kruijt, Linda van den Heijkant, Jeroen Jonkman, Toni van der Meer, & Theo Araujo, University of Amsterdam

Abstract:

Today's world is increasingly confronted with several complex issues that could grow into serious global problems if left unaddressed (Boin et al., 2021). Key examples of such *persistent social issues* are climate change, aging populations, and digital safety (United Nations, 2025). What distinguishes these issues is not merely their complexity, but also their persistence as they unfold over long time horizons and lack clear beginnings or endings. While these issues are important to cover in news media as they fundamentally shape our collective future, their long-term, uncertain, and global nature clashes with journalistic preferences for proximity, immediacy and audience relevance (e.g., Altheide, 2015; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). This creates distinctive challenges for journalism in how it can, and should, support democratic debate and sustain attention when urgency and novelty are structurally limited for these issues.

Drawing on 15 in-depth interviews with journalists, this study explores how the reporting on persistent social issues is handled in day-to-day journalism and how journalists perceive their role in covering issues that unfold gradually over time and extend beyond event-based news logic. We believe this study fits well with the symposium's theme *Connecting to the Human* since it explores how journalism seeks to make abstract, structural issues feel immediate and personally relevant to audiences. Understanding this is crucial for strengthening journalism's capacity to sustain public engagement with long-term issues, thereby counteracting the short-termism that often dominates contemporary discourse (Boston, 2021; Ogami, 2024).

The findings show that some journalistic considerations when selecting and framing persistent social issues remain business-as-usual, as journalists continue to rely on established news values such as audience relevance and importance assessment when selecting and framing stories. At the same time, journalists

stressed that covering persistent social issues demands more deliberate considerations than routine news on other aspects, since sustaining salience and upholding journalistic values is harder when issues evolve slowly, lack events with a clear starting point, and involve contested factuality. Importantly, journalists perceive persistent social issues as different from concrete, breaking news events that come with built-in immediacy and audience relevance (Mast & Temmerman, 2021). Specifically, the *distant*, *complex*, and *persistent* characteristics conflict with media logic and traditional newsworthiness criteria. Thereby, it challenges journalism's democratic role in fostering informed public debate. Journalists respond to these tensions with specific navigation strategies, including bridging psychological distance, contextualizing developments, and integrating diverse perspectives. However, they acknowledge these strategies as only suboptimal solutions, and therefore recognize persistent social issues as a distinct journalistic genre requiring specific attention.

Beyond current practices, journalists express two competing normative role conceptions in reporting on persistent social issues: journalism as *communicator of complexity* and *facilitator of public engagement*. These roles pull in different directions, as complexity-oriented approaches risk audience disengagement, while engagement-oriented approaches risk oversimplification. Notably, journalists show little explicit reflection on journalism's responsibility toward future society. Even though, greater future-oriented role reflection could shift journalism away from merely engagement-focused news toward an emphasis on news that covers long-term, complex societal stakes of these issues.

Overall, this study contributes by identifying persistent social issues as a distinct journalistic genre, demonstrating that journalists themselves recognize their unique challenges and demands. In doing so, it advances debates on journalism's institutional responsibilities and offers insights into how news media might counter societal short-termism by underscoring calls to shift journalistic priorities from immediacy and proximity toward greater (future-oriented) societal relevance (Karlsson et al., 2023).

References

Altheide, D. L. (2015). Media logic. *The international encyclopedia of political communication*, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118541555.wbiepc088>

Boin, A., Ekengren, M., & Rhinard, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Understanding the Creeping Crisis*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70692-0>

Boston, J. (2021). Assessing the options for combatting democratic myopia and safeguarding long-term interests. *Futures*, 125, 102668. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2020.102668>

Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2017). What is news? News values revisited (again). *Journalism Studies*, 18(12), 1470–1488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193>

Karlsson, M., Ferrer Conill, R., & Örnebring, H. (2023). Recoding journalism: Establishing normative dimensions for a twenty-first century news media. *Journalism Studies*, 24(5), 553-572. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2022.2161929>

Mast, J., & Temmerman, M. (2021). What's (the) news? Reassessing “news values” as a concept and methodology in the digital age. *Journalism Studies*, 22(6), 689-701. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1917445>

Ogami, M. (2024). The conditionality of political short-termism: A review of empirical and experimental studies. *Politics and Governance*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.7764>

United Nations. (2025). Global Issues | United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues>

Journalistic values in the age of the televised news reconfiguration in digital ecosystem: The case of News Bulletins in Romania

Author: Roxana Chivu, University of Bucharest

Abstract:

Under the impact of the rapid digital transformations on news production, the current literature discusses the core ideals of professional journalism mainly from the perspectives of the practitioners and the public (Milosavljević & Igor Vobič, 2019; Mellado & Gajardo, 2024). The human elements of the journalism are not yet analyzed regarding the consequences for journalistic ethical values in the case of the televised news reconfiguration under the impact of the Internet, as a research topic that remains less explored (Ségur, 2024). Regarding the news transformations, media scholars emphasize aspects such as the recursiveness of information, the fragmentation of media content (ibidem), or the rhetoric of transformative remixing in online spaces (Erdal, 2011) due to the use of hybrid elements of communication. In this respect, this qualitative research focuses on the ways in which TV stations integrate the digital practices in building the political communication, on one side, and, on the other, the transposal of the televised political news to the Internet, as a form of media recurrence. From this perspective, taking the Romanian public sphere as a primary case study, the considered research questions are: 'Which of the journalists' roles is more significant when television stations extend their televisual apparatus into the digital environment?', and 'How do transformations of the televised political news and the evolving roles of the journalists within the digital ecosystems impact established ethical normative frameworks?'. I have situated this research within an analytical framework which discusses media convergence (Jenkins, 2006; Deuze, 2007) in relation to practices relevant to the reconfiguration of news, such as hybrid communication (Debrett, 2014), and news (re) mediation (Couldry, 2008). The explored area consists of 40 political news items initially broadcast by four Romanian TV stations (two 24-hour news commercial TV networks, namely Euronews Romania and Antena 1 CNN, and two generalist media actors, namely PRO TV, and the Romanian Public Television - TVR), and then transposed to their websites and social media pages. The study examines

pivotal periods within the political landscape, specifically the 2024 European Parliament elections and the 2024-2025 presidential race. This includes the Romanian Constitutional Court's decision to annul the second round of the 2024 elections due to external interference, as well as the subsequent resumption of the electoral process.

Through qualitative content analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016) and multimodal analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the analysis identifies emerging hybrid journalistic practices within the sphere of political communication at both textual and visual levels. The study thus examines the reconfiguration of informational content and professional journalistic roles. The findings suggest implications that extend not only to professional standards but also to the audiences consuming hybrid journalistic products. The convergence of traditional and digital communication environments leads to a faster and more abundant dissemination of political information, with the possibility of updating it in almost real time. However, a convergent environment could also lead to informational dissonance or redundancy via hyperlinks and algorithmic recommendations. Against this backdrop, the human element, defined by ethical values such as responsibility and journalistic integrity (Verma, 2024), in relation to audiences might be altered by specific practices of dissemination and recontextualization through technological and symbolic constraints in the culture of media convergence. This disruption of the human element occurs thereby within the hybridization process, as well as through the reconfiguration/reframing of news items across various digital platforms to which journalists must adapt. Furthermore, the analysis reveals a shift in the journalists' roles from 'watchdog' or 'gate-watcher' towards those of 'interventionist' and 'loyal facilitator' (Mellado, 2019), which could also impact the journalistic transparency and accountability in the new media 'logic of flux' (Lobato & Lotz, 2021). The findings also suggest that the insertion of elements specific to the Internet into the traditional media items leads to a loss of traditional news qualities such as clarity, accuracy, or credibility (Hough, 1975), essential values for maintaining journalistic integrity. These findings raise the question of whether the reshaping of news content undermines the relationship between journalists and their audiences. In this respect, the research brings into discussion the possible erosion of the human factor in the (re)construction of

televised political news from the perspective of the emergence of new hybrid journalistic genres (Erdal, 2009), underscoring the importance of cross-national studies to evaluate the impact of the Internet on ethical norms beyond a single geographic scope.

Keywords: journalistic ethical values, human elements, televised political journalism, digital environment

References

Couldry, N. (2008). Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling. *New Media & Society*, 10(3), 373-389. DOI: 10.1177/1461444808089414

Debrett, M. (2014). Tools for citizenship? Public Service Media and Civic Engagement: An Australian Case Study”, *Television and New Media*, 16(6), 557-575. DOI:10.1177/1527476414557951.

Deuze, M., (2007). Convergence culture in the creative industries. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 243–263. DOI: 10.1177/1367877907076793.

Drisko, J. W., & Maschi, T. (2016). *Content analysis*. Oxford University Press.

Erdal, I.J. (2009). Repurposing of content in multi-platform news production. *Journalism Practice*, 3(2), 178-195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512780802681223>

Erdal, I.J. (2011). Coming to Terms with Convergence Journalism: Cross-Media as a Theoretical and Analytical Concept. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17(2) 213–223. DOI: 10.1177/1354856510397109

Hough, G.A. (1975). *News Writing*. Michigan State University.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture Where Old and New Media Collide*. University Press.

Kress, G., Van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. Routledge.

Lobato, R., & Lotz, A.D. (2021). Beyond streaming wars: Rethinking competition in video services. *Media Industries*, 8(1), 89–108. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.1338>

Mellado, C. (2019). Journalists' Professional Roles and Role Performance. In J., F., Nussbaum (Ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* (pp. 1-21). Oxford University Press.

Mellado, C., & Gajardo, C. (2024). The importance of the human touch in journalism: Journalistic values from an audience perspective. *Journalism Practice*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2024.2387668>

Milosavljević, M., & Vobič, I. (2019). Human still in the loop. *Digital Journalism*, 7(8), 1098–1116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1601576>

Ségur, C. (2024). Introduction du dossier 2024B: Les reconfigurations de l'information télévisée, *Les Enjeux de l'Information et de la Communication*, 24(3), 5-12, URL : <https://lesenjeux.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/2024/dossier/00-introduction-du-dossier-2024b-les-reconfigurations-de-linformation-televisee/>

Verma, D. (2024). Impact of artificial intelligence on journalism: A comprehensive review of AI in journalism. *Journal of Communication and Management*, 3(2), 150–156. <https://doi.org/10.58966/JCM20243212>

New routines and norms in German newsrooms: How the demands of digital media put pressure on local journalism

Authors: Andrea Czepek & Melanie Hellwig, Jade University of Applied Sciences

Abstract:

Local journalism in Germany has been undergoing enormous change for several years now: economic, technical and journalistic pressures have increased on all sides as a result of digitalisation, social media, artificial intelligence and political conditions. Falling revenues due to declining newspaper sales and the slump in advertising are accompanied by rising costs for paper, distribution and personnel, as well as investments in ever-new technologies. At the same time, newsrooms are facing a variety of challenges: organisationally, technically and professionally. Journalists need to transfer local journalism to various new media with new requirements, while being exposed to high cost pressure and expected to reach new, younger target groups (cf. Lehner et al. 2024; Meier et al. 2024).

These conditions can have an unfavourable effect on the diversity and depth of reporting. There is a lack of resources for research. Minority perspectives may not be adequately represented. Aggressive opinion campaigns on social media, increasing pressure on journalists and a lack of resources are leading to an increase in self-censorship. Journalists may avoid sensitive topics or controversial perspectives.

Using the example of local journalism in north-western Lower Saxony, this study examines the influence of social media and other digital developments on the everyday work of journalists and whether this has led to the emergence of new norms in the newsrooms. In local journalism, we suspect that the pressure on journalists is particularly strong due to the close geographical proximity between those who write articles and those who comment on social media. A threat or insult can have a very different effect than in national or international reporting, because unlike in international politics, people actually encounter each other in everyday life, as our interviews have shown. Three exploratory qualitative interviews were conducted with editors-in-chief in northwestern Lower Saxony.

We spoke with the two editors-in-chief of the Nordwest-Zeitung (NWZ) in Oldenburg, the Ostfriesen-Zeitung (OZ) in Leer, as well as the managing editor of the Wilhelmshavener Zeitung (WZ) in Wilhelmshaven.

Some recent changes have a major impact on editorial work: social media is expanding distribution channels. Artificial intelligence is taking over routine tasks. And fake news, shit storms and campaigns on social networks are creating particular challenges. We will present some examples in our presentation.

Highly emotional campaigns and the spread of disinformation keep journalists on their toes: they must find their way through this thicket, respond to it and provide fact checking, which is becoming increasingly difficult. In addition, newsrooms must find ways to deal with an increasingly aggressive communication culture on social platforms, which could lead to particularly affected social groups or certain topics receiving less coverage in the local public sphere.

The editors-in-chief we interviewed emphasise that local newsrooms protect their reporters. Here and there, even a ‘now more than ever’ attitude is emerging. However, there are already signs that editors are more cautious, having to think more carefully about how they approach certain topics, or which authors still dare to come forward. While just a few years ago, early and late shifts were introduced to feed the internet with regional news around the clock (and not just once a day with the news from the previous day), comments are now being disabled at night. This also has advantages: the newsrooms we looked at have shifted down a gear and are concentrating on background reporting and in-depth research. Editorial managers continue to uphold standards such as objectivity, truthfulness and diversity of opinion.

However, journalistic independence is eroding in the face of the diverse technical, economic, political and social conditions that affect newsrooms. Some standards of journalism have changed fundamentally: editorial offices no longer claim to determine topics they consider relevant, but are strongly guided by the demands of their users. As a result, certain topics are avoided, either because not enough users show interest or because they trigger negative reactions. Editorial managers admit that discussions about which topics the editorial team should

tackle and how have changed in the face of possible reactions of the public. Local and regional newsrooms increasingly have to deal with the loss of the audience's trust in journalism per se. Against this backdrop, local newsrooms are under pressure to justify their work, but are also challenged more than before in a constructive way to re-consider their objectives, reflect their roles and constantly evaluate the norms and rules in their journalism practice.

References

Altmeppen, K.-D., Bieber, C., Filipović, A., Heesen, J., Neuberger, C., Röttger, U., Stieglitz, S. & Thomas, T. (2018). Öffentlichkeit, Verantwortung und Gemeinwohl im digitalen Zeitalter. Publizistik, 64, S. 59 – 77.

Arnold, K. (2009): Qualitätsjournalismus. Die Zeitung und ihr Publikum Konstanz: UVK.

Burger, J., Künzler, M. & Autenrieth, U. (2024). Zwischen normativen Ansprüchen und wachsenden Nachrichtenwüsten: Zur Notwendigkeit von Lokaljournalismus als mediale Infrastruktur – am Beispiel der Schweiz. In M. Litschka, C. Paganini, L. Rademacher (Hrsg.), Digitalisierte Massenkommunikation und Verantwortung. Politik, Ökonomik und Ethik der Plattformen. S. 43 – 63. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Czepek, A. (2023): Pressefreiheit - Hindernisse und Grenzen. In K. Meier, C. Neuberger (Hrsg.), Journalismusforschung. Stand und Perspektiven, 3. Auflage, S. 29-59, Baden-Baden: Nomos.

European Commission (2022): The Digital Services Act package. <https://digitalstrategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package>

Heese, J., Pérez-Cavacos, G. & Peter, C. D. (2022). When the local newspaper leaves town: The effects of local newspaper closure on corporate misconduct. Journal of Financial Economics, 154, S. 445 – 463.

Jarren, O. (2021): Öffentlichkeitswandel durch Social Media – Auswirkungen der Plattformisierung auf die gesellschaftliche Vermittlungsstruktur. In: M.

Eisenegger et al. (Hrsg.), Digitaler Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, Mediensymposium, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-32133-8_3

Lehner, L.S., Sengl, M., Hohlfeld, R. (2024): Innovative Formate, neue Zielgruppen oder alles wie immer? Eine Analyse zum Stand der redaktionellen Konvergenz und Vielfalt im Lokaljournalismus. In: Kretzschmar, S., Sehl, A., Nölleke, D. (eds) Innovationen im Journalismus:. Springer VS, Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-45321-3_7

Loosen, W., Garmissen, A. v., Bartelt, E. & Olphen, T.v. (2023). Journalismus in Deutschland 2023. Aktuelle Befunde zu Situation und Wandel. (Arbeitspapier des Hans-Bredow-Instituts, 68). Hamburg: Verlag Hans-Bredow-Institut.

Mathews, N. (2022). Life in a news desert: The perceived impact of newspaper closure on community members. Journalism, 23 (6), S. 1250 – 1265.

Meier, K., Graßl, M., Klinghardt, K., Körner, M., Schützeneder, J. (2024). Zehn Trends, die in die Zukunft weisen. In: Die Zukunft des Journalismus. Medienwissen kompakt. Springer VS, Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3658-46841-5_3

Neuberger, C. (2020). Journalismus und digitaler Wandel: Krise und Neukonzeption journalistischer Vermittlung. In: Jarren, O., Neuberger, C. (Hrsg.): Gesellschaftliche Vermittlung in der Krise, Seite 119 - 154, Baden-Baden : Nomos doi.org/10.5771/9783748909729-119

Neuberger, C. (2022). Soziale Medien und Journalismus. In J.-H. Schmidt & M. Taddicken, Handbuch Sozial Medien, 2. Auflage. S. 81 – 101. Wiesbaden. Springer VS.

Sell, Saskia (2017): Kommunikationsfreiheit. Emanzipatorische Diskurse im Kontext medientechnologischer Entwicklungsprozesse. Springer VS, Wiesbaden., doi:10.1007/978-3-658-18277-9

Snyder, J. M. Jr.& Strönberg, D. (2010). Press Coverage and Political Accountability. Journal of Political Economy, 118 (2), S. 355 – 408.

Thomaß, B. (2016). Ethik des Journalismus. In: Löffelholz, M., Rothenberger, L. (Hrsg.) Handbuch Journalismustheorien. Springer VS, Wiesbaden.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-18966-6_33

Worlds of Journalism 2 (2012 – 2016):
https://worldsofjournalism.org/wojwordpress/wpcontent/uploads/2019/07/WJS_Ethical_orientations_-_aggregated.pdf

Under pressure: Journalistic practices and newsroom routines in crisis coverage

Authors: Sandra Förster, Denise Voci, & Matthias Karmasin, University of Klagenfurt

Abstract:

The role of journalism is paramount in times of crises, providing essential information for informed decision-making (Olsen et al., 2020; Van Aelst et al., 2021). During the early stages of one recent crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, studies reported increased information-seeking (Newman et al., 2021; Groot Kormelink & Klein Gunnewiek, 2022). However, as the crisis evolved, media consumption patterns shifted, with rising news avoidance and selective consumption (Vermeer et al., 2022; Andersen et al., 2024; Betakova et al., 2025).

This shift has been linked to “corona fatigue” (Groot Kormelink & Klein Gunnewiek, 2022), negative emotional responses to news (de Bruin et al., 2021), and mental overload (Jukes et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2024), contributing to a “crisis coverage gap” (Masullo et al., 2022) – a misalignment between public information needs and media coverage. While audiences expressed a preference for solution- and service-oriented journalism (Thier & Namkoong, 2023), media coverage has often prioritized political and economic reporting, leaving audience needs unmet and fueling news avoidance (Masullo et al., 2022).

Service journalism, characterized by audience dialogue, guidance, and practical value (From & Nørgaard Kristensen, 2018), represents a potential approach to address this gap. Studies suggest its prevalence increases during crises, offering personally relevant information and enhancing self-efficacy (Authors et al., forthcoming). Yet, crises reshape journalistic roles, requiring journalists to balance informing the public with avoiding panic, delivering rapid updates, and maintaining critical inquiry (Lundin & Walukiewicz, 2025). While research has addressed the changing roles of journalists (see e.g., Hallin et al., 2023; Blanchett & Duncan, 2024; Lundin & Walukiewicz, 2025), less attention has been given to the specific practices that journalists employ to address news

avoidance and the crisis coverage gap, and how this affects their journalistic self-perception, along with workload and working conditions.

This study aims to address this discrepancy. It investigates how journalists perceived their roles during the pandemic, the routines they adopted, and the factors influencing their work. Specifically, it asks: *What practices did journalists employ during a crisis to counteract two major problems – news avoidance and the crisis coverage gap –, and which factors enabled or restricted these journalistic practices?*

To address this question, a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) survey was conducted in spring 2024 with 200 Austrian journalists (51.5% male, 48.5% female). The sample comprised journalists with varying professional experience; 45.5% had been with their current outlet for over 15 years, and 91.5% held permanent positions. The sample included leadership (45.5%) and non-leadership roles (54.5%) across print (55%), online platforms (43%), television (23.5%), radio (15.5%), and news agencies (3%). The survey explored newsroom routines and identified contextual factors such as time pressure, workload, audience interaction, and technical demands.

Preliminary findings reveal a complex picture: (1) *Working Routines and Condition*: 45% of respondents reported increased workload, necessitating new skills acquisition and adaptations to working arrangements. Over half adopted remote or flexible work models, and the majority reported feeling team support, despite physical distancing. Interestingly, audience interaction did not demonstrably increase during the pandemic, with most journalists dedicating up to two hours weekly to engagement via email, telephone, and social media.

(2) *Journalistic Skills and Reporting*: The data indicate a strong focus on providing valuable information and guidance. Journalists demonstrated commitment to reporting on practical solutions and responding to audience needs, motivating exploration of new approaches. Maintaining neutrality and objectivity was prioritized by 76% of respondents, though challenges were noted in accessing sources and experts. A significant number also expressed a desire to provide audiences with entertainment and relaxation.

These initial findings show that there are crisis-specific routines and that journalists have, to some extent, adopted elements indicating a service orientation, such as acting as guides and providing valuable information. However, further analysis is needed to determine whether there are differences between the journalists surveyed, for example in terms of factors such as age, experience in journalism, and the sector. By adopting analytical dimensions on internal and external factors, further analysis will examine which factors enable or restrict service orientation in crisis coverage. By foregrounding the lived experiences of journalists, this study will make a valuable contribution to advance our understanding of how journalists try to reconnect with their audiences, especially during times of crises, as well as how journalists as human beings are affected from such crises by the work they do.

References

- Andersen, K., Shehata, A., Skovsgaard, M., & Strömbäck, J. (2024). Selective News Avoidance: Consistency and Temporality. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00936502231221689>
- Authors et al. (forthcoming). Navigating Uncertainty: Can Service Journalism Bridge the Coverage Gap in Times of Crisis?
- Betakova, D., Boomgaarden, H., Lecheler, S., & Schäfer, S. (2025). I Do Not (Want To) Know! The Relationship Between Intentional News Avoidance and Low News Consumption. *Mass Communication and Society*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2024.2304759>
- Blanchett, N., Brin, C., & Duncan, S. (2024). Catch, Engage, Retain: Audience-Oriented Journalistic Role Performance in <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2024.2310712>
- de Bruin, K., de Haan, Y., Vliegenthart, R., Kruijemeier, S., & Boukes, M. (2021). News Avoidance during the Covid-19 Crisis: Understanding Information Overload. *Digital Journalism*, 9(9), 1394–1410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1957967>

From, U., & Nørgaard Kristensen, N. (2018). Rethinking Constructive Journalism by Means of Service Journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 12(6), 714-729
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1470475>

Groot Kormelink, T., & Klein Gunnewiek, A. (2022). From “Far Away” to “Shock” to “Fatigue” to “Back to Normal”: How Young People Experienced News During the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journalism Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1932560>

Hallin, D. C., Mellado-Ruiz, C., Cohen, A., Hubé, N., Nolan, D., Szabó, G., Abuali, Y., Arcila, C., Attia, M., Blanchett, N., Chen, K., Davydov, S., de Maio, M., Garcés, M., HimmaKadakas, M., Humanes, M. L., I-Hsuan Lin, C., Lecheler, S., Lee, M., ... Ybáñez, N. (2023). Journalistic Role Performance in Times of COVID. *Journalism Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2274584>

Jukes, S., Fowler-Watt, K., & Rees, G. (2022). Reporting the Covid-19 Pandemic: Trauma on Our Doorstep. *Digital Journalism*, 10(6), 997-1014.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1965489>

Lundin, R. B., & Walukiewicz, E. (2025). Journalistic practice in times of crisis: A scoping review of role shifts and challenges tied to news production under extraordinary conditions. *Nordicom Review*, 46(s1), 108–129.
<https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2025-0010>

Masullo, G. M., Jennings, J., & Stroud, N. J. (2022). “Crisis Coverage Gap”: The Divide between Public Interest and Local News’ Facebook Posts about COVID-19 in the United States. *Digital Journalism* 10(6), 1037-1058,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1965488>

Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C. T., & Kleis Nielsen, R. (2021). Digital News Report 2021.
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>

Olsen, R. K., Pickard, V., & Westlund, O. (2020). Communal News Work: COVID-19 Calls for Funding of Journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 8(5), 673–680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1763186>

Thier, K., & Namkoong, K. (2023). Identifying Major Components of Solutions-Oriented Journalism: A Review to Guide Future Research. *Journalism Studies*, 24(12), 1557–1574. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2230314>

Van Aelst, P., Toth, F., Castro, L., Štětka, V., Vreese, C. de, Aalberg, T., Cardenal, A. S., Corbu, N., Esser, F., Hopmann, D. N., Koc-Michalska, K., Matthes, J., Schemer, C., Sheafer, T., Splendore, S., Stanyer, J., Stępińska, A., Strömbäck, J., & Theocharis, Y. (2021). Do-es a Crisis Change News Habits? A Comparative Study of the Effects of COVID-19 on News Media Use in 17 European Countries. *Digital Journalism*, 9(9), 1316–1346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1943481>

Vermeer, S., Kruikemeier, S., Trilling, D., & de Vreese, C. (2022). Using Panel Data to Study Political Interest, News Media Trust, and News Media use in the Early Stages of the COVID19 Pandemic. *Journalism Studies*, 23(5-6), 740-760. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.2017790>

Xu, J., He, Z., Guo, D., & Ding, Y. (2024). Relationship between news overload and news avoidance: A meta-analysis. *Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849241299667>

Session 3 – AI in Journalism

Human-machine agreement in detecting disinformation: Limits of AI sentiment analysis in social media debate//Katarína Fichnová, Łukasz Wojciechowski & Michal Radošinský, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava

Journalism in the era of AI campaigns: Hungarian journalists' perspective on using AI in the light of the 2026 elections//Kata Horvath, UCP

Let data speak: Data storytelling in the era of big data and AI//Tomáš Hána, Charles University

Soft news, artificial intelligence, students, and “human” journalism//Mateusz Sobiech & Karolina Burno-Kaliszuk, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University

Human–machine agreement in detecting disinformation: Limits of AI sentiment analysis in social media debate

Authors: Katarína Fichnová, Łukasz Wojciechowski & Michal Radošínský,
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, University of Ss. Cyril and
Methodius in Trnava

Abstract:

The aim of the research study is to identify the degree of agreement between the automated tool and human coders (human–machine agreement). The validity of the automated sentiment analysis (SA) tool will be assessed by comparing it with human coding (gold standard) as well as inter-rater reliability (IRR, i.e., the degree of agreement between two or more human coders working with the same coding framework (Fleiss's κ)) on materials that are responses to various disinformation or technologically manipulated media content.

Theoretical background: The article has several sources of inspiration. We consider the following insight to be significant: *"The choices ... [people] make, are, to a considerable degree, conditioned upon how others see and evaluate the world. For this reason, when we need to make a decision we often seek out the opinions of others"* (Liu, 2012, p. 8). At the same time, there is the growing popularity of the internet, which has elevated digital media to the main source of universal information, with many users utilizing various online sources to express their opinions and attitudes (Wankhade et al., 2022). The third inspiration is the finding that emotionally charged news significantly increases news diffusion in online networks (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013), as does disinformation (which spreads faster than truthful information - Zhao, et al., 2020).

Sentiment analysis (*opinion mining* (Liu, 2012)) provides information about the polarity of text and classifies text into positive and negative categories. It is mainly used on social media to monitor reputation and sentiment towards brands, which can be useful for marketing or communication (Šperková, 2014; Gupta et al., 2020). Findings by Pellert et al. (2022) showed that aggregated sentiment ratings from discussions strongly correlate with users' daily self-assessments of

emotions in surveys. Social media sentiment can therefore serve as an indicator for tracking emotions within a community and emotional trends over time. However, there are legitimate concerns that machine sentiment analysis (SAS) is not sufficiently accurate. Mehanna, et al. (2021), in an effort to refine SAS results, provide recommendations for appropriate preprocessing techniques to improve its accuracy. A study by Sharma et al. (2020) comparing different sentiment analysis techniques found that algorithms such as SVM, ANN, and modern neural networks (CNN, RNTN) often achieve higher accuracy than simple lexicon methods, but results vary depending on the dataset, language, and approach. According to research by Singh (2024), Transformer Architectures for Sentiment Analysis in English can achieve up to 90% accuracy (two-class classification), but significant computational resources are required. Sokolová et al. (2025) investigated these facts on Slovak datasets. According to their experimental findings, transformer models significantly improve the performance of (two- and three-level) sentiment classification compared to traditional methods. The authors also emphasize the importance of selecting a model specific to a given dataset (performance varies depending on the nature and characteristics of the datasets when evaluating sarcasm and irony). These imperfections and low classification levels lead to biased results (especially two-level classification: information about neutral or ambivalent sentiment is lost. Similarly, three-level classification does not distinguish between mild vs. strong positive or negative feelings). In addition, legitimate questions arise regarding the validity and reliability of the tools. Despite the aforementioned imperfections, which should lead to cautious use of SA, up to 60–76% of marketing teams monitor brand sentiment as a key indicator (Amra & Elma, 2025), and 58–60% of companies use AI to monitor sentiment on social media (Seosandwitch, 2025).

Research questions and methodology: What is the validity of automated tools optimized for the Slovak language for three-level and five-level classification? (RQ1, RQ2) We decided to explore these and other related questions in this study. For sentiment analysis, we will use: Modeler (Acrea), GPT, Claude, Gemin, XLM-RoBERTa v2, and human coders, with three-level and five-level classification. The material will consist of discussion posts on videos/photos that

show signs of technological manipulation and where users actively address the issue of authenticity and origin of shared content in the context of media disinformation. The criterion for sample selection is a high level of interaction. We will evaluate accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score, and the data will also be subjected to statistical analysis (inter-rater reliability, Fleiss's κ). Expected benefits: The contribution aims to introduce methodological frameworks for working with data in the field of sentiment analysis in Slovak conditions, and we see its use as enriching the methodology and theory of media communication, as well as the practice of marketing communication, political marketing, and media sociology.

Acknowledgement: This study was supported by project APVV-23-0612 Creativity as a source of prophylaxis against media hoaxes / CREativity Against HOaXes / CREATHOX.

References

- Amra & Elma. (2025). Best sentiment analysis in marketing statistics 2025. <https://www.amraandelma.com/sentiment-analysis-in-marketing-statistics/>
- Gupta, V., Juyal, S., Pal Singh, G., Killa, C., & Gupta, N. (2020). Emotion recognition of audio/speech data using deep learning approaches. *Journal of Information and Optimization Sciences*, 41(6), 1309–1317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02522667.2020.1809089>
- Liu, B. (2012). *Sentiment analysis and opinion mining*. Morgan & Claypool Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.2200/S00416ED1V01Y201204HLT016>
- Mehanna, Y. S., & Mahmuddin, M. (2021). The effect of pre-processing techniques on the accuracy of sentiment analysis using bag-of-concepts text representation. *SN Computer Science*, 2(4), Article 237. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42979-021-00453-7>
- Pellert, M., Metzler, H., Matzenberger, M., García, D., & Schweighofer, S. (2022). Validating daily social media macroscopes of emotions. *Scientific Reports*, 12, Article 11236. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-14579-y>

Seosandwitch. (2025). *Brand sentiment analysis statistics*.
<https://seosandwitch.com/brand-sentiment-analysis-statistics>

Sharma, D., Sabharwal, M., Goyal, V., & Vij, M. (2020). Sentiment analysis techniques for social media data: A review. In *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Sustainable Technologies for Computational Intelligence (ICTSCI 2019)* (pp. 75–90). Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0029-9_7

Singh, U., & Paridhi. (2024, August). Comparing transformer architectures for sentiment analysis: A study of BERT, GPT, and T5. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Technology*, 11(3), 394–399.

Sokolová, Z., Harahus, M., Sokol, M., Kupcová, E., & Pleva, M. (2025, May). Sentiment analysis using transformer models: BERT, T5, and GPT. In *2025 35th International Conference Radioelektronika (RADIOELEKTRONIKA)*, pp. 1-6,
<https://doi.org/10.1109/radioelektronika65656.2025.11008427>

Stieglitz, S., & Dang-Xuan, L. (2013). Emotions and information diffusion in social media: Sentiment of microblogs and sharing behavior. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 29(4), 217–248.
<https://doi.org/10.2753/MIS0742-1222290408>

Šperková, L. (2014). Unstructured data analysis from Facebook banking sites [Analýza nestrukturovaných dát z bankových stránok na sociálnej sieti Facebook]. *Acta Informatica Pragensia*, 3(2), 154–167.

Wankhade, M., Rao, A. C. S., & Kulkarni, C. (2022). A survey on sentiment analysis methods, applications, and challenges. *Artificial Intelligence Review*, 55(7), 5731–5780. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10462-022-10144-1>

Zhao, Z., Zhao, J., Sano, Y., Levy, O., et al (2020). Fake news propagates differently from real news even at early stages of spreading. *EPJ Data Science*, 9(1), Article 7. <https://doi.org/10.1140/epjds/s13688-020-00224-z>

Key Words: Human Sentiment Analysis; Machine Sentiment Analysis; Social Media Debates; Disinformation; Reliability; Validity; F1-score

Journalism in the era of AI campaigns: Hungarian journalists' perspective on using AI in the light of the 2026 elections

Author: Kata Horvath, UCP

Abstract:

AI and its everyday use are spreading at an unprecedented rate across most countries around the world. Due to technical advances, even an experienced eye cannot always tell whether most of the content is produced by artificial intelligence or is real. This phenomenon also makes the work of journalists and fact-checkers much more difficult.

As AI-generated videos are not limited to funny cat videos, they have gained greater significance due to their use as a tool in political campaigns. Hungarian politicians have had to file several police reports due to often dehumanizing content generated about them with the help of artificial intelligence (Patakfalvi, 2025; Székely, 2025; Horváth, 2025). However, AI-generated content appears not only on social media platforms but also in traditional media outlets, including Hungarian public media (Nagy, 2025), as well as in the rural county newspapers linked to the government (Német, 2025). The appearance of such content threatens the integrity of elections and further erodes trust in the media (Farooq et. al., 2025; Momeni, 2024).

The endless amount of content produced by artificial intelligence at an unmatched pace makes the question of journalists' perceptions of the use of AI even more interesting. Numerous studies have shown that the potential offered by artificial intelligence can be exploited in an ethical manner by the media (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2024). Nevertheless, even in more stable democracies and media systems, journalists have expressed concern about the negative impact of AI on trust in the media and the erosion of journalistic identity (Møller et.al., 2024; Dierickx et. al., 2024). However, journalists' perceptions are still largely an unexplored research area, especially when it comes to journalists in Eastern Europe.

This research aims to assess the perceptions of mainstream journalists regarding artificial intelligence in an unbalanced democracy and media environment, where AI is an integral part of the campaign. How do Hungarian newsrooms use AI? Have newsrooms developed protocols for the transparent and ethical use of AI? What is their perception of how their readers feel about the use of artificial intelligence?

To answer these questions, in-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen journalists employed by seven different editorial offices. When compiling the sample, the aim was to cover as broad a spectrum as possible, so the semi-structured questions were answered by a mix of senior and junior journalists from smaller, fact-checking and investigative media, large national newspapers, and smaller regional online media outlets. The interview request was, of course, also sent to employees of several pro-government newspapers, but they did not respond to the request by the time the abstract was submitted. Hopefully, the sample can be supplemented with their responses as well.

The interviewees offer a colorful range of views on the use of artificial intelligence and the fears surrounding it. They also express widely differing opinions on the image of journalists reconnecting with humanity and how AI transforms the journalistic identity. With the answers, the research aims to illustrate how the journalistic identity defined by the respondents changes depending on the use of AI across different editorial offices. However, their answers also highlight, among other things, the serious problems that a lack of comprehensive regulation can cause in the field of ethical reporting, in shaping reader expectations, and the misuse of developing technology.

References

Dierickx, L., Sirén-Heikel, S., & Lindén, C.-G. (2024). Outsourcing, Augmenting, or Complicating: The Dynamics of AI in Fact-Checking Practices in the Nordics. *Emerging Media*, 2(3), 449-473. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27523543241288846>

Cools, H., & Diakopoulos, N. (2024). Uses of Generative AI in the Newsroom: Mapping Journalists' Perceptions of Perils and Possibilities. *Journalism Practice*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2024.2394558>

Farooq, A., van den Hoogen, E., Tulin, M., & de Vreese, C. (2025). Generative AI Generating Concerns: Citizens' Perspectives During the 2024 European Elections. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612251376060>

Horváth, D. (2025). Jogilag sem oké kamu politikusi MI-videókkal elárasztani a netet, ráadásul bele is bukhat az, aki készítette. *Telex*. <https://telex.hu/belfold/2025/10/30/mesterseges-intelligencia-videok-kampany-jog-jogasz>

Møller, L. A., van Dalen, A., & Skovsgaard, M. (2025). A Little of that Human Touch: How Regular Journalists Redefine Their Expertise in the Face of Artificial Intelligence. *Journalism Studies*, 26(1), 84–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2024.2412212>

Momeni, M. (2024). Artificial Intelligence and Political Deepfakes: Shaping Citizen Perceptions Through Misinformation. *Journal of Creative Communications*, 20(1), 41-56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09732586241277335>

Nagy, N. (2025). A közmédia Híradójában is lejátszott Nemzeti Ellenállás Mozgalom-videóban még az utca emberét is mesterséges intelligenciával csináltákmeg. *Telex*. <https://telex.hu/zacc/2025/09/07/m1-kozmedia-nemzeti-ellenallas-mozgalom-mesterseges-intelligencia-video-kampany-magyar-peter-tisza-part>

Német, Sz. (2025). AI-dili a megyei lapok Facebookján: mióta kivezették a fizetett hirdetéseket, szinte minden napra jut egy Magyar Pétert fura helyzetben ábrázoló poszt. *Lakmusz*. <https://lakmusz.hu/2025/12/17/ai-dili-a-megyei-lapok-facebookjan-miota-kivezett-ek-a-fizetett-hirdeteseket-szinte-minden-napra-jut-egy-magyar-petert-fura-helyzetben-abrazolo-poszt>

Patakfalvi, D. (2025). Magyar Péter feljelenti Orbán Balázst a mesterséges intelligenciával készített álvideója miatt. *Telex*.
<https://telex.hu/belfold/2025/10/29/magyar-peter-felejelenti-orban-balazst-mesterseges-intelligencia-hamis-video>

Székely, S. (2025). Egy AI-videó miatt tesz feljelentést Hadházy Ákos, amiben Hunyadi felpofozza őt. *444.hu*.
<https://444.hu/2025/09/26/egy-ai-video-miatt-tesz-feljelentest-hadhazy-akos-amiben-hunyadi-felpofozza-ot>

Let data speak: Data storytelling in the era of big data and AI

Author: Tomáš Hána, Charles University

Abstract:

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI)-based tools is beginning to change data-driven work in journalism, particularly in investigative reporting (Bradshaw 2025). With the advent of AI, new powerful tools enable the extraction of knowledge from large datasets more effectively, identifying ideas for newsworthy topics quicker, and supporting journalistic investigations (de-Lima-Santos and Ceron 2021; Thäsler-Kordonouri and Koliska 2025). At the same time, it is essential to understand how big data and AI interact with each other in these contexts, as it poses epistemological consequences in terms of creating new stories. This study offers an analysis of their impact on data-driven stories in terms of sourcing, newsgathering, processing, and subsequent presentation.

Working with data has been part of journalism for decades (Anderson, 2018) yet the adoption of AI in the newsroom and newswork is likened to “a new journalistic paradigm” (Biswal and Kulkarni 2024). In this study, we examine the main characteristics of stories created using big data and AI-based tools using a sample of 22 projects from the 2025 Sigma Awards for data journalism. Using the grounded theory methodology (GTM) (Bryant and Charmaz 2019), the study first identifies the salient characteristics of the projects, then develops them in more detail, and analyses them. The characteristics are associated with three categories – sources, newsgathering/processing and appearance, which reflect the entire process of creating a data story (Garreton et al. 2024). The findings indicate that artificial intelligence tools are transforming data stories in both the creation process, where the authors often used the tools to identify new topics, and possibly follow-up action in the field, and their visual form, yet data visualisations are not the only means to reveal findings.

The study discovered that the amount of processed data enables newsrooms to develop new participatory interfaces, where every reader can explore data themselves, bringing more engagement towards the message in the story. There

is an observable trend to employ self-developed AI tools, which were the most frequently used type of tools in these projects, also enabling journalists to increase the transparency of their data gathering and analysis procedures, supporting earlier evidence (Weber et al. 2018). The performed analysis confirmed previous statements (Salaverria and de-Lima-Santos 2020; Dowd 2025), that the availability of data and unrestricted access are necessary prerequisites for new, data-driven investigations, that can cover wider ranges of topics than before.

The results clearly showed that new developments in AI are changing the way not only journalistic content is presented, but they could also serve as a suitable basis for further research on audience needs to better understand the impact and understanding of data stories (Appelgren 2018; Swart et al. 2022), potentially leading to interdisciplinary approaches about the impact of data-driven storytelling and interfaces for public discussions and political ‘ramifications’ of data-driven investigations (Hamm 2022).

Soft news, artificial intelligence, students, and “human” journalism

Authors: Mateusz Sobiech & Karolina Burno-Kaliszuk, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University

Abstract:

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), declining trust in the media, and growing reluctance to seek out information (Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2024) are having a profound impact on contemporary journalism. As a result, not only are the processes of gathering sources, verifying news, distributing and moderating content changing, but also – crucially for the essence of the profession – the process of creating news and other media genres (Cools, Diakopoulos, 2024).

The blurring line between journalistic statements created by humans and those “authored” by technology has been and continues to be the subject of numerous studies and analyses. Among other things, it has been established that AI can effectively generate content based on statistics, but the emotional layer of these statements is not as engaging as in the case of texts created by humans (Sadri et al., 2025). The technology in question also copes well with aggregating information from social media, but it can reinforce existing biases or simplify the narratives being disseminated (Nah et al., 2024). Analyses comparing journalistic content produced by AI and humans also point to existing linguistic differences. “Non-human” texts are more focused on the topic, but less diverse in terms of subject matter and potentially more biased (TechExplore, 2025). Despite the risks identified here and existing ethical concerns (Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2024), AI-generated information is sometimes rated by journalism students as being of better quality (Baptista et al., 2025).

Existing studies, although they indicate the main trends in the differences between news created by humans and AI and their perception, are mostly based on quantitative analyses that do not sufficiently capture the reasons behind the respondents' assessments. They also fail to analyze the consistency of these assessments and the competencies behind them, which is particularly important for the education of future generations of journalists.

The main goal of our study is therefore to characterize the liminal space that stretches between human and AI-generated soft news, which is supposed to highlight the “human,” emotional component of journalism. We are particularly interested in the shifts and transformations taking place within the structural elements of journalistic discourse, including text structure, lexical layer, and their informativeness and emotiveness. We want to determine how the above-mentioned liminality is perceived by future journalists, media students who, on the one hand, are just developing their journalistic skills, and on the other, are active users of artificial intelligence and the first generation to satisfy their information needs outside the traditional media system.

In light of the above, we would like to ask the following question in particular:

Q1. Which elements of soft news are “most human” and cannot be easily transferred to the world of automated journalism?

Q2. To what extent do future journalists recognize the “human components” of soft news?

Q3. Do journalism students' statements about the “human components” of soft news correspond to their actual interlocution skills?

To determine the answers to the above questions, we will conduct an experiment among journalism students at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin (Poland), which will consist of the following three consecutive steps:

Step 1. Pre-test – Students will be asked to identify the structural elements of gossip and sports news stories that enable them to distinguish between “human” and generated texts.

Step 2. Comparative analysis – Each student will receive one piece of gossip and one piece of sports news created by a human, and one piece of gossip and one piece of sports news generated by artificial intelligence. Both the “human” and automated news items will cover the same topic, contain the same information, and be of the same length. After reading the news items, students will be asked

to highlight passages in the texts that indicate the “human” nature of the analyzed statements and to mark the news items created by AI.

Step 3. Test – Students will again be asked to identify the structural elements of gossip and sports news that enable them to distinguish between “human” and generated texts.

Finally, the collected responses and analyzed news items will be collated and subjected to inductive analysis. We hope that the conclusions of this research will contribute to the scientific discourse on the relationship between human journalism and AI journalism, expanding on existing findings on the automation of soft news not only with the characteristics of elements defining the existing liminal space, but also with the didactic element related to the education of “human” competencies of future journalists.

References

- Baptista, J.P., Rivas-de-Roca, R., Gradim, A., Pérez-Curiel, C. (2025). Human-made news vs AI-generated news: a comparison of Portuguese and Spanish journalism students’ evaluations. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun*, 12, 567.
- Cools H., Diakopoulos N. (2024). Uses of Generative AI in the Newsroom: Mapping Journalists’ Perceptions of Perils and Possibilities. *Journalism Practice* 2024, s. 1-19.
- Gutiérrez-Caneda B, Lindén C-G., Vázquez-Herrero J. (2024). Ethics and journalistic challenges in the age of artificial intelligence: talking with professionals and experts. *Front. Commun.* 2024, 9:1465178.
- Nah, S., Luo, J., Kim, S., Chen, M., Mitson, R., & Joo, J. (2024). Algorithmic Bias or Algorithmic Reconstruction? A Comparative Analysis Between AI News and Human News. *International Journal of Communication*, 18, 700-729.
- Sadri, S. R., Payne, J. L., Brown, K. A., & Billings, A. C. (2025). Sports News and the Artificial-Intelligence-Generated Article: Examining Identity and the Influence of Human Versus Artificial Intelligence Authorship on Perceptions of

Credibility and Online Share Likelihood. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 18, 160-174.

TechExplore (2025). *Is this AI or a journalist? Research reveals stylistic differences in news articles.*
<https://techxplore.com/news/2025-04-ai-journalist-reveals-stylistic-differences.html> (23.01.2025).

Session 4 – Confronting Challenges and Social Issues

Compassionate communication as a response to journalistic sensationalism: An Italian case study on the role of families impacted by crime//Diana Garrisi, Cardiff University

Information disorder in contemporary political communication on social media//Katarína Fichnová, Łukasz Wojciechowski & Michal Radošinský, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava

Media necropolitics and humanitarian journalism//Changiz Mahmoudzadeh Varzi, UCP

Sunshine or Suffering? The impact of valence and human presence in news visuals of heatwaves on emotional and risk perceptions of climate change//Linda van den Heijkant & Christel van Eck, University of Amsterdam

Compassionate communication as a response to journalistic sensationalism: An Italian case study on the role of families impacted by crime

Author: Diana Garrisi, Cardiff University

Abstract:

This study explores how principles from self-help literature on conflict de-escalation can inform the responses of relatives of victims of gender-related crime to media exposure in Italy. The paper draws on the tenets of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), a conflict resolution method developed by American psychologist Marshall Rosenberg (2015), to analyse how a father, whose daughter was killed by her former boyfriend, engaged with the news media using compassionate communication, offering an alternative to, and a critique of, sensationalist journalistic practices.

The NVC model draws on the assumption that linguistic choices contribute to exacerbate conflict, hence linguistic choices may help mitigating it. To promote a constructive type of communication devoid of judgment, blame, and criticism, Rosenberg (2015, p. 3) devised a progressive method of conflict resolution based on four levels: 1) ‘observations’, i.e. a neutral factual determination of a given situation; 2) ‘feelings’, i.e. bodily sensations following our observations that can be connected to emotions; 3) needs, i.e. life essentials and necessities driven by personal values; 4) requests, i.e. wishes formulated with the aid of positive language. The objective of the framework is to facilitate our compassionate interaction with ourselves and others.

Current Italian news representations of femicide, defined as the intentional killing of women or girls, employ a language designed to elicit excitement, an effect amplified by clickbait culture (Cominetti and Belotti, 2025). Murders are often depicted as isolated personal tragedies rather than structural problems, leading to government responses that prioritise punishment over addressing systemic causes and implementing prevention strategies (Botti, Ingarra and Panaggio, 2024). News coverage frequently relies on stereotypical labels that reinforce patriarchal ideologies, such as “weak woman,” “helpless victim,” and “passionate man” (Capecchi, 2019).

Reporting crime offers the opportunity to stage a “morality play” that situates events and individuals within a perceived social order (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1991, pp. 74, 78). A discourse narrowed down to distinguishing the innocent from the guilty, a central modality in the courtroom, limits our ability to comprehend and prevent violence because it focuses on blame and punishment of individuals (Gilligan, 2000). Journalists have mirrored, and continue to mirror, the narratives and practices characteristic of jurisprudence, failing to offer themselves as a platform for reflection while disregarding the insight that “all human action is relational” (Gilligan, 2000, p.7). Adjectives that categorise violence as “bad,” “evil,” or “guilty” are value judgements, in other words, they are tautologies that create the illusion of understanding when, in fact, no explanation has been provided (Gilligan, 1996).

On 11 November 2023, Giulia Cecchettin, a 22-year-old Italian university student, was killed by her former boyfriend. The story sparked national outrage, prompting marches and protests across the country. Approximately 10,000 people, including government officials, attended Giulia’s funeral (RaiNews, 2023). Shortly afterwards, the Italian Senate approved a bill (Legge 24 November 2023, n. 168) aimed at strengthening existing provisions to protect victims of domestic violence, reinforce preventive measures, and ensure timely judicial proceedings (Penazzo, 2023).

The victim’s family played a key role in heightening public awareness of violence against women, helping catalyse public and political mobilisation; from his earliest public appearances, her father, Gino Cecchettin, made it clear that this case was not only a personal tragedy but also a broader political issue (Degani, 2025).

Using NVC as the main reference, this paper provides a rhetorical and stylistic analysis of 20 televised interviews released by Gino Cecchettin demonstrating four communicative strategies he routinely employed when speaking to journalists to ground his identity and responses in compassion and positive reframing. These strategies include:

- Antithesis: articulating a divergence of ideas by juxtaposing words or concepts of contrasting meaning.
- Perspective setting: defining an issue by foregrounding an alternative viewpoint, either in direct opposition or through thematic amplification.
- Reference to feelings and/or needs: explicitly articulating the father's personal emotions and necessities during the interview.
- Requests: stating concrete actions needed to meet identified needs.

Gino Cecchettin confronted the blame-oriented and polarising style often found in media coverage of crime by adopting empathy and positive reframing.

This case study shows how Nonviolent communication can enable news sources affected by crime to shape their identity in the public sphere beyond conventional moral expectations. It also provides a practical framework that journalists and sources can adopt to reduce sensationalism and promote restorative practices in public discourse.

References

- Cominetti, F and Belotti, F (2025) Giulia Cecchettin's femicide in the Italian online press. How headlines changed the narrative, if they did at all. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 1-25.
- Botti, L, Ingarrà, NM, Panaggio, A (2024) Discorsi di genere: perché il femminicidio di Giulia Cecchettin continua a mettere in discussione i confini tra violenza pubblica e privata contro le donne. *Heteroglossia. Quaderni di Linguaggi e Interdisciplinarietà*, 20: 139-160.
- Capecchi S (2019) The numbers of Intimate Partner Violence and femicide in Italy: methodological issues in Italian research. *Quality & Quantity* 53 (5): 2635–2645.
- Degani, P. (2025). Dying because of gender: the femicide crisis in Italy. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 1–13.

Ericson, R., Baranek, P. and Chan, J. (1991) *Crime Media*. Routledge.

Gilligan J (2000) *Violence. Reflections on our Deadliest Epidemic*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Legge 24 novembre 2023, n. 168, Disposizioni per il contrasto della violenza sulle donne e della violenza domestica (23G00178). Gazzetta Ufficiale, Serie Generale n.275, 24 Nov. 2023. [GazzettaUfficiale.it](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it)

Penazzo, M (2023). Approvato il ddl sul contrasto alla violenza sulle donne e alla violenza domestica. Istituto di Scienze Forensi.

RaiNews. (2023, December 5). Funerali di Giulia Cecchettin, martedì 5 dicembre ore 11. Diretta TV Rai, Padova città blindata e maxi schermi. RaiNews.

Rosenberg, M. (2015). *Nonviolent Communication*. PuddleDancer.

Information disorder in contemporary political communication on social media

Authors: Katarína Fichnová, Łukasz Wojciechowski & Michal Radošinský,
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, University of Ss. Cyril and
Methodius in Trnava

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to identify the scope, frequency, and types of information disorders (from misinformation to disinformation) in video speeches by politicians presented on the official social media pages of political parties.

Theoretical background: Disinformation poses a critical threat because it is no longer just false news, but sophisticated tools that directly interfere with the security and functioning of society: they undermine trust in institutions, science, and state authorities; they have real consequences in critical areas (such as healthcare) (historically, they have led to deaths); it has become a tool of hybrid warfare and the undermining of democracy. As research by S. Mariconda et al. (2024) has shown, fake news is particularly insidious because even when interested parties know it is false, they act as if it were true. Political candidates contribute significantly to the spread of misleading news through social media (Sami, 2021). Audiovisual content has the most significant impact on changing attitudes (Shmidt et al., 2020). At the same time, research has confirmed (Altay, 2023) that lower GDP, lower press freedom, and higher levels of corruption are associated with higher levels of concern about disinformation, especially disinformation originating from their own government rather than from foreign governments. Research by the Ján Kuciak Investigative Centre has shown that, in terms of paid political content on Meta (between July 2024 and June 2025)² in the V4 (Visegrád Group) countries, the highest number of attacks and instances of hate speech against the media and journalists in the V4 countries was recorded in Slovakia (68%). There are therefore reasonable concerns that the spread of disinformation and other so-called information disorders in Slovakia is

² New EU legislation (which came into force in April 2024) strictly regulates the targeting, financing, and transparency of political advertising. Google turned off political ads in the second half of September 2024. Meta stopped displaying and selling them on October 6, 2025.

significant and, as Zuidijk (2003) states, the 2023 elections in Slovakia are a sign of "the dawn of a new era of disinformation" (Zuidijk, 2023), or media speculation that they were "the first swung by deepfakes" (Conardi, 2023). The development of deepfakes, the speed at which disinformation spreads (it spreads faster than the truth, see Vosoughi et al., 2018; Zhao, et al., 2020) and their increase may be behind the general decline in media trust, according to research conducted by YouGov (Newman et al., 2024), which surveyed more than 95,000 people in 47 countries. According to the data, the average for all countries shows that 40% trust most news reports, with Finland being the country with the highest level of trust (69%), Greece and Hungary (23%) having the lowest levels, and Slovakia second from the bottom (25%). Overall, it can be said that disinformation and misleading information in Slovak political video speeches are part of a complex media environment influenced by external propaganda, historical narratives, and evolving digital communication strategies. Addressing these challenges requires an understanding of both the content and perception of such messages within the Slovak political and media environment. For these reasons, we aim to identify types of information disorders (from misinformation to disinformation) in politicians' video speeches on the official social media pages of political parties. We have preliminarily formulated several research questions (which will be further refined and supplemented): (RQ1) What is the frequency of information disorders in video speeches by selected Slovak politicians who presented on the official social media pages of political parties? (RQ2) Are there significant differences in the number (frequency) of information errors in video speeches between selected Slovak politicians? (RQ3) Which types of information errors are most prominent in politicians' video speeches? In this study, we will use a modified version of the content analysis method (Berelson, 1952), while defining the categories of information errors based on the approach of C. Wardle (2020).

As research material, we will use videos of (Slovak) politicians, narrowing the scope of the videos to a selected thematic area ("migration"), which will also correspond to keywords. The research strategy will be triangulation (a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches) using descriptive and inductive statistical methods. The results will be discussed and proposals will be

articulated for policymakers, for the content of media education and education in general, as well as for journalism, media communication, and, last but not least, for citizens—the recipients of political communications.

Acknowledgement: This study was supported by Project EÚ – Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic 09I03-03-V04-00666 Fellowships for Excellent Researchers R2-R4 “Potentials of creativity as a source of prophylaxis against fake news in social media”.

References

Altay, S. (2023). Who is concerned about misinformation and why? Evidence from 46 countries between 2018 and 2023. PsyArXiv. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/fz6wu>

Berelson, B. (1952). Content analysis in communication research. Free Press.

Conardi, P. (2023, October 7). Was Slovakia election the first swung by deepfakes? The Times. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/was-slovakia-election-the-first-swung-by-deepfakes-7t8dbf19b>

Mariconda, S., Pizzetti, M., Etter, M., & Haack, P. (2024). Fooling them, not me? How fake news affects evaluators' reputation judgments and behavioral intentions. Business & Society, 65(2), 467–511. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503241271255>

Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Ross Arguedas, A., & Kleis Nielsen, R. (2024). Reuters Institute digital news report 2024. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024>

Samia, B. P. (2021). Sources, channels and strategies of disinformation in the 2020 US election: Social networks, traditional media and political candidates. Journalism and Media, 2(4), 605–621. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia2040036>

Schmidt, A. L., Peruzzi, A., Scala, A., et al. (2020). Measuring social response to different journalistic techniques on Facebook. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 7, Article 17. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-0507-3>

Sólymos, K. K., Šlerka, J., & Možański, M. (2025, October 8). Platená nenávisť: Útoky na novinárov najviac sponzorovali politici na Slovensku a v Maďarsku. Platformy nezasiahli. Aktuality.sk. <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/A9u7pPO/platena-nenavist-utoky-na-novinarov-najviac-sponzorovali-politici-na-slovensku-a-v-madarsku-platformy-nezasiahli/>

Traberg, C. S., Harjani, T., Roozenbeek, J., et al. (2024). The persuasive effects of social cues and source effects on misinformation susceptibility. *Scientific Reports*, 14, Article 4205. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-54030-y>

Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146–1151. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559>

Wardle, C. (2020, September 22). Understanding information disorder. First Draft. <https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/understanding-information-disorder/>

Zhao, Z., Zhao, J., Sano, Y., Levy, O., et al (2020). Fake news propagates differently from real news even at early stages of spreading. *EPJ Data Science*, 9(1), Article 7. <https://doi.org/10.1140/epids/s13688-020-00224-z>

Zuidijk, D. (2023, October 4). Deepfakes in Slovakia preview how AI will change the face of elections. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2023-10-04/deepfakes-in-slovakia-preview-how-ai-will-change-the-face-of-elections>

Media necropolitics and humanitarian journalism

Author: Changiz Mahmoudzadeh Varzi, UCP

Abstract:

The Cameroonian theorist Achille Mbembe (2003) developed the theory of necropolitics to explain the social and political conditions that shape relations between the coloniser and the colonised. This theory was first taken up by scholars in political and social studies, exploring the life and death of marginalised groups such as Indigenous Peoples in Canada (Martensen 2021) and people living under neo-colonialism in places like Puerto Rico (Khoshnevis 2024). However, journalism and media scholars have also used necropolitics to analyse reporting in humanitarian and crisis situations. Yet despite this growing interest, the use of necropolitics in media studies remains scattered and not clearly defined. There is still no shared understanding of what “media necropolitics” means or how to use the concept as a tool for studying journalism.

Necropolitics is built on two central ideas. The first is Michel Foucault’s theory of biopower, which examines how modern states manage and control their populations. Foucault introduced this concept in his lectures and further developed it in *The History of Sexuality* (1998). The second idea comes from Giorgio Agamben’s work on the state of exception (2005). Agamben’s focus is on situations in which the sovereign suspends the law, and certain groups lose all their basic rights. Mbembe brings these two ideas together and argues that the highest expression of power is the sovereign’s ability to decide “who may live and who must die” (Mbembe, 2003. p. 11). He calls the places where this occurs “death-worlds”, where people live under conditions that reduce them to what he names “the living-dead” (ibid., p. 40).

Media scholars have used the concept of the death-world to study journalism in contexts affected by conflict, colonialism, and broader inequalities. For instance, Miriam Deprez (2023) coined the term “visual necropolitics” to examine visual violence in news coverage on Palestine. In Turkey, İşleyen and Çoban (2025) studied how the Turkish media reported on violence against women and gender minorities. Another example is Kelly Lewis (2023), who analysed how digital

platforms govern online populations through necropolitical power. These few examples show how the theory can be widely applied, but they also highlight that scholars often use it without defining what exactly media necropolitics means.

This study aims to address this gap by providing a clear conceptual and explanatory mapping of the application of a necropolitical framework in journalism studies. It also proposes a working definition of media necropolitics to guide future research. To this end, the study asks a central research question: How has necropolitics been used in journalism studies, and what conceptual gaps need to be filled to build a clearer framework for “media necropolitics”?

This paper uses a scoping review approach to examine academic articles, book chapters, and conference papers published between 2003 and 2025 that employ necropolitics to study journalism and humanitarian communication. The study will analyse the English texts in media and journalism studies. By comparing the various uses of Mbembe’s theory, this study identifies key themes and frames drawn from necropolitics in journalism studies. This paper also proposes a conceptual framework that explains how journalism can reinforce or challenge death-worlds through storytelling and news reporting, particularly in humanitarian situations.

Alongside older theories such as media imperialism (Schiller, 1978) and cultural colonialism (Said, 1994), this paper argues that media necropolitics can help explain how journalism shapes the boundaries between life, death, and humanity in our time.

Keywords: Necropolitics, Humanitarian Journalism, Colonialism, Story-Telling

References

- Agamben, Giorgio. 2005. *State of Exception*. University of Chicago Press.
- Deprez, Miriam. 2023. “Visual Necropolitics and Visual Violence: Theorizing Death, Sight, and Sovereign Control of Palestine.” *International Political Sociology* 17 (3): olad016. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olad016>

Foucault, Michel. 1998. *The History of Sexuality the Will to Knowledge*. Penguin Books, Limited.

İşleyen, Melike, and Barış Çoban. 2025. "Mediation of Gendered Life and Death Within Intersecting Regimes of Patriarchy, Authoritarianism, and Necropolitics." *Media and Communication* 13 (0). <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.10626>

Khoshnevis, Hadi. 2024. "State of Exception, Necropolitics, and Puerto Rico: Naturalizing Disaster and Naturalizing Difference." *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 35 (1): 75–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2023.2279957>

Lewis, Kelly. 2023. "Colonising the Narrative Space: Unliveable Lives, Unseeable Struggles and the Necropolitical Governance of Digital Populations." *Information, Communication & Society* 26 (12): 2398–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2023.2230260>

Martensen, Sophia. 2021. "Necropolitics, Colonialism, and Indigenous Peoples in Canada." *York University Criminological Review* 3 (1). <https://csri.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/default/article/view/115>

Mbembe, Achille. n.d. "Translated by Libby Meintjes." Public Culture.

Said, Edward W. 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage.

Schiller, Herbert I. 1978. "Media and Imperialism." *Revue Française d'études Américaines*, 269–81.

The impact of valence and human presence in news visuals of heatwaves on emotional and risk perceptions of climate change

Authors: Linda van den Heijkant & Christel van Eck, University of Amsterdam

Abstract:

Visual news coverage of climate change shapes public perceptions by emphasizing specific aspects of events through images (Tetzlaff et al., 2024). Visuals convey complex issues more effectively than text, often evoking strong emotions and enhancing journalistic impact (O'Neill et al., 2023). Research indicates that Dutch climate news mainly features impact visuals without humans, while images of the causes or solutions of climate change are less common (reference excluded for blind review). This is consistent with other studies demonstrating that journalists prioritize impact visuals in climate reporting (Dahl, 2023).

Recent research suggests that the tone, or valence, of these visuals matter considerably. O'Neill et al. (2023) found that many visuals in European news coverage portray climate change impacts, particularly heatwaves, in a positive way, as *fun in the sun* moments associated with leisure and holidays. However, such portrayals can be problematic as they downplay the serious environmental threats posed by rising temperatures and extreme heat. A similar pattern emerged in a recent study in the Canadian news context, where climate visuals rarely depicted heat as a dangerous phenomenon (Tetzlaff et al., 2024). When the dangers of extreme heat are depicted, they often lack a human presence, making climate change seem distant and disconnected from daily life.

Against this backdrop, we conducted a preregistered 2×2 between-subjects experiment to examine how the valence (positive vs. negative) and human presence (present vs. absent) in climate visuals influence perceptions of climate change. Participants ($n = 890$) recruited through a panel agency were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. Each participant viewed one of four visuals, differing by condition in valence and human presence, embedded within a news excerpt that was consistent in text across all conditions. The news excerpt was taken from a real-world Dutch news article (from NOS), preserving its

wording, layout, and headline. The article was selected for its neutral and factual tone, describing that temperatures exceeded 25 degrees Celsius for five consecutive days, the official threshold for a heatwave in the Netherlands. Afterwards, participants answered questions about their emotional responses and perceptions of climate risks.

The visuals were sourced from news archives and open-access platforms (e.g., Pixabay). Following the classification by the Heatwave Images Project (O'Neill et al., 2023), positively valenced images depicted heatwaves as pleasant or leisurely, while negatively valenced ones emphasized risk, discomfort, or danger. In the non-human conditions, the positive image showed a bright sun umbrella under a clear sky, evoking enjoyment and warmth, while the negative image depicted a thermometer against a burning orange-red sky, signaling danger. In the human conditions, the positive image featured four women happily cooling off in a public fountain, whereas the negative image showed a woman visibly struggling with the heat.

Preliminary results support our expectations regarding valence: positively valenced visuals elicited stronger positive and weaker negative emotional responses compared to negatively valenced visuals. As anticipated, positive valence was also linked to lower perceived heatwave risks compared to negative valence, reinforcing concerns that positively framed images can downplay the seriousness of extreme heat. However, no significant differences emerged between human and non-human visuals in terms of emotional responses or risk perceptions. Final results will be presented at the symposium.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how visuals in climate news influence public perceptions, particularly regarding the impact of positive portrayals and visuals that lack a human connection. Ultimately, our research seeks to support climate journalism that both informs and motivates audiences to engage with the climate crisis.

Keywords: Climate change journalism, visual journalism, heatwave imagery, human presence, emotional valence, online experiment

References

- Dahl, T. (2023). *Inspiration to act or just another scary vision? A study of images accompanying news coverage of the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report in Norway and the UK*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15845/bells.v13i1.3734>
- O'Neill, S., Hayes, S., Strauß, N., Doutreix, M. N., Steentjes, K., Ettinger, J., Westwood, N., & Painter, J. (2023). Visual portrayals of fun in the sun in European news outlets misrepresent heatwave risks. *Geographical Journal*, 189(1), 90–103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12487>
- Tetzlaff, E. J., Goulet, N., Yapici, N., Gorman, M., Richardson, G. R. A., Enright, P. M., & Kenny, G. P. (2024). Beach day or deadly heatwave? Content analysis of media images from the 2021 Heat Dome in Canada. *Climatic Change*, 177(5). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-024-03713-6>

Session 5 – Human Journalists

Shielding the messenger: The role of civil society organisations protecting journalists from online harassment and hate//Susana Sampaio-Dias, University of Portsmouth & Maria João Silveirinha, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

Take that, Janet Malcolm!: An apology for befriending a source//Russell Frank, Pennsylvania State University

Witnessing from within: The role of human presence and first-person journalism in Bisan Owda's reporting on the conflict in Gaza//Maria Simonato, UCP

Going independent in gaming media: From one place of precarity to another//Ian Farrugia, UCP

Shielding the messenger: The role of civil society organisations protecting journalists from online harassment and hate

Authors: Susana Sampaio-Dias, University of Portsmouth & Maria João Silveirinha, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

Abstract:

To fulfil their essential role in safeguarding democracy, journalists must work in a free and secure environment. Yet, they face multiple personal threats, ranging from cybersecurity dangers to sexual harassment, causing them a heightened risk of experiencing anxiety, depression and/or symptoms of PTSD (Feinstein and Osmann, 2023). Thus, the importance of monitoring violations against journalists, supporting them, and providing assistance when needed, and how these forms of help can improve their well-being and ultimately safeguard democracy, cannot be overstated.

Aiming to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, in 2012, the United Nations developed a participatory, multi-stakeholder approach to protect journalists. It brought together UN bodies, national authorities, media organisations, and civil society organisations and drew up a Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which addressed the fundamental aspects of prevention, protection, and prosecution. On its 10th anniversary, 50 countries renewed their commitment to the UN Plan of Action through a political declaration complemented by pledges, as well as civil society's Call to Action, committing to address new and emerging threats to journalists' safety such as those arising in the digital age, as well as the specific risks faced by women journalists in relation to their work (Unesco 2022).

Against the backdrop of the risks journalists face in the digital era, and the importance of monitoring all forms of action by civil society in this respect, this research presents an exploratory data analysis of a dataset from a larger research project examining the role of non-state civil society organisations (CSOs) in safeguarding journalists from online threats and harassment, particularly within the framework of international human rights law. As digital platforms become central to journalistic work, journalists—particularly women and racialised

people — face escalating online abuse (Posetti and Shabir 2022), hate speech, threats, surveillance, and disinformation campaigns often orchestrated by online mobs as a strategy to silence them (Waisbord 2020). The research considers states' obligations under international law to protect press freedom and create supportive environments. However, due to insufficient responses from states, media organisations, and social media platforms, civil society initiatives that organise to fill the gap in defending journalists against online violence become increasingly important, acting as intermediaries, advocates, and watchdogs to defend journalists' rights to freedom of expression, privacy, and protection from violence, as outlined in instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and regional human rights frameworks.

Drawing on an exploratory data analysis of a non-exhausting dataset of such initiatives worldwide we identify these organisations, their locations, the funding they receive, their main donors, as well cases of collaborative bodies where independent journalist groups and broader civil society organizations (CSOs) partner, focusing on media freedom, safety and support, combating disinformation and working together through shared goals of advocacy, and joint campaigns to hold power accountable and provide information to key decision-making actors. Further, we examine the different forms of support, including funding, that these non-state civil society organisations offer journalists regarding safety, well-being, and mental health. We also discuss the support they provide, how often they handle cases, and attempt to characterise a possible typology of journalists they support.

Additionally, the research maps exemplary initiatives employed by these actors, including digital security training, legal advocacy, response mechanisms, helplines and guidelines. By analysing case studies and legal developments, we argue that civil society plays an indispensable, though often undervalued, role in protecting journalists online, serving as both a buffer against institutional inaction and a catalyst for normative and policy change in the digital age.

References

Feinstein, A., and J. Osmann, 2024. Predictors of psychological distress in frontline journalists: Common denominators across three decades of conflicts. *Traumatology*, 30(3), 306.

Posetti, J., and N. Shabbir. 2022. *The Chilling: A Global Study of Online Violence against Women Journalists*. UNESCO.

UNESCO (2022) Outcomes of the regional and thematic consultations to mark the 10th anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

Waisbord, S. 2020. “Mob Censorship: Online Harassment of US Journalists in Times of Digital Hate and Populism.” *Digital Journalism* 8 (8): 1030–1046. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1818111>.

Take that, Janet Malcolm!: An apology for befriending a source

Author: Russell Frank, Pennsylvania State University

Abstract:

“It is always awkward for a reporter when a source stops answering his questions, moves closer and gently chews his ear.” (Wall Street Journal)

The source in that Wall Street Journal story lede was a talking parrot named Alex (Stip, 1990). I thought of Alex the parrot when, at the end of our interview, Irvin Moore approached me with his arms in a circle.

“Bring it in,” he said. “I couldn’t hug anyone for 52 years, so now I’m making up for lost time.”

Irvin Moore couldn’t hug anyone for 52 years because he had been in prison all that time.

I wasn’t about to explain to him, as I do in my journalism ethics classes, why reporters must maintain a professional distance from their sources lest they become or be perceived as advocates for those sources.

Nor was I about to explain, as I do in my feature writing classes, that the job is not to sing the praises of our subjects, but to portray them “warts and all,” in the fullness of their complicated and imperfect humanity, which becomes harder to do if that source becomes your friend.

The guy needs hugs; I was happy to oblige. It wasn’t all that awkward, even though it may have been the first time in my 40 years as a journalist that I had embraced a source.

Was I being strategic in the way that Janet Malcolm famously asserted that all reporters are being strategic when they cozy up to a source in hopes that the source will let down their guard?³

³ The less famous quote from Janet Malcolm’s *The Journalist and the Murderer*: “On reading the article or book in question, he [the source] has to face the fact that the journalist—who seemed so friendly and sympathetic, so keen to understand him fully, so remarkably attuned to his vision of things—never had the slightest intention of collaborating with him on his story but always intended to write a story of his own (Malcolm, 1989).”

Perhaps. I did my first interview with Irvin Moore in 2021. Four years later, I'm still interviewing him, and still writing about him, adding more and more detail and nuance to the story of his life, which I hope to write in full in the next year.

I usually come to Irvin's house at breakfast time, bearing McGriddle's pancake-and-egg sandwiches, his favorite. We hug when I arrive, and when I depart. When he was ill last winter, I signed up for the meal train to bring him a dinner. He's been to my house for dinner several times. We are, in short, both friends and collaborators.

Would Irvin be as candid with me if our relationship was more "professional?" Hard to say. Would I be more skeptical? This presentation explores these questions. It's important to note that Irvin has never tried to convince me of his innocence; he readily acknowledges that he killed a man when he was in his early twenties. As such, I am not trying to clear his name. I am trying to call attention to the insanity of a justice system that pays lip service to rehabilitation but gives inmates very little opportunity to show that they have been rehabilitated.

In addition to my four-year relationship with Irvin Moore, I will discuss my 10-year relationship with Subramanyam Vedam, another lifer who was in prison for 43 years; and my relationship to Ellie Nesler, an acquaintance who became briefly famous for bringing a gun into a courtroom and killing the man accused of molesting her son. I will also address Los Angeles Times columnist Steve Lopez's ongoing relationship with the homeless musician Nathaniel Ayers (Lopez, 2008), a relationship dramatized in the film, "The Soloist," and other instances of journalists wrestling with the question of when and to what degree they should insert themselves into the lives of the people they are writing about.

The aim is to problematize conventional takes on the ethics of the reporter-source relationship.

References

Lopez, S. (2008). *The soloist: a lost dream, an unlikely friendship, and the redemptive power of music*. G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Malcolm, J. (1989). The journalist and the murderer I. *The New Yorker* (March 6).

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1989/03/13/the-journalist-and-the-murderer-i>

Stip, D. (1990). Einstein bird has scientists atwitter over mental feats: He may be an avian genius or the great pretender; polly wants a thesaurus. *Wall Street Journal* (May 9).

<https://ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/einstein-bird-has-scientists-atwitter-over-mental/docview/135539905/se-2>

Witnessing from within: The role of human presence and first-person journalism in Bisan Owda's reporting on the conflict in Gaza

Author: Maria Simonato, UCP

Abstract:

With the ongoing rise of journalism on digital platforms dominated by automated technologies, algorithmic visibility and artificial intelligence, considerations about the role of human beings in journalistic practice have taken on renewed urgency. This is particularly relevant in the case of war journalism, which is characterised by strong emotional proximity, constant involvement with suffering and having to deal with human vulnerability and the possibility of death (Hanusch, 2010). In this context, first-person journalism⁴ has emerged as a professional practice and a site of theoretical discussion, stimulating reflections on established assumptions of impartial detachment and journalistic credibility (Smeenk et al., 2025). This study examines the relevance of the witness function in contemporary journalism, focusing on the importance of human presence and first-person narration in Bisan Owda's⁵ reporting on the conflict⁶ in Gaza. Drawing on theoretical approaches that conceptualise the witnessing as a fundamental epistemic dimension of journalism (Peters, 2001; Zelizer, 2007) - understood not simply as "being there", but as a concrete, reflective and ethically responsible practice through which journalism mediates reality for a distant audience. From this perspective, direct experience becomes central to understanding how journalism relates to what is "human" in conditions of extreme violence and uncertainty.

This work aims to explore how first-person testimony operates as a journalistic resource in a media context increasingly driven by platform logic, arguing that

⁴ First-person journalism refers to reporting practices where journalists explicitly position themselves within the narrative, using subjective perspectives and personal experience as sources of authority.

⁵ Bisan Owda is a Palestinian journalist, activist and filmmaker based in Gaza who has been documenting the conflict through social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok, since October 2023.

⁶ Referring to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, which intensified in October 2023.

journalism based on affecting involvement does not represent a deviation from professional standards, but rather that it reconfigures “classic” journalistic values, relocating the concept of authority, credibility and responsibility within the reporter’s own presence.

The empirical focus of the study is a qualitative case study of Bisan Owda’s first-person reportage from Gaza, which has been widely shared on social media during the conflict. Produced in a context of extreme violence, risk to her personal safety and constant uncertainty, Owda’s work combines professional journalistic conventions with a personal and emotionally engaged narrative (Nasseri & Nasseri, 2025). Rather than favouring sensational or crude representations of death, her reporting focuses on fear, waiting, exhaustion and the precarious continuity of daily life, constantly under threat. This narrative orientation makes Owda’s work a particularly significant case for investigating how the news reports on the reality of suffering, seeking to find a balance between the ethical limits of visibility and emotive exposure (Nilsson, 2019). From an analytical point of view, the thesis argues that first-person testimony - as in Owda’s reports - redefines fundamental journalistic values rather than compromising them. Objectivity is reformulated as contextualised credibility, based on the capacity for reflection and reliability, while responsibility is exercised through ethical awareness of vulnerability, rather than through emotive detachment.

Referring to critical perspectives on the mediation of suffering (Sontag, 2003; Chouliaraki, 2006), empathy is conceptualised as a relational and mediated practice that does not depend on the explicit visualisation of death. Instead, empathic capacity is cultivated through narrative strategies that make suffering understandable as factual experience, resisting sensationalism and desensitisation. In Owda’s reportage, this takes the form of a continuous documentation of disrupted routines, fears of displacement, and moments of collective resilience, creating what can be described as an affective geography of resistance rather than a spectacle of atrocity (Zelizer, 2010). Contrastingly, the research situates Owda’s reportage within the context of platform media and

*affective publics*⁷ (Papacharissi, 2014). While digital platforms facilitate affective connection and amplify narratives with strong emotional resonance, they also raise ethical questions related to compassion fatigue⁸ and the commodification of suffering (Mortensen, 2014). Considering this, the analysis distinguishes human testimony from algorithmic simulations of empathy. Although automated systems may be able to generate emotionally coded language or disseminate content capable of provoking affective interest, they cannot assume the same ethical responsibility that comes with real vulnerability and exposure to risk in order to provide direct testimony. While algorithmic processes aim to optimise engagement statistics, human documentation has consequences: journalists can be injured, traumatised or even killed.

Methodologically, the study is based on a qualitative analysis of selected posts and videos from Owda's Instagram and TikTok accounts⁹, focusing on how visual composition, verbal testimony and forms of communication contribute to a position of witnessing that urges ethical objectivity without compromising credibility (Mortensen, 2014; Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2013). By placing first-person witnessing as a practice based on human presence centre stage, this thesis argues that in an era dominated by automation, the moral and epistemic legitimacy of journalism continues to depend on its human dimension.

References

Chouliaraki, L. (2006). *The spectatorship of suffering*. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446220658>

Franklin, B., & Carlson, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Journalists, sources, and credibility: New perspectives* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203835708>

Hanusch, F. (2010). *Representing death in the news: Journalism, media and mortality*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230289765>

⁷ Affective publics, as theorised by Papacharissi (2015), are networked publics mobilised and connected through expressions of sentiment, enabled by social media platforms and characterised by emotional rather than solely rational engagement.

⁸ Compassion fatigue refers to the diminishing of emotional response and empathetic engagement that can result from repeated exposure to representations of suffering and violence.

⁹ Owda's reporting primarily circulated on Instagram (@wizard_bisan1) and TikTok, platforms that enabled her to bypass traditional gatekeeping but also subjected her content to algorithmic moderation and intermittent suppression (Nasseri & Nasseri, 2025).

- Lestari, R. (2019). Shifting journalistic ethics in the internet age: Case study of violation of journalistic ethics in journalistic products and journalist behavior in online media. *Komunikator*, 11(2), 142–150. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jkm.112027>
- Mortensen, M. (2014). *Journalism and eyewitness images: Digital media, participation, and conflict* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203520680>
- Nasseri, J., & Nasseri, E. (2025). Witnessing war in the digital age: Journalism, disinformation, and the battle for truth in Gaza. *The International Journal of Arts, Culture & Heritage* (iJACH), 14, 27–50. <https://doi.org/10.62312/asw.ijach.14.2.2025>
- Nilsson, M. (2019). An ethics of (not) showing: Citizen witnessing, journalism and visualizations of a terror attack. *Journalism Practice*, 14(3), 259–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1623708>
- Oso, L., Adeniran, R., & Arowolo, O. (2024). Journalism ethics: The dilemma, social and contextual constraints. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2328388>
- Pantti, M. (2019). Journalism and witnessing. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies* (2nd ed., pp. 151–164). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315167497-10>
- Papacharissi, Z. (2014). *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199999736.001.0001>
- Peters, J. D. (2001). Witnessing. *Media, Culture & Society*, 23(6), 707–723. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016344301023006002>
- Smeenk, K., Harbers, F., Kruitbosch, H., & Broersma, M. (2025). The reporter as first-person witness: Eyewitnessing and subjectivity in epistemic authority claims in personal journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2025.2598359>

Sontag, S. (2003). *Regarding the pain of others*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K., & Pantti, M. (2013). The ethics of global disaster reporting: Journalistic witnessing and the challenge to objectivity. In S. J. A. Ward (Ed.), *Global media ethics: Problems and perspectives* (pp. 191–213). Wiley-Blackwell.

Zelizer, B. (2007). On “having been there”: “Eyewitnessing” as a journalistic key word. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 24(5), 408–428.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07393180701694614>

Zelizer, B. (2010). *About to die: How news images move the public*. Oxford University Press.

Going independent in gaming media: From one place of precarity to another

Author: Ian Farrugia, UCP

Abstract:

The circumstances of corporate gaming media are “bleak” (Stanton & Jonson, 2024). Over the past few years, these enthusiast websites have pushed towards advertiser friendly content and search engine discoverability. Advertisements are their main source of revenue, which is threatened by the implementation of AI in search and the portion of users who prefer AI chatbots over search engines. There has been a visible decline in employment in games media, with costcutting layoffs being common and no new opportunities opening up (Poirot, 2019).

For games writers (reporters, access journalists, critics, games industry veterans, and content creators) who are facing this drought of opportunities, two main paths present themselves. Through their connections and expertise, some try their luck in the videogames industry itself. Those determined to keep working in games media can only turn to the entrepreneurial route - relying on the support of their audiences to continue producing content independently. These creatives have exchanged the precarity of their corporate jobs to the precarity of life as audience funded content creators - answering instead to the whims of platforms and audiences.

This dissertation will be focused on independent gaming media, how they keep the lights on, and their relationship to social responsibility. Specifically, I will focus on the people that have made this shift from corporate to independent, as well as independent outlets which cover gaming news.

While the literature on games media is limited, I will not be starting from scratch. Stanton & Johnson (2024) addresses the status quo of games journalism and independent gaming news. Stanton (2025) provides a far reaching overview of gaming podcasts and their audiences, which by proxy includes the work of games journalists. Metajournalistic discourse around the term ‘games journalist’ is more closely discussed in Poirot (2019), Perreault & Vos (2019), and Fisher & Mohammed-Baksh (2020); who assess the lack of suitability of the term

“journalism” owing to the economic necessity to maintain proximity with games companies. I intend to enquire whether independent and audience-funded games media could pursue investigative reporting beyond their abilities under the constraints of corporate media.

In addition to engaging with research on games media, my literature review, I will look towards research on entrepreneurial journalism and its financial sustainability as well as the ethics of access journalism.

The research undertaken during this dissertation will consist of interviews with people working in the independent games press, drawing upon a pool of writers, media personalities, publication staff and owners, as well as freelancers who have worked for independent publications. Speaking to people with first hand experience in corporate and independent games media will allow me to see the risks and benefits of working independently in light of the conditions of corporate gaming media at the time they left. It will be important to include freelancers in this sample as they are more likely to be frank about the precarity of independent media, since their perspective is not representative of any specific publication.

References

Fisher, H. D., & Mohammed-Baksh, S. (2020). Video Game Journalism and the Ideology of Anxiety: Implications for Effective Reporting in Niche Industries and Oligopolies. *Journal of Media Ethics*, 35(1), 45–59.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2020.1731312>

Nieborg, D. B., & Foxman, M. (2023). *Mainstreaming and game journalism*. MIT Press.

Poirot, S. J. (2019). *The Self-Perception of Video Game Journalism: Interviews With Games Writers Regarding The State of the Profession* [Doctoral dissertation].

<https://shareok.org/items/b66a3158-7037-4a94-9302-079a5d23d441/full>

Perreault, G., & Vos, T. (2019). Metajournalistic discourse on the rise of gaming journalism. *New Media & Society*, 22(1), 159-176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819858695> (Original work published 2020)

Stanton, R. & Johnson, M. R. (2024). “You can’t work for somebody who doesn’t exist”: The Decline of Games Journalism and the Rise of Gaming Podcasts. *Games and Culture*, first published online.

Stanton, R. (2025). Podcasting and Play: Gaming Podcasts and the Changing Face of Gaming Media [Thesis]. <https://hdl.handle.net/2123/33894>

Session 6 – Human Perceptions

“With no media, I know nothing”: How people get local information in news deserts//Luísa Torre & Pedro Jerónimo, University of Beira Interior

Journalism under prolonged war: Information fatigue and the human scale of local news//Tanya Gordiienko, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy

Reconnecting journalism through transparency: Funding appeals and human resilience in Portuguese alternative media//Cátia Ferreira & Carla Ganito, UCP

Authority over truth: A discursive analysis of the identity of fact-checking in Portugal//Luis Pedro Rodrigues, UCP

“With no media, I know nothing”: How people get local information in news deserts

Authors: Luísa Torre & Pedro Jerónimo, University of Beira Interior

Abstract:

News deserts are commonly defined as communities where residents have limited access to critical, reliable, and relevant news and information necessary for democratic participation and social cohesion. Beyond structural factors such as depopulation, economic fragility, and the collapse of local press business models, news deserts also reshape the everyday informational practices of citizens and their relationship with journalism as a human institution.

In the absence of consistent journalistic coverage, the ways people stay informed about their communities are transformed. Citizens increasingly turn to social networks and digital platforms to meet their local information needs, relying on sources characterized by different temporalities, weaker professional norms, and varying degrees of credibility. These shifts raise questions about trust, human judgement, and the social role traditionally played by local journalism.

This study examines audiences’ perceptions of local information in municipalities classified as news deserts and non-deserts. It asks: What sources do citizens use to learn about what is happening in the municipality where they live? Which sources do they follow on social media? To what extent do they consume information produced by non-journalistic actors? How much trust do they place in these sources? Are citizens interested in news about their municipality, and do they value local journalistic coverage? Finally, are there differences in perceptions and practices between territories with and without local media?

The study draws on a mixed-methods approach combining a survey ($n = 246$) with semi-structured interviews conducted with residents of seven municipalities with different levels of local news coverage. Findings show that, among non-journalistic sources, the social media pages of institutions and politicians are the most frequently used sources of local information, both in news deserts and

in municipalities with journalistic presence. In news deserts, 57% of respondents report using institutional Facebook pages three to five times a week or daily.

Approximately 23% of respondents in both contexts follow influencers or public personalities—most often politicians—to obtain local information. At the same time, respondents identify politics and electoral periods as moments when misinformation spreads most intensively.

Despite limited journalistic supply, interest in local news remains high. More than 80% of respondents living in news deserts report being very or extremely interested in news about their municipality, and around 70% actively seek such information—an even higher proportion than in municipalities with journalistic coverage. Over one third of respondents in news deserts report producing or having produced content for their communities, often motivated by a desire to keep others informed, suggesting forms of civic engagement that partially compensate for journalistic absence.

While journalistic sources are used less frequently than social media, they continue to enjoy higher levels of trust. Respondents in news deserts, in particular, attribute strong symbolic and practical value to local journalism, emphasizing its role as a trusted information provider and a resource for community cohesion. In the absence of newsrooms, however, local councils' websites and social media pages have emerged as central information hubs: 55% of respondents in news deserts consult them at least three times a week.

By examining how people navigate information scarcity, trust, and community responsibility in different local contexts, this study offers a human-centred reflection on the informational lives of citizens in news deserts. It highlights the enduring desire for local journalism, the affective and civic consequences of its absence, and the risks these dynamics pose to local democracies in an era marked by the erosion of local news and the spread of misinformation.

Journalism under prolonged war: Information fatigue and the human scale of local news

Author: Tanya Gordiienko, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy

Abstract:

Journalism is expected to help people orient themselves in times of uncertainty, yet prolonged crises increasingly test the limits of this function. Continuous updates, heightened emotional intensity, and the accumulation of crisis-driven information can turn news consumption into a demanding and exhausting practice.

Ukraine offers a revealing context for examining these tensions, as the war began in 2014 and escalated into a full-scale Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This prolonged conflict has unfolded within a media environment marked by high public reliance on news and uneven access to independent local journalism (Sribnyi et al., 2023; Internews Ukraine, 2025).

The study explores these dynamics and also centers the question: what local media can possibly do to keep the connection with their audiences? It also aims to examine the consequences of protracted exposure to crisis-driven news for audience engagement and news avoidance, and how these dynamics shape the capacity of local journalism to connect with audiences in everyday life.

The proposed study is situated within existing scholarship on news fatigue and avoidance (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2019; Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2022), selective and topic-based news avoidance (Schäfer, Betakova & Lecheler, 2022), and global trends in news consumption and trust documented in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2023), allowing our findings to be positioned within global shifts in attention, trust, and audience behavior.

Methodologically, the study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. It consists of five linked stages: a survey of 1,000 respondents aged 18–60 living in cities with populations over 50,000; a content analysis of 1,878 articles published by ten Ukrainian local news outlets; six months of automated

media monitoring across approximately 110 Ukrainian outlets using LOOQME.IO; an analysis of Google Analytics data from ten independent local news sites in five different macro-regions of the country; and expert interviews to contextualize findings and inform recommendations.

The findings challenge a common assumption that news avoidance reflects apathy or disengagement from public life. Instead, audiences described filtering and rationing news as an act of self-preservation in response to emotional saturation. Participants prioritized practical, reliable, and actionable information, while repetitive, sensational, or emotionally overwhelming coverage accelerated disengagement. Long-term crisis reporting that lacked local relevance and emotional sensitivity tends to intensify news fatigue.

Importantly, the study highlights a strong demand for credible, context-rich local journalism that addresses people's everyday challenges—coverage that national and international media often cannot replicate. The findings further show that stories focused on local issues or centred on members of local communities tend to attract higher audience attention and engagement, indicating that local journalism can maintain connection with audiences through relevance rather than volume in conditions of information fatigue. Taken together, the results suggest that information fatigue does not eliminate audience interest in news, but reorients it toward journalism grounded in everyday community experience and human-scale concerns.

While grounded in the Ukrainian wartime media context, the study uses empirical findings to illuminate broader dynamics of news fatigue and what they reveal about journalism's relationship to audience experience in crisis-affected media environments. The findings contribute to discussions on how journalism's public role is redefined under conditions of prolonged uncertainty and widespread information fatigue.

References

Internews Ukraine. (2025). *Ukrainian Media: News Consumption and Trust in 2025*. Internews Ukraine.
https://internews.ua/opportunity/media_trust_consumption_2025_release

Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Eddy, K., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2023). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2023*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Sribnyi, M., Lypova, P., Buts, O., Kohen, I., Fedor, N., Tovstanovska, Y., & Boborykin, A. (2023) *News deserts in Ukraine* [Research report]. Media Development Foundation.
<https://research.mediadevelopmentfoundation.org/en/news-deserts-in-ukraine.html>

Skovsgaard, M., & Andersen, K. (2019). Conceptualizing News Avoidance: Toward a Shared Understanding of Different Causes and Potential Solutions. *Journalism Studies*, 21(4), 459-476.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2019.1686410>

Skovsgaard, M., and K. Andersen. (2022). "News Avoidance." In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Journalism*, edited by G. A. Borchard, 1099-1103. SAGE.

Svenja Schäfer, Dominika Betakova & Sophie Lecheler (2024) Zooming in on Topics: An Investigation of the Prevalence and Motives for Selective News Avoidance, *Journalism Studies*, 25:12, 1423-1440.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2024.2338114>

Reconnecting journalism through transparency: Funding appeals and human resilience in Portuguese alternative media

Author: Cátia Ferreira & Carla Ganito, UCP

Abstract:

Journalism faces a global structural crisis as market-driven models collapse under digital disruption and democratic backsliding (Pickard, 2019; UNESCO, 2022). In Southern Europe, this crisis is amplified by systemic fragilities: low subscription rates, late digital adoption, and weak institutional support (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Papathanassopoulos & Miconi, 2023). Portugal exemplifies these vulnerabilities, where independent outlets operate in a “structural void” without robust state or philanthropic safety nets. Against this backdrop, alternative media become critical laboratories for funding models that humanize resilience through direct audience appeals and transparency politics; positioning readers not as consumers, but as empathetic human partners in journalistic survival.

This exploratory study investigates how Portuguese alternative outlets articulate resilience through funding rhetorics, using the Actor-Structure dialectic (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010) as a theoretical lens. Alternative media are not “pure” entities; they exist in constant negotiation between structural constraints (legal status, financial precarity) and actor-driven ideals of independence and dissent (Atton, 2002; Downing, 2001; Fuchs, 2010). Funding models emerge as the primary site where these tensions materialize, shaping human-centered audience relationships via visible vulnerability and participatory engagement. By making financial precarity transparent, outlets transform structural crises into opportunities for communal bonds. The study adopts a qualitative methodology, employing thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021) to examine media self-discourse on financial sustainability across website texts, calls-to-action, and visual hierarchies. Case selection draws on Ganito & Ferreira's (2024) mapping of the Portuguese alternative media landscape, identifying Fumaça, Divergente, and Gerador as emblematic of distinct sustainability logics: militant independence, professional rigor, and cultural hybridity. Data were analyzed across four dimensions capturing Actor-Structure mediation: Foundation

(ownership, revenue mix, transparency), Narratives (mission, antagonism), Relations (audience naming, calls-to-action), and Aesthetics (interface design, tone).

Preliminary findings reveal three rhetorical logics that operationalize transparency as human reconnection. Fumaça pursues “radical transparency” (“disclosing where our money comes from and where it goes”), publishing salaries and contracts to build political legitimacy while mobilizing audiences as Fumaça Community co-strugglers toward 100% community funding, framing grants as a temporary “necessary evil” via progress bars gamifying collective survival. Divergente employs “methodological transparency” (“every report has a page explaining who supports and funds the work”), linking contributions to concrete labor costs (“the gross salary of one journalist”) and positioning supporters as “enlightened patrons” sustaining slow, analog craftsmanship (“we write for people, not algorithms”) against market commodification. Gerador strategically discloses funding challenges (“the constant discovery of intricate formats”) through long-term memberships (€55-128) and utilitarian benefits (academy discounts, Timewall access), constructing audiences as “cultural citizens” within a triple-pillar ecosystem of journalism, culture, and education.

These strategies reveal funding as ethical performative practice: Fumaça’s militant logic fosters horizontal struggle; Divergente’s professional rigor humanizes labor costs; Gerador’s ecosystem approach builds transactional community belonging. Rather than alienating audiences, transparency invites participatory agency, countering digital dehumanization.

By situating Portugal within the Polarized Pluralist Media System (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), this study contributes to debates on human-centered media resilience in Southern Europe. It informs policies treating journalism as a participatory public good, where transparent funding fosters sustainable community bonds. Ultimately, these rhetorics offer adaptive paths on shifting grounds, innovating at ethics-economics intersections to sustain resilient, human-connected journalistic futures.

References

- Atton, C. (2002). *Alternative Media*. Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.
- Cagé, J. (2016). *The saving of the media: Capitalism, crowdfunding, and democracy*. Belknap Press, Harvard University Press.
- Downing, J. D. (2001). *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements*. Sage.
- Fuchs, C. (2010). Alternative Media as Critical Media. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 13(2), 173-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431010362294>
- Ganito, C., & Ferreira, C. (2024). Media alternativos em Portugal. Estudo exploratório da lusofonia no espaço mediático alternativo em Portugal. In F. Ilharco, M. S. Lopes, I. Barros, & R. Caiado (Eds.), *Em Português. Identidades, Literatura, Media, Ciência* (pp. 240–262). Lisboa: CEPCEP – Universidade Católica Portuguesa.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Papathanassopoulos, S., & Miconi, A. (2023). *The Media Systems in Europe: Continuities and Discontinuities*. Springer.
- Pickard, V. (2019). *Democracy Without Journalism?: Confronting the Misinformation Society*. Oxford University Press.
- Sandoval, M., & Fuchs, C. (2010). Towards a Critical Theory of Alternative Media. *Telematics and Informatics*, 27(2), 141-150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2009.06.011>

Teixeira, L. M., & Jorge, A. (2021). Crowdfunding platforms in the political economy of alternative media. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 39, 183–202.

[https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.39\(2021\).2863](https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.39(2021).2863)

UNESCO. (2022). *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Journalism as a Public Good*. UNESCO Publishing.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000396638>

Authority over truth: A discursive analysis of the identity of fact-checking in Portugal

Author: Luis Pedro Rodrigues, UCP

Abstract:

The mission of communicating truth, although fundamental to democracy, has been increasingly threatened by the rise of disinformation. In effect, disinformation dehumanizes individuals and diminishes their citizenship by distancing them from processes of knowledge production and hindering their access to the information necessary for deliberating about their own well-being. In this context, fact-checking has become established as the journalistic genre dedicated to restoring truth in public debate by correcting factual inaccuracies in political statements and viral content circulating on social networks. In this sense, fact-checking not only contributes to the quality of public debate but also to the full human and democratic development.

However, these two tasks, arbitrating truth and confronting disinformation, involve a complex construction of professional identity, which is essential for legitimizing the role of fact-checking in the public sphere. The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) and its Code of Principles, for example, are outcomes of this institutional process, setting five commitments that all independent fact-checking organizations must uphold (IFCN, n.d.). This discourse frames fact-checking as fundamentally committed to transparency, nonpartisanship, and fairness in its primary mission of adjudicating truth.

To better understand which values and principles constitute the fact-checking identity in Portugal, and which interrelations are embedded in this discursive construction, this study analyzes the editorials produced by the three main independent projects: *Polígrafo*, *Observador*, and *Prova dos Factos (Público)*. The corpus is analyzed using the analytical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed by Norman Fairclough (2006).

Our findings indicate that all the texts construct an authoritative identity for fact-checking. It is achieved primarily by representing fact-checkers as

performing typical material processes grounded in scientific and rational paradigms, as well as in the paradigm of fact-centered journalism. In other words, the authors portray fact-checkers as agents capable of working with facts in a systematic, scientific, and rational manner. This association, however, functions not only as a source of legitimacy but also as a discursive strategy that presupposes the reliability of fact-checking methodologies and their underlying epistemic assumptions.

The discourse also highlights an assertive stance on fact-checking in relation to political power, insofar as it seeks to scrutinize factual statements made by politicians and, when necessary, correct their factual inaccuracies. The values of independence and transparency underpin this stance, in accordance with IFCN principles, framing the task of adjudicating truth as one conducted with impartial justice. On the other hand, the interrelation between fact-checking and the phenomenon of disinformation is not the same across all texts. While some explicitly assert the priority of combating the spread of false information in online environments, others downplay this task, emphasizing adherence to the long-standing tradition of fact-centered journalism.

Note: due to travel restrictions, the author was unable to present his research in-person, but the abstract was initially accepted for inclusion in a paper session.

Restoring the human voice: From "nominal neutrality" to empathetic narrative engagement with LGBTQ+ communities in wartime Ukraine

Author: Leonid Polishchuk

Abstract:

Context and Research Problem. In the era of rapid mediatization and algorithmic news delivery, the "human touch" in reporting often undergoes a process of de-contextualization, where subjects are reduced to data points or symbols of conflict. In societies facing existential crises, such as Ukraine during the full-scale Russian invasion, the challenge of connecting journalists with the communities they serve is not only an ethical imperative but a matter of national resilience. This study investigates the representation of LGBTQ+ communities in Ukrainian media (2019–2025), exploring how journalistic practices either foster a genuine human connection or reinforce social distance through mechanical adherence to professional standards.

Theoretical Framework and the Human Dimension. The research identifies a phenomenon termed “nominal neutrality”—a deformation of the professional standard of objectivity where journalists quote dehumanizing rhetoric without ethical contextualization, hiding behind the "strategic ritual of objectivity" (Tuchman, 1972). Drawing on Paul Ricoeur’s (1984) theory of "triple mimesis" and narrative identity, I examine the gap between the *pre-figuration* of the lived experience of LGBTQ+ subjects and their configuration in media narratives. The study questions whether the shift from "symbolic annihilation" (Tuchman, 1978) to mediatized visibility during the war actually restores the humanity of the subjects or merely instrumentalizes them for military or political goals.

Methodology and Analytical Triangulation. To ensure a comprehensive bridge between media production and human reception, the study employs a mixed-methods design based on methodological triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018):

1. Quantitative Content Analysis (N=1,223). Following the reliability standards of Krippendorff (2018) and Riffe et al. (2019), I analyzed a longitudinal dataset from institutional (*Suspilne Ukraine*, TSN) and non-institutional (*Telegram*) media. The analysis utilized a coding scheme of 10 categories to identify structural shifts in visibility and thematic salience.

2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Utilizing Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model and Wodak's (2001) discourse-historical approach, the study deconstructs how media apparatuses configure power relations and assign social roles (Hero, Victim, Threat).

3. Narrative Analysis (NA). Based on the methodologies of Baker (2006) and Riessman (2008), the research reconstructs the "emplotment" of LGBTQ+ stories. This stage focuses on the evolution of archetypes—from the pre-war "Passive Victim" to the wartime "Hero-Defender"—analyzing the causal links established between individual identity and national defense.

4. Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Three homogeneous groups were conducted to capture the *lived experience* and emotional responses of community members (Gays/Bisexual men, Lesbians/Bisexual women, and Transgender/Queer people). Data were analyzed via reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), interpreting reactions through Pasitselska's (2022) model of interaction modes (inquiry, narrative, avoidance).

Findings. Transactional Subjectivity and the Demand for Authenticity. The research reveals a radical "discursive break" post-February 2022. While media facilitated mediatized desecuritization (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2025) by rearticulating LGBTQ+ individuals as active subjects of national defense, qualitative data highlights a persistent gap in human connection:

- Transactional Subjectivity. Participants feel their humanity is acknowledged by journalists only in exchange for military sacrifice. This creates a "burden of heroism" that marginalizes civilian human routine.

- Parasocial Counter-Contact. On unregulated platforms, hyper-visibility is weaponized through irony and visual dehumanization, destroying the conditions for empathetic contact.

- The Demand for Authenticity. Findings show a profound fatigue with "formulaic stories" (tragedy or scandal). There is a significant audience demand for representation centered on individuals as integrated professionals (doctors, teachers, volunteers) rather than political symbols.

Conclusion. Toward a Philosophy of Authenticity. To "re-connect" with communities, journalists must move beyond "nominal neutrality" toward "Pragmatic Objectivity" (Ward, 2011), where human dignity serves as the foundational filter. The study provides consolidated recommendations (vibe-checks, sensitivity reading, and authenticity filters) to restore the human voice to the center of the narrative. By humanizing the subjects, journalism acts as a catalyst for social cohesion rather than a neutral bystander to marginalization.

References

[Author, 2025a]. (Title hidden for review). *Communications and Communicative Technologies*, 25, 148–160.

[Author, 2025b]. (Title hidden for review). *Current Issues of Mass Communication*, 38, 69–83.

Baker, M. (2006). *Translation and conflict: A narrative account*. Routledge.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Doubleday.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse*. Arnold.

Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Luciani, L., & Shevtsova, M. (2025). Sexuality securitized: How Russia's invasion of Ukraine reconfigures (anti-)LGBTIQ politics in Eastern Europe. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 34(5), 655–668. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2024.2427198>

Pasitselska, O. (2022). Logics of exclusion: How Ukrainian audiences renegotiate propagandistic narratives in times of conflict. *Political Communication*, 39(4), 475–499. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2022.2047846>

Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and narrative* (Vol. 1). (K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., Fico, F., & Watson, B. (2019). *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. SAGE Publications.

Tuchman, G. (1972). *Objectivity as strategic ritual: An examination of newsmen's notions of objectivity*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 77(4), 660–679. <https://doi.org/10.1086/225193>

Ward, S. J. A. (2011). *Ethics and the media: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 63–94). SAGE Publications.

III Journalism Studies Symposium

Connecting with the Human

May 11, 2026 – Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Organising and Scientific Committee

Jessica Roberts
Ioli Campos
Manuel Carvalho Coutinho
Luís Rodrigues
Jason Baguia
Inês Ferreira Fernandes
Káta Horvath
Changiz Mahmoudzadeh Varzi
Ghena Alkhateeb

Paper Session Chairs

Catarina Valdigem
Nelson Ribeiro
Karin Wahl-Jorgensen

CECC- Research Centre for Communication and Culture

Alexandra Lopes (Director)
Cassilda Alcobia-Murphy (Research Assistant)
Elisa Fauth (Research Assistant)

FCH - Faculty of Human Sciences

Catarina Duff Burnay (Dean)



CATOLICA
FACULDADE DE CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS
LISBOA



CATOLICA
CECC - CENTRO DE ESTUDOS
DE COMUNICAÇÃO E CULTURA
LISBOA



Fundação
para a Ciência
e a Tecnologia

