

LOCAL RADIO WITHOUT BORDERS:

the experiment of a small Portuguese broadcaster on the internet



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DOI: 10.25200/BJR.V17N2.2021.1324

Received in: May 31st, 2020

Desk Reviewed: June 22nd, 2020

Desk Review Editor: Laura Storch

Revised on: September 18th, 2020

Approved on: December 19th, 2020

ABSTRACT – Hyperlocal journalism, understood as the type of journalism practiced and undertaken in small communities around the world, is part of the media ecosystem, but its importance is rarely recognized. With the withdrawal of media companies from smaller locations in the early 21st century, hyperlocal journalism has regained its space thanks to the internet, exploiting the streak of community news to reach audiences in various parts of the world. This study focuses on Portugal and investigates how hyperlocal news is reported on a radio station in the interior of the country: Rádio Cova da Beira (RCB). The results of an analysis of the website's content, interviews, and participant observation in the newsroom of the broadcaster, based in Fundão, in the district of Castelo Branco (Portugal), show that this model of local journalism values culture, but faces serious structural and financial problems.

Keywords: Radio. Hyperlocal journalism. Local journalism. Portugal. Website.

RÁDIO LOCAL SEM FRONTEIRAS: a experimentação de uma pequena emissora portuguesa na internet

RESUMO – O jornalismo hiperlocal, compreendido como o tipo de jornalismo praticado em pequenas comunidades, faz parte do ecossistema midiático, mas raramente tem sua importância reconhecida. Com a retirada das grandes empresas de mídia das localidades de menor tamanho, no início do século XXI, o jornalismo hiperlocal vem retomando seu espaço graças à internet, explorando o filão das notícias comunitárias com vistas a alcançar audiências transfronteiras. Este estudo tem como foco Portugal e investiga como estão sendo feitas notícias hiperlocais em uma rádio do interior do país – a Rádio Cova da Beira (RCB). Os resultados de análise de conteúdo no site, de entrevistas e observação participante na redação da emissora com sede em Fundão, distrito de Castelo Branco (Portugal), mostram que este modelo de jornalismo local valoriza a cultura, mas enfrenta sérios problemas estruturais e financeiros.

Palavras-chave: Rádio. Jornalismo hiperlocal. Jornalismo local. Portugal. Site.

RADIO LOCAL SIN FRONTERAS: la experimentación de una pequeña estación de radio portuguesa en internet

RESUMEN – El periodismo hiperlocal, entendido como el tipo de periodismo practicado en pequeñas comunidades, es parte del ecosistema de los medios, pero rara vez se lo reconoce por su importancia. Con la retirada de las grandes empresas medianas de las ciudades más pequeñas, a principios del siglo XXI, el periodismo hiperlocal se ha hecho cargo gracias a internet, explorando la racha de noticias de la comunidad con miras a llegar a audiencias transfronterizas. Este estudio se centra en Portugal e investiga cómo se producen noticias hiperlocales en una radio en el interior del país: Rádio Cova da Beira (RCB). Los resultados del análisis de contenido en el sitio web, las entrevistas y la observación participante en la sala de redacción de la emisora con sede en Fundão, distrito de Castelo Branco (Portugal), muestran que este modelo de periodismo local valora la cultura, pero enfrenta serios problemas estructurales y financieros.

Palabras-clave: Radio. Periodismo hiperlocal. Periodismo local. Portugal. Sitio web.

1 Introduction

The internet is a major and perhaps the greatest challenge to radio in history, not only as a means of transmission but also of production, consumption, and social fruition of news on the airwaves. When examining the post-modern way of consuming radio and the presence of contemporary mobile devices, Belau (2001, p.16) observed that it was a complex scenario that “deserves dedication, reflection, and observation”, understanding that the situation involves greater threats than those posed by the arrival of television. The heart of radio was about to be affected and its essence changed.

In the old days, radio was the platform that launched and played music albums. Since the advent of the MP3, the supply of

musical content and how it is made available has changed, and now personalized music is provided online. Radio stations dedicated to music now compete with applications and on-demand music websites. Meanwhile, news radio has had to adapt to public demand, broadening the scope of live features and working much harder than usual to provide the up-to-the-minute and first-hand information. Added to all this is the multiplatform presentation, with which radio has to keep in step (Bianco, 2010) due to the resources provided by digital technology (Belau, 2001).

Ferraretto and Kischinhevsky (2010) argued that the integration of the medium and digital platforms, in a converging scenario, has reconfigured the logic of radio: “In every stage of the communication process, including the production of content, radio in the internet age is no longer what it was before the emergence and consolidation of the worldwide web” (p.2). The authors adapted the concept of digital convergence to the contemporary situation of radio, foreseeing its various aspects: a) technological; b) business; c) professional; and d) content-related (Ferraretto & Kischinhevsky, 2010, p.176).

In addition to the possibility of broadcasting on several platforms, interaction with the audience through multiple media is part of radio nowadays, as it has found new ways to diffuse its content and engage with listeners. The live participation of listeners on the air by telephone (a modality that has been exploited by the medium from the outset) has been replaced today by electronic messages in the form of texts, images, and recordings. Moreover, in regions with high literacy rates, the medium remains active, now with the possibility of sending audio and video files and photographs over the internet. Radio has also ceased to be a privilege for those with broadcasting licenses. In many places (underprivileged and low-income sectors in Brazil and other countries), organized communities, including indigenous people and residents of shantytowns, or favelas, have developed their channels for the production and distribution of radiophonic content thanks to digital technology.

What do these changes mean for journalism and how do they impact the daily workings of the profession? According to scholars, local journalism, like journalism in general, has changed because it is embedded in a structural transformation of the media, and this trend is propelled by new digital technologies (Pereira & Adghirni, 2011). These changes have affected how we communicate, how we share

content, stay informed and have fun. The changes that have taken place in the digital environment challenge the business models and journalistic routines inherited from the established media (Charron & Bonville, 2016).

Hyperlocal journalism, understood as the kind of journalism practiced and undertaken as a venture in small communities around the world (Pavlik, 2011), is part of the media ecosystem (Canavilhas, 2010), but its importance is rarely recognized. However, with the removal of large media companies from smaller locations in the early twenty-first century, this type of journalism has been regaining space, exploring the development of community news operations led by citizens in various parts of the world.

The present study focuses on Portugal, although its findings address common problems found in the media systems of other western democracies. The work investigates how hyperlocal news is reported by a radio station in the interior of Portugal, Rádio Cova da Beira (RCB), and how, besides production practices, community and participative journalism models breathe life into the economy of hyperlocal operations. We understand that the example of this Portuguese radio station is representative of the variety of journalistic experiences in different parts of the globe, facing issues such as switching from an analog to a digital system, the introduction of social media, smaller teams in the scenario of an economic crisis and the lack of capital available for investment in technology, human resources, and other aspects.

When it was officially created in 1988, RCB, with its headquarters in the city of Fundão and license to broadcast to Covilhã, Belmonte, and Penamacor, chose as its motto “A radio station between Beira and the world”, as it covered the region of Beira Interior, an area of 12,740 km², with a population of 383.995 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2018). The area of Cova da Beira alone has 42.546 residents. Fundão is a municipality with around 30.000 residents in the district of Castelo Branco, in the province of Beira Baixa, in the Central Region of Portugal, and sub-region of Beiras and Serra da Estrela, with a hot climate in summer and very cold in winter.

On the one hand, the establishment of the radio station was the result of a social mobilization process. On the other hand, it corresponded to a kind of preview of the representativeness of a limited initiative that today reaches beyond the borders, with the

creation of a website (www.rcb-radiocovadabeira.pt), and is viewed 1.554.331 times per year, in unlikely places in the Portuguese speaking world and around the globe, which means an average of 4.258 page views per day (Rádio Cova da Beira, 2019).

As a field of study, hyperlocal journalism, observing community news holistically, is capable of conveying an image experienced by citizens who create and feed their news services in order to retain the power of inspecting public accounts, correcting distortions regarding the population, developing contacts and local culture and telling everyday stories. Viewed as an experiment in the digital field, the activity of a local radio on the internet can be seen as a new possibility in terms of the production of multimedia and interactive content, with innovative formats of reporting and even the transmission and engagement of audiences.

2 The expansion of radio

Bolter and Grusin (2000) found that media influence one another and always change, although this fact did not occur in a historical trajectory. Jorge understands that news and journalism have undergone a mutation process in which “the state of perceiving, capturing and processing facts provokes differences in routines, products and sub-products” (2013, p.158) of communication. After influencing TV, radio now finds itself under the umbrella of digital media, potentializing the characteristics of interactivity and immediatism, and introducing new standards for memory, multimedia, and personalization (Palacios, 2004).

Lopez views convergence as an essential agent in designing the management of a radio station in its current form, as well as in delineating its characteristics, programming, and the production routines of newsrooms. The author recalls the advent of the internet when many news outlets were limited to using shovelware to transfer content from the original medium to the new platform: “Radio (...) was initially incorporated into the web transpositively. At that time, the redesign took place in two ways: the web gradually began to incorporate elements of sound, while radio began to incorporate multimedia and hypertextual strategies into its definitions” (2010, p.139).

Lopez (2010) analyzed three levels of convergence in radio, alongside the process that emerged in media organizations

all over the world: 1) the computerization phase of newsrooms; 2) the technologization phase, with impacts on the investigation, production and transmission tools, but without influencing the final product, which became more streamlined; and 3) the medium configuration phase, with redefined roles and functions and new language strategies, in which multimedia production makes its presence felt. As convergence is not watertight and does not function within determined patterns, every company adapts technologies to its reality to ensure that the new characteristics do not drive radio away from its basic function of being close to its listeners.

After observing convergence in the Brazilian radio stations CBN and BandNews FM (both all-news broadcasters with an audience nationwide), Lopez coined the term “Hypermedia Radio”: “When exploring the potentials of a network seeking to maintain its identity, the medium begins to reconstruct and redefine itself as a new kind of radio: hypermedia radio” (2010, p.124). This would be a fusion of radio and the internet, in which both share the characteristics of each medium. In Hypermedia Radio, the use of sound esthetics as an expressive stimulus is very important, aiding radio rebroadcasts, the reconstitution of facts, special reports, and chronicles. In this new type of radio, one of the most popular formats recently has been the podcast, a program that can be made available on websites and applications for on-demand consumption.

Meanwhile, Kischinhevsky preferred the term “expanded radio” (2012, pp.410–437), arguing that radio used to be measured only by media research companies in terms of the audience it attracted, but today it has expanded beyond the airwaves. In modern times, the medium is also evaluated by the number of “likes” on social media, the number of engagements and shares it attracts, downloaded and copied content, the podcasts it makes, and the infographics, games, and blogs it feeds, forming a network of voracious consumers who demand attention 24 hours a day and use radio as a social tool.

In this range of converging possibilities, Lopez (2010) believes that the focus of radio remains the same and that its strength lies in audio. The listener listens and, consequently, interacts. If the tools that make available the listening give him/her other opportunities to manifest, audio continues to be the root of everything and it is through it that the warmth that characterizes this relationship and identification occurs. Being multiplatform and hypermedia is the spillover of that early contact between radio and listener.

(...) it is not about the deconfiguration of radio journalism, transforming it into digital journalism, but rather the use of multimedia tools and multiplatform production (Martínez-Costa, 2001) to complement the content aired by the radio station. Audio, in hypermedia radio, remains the core tool for broadcasting information. But now radio stations are allowed to use new tools and strategies without fear of losing space or identity, building a narrative of their own. (Lopez, 2010, p. 120).

In scenarios that differ from that old image of the family gathered around the radio set, broadcasters are concerned with only one goal: to attract the new profile of listeners, who have other demands. They seek the latest updates, they are young (they may even be digital natives) and expect radio stations to change and adapt (Martínez-Costa, 2001). Interaction, which has always existed on the radio, has gained new characteristics as the audience has become more active. They listen to the radio on their smartphones, either FM or the internet. They read texts to check data, send messages, photographs, and videos and chat on social media.

The context of cultural and media convergence is directly reflected in practices, techniques, and production routines, the formats of radio stations, and even their deontology. Radio journalism needs to be attentive to demands to integrate the environment of the listener-internaut, and for this purpose, it is necessary to participate assiduously on blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms. It is also necessary to invest in the creation of a new sound esthetic to offer new content and surprise and captivate these post-modern consumers.

A mobile medium, radio has not lost its main characteristic of being “on the move”, as highlighted by Cebrián Herreros (2001), with its great capacity to move around, not only on the streets and other environments where events take place but also into cyberspace. Scholars of the medium (Lopez, 2010; Martínez-Costa, 2001; Cebrián Herreros, 2001) believe that the concentration of consumption on mobile devices can be interpreted as a way for radio to rejuvenate, shake off the dust of the centuries and reach young audiences.

The transformation from analog to digital, which mainly began in the 2000s, but with changes in the 1990s and even before, had an even greater effect on radio journalism. Radio stations made the transition to the world wide web, increasing their production of content in the form of texts and images to complement the information they provide. Consequently, the multimedia journalist on the radio emerged, capable of extending sound content to websites,

social media platforms, and instant text message applications. These are new demands and new technicalities set alongside the comprehensive function of expanded hypermedia, hyperlocal and global radio.

3 Hyperlocal and global

According to Pavlik (2011, pp. 94–118), hyperlocal news means reports, “typically online, about events and local issues within an exceptionally well-defined geographical community”. In the United States, where the concept of hyperlocal prospered in financial and social terms, “hyper-social websites mainly serve residents and are very often produced by local reporters or residents”.

A pioneer website is Red Bank Green (redbankgreen.com), founded in 2006 in the state of New Jersey. Its slogan is “a town square for an unsquare town”, which portrays localism very well, as “a square” is understood as a place where people come to talk and interact with one another. As the founders say, it is “a place where neighbors meet to exchange news and opinions and do business”. In addition to the founder, John T. Ward, and his wife, Trish Russoniello, in charge of the graphics and design, the website has experienced journalists who use their cell phones as a tool to gather news and get to know the community very well.

In general, subscribers to hyperlocal websites wish to see tailor-made, personalized news with stories about citizens, accompanied by texts, photographs, and videos. Functioning as the extension of a town square, the website also feeds online discussion forums for readers and does not neglect requests from its audience, offering quality journalism (Red Bank Green, n/d). However, in the United States, this hyperlocal journalism has also pushed the boundaries and become a business. The organization patch.com is a journalistic company that publishes community news online in 1.226 cities and towns in 50 American states (Patch Network, n.d.).

Radio stations are also part of this hyperlocal context wherever they are because one of their characteristics is being involved in the community. “In a world where communication is increasingly global due to the emergence of the internet, local radio stations seek to adapt to this challenge of conciliating the local and the global”, observes López García (2008), highlighting that the local

must overcome the dimension and territorial environment of content (p.10). Indeed, in the Ofcom (Office of Communications, 2011) report, the public expressed special feelings for local radio stations:

Listeners have a real affection for their small-scale services. This affection appeared to be peculiar to small-scale local stations as they did not seem to have the same warmth and fondness when talking about the other radio stations that they listened to. This affection was not just derived from listening, however, but also from a sense of belonging that the station created – listeners felt they were a part of something. (Office of Communications, 2011, p. 16).

Bonixé recalls that the European phenomenon of radio stations, which attempt to promote local content from cities outside of the main great economic axes, presents a “stage to promote proximity by creating conditions for the community to see itself in them” (Bonixé, 2017, pp. 47-86). The author points out three characteristics of localized radio broadcasting:

1) Democratic dimension – since the beginning (when they were still “pirate radio stations”), small radio stations have allowed other protagonists of social life to have access to this medium. “Pirate stations” is how these broadcasters referred to themselves, as they operated without a government license. However, we know that this term originated in the 1960s in the United Kingdom when radio stations broadcast from ships anchored in international waters to evade the restrictions on private radio broadcasting;

2) Alternative dimension – radio stations emerged at a time when they operated without a license, providing an alternative view of the world. Examples include Radio Alice, founded in 1976, with links to the autonomism movement in Bologna (Italy), and Radio Caroline (United Kingdom), created in 1964 to escape the control of record companies on popular music in the United Kingdom and the BBC’s monopoly on radio broadcasting;

3) Proximity dimension – to promote local identity (pp.47–86).

In this latter dimension, local and regional media were confirmed as geographically specialized media. Considered a competitive advantage, they rely on strategies that strengthen these characteristics, creating space and discourses for their specific audience.

With deep popular roots and mirroring the free radio movements that originated in Italy, Spain, and France, Portuguese local radio stations emerged in the late 1950s and reached their

peak in the 1970s as an initiative that sought to underline the local as a territory of affirmation and distinction to rival the media that broadcast nationwide. Their basic purpose was to serve as a platform for expressing the experiences of their communities, promoting an alternative discourse in the face of the proposals presented by the larger media. They fit into the concept of proximity journalism, “committed to a certain territory and its community”, according to Jerónimo (2012, pp.81-86).

Technology provides radio stations with the opportunity to draw even closer to their communities, increasing the values of citizenship and democracy. In Portugal, the sector is divided today between national stations (which include public service stations), regional (in relation to the Northern, Central, and Southern regions of the country), and local. Bonixe (2012) cataloged 328 radio stations, classifying them as general, thematic and informative, musical, and university stations. There are no community stations. Many are part of large communication groups, while some were merely relay stations, with no connection with the communities in which they operated.

In 2012, an alteration to Portuguese law facilitated changing the typology of radio stations, and the main radio groups changed their function from general local to mostly musical. This resulted in the mass dismissal of professionals. The study entitled “Journalism and journalists in Portuguese Local Radio Stations” (Bonixe, 2015) identified several difficulties facing radio stations: newsrooms with fewer staff (between one and four journalists); low salaries (under 650 euros per month); and little reporting work due to the lack of funds and a low number of journalists. Furthermore, competition with larger stations was making it difficult to attract advertisers. The stations suffer due to problems in their organizations (most of them are micro-businesses). Due to the economic crisis, Bonixe (2012) reported that “many local radio stations have closed their doors and others have reshaped their projects and moved away from the local” (pp.17–30).

The internet provides other resources that radio stations could come to use to a greater or lesser extent: memory (in the form of files) and interaction, making listeners more active when websites provide spaces for discussion forums and for listeners to comment on the news. “The internet has made listening to radio broadcasts global, which, in the case of local radio

stations, is very important”, the scholar highlights (Bonixe, 2017, pp.47–86). The Social Communication Regulation Agency (2009) recognized what this modality produced, thinking of “a wider audience, especially one that includes natives of the respective municipalities who live far away or even abroad, providing them with programs and information that enables them to maintain close ties to their roots” (p. 149).

Indeed, in regions with great cross-border mobility (from Portugal to Spain or France, for instance) news programs began to create space for communities of emigrants and thus provide another public service. This is the Hypermedia Radio and expanded radio that Kischinhevsky (2012) and Lopez (2010) spoke of, which is confirmed by Bonixe (2017, pp.47–86): “Reaching the many Portuguese emigrants who live outside the country is one of the main advantages that Portuguese local radio stations enjoy with their online presence.”

4 The radiophonic panorama of Europe and Rádio Cova da Beira

Radio stations emerged in Portugal in parallel with the rest of Europe. According to Santos (2013), in Belgium, local radio stations began to appear with links to groups of activists, such as ecologists, and the government opted to regulate them. Meanwhile, in Greece, it was a presidential decree that paved the way for local radio stations, leading to the creation of around eight hundred local stations, most of which remain operational today.

In Denmark, there are around 250 local stations and in Sweden, there are a hundred. In Finland, the panorama is a little different. This Nordic country has 20 stations linked to the state broadcaster, which compete with 70 private regional stations. In Switzerland, there are 50 local stations, which broadcast in the country’s three languages (German, French and Italian). Although few in number, their strength and market penetration forced the national radio to become regional and spread its studios over the main centers of the country (Santos, 2013).

The French case is emblematic. Here too the state had to pursue citizens to regulate the sector, with local stations beginning to flourish in the nineteen seventies. The state radio (Radio France) was obliged to create regional channels to compete with local stations,

of which there are not approximately one thousand. Because France has several communities of immigrants, foreign language stations have emerged, such as Rádio Alfa, which broadcasts exclusively in Portuguese for the community of Portuguese emigrants that live in Paris (Pierre & Tudesq, 1981).

According to the National Communications Authority (Anacom), in Portugal, there are 347 licensed local FM radio operators, with 311 on continental territory, 14 in Madeira, and 22 in the Azores. The region of the country with the most local radio stations in the Algarve (7%), followed by Greater Lisbon (6%) and Greater Porto (6%). The other stations are spread around the country (Social Communication Regulation Agency, 2009). Local radio stations have accompanied the technological evolution and made the transition to the internet thanks to the ROLI project, which began in 2005 with funding from the European Union and support from the Portuguese Radio Broadcasting Association. Thus, 174 local stations (50%) began to make use of online broadcasting (pp.65–69).

RCB was established in 1986 when the phenomenon of free radio stations began to emerge in Portugal, linked to private, cooperative religious, and associative projects. Rádio Cova da Beira was born through one of these projects and today, even after 34 years, it maintains its cooperative statute. From a legal viewpoint, the emergence of hundreds of stations in the late 1980s forced the government to intervene and regulate the sector, and at the Assembly of the Republic in 1988, the Radio Law was passed. RCB broadcasts on two frequencies, 92.5 and 100.5, in order to reach parts of the country that are far from its original area, which is in the central region of Portugal.

5 Methodology

This study was conducted using participant observation and content analysis methods. The participant observation was done with a female presenter (Interviewee 1, 2020) and a male reporter (Interviewee 2, 2020), monitoring their work for one day (10 March 2020), from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The radio station's Information Coordinator, Paulo Manuel Rocha Pinheiro was also heard. For ethical reasons, the names of the interviewees are not revealed in the study. However, the coordinator's name is given because he speaks for the institution. At RCB, the newsroom team is made up of five people:

four journalists and one intern. The journalists work eight hours a day with a flexible schedule but usually extend their working hours to days, nights, and weekends.

To complement the participant observation, content analysis was conducted for seven days (from 9 to 15 March 2020), examining the production of content on the Rádio Cova da Beira website (www.rcb-radiocovadabeira.pt) to evaluate the published reports concerning the number of views and gauge their reach. These two methods were used to investigate how the publication of the website on the internet changed the routine of the station's journalists and how a local radio station fits into the community.

The interviews and observations were conducted at studios located in the city of Fundão (Portugal). We opted for a semi-structured questionnaire with a script that began by gathering data on the professional careers of the journalists and continued with a description of their routines before and after the creation of the website. It also included the interviewee's personal evaluation regarding the role of the radio station in the community.

The observation day (March 10, 2020) is part of the sample collected. If the World Health Organization (WHO) had recognized covid-19 as a pandemic before 11 March, this would have influenced not only the news but also the attitudes of the journalists later, as they would come to obey hygiene protocols that would restrict coverage. However, on the day of the participant observation, the newsroom's structure was maintained, with a row of desks in a closed unventilated room. It was only after the first measures decreed by the Portuguese government on 17 March that companies, institutions, and people began to take precautions to control the coronavirus (Oliveira, 2020). The pandemic did not affect the participant observation, but reports about it were published in audio and on the website, as we will see.

In short, this work aims to examine how hyperlocal news is reported on a radio station in the interior of Portugal, Rádio Cova da Beira (RCB), and how, in addition to production practices, which are affected even more by the internet, local and participative journalism aid the economy and social life in a small location, the district of Fundão and the region of Beira Interior.

6 Results

We will begin the report of the empirical part of the study with the interviews and participant observation, followed by the results of the analysis of the RCB website. In the building that houses Rádio Cova da Beira, which was acquired through negotiations in exchange for a piece of land on the outskirts of the city and refurbished to meet the needs of the station, the environment is one of great camaraderie among the employees. Despite this and the long years of working together, there is a consensus in the common complaint regarding how much they are paid. The four journalists have been with the station for over a decade. The explanation for the low salaries lies in the existence of RCB itself, which is maintained by a cooperative with 600 members. The money from advertising is not enough to pay the professionals the market rate, and the municipal authorities, by law, are unable to help. Interviewee 1 is a qualified journalist. She states:

We have always been a local station. We are a public utility institution, (...) a proximity radio station. We talk about the confectioner that makes the best sweets in Fundão, the last knife sharpener. We listen to people, and we have a close relationship with the population. On my show, not a day goes by without a visitor. I get phone calls starting at seven o'clock in the morning. A person needs to hear a certain word. We are catalysts of problems (Interviewee 1, Personal Communication, 2020, March 10).

“We bring things that are far away closer to home”, the Information Coordinator complements, revealing that 80% of RCB’s listeners are in Portugal, while the rest are spread over France, England, the United States, Brazil, and India, “where there are natives of Fundão who will not cut their umbilical cord”, which is why the station offers such a wide range of programs.

Pinheiro reckons that 40% of the station’s content is information. “For me, information is saying that there is going to be a water shortage in such a place”, he says. However, every morning the station goes on the air with Portuguese music and provides space for schools, civil society associations, and local characters. It covers markets, parties, marches all over the region and considers sports coverage an important topic. “A microphone and an antenna”, according to Interviewee 2 (2020), who has been at RCB for 19 years, starting work there “when I was still in college”, he states,

remembering the guidelines of the first president of the institution, who emphasized close ties with the community.

In this respect, Comassetto (2007) reaffirms:

The neighborhood, suburb, town, or urban or rural region remain relatively stable landmarks. People, for all sorts of needs, still depend on one another. They form ties and relationships, they share values, emotions, good times, and bad times. They complain, make demands and join forces to solve everyday problems, and they are not likely to discard their memories and the feeling of having roots in a certain place. (Comassetto, 2007, pp.123–131).

Interviewee 1 welcomes a local poet on her show. Loquacious, she is proud of being recognized in the streets and of being the people's "journalist, psychologist and doctor" and also a "means of shaking off loneliness". She has a loyal audience who tune in "religiously" every day to listen to the interviews she conducts and the advice she gives.

We are a region of emigrants, not only those of the 1960s, from the first lot of those who left. And many people, when they do not find jobs here, go to France. Today, social networks are not enough. It is very good to know that I am heard in other countries, in Dubai (...). They say to me: "I've already cried, already laughed a lot with your program!" or "Ah, how you remind me of my grandmother" problems. (Interviewee 1, Personal Communication, 2020, March 10).

These excerpts from the interviews show that Rádio Cova da Beira has two clear goals: 1) to provide information to the local community and serve as a link between people; and 2) to maintain ties with Portuguese people who leave the country (Rádio Cova da Beira, 2019). Later, we will address how the radio station adapted to the internet age.

In the week in question (March 9–15, 2020), RCB covered 83 news stories, an average of 11 per day. On 11 March, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the pandemic. This news, of worldwide interest, had local repercussions: "Covid-19: CMF puts contingency plan into action" (Pinheiro P., 2020), for example, had the highest ratings in our sample, with 7.917 views. The information on the number of views was provided by the page administrator, at the behest of RCB.

It is interesting to note that the headlines starting on 11 March repeated the verbs postpone and suspend/cancel, attesting to a provisional nature of the time: "AMCB postpones initiatives"

(Miguel, 2020); “PS postpones elections” (Miguel, 2020); “League suspends trials” (Malaca, 2020); “Hospital suspends visits” (Pinheiro P., 2020) and “Fundão’s weekly market is canceled” (Pinheiro P., 2020). Of all the news stories that were published, we chose for our analysis the headlines that occupy the upper part of the home page and that, according to the journalistic hierarchy system, are the most important of the edition. Of the 28 headlines, ten are dedicated to covid-19, especially from the middle of the week onwards. As in the international news, the subject had local repercussions and the local community responded and reacted.

Other issues deserved the people’s attention. We highlighted some of the most representative for our study. “When the problem lives next door” (Brito, 2020) is a report based on interviews with residents close to a composting plant. The place was visited by a deputy from the Assembly of the Republic, the legislative branch of the Portuguese state. The reporter listened to the residents’ complaints and the deputy promised to request clarification from the government. This was one of the most widely read stories of the week, with 3.714 views. On the following day, other news agencies reported the story.

The headline “Ambassador confirms consulate in Belmonte” (Brito, 2020) is about the visit of the ambassador from Brazil to Belmonte, a city in the region. He announced that the home village of the sailor Pedro Álvares Cabral would be home to an honorary Brazilian consulate before the end of the year. Belmonte is visited by many Brazilian tourists, as Cabral is recognized as the man who discovered Brazil, and there is even a museum in the town, in the house where the sailor was born. This local news story was of interest to the community, as well as to the area of Cova da Beira, the country, and the Brazilians who live in the region, and was viewed by 1.616 people.

Sometimes, the station does not have a notion of its reach. On 10 March, the president of the Municipal Chamber of Covilhã gave the news that would be important to this town, which belongs to the same district of Castelo Branco and Fundão’s neighbor: “There is hope for the tower of Santo Antônio” (Brito, 2020). This was a building that because of its size and abandonment stood out in the landscape of Serra da Estrela. The story was viewed 3.235 times.

7 Discussion of the results

During the week in question, the RCB website was viewed 8,100 times by 1,410 users, an increase of 27% over the previous week. On average, a reader remains on the website for two minutes and three seconds and most (51.3%) use a computer to access it, followed by 44.3% who use a smartphone. A tablet is used by 4.4%.

If we analyze the news for the week 9–15 March through the sections, we can see that those classified under the heading “Society” are in first place in terms of numbers (45), followed by Politics (17), Culture (13) and Sport (8), demonstrating that localism is the predominant factor of interest on the Rádio Cova da Beira website. Regarding the source of the news, most (59%) came through a press release, especially those addressing the coronavirus pandemic. These indirect news sources include the Municipal Chamber (which corresponds to the Town Hall in Portugal), companies, local industry, and third-sector organizations, especially the Catholic Church, whose organizations are traditionally strong in both the region and country.

In second place is the station’s sources (25%), discovered through reporting work, when the journalist leaves the newsroom, either to cover an assembly or for a press conference.

In third place is upcoming news, in other words, what is going to happen. For example, “Ministerial council meets in Sertã” (Miguel, 2020) or “Idanha presents an agenda of the mysteries of Easter” (Miguel, 2020). The latter story is a demonstration of how the circulation of reporters around the town and catholic sources of information in the region join forces to provide an agenda that attracts interest in the exoticism of Holy Week rituals (with funeral songs and mysterious ceremonies in the village of Idanha) and at the same time reinforces the importance of preserving the religiosity, culture, and identity of a people. A local news story may be highly relevant to the population, such as the headline of 9 March: “Sunday mass only on RCB” (Brito, 2020). With the cancellation of religious services due to the pandemic, the radio station became the only means of broadcasting a live mass from the church behind closed doors. Thus, the station also affirmed its role of being close to the people.

Most visits to the site originate in Portugal (86%). Within the country, the site is viewed far beyond Cova da Beira, the

geographical area covered by the FM radio station. In first place is Fundão, where the radio station has its headquarters, followed by the neighboring Covilhã. However, from there on, the views break down barriers, with Castelo Branco, the district capital, Gaia, in the north of the country, and other cities, both closer and farther away, such as Guarda, Porto, Lisbon, Varzim, Coimbra, Guimarães and Amadora, in descending order.

RCB also reaches across the country's borders. The remaining 14% of users who accessed the RCB site during that week from outside of Portugal were distributed over two continents: Europe and America. The USA was in first place (4.1%), followed by France (4%), Norway (2.7%), Switzerland (1.9%), the United Kingdom (0.9%), and Brazil (0.4%). Mediating the two-way street of communication between the authorities in the region of Cova da Beira and abroad, the radio has not only played the role of an observer of reality, but also an agent of change. In this respect, it encompasses the "temporal, psycho-affective, socio-professional and socio-cultural dimensions" (Camponez, 2012, pp.35–47) that constitute the "polysemy of senses" that surround the concept of proximity in journalism and expands the geographical perspective beyond the mere newsworthiness that justifies its existence, as well as the public's preference for local news.

If technical renewal and professionalization were a path followed by most Portuguese local radio stations, there is still a lack of focus on solid newsrooms, with a sufficient number of journalists to enable work beyond the upcoming news and press releases, allowing permanent updating of the website and greater coverage of the region. The reporters note that they cannot always be out in the streets to do their reporting as they are tied to a routine with many subjects to be transformed into news items, not only on the airwaves but also on the web. Nevertheless, the other side of technology is the exclusion of part of the population, who do not yet have internet access, which, in this specific case, means the elderly and illiterate² (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2018). These continue to give preference to the audio medium.

Whereas at first, the news was not published on the website unless it had been broadcast on the air by the radio station, today, with the growth of the online service, news can be published at any hour, minute, or second, unlike radio news and scheduled radio programs. Breaking news, upcoming news, facts that are going to happen,

can emerge anytime and will be published on the website. A point in question is “Ministerial Council meets in Sertã” (Miguel, 2020) or “Idanha presents an agenda of the mysteries of Easter (Miguel, 2020). News of a local nature can be of great importance to the population, as highlighted by the headline “Sunday mass only on RCB”.

8 Conclusions

The dimension of changes imposed by information and communication technologies affects the conceptual structure of radio, although its characteristics remain the same. Ortriwano (1985) pointed out eight attributes regarding so-called analog radio: oral language; penetration; mobility; low cost; immediatism; instantaneousness; sensoriality; and autonomy (p.23).

These attributes are also present in online radio, but Cebrián Herreros (2001) calls attention to a process of accommodating the radio stations, with the simple transposition of content from the analog to the digital medium (so-called shovelware), as occurred in the early days of the internet in both radiophonic and print media. Thus, the challenge is to drive creativity and offer different services from analog radio, which is facilitated by the new technologies.

Meditsch warns that the nature and identity of radio and its importance in the future are not directly linked to the supports that are used. On the contrary, the existence and maintenance of radio stations depend more “on the social use and preservation of the local culture” that they are capable of undertaking (2010, pp.203–238). However, as it has always had throughout history, the medium has a great capacity to adapt, and in times of media convergence, this would be no different.

When reflecting on how radio as a means of communication is part of the media ecosystem, we need to be attentive to the new logics of production, diffusion, and reception of sound content, as well as the competition from independent media, autonomous podcasts, blogs, and online broadcasters on social media, as all of this constitutes a complex construction process. “The existence of independent radio stations is above all due to the fact that new sectors of the population have acquired the means to make known their opinions and viewpoints”, highlights Umberto Eco

(1981, pp.213–230), and the general panorama of radio cannot be unaware of this.

Rádio Cova da Beira complies with the attributes pointed out by Ortriwano (1985). The broadcaster stands out because of its good use of oral language. It has a local audience and an audience beyond its home region, meeting the requirements of immediatism and instantaneousness. It is maintained at a low cost, enjoys autonomy in the community it serves, and for which it demonstrates sensoriality, in terms of problems and the cultural values of the region.

In this respect, it fulfills its role as an institution that strives to promote citizenship, which Amaral (2012) identified as “active citizenship” related to defending causes. RCB has ceased to be merely a broadcaster to constitute “an industrial system of services” (Amaral, 2012) that feeds the “information market, following the interests of the audience”. From a political perspective, the station has the potential to develop “a conscience fed by flows of information of a horizontal, participative and reflexive nature, which draws attention to issues that are in the public interest that lack transparently and are addressed superficially” (pp.1–16).

If the radio station in Fundão is not sufficiently mobile to report on issues that interest the public, this is due to the legal structure that is imposed on it because, without the resources to hire more journalists or increase the salaries of the current team, it is not possible to do imaginative journalism, a modality that requires time and specialized and dedicated teams.

Regarding the narrative forms that are used, we would like to emphasize that a new multimedia narrative structure, which makes use of other platforms with reasonable success, such as social media, requires professionals to make changes in their routines, investing in new competencies, and improving their skills (Lopez, 2010). This hypermedia radio remains far from the reality of Rádio Cova da Beira, despite the team's efforts to adapt to the digital age. However, RCB does a good job of preserving the local culture and taking it to other audiences outside its own geographical territory. Bonixé (2015) likewise found that “emigrants also like to keep up with what is happening in their homeland and mail and message us to say that they listen to us”.

Of the 83 news reports in our sample from the RCB website, most of them, almost 57% (56,6%), are hyperlocal reports. In other

words, they are written at and for a specific place like a neighborhood or village and, when they are published on digital media, they attract interest at the local, regional, national, and even international levels. We witnessed this in the report with the headline “When the problem lives next door” (Brito, 2020), where a local theme had widespread repercussions. This is just one example of how a small radio station, in this case, RCB, works as a kind of local news agency and serves as a guide for larger organizations.

What is the meaning of these transformations in journalism and how do they affect the daily functions of the profession? Local journalism, in a general context, is embedded in a panorama of changes in the media system as a result of digital technologies. From the example of Rádio Cova da Beira, which crossed frontiers, adapting to the internet age and new forms of communication, we can say that local journalism is simultaneously global and an alternative to the massification of communication by maintaining its original local identity.

This is what happened with RCB, in keeping with the auspicious slogan with which it started broadcasting in 1986: “A radio station between Beira and the world”. As Comassetto recalls, “local radio, despite its deficiencies, continues to represent a differential amidst the evident multimedia context about the new and attractive media, the multiplication of channels, and the chains that accelerate the concentration of the sector” (2007, pp.123–131).

The journalists on the RCB team resent (particularly in times of imposed limitations, such as the pandemic) the excessive influence of local news sources on the choice and production of agendas, undermining the necessary distance and exemption that are part of a reporter’s mission, the lack of time to practice in-depth journalism, and overlapping tasks to which they were not accustomed, to the detriment of the audio medium itself.

Finally, following the advice of Seaton (2001 as cited in Amaral, 2012), RCB could, as a powerful tool of proximity journals, seek to 1) integrate online and offline narratives with communicative actions to promote participation; 2) legitimize the role of journalism in the community as a driver for affinity and identity; 3) adopt marketing strategies to suit the local reality; and 4) act on a scale, to benefit from a possible merger, for example, with *Jornal do Fundão*,

a traditional newspaper in the Cova da Beira region, in the sense that both seek financial survival, greater recognition by the community and better journalistic quality.

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TRANSLATED BY: ROBERT STEWARD

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