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GATEKEEPER RELOAD:

the expansion of news planning
in the age of artificial intelligence,
applied development, and
conceptual reconfiguration model



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ABSTRACT – Obesity is a major public health issue. This study aims to analyze how obesity is represented in the media. To this end, a content analysis was conducted on 385 news articles published in 2021 in six Spanish online newspapers, where obesity was the main topic. The objective was to examine how these articles approached service journalism. The findings reveal a shifting trend: obesity is increasingly framed as a social issue rather than an individual one. However, when focusing solely on articles classified under service journalism, the individual perspective remains dominant – placing responsibility for excess weight on the individual. The covid-19 pandemic appears to have reinforced this individualistic framing. Additionally, references to obese women and celebrities in digital media undermine the informative function of service journalism. In conclusion, service journalism tends to stigmatize individuals with obesity and overlooks socioeconomic and educational perspectives on a problem – obesity – that social groups increasingly define as transversal and systemic within an obesogenic society.

Key words: Obesity. Framing. Online newspapers. Stigmatization. Covid-19.

GATEKEEPER RELOAD: a expansão da pauta em tempos de inteligência artificial, desenvolvimento aplicado e modelo de reconfiguração conceitual

RESUMO – A inteligência artificial vem reconfigurando o jornalismo e conceitos associados às teorias do gatekeeping e dos critérios de noticiabilidade. O artigo reflete sobre as mudanças na etapa inicial da produção jornalística – concepção e roteirização da pauta – mediante a colaboração humano-máquina advinda do uso de assistentes virtuais no planejamento editorial. A partir da pesquisa aplicada, com base nas instâncias da Design Science Research Methodology (DSRM), na concretização de um artefato que conecta a teoria às práticas emergentes, o artigo apresenta uma experiência com um modelo de assistente virtual, mostrando seus níveis de controle e interferência e seu impacto na seleção de pautas e planejamento jornalístico. Os resultados indicam possibilidades de eficiência e inovação, mas também implicações éticas e operacionais na autonomia editorial.

Palavras-chave: Inteligência Artificial. Gatekeeping. Noticiabilidade. Pauta Jornalística. Automação.

GATEKEEPER RELOAD: la expansión de la planificación de noticias en la era de la inteligencia artificial, desarrollo aplicado y modelo de reconfiguración conceptual

RESUMEN – La inteligencia artificial está reconfigurando el periodismo y los conceptos asociados a las teorías del gatekeeping y los criterios de noticiabilidad. El artículo reflexiona sobre los cambios en la etapa inicial de la producción periodística – concepción y guionización de la agenda – mediante la colaboración entre humanos y máquinas derivada del uso de asistentes virtuales en la planificación editorial. A partir de la investigación aplicada, basada en las Instancias de la Metodología de Investigación en Ciencia del Diseño (DSRM) en la realización de un artefacto, que conecta la teoría con las prácticas emergentes, se presenta una experiencia con un modelo de asistente virtual, mostrando sus niveles de control e interferencia y el impacto en la selección y planificación periodística. Los resultados indican posibilidades de eficiencia e innovación, así como implicaciones éticas y operativas en la autonomía editorial.

Palabras clave: Inteligencia Artificial. Gatekeeping. Noticiabilidad. Planificación Periodística. Automatización.

1 From editor to editing machine

Technological evolution has radically reshaped and transformed the social, cultural, and professional practices that organize contemporary discourses, consequently reaching and impacting journalism and its performance as a mediator of reality. In an attempt to explain the functioning of the field and its forms of regulation, journalism theories present the challenges that these changes bring to traditional concepts, changes that stem from the shifting dynamics of news production, distribution, and consumption. In this regard, this article explores how these theoretical foundations of journalism are being reshaped by digitization, by the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) (Saad & Santos, 2023; Santos, 2023), and by the emergence of new actors and concepts that challenge traditional approaches. This is particularly true for the initial stage of news production processes, i.e., news coverage planning, from its conception based on the news agenda.

We must therefore recognize that the work of editorially adapting the world to newspapers is the exact essence of journalism. As Zelizer (2000) states, the professional identity of a journalist is constituted by the recognition of their expertise in judging and choosing what people need or do not need to know. News is therefore the result of the editor's competence in selecting events, based on the periodical's editorial position, and deciding what to publish and how to publish it, taking journalism's social function as an interpreter of realities into account (Marcondes Filho, 2000).

Journalism, which became institutionalized through Enlightenment principles of bringing truths to the public, has since gone on to set debate agendas, endowing journalists with the role of watchdogs: the guardians and monitors of irregularities that threaten civil society and are denounced within the Habermasian public sphere (Habermas, 2003). Thus, the editing of a newspaper involves a complex set of operations aimed at adapting and formatting relevant and new facts and information that meet the criteria of what is conceptually understood as news, from the combination (as Marocco and Berger (2006, p. 17) point out) of "... individual gesture, business strategies and journalistic practices to historical conditions of possibilities".

Journalists/editors are described by the theory as gatekeepers (White, 1993) who rely on news criteria (Wolf, 2001) in order to select

the information and data that can and/or should be transformed into news. Their news coverage conduct is guided by these criteria, which seek to systematize the work, especially in the face of the abundance of information available, due to the need for its objective selection (Tuchman, 1999). From gatekeeping theory, which explains editorial action from a personal perspective, the description of newspaper editorial conduct has advanced to the theoretical model of newsmaking, which explains the choices behind what and how to publish based on the constraints of the media organization (Breed, 1955). The resulting newsworthiness criteria were therefore considered by taking into account the news value in its articulation with production routines, resulting from the limits and possibilities of the company's news coverage.

Once derived from this systematization, news values were therefore contextualized within the set of productive procedures (Paul & Berkowitz, 2014) to acquire meaning, as stated by Wolf (2001). There are three major stages to this: 1) information gathering, 2) selection and editorial processing, and 3) publication. Although there is an intrinsic connection, especially between the first and second stages of information processing, this article aims to highlight the work developed in the first stage, where news coverage begins to take shape, including the selecting and outlining of topics that will receive attention, as well as planning the activities to cover the story and detail all the journalistic work that will be carried out.

The aim is to observe how an agenda is built, a document that organizes the work of journalists by systematizing the chosen topic, deciding on the direction of news production, defining the themes, angle of approach, and sources that will be consulted, as well as what textual and visual information will be used, and what format the report will be given. It is the editor/producer who must meet the demands of the agenda: screening the topics, prioritizing information based on newsworthiness criteria (the relevance of the subject and its potential for public interest), and specifying the perspective from which the story will be addressed.

Since this planning is based on the media outlet's position, editorial identity, and target audience, its construction, as Wolf (2001) describes, results from contexts that end up producing specificities to this work, with individual influences, as well as the practices inherent in the organization of newsroom work and even the operational routines associated with the type of publication, technologies, and

available human resources. Time is a factor here, particularly with regard to the integration, in contemporary newsrooms, of operational practices and routines characterized by some level of automation in news production. As Canavilhas (2023) points out, AI has been adopted for both its ease of use and considerable economic efficiency.

To this point, we specifically discuss the initial stage of journalistic work that goes into building news agendas in convergent, digital, and multiplatform newsrooms through the integration of automated news production technologies and their implications (Silva & Piccinin, 2024). The question then arises as to how this process of defining the agenda is presented, from what angle the story will take, to the moment of publication, when it combines human action with generative artificial intelligence, which is, in turn, subject to algorithm¹ recommendations in terms of platformized journalism (Van Dijck et al., 2018).

From a methodological point of view, in order to support processes of digitization, platforms, and technological environments, this research draws on the principles and fundamentals of Design Science Research Methodology (DSRM).

2 The digital age and conceptual reshaping

As an activity that mediates reality, journalism has always been theoretically described as using key concepts that guide its practice and research, particularly the processes of selecting and choosing what to publish and how to publish it, based on theories such as gatekeeping (White, 1993) and newsworthiness (Wolf, 2001), the frameworks of which helped to systematize our understanding of the news production process. These concepts, historically rooted in the industrial and social dynamics of the modern, linear, and axiomatic perspective, reflect a unidirectional communication model based on hierarchical structures where the journalist's main role is to mediate reality.

For example, gatekeeping theory was a turning point in understanding journalists and their role in selecting information based on personal interpretation. Developed from the studies of Kurt Lewin and later adapted for journalism by David M. White (1993), this approach focused on the forces that influenced professionals and their choices when deciding what should or should not be

published, relieving the editor of the final decision in the editorial process. The theory of newsworthiness brought forward the criteria that determine news value, such as proximity, relevance, and impact, systematizing what was considered worthy of media attention, while also incorporating into the judgment and selection of news the impact of editorial practices due to the socialization of work in the newsroom. The criteria for newsworthiness were therefore based on a combination of the news value of information and the organizational limitations of production routines (Wolf, 2001), which, in turn, were affected by variables such as the availability of human resources, compliance with strict and inflexible deadlines, and potential sources.

The digitization of information and the convergent processes inherent to the web ecosystem have introduced elements that challenge these principles. The way the convergent and digital media ecosystem has been shaped has led to building agendas that conform primarily to the speed of information and the reallocation of duties in newsrooms (Salaverría & Áviles, 2008). It has also demanded that emerging stories and topics be included on internet networks and platforms, as well as having to verify information in real time (Bertocchi, 2016), as fixed and conventional deadlines have gone by the wayside. What's more, the interactivity has led to multimedia content production and user-generated content. Journalism is no longer exclusive to professionals; it has come to be exercised by ordinary citizens, changing the traditional role of journalists and questioning the news institution's monopoly on information.

The impact this has had on journalism studies has led to concepts being reconsidered, such as the horizontality of digital networks, which has taken the centrality or stature away from journalists as gatekeepers. Technology platforms now play this role by filtering and distributing content based on algorithms¹ (Wallace, 2017). This "algorithmic mediation" has important implications not only for those who control the flow of information, but also for the news values and production routines that guide these choices, in terms of newsmaking theory. The theory of gatewatching (Bruns, 2011), proposed as a counterpoint to gatekeeping, has also sought to reflect this change by considering content from audiences, who are now involved in selecting what to publish and how to publish it, thus relegating journalists to simply editors/curators of information. This means that, instead of blocking or selecting what reaches the public, technological platforms act as observers that amplify and

redistribute content that is produced by numerous agents, including users themselves.

The traditional criteria for newsworthiness (based on normative principles) are being questioned by a digital and convergent logic, one that focuses on engagement and its ability to retain users and their interactions with platforms. Additionally, platformized journalism (Van Dijck et al., 2018) – where companies like Google and Meta play a key role in the distribution and consumption of news – has introduced dynamics that have redefined the relationships between producers and information consumers. It is important to note that this is specifically due to the media's growing concern with connecting more to audiences as a result of the proliferation of narratives on the web and the pursuit of engagement that platforms have introduced into journalism. By enabling interactions between publications and end users (Poell et al., 2020), platformization systematically collects and organizes data for algorithmic processing, for monetization, and for circulation in order to shape content, ultimately looking to capture the interest of audiences, and anticipate their likes and preferences to keep them engaged (Pariser, 2012).

Currently, the platformization of journalism has instilled the concern that has always been at the heart of editing: the conflict of interests between meeting the demands of public interest and those of the public's interest insofar as every editor seeks to build the newspaper's narrative and capture audience attention (Paulino & Cabral, 2024). Computing tools are used here as a means of expression, shaping discourse while simultaneously highlighting what is relevant based on user activities (Gillespie, 2018). Data is the fuel that connects platforms as it generates insights into user behavior and metrics, which then provide input for creating new functionalities for applications or platforms. The integration of AI tools (Santos, 2024) into these ecosystems has further enhanced these changes by mobilizing virtual assistants (chatbots and recommendation systems) that act as invisible mediators influencing both what is produced and what is consumed (Santos, 2024).

Artificial intelligence, particularly generative artificial intelligence (GAI), is transforming journalism and its news production processes, media structures, and professional roles. It enables the automated creation of content in text, audio, and video formats, all while increasing efficiency and productivity (Túñez-López et al., 2021). For this reason, incorporating artificial intelligence technologies into

journalism is perhaps the most disruptive development the field has seen to date, since these tools not only automate manual tasks but also challenge the epistemological and ethical boundaries of the field. They are like agents with the specific role of analyzing algorithms and consequently identifying, prioritizing, and suggesting topics, ultimately influencing the criteria for newsworthiness.

Therefore, AI-based systems introduce a new layer of mediation into the journalistic process that is no longer exclusively based on human experience and judgment; newsrooms are now beginning to rely on the predictive and analytical capabilities of these tools. Historical data and behavioral patterns are monitored and systematized by AI to suggest content, and while this may increase efficiency and productivity, it also raises questions about the subjectivity of choices and the potential biases embedded in the algorithms within this human-machine co-creation (Diakopoulos et al., 2024). To put it another way, AI is redefining the very concept of journalistic objectivity insofar as algorithms present that objectivity based on data and metrics, which reflects the priorities and values of their developers, shaping specific editorial criteria. This dynamic is advancing in AI and is already different from the first predictive AI systems, as it now generates original content (Santaella, 2024). This ultimately impacts the choice of what to publish and especially how to present it.

3 Research methodology

The literature, according to Moretto et al. (2010), addresses the concept of socio-technical systems, the properties of which emerge through the dynamic collaboration between people and artificial agents. This perspective offers a solid foundation on which to think about innovation in journalism, especially at a time marked by increasing integration between professional practices and smart technologies. We adopted the Design Science Research method, which, according to Freitas Junior et al. (2017), is a process for designing problem-solving artifacts to evaluate what was designed or what is working, and communicating the results.

Julia Müller et al. (2024) and Peffers et al. (2007) identify a wide variety of artifacts associated with evaluation methods within the Design Science Research Methodology and draw particular attention

to logical reasoning, expert evaluations, technical experiments, user experiments, action research, prototypes, case studies, and illustrative scenarios. According to Peffers et al. (2007), the Design Science Research Methodology is structured into the following six stages: 1) problem identification; 2) defining solution objectives; 3) design and development; 4) demonstration through experiments, simulations or case studies; 5) evaluating the artifact's performance against the objectives; and (6) communicate the problem, the solution, and present the artifact.

In the first stage, the research problem focused on the following question: how can artificial intelligence be used to enhance the identification of agendas, making this process quicker, more accurate, and more efficient? Based on DSRM, the artifact acts as a technological solution that materializes previously mapped socio-technological requirements, allowing journalists to identify relevant topics more quickly, accurately, and in a contextualized manner. The artifact developed in this research is a support system for generating news agendas (which we call the Agenda Setter) and is designed to integrate information from different sources, such as social networks, community groups, public indicators, government databases, and predictive signs of vulnerability and general contexts. The type of instantiation (or artifact) not only reinforces innovation in news processes but also demonstrates how artificial intelligence can improve editorial decision-making and strengthen local and data-driven journalism.

For the second stage – defining the solution objectives – we present, in subsection 3.1, the experience with the Agenda Setter, a virtual assistant designed to support journalists in identifying and creating agendas. The system uses a GPT language generation model developed by OpenAI and is designed to optimize editorial processes through contextualized suggestions, information analysis, and initial agenda generation. In the third stage – designing and developing the artifact – presented in section 4, the Agenda Setter is a non-human assistant intended to support editors in optimizing and accelerating the identification of factual agendas and their scripts. At this stage, the editor maintains full control of the process and has autonomy in editorial choices, while benefiting from the insights, suggestions, and new perspectives generated by artificial intelligence. These contributions not only streamline workflow steps but can also provide innovative perspectives that, under traditional conditions, might go unnoticed in the fast-paced routines of journalism.

For the fourth stage—**demonstration through experiments and case studies**—we present a practical example of the Agenda Setter, detailed in subsection 4.1 (Example of use). This experiment began by defining a theme from which the system could generate different angles and possibilities for agendas, exhibiting its potential as a tool to support journalism. The final considerations for the fifth stage—evaluating the artifact’s performance against the objectives (section 5)—discuss the results obtained. The theoretical-applied approach allowed us to articulate the fundamentals of journalism with practical experimentation, offering a consistent basis for analyzing the intersection between humans and artificial intelligence systems in building agendas. This proved how the artifact’s ability to expand the editorial capabilities while preserving the critical and decision-making role of the journalist. Lastly, for stage six—communicate the problem, the solution, and present the artifact—this study accomplished its purpose by disseminating its results in this scientific journal and engaging in dialogue with the field. In doing so, this study considers not only the impacts of AI and the ethical issues involved, but mostly seeks to identify in which contexts AI use can be truly beneficial for optimizing news processes.

3.1 AI in journalism and the agenda setter experience

AI refers to the ability of computer systems to perform tasks normally associated with human intelligence, such as pattern recognition, decision-making, and problem-solving. Generative AI (Saad & Santos, 2023), a subsection of this technology, focuses on creating original content such as text, images, audio, and video using advanced algorithms to generate materials that mimic human creativity. These algorithms, in the form of bots or applications for specific tasks, are automated interaction systems that play a crucial role in changing contemporary journalism and producing this type of content. They use data collection to directly interact with the public, providing a responsive and quick interface that can meet the demands of news production and consumption. The application used for the specific case in this paper is Agenda Setter, a virtual assistant designed to support journalists in identifying and creating agendas based on a GPT language generation model developed by OpenAI. Through predictive algorithms and machine learning, the system suggests

agendas based on trends, historical data, and audience behavior.

As a theoretical development of the research, we generated a model artifact for Agenda Setter, which structures an initial version that attempts to organize the reconfiguration of AI use in news production processes. The model offers a framework for understanding the nuances and limitations of the control and interference of automated agents in journalistic gatekeeping and the selection of newsworthiness criteria. It highlights different combinations of factors—knowledge, technological dependence, alignment with social role, and organizational objectives—that shape the impact of AI on the news production process, resulting in a model that serves as a starting point for empirical investigations and future adaptations, as described below.

3.2 Theoretical model of control and interference of automated agents in news gatekeeping

3.2.1 Introduction

The incorporation of artificial intelligence in journalism significantly alters the classic gatekeeping process, especially in the initial phase of defining agendas. The influence of automated agents, such as the Agenda Setter, varies according to factors within the newsroom and outside the context of news production. This theoretical model seeks to categorize and explain the following different levels of control and interference by the automated agent:

- a) Professionals' knowledge of AI
- b) Dependence on technological resources
- c) Alignment with the classic social role of journalism
- d) The organization's primary focus, such as monetization or public mission

3.2.2 Theoretical Presuppositions

The model is based on two fundamental concepts:

- a) Gatekeeping control: the ability of agents—human or automated—to decide what will be produced and distributed as news.

b) **Algorithmic interference:** the degree to which automated tools influence these decisions, either as support or as a determining factor.

3.2.3 Structure of Theoretical Model

The model features four levels of control and interference, defined by two main pillars:

a) **Knowledge and technological dependence:** measures a journalist's knowledge of AI and their reliance on technological resources for gatekeeping.

b) **Alignment with the social role of journalism:** assesses the degree to which the newsroom is aligned with classic ideals of public interest, as opposed to commercial objectives such as revenue and monetization.

3.2.4 The Four Levels of Control

a) **Dominant Journalistic Control**

Context: professionals possess advanced knowledge of AI and use it as a complementary support.

Algorithmic interference: low.

Characteristics:

- The journalist maintains complete control over editorial decisions.

- AI provides data to enrich decision-making, but it does not interfere in the final decision.

- Strong focus on public interest and the social mission of journalism.

b) Shared Control

Context: Intermediate level of knowledge about AI, with moderate dependence on technological tools.

Algorithmic interference: moderate.

Characteristics:

- The automated agent directly influences agenda choices, suggesting priorities based on data.

- The journalist acts as a mediator, refining the AI's suggestions to ensure they align with the context and editorial values.

- A balanced focus between commercial and social mission.

c) Dominant Automated Control

Context: high reliance on technological resources, with low levels of AI knowledge among professionals.

Algorithmic interference: high.

Characteristics:

- The automated tool is primarily responsible for setting the agenda.

- A journalist's role is limited to the execution phase, with little influence over initial decisions.

- Strong focus on performance indicators and monetization.

d) Complete Technological Dependence

Context: professionals with a high degree of dependence on technology and low alignment with the social ideals of journalism.

Algorithmic interference: complete.

Characteristics:

- Topics are generated entirely by AI, with minimal or no human involvement.

- Commercial objectives are the focus, such as maximizing clicks and advertising revenue.

- The social role of journalism is secondary or nonexistent.

3.2.5 Implications and Limitations of the Model

The theoretical model proposes a framework for analyzing how automated agents may influence different newsrooms and news production contexts. However, the practical application of said model needs to be adapted to each organization, including the following considerations:

a) Algorithmic biases: automated tools should be constantly evaluated to avoid reinforcing biases or inappropriate prioritizations.

b) Journalistic autonomy: it is essential to ensure that the use of AI does not compromise the fundamental role of journalists as guardians of the public interest.

c) Professional training: training and education in AI are paramount for balancing the relationship between humans and machines.

4 Experiment methodology

The system was developed based on the context of AI in journalism and the potential of automation solutions using artificial intelligence in newsrooms. It started with theoretical hypotheses on the exigencies of conceiving, building, and planning news agendas in order to develop the Agenda Setter. By adopting applied research principles, this study analyzed the changes introduced by AI in the initial stage of news production, with a particular emphasis on identifying agendas. According to Santos (2018), applied research seeks solutions or improvements to real problems of a duly identified group, social segment, or organization, by developing artifacts intended for social impact, innovation, and to improve procedures and processes.

This understanding stems fundamentally from the Communication and Information area document from the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes), which identifies the work of professional postgraduate programs to these objectives. For the applied research work, there are a number of development frameworks that can be used. These can be applied individually or in combination, depending on the usage scenario, the users involved, and the problems being addressed. It is important to remember that, in most cases, the notion of innovation is not associated with inventing something entirely new (disruptive innovation), but rather with reshaping existing elements for the purpose of achieving better results. In these cases, an interdisciplinary approach is essential in order to obtain more conclusive results regarding participation in the digital public sphere (Paulino, 2021).

Overall, these are developments of a broader framework known as PACT (People, Activities, Context and Technologies), which is widely applied in the field of design and is user-centered, that analyzes people and the tasks they perform in a given context using technologies. These tasks are not necessarily limited to tools; they include the many ways that people interact with the world (social technologies, of course, being one of them).

Table 1

Applied Artifact Development Frameworks

Tool	Description	Author	Level of Use	Type of Evaluation or Use
Context Analysis	Economic, Technological and Cultural	MCS	General – but correlations between the different areas are observed	Context Evaluation
Van Dick Framework	Micro – Technology, Product, Uses and Appropriation Macro – Ownership, Governance, and Business Model	Jose Van Dick	Specific – Created for analyzing social media platforms, but applicable to other technological devices	Context Evaluation
External Environment Analysis	Economic, legal, cultural, technological, and social factors, etc.	Various	General	Context Evaluation
Adoption Scale	Innovators, Newcomers, Early Majority, Late Majority, Latecomers	Ryan and Gross; Rogers	General – but considers the specific aspect of the adoption stage	Technology Adoption Evaluation
Factors Impacting Adoption Rate	Relative advantage, Compatibility, Complexity, Testability, Observability	Rogers, Valente	Specific – used for analyzing adoption potential once introduced into the environment	Technology Adoption Evaluation
Diffusion Models	Contagion, Social Threshold, Social Learning	Yong	General – observing the specific parameter of the diffusion pattern	Technology Adoption Evaluation
Sociodemographic Segmentation	Age, Gender, Age Range, Income, Education Level, Location	Various	General	Segmentation Evaluation
Segmentation by Psychological Profiles or Clusters	Independent, Conservative, Inquisitive, Indifferent	Various	General	Segmentation Evaluation

Segmentation by Needs or Requirements	Made from specification lists	Various	Specific	Segmentation Evaluation
Activity Description	Contextualization based on in-depth descriptions	Various	General	Usage Evaluation
Problem Classes	A set of pre-established questions and solutions	Various	Specific	Usage Evaluation
Result Orientation	Choices based on specific objectives (narrative, medical, recreational, technical, educational)	Various	Specific	Usage Evaluation
UNF	Users – Needs – Features	Various	General	Usage Evaluation

For this project, the PACT framework was translated into its simplest version based on a usage setting in which journalists (users) need assistance in organizing and planning news coverage that will be produced by the newsroom (needs) and, through a Generative AI application, receive support from functionalities (features) developed to help them with what Generative AI can essentially do, which is ideation or generating insights. As seen in the table above, the activity description and segmentation by needs or requirements were carried out (in a complementary and preliminary manner) in conjunction with the theoretical framework that describes the pre-production stages of news content.

Identifying agendas (Silva, 2022) in journalism is a fundamental process that decides what will be transformed into news or reports and involves the careful selection of relevant, current topics of public interest (Marocco & Berger, 2006), serving as a guide for news production. According to Moreira (2006), by transforming facts into news, journalistic activity is dictating what should or should not be known by the public. Daily, the news agenda functions as a roadmap that guides reporters and editors when covering events and preparing stories (Lage, 2001). It defines the theme, the focus, the sources that will be consulted, and the approach that will be taken. A well-developed agenda ensures that the information is presented clearly, objectively, in line with the interests of the target audience, and follows these steps:

1) source monitoring – tracks the sources of information, such as news agencies, social media, press releases, and public events, to identify potential topics of interest; 2) hold agenda meetings – newsrooms hold morning meetings where editors and reporters discuss and select which topics will be covered based on criteria such as relevance, timeliness, and potential impact on the public; 3) data analysis – use data analysis tools to identify trends and emerging issues that could become relevant stories; and 4) external suggestions – companies and communications agencies can suggest topics to media outlets, presenting themes they consider to be of public interest.

The experiment focuses on the following stage: how to use AI to enhance the topic identification stage in order to optimize this process. Advanced chatbot systems (like the Agenda Setter) use algorithms that take editorial metrics and human feedback into account from large and varied databases of texts similar to or related to the topic of interest. They aim to assist editors in identifying factual topics and to apply predictive intelligence and data analysis to personalize suggestions based on user profiles and prior behaviors.

Initially, the GPTs were used for development purposes. These are optimized versions for a specific task that can be created by CHATGPT subscription plans that paying or non-paying users can access via a link. GPTs (not to be confused with the GPT model or the general CHATGPT product) are similar to Google GEMs and allow access at three levels: to the developer user, via a link, or more broadly, in the GPT store within CHATGPT, this latter level being the most widespread form of public use.

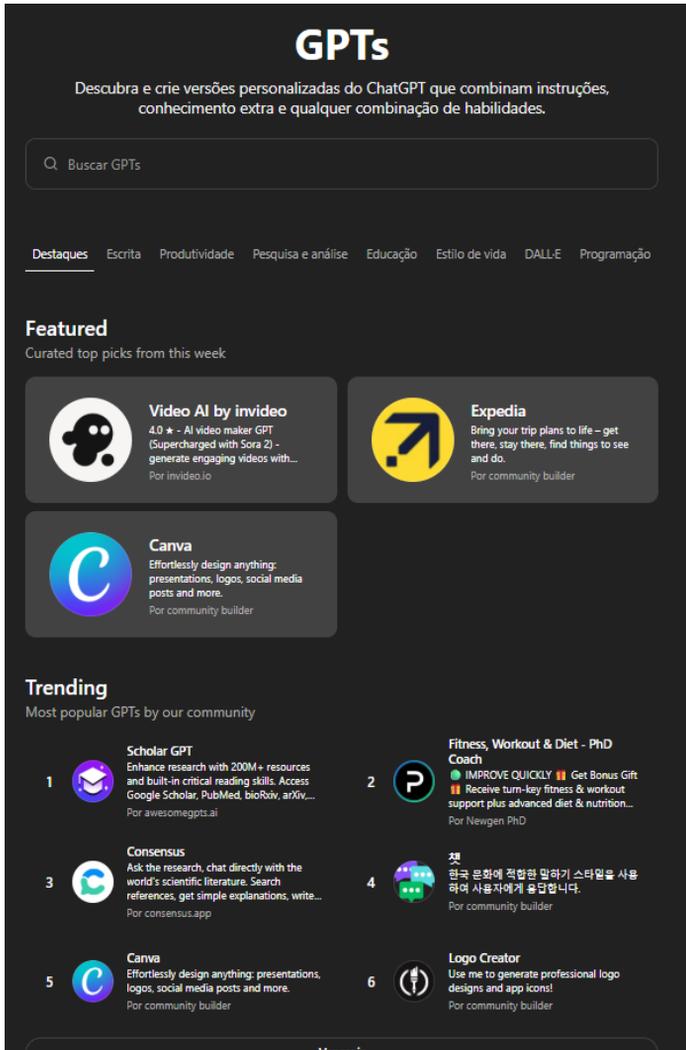
Figure 1

GPT Agenda Setter Home Screen



Figure 2

Screenshot of GPT Store in CHAPGPT - OpenAI



Source: Screenshot of GPT Store showing available applications.

In journalism, the Agenda Setter acts as a (non-human) assistant to the editor, helping to optimize and quickly identify factual topics and their scripting. In this process, the editor still manages the activities and has editorial independence, but is able to make use of insights and ideas generated by artificial intelligence that can

accelerate the process or consider angles that were not previously considered or identified as being innovative for daily agendas. An example of this can be seen when an assistant suggests a specific source that should be consulted. This source will not (and should not be asked to) provide details such as type, position, contact number, or any information that could easily be mistaken or misconstrued. Specialized Generative AI language that describes the inherent difficulty LLMs (Laboratory Management Systems) have in correctly linking precise information from their enormous databases.

Following the methodological steps, a further four steps were taken to connect the applied experiment to the investigation of the formulated theoretical questions. The process began with a theoretical review and the formulation of hypotheses based on literature on gatekeeping, newsmaking, and emerging theories of journalism like gatewatching. The theoretical review provided the foundation for formulating the guiding questions and allowed us to identify gaps in current knowledge about the integration of AI in journalism.

- 1) How does AI redefine news criteria by suggesting data-driven agendas?
- 2) How does integrating algorithmic tools challenge journalists as gatekeepers?
- 3) What are the limits and possibilities of collaboration between humans and machines in setting agendas?

The Agenda Setter virtual assistant was developed to help answer these questions, guided by data and suggesting topics based on: a) a predictive analysis of trends on social networks and other information sources; b) identifying newsworthiness criteria based on algorithms that prioritize relevance, impact, and engagement; and c) human feedback, incorporated through interactions with journalists throughout the testing phase. The virtual assistant was developed using machine learning techniques such as natural language processing (NLP) and recommendation systems to optimize the process of identifying and selecting topics.

The testing phase for Agenda Setter was developed in three levels, each one progressively more complex than the last.

- a) Level 1 – presenting simple testing in classes and lectures given by the developer using the OPENAI GPT link.
- b) Level 2 – experimenting in the university's advisory environment using an evaluation and usage plan.

c) Level 3 – experimenting and developing through feedback and validation in real-world newsroom scenarios. At this stage, the version we used retains only the instructions (prompts).

All these stages are still ongoing, and are being evaluated at every opportunity by journalists and in partnering newsrooms and communication consultancies. A basic model for the standard prototype evaluation form can be accessed online². The standard set of guidelines for a request for testing from press offices is described in the following example sent to communication offices in public universities:

a) Due to their experimental nature, the aforementioned applications are not under license, and access to them is contingent upon defining a usage plan as described below in order to generate feedback and information from the testing users that will allow us to improve on the solutions; b) the usage plan should be proposed by the interested unit and objectively define the employee who will conduct testing for each solution or application, the functions these employees currently perform, the activities which they intend to integrate into the Generative AI tool, and what benefits or metric improvements they would like to achieve with the change c) the plan for each user/application combination should set a trial period of no more than 30 consecutive days, at the end of which the user agrees to provide, via an evaluation form, information, general usage feedback, and suggestions for improvements that would be fundamental to the development of the tools; d) before the start of each testing phase, we recommend a brief training workshop be conducted for the testers to guide them on the use and evaluation procedures. This workshop will be scheduled after the plan is submitted to the NID through PPGCOMPro. Lastly, the plan must be aligned with the governance and use of AI guidelines at the university (NID-UFMA, 2025).

It is important to note that the applied research process within Design Science Research is a development *continuum* in which users test versions and provide feedback and suggestions, which are then used to build subsequent versions, for example, a standard model in software industry development. The process then moved on to phase three, which involved the experimental testing of the Agenda Setter. This stage is ongoing and has not been completed, as it must still be subjected to journalist reviews in partner newsrooms and communications agencies. Tests have been conducted to measure efficiency, comparing the time spent identifying agendas with and without the use of the solution, as well as the relevance of the suggestions, in order to assess whether the AI-suggested agendas met the criteria of traditional newsworthiness and human-machine interaction, where journalists interpret and use the AI's suggestions.

The results of the experimental tests will be analyzed in light of the proposed theoretical questions for redefining news criteria to verify whether the algorithmic suggestions introduce new parameters of relevance and impact. We also consider the role of the Agenda Setter as an algorithmic gatekeeper, acting as a mediator in the information selection process, highlighting its limitations and contributions. Lastly, we consider the human-machine collaboration, which analyzes how interactions between journalists and AI influence the adoption of new work dynamics. Although this stage has not yet been completed, the information it has generated so far from the initial responses is being used to improve the system and its application, resulting in the experiment described in this article.

4.1 Example of use

We began the Agenda Setter application (the subject of this reflection) by requesting a **theme** so that the system could provide us with angles and possibilities for agendas. Once the context had been understood, the prompt was then used to develop a story idea for Valentine's Day, and the system offered three options, asking the editor to choose one so that the AI could create a template script for radio or TV. The system then suggested three topics with different approaches to the subject:

- 1) "Love in the digital age: how dating apps have transformed relationships"
- 2) "The Economy of Love: How Valentine's Day Boosts Commerce"
- 3) "Conscious dating: the search for healthier and less toxic relationships"

The system then asked: Which of these topics would you like to choose? The user interacted with the AI and chose option 3: "Conscious dating: the search for healthier and less toxic relationships". The system then listed the objectives, the context of the story, proposed approaches, sources to be consulted, and made suggestions for possible interviewees or additional angles.

Objective of the story: to show how people are increasingly seeking healthy and balanced relationships in contrast to toxic ones. It will address the concept of conscious dating, the importance of self-

love, clear communication, and boundaries, as well as the impact of social media on the dissemination of this concept.

Contextualization: in a world where social media has a significant influence on how people behave and relate to each other, a new movement in favor of healthier relationships has been gaining momentum. Terms like “toxic relationship” and “conscious dating” are appearing more and more frequently in influencer content and conversations about love and well-being. Conscious dating proposes that couples pay more attention to each other’s emotional health, establishing boundaries, clear communication, and mutual respect, as opposed to harmful behaviors that often lead to emotional burnout. Psychologists and therapists have dedicated themselves to this issue, warning about the signs of abusive relationships and reinforcing the importance of balanced ones.

Sources to be consulted:

- Psychologists and couples therapists: to explain concepts of healthy relationships, offer tips on communication and self-love, and warn about the signs of emotional abuse.
- Digital influencers: those who discuss the topic, in an educational way, and promote responsible dating among their followers.
- Couples who practice conscious dating: real accounts of how this approach impacts the day-to-day life of the relationship.
- Social media experts: to analyze how platforms influence behaviors related to relationships and self-esteem.

Suggestions for interviewees or additional angles:

- Psychologists and couples therapists: ones who work with self-esteem, self-love, and abusive relationships, such as Aline Castelo Branco or Alexandre Coimbra Amaral.
- Influencers with a focus on mental health and relationships: like Victor Fernandes or Lorena Comparato, who talk about self-love and healthy dating on social media.
- Couples on social media who openly discuss the importance of emotional balance in relationships: suggestions from young couples who practice mindful dating.
- Social media experts: to discuss how Instagram and TikTok are platforms that can be used to hold discussions on harmful behaviors and self-care.

Following this interaction, the system asked: “Now that the story is ready, shall we move on to creating the script for the TV news report?” The user answered “Yes” and the AI produced a **TV** news report script (table 2) based on the topic “Conscious dating: the search for healthier and less toxic relationships”.

Table 2

Excerpt from TV news script created by AI agent, Agenda Setter

Voice-over narration	Interviews	Imagens sugeridas
(Images of couples walking and talking) "In recent years, there has been growing interest in a new approach to relationships: conscious dating. A practice that values mutual respect, open communication, and the preservation of self-esteem"	Psychologist: "Conscious dating is a practice in which both partners have emotional responsibility, and prioritize communication and respect for individual boundaries"	Happy couples walking together, scenes of couples naturally and spontaneously exchanging affectionate gestures
(Images from social media and influencers talking about conscious dating) "Social media has been an important space for debate about healthy relationships. Digital influencers are increasingly taking a stand against toxic behaviors"	Digital Influencer: "Many people still romanticize abusive behaviors. Our mission is to show that healthy love is about respecting the other person's space and begins with self-love"	Videos of influencers talking about healthy relationships, social media posts with hashtags about conscious dating

Source: research data, results of the experiment with Agenda Setter.

To conclude the experiment, the AI reported **that “the script suggests a dynamic and visually rich approach, interspersing accounts and explanations with images that convey lightness and positivity in line with the theme of conscious dating”**. The entire process using the AI took approximately 10 minutes.

5 Final considerations

The development and initial testing of the Agenda Setter offer a unique opportunity to observe how artificial intelligence tools can transform the field of journalism. Although the project is still ongoing, the preliminary results obtained during the testing phase with newsrooms, communications agencies, and the University Radio indicate significant directions for both the practice and theory of journalism. The theoretical-applied approach made it possible to connect the theoretical foundations of journalism to a practical experiment, providing a robust basis for exploring the intersection between humans and machines in story development. This methodology not only validated the Agenda Setter

as an innovative tool but also allowed for initial empirical considerations about the impact of AI on journalistic theories and practices.

The initial evidence and theoretical reflections present three moments: 1. The redefinition of the idea of newsworthiness criteria insofar as the tests revealed that Agenda Setter is capable of identifying relevant topics using algorithms from data analysis that consider parameters such as social network engagement, frequency of mentions by reliable sources, and search trends. This approach broadens the criteria for newsworthiness traditionally employed by journalists and incorporates new quantitative factors that complement human experience and judgment. As a theoretical concept, newsworthiness is enriched by the introduction of real-time data into journalistic practices and by the ability of AI to map emerging patterns. However, these new criteria also raise questions about the risk of overvaluing what is popular at the expense of what is relevant to the public interest. 2. The role of gatekeeping in the algorithmic era – by suggesting topics based on data, the Agenda Setter acts as a new agent in the gatekeeping process, mediating the selection of information even before human intervention. The Agenda Setter can propose approaches or angles that had not been previously considered, thus enhancing the diversity of content, leading to the need to revisit the gatekeeping theory to accommodate the concept of algorithmic gatekeeping, which does not replace human judgment but complements it and, in some cases, even challenges it. This phenomenon also raises debates about algorithmic biases and the lack of transparency in the criteria used by AI. 3. Human-machine collaboration – preliminary results indicate that the interaction between journalists and the Agenda Setter system is marked by a balance between automatic suggestions and human editing. Professionals reported that while the tool's suggestions are valuable, they do need to be adapted to meet the editorial line and specific context of the newsroom. This dynamic reinforces the main role of journalists as social mediators who use AI as an extension of their capabilities, but do not relinquish control over the editorial process. This collaborative model redefines the boundaries of authorship and raises new questions about ethics in content production.

It is also possible to indicate the limits and possibilities of AI in journalism – the results highlight the limitations and possibilities of AI in its role as social mediator, algorithmic biases being one example: the tool may reproduce biases embedded in the data used for training,

thus compromising the diversity and plurality of voices. Technological dependence: journalists have expressed concern about the possibility of becoming overly reliant on AI suggestions to the detriment of their own analytical abilities. Some examples include increased work efficiency as the Agenda Setter tool significantly reduces the time spent identifying story ideas, which allows journalists to focus more on research and content production. The tool also encourages experimentation and creativity by proposing angles and themes outside the conventional spectrum. The preliminary results from Agenda Setter indicate that the integration of AI in journalism is promising, but also challenging. The tool highlights the need to revisit classic theories and question established assumptions about journalistic practice. At the same time, it shows the collaboration possibilities between humans and machines and how that can enrich the field and meet the demands of a constantly changing media ecosystem.

NOTES

- 1 In simple terms, the classic concept of an algorithm denotes a set of instructions, usually structured in a programming language, that are executed by the machine's hardware to perform simple or complex tasks in different scenarios.
- 2 Link: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd4JnpuEbigr6vQNLHzxVxaVY8nHUSkg0DpwK1ZAHik3MbTOW/viewform>

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