

---

## The role of geomedia in building intercultural competence

### A qualitative case study within the context of a student exchange program between Austria, Germany and China

Helena Atteneder<sup>1</sup> and Thomas Herdin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Geography, University of Duisburg-Essen, GERMANY

<sup>2</sup>Department of Communication Studies, University of Salzburg, AUSTRIA

KOME – An International Journal of Pure  
Communication Inquiry  
Volume 8 Issue 2, p. 1-22.  
© The Author(s) 2020  
Reprints and Permission:  
kome@komejournal.com  
Published by the Hungarian  
Communication Studies Association  
DOI: 10.17646/KOME.75672.54

**Abstract:** Structured student exchange programs are known to foster intercultural competence (IC). We conceptualize IC as a construct that ranges from the individual level to the interactive cultural level, and we complement existing models of intercultural sensitivity and processes of introspection. Several factors may influence IC, such as mediatization, the ubiquity of geomedia, and global economic power shifts – in our case the rising global influence of China. In our long-term, qualitative case study on Austrian/German and Chinese exchange students, we consider geomediatization as a new *socio*-technological regime that influences processes of social, cultural and physical orientation. The results indicate that, at the level of student exchanges, IC is a process of self-reflection and self-development. Geomedia play a major role in this process: they promise to provide a certain authenticity of experience, and sense of independence and safety, promises that are thwarted by exchange students' strong platform dependence and reliance on "the bubble".

**Keywords:** Geomedia, intercultural competence, China, student exchange, qualitative case study

### Introduction

Intercultural competence (IC) has been intensively investigated and its importance in a globalized world is undisputed. It is even framed as a key competence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Bertelsmann Stiftung and Fondazione Cariplo, 2008). The importance of IC is often argued, and given increased professional opportunities in a global labor market, student exchange programs are seen as effective tools to foster this soft skill. In the European context, the Erasmus+ Higher Education Program functions under the umbrella of the European Commission to serve students, staff and institutions, and the impact study by Souto-Otero et al. (2019) shows significant results for the students who participated. Interestingly, the authors' results show high levels of intercultural openness, tolerance and engagement with social and political issues, and significant results with regards to competences relevant to employment and social cohesion (such as intercultural understanding or critical analysis of the media) (ibid. 181).

Address for Correspondence: Atteneder Helena, email: Helena.Atteneder[at]sbg.ac.at

Article received on the 3th December, 2019. Article accepted on the 25th September, 2020.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Three developments have possible fundamental influences on IC and the ability to achieve it. First, alongside other metaprocesses such as globalization, individualization and commercialization, mediatization concerns the central role of the media and media technologies in almost every aspect of our lives (Krotz, 2007), or even their indispensability (Jansson, 2018a).

Second, interwoven with those metaprocesses are global power shifts, influencing worldwide policymaking. On the one hand there are transnational, global companies, the so called “big five” (Google for Searching; Facebook among social media; Amazon in online retailing; Apple and Microsoft in personal computing), that have led to a “commercial annexation of public culture” and to an “economy of advanced capitalism” (Murdock, 2017, p. 123). The privacy policies, and data-mining and marketing strategies of these companies have created a new form of capitalism, “surveillance capitalism” (Zuboff, 2015, 2019), thus bringing existing notions of “private” and “public” into question, and allowing new variants of social and political life to thrive. These developments are particularly driven by geodata (Atteneder & Collini-Nocker, 2018; Claesson & Bjørstad, 2020; Elwood & Leszczynski, 2011; Keßler & McKenzie, 2018). On the other hand, there is China with its closed political, social and media systems, economy and self-controlled digital platforms, but rising global influence regarding (digital) infrastructure, developments in engineering, financial power through loans, and massive investments in Artificial Intelligence (AI).

China currently competes head-to-head with the USA regarding digital infrastructures, platform economics, robotics and automation; Europe is far behind (Heymann & Körner, 2018). The Chinese government invests in Europe’s digital and physical infrastructures with projects such as the “One Belt, One Road” infrastructure network project, with a strategy formulated under the slogan “Made in China 2025” to overcome China’s reputation for cheap mass products or the government’s plans to launch China’s own digital currency (Chen, 2019). China grants credits to foster those infrastructures to such an extent that some countries risk never being able to pay back their loans (Steinmetz, 2018). This initiative is accompanied by media offensives on Western network platforms to promote China's hard and soft power (Liang, 2019).

Other particularly noteworthy Chinese initiatives, with a potentially global reach, include plans to revolutionize China’s entire health system (“Healthy China 2030”) to make it more affordable, by outsourcing some diagnoses and treatments to AI platforms such as “Ping An Good Doctor” (Lovett, 2018; Wang, 2015), a service that would also include a “smart medicine cabinet” that could dispense more than 100 medications (Lovett, 2018; Wang, 2015). Another notable initiative is the introduction of a “Social Credit System”(Schlieker, 2019) based on (social network) behavior, and face and voice recognition, where algorithms decide which behaviors to foster and which to hamper. This system, which is being trialed between 2014 and 2020 to test the honesty and creditworthiness of voluntary participants, is a major step towards total control and surveillance (Sinopi, 2018).

At the same time, the Chinese university sector has been developed thanks to significant investment. According to the Center for World University Rankings (2017), there are several fields in which Chinese universities are particularly strong, notably Computer Science (Hardware and Architecture, Information Systems, Theory and Methods), Software Engineering, Telecommunications and Artificial Intelligence. Due to Chinese protectionism, which prevented U.S. corporations like Google and Amazon from penetrating Chinese markets, China developed successful equivalents such as Baidu (China’s biggest search engine), Alibaba (an e-commerce platform with payment function), and Tencent, which combines instant messaging, a social network platform, an email service, online games platforms, news portals, online trading and a payment function. According to Goldfarb & Trefler (2018), China has developed significant commercial AI capabilities that can be measured by the number of

Chinese authors presenting papers at the major research conference hosted by the AAAI (Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence). Whereas in 2012, 41% of the speakers were affiliated to U.S. institutions, this number decreased to 34% in 2017. Interestingly, in the same timeframe, the number of presenters affiliated to China increased from 10% to 23%. If we compare the largest companies engaged in AI by market capitalization, it is remarkable that Tencent and Alibaba, both AI-intensive Chinese firms, are also amongst the largest companies in the world (Goldfarb & Treffer, 2018, pp. 1-4).

These Chinese initiatives, which increase the global area of influence, not only lead to changes in political power relations, but especially to a spread of specific values and norms, such as an understanding of state control or privacy that differs from Europe. China's rising power status in international systems is linked to China as a normative power (Zhou & Esteban, 2018). A better understanding of culturally different value and norm systems and the corresponding skills and behaviors could therefore become increasingly indispensable to gain a foothold in a globalized job market. It is precisely this argumentation that legitimizes the increasing number of exchange programs between different countries and is listed as the main benefit of participating in such programs. In this respect, an exchange program with China is particularly suitable for exploring the conditions for developing intercultural competence.

Third, a new socio-technological condition – geomeia as “relational concept” – culminates in fundamentally new ways of (re)thinking the dialectics of place and media. Conceptually, the term "geomeia" describes the current media reality and does not only refer to a bundle of specific technologies or their associated practices, but rather functions as a label for the situations created by location-sensitive and spatial in interaction with further social, economic, cultural or political developments. Therefore, “Geomeiatization” – that is, the indispensability of geomeia technologies in almost all social spheres and the subsequent adaption of (inter)actions (Adams, Cupples, Glynn, & Jansson, 2017, p. 10) – plays a role in our specific context, as exchange students might have an increased need for social, cultural and physical orientation. Our assumption is that geomeia influence the appropriation and perception of processes of culture, space and sociality in manifold ways.

There is extensive literature on social media, ICTs and appropriation of place in the context of tourism (see e.g.: Amaro, Duarte, & Henriques, 2016; Jansson, 2018b; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Narangajavana, Callarisa Fiol, Moliner Tena, Rodríguez Artola, & Sánchez García, 2017; Nguyen, Camacho, & Jung, 2016; O'Regan, 2009; Su, Wan, Hu, & Cai, 2016), most often based on Urry's “tourist gaze” (Urry, 2002) seen as a performative act, with its typical practices such as photo-taking. We consider these studies on tourism as organized mobility as part of a new mobility paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006). They are important as they concern tourists' changed perceptions of place. More recent research in geomeia studies has had diverse application fields. Jansson (2019) promotes an analytical framework for the role of geomeia technologies in gentrification processes; Halegoua (2020) and Polson (2015, 2016) focus on professional mobility and digital place-making that provoke new affordances and agencies, especially for women; Frith and Wilken (2019) point to the social shaping of geomeia service platforms based on Lievrouw's (2006) take on determination/contingency. In addition, some studies deal with the gratifications of the use of so-called "location-based services", for example with regard to identity formation processes (Saker, 2016; Saker & Evans, 2016a), as a digital memory function (Finley, Naaz, & Goh, 2018; Trigg, 2012) or with regard to social interactions or emotions (Evans, 2014; Wu & Wang, 2015). However, although these are very interesting approaches and worth consideration, they do not fully capture the specific setting of student exchanges, which are neither purely tourism, nor clearly professional (job-based), and there are no studies that specifically examine the role of geomeia in IC processes in this context.

The aim of this study was to find out whether and at what level intercultural competence was achieved in the case of a specific student exchange program. Assuming an increased need for orientation (in terms of navigation, social but also cultural orientation) in such exchange programs, the question arises whether and in what way geomeia promote or hinder the development of IC. In addition, this context raises the question of how to cope with socio-cultural challenges and, accordingly, learning processes and transitions. Research in this area is promising insofar as geomeia have become ubiquitous mediators between space, place and people. Geomeia in their dual nature are to be understood as media that are located: their use is bound to a specific location (every form of communication happens in a physically determinable space that can be expressed by added GPS coordinates) and as media that situate and therefore contextualize communication. This complexity and multilocality points to the productive elements of geomeia and the co-constructed nature of technology, the social and space. For research on IC, this results in the possibility of reintegrating space as an analysis category, but with a more fine-grained breakdown. Meaning that this proposed approach to space and place, however, does not fall into the trap of conceptualizing space as a container in which culture takes place, but as something fluid, changeable and constructed. On the other hand, research on the role of ICTs in student exchange programs and on the acquisition of IC is being expanded through the concept of geomeia. Geomeia not only create access to physical-geographical space, but also actively construct it by making pre-selections, guiding our perception and prescribing our handling of space. In this sense, (geo)media are not merely "carrier media" for the representation of geographic content, but should be thought of as a concept characterized by the simultaneity of different spatial, social and technological layers and dimensions. The respective scope of action of individuals is significantly influenced by these multiple digital realities, which cannot be reduced to physical-spatial components or media representations.

## **Theorizing intercultural competence**

### *Intercultural Competence*

A Delphi study amongst intercultural scholars showed the best-rated definition of IC to be the "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2004, p. 186). Deardorff identified 22 essential elements of IC. To eliminate the fragmentation inherent in the list, she then developed a process model to summarize all components into four inter-related sectors or levels. The model moves from the individual level to the interactive cultural level (from internal to external outcomes). The individual level consists of attitudes and personal attributes (first sector). Central elements here are openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, without judgment), respect (valuing other cultures and cultural diversity), curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty). The second sector describes specific skills (to listen, observe, interpret, analyze, evaluate, etc.) for acquiring and processing knowledge (cultural self-awareness; understanding and knowledge of culture; culture-specific information; sociolinguistic awareness). The desired external outcome (fourth sector), such as behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately to achieve one's goal, is based on the desired internal outcome (third sector) – that is, on an informed shift in frame of reference/filter, which comprises adaptability (to different communication styles and behaviors, and new cultural environments), flexibility (selecting and using appropriate communication styles and behaviors; cognitive flexibility), ethno-relativism and empathy (Deardorff, 2004, p. 196).

In order to gain an ethno-relative view, we have to overcome an ethnocentric orientation. In his developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), Bennett (1986, 1993) provides a conceptualization for becoming an intercultural competent person. The first three ethnocentric orientations are denial, defense, and minimization. In this stage, one's own culture is experienced as central to reality. Ethno-relativism, by contrast, means that one's own culture is always embedded in the context of other cultures. Cultural differences are no longer avoided, but rather contribute to one's becoming more culturally sensitive and to developing cultural competence. This ethno-relative level has three stages: acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Acceptance means that the foreign culture is – in principle – regarded as of equal value to the home culture. In the adaptation stage, the experience of foreign culture leads to culturally adapted behavior, and foreign cultural perspectives can be adopted. In the final stage, integration, the person deals with the issue of his/her own cultural marginality, which means that the self is not constructed at the center of a culture, but at the margins of two or more cultures and central to none (Bennett, 1986, 1993).

Deardorff differentiates between the individual level and the interactive level, the latter being again divided into internal and external outcomes, making this conceptual framework suitable for the empirical part of our study, while applying Bennett's DMIS framework will help us to analyze the learning process and to evaluate which level the students reached after finishing their exchange semester.

We strongly emphasize the processual character of acquiring IC. IC is not something static or discrete but consists of transitions that can affect all four sectors. However, two shortcomings can be identified, especially in Deardorff's model: (a) the limited explanation of the concept of internal outcomes, and (b) the emotional drawbacks experienced in intercultural encounters (better known as culture shock), which are important for gaining self-knowledge in order to build up IC. Therefore, two further concepts will be introduced to establish a sound theoretical framework: the oscillation model of cultural internal and external experiences, and the concept of cultural confusion.

### *The oscillation model – a closer look at the process of introspection*

The first shortcoming relates to the third sector in Deardorff's model (2004), the internal outcome, which involves a shift in reference and is of utmost importance for developing IC. Unfortunately, this component is not mentioned in the definition of IC: the first part of the definition, "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately", focuses on sector four (external outcome); the second part of the definition, "based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes", focuses on the first two sectors (attitudes; knowledge and skills). Furthermore, the process of gaining and evaluating desired outcomes such as adaptability, flexibility, ethno-relative view and empathy is not elaborated. Therefore, we introduce the oscillation model of cultural internal and external experiences. This model will help us to understand how the process of self-perception and introspection helps us to become aware of our own cultural filters and enables us to act with cultural sensitivity.

To be effective in engaging in IC, people need to construct observational categories that highlight communication. In the next step, they need to create categories that allow them to experience the world in a way which is similar to how people with a different worldview experience the world (Bennett, 2017, p. 4). However, the process of developing mutual understanding is always based on an interaction between the self and the other. The other can never be understood per se, because filters (the so-called socio-cultural filters of perception) are always interposed in perception. Experiencing the other is thus shaped by one's own socialization. These filters help us to deal with the infinite number of sensory impressions that affect us according to subjective criteria. Perceptual filters organize our experiences, and

therefore the focus must be on the unconscious strategy we use to order and generalize our subjective world and on how we assign meaning to the world. Building up empathic capacity is therefore a self-reflective process of cognition.

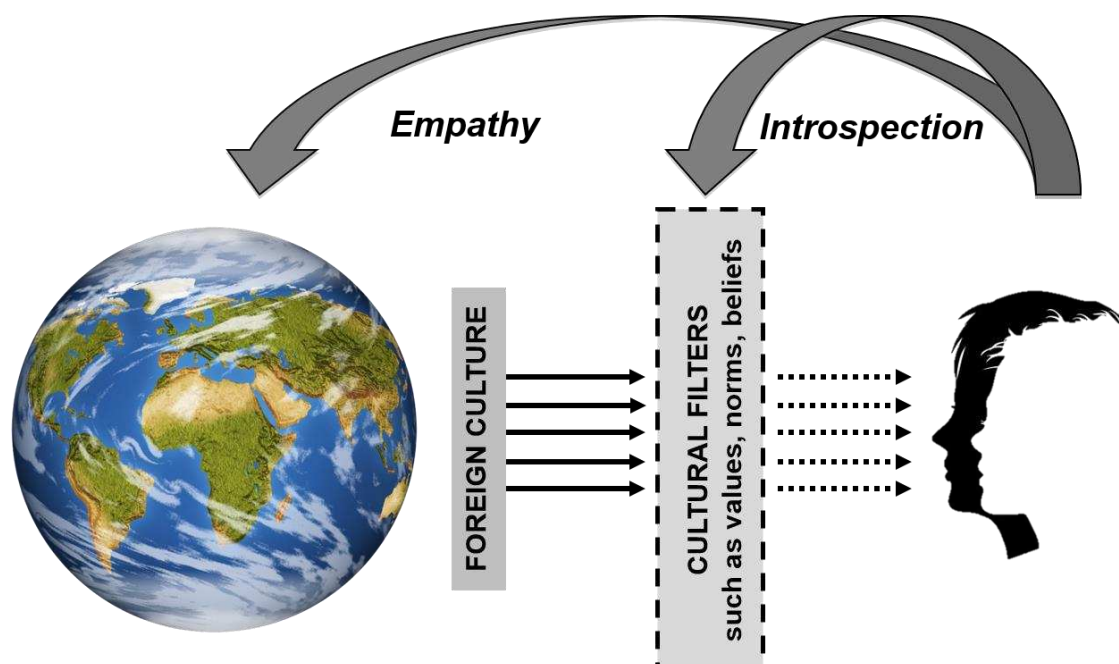


Fig. 1: Oscillation model of cultural internal and external experiences (Herdin 2018, p. 165)

The oscillation model describes the other as a mirror of one's self. Values represent a helpful approach because they are the core elements of culture and legitimize social norms. It is therefore necessary to become aware of one's own filters of perception, because we cannot experience and understand the world in an objective way. The writer Anaïs Nin makes the point: we do not see things as they are; we see things as we are. The other thus functions as a mirror in which the mental contours/profile of the self emerge. In this way, rigid perspectives and routines and solidified values can be challenged. This form of introspection, which can lead to greater self-knowledge, represents an important approach in the cultural discourse even though the other is ultimately incomprehensible. We can only create mental, metaphorical, 'maps' of the world outside us. To access reality is only possible via the subjective unconsciousness. Just as a map does not correspond to the landscape but only represents it in a symbolic way, so objective reality does not exist. Interaction with the other always represents an act of introspection with the goal of developing an empathic sensorium which "leads to personal enrichment, because it functions as a catalyst to explore one's own sensory world and to deal competently with contradictions" (Herdin, 2020).

Too little significance has so far been attributed to this aspect of self-knowledge, which is of central importance for establishing successful communication. From a constructivist perspective, competence cannot be associated with knowledge or attitudes, but rather with a certain "condition". Communicating well in another culture "is the ability to establish a particular perceptual condition that enables communication competence to be exercised" (Bennett, 2017, p. 4). Whereas people naturally learn and develop a sense of culture in their native environment, a clear and nuanced feeling for communication in other cultures does not often come naturally. For short-term sojourners, Bennett (2017) argues for perceptual flexibility, which consists of two aspects: perceptual acuity (being aware of one's own perceptual processes – "cultural self-awareness"), and perceptual agility (being able to change

those perceptual processes and setting up the conditions for empathy). One less obvious aspect of being empathic is being “mindful”, “since no matter how attentive one is to different cultural expectations, it is likely that some *automatic* [our italics] processes from one’s own culture will be engaged – possibly in ways that are detrimental to the goal of effective communication” (Bennett, 2017, p. 5). Consequently, when we talk about a “different culture” we mean the individual perception of “otherness” or “difference” in relation to one’s own “fabric” (a construct of one’s belief system, socialization, previous experience, etc.). Therefore, the question of how “otherness” is constituted is always a question of the constitution of one’s own identity. According to Hall (1997) and philosophers such as Lévinas (1969), difference is indispensable for identity-forming processes and for the construction of meaning, and it is therefore the “basis of that symbolic order which we call culture” (ibid. 236). But difference can be the basis of prejudice and stereotypes; it is both “necessary and dangerous” (Hall, 1997, p. 234).

### *Culture shock – to be reconsidered in times of interconnectedness*

The second shortcoming of Deardorff’s model lies in neglecting intercultural setbacks, better known as culture shock. But in times of accelerated physical globalization in combination with rapid developments in information technology, the topic of culture shock needs to be reconsidered. Classical models are based on Oberg (1960), who stated that the new cultural experience begins extremely positively (honeymoon stage), since the first experiences elicit excitement. Unfamiliar signs and symbols in the host culture then lead to uncertainty and anxiety (disillusionment), and this accumulation of stress and cognitive overload ultimately leads to culture shock. This shock may trigger reflection on one’s own attitudes and adjustment in order to cope better with otherness. The implementation of new behaviors would lead to a feeling of emotional stability, and at best it results in empathic behavior and an integration of cultural differences.

It is questionable whether these kinds of models are still relevant today, as cultures are not isolated entities and otherness is accessible at all times through increased mobility and digital interconnectedness. These developments require a dynamic model, such as Kim’s dynamic stress adaptation growth model (Kim, 2001, 2017). Acculturation is understood as consisting of spiraling positive and negative phases. The dualism of stress and adaptation is related to the duration of the stay abroad, which ultimately leads to the individual’s psychological adaptation to the foreign culture (Kim, 2001, p. 246).

Neuliep (2017) refines the factors that influence a difficult cultural experience. He lists intrapersonal, interpersonal, spatial and control factors, as well as cultural similarity, quality of information, host culture receptivity, geopolitical factors, and organismic-biological factors. Applying these factors to a student exchange, we see that participation is voluntary and limited in time (control factor), and right from the start the participants get an idea of Chinese culture through information from the program managers and former participants (quality of information). Particular emphasis is placed on the interpersonal factor in the exchange program. According to Neuliep (2017), this factor includes social support networks, host culture relationships and native culture relationships (cultural informants)<sup>1</sup>. In addition, the students

---

<sup>1</sup> “Cultural informant” is a term originally used in ethnography to describe people who are deeply integrated in the culture that is being observed and are willing to give insights and guidance to answer ethnographers’ questions (Spradley, 2012; Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). We use the term to refer to anyone who knows more about the host culture than the exchange student, including the program’s coordinators, former participants or buddies.

are actively integrated into the host culture, as courses have been established to meet their academic needs, and bonds with their buddies are promoted (host culture receptivity).

Although the cultural differences in the Austrian/German–Chinese exchange program are profound, the students are well prepared, socially embedded, and always networked online, both to their buddies (as cultural informants) and home (family and friends). A culture shock in the classical sense was not to be expected and did not occur. Cultural challenges provoke more to a form of cultural confusion (Hottola, 2004), a concept that provides an alternative framework, which was developed in the field of tourism. Most tourists are not motivated to assimilate or even to adapt to the host culture because of their short-term exposure to cultural differences. Although the exchange program lasts longer, it, too, is limited in time. While in traditional models culture shock is characterized by uncertainty and anxiety, in the cultural-confusion approach learning and control management are more central than depression and recovery (Hottola, 2004, p. 461). As in the Oscillation model, cultural confusion (external experience) is the catalyst to reflect on one's own values and beliefs, which could lead to greater self-awareness.

### *Mediatized Cosmopolitanism*

Although we have stressed the increasing importance of China (as a nation-state with its specific policy) globally, we argue strongly against a conceptualization of China as a homogeneous culture. History has shown the problems of conceptualizing the nation-state as a container for culture and society. In direct opposition to traditional notions of the nation-state, cosmopolitanism (as for example in Beck, 2002) captures various aspects which we describe under the term IC, such as acknowledgement of “otherness” in terms of culture, places and people, a certain curiosity regarding difference, as well as empathy (Beck, 2006, p. 7). Lindell (2014) attempts to operationalize the concept of cosmopolitanism, dividing indicators into moral, political and cultural aspects of a cosmopolitan disposition – that is, a disposition to “elevate ‘openness’ to the ‘transcultural’ or global level” (Lindell, 2014, p. 3).

Several authors emphasize the centrality of media and communication (technologies) in processes of cosmopolitanism: globally mediatized events that make people cosmopolitans by default (Beck, 2006), different ways of relating at a distance (Rantanen, 2006), or the assumption of cosmopolitanism among ‘digital natives’ (high media and technology penetration and low age) (Lindell, 2014, p. 7) mean that it is “impossible to conceive of cosmopolitanism(s) today without accounting for mediatized lifeworlds” (Christensen, 2014).

To help counter the shortcomings of mediatization theory, we adopt Jansson's “cultural materialist perspective”: “mediatization” does not refer simply to increased media usage or increased digitalization, but rather to a structuration of, and materialization within, the fabric of social life and culture, through everyday (unconscious) habits. Further, Jansson (2018a, p. 7) points to the dialectical nature of mediatization as having possibly liberating as well as trapping tendencies through which the tension between autonomy and dependence can be expressed, and pays attention to the complex relations between mediatization, individualization and globalization.

At this point, we have to ask about the consequences of mediatization for student exchange programs and encounters with an unfamiliar place and culture. With respect to the ubiquity and indispensability yet dialectical character of mediatization, we find on an individual level aspects of “cosmopolitan selves” which may “integrate vernacular experiences of territorial insecurity, threat, and loss, as well as more subversive manifestations of identity and identification” (Christensen & Jansson, 2015, p. 1438). The cosmopolitan self stands in tension with the encapsulated self, which “entails the very opposite outlook, an ethical desire to avoid ontological threats and problematic encounters with the Other. It corresponds to the social logic

of dwelling, moving, and fantasizing in a seamless, uninterrupted, and securitized manner” (ibid.). While the “intense mediatization of our worlds brings with it a de facto openness to, and the possibility of connectivity with, the other (cosmopolitanism), it also makes it possible to create mediated bubbles of closure, clash, monitoring and exclusivism” (Christensen, 2014, p. 160).

When students spend a semester abroad, we assume that they have an increased need for orientation in the broadest sense: socially, culturally and physically (navigation) – socially with respect to the organization of study and social life and the management of existing social networks; culturally in (de)constructing and perceiving “the different culture”; and physically in placing/moving/navigating themselves physically while at the same time (adopting a phenomenological view) having bodily experiences that challenge their own “fabric”.

This points to the question of how to capture the relations between the perception and appropriation of place, communicative practice (expanded through media and technologies), and actual location.

### Relations of Place and Media

Fueled by socio-technological conditions such as digitalization, algorithmization and datafication, the ongoing discussion about the dialectics of space/place and media regains significance. Techno-economically, “ubiquitous geodata capture” (Wilken, 2018) is at the core of almost all services and business models. At a higher level of abstraction, focusing on broader societal implications several authors refer to “geomedia” (Fast, Jansson, Lindell, Ryan Bengtsson, & Tesfahuney, 2018; Gryl & Jekel, 2012; McQuire, 2016) as an analytical framework and relational concept that captures the co-constitutive processes between space/place, media (technologies), and the social (Fast, Jansson, Tesfahuney, Ryan Bengtsson, & Lindell, 2018, p. 8).

Sketching the terrain of geomedia studies, Adams (first in 2009) systematizes the dialectics of space/place and content/context in his “four quadrant diagram”:

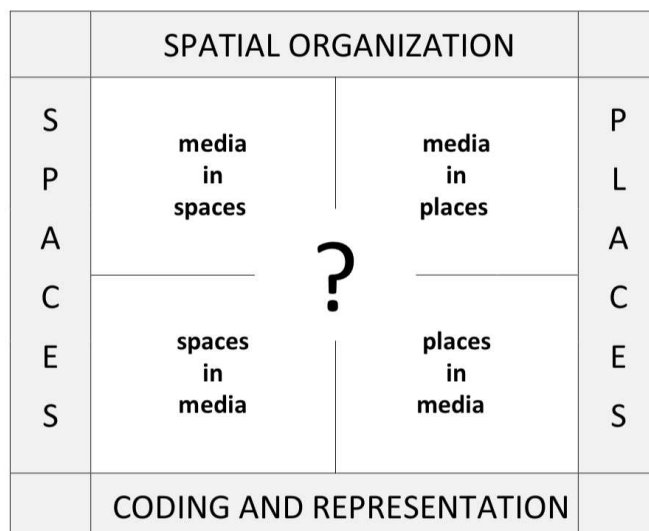


Fig. 2: “the ontological and epistemological terrain of geomedia studies” (Adams, 2018, p.43)

Adams bases his ideas on Lefebvre (1993) but aims to provide a framework that is more complete and easier to apply, avoiding essentializing the binaries and seeing the terms, rather, as being on a spectrum (Adams, 2010, p. 40). It is fruitful to adopt an understanding of

space/place that ranges from a container perspective to a constructivist understanding of place (Wardenga, 2006), capturing space as socially constructed and reshaped by individuals' discursive practices. Space in this tradition is a product of the appropriation of space; and as Massey (1999) famously pointed out, this is a question of power geometries. Starting with the "media in places" quadrant, we should note that "an act of communication is an event that occurs somewhere – it *takes place*" (Adams, 2018, p. 43). When applying these quadrants to our exchange students in China, we can imagine the students going out to a karaoke bar. This particular public place with its specific implicit and explicit rules "shapes communication, not merely with regard to interpretative or 'decoding' activities, but also with regard to embodied engagement and social interactions arising from communication" (ibid. 44). As an example for the "place in media" quadrant, we could think of the students watching a vlog about a particular place in China which they plan to visit – for example Suzhou, which is famous for its history, architecture and canals. Watching a vlog about it would mean "encountering a place in video form" (ibid. 44), with the video having a life of its own that was "separate from but related [to]" (ibid. 44) the physical space. "Space in media" refers to "topological spaces defined by networks of organizational affiliations and personal acquaintances", such as the spaces of connectivity of social network sites where the "main structuring force is who 'knows' (or 'follows' or 'likes') whom, rather than who is necessarily physically close to whom" (ibid. 45). It is this quadrant that was involved when students argued that their communication habits regarding their existing social networks (with friends and family "at home") would not change although they were in China. The final quadrant, "media in space", refers to the actual material or hardware for the transmission of (digital) signals (sounds and images) – fiber-optic cables, communication satellites, or other technology. Adams points out that all "four quadrants are profoundly interdependent and come together in every communication event, although one aspect or another may be more apparent" (Adams, 2018, p. 46).

Acknowledging technological developments such as a GNSS, mobile devices with permanent internet access, digital cartographical applications, cloud services, connection between APIs and social media profiles, augmented reality, sensors (for movement, speed, light, etc.), and the software that is an integral part of these technologies, we may share a non-technodeterministic view that takes the *social construction* of (geomedia) technologies into consideration (Fast, Ljungberg, & Braunerhielm, 2019). With respect to geomedia, some scholars point to a conceptualization of "software as both a product of the world (created via a collective and contingent process) and a producer of the world (or code/space) through its relations and interactions" (Zook, 2012). This means we have to consider "the reciprocal shaping of technology, the social, and space/place" (Fast et al., 2019), pairing a social constructivist (Berger & Luckmann, 1969) with a SCOT (Social Shaping of Technology) or rather ANT (Actor Network Theory) perspective. These approaches come together in the "socio-technological molding force that has been presented as *geomediatization*" (Fast, Jansson, Tesfahuney, et al., 2018; Fast et al., 2019; Jansson, 2019) and that is marked by the indispensability of geomedia technologies in virtually all social spheres, where (inter)actions have to be adapted accordingly (Adams et al., 2017, p. 10).

These approaches provide fruitful analytical frameworks for investigating the media–space–technology triad and allow for its extension to cover aspects of the construction of IC, as based on the concepts of "foreign" space, culture and "otherness" in combination with reflection on the self. Consequently, we must focus on the processual and co-constructive character of IC. Geomedia could be a bridge between cultures, or allow the perception of difference, and could perforate closed cultural settings. They could help to overcome the limitations of a traditional (container) understanding of space and could moderate cultural obstacles of difference, such as language. If "intercultural competence" means the "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's

intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2004, p. 186), geomeia could help to focus on similarities rather than differences, or strengthen the tolerance of ambiguity.

### **The Sample**

Participants in our study were part of the Master’s Exchange Program “Media and Communication Management“ (MCM), a cooperation between the School of Journalism at Fudan University, Shanghai<sup>2</sup>, and the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Salzburg.

The Exchange Program was established in 2007 at the Sino-Austrian Center for Media & Communication Management (University of Salzburg). Since the start of the program, more than 400 students have taken part and studied for a semester in Salzburg and Shanghai. The special characteristic of this exchange program is that two cohorts (Chinese as well as Austrian/German students) study together for one semester in Salzburg (winter) and then in Shanghai (summer). To ensure students’ motivation, they had to go through an application process to prove their attitudes towards openness, curiosity and respect (the first sector of Deardorff’s model (2004)). Once on the program, they were obliged to work in intercultural, collaborative teams and to analyze cultural differences in academia and their respective scientific systems to stimulate IC.

To enhance their cultural skills (second sector) and foster cultural exchanges on a daily basis, students were integrated in mixed social buddy pairs (one Chinese with one Austrian or German) and academic tandems. Due to Salzburg University’s catchment area, there were a significant number of German citizens amongst the students. The cohort we studied consisted of 14 students from China (4 from BFSU, 8 from NNU, 2 from Fudan), and 11 from Austria/Germany.

### **Methods, approaches and data capturing**

The data for this paper was gathered between 2016 and the end of 2018, at Fudan University, Shanghai, and at the University of Salzburg. To ensure rich data, we applied a qualitative mixed-method approach, combining focus group interviews (during students’ stay in China/Salzburg as well after their return to Salzburg/China), “in vivo” diaries (Nezlek, 2012), and “worldcafés” (one per semester). To gain insights into their experiences, impressions and changes in attitude, and their retrospective reflections, we accompanied the students and collected data beyond the actual exchange period.

---

<sup>2</sup> Fudan University is the main partner; junior partners are Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) and Nanjing Normal University (NNU).

cohort	WS16/17		SS17			WS17/18
<b>Chinese students</b>	group interviews (3-5 students per interview)	worldcafé 1		diaries	worldcafé 2	
<b>Salzburg students</b>			group interviews (3-5 students per interview)			

Fig. 3: time-scheme for the data-capturing process

Focus group interviews averaged 60–90 minutes and allowed insights into group settings and group dynamics (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). In wintersemester (WS) 16/17, we started the focus group interviews with Chinese students during their stay in Salzburg. Field notes about body language, eye contact and facial expressions were taken. Those markers helped to identify ambiguous expressions and, accordingly, differences in meaning during the interviews what was marked in the transcripts and taken into account in the analysis. Especially in the interviews with the Chinese students, agreements with statements of the others were made clear through non-verbal gestures, which made the field notes important additions to the material. The worldcafés, as format for participatory (Löhr, Weinhardt, & Sieber, 2020), circularly shifted communicational processes allowed students from China and Salzburg to work together on their stereotypes and prejudices about the respective foreign country. The results of the worldcafés, in turn, were specifically addressed in a section of the semistructured interviews as a stimulus and were thus incorporated into the results and the evaluation. The “in vivo” diaries captured experiences in everyday life, organized according to type of event, such as excursions following the so-called “Event-Contingent Design” (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013, pp. 17-18). The diaries were structured using questions about the diarists’ strategies for preparing a trip, the used technological tools, platforms and subsequent behavior; they were urged to answer the questions as far as possible before and during the event. This “intensive longitudinal measurement” (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013), or “intensive repeated measures” (Nezlek, 2012), reveals “the relationships within and between everyday behaviors, activities, and perceptions” (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013, p. 12). The approach also both reduced recall bias and gave us a point of comparison for the answers given in the group setting, which may themselves have been subject to group biases.

About three months after their return, we again did focus group interviews with the Salzburg students to find out more about the transitions they were going through and possible re-entry culture clashes. We asked them to classify their experiences and wanted to know whether they would look differently on their semester abroad having a distance to the events. Unfortunately, the "retrospect" interviews with the Chinese students could not be carried out in the wintersemester 17/18 due to lack of willingness. In this respect, the analysis of the longer-term transition processes could not be carried out in a comparative perspective.

Finally, the data was loaded into MAXQDA (version 18.2.0), a qualitative data analysis program and coded. The coding scheme resulted from a theoretical framework that was refined and replenished through the coding-procedure – for example by sub-codes. Utmost care was

taken to establish clear, mutually exclusive codes according to the approach of Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2013). This required keeping a balance between reducing the coding scheme for a higher degree of reliability, and implementing code families to capture different nuances of a general theme. To overcome subjective interpretations of what to consider the unit of analysis and in order to achieve inter-coder agreement, the first samples were coded in joint coding sessions, discussed, revised and enriched with background information. For more structure code families were implemented to capture different nuances of a general theme. The transcripts of the group discussions most often included free responses to open-ended questions from sometimes different speakers, hence the units of analysis were not naturally given. We decided to stick to the idea of Krippendorff (1995) to select “individually meaningful and codeable entities”, a process called unitizing. In the final step, the finished coded transcripts were, according to our research questions, combined, exported and finally extracted to results-sheets for analysis.

## Results

The categories set from the theory, supplemented by subcategories from the material, are: “aspects of intercultural competence” (consisting of the individual and the interactive-cultural level), “the group“, “relations of place and media(-technologies)” and “transitions“.

		Chin. stud.	Salzburg stud.	Diaries	Retrospect IVs	Total	Total per Main category
Aspects of intercultural competence - Individual level (introspection)		1	0	0	0	1	
	lessons learned, competences, capabilities, ambiguity-tolerance	17	24	7	52	100	
	strategies for stress-reduction	14	27	15	0	56	
	self-reflection	3	20	11	25	59	<b>216</b>
Aspects of intercultural competence - Interactive cultural level („the other“)		1	0	0	0	1	
	the importance of travel	9	1	1	4	15	
	contact with locals	8	13	19	27	67	
	cultural informant	17	6	3	0	26	
	changed stereotypes/images of China/Salzburg	20	38	15	30	103	
	language barriers	10	22	6	12	50	<b>262</b>

The group		0	3	0	0	3	
	group dynamics	7	10	0	1	18	
	isolation/encapsulation	2	11	1	5	19	
	role of the group (group reflections)	2	9	0	3	14	<b>54</b>
Relations of place and media (technologies)		0	0	0	0	0	
	tools / geomeia tech. / ICTs	26	27	13	2	68	
	(changed) perception	8	14	4	1	27	
	navigation	7	20	29	0	56	
	appropriation (of places)	12	6	12	13	43	
	permanent connectivity	9	15	2	0	26	<b>220</b>
Transitions		0	0	2	6	8	
	re-entry	0	0	0	26	26	
	stress (trigger) group	0	15	3	1	19	
	stress with locals	10	18	16	6	50	
	stress with oneself	6	16	1	5	28	<b>131</b>
	SUM	189	315	160	219	883	
	N = documents	4	4	16	3	27	

Table 1: Coding scheme and results per category

On an individual level, the following topics could be identified from the material: "lessons learned, competences, capabilities, ambiguity tolerance" (100 mentions), "strategies for stress-reduction" (56 mentions) and "self-reflection" (59 mentions). It is not surprising that most of the competences and learnings achieved were only recognized and named by the participants after the exchange programme. On this level we see intra-individual processes of change towards IC, such as the development of skills, competences and capabilities or a generally more relaxed approach to life and the better tolerance of ambiguities. "If you are quite relaxed and don't let yourself get stressed, then it works. If you now /.../ look at every little obstacle a thousand times, of course, and look at it from every angle, this obstacle becomes bigger than it actually is" (IV1\_2). The development of the own attitude was partly even described in the direction of fatalism.

In the terms of the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986, 1993), a higher degree of ethno relativism could be observed. Students became more culturally sensitive and developed a measure of IC, especially on the levels of acceptance and adaptation. Regarding Deardorff's model (2004), change happened predominantly in the third sector (the desired internal outcome), such as an informed shift in reference based on experiences that were reflected on, adaptability to new cultural environments, or behavioral and cognitive flexibility.

On the interactive cultural level topics such as "the importance of travel" (15 mentions), "contact with locals" (67 mentions), the role of the "cultural informant" (26 mentions), the change of stereotypes" (103 mentions) and language barriers arose.

Within our sample, the role of cultural informants in providing access to the host culture was immense. This might not be reflected in quantitative measures, but most contacts with

locals came about through the connections of cultural informants. In preparing for new students' stays abroad, former MCM students supported both Chinese and German/Austrian students; the MCM Coordinator was an essential pillar for administrative matters. However, contact with local people and institutions was minimal. This echoes findings in the field of cultural surface synchronization (CSS), which indicates that while cultures synchronize globally, they do so only superficially – with respect to clothing, global retailers, behavioral patterns etc. (Herdin, 2018, p. 664). Values and norms that are deeply rooted in the social fabric still exist and influence beliefs and habits. Intercultural learning takes place on the margins, and “the other” is seen through one’s own reflection, meaning that the experience of difference is tested against existing coping strategies and behavioral norms. There is very little common ground or common understanding. These findings indicate that while strong existing filters (through socialization, experiences, values and norms etc.) hinder intercultural contact, these must be seen at the same time as protective, complexity-reducing mechanisms that help to prevent mental overload. Coming back to Deardorff’s model (2004) the fourth level (the desired outcome), the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in an intercultural situation was hardly noticeable and deep cultural exchanges with Chinese locals rarely took place as students were unable to decipher “the others” mindset. This became visible in communication behavior, for example, when it came to expressing a direct “no”, or conversely, when a vague statement could not be decoded. “...so the distance to the locals is greater than I might have expected...” (IV1\_1). Overall, language barriers were among the most frequently mentioned problems when it came to direct contact with locals and food and language were the main topics discussed in relation to cultural differences: problems understanding labels in a supermarket, ordering food, making complaints, availability of certain goods, different mealtimes, new flavors and foodstuffs, cooking at home vs. going out, etc. Interestingly, we did not discern any differences between the Chinese and Austrian/German groups where the main topics of discussion were concerned.

Nevertheless, both groups discovered the huge heterogeneity of Chinese/European culture, which is the first important step to eliminating stereotypes and prejudice. There were certain changes in attitude. For example, “to go to China and learn everything about Chinese life and culture” changed to “the more I learn [about Chinese culture], the less I know.” Or the astonishment of the Chinese students that Paris, for example, does not meet their romanticized expectations<sup>3</sup> and that not all of Europe is affected and uncertain by terrorist attacks. With regard to safety-aspects, an interesting topic came up in the lively discussions, although we didn’t ask about it directly: the perception of security. A common view amongst Chinese interviewees was that Salzburg was extremely safe compared to other European cities. They said that they were quite anxious about living in Europe due to recent terror attacks. Nevertheless, living in Salzburg seemed to be an option they were happy with, compared to Paris, for example, where they experienced muggings. Safety also played an important role for the Austrian/German students, but in a completely different way. They felt safe in Shanghai and other parts of China due to heavy surveillance, such as CCTV. Being surveilled by the state was an evil that they accepted in order to be able to travel and go out independently and freely.

Reflecting on the whole student exchange, after settling back into their home setting, one interviewee when asked about what they had learnt and understood about Chinese culture stated “the foreign culture is different, and that’s ok”. Overall, the results indicate that IC is a process of self-reflection and self-development. The (intercultural) experiences that they had were interpreted by the participants in direct relation to “the self”.

Regarding the role of the group, which is specific to such coordinated exchange programs, the following issues could be identified: the discussion of certain “group dynamics” (18

---

<sup>3</sup> Aspects of the „paris syndrom“?

mentions), the group as a source of “isolation/encapsulation” (19 mentions) and overall “group reflections” (14 mentions). The group had an ambiguous character. On the one hand, it was seen as being hugely important, providing safety and a sense of belonging, family and home. Especially during the first weeks, the group was strongly bonded together. Some felt that even shopping at the nearest grocer’s was a task that couldn’t be completed without the group. Some interviewees stated that they wouldn’t have considered going on the exchange at all without a group. Functioning as a catalyst for releasing stress and frustration, and as a mirror to reflect the participants’ own coping strategies and reactions, the group fulfilled an important role. As one interviewee puts it: “I learn a lot about myself, because I see how others behave in certain situations...” On the other hand, students described interpersonal tensions and conflicts within the group, and the negative effects of a group bubble that prevented them from experiencing and exploring the foreign culture on their own. On returning to their “home” cultures, the group played an important role in the process of “deculturation” of “the other”, in integrating the cultural challenges or cultural confusion (Hottola, 2004) experienced abroad. Some participants described, for example, that they could not share certain experiences with their friends or their family because they did not feel understood there.

In the category “relations of place and media(-technologies)” we could identify the subgroups of certain “tools, geomeia technologies, ICTs” (68 mentions), the discovery of a “changed perception” (27 mentions) through those tools, “navigational queries” (56 mentions), the “appropriation (of places)” (43 mentions) or issues of a “permanent connectivity” (26 mentions). Reflecting on the use of geomeia technologies, participants said that they relied on them at different stages of their exchange. Different kinds of geomeia technologies were key in preparing for the exchange as well as for excursions during their stay. They gathered information about their excursion destinations/host culture from travel blogs, vlogs, and better and less well-known commercial platforms such as TripAdvisor. They also prepared navigational queries and bought tickets in advance using mobile devices. The decision of where to go and what to visit was generally made before departure (for local and daytrips in the host-culture) and was based on their inquiries (“place-in-media” perspective). The interviewees, both Chinese and Austrian/German, expressed a strong wish for “authentic” cultural experiences and relied on geomeia platforms and services to provide them with information about these. The participants were under the impression that they were receiving “insider tips” and indications of “hotspots” that were normally known only by locals. But our research revealed that students tended to rely on just a small number of platforms for information, and the “insider tips” were most often revealed to be of commercial interest. Participants did not evaluate the source of the information; the use of geomeia was characterized by passive consumption. Geomeia were used for simple navigational queries and for coordinating social events (e.g. “I’ve sent you my location – where are you?”). They functioned as superficial communication tools with the possibility of visual and spatial extensions. Sending a picture and locational information for the broken air-conditioning is an example here.

Once students were in their host countries (“media in place” perspective), geomeia also helped to give students a sense of independence and safety with respect to mobility and navigation. The choice of POIs (Points of Interest) on excursions was generally made in advance, but sometimes there was room for spontaneous decisions, with the “help” of location-based services. Geomeia technologies worked as tools for emergency management if preparation failed, and as (non-human) agents for following a plan. Interestingly, participants described situations in which preparation *and* troubleshooting with technological help failed as being the most fruitful for their intercultural learning. Having to find creative solutions, overcoming resentments and fears – stepping out of their comfort zone – were associated with unpleasant feelings, but in retrospect were connected with pride. Participants described situations in which the environment in which they found themselves was blurred, their

perception of it being vague due to the extensive use of their smartphones. Movements were goal oriented, following a prior plan; POIs were “ticked off”, with obligatory photo-taking.

Geomedia technology makes it easy to stay within “the bubble”, whether the “group”, “backpacker”, “Chinese-travelers-in-Europe” or “academia” bubble. This points to media–space dialectics, as geomedia seem to reinforce the filters that already exist, helping to avoid challenges to one’s own opinions. They could in this respect hamper the development of empathy and mindfulness.

After the experiences themselves, geomedia technologies were used to share pictures and maps with itineraries, to discuss the lessons learned, or for mental processing. They work as what Saker and Evans (2016b) call technological memory and play a role in identity-forming processes.

Within the framework of “place media relations”, we experienced one cross-cutting theme: a strong dependence on mobile network technologies, referred to many times by Chinese and Austrian/German students alike, in contexts ranging from staying in touch with loved ones, shopping and finding the right goods, to navigation, translation, logistics and organizing one’s social life. Talking about technological dependencies, one interviewee said: “I am completely lost without my smartphone.” When asked about the one thing they wouldn’t want to be without during their semester abroad, the students’ number-one answer was their smartphone.

## Conclusion

Cultural contact only happens on the margins, and in our study the cultural experience was reduced to a minimum (food and language). Furthermore, we argue that geomedia technology supports the strong existing filters, and makes it easier to stay within “the bubble”, reducing uncertainty and challenge to a minimum.

Our findings strongly support the definition of geomediatization as the indispensability of geomedia technologies and adaptation of social (inter)actions according to these technologies. But the adaptation of social interactions in an intercultural setting often means to interact socially while staying within one’s own bubble, avoiding insecurities such as having one’s prejudices and preconceived ideas challenged. Geomedia technologies make it possible to navigate through a different culture without direct contact with that culture: the self remains “encapsulated”.

Is this *appropriate* behavior and *effective* communication (and in that sense interculturally competent), or is it successful avoidance of intercultural contact within a foreign country? We would suggest it is both: going abroad *and* staying within the bubble, overcoming one’s own barriers *and* reinforcing one’s own filters, encapsulation *and* decapsulation... Most of the students admitted that they wouldn’t have considered the exchange at all without the group setting or without the technological possibilities that enable orientation and a sense of security. Geomedia technologies therefore can help to overcome barriers. In a context that brings a “de facto openness to and the possibility of connectivity with the other” (Christensen, 2014, p. 160), we could speak of *geomediatized* cosmopolitanism. Moreover, several examples showed that geomedia bubbles could be burst – by accident or deliberately. Bursting the bubble, opening students to “the other”, had challenging yet identity-forming aspects, as “the other” resonates directly with oneself. This means that geomedia as a socio-technological condition are co-constructed by filtered perception, appropriation processes and subsequent actions.

## References

- Adams, P. C. (2009). *Geographies of Media and Communication. A Critical Introduction*. Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Adams, P. C. (2010). A taxonomy for communication geography. *Progress in Human Geography*, 35(1), 37-57. [CrossRef](#)
- Adams, P. C. (2018). Mapping Geomedia: Charting the Terrains of Space, Place and Media. In K. Fast, A. Jansson, J. Lindell, L. Ryan Bengtsson, & M. Tesfahuney (Eds.), *Geomedia Studies. Spaces and Mobilities in Mediatized Worlds*. (pp. 41-60). New York: Routledge.
- Adams, P. C., Cupples, J., Glynn, K., & Jansson, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Communications/Media/Geographies*. New York: Routledge.
- Amaro, S., Duarte, P., & Henriques, C. (2016). Travelers' use of social media: A clustering approach. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 59, 1-15. [CrossRef](#)
- Atteneder, H., & Collini-Nocker, B. (2018). Geomedia and privacy in context. Paradoxical behaviour or the unwitting sharing of geodata with digital platforms? *Mediatization Studies*(2), 17-48. [CrossRef](#)
- Beck, U. (2002). The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19(1-2), 17-44. [CrossRef](#)
- Beck, U. (2006). *The cosmopolitan vision*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10(2), 179-196. [CrossRef](#)
- Bennett, M. J. (1993). Towards ethno-relativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In M. R. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 21-71). Yarmouth: Intercultural Press.
- Bennett, M. J. (2017). Constructivist Approach to Intercultural Communication. In Y. Y. Kim (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication* (pp. 1-9): Wiley Online Library.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1969). *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit: eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
- Bertelsmann Stiftung and Fondazione Cariplo. (2008). Intercultural Competence - the key competence in the 21st century? Retrieved from <https://www.ngobg.info/bg/documents/49/726bertelsmanninterculturalcompetences.pdf>
- Bolger, N., & Laurenceau, J.-P. (2013). *Intensive Longitudinal Methods : An Introduction to Diary and Experience Sampling Research*. New York: Guilford Publications.
- Campbell, J. L., Quincy, C., Osserman, J., & Pedersen, O. K. (2013). Coding In-depth Semistructured Interviews: Problems of Unitization and Intercoder Reliability and Agreement. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 42(3), 294-320.
- Center for World University Rankings. (2017). Rankings by Subject - 2017 - CWUR. Retrieved from <https://cwur.org/2017/subjects.php>
- Chen, J. (2019, July 9th, 2019). Central bank unveils plan on digital currency. *ChinaDaily*. Retrieved from <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201907/09/WS5d239217a3105895c2e7c56f.html>
- Christensen, M. (2014). Technology, Place and Mediatized Cosmopolitanism. In A. Hepp & F. Krotz (Eds.), *Mediatized Worlds: Culture and Society in a Media Age* (pp. 159-173). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

- Christensen, M., & Jansson, A. (2015). Complicit surveillance, interveillance, and the question of cosmopolitanism: Toward a phenomenological understanding of mediatization. *New Media & Society*, 17(9), 1473-1491. [CrossRef](#)
- Claesson, A., & Bjørstad, T. E. (2020). Out of Control - a Review of Data Sharing by Popular Mobile Apps. In. Oslo: Norwegian Consumer Council.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2004). *The Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization at Institutions of Higher Education in the United States*: NC State University Libraries.
- Elwood, S., & Leszczynski, A. (2011). Privacy, Reconsidered: New Representations, Data Practices, and the Geoweb. *Geoforum*, 42(1), 6-15. [CrossRef](#)
- Evans, L. (2014). Being-towards the social: Mood and orientation to location-based social media, computational things and applications. *New Media & Society*, 17(6), 845-860. [CrossRef](#)
- Fast, K., Jansson, A., Lindell, J., Ryan Bengtsson, L., & Tesfahuney, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Geomedia Studies. Spaces and Mobilities in Mediatized Worlds*. New York: Routledge.
- Fast, K., Jansson, A., Tesfahuney, M., Ryan Bengtsson, L., & Lindell, J. (2018). Introduction to Geomedia Studies. In K. Fast, A. Jansson, J. Lindell, L. Ryan Bengtsson, & M. Tesfahuney (Eds.), *Geomedia Studies. Spaces and Mobilities in Mediatized Worlds*. (pp. 1-17). New York: Routledge.
- Fast, K., Ljungberg, E., & Braunerhielm, L. (2019). On the social construction of geomedia technologies. *Communication and the Public*, 4(2), 89-99. [CrossRef](#)
- Finley, J. R., Naaz, F., & Goh, F. W. (2018). *Memory and Technology*. Cham: Springer Nature.
- Frith, J., & Wilken, R. (2019). Social shaping of mobile geomedia services: An analysis of Yelp and Foursquare. *Communication and the Public*, 4(2), 133-149. [CrossRef](#)
- Goldfarb, A., & Treffer, D. (2018). *AI and International Trade* (Vol. Working Paper 24254). Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Gryl, I., & Jekel, T. (2012). Re-centring Geoinformation in Secondary Education: Toward a Spatial Citizenship Approach. *Cartographica*, 47(1), 18-28.
- Guest, G., Namey, E. E., & Mitchell, M. L. (2013). Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research. In (pp. 172-122). [CrossRef](#)
- Halegoua, G. R. (2020). *The Digital City. Media and the Social Production of Place*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hall, S. (1997). The spectacle of the other. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (pp. 225-290). London: Sage.
- Herdin, T. (2018). *Werte, Kommunikation und Kultur: Fokus China* (1 ed. Vol. 1). Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG.
- Herdin, T. (2020). Enhancing Understanding: The Atmospheric Dimension of Communication as a Catalyst for Creating Deeper Human Understanding. In: M. Volgger & D. Pfister (Eds.), *Atmospheric Turn in Culture and Tourism: Place, Design and Process Impacts on Customer Behaviour, Marketing and Branding* (pp. 77-90). United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Heymann, E., & Körner, K. (2018). *EU-Monitor. Digitale Ökonomie und struktureller Wandel*. Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Bank Research.
- Hottola, P. (2004). Culture Confusion: Intercultural Adaptation in Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(2), 447-466.
- Jansson, A. (2018a). *Mediatization and Mobile Lives. A Critical Approach*. New York: Routledge.
- Jansson, A. (2018b). Rethinking post-tourism in the age of social media. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 69, 101-110. [CrossRef](#)

- Jansson, A. (2019). The mutual shaping of geomeia and gentrification: The case of alternative tourism apps. *Communication and the Public*, 4(2), 166-181. [CrossRef](#)
- Keßler, C., & McKenzie, G. (2018). A geoprivacy manifesto. *Transactions in GIS*, 22(1), 3-19. [CrossRef](#)
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2017). Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic. In Y. Y. Kim (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication* (pp. 1-6): Wiley Online Library.
- Krippendorff. (1995). On the Reliability of Unitizing Continuous Data. *Sociological Methodology*, 25, 47-76.
- Krotz, F. (2007). The meta-process of 'mediatization' as a conceptual frame. *Global Media and Communication*, 3(3), 256-260. [CrossRef](#)
- Lefebvre, H. (1993). *The production of space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lévinas, E. (1969). *Totality and infinity: an essay on exteriority*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press.
- Liang, F. (2019). The New Silk Road on Facebook: How China's official media cover and frame a national initiative for global audiences. *Communication and the Public*, 4(4), 261-275. [CrossRef](#)
- Lievrouw, L. A. (2006). New Media Design and Development: Diffusion of Innovations v Social Shaping of Technology. In L. L. A. & S. Livingstone (Eds.), *Handbook of New Media: Social Shaping and Social Consequences of ICTs* (pp. 246-265). London: Sage.
- Lindell, J. (2014). A Methodological Intervention in Cosmopolitanism Research: Cosmopolitan Dispositions Amongst Digital Natives. *Sociological Research Online*, 19(3), 1-14.
- Löhr, K., Weinhardt, M., & Sieber, S. (2020). The "World Café" as a Participatory Method for Collecting Qualitative Data. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, First Published April 24, 2020. [CrossRef](#)
- Lovett, L. (2018, November, 29 2018). Ping An Good Doctor showcases AI-powered, unstaffed clinics. *mobihealthnews*. Retrieved from <https://www.mobihealthnews.com/content/ping-good-doctor-showcases-ai-powered-unstaffed-clinics>
- Massey, D. (1999). *Power-geometries and the Politics of Space-time*. Heidelberg: Geograph. Inst. d. Univ.
- McQuire, S. (2016). *Geomeia. Networked Cities and the Future of Public Space*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Munar, A. M., & Jacobsen, J. K. S. (2014). Motivations for sharing tourism experiences through social media. *Tourism Management*, 43, 46-54. [CrossRef](#)
- Murdock, G. (2017). Mediatisation and the Transformation of Capitalism: The Elephant in the Room. *Javnost - The Public*, 24(2), 119-135. [CrossRef](#)
- Narangajavana, Y., Callarisa Fiol, L. J., Moliner Tena, M. Á., Rodríguez Artola, R. M., & Sánchez García, J. (2017). The influence of social media in creating expectations. An empirical study for a tourist destination. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 65, 60-70. [CrossRef](#)
- Neuliep, J. W. (2017). Culture Shock and Reentry Shock. In Y. Y. Kim (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication* (pp. 1-9): Wiley Online Library.
- Nezlek, J. B. (2012). *Diary Methods for Social and Personality Psychology*. London: Sage.
- Nguyen, T. T., Camacho, D., & Jung, J. E. (2016). Identifying and ranking cultural heritage resources on geotagged social media for smart cultural tourism services. *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, 21(2), 267-279. [CrossRef](#)

- O'Regan, M. (2009). New Technologies of the Self and Social Networking Sites: Hospitality Exchange Clubs and the Changing Nature of Tourism and Identity. In Y. Abbas & F. Dervin (Eds.), *Digital Technologies of the Self* (pp. 171-198). Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments. *Practical Anthropology*, *os-7*(4), 177-182. [CrossRef](#)
- Polson, E. (2015). A gateway to the global city: Mobile place-making practices by expats. *New Media & Society*, *17*(4), 629-645.
- Polson, E. (2016). *Privileged mobilities*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Rantanen, T. (2006). *The media and globalization* (Repr. ed.). London: SAGE.
- Saker, M. (2016). Foursquare and identity: Checking-in and presenting the self through location. *New Media & Society*. [CrossRef](#)
- Saker, M., & Evans, L. (2016a). Locative Media and Identity: Accumulative Technologies of the Self. *SAGE Open*, *6*(3), 215824401666269. [CrossRef](#)
- Saker, M., & Evans, L. (2016b). Locative mobile media and time: Foursquare and technological memory. *First Monday*, *21*(2).
- Schlieker, A. (2019). Digitale Überwachung in China. Diktatur 2.0 oder nur effizienteres Regieren? In S. Rietmann, M. Sawatzki, & M. Berg (Eds.), *Beratung und Digitalisierung. Zwischen Euphorie und Skepsis* (pp. 109-128). Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Sheller, M., & Urry, J. (2006). The new mobilities paradigm. *Environment and Planning A*, *38*(2), 207-226. [CrossRef](#)
- Sinopi, K. (2018, September, 10th, 2018). „Social Scoring“ in China: Das Sozial-Kredit-System. *digitalcourage*. Retrieved from <https://digitalcourage.de/blog/2018/social-scoring-china-das-sozial-kredit-system>
- Souto-Otero, M., Gehlke, A., Basna, K., Dóda, Á., Endrodi, G., Favero, L., . . . Stiburek, Š. (2019). *Erasmus + Higher Education Impact Study. Final Report*. Brussels: European Commission.
- Spradley, J. P. (2012). Ethnography and Culture. To discover culture, the ethnographer must learn from the informant as a student. In J. P. Spradley & D. W. McCurdy (Eds.), *Conformity and Conflict. Readings in Cultural Anthropology* (pp. 6-12). Boston: Pearson. (Reprinted from: 14th edition).
- Spradley, J. P., & McCurdy, D. W. (1972). *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society*. Chicago: Science Research Associates.
- Steinmetz, V. (2018, April, 7 2018). Schuldenfalle Seidenstraße. China lockt mit 900 Milliarden Dollar. *Spiegel Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/china-das-infrastrukturprojekt-neue-seidenstrasse-ist-eine-schuldenfalle-a-1201015.html>
- Su, S., Wan, C., Hu, Y., & Cai, Z. (2016). Characterizing geographical preferences of international tourists and the local influential factors in China using geo-tagged photos on social media. *Applied Geography*, *73*, 26-37. [CrossRef](#)
- Trigg, D. (2012). *The Memory of Place. A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Vol. s). Athens Ohio: Ohio University Press.
- Urry, J. (2002). *The Tourist Gaze* (2nd. ed. ed.). London: Sage.
- Wang, O. (2015). Ping An Good Doctor. Retrieved from [http://www.pingan.com/app\\_upload/images/info/upload/5789191e-3019-4370-b8e1-a3a81561d4e3.pdf](http://www.pingan.com/app_upload/images/info/upload/5789191e-3019-4370-b8e1-a3a81561d4e3.pdf)
- Wardenga, U. (2006). Raum- und Kulturbegriffe in der Geographie. In M. Dickel & D. Kanwischer (Eds.), *TatOrte: neue Raumkonzepte didaktisch inszeniert* (pp. 21-47). Berlin: Lit-Verl.

- Wilken, R. (2018). The Necessity of Geomedia: Understanding the Significance of Location-Based Services and Data-Driven Platforms. In K. Fast, A. Jansson, J. Lindell, L. Ryan Bengtsson, & M. Tesfahuney (Eds.), *Geomedia Studies. Spaces and Mobilities in Mediatized Worlds*. (pp. 21-40). New York: Routledge.
- Wu, W., & Wang, J. (2015). *Exploring city social interaction ties in the big data era: Evidence based on location-based social media data from China*. Paper presented at the 55th Congress of the European Regional Science Association: "World Renaissance: Changing roles for people and places", Lisbon.
- Zhou, W., & Esteban, M. (2018). Beyond Balancing: China's approach towards the Belt and Road Initiative. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 27(112), 487-501. [CrossRef](#)
- Zook, M. (2012). Book Review: Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life. *Regional Studies*, 46(8), 1105-1106. [CrossRef](#)
- Zuboff, S. (2015). Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization. *Journal of Information Technology*, 30, 75-89. [CrossRef](#)
- Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism*. New York: PublicAffairs.

---

# The MMJ became a McJob: The McDonalidization of Multimedia Journalism

KOME – An International Journal of Pure  
Communication Inquiry  
Volume 8 Issue 2, p. 23-42.  
© The Author(s) 2020  
Reprints and Permission:  
kome@komejournal.com  
Published by the Hungarian  
Communication Studies Association  
DOI: 10.17646/KOME.75672.55

**Dean Cummings**

**Department of Communication Arts, Georgia Southern University, USA**

**Abstract:** Broadcast news corporations want to make the Multimedia Journalist (MMJ) a vital part of their future employee structure. This study examines the present use of the MMJ method in television news production. A sample of television news professionals, from all DMA markets, was surveyed. The results show expertise in one skill is not required, but overall ability to complete tasks is desirable. The consequence is a "McDonalidization" of the profession. TV managers give new hires minimal training and work is routinized. The MMJ is becoming a "McJob"; attracting young workers with transitional goals for future career employment opportunities.

**Keywords:** Multimedia Journalism, News production, Labor Process Theory, burnout, news business

## Introduction

The success of the MMJ or multimedia journalist, in local newsrooms in the United States, can be said to be in a mythical state at present. There is the technological deterministic belief among many news executives in broadcast corporations that the multimedia journalist will become the most utilized method of newsgathering (Steensen, 2011, p. 311). The argument for the change in production methods comes from the belief that technology enables the shift in work production. Corporate leadership is amending the methods of newsgathering in local television news stations. Technology may be the reason for the change in worker skill sets, but economics is cited as the catalyst. During the last decade, local television news stations in the United States have been competing to retain audiences who are turning away from their traditional broadcasts and heading toward other platforms such as websites, social media, and live streams. The competition has inspired innovations in news gathering, most notably the implementation of the Multimedia Journalist (MMJ).

Historically, local television stations structured their newsrooms around teams of reporters and photographers. Smaller television markets would use 'one-man-bands' to lower costs by requiring reporters to videotape their stories without the help of a trained photographer (Goedkoop, 1988). The 'one-man-band' was viewed as an entry level requirement of most reporters. A reporter expected that they would not be required to do all the work by themselves as he or she moved up the career ladder. Technology changed the hegemonic expectation when

Address for Correspondence: Dean Cummings, email: dcummings[at]georgiasouthern.edu

Article received on the 25th June, 2020. Article accepted on the 25th October, 2020.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

the more cumbersome equipment became lighter and more manageable for one person (Hemmingway, 2008).

Starting in the early 2000s, the adoption of the multimedia journalist model began in many markets. The new position was termed, 'backpack journalist' or 'solo journalist' but it was essentially a 'one-man-band' (Potter, 2001). Eventually, the term multimedia journalist became the proper vernacular for the reporter who shot and edited their own stories. For over a decade, local television news journalists have conducted 'news work' without being tethered to a technician. This study will look at the changing definition of the television news journalist, the hegemonic state that exists and the intentions of ownership to require their journalists to multitask. This study looks at the 'news work' as television news organizations find strategies to deal with convergence.

Media organizations are fundamentally industrial in their nature and they impact cultural, economic and political aspects of media communication (Radošinska, Kvetanova, and Visnovsky, 2020). The industry, ruled by timeliness and productivity, feeds the masses a constant flow of information. The process is fascinating and complex. The daily grind of newsrooms producing news stories on a deadline basis has been studied for decades (Molotch & Lester, 1974), (Underwood, 1988), (Nappi, 1994), (Allan, 2010). Underwood (1988) examined how the business of news production was impacting the newsroom, as well as Nappi (1994) and Allan (2010), indicating that the industrial side of journalism requires academic surveillance. This study looks at local television news as a media industry, in the similar view as Stuart Moss, as a specific group of companies and production strategies. The individual entities of local affiliates share goals and produce similar products in terms of form and content (Moss, 2009).

Hemmingway (2008) and Lee (2015) believe the heightened processes of acquiring news threatens journalistic standards. Audiences demand constant updating of breaking news, putting journalists at risk of reporting false or inaccurate information because of the necessity to report. "The quest for speed is a double-edged sword (Lee, 2015)." The ability to perform quality journalism is threatened by the resistance to change to both the performance of journalism and the technology utilized by journalists. The balance of speed, practice, and technology requires an evaluation of the actors (Hemmingway, 2008). The actors or forces impact the efficiency of producing news. Work routines and technologies change the 'news work' and the 'news texts' (Erdal, 2009).

Bob Franklin, former editor of Digital Journalism, influenced other researchers to look skeptically at local newspapers when the local newspapers were flourishing, and the number of journalists were declining. Franklin asks is contemporaries if efficiency is compatible with quality journalism and refers to George Ritzer's research as a suitable response. George Ritzer (1998) created a metaphor of a fast food restaurant to describe evolving methodologies of journalism focused on efficiency, predictability, control, and calculation. He believed it was a symptom of modernity and a cultural trend toward convenience. Ritzer coined the term "McDonaldization" to describe the encroachment of business tactics into journalistic practice. The creation of the Multimedia Journalist or MMJ was not needed. It seems to be a counter intuitive response for the increased need for products and production. The increase of platforms and competition was viewed as a threat to ratings used to establish commercial sales rates, and news corporations decided, using Franklin's description (cited in Allan, 2005, p. 138), news should no longer be a culinary feast of elaborate creation but simplified into a McNugget sized meal.

Consumer demand and consumer behavior change with the multi-platform methods available. The audience consumption habits are changing rapidly, as news consumers embrace multiple sources of information on multiple devices (Ran & Yamamoto, 2020). The audience's media practices change with it. "Media convergence has nothing to do with technology or

architecture. It has everything to do with the mindset” (Quinn, 2004). The introduction of the Internet and other media, into newsrooms, stimulates the acceptance of new requirements. The consumers wanting news 24-hours poise the requirements, seven days a week, online and available when they want. New positions are created to allow for flexibility and expanded coverage necessary to remain competitive with the new demands (p. 119).

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, online communication was heralded as a transformation of human communication and has developed deep roots into the media industry. The interactions between journalists and the public has changed but hasn't changed is the increasing trend of media ownership accumulation and concentration (Radosinka et al, 2020). The Telecommunications Act of 1996, expanded the ownership of large broadcast companies and many local television stations were being bought by corporations looking to lower costs as well as dominate market share (Crandall, 2005). Originally, the concept of the MMJ inspired ideas of increasing the staff and broadening the reach of the news organization (Hemmingway, 2008). Technological innovation of smaller, light-weight equipment is believed to be the incentive for the widespread use of MMJ (Cedeño Montaña, 2017). However, new technologies could have created specialists or 'crafts' individuals similar to the past evolutionary stages of technology. Instead, the marketplace influenced the implementation of the MMJ. Economic and technological considerations seemed to perpetuate the notion one person eliminated redundancies. Instead of increasing specialization the creation of the MMJ allows for broadening roles and more demands. The one worker's valorization rises and with it the value of their work.

The revaluation of the employee's value has become more important as the traditional forms of revenue are steadily weakening. Between 2005 and 2017, local TV revenue as dropped 17% (Pew Research Center, 2019). Diffusion theory may explain the adoption of the MMJ model is based on economics. There is an assumption that managers adopt and maintain innovations after a cost-benefit analysis (Rogers, 2003) and with the increase in competition and less profit, the innovation of the MMJ may be viewed as a way to offset the loss of revenue by downsizing newsroom staff and demanding 'multi-skilling' of the remaining employees (Aviles et al., 2008).

By combining existing jobs and multiplying the number of MMJs of a news staff, the result could be more diverse news stories and broader community reach. If the news stations kept all their employees and trained them, they could create more news for multiple platforms and lessen the burden on the individual employee. Alternatively, the utilization of the MMJ could result in cutting the number of news gathers in half. Ultimately, TV stations and their corporate owners try to maintain the same number of production units whether they are traditional reporting crews or the MMJ. The MMJ method is used to maximize a minimal staff with the impetus of giving more work to individuals. The MMJ became a reagent to lower operational costs.

## **Literature Review**

The value of adopting new technologies may be calculated in quantifiable ways, especially in valuation of profit (Bailey & Leonardi, 2015). However, the value of a journalist may be difficult to measure. The journalist's value is altered with the transfer of skills; from a communal experience between a reporter and photographer, with job delegation, and the exchange of expertise, to an isolated solo performance with the burden of completing all the tasks. Harry Braverman's (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* focused on computerization and the removal of skills and the expropriation of surplus labor time from workers. He articulated how modernity impacts industrial

environments and shifts the hegemonic state of workers on the factory floor. The newsroom is a factory floor, according to Schlesinger (1979), Hemmingway (2008) and Greenhouse (2019). Greenhouse (2019) details how journalists are banding together to form unions in both print and digital platforms because they wish to have more of a voice on the job, as the demand for work has increased, with managers asking the journalists to do more and more with less. In this context, Braverman's analysis of work should be applied to the multimedia journalist and it should begin with an examination of labor process. The multimedia journalist is not a variation of past methodology, it is a product of journalism modernity redefined by the tasks of the multimedia journalist (Aviles et al, 2008).

The television reporter was once paired with a photographer. The intention was to maximize efficiencies and share expertise. The multimedia journalist was created by giving the reporter the camera and the photographer was eliminated. The loss of the photographer impacted the valorization of the former reporter because the new role required surplus labor from the individual. Braverman (1974) detailed the Labor Process theory as a way to describe the surplus value of workers under capitalism invisible to workers. In the process of changing the demand of the worker and redefining the journalist's role, Braverman would argue this was a degrading of the labor. Sherijarji (2019) believes the degradation of labor and the deskilling of labor is determined by the current technological paradigms of its age, supporting Braverman's claims. Sherijari states that, 'New technologies force entire nations into new forms of organization and specialized skill sets based around ever increasing speed and volume.' The multimedia journalist forces reporters to learn new technologies and meet increased volume of work.

Braverman was interested in how the forms of technology and the outcomes of the using the technologies impacts the working class. He believed the worker is changed by the formation of the new relations and hierarchies within the working class (Sherijarji, 2019). In terms of the multimedia journalist, the technology deskills the journalist as a reporter and as a photographer, as there are more tasks to complete with questionable expertise as a technician. Braverman viewed "deskilling" as a way to enslave workers into a production process and saw evidence of the deskilling on the shop floor among blue-collar workers. He predicted that one day the white-collar jobs would similarly be affected. The television reporter may be viewed by some as a white-collar position, elitist celebrity (Malone, 2011, Stelter, 2013) but the multimedia journalist model transforms the reporter into working class. Braverman would view this transformation as a way profession were increasingly brought under the capitalist labor process with the degradation of the work and pay structures. The skilled elites merged with the blue color workers (Jonna & Foster, 2014).

Deskilling is central to Braverman's assertions. Sallaz (2014) goes as far as to say that Braverman believed labor deskilling is not peripheral to capitalism, but its essence. Braverman believed one of the conditions for the purchase and sale of labor power, and most relevant to the multimedia journalist, is the condition that firms employ labor in order to enlarge their capital, that is, earn profit (Braverman 1974). The first impediment to the process was the power of the traditional crafts. Braverman asserts management views specialized crafts individuals as static and could not help the company keep pace with the competition, 'they were limited by their inability to change the processes of production (p. 63).' In the view of the traditional grouping of television reporter and photographer, the stations were limited, and deskilling allowed for flexibility and labor value.

According to Sallaz (2014), Braverman was proposing an alternative view of American capitalism that was in line with Marx's first principle that the interests of capital and labor are fundamentally opposed. Work is steadily cheapened, deskilled, and degraded (p. 299). This assertion can be applied to the multimedia journalist who went from a specialized skill to generalized execution of tasks. The incentive is not to pay crafts individuals for a finished

product but hire unskilled workers and dictate to them exactly how to perform their job. O'Doherty et al. (2001) criticized Braverman, and they contend that Labor Process Theory is subjective in its application and use. The standardization and deskilling of labor articulate the essential dynamics of capitalism of securing growth of capital at the expense of an increasingly impoverished and degraded working class (p. 113).

There are arguments against the assertion that deskilling is not a degradation of work. The deskilling leads to adaptive practices that are not standardized, and the skill sets are altered, not diminished. Leiter (1993) found that while management looks to streamline production, the reality is different. The workplace becomes chaotic because low pay leads to high attrition. Meanwhile, there is a constant number of new workers rushing into the profession without mentoring. The labor process is standardized, but workers find ways to circumvent the standardization, making it unique to their methods. There are limits to the routinization of service work (Leiter, 1993). A recent study by Parahita, Monggilo, and Wendratama (2020), supports the philosophy that teaching unskilled workers technical skills, such as operating the camera equipment, is relatively easier than teaching the worker written language and journalistic competencies.

Rowlinson & Hassard (2000) challenged Braverman's assertions about deskilling by stating that the tendency of separating conception and execution from each other. Conception is concentrated on smaller groups of employees while most of the workers in the executing phase are increasingly meaningless. Post-Taylorist work does not have the division of design and execution, and in this sense, production has evolved. There are many arguments that Labor Process Theory lacks the complicated multi-actor relationships of modern technologically driven labor (Rowlinson et al, 2000).

Ben Scott (2005) believed capitalism is the major catalyst for changes in news production, "Left without sufficient funds from the primary market – selling audiences to advertisers – they (television news stations) are forced to think of ways to make the news itself a commodity worth buying" (Scott, 2005). Pamela Jackson (2009) identified the conflict between capitalism and journalism as a clash between "an amoral force against an ethical agency". She expresses her dissatisfaction of media ownership by using commodification theory to explain how corporate media has an inclination toward the "complete commodification of news" and claims capitalism has no social consciousness (Jackson, 2009), that news as a contested commodity. The introduction of multi-platform distribution could have led to the expansion of staff to supply the platforms. Increases in staff size did not occur instead job requirements multiplied. The Multimedia Journalist was the result.

Multimedia journalism is accepted today, in what Marx and Engels (1848) would consider 'seeping commodification.' Marx and Engel stated, 'All that is solid melts into a commodity,' and Prodnik (2015) concurred arguing the 'cell forms of capitalism' have become a part of human activities and relations. The interchange between the television reporter and the television photographer were valued and monetized. The social form of their news making can be identified as labor process. Taking away the television reporter recalculates the monetary value of the work, the labor process. Seeping commodification is described as capitalism's need to revolutionize the means of production resulting in influence on the social forms as well. The mode of production of the MMJ is changing the social groups inside newsrooms. Dobek-Ostrowska (2015) view journalistic cultures as a complex mix of journalistic values, practices, norms and media products. Bourdieu (1998) would argue that ownership is not important to the 'journalistic field' because of a 'code of ethics' journalists maintain and the journalism they create.

It is not unusual for the free press in a democracy to be challenged by the restraints of economics. Journalism is unlike many businesses because there is no inventory or products placed on shelves and there is no open market for news stories similar to groceries, albeit there

are arguments the future innovations may provide such amenities. Lazzarato (1996) coined the phrase Immaterial Labor. Immaterial Labor can be identified as the defining characteristics as labor that produces informational content of a commodity and the labor that produces the cultural content of the commodity. One type of immaterial labor Lazzarato focused on includes photography and that would indicate the multimedia journalist performs Immaterial Labor. The multimedia journalist may not be paid additional wages to perform the immaterial labor. Mosco & Fuchs (2016) would argue that the workers are being exploited by offering them a disproportionately low wage in exchange for their labor power and time.

By paying a wage lower than the amount of capital it generates, the capitalist extracts profit from the labor force of the multimedia journalist. Mergers and acquisitions of television stations, similar to any merger or acquisition of business entities, creates waves of infrastructure revisions to raise shareholders (Martyn, 2009). Dvoskin (2019) identifies the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 as the catalyst of corporate profiteering in the television industry in the United States. 'Deregulation has resulted in a gigantic corporate conglomerate ownership of the media where the bottom line takes priority.' Halstead (2000) blames the Telecommunications Act of 1996 with saddling broadcasters with billions of dollars in expenses to pay for spectrum allocation. It is no coincidence that the rise of the multimedia journalist can be traced to the late '90s and early '00s (Kolodzy, 2006, Hemmingway, 2008). Michael Rosenblum is credited as the 'father of videojournalism'<sup>1</sup> touring the country's network affiliates, training the reporters to be videojournalists and preaching about the economic savings the videojournalist would provide stations (Rosenblum, 2008). The campaigning to integrate the videojournalist seems to have been successful. The moniker 'videojournalist' was dropped in favor of others, such as 'mojo' (mobile journalist) or 'sojo' (solo journalist) (Martyn, 2009). Martyn (2009) declared that the increased pressure to do more with less, to produce more content with fewer staff was the inspiration for the changes in news gathering, citing that the multimedia journalist was created because the new technology was available and that intrinsically drove the change.

Today's journalist is expected to maintain a social media presence while on the job as well as creating 'speed-driven journalism' (Lee, 2015). The traditional tasks are required of an MMJ, but the non-traditional tasks are filling in production roles when needed, especially live production. Posting on Facebook and Twitter is a common practice and a requirement of the MMJ and is widely adopted for news coverage (Hermida, 2010).

The MMJ copes with the exchanges of traditional and non-traditional tasks by creating routines. Many times, technology such as social media changes the conventions of the profession (Lowrey, 2006) and in the adaptive process individuals are expected to take on the new and old methodologies. The rise of digital technology "contributes to the industry's obsession with speed," and journalists are expected to "do more at a faster pace, giving rise to new expectations and practices in the news industry (Lee, 2015)."

Consolidation greatly increased industry profitability. Much of the profitability came through cost-cutting. Large broadcast groups with many stations were able to centralize news operations. Sinclair Broadcast Group and Nexstar Broadcasting (the two largest broadcasting companies in the United States) were able to consolidate and share content (Stahl, 2016).

Studies on the impact of external factors on internal practices in newsrooms may have research gaps. Örnebring, Lindell, Clerwall, and Karlson (2016) found that qualitative and quantitative studies revealed two outcomes. Qualitative studies find commercial pressures have increased in the past few decades around the world. Journalists believe the pressures have impacted their autonomy. However, the quantitative studies found that the journalists said they

---

<sup>1</sup> Halstead, D. (2000), *Looking Ahead to Photojournalism 2001*, The Digital Journalist retrieved at <http://digitaljournalist.org/issue9809/editorial.htm>

enjoyed a high level of professional autonomy (Örnebring et al, 2016). Autonomy is an essential element in the multimedia journalism.

If the future of television news is dependent upon the liquidity of corporate shares and market strength, then there may be doubts about the compatibility between the owner's demands and the workers' ethical responsibility. Jackson (2009) joins the voices of McChesney and Scott (2005) in a rebuke of the current tide of corporate ownership of local television news. They each believe the rising expectations of capitalism do not give corporations an excuse for neglecting the social responsibility of the press. Capitalism does not have a social consciousness and therefore immune to the moral responsibilities of the 4<sup>th</sup> Estate. Moral failure results when the news conceptualizes itself as just another commodity bought and sold in a capitalist economy resulting in a negative impact on democracy.

Ritzer (1998) identified a trend of appropriating the principles of the fast food restaurant into more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world. His work provided a metaphor of the change toward more highly controlled, bureaucratic, and dehumanizing society. Ritzer updated and defended his original thesis, that the shift to the digital age may require an examination of the relationship between production and consumption, especially in the way in which forms of consumption are delivered to the consumer are changing (Ritzer and Miles, 2019).

Kellner (1999) has been critical of Ritzer's view that characterizes social relations in which individuality and diversity are limited. While McDonald's is a brick and mortar business, with limited options for consumers, multimedia journalists do not seem to be under the same social paradigm, nor are the consumers of the product produced by the multimedia journalist.

McDonaldization of jobs begins with the consumer becoming a part of the labor process. In 2017, the New York Times offered buyouts to newsroom staff to reduce the number of editors. New York Times publisher, Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. defended the action by saying, "Our followers on social media and our readers across the Internet have come together to collectively serve as a modern watchdog, more vigilant and forceful than one person could ever be. (Snider, 2017)." Television news welcomes their audiences to help in the news gathering process by offering tips, stories, videos, photos, etc. that was once the duty of trained staff. Any platform for journalism is susceptible to the application of McDonaldization. People are costly and impede McDonaldization because the workers are independent thinkers, not robots (Ritzer and Mills (2019).

As a social theory, McDonaldization is a type of rationality, first defined by Weber (1968), as formal rationality, whereas consumption is increasing, therefore production requires more efficient ways to meet demand. More rationalized forms of consumption have more implications and in capitalist society they mean, above all, ever-increasing consumption (Ritzer et al., 2019). Feenberg (2017) believes there is a limit to rational organization in modern society. He believes technical progress is defined in the dominant culture by the substitution of machines and humans, the rational form of this progress makes it difficult to see alternatives or contingencies. The philosophy lines up with Braverman's arguments about deskilling (Feenberg, 2017) and why the multimedia journalist may be considered a rational form of technological application and replacement of human work.

The process of McDonaldization can lead to the creation of "McJobs" whereas work is a relegated process of speed and inventory. Efficiency involves 'the choice of the optimum means to a given end' (Ritzer, 1993). Maximizing the hours an employee works to create as many products as possible and serve the customer as fast as possible. Work is simplified to de-skill the employee and increase efficiency. The de-skilled work requirements are supported with rationalization within the companies on all levels. Braverman saw worker's autonomy as a function of skill (Smith, 2015). He believed there is a relationship between skill, job autonomy, knowledge, and control. Braverman did not believe that increased formal education of the

workforce did does not translate into increased skill levels. He believed that was a myth and that production, not training, was central to capitalism.

Multiple platforms increase the need for sources and consumer participation. In 1998, Ritzer identified the future role of Internet content providers as major contributors of the McDonaldization Thesis. The patron/customer/client becomes part of the labor process. There is no longer a clear distinction between worker and patron. Patrons have become unpaid workers who perform tasks that would otherwise have to be done by paid employees. They do it largely on their own and create a secondary workforce to be exploited to enhance profits (Ritzer, 1998, p. 7). Others disagree with Ritzer's assertions and claim there are larger forces at play. Smart (1999) believes the changing ways of living transform the habits of customers and the material does not classify as work but residue social activity. They may both be right regarding media work. Consumers are looking for easily accessed bits of continuously updated information, and corporations are seeking to standardize production methods to lower costs in a fast food delivery motif. It is in that context we see the modern television newsroom. The television newsroom is in a state of McDonaldization in both the way news is consumed, and in the way, the news is produced. Ritzer's (1998) 'McDonaldization Thesis' can be applied to new means of consumption. The thesis promotes the idea that nothing is "safe from McDonaldization as long as there are material interests that push it and stands to benefit from its expansion" (Ritzer, 1998).

Technological modernity plays a factor in job skills and the future adaptiveness of journalists. According to Davier & Conway (2019), when convergent strategy is rooted in print, news-gathering does not vary from one platform to others. Reporters write a piece of news that is copied from print to digital to mobile to social media. The chain of distribution may change as convergence of media is incorporating more multimedia tools such as video. Eventually, there will be more forms that the definition of multimedia will need to be updated. In recent years, the negativity over the amount of labor and technical skill has diminished. Matt Pearl (2020) preaches a positive approach to process of newsgathering as a solo video journalist. He found that a majority of the MMJs he surveyed believed they have enough time to during the day to fulfill their job requirements, however, at the same time a majority of the MMJs he surveyed do not believe they see themselves in the same role ten years from now, with a vast majority of MMJs agreeing that they feel overwhelmed by the workload.

News managers want calculability of their employee's work. The work hours are measured in product forms. The work is counted and quantified to make sure the MMJ is increasing valorization. Many MMJs will complain about the expectations because it leads to what Ritzer (1993) believes is a desire to measure their value of quantity over quality (Ritzer, 1993). Liu & Lo (2018) studied Taiwanese reporters and found that workload and news autonomy directly relate to emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, cynicism and turnover intention of jobs. Job satisfaction acts a mediator in the relationship between burnout and turnover intention. The overwhelming workload of multimedia journalism and their autonomy lead to burnout.

The social relations of production between manager and employee can lead to worker resistance and acquiescence as there are mutual amounts of paradigm repair and social advancement. The social relations are boundaries for the labor processes of restructuring work and the control imperative. It is possible to comprehend the current state of television newsrooms within corporate owned stations by applying Gaines and Domagalski (1996) approach to Labor Process Theory. The control imperative is converting labor power into profit, in the case the multimedia journalist labor power; the valorization increases with the restructuring of the work and the cheapening of the process. Television workers may not fit into the description of factory workers because their work is collaboration, but off the shop floor of the newsroom, there is continuous tension to treat labor as a commodity while maintaining cooperation between worker and manager. Managers may issue demands of time

and output and grant workers some autonomy, but ultimately the desires of the corporation override the intentions of the middle manager.

The critical study of political economies of communications (CPEC) attempts to look at both the theory and research focused on the public sphere and democracy and reflect on the social role of research and researchers. The multimedia journalist may be overlooked in years to come as the practice becomes normalized and future research needs to recognize the origins. According to Wasko (2018), future developments need to be viewed historically, a fundamental starting point for the CPEC. ‘A careful analysis of capitalism, its structure, the consequences of those structures and the contradictions that abound is more than ever relevant and needed (Wasko, 2018). Future studies or international comparisons should require a search for a place of origin and examination of the political economy to find a common ground.

Ritzer’s (2019) reevaluation of his McDonaldization thesis concludes that McDonaldization will become more relevant in the digital future than it ever was in the bricks and mortar past. The absence of opposition to the changing forms of production, is another reason to expect the process of McDonaldization will continue.

## Methodology

This study used quantitative analysis of survey data from multimedia journalists in the United States. The survey conducted from 2017 – 2018, collected quantitative data on age, gender, specific work requirements such as writing, editing, and videotaping. Survey participants work at television stations in different size audiences and broadcast ranges. In the United States, the size of the audiences measures the ranking of the station. In the United States there are 210 areas of different sizes. New York City is the #1 market area in the country with a population of 18.2 million people and Glendive, Montana is the smallest market area with a population of 4, 935. 289 participants responded to the survey. Based on the description of a multimedia journalist as someone who shoots, writes and edits their own news stories for broadcast, as well as create web content, 172 of the 281 respondents considered themselves to be television multimedia journalists. The MMJs represented 132 television market areas in the United States. Participants were given opportunities to give personal feedback, and then the qualitative data was collected. All comments were reviewed and coded.

The survey included a respondent from all areas of the United States, including Montana and New York. The majority of the survey’s respondents were from television stations outside large metropolitan areas. 106 respondents of the 172 (61.6%) were from medium or small market areas (DMAs 34 – 210).

A Qualtrics survey of 39 questions was created, IRB approved, and distributed via the Facebook group page, Storytellers. The Facebook group of 11,767 members representing a community of television journalists. Their website [tvnewstorytellers.com](http://tvnewstorytellers.com) is a resource for journalism education. Their mission statement on their website defines their role as a place where, “Journalists frequent the community to mentor, share stories, discuss ethics and inspire each other.”

Storytellers is a private group with restriction on membership. Founder Matt Mrozinski, states that the page is meant as a critique forum, helping peers to improve their work. The members of this community regularly engage in discussions involving their professions. I became a member of the group and requested to post the survey to group members.

The participants were asked questions to help define the multimedia journalist, comparing them to the traditional news gathering unit of reporter and television news photographer. The survey measured the phenomenon of the MMJ in local television news by asking specific questions about the job responsibilities of the MMJ. The participants were asked questions to

establish the numbers of MMJs in the respondents' newsrooms, the ratio of traditional reporters to MMJs in their newsrooms, additional work requirements such as social media and online reporting, and managerial preferences for using the MMJ to cover particular types of stories.

The intent of this study is to evaluate the phenomenon, causal conditions, and action strategies of the multimedia journalist on local television news organizations. The survey measured the phenomenon of the MMJ in local television news by asking specific questions about the job responsibilities of the MMJ. The participants were asked questions to establish the numbers of MMJs in the respondents' newsrooms, the ratio of traditional reporters to MMJs in their newsrooms, additional work requirements such as social media and online reporting, and managerial preferences for using the MMJ to cover particular types of stories.

Drawing from the literature discussion, data analysis and observation of multimedia journalists, I proposed the following research questions:

**RQ1: What are imperative issues associated with the popularity of the Multimedia Journalism model in local television newsrooms?**

Respondents were encouraged to discuss their observations and experiences. The intent of the discussion questions was to formulate qualitative data to find the causal conditions applied to their individual experiences as MMJs. The causal conditions were coded based on the frequency of similar response, resulting in key words, "quality, quantity, burnout, gender, and safety." The intent of this question is to form a better understanding of how multimedia journalists view their work, the limitations of their professions and the challenges they experience. Do the MMJs feel that they are deskilled and "enslaved" into a production process described by Braverman (1975)?

**RQ2: Do MMJ employees feel their workload is manageable?**

'Burnout' is an issue for many MMJs. The workload on MMJs can be overwhelming. MMJs need to be proficient enough with technical skills to be efficient while using their social skills with interviews, news events, and dealing with the public while performing their jobs. Workers who are given low organizational support result in higher levels of burnout than those with high organizational support. A large part of the stress appears to be organizational in nature (Lawal, 2017). MMJs work alone and often feel disconnected.

**RQ3: Given a choice, would MMJs prefer the multimedia journalism method of production or the traditional method of a reporter and photographer?**

Does the worker identify the Immaterial Labor, described by Lazzarato (1996)? Would the MMJ want to displace the material labor if they had a choice? The theoretical prediction focuses on the effect of the working model on employees. Action strategies for employees and the company may be used to lessen the consequences of long-term stress. Retaining workers for extended periods of time or within the definition of 'careers' at one place of work is not the intention of McDonaldization as wages are meant to have a limited ceiling. Braverman (1975) concluded that businesses expected minimal costs to produce products. The working conditions are created to increase productivity.

**RQ4: Has the implementation of the multimedia journalist become the dominate method of news production?**

Are newsrooms rejecting the traditional modes of production? If the dominate form of news production is evolving towards a desire for quantity instead of quality production, can Ritzer's McDonaldization be applied to TV news production (Ritzer, 1998)? This question is also posed to see if Braverman's assertions that the new methods of work will be accepted and adopted by the workers. Plus, does Quinn's (2004) assertion that media convergence is a mindset include the acceptance of the production method?

## Findings

Management's perception focuses on workers' attitude, commitment, and motivation and task competence (Thursfield, 2017). Workers learn in five stages. The employee progresses from novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. It is by moving through these stages that skills and experience are acquired. It must be acknowledged that the evidentiary findings of this study may be based on workers who have not gone through the entire set of stages and are not considered expert workers. Similarly, the perceptions of the workforce by management may lead to misconceptions of skill as the management elicits the cooperation and consent of employees, which is necessary to the production of surplus profit and managers' performance at work.

**RQ1:** *What are imperative issues associated with the popularity of the Multimedia Journalism model in local television newsrooms?*

93% of the MMJs in this survey are under the age of 36. 63 of the 130 MMJs are 18-25 years of age. 114 of the 132 (86.36%) MMJs have seven years or less experience in television news. 23% of the MMJs have no more than two years experience in television journalism. 37.6% have no more than three years of experience. "Bigger markets want to hire journalists out of college because it's cheaper (you get what you pay for) and I think this is a detriment to the station and the news reporter. (MMJ, Paducah, Kentucky)." It appears the rise of employment for recent college graduates is rising and the percentage of older employees at local television stations is falling.

The majority of MMJs are young women. 56% of all the respondents were female. Of the 132 respondents, considering themselves an MMJ, 95 were female (71.9%). The majority of those who did not identify as an MMJ were male (46 males to 12 females). Overall 107 of the respondents were female, and 81 were male.

67.72% of the respondents believe the implementation of the multimedia journalists has become the dominant method of news production. However, 64.89% say they prefer the traditional crew of reporter and photographer over the MMJ method.

The MMJ method was considered a small market mode of production because it minimized costs and staff. The less experienced TV reporter would work in a small market as a "one-man band" and after gaining experience would move to a larger market where they would work in traditional crews. "The MMJ format does not work well in large size markets. I have colleagues who are MMJs in mid-size markets that do efficient or extremely efficient work. (Television News Photographer, Top 10 DMA)."

The large markets have different issues than smaller markets, mainly in transportation to and from a news story. An MMJ can not work while driving but a traditional reporter can make phone calls and write scripts while the photographer drives. "The expectation to do everything simultaneously. Sometimes I feel pressured to email or text while driving. The station wants Facebook live, Tweets, and station web updates by 2 pm (we don't have a mobile app so to publish to web we need to be in front of a computer). At the same time were expected to

communicate with sources and managers. I can't do all these things on my phone at once and drive place to place! The most important thing to our managers is finishing two stories by deadline and not having overtime. (Female MMJ, age 18-25, New Orleans).”

News stations are hiring younger MMJs with lower salaries. “Low salaries lead to inexperienced reporters in larger markets than they should be working in. (Male, Television Photographer, Baltimore, MD).” The lack of experience of the MMJs does not help the efficiency of their work. “MMJ is the model, but very few people care to master it. It's looked at as something that's lesser than a reporting job. Management tends to pay MMJs less. (Female MMJ, Denver).”

Safety concerns in larger cities are a threat to the MMJ. “Newsrooms are requiring many MMJs to report in dangerous situations without backup. Solo live shots are a terrible idea, no matter what neighborhood you're in. It's impossible to focus on anything but the camera, which could be you in danger. (Female MMJ, age 26-35, Washington, DC)” “Management doesn't always take safety into concern. I don't think MMJs should be doing live shots alone. - Role models for women MMJs- there really aren't a lot of older women one man banding and I worry it's because companies haven't supported them (what happens if a woman is pregnant, has safety concerns? I feel management is not sympathetic to those concerns). (MMJ Female, age 26-35, New York City).

**RQ2:** *Do MMJ employees feel their workload is manageable?*

Braverman (1975) asserts that quantity is valued over quality in the deskilling process and Ritzer's (1998) McDonaldization requires standardization of output. Workload is used to evaluate both quantity and standardization. The survey revealed that 54% (sd = .55, var. .31) of the respondents in this study believe the workload of the MMJ is too much for one person and only 2.87% believe the workload is not an issue. Workload is similar for all MMJs according to our survey. Market size did not indicate an increase or decrease in expected output. Smaller markets have a slight increase in their output, mostly online stories. 93% of the 132 MMJ respondents are expected to post pictures to social media. Facebook (51.54%) and Twitter (33.85%) are the most popular apps.

The workload creates anxiety for many of the respondents. Some of the inexperienced MMJ (18-25-year-olds) are being routinized, and in the process of improving their skills, the MMJs are often overwhelmed. “I'm exhausted every day. And I feel like my quality of work suffers cause I'm doing the job of 6 people. (Female, 18-25, Scranton, PA)”

Lawal (2017) believed a large part of worker's stress appears to be organizational in nature the respondent's comments reflect the stress that occurs because of the organizational structure. “It's too much, plain and simple. An MMJ should be able to determine their own workload, instead a boss who is not even at the story determines it for herself/himself. (Male, 18-25, Atlanta, Georgia).” “The MMJs have too much on their plate, especially with the constant push for social media content. Shooting and editing a story while also being expected to report things accurately is an excessive amount of work on its own. I also feel very badly for those who are forced to operate their own live shots. It's unsafe, and many MMJs feel this way--they're simply afraid to voice this to management. (Male, Over 36, Salt Lake City, Utah).”

Many MMJs feel the pressures to perform different skills quickly and efficiently lead to a lack of interpretation that leads to habits of selection, exclusion of points of view and emphasis on the dominant perspective. “If it's a busy day and I turn three separate stories plus live shots, and Facebook lives, I need another pair of hands, so the product won't look like crap. Burn out. I'm a storyteller. I am passionate both behind and in front of the lens. But too many hours spent gathering news for ten different platforms wears me out. (Female, 26-35, Knoxville, TN)”

“There are a lot of issues. The responsibilities of a single person are out of control. The expectations are so much higher and typically quality goes to the wayside. It's out of control. (Female, 18-25, Ashland, KY)” The necessity for more products with fewer journalists, especially MMJs who work alone, highlights the counter-intuitive nature of hiring and supporting the MMJ model instead of the traditional crew. Many MMJs view the use of MMJs as a managerial decision and not a journalistic decision. “The problem is news managers (many of whom who have no real field experience) have the same deadlines and production asks for MMJs as 2-person crews. Inexperienced news managers are a widespread problem in news-- which is part of how they get suckered into producer-vision or consultant-vision. (Male, Over 36, Washington, DC).”

Technology may have created greater flexibility and mobility of reporting, but there are physical limitations to the multimedia journalism that are caused by the aspects of deskilling. Deskilling creates vulnerabilities (Braverman, 1975). “No matter what, something will have to suffer out of all the jobs being performed. Usually it's the photography aspect but in many cases it's the ability to have a good interview and be able to pay attention and ask the right questions. If you are worried about technical problems, you are not listening properly. If the technology fails during importing or feeding you are not able to write your lead ins etc because now you are trouble shooting. If you are in a bad neighborhood you have no one keeping an eye out for you while you are working which puts you in an unsafe work environment. (Male, 26-35, Seattle, WA.)”

The expectations of meeting deadlines and carrying a heavy workload are accelerating burnout. “Burnout” is described by Schaufeli (2008), as “exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of professional efficacy” (p. 175). Rahim (2016) explained job burnout as a syndrome of physical and mental health caused by prolonged exposure to stress involving emotional responses (p. 205). The symptom can lead to disillusionment about their job. There are three components of job burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment. “If one-man-bands can enhance what you can do, I'd be all for it. (But) The grind of breaking news with no staffing and two stories because it's just churn, churn, churn, no time, day in, day out, lead stories. You go nuts. (Female, 25-36, Tampa, FL).”

**RQ3:** *Given a choice, would MMJs prefer the multimedia journalism method of production or the traditional method of a reporter and photographer?*

If the respondents were given a choice, 64.89% (sd = .57, var = .33) would prefer the traditional crew of reporter and photographer overusing the MMJ method. 23.94% of the respondents prefer the MMJ model. 53% of those who prefer the MMJ model are 18-25 years of age. “There is so much news, too much land mass and traffic to get there, and not enough hours in the day before your live shot or story is due to do "one-man bands", or MMJ work. Trust me, it doesn't matter how organized you are. They prefer quantity over quality, the majority of the time in large markets. In my opinion, traditional crews work best in big markets and network television news hand down. (Female, age 36-over, Top 10 DMA).”

The question remains if it is beneficial to have one person produce the work that formerly took two people. In this context, McDonalidization is realized (Ritzer, 1993) when work becomes a relegated process of speed and inventory. Management seems to separate the work from the worker and placing too much work on the individual MMJ. “That's one of the biggest worries. Not only the pay scale, but the workload. I'm completely burnt out. I'm worked to the bone - and my station care only about quantity - not quality. I'm a grinder. And the managers are either completely ignorant, or totally insensitive to, our plight. (Male, 26-35, Hartford CN).”

Feenberg's assertion that technical progress is defined in the dominate culture by the substitution of machines for humans (Feeberg, 2017). It appears that the journalists see the

value in the traditional methods and resist the rational form of progress that is imposed on them. The multimedia journalists would argue Braverman's deskilling is not beneficial to them but the technology appeals to the administrative hierarchies. One of the results of the industrial revolution was the importance of adopting organizational practices intended to promote the efficient use of time (Pfeffer et al., 2012, p. 47). "The emphasis on cutting back on some staff means more MMJs that are expected to cover more content, lowering the quality of the stories. (Female, 18-25, Dallas, TX)."

The "one-man band" has been in existence since the beginning of television broadcasting. A significant difference between the "one-man band" and the MMJ is the number of platforms where their work is intended to be delivered. Besides all of the steps to create a TV news story, the MMJ have other types of production requirements for social media. The impact on the worker is an overload. "Too much load for quality work. We're expected to shoot mobile stories for the web and take slideshow photo essays, while simultaneously conducting interviews on ENG style cameras. Covering large events alone is impossible. And asking for help is useless since all other MMJ's are working on their own stories. Modern newscasts are built on the backs of underpaid and under-resourced MMJ's. (Male 18-25, Tyler, TX)".

Experienced reporters see multitasking as a threat to verifying the accuracy of their stories and can ultimately lead to a loss of integrity. "Certain people will try to tell you one thing and put a spin on a story that you many not have time to check out. You've got to worry about that. I think at some point, if they cover a big enough story, they're going to have to put their foot down and say, 'I'm not comfortable airing the story the way it is now. I've got to find out more.' And that might be a difficult thing to get through to a producer or a news director, but those are the times we live in now. (Male, Over-36, Syracuse, NY)"

**RQ4:** *Has the implementation of the multimedia journalist become the dominate method of news production?*

Respondents viewed the multimedia journalist as a dominate method in their newsrooms. 68.45% (sd=.46, var.= 0.22) of the MMJ respondents believe the implementation of the multimedia journalist has become the dominate method of news production. MMJs recognize management prefers to use the MMJ for certain stories and the traditional crew for other types of stories. In regard to a spot news or breaking news, 54.5% (sd = 1.13, var. 1.28) respondents believe that their managers prefer to send a photographer and a reporter to cover the story. In the case of a general news story, 53.97% of the respondents (sd = 1.08, var. 1.18) believe managers prefer the multimedia journalist to cover the story.

Respondents believe that managers would prefer that In-Depth reporting be produced by a crew of reporter and photographer (68.25%, sd = 1.09, var. 1.20). The ability of the MMJ to create an In-Depth piece is not necessarily the issue. Respondents would like to see MMJs used in different ways than daily assignments. "News Directors think MMJs replace and can efficiently handle the workload of a photographer and reporter crew, but MMJs are rarely given time to make a good story when given the same tasks as a regular team. (MMJ, New Orleans)" "There are many demands for MMJs, leaving little time for in-depth reports. All of my stories, for example, are day turns, and because my station does not give overtime or comp time, I have to work on special reports on my own time. (Female, 18-25, Lincoln, NE)"

The 2018 RTDNA Newsroom Staffing Report indicates that the use of MMJ is dominate in smaller markets with smaller staff (Papper, 2018). More than half the local television stations in the United States (DMAs 51-210) utilized a staff consisting of 59.7% MMJ employees. The other half of larger stations (1-50) utilized a staff consisting of 19.5% MMJ employees. RTDNA's study reveals that staff size is directly related to MMJ use. Newsrooms with 31-50

employees use 56.7% MMJs. Staff size of 21-30 consists of 83.9% MMJs. Staff size of 11-20 consists of 84.8% MMJs. Staff size of 1-10 consists of 80% MMJs (Papper, 2018).

The growth of the MMJ may have plateaued. RTDNA reports that a number of news directors have reported that they are looking to cut back on their use of the MMJs. However, the overall growth of the MMJ was 1% in 2018. MMJ new hires are up 16.9%, more than Producers (15.4%) and Reporters (9.6%). In the “average” local TV news department of 40.4 people, RTDNA attributes 6.2 employees are photographers, 4.9 MMJs, and 3.7 Reporters (Papper, 2018).

The MMJ method at local television stations is not a dominant methodology, but the numbers of MMJs are growing. According to the RTDNA/ Hofstra study of 2018, the use of the MMJ is increasing with employee replacement hiring. The numbers of replacement hires of MMJs have risen 19.5% meanwhile the traditional reporter hires are up 13.7%. The combined MMJ/Reporter hires consist of 33.2% of new employees in television newsrooms (Papper, 2018).

“Great for companies who want to cut cost - bad for quality journalism. Don't get me wrong - you can still turn a great story as an MMJ. But your attention is divided - meaning something also always suffers. And there are physical limitations as an MMJ that just cannot be replicated without a full crew. Anyone that says they can do just as good of a job as an MMJ as a competent, traditional crew, is either in complete denial or ignorant. Two is always better than one. (Female 26-35, Dallas, TX).”

## Limitations

RTDNA’s 2018 survey concluded there are 27,100 individuals in local television newsrooms in the United States. Roughly 12.1% of those newsroom’s staff are MMJs. This would indicate that the pool of 11,767 individuals from the Storytellers Facebook Page may not necessarily be representative of local television newsrooms. Notably, the RTDNA surveys have more access to management to collect their data and have a more representative pool, this study, utilized a rare opportunity to survey the members of Storytellers, a respected collection of professionals.

Respondents quotes were selected based on the relevancy to the research questions. One-word responses or short sentences were not considered, but small portions of longer responses were chosen, as to best reflect meaningful and accurate representation of the pool dialogue. The chosen quotes may reflect dissenting opinions more than positive affirmations of the professions. The ‘positive-negative asymmetry effect’ (Anderson, 1965; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989) states that when equal measures of good and bad experiences occur, the psychological effects of the bad events outweigh the good remembrances. Perhaps there are more positive feelings that were not expressed in the survey. The positive opinions of this survey were consistently shorter one-word answers.

## Conclusion

The MMJ is an accepted and growing method of journalism production and TV news employment has now surpassed newspapers.<sup>2</sup> Efficiency is expected, and each story is a

---

<sup>2</sup> 2018 RTDNA/Hofstra University Newsroom Survey, retrieved at:  
[https://www.rtdna.org/article/research\\_tv\\_news\\_employment\\_surpasses\\_newspapers#.X0gmIRLFSa4.gmail](https://www.rtdna.org/article/research_tv_news_employment_surpasses_newspapers#.X0gmIRLFSa4.gmail)

calculated commodity inventoried in its multiple formats. McDonaldization is occurring to the profession of journalism with serious aftereffects. Braverman's assertion that the disparate white-collar sectors would be brought under capitalistic labor process by the "degradation" of their work (Braverman, 1975). Quantity over quality, with little room for nuanced specialization.

Braverman (1975) would associate the traditional television news crew professionals with higher skills and higher status, a higher working class, that has been demoted to a "growing working-class occupation" with relentless degradation of their working conditions. Safety issues and emotional stress have become a growing concern for MMJs. "Burnout" was frequently cited as a concern by all the respondents. Luz et al. (2017) concluded that burnout is a defense response, even if improper, to the chronicity of occupational stress that reaches unbearable limits (pp. 238-246). Deadline pressure has always been a part of the journalism profession but it is possible to say that no other particular type of journalist was ever required to complete so much work, with so many skills, to be placed on so many formats each day than the MMJ.

Safety concerns rise because of increased burnout. Studies by Maslach & Jackson (1996) identified burnout symptoms with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and inefficacy. Burnout can lead to the risk of injury. Ahola et al. (2013) found that employee suffering from exhaustion have a 10% increase in risk for severe injuries. And those employees who experience burnout symptoms at least once a month saw a 19% increase in their risk of serious injury as compared to those with symptoms less often. They concluded that 'burnout is a risk factor for future severe injuries' (pp. 450-457).

In the United States, there is an overwhelming tendency towards the degradation of work, in a system that is heading toward oligopolistic capitalism. The need to recreate or repurpose the "one-man band," in the form of the MMJ, was nurtured by what Weber would describe as a rationalization of substantively irrational working conditions (Weber, 1968). The last ten years have been difficult for television journalists and the television news industry. In a farewell address Mike James (2017), Editor of NewsBlues.com lamented that during the last decade there had been an unhealthy transformation of TV news. He says, "We've watched a handful of broadcasting companies leverage investment money to gobble up local TV stations by the hundreds, creating ownership behemoths that threaten the public interest by centralizing news production, eliminating competition and diversity (NewsBlues.com, 2017)."

The multimedia journalist is the cell-level organism of a growing corporate organism. Government deregulations have catalyzed change at all levels of the broadcast industry. Corporate consolidation is making an impact on news coverage (Hedding et.al. 2019). The respondents in this survey support Braverman's assertion that deskilling takes place in conforming industries (Braverman, 1975) because of societal and industrial changes, in this case deregulation. Stahl (2016) would support the respondents claim that management is looking for quantity over quality, and a homogenization of the product created by shared resources. McDonaldization of the MMJ occurs because the brick and mortar corporations, like Nexstar, Sinclair, and Tegna, package and brand intangible products manufactured with deskilled workers, performing immaterial labor. All of these assertions can identify the McDonaldization of journalism. Ritzer (1998) would conclude that the respondents of this survey form a working class in the Braverman model.

## **Further Research**

Corporations are consolidating their work and "hubbing" work to be distributed between the stations. TV stations are providing content for more than one TV station. Consolidation of

television stations and mutual operating agreements are increasing the number of stations with local news to a record level. 717 local TV newsrooms are supplying news to another 328 stations. There is a record number 1,045 stations running local news (RTNDA/Hofstra; The Business of News, 2015).

## References

- Ahola, K., Salminen, S., and Toppinen-Tanner, S. (2013). "Occupational burnout and severe injuries: An 8-year prospective cohort study among Finnish forest industry workers." *Journal of Occupational Behavior*, 55(6), 450-457. [CrossRef](#)
- Allan, S. (2005). *Journalism: Critical Issues*. Maidenhead, England: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Allan, S. (2010). *News Culture: Vol. 3rd ed.* McGraw-Hill Education.
- Anderson, N. H. (1965). Averaging versus adding as a stimulus-combination rule in impression formation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2, 1-9.
- Aviles, J. A. G. and M. Carvajal (2008). "Integrated and Cross-Media newsroom Convergence: Two Models of Multimedia News Production: The cases of Novotecnica and La Verdad Multimedia in Spain." *Convergence*, 14(2), 221-239. [CrossRef](#)
- Bailey, D.E. & Leonardi, P.M. (2015). *Technology Choices: Why Occupations Differ in Their Embrace of New Technology*. The MIT Press
- Bourdieu, P. (1998) On Television and Journalism. *London: Pluto Press*.
- Braverman, H. (1974). *Labor and monopoly capital: the degradation of work in the twentieth century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Cedeño Montaña, R. (2017). *Portable Moving Images: A Media History of Storage Formats*.
- Crandall, R. W. (2005). *Competition and chaos: U.S. telecommunications since the 1996 Telecom Act*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Davies, L., & Conway, K. (2019). *Journalism and Translation in the Era of Convergence*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Dobek-Ostrowska, B. (2015). Journalism and commercialization. *Journalism in Change: Journalistic Culture in Poland, Russia and Sweden*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 211-231.
- Dvoskin, S. A. (2019). Media in Flux: Does Consolidation Promote the Public Interest? *Cardozo Arts & Entertainment Law Journal*, 38(1), 219–256.
- Erdal, J.E. (2009). "Cross-Media (Re)Production Cultures." *Convergence*, 15(2), 215-231. [CrossRef](#)
- Feenberg, A. (2017). *Technosystem*. Harvard University Press.
- Gaines, J. and Domagalski, A. (1996). "An Alternative Employee Rights Paradigm: Labor Process Theory." *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 9(3), 177-192.
- Goedkoop, R. J. (1988). *Inside local television news*. Sheffield Pub. Co.
- Greenhouse, S. (2019). WHY NEWSROOMS ARE UNIONIZING NOW: Journalists are saying yes to unions to lift salary floors, win or improve basic benefits, and provide some cushion to the industry's volatility. *Nieman Reports*, 2, 32.
- Hedding, K. J., Miller, K. C., Abdenour, J., & Blankenship, J. C. (2019). The Sinclair Effect: Comparing Ownership Influences on Bias in Local TV News Content. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 63(3), 474–493. [CrossRef](#)
- Hemmingway, E. (2008). *Into the Newsroom: Exploring the digital production of regional television news*. Oxon, Routledge.
- Hermida, A. (2010). Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 4(3), 297–308. [CrossRef](#)

- Jackson, P. T. (2009). "News as a Contested Commodity: A Clash of Capitalist and Journalistic Imperatives." *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 24,(2-3), 146-163. [CrossRef](#)
- James, M. (2017). NewsBlues.com, May 26, 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.robertfeder.com/2017/05/26/newsblues-editor-takes-parting-shot-unhealthy-transformation-tv-news/>
- Jonna, R. J., & Bellamy Foster, J. (2014). Beyond the Degradation of Labor. *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine*, 66(5), 1–23. [CrossRef](#)
- Kellner, D. (1999). 12 Theorizing/Resisting McDonaldization. *Resisting McDonaldization*, 186.
- Kolodzy, J. (2006) *Convergence Journalism: Writing and Reporting across the News Media*, Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers.
- Lawal, A. M., & Idemudia, E. S. (2017). The role of emotional intelligence and organisational support on work stress of nurses in Ibadan, Nigeria. *Curationis*, 40(1), 1-8.
- Lee, A. M. (2015). "Social media and Speed-Driven Journalism: Expectations and Practices", *International Journal on Media Management*, 17(4), 217-239. [CrossRef](#)
- Leiter, M. P. (1993). Burnout as a developmental process: Consideration of models. *Professional burnout: Recent developments in theory and research*, 237-250.
- Liu H-L, Lo V. (2018) An integrated model of workload, autonomy, burnout, job satisfaction, and turnover intention among Taiwanese reporters. *Asian Journal of Communication* 28(2), 153-169. [CrossRef](#)
- Lowrey, W. (2006). Mapping the journalism–blogging relationship. *Journalism*, 7(4), 477–500. [CrossRef](#)
- Luz, L. M., Barbosa Torres, R. R., de Queiroga Sarmiento, K. M. V., Rocha Sales, J. M., Nascimento Farias, K., & Braga Marques, M. (2017). Burnout Syndrome in urgency mobile service professionals. *Revista de Pesquisa: Cuidado e Fundamental*, 9(1).
- Maslach, C. (1982). *Burnout: The cost of caring*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Leiter, M. P. (1996). *MBI: Maslach burnout inventory*. Sunnyvale, CA: CPP, Incorporated.
- Malone, M. (2011, October 24). Protests "occupy" local newscasts: TV reporters find a few media-savvy protesters--and some anger aimed their way. *Broadcasting & Cable*, 141(40), 22.
- Martyn, P. (2009). The Mojo in the Third Millennium. *Journalism Practice*, 2, 196.
- Marx, K (1867). Capital Volume 1. London: Penguin.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). Manifesto of the Communist party. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 469-500.
- Maslach, C. and Jackson, S.E. (1987). "Burnout in organizational settings. In S. Oskamp (Ed.), *Applied Social Psychology Annual*, 5, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- McChesney, R., Newman, R., and Ben Scott (2005) *The Future of Media: Resistance and Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, New York: Seven Stories Press
- Molotch, H., & Lester, M. (1974). News as Purposive Behavior: On the Strategic Use of Routine Events, Accidents, and Scandals. *American Sociological Review*, 39(1), 101–112. [CrossRef](#)
- Mosco, V., & Fuchs, C. (2016). *Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism*. Brill.
- Moss, S. (2009), An Introduction to the Entertainment Industry, In Moss, S. (ed): *The Entertainment Industry: An Introduction*. Wallingford: CABI, pg. 4.
- Nappi, R. (1994). A newsroom manifesto: no more whining. *American Journalism Review*, 16(7), 12.
- O'Doherty, D., & Willmott, H. (2001). Debating Labour Process Theory: The Issue of Subjectivity and the Relevance of Poststructuralism. *Sociology*, 35(2), 457–476. [CrossRef](#)

- Örnebring H, Lindell J, Clerwall C, Karlsson M. (2016) Dimensions of Journalistic Workplace Autonomy: A Five-nation Comparison. *Javnost-The Public* 23(3), 307-326. [CrossRef](#)
- Papper, B. (2018) '2018 RTDNA/Hofstra University Newsroom Survey', retrieved at: [https://www.rtdna.org/article/research\\_tv\\_news\\_employment\\_surpasses\\_newspapers#.X0gmIRLFSa4.gmail](https://www.rtdna.org/article/research_tv_news_employment_surpasses_newspapers#.X0gmIRLFSa4.gmail)
- Pearl, M. (2020). *The Solo Video Journalist : Doing It All and Doing It Well in TV Multimedia Journalism* (2nd ed.). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Peeters, G., & Czapinski, J. (1990). Positive-negative asymmetry in evaluations: The distinction between affective and informational negativity effects, *European review of social psychology* 1(1), 33-60. [CrossRef](#)
- Pew Research Center (2019) 'Most Americans think their local news media are doing well financially; few help to support it', Retrieved from: <https://www.journalism.org/2019/03/26/most-americans-think-their-local-news-media-are-doing-well-financially-few-help-to-support-it/>
- Pfeffer, J. and DeVoe, S. E. (2012) "The economic evaluation of time: Organizational causes and individual consequences", *Research in Organizational Behavior* 32, 47-62. [CrossRef](#)
- Potter, D. (2001). TV's "One-Man Bands." *AMERICAN JOURNALISM REVIEW*, 64.
- Quinn, S. (2004) 'An Intersection of Ideals: Journalism, Profits, Technology and Convergence' *Convergence*, 10(4), 109-23, [CrossRef](#)
- Radošinská, J., Kvetanová, Z., & Višňovský, J. (2020). To Thrive Means to Entertain: The Nature of Today's Media Industries. *Communication Today*, 11(1), 4–21
- Rahim, A. (2016) "Reducing Job Burnout Through Effective Conflict Management Strategy", *Current Topics in Management*, 18, 201-212.
- Ran, W., & Yamamoto, M. (2019). Media Multitasking, Second Screening, and Political Knowledge: Task-Relevant and Task-Irrelevant Second Screening during Election News Consumption. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 63(1), 1–19. [CrossRef](#)
- Ritzer, G (1993) *The McDonaldization of Society*. London: Sage.
- Ritzer, G. (1998) *The McDonaldization thesis: explorations and extensions*. London: Sage.
- Ritzer, G., & Miles, S. (2019). The changing nature of consumption and the intensification of McDonaldization in the digital age. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 19(1), 3–20. [CrossRef](#)
- Rosenblum, M. (2008), *Video News: The Videojournalist Comes of Age*, Nieman Reports, retrieved at: <https://niemanreports.org/articles/video-news-the-videojournalist-comes-of-age/>
- Rowlinson, M., & Hassard, J. (2000). Marxist political economy, revolutionary politics, and labor process theory. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 30(4), 85-111.
- Sallaz, J. J. (2014). "Labor and Capital in the Twenty-First Century: Rereading Braverman Today", *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 26(4): 299-311.
- Schaufeli, Wilmar B., Toon W. Taris, and Willem Van Rhenen (2008) "Workaholism, burnout, and work engagement: three of a kind or three different kinds of employee well-being?." *Applied Psychology*, 57(2), 173-203. [CrossRef](#)
- Schlesinger, P. (1979). *Putting "reality" together: BBC news*. Constable.
- Scott, B. (2005) A Contemporary History of Digital Journalism. *Television & New Media*, 6(1), 89-126. [CrossRef](#)
- Skowronski, J. J., & Carlston, D. E. (1989). Negativity and extremity biases in impression formation: A review of explanation. *Psychological Review*, 105, 131-142.
- Smart, B. (1999). *Resisting McDonaldization*, London: Sage.

- Smith, C. (2015). Continuity and Change in Labor Process Analysis Forty Years After Labor and Monopoly Capital. *Labor Studies Journal*, 40(3), 222-242. [CrossRef](#)
- Snider, M. (2017). "The New York Times offers newsroom buyouts, eliminates public editor post." USA Today, May 31, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2017/05/31/new-york-times-buyouts/102344652/>.
- Stahl, J. C. (2016). Effects of Deregulation and Consolidation of the Broadcast Television Industry. *American Economic Review*, 106(8), 2185–2218. [CrossRef](#)
- Steensen, S. (2011). Online journalism and the promises of new technology. *Journalism Studies*, 12(3), 311-327. [CrossRef](#)
- Stelter, B. (2013). *Top of the morning: inside the cutthroat world of morning TV* (First edition.). Grand Central Publishing.
- Thursfield, D. (2017). *Post-Fordism and Skill: theories and perceptions*. Routledge.
- Underwood, D. (1988). When MBAs rule the newsroom. (cover story). *Columbia Journalism Review*, 26(6), 23–30.
- USA Today, Gannett, May 31, 2017
- Wasko, J. (2018). Studying Political Economies of Communication in the Twenty-First Century. *Javnost-The Public*, 25(1-2), 233–239. [CrossRef](#)
- Weber, M. (1968) *Economy and Society*, 3 vols. Totowa, NJ Bedminster Press.

---

# Development Journalism, Gender Sensitivity and Sustainability in Egypt: Analyzing the Women's Voices project

KOME – An International Journal of Pure  
Communication Inquiry  
Volume 8 Issue 2, p. 43-60.  
© The Author(s) 2020  
Reprints and Permission:  
kome@komejournal.com  
Published by the Hungarian  
Communication Studies Association  
DOI: 10.17646/KOME.75672.51

**Rasha El-Ibiary**

**Department of Political Mass Media, Future University In Egypt, EGYPT**

**Abstract:** Examining the concept of “development communication” and “development journalism” in the professional development of women journalists in Egypt, this study analyzes the *Women's Voices* Project undertaken by Deutsche Welle Academy (DWA) in Egypt to develop the professional and gender sensitive skills of young women journalists. The project has taken place through a set of intensive professional trainings, leading to the establishment of the *Masr El Nas* website, intended to achieve sustainability or “media viability.” Testing the role of this “media development” project in developing the interpersonal and professional skills of women journalists and in promoting “development journalism,” through *Masr El Nas*, the methods used include in-depth interviews with the project managers, trainers and selected trainees, and a thematic content analysis of *Masr El Nas*, as a case study of development journalism.

Research findings indicate there is no nation-wide impact for the project, since it has operated in a tight media environment with a variety of laws strangulating media freedom, as well as media development projects. The project, as a result, failed to achieve “media viability.” Yet, it could reach many of its small-scale goals, such as developing the interpersonal and professional skills of women journalists, enhancing gender sensitive reporting, using state-of-the-art technology, reporting on the people, and engaging local communities and attempting to develop them, as the interviews indicated. The content analysis showed that stories about marginalized women were dominant on the website, as well as stories from Upper Egypt, a blind spot for mainstream media.

**Keywords:** Communication Development, Digital Media, Media Development, Development Journalism, Gender Sensitivity, Gender Sensitive Reporting

## Introduction

Especially in developing countries where many citizens suffer from “undesired socio-economic conditions, the media has been recognized as the engine for development.” Yet, the media power is subject to the feasibility of the “operating environment” and the likelihood of adopting a development journalism model (Lencho, 2013: p.123). Development journalism, focusing on

development issues to serve ordinary people (Ismail, 2013) stems from the concept of development communication—the use of communication technology to foster development.

Operating in a democratic or a democratizing environment is crucial for development journalism since the process of “democratization” is central to development. This necessitates transformation at the societal, economic, and political levels, as well as the constitution, the electoral system, and the government practices, says Lencho (2013). Development is a “multidimensional process incorporating economic, socio-cultural... transformation” (Lencho, 2013, p. 122). It incorporates “human dignity, security, justice and equality,” say Pant and Kumar (1995, p. 50, cited in Lencho, 2013).

Central to development is ensuring diversity and gender equality both in participation and representation. Research shows women in developing countries suffer gender inequality especially in media representation and participation in development (World Association of Christian Communicators, 2015). In Egypt’s media, women do not have seniority, nor do they have editorial freedom. Gender stereotyping and sexualized representation of women in media is also common in Egypt, as they are often portrayed as passive and powerless in front of men (Institute for Women’s Studies, 2013).

Meanwhile, the tight grip on the public sphere, the absence of media freedom, and the crackdown on media development efforts have been in effect since 2014, says journalist and media trainer, Omar Mostafa (2019, personal interview). After issuing the NGOs law and media laws, in 2018 and 2019 respectively, legalizing state control over NGOs and media organizations, including online media and social media, the situation has worsened, adds Mostafa. This makes conducting a media development project targeting women journalists, along with the uncertain status of Egyptian women, media freedom and democracy, a more challenging task.

Analyzing the *Deutsche Welle Akademie (DWA)*-sponsored *Women’s Voices* project, 2014 - 2018, which aimed to empower young women journalists from around Egypt with state-of-the-art skills through their brainchild website, *Masr El Nas*, this research examines the project feasibility in producing development journalism and fostering gender equality in Egypt. Operating in a tight media environment, this research raises questions and attempts to provide answers on the viability of the project, and the extent to which it can improve the status of Egyptian women journalists and what represents an effective development journalism model. Using a mixed methods approach to boost the results, it combines in-depth interviews with the project manager, trainees, trainers, media professionals and experts, as well as a thematic content analysis of the *Masr El Nas* website, to evaluate its representation of development aspects, gender and geographical diversity, and its likelihood to yield a difference.

## **Development Communication/Journalism**

Development communication—communication about development operations—aims to inform the audiences about development initiatives, activities and results (Mefalopulos 2008). Development communication has two primary roles: (a) a *transforming role*, bringing in social change in a way that will bring a higher quality of life, where communication is an instrument to achieve these objectives; and (b) a *socializing role*, seeking to maintain some of the established values of society. Playing these roles, development communication seeks to create an atmosphere for change and provide *innovation* through which society may change (Choudhury, 2011: 3-4).

Development journalism is “a new attitude towards the treatment of certain subjects in relation to development, designed to serve ordinary people and not the elite,” (Chalkley quoted in Ismail, 2013: pagenumber) by reporting on development issues in society and how society

was developing. To realize the goals of development journalism, Banda (2006) notes that a development journalist has to motivate the audience to actively cooperate in development; and must defend the interests of those concerned, reporting “ideas, programs, activities and events, ...related to an improvement of the living standard.” The essence of development journalism rests on promoting holistic development that equally benefits the people (Wimmer and Wolf, 2005).

“Media development”—the overall development of the media in a country—it reflects the status of free media expression, pluralism, democracy and gender equality. The goal of media development is to create and sustain a “healthy media sector,” say Susman-Pena (2012), whereby the media must be free, independent, professional, and reach out to many populations, offering diverse perspectives and providing people with the information they need to make sound decisions and hold governments accountable. It also means that people can freely create, distribute, and exchange content—since the media cut across all sectors in society, its potential for impact is enormous (Susman-Pena, 2012). To reach its full potential, media development necessitates democracy and freedom of expression.

In developing countries, media development is nurtured through projects conducted by international governmental organizations of well-established democracies to foster development, using all communication tools including interpersonal, audio-visual and mass media (Colle, 2002). Development Journalism is a tool of media development, whereby journalists apply the ideals learned in training workshops, in a way that would be more inclusive to the society’s grassroots. Sustainability, or “media viability,” as a media development goal, says Schneider et al (2016), not only includes financial sustainability, but also the media outlets’ ability to produce high quality journalistic content in the long term.

Development journalism dates to the 1960s in the Philippines, where Alan Chalkley coined the term “development journalist” during a Thomson Foundation course. Chalkley (1968) identified the main tasks of a journalist as (1) to report the facts, (2) to interpret those facts within “their framework” and “draw conclusions” and (3) a third task that can be called “promotion,” which includes promoting the facts and bringing them home to readers (quoted in Gunaratne and Hasim 1996: 98). In the same vein, Galtung and Vincent (1992) urged journalists to relate development to the “people” by reporting people as subjects, actors and agents rather than objects or victims; and define problems and solutions as clearly as possible, taking into account “ecological balance,” and factors such as gender, race, class and nation (quoted in Gunaratne and Hasim, 1996: 99). These ideals indicate that gender balance and gender sensitive reporting, which can “help generate respect for the individual regardless of sex,” (Joerger and Taylor, 2004: iiv) lie at the heart of development journalism.

Nevertheless, there are different views on the impact of media development. “Building the media as an institution means that it in turn will support other institutions,” analyzes Susman-Pena (2012). A credible and trustworthy media would provide informative reporting about other development issues leading the people to support development. In contrast, John Merrill (1971: 240) doubted that the outcome of media development can be projected for an entire nation. “One might as well study the impact of a message on one person and project it to a whole group of people.” It would be unrealistic to expect more than that, he adds.

Despite its benign intentions, development journalism—focusing on society and updating people with development information—has been widely criticized on practical and conceptual grounds. Shafer (1991) criticized development journalism for not enhancing the media’s watchdog function (cited in Ismail 2013). Other scholars argue that it has “no fixed terms of practice,” which creates variations in its application. Due to the malpractices of developing countries in applying development journalism, its presumed goal of ‘promoting development’, has been assumed as essentially serving national and government agendas (Ismail, 2013).

Asserting that development journalism should be a critical evaluation of government development programs or act as a watchdog on the government, Ogan (1982, p.10) says, development journalism is “the critical examination, evaluation and report of the impact of development programs which demands that the mass media be independent of government.” In short, development journalism is meant to serve society with a socially responsible press (Ismail, 2013).

However, with the global variations in development journalism practices, it is important to note how it works in developing countries with different realities. Shah (1992, cited in Ismail 2013) points to the need to reconceptualize development journalism, since, according to Kamal the ‘noble conception’ of development journalism has been corrupted in various situations to serve the ruling elites (cited in Ismail 2013). Development journalism is highly influenced by diverse social, economic, cultural and political conditions of a country, says Ismail (2013). In Asia, it refers to “the ‘government and elites’ news, rather than promoting the citizens’ voice” (Ismail, 2013, p.26).

Due to those practices, scholars differ about development journalism. While some denounce development news as “a camouflage for government control” or news management, others argue, development journalism was and still face struggles and misconceptions, as a “new” brand of journalism (Ismail, 2013). Waisbord (2010) says development journalism is an “obsolete term,” “unfitting for developing countries,” since it is unlikely that authoritarian countries allow critical watchdog journalism required for development journalism to function (cited in Ismail, 2013).

Efficient development journalism, thus, necessitates policies granting diversity. Journalists, governments, development partners and the general public need to learn about the role that communications and media can play in political change. However, it must be noted that supporting and strengthening the media in shifting political dynamics is a long-term process that needs persistence and involvement of all stakeholders. This includes involving journalists, NGOs, and civil society organizations and avoiding replacing “donor-driven agendas” for local aspirations and priorities. In addition, there is a need to encourage governments to commit to media development by legislating freedom of information, building information databases and making them accessible to journalists and the public (Wilson and Bama, 2007).

## **Status of the Media and Media Development in Egypt**

### ***Status of the Media in Egypt***

Assessing the prospects of media development in Egypt necessitates a flashback to the status of the media in Egypt. The era before Nasser was marked with “a highly politicized and vibrant media environment and significant partisanship among both media professionals and audiences.” Struggling against the occupation, many newspapers represented “a strong and dynamic partisan press” says Khamis (2011).

Since Nasser’s rule, political regimes have employed Egypt’s media to consolidate their power. Curbing down diversity and plurality, “Nasser’s nationalization of the press marked the end of its freedom, professionalism, and excellence,” says Khamis (2011). To mobilize the people behind his policies and ideologies, Nasser politicized the media under stiff regime control, established radio “to reach illiterate people in the Arab world,” monopolized all newspapers and abolished private ownership, then launched state television, to consolidate his control of all media (Mollerup, 2015).

The situation continued the same way during Sadat and most of Mubarak's time. Sadat allowed political parties, without public base, to have newspapers, but constrained them by the Supreme Press Council, which never licensed a newspaper. He officially lifted censorship, yet assigned editors in all major publishing houses, which effectively worked as a censorship mechanism (Mollerup, 2015). Torn between the desire to increase democracy and fear of its exploitation, says Khamis (2011), Sadat shifted the press system several times, towards and away from freedom and diversity (Rugh, 2004).

Mubarak's era was marked with arrests and abuse of journalists—police assaults and raids, detentions, even torture under media laws of 1995 and 1996 which continued to restrict and imprison journalists (Khamis 2011; Sakr, 2013). Egypt's media witnessed remarkable developments, such as emergence of private satellite television channels, the spread of privately owned newspapers, and growing Internet accessibility (Khamis, 2011). By 2000, private television channels were allowed, yet only licensed through the Media Free Zone and not permitted to broadcast news (Sakr, 2012). Then, the first private newspaper, *Al Masry Al Youm*, owned by influential businessmen, was licensed in 2004, and people started to have more access to the internet.

The increasing media pluralism and diversity opened the way for newspapers critical of the regime and top official to break long-held taboos (Khamis, 2011). Likewise, satellite television offered uncensored alternative to the government media (Sakr, 2013). In addition, the widespread access to the internet created a new milieu for public opinion expression, and discussions of various issues. Yet, "it was not until the 2011 revolution that the proliferation of these new media aided a genuine shift toward political reform in Egypt," says Khamis (2011).

The government's direct and indirect media repression—including censorship, subsidies, regulations and ownership—and the amount of freedom of expression eased by new technology accelerated the rate of press freedom, despite restrictions, representing "a case of media schizophrenia," says Iskandar (2006; cited by Khamis, 2011). The "new media substituted, rather than promoted," democratic practice (Seib, 2007), acting as a safety valve for the public to vent out anger at political injustices, without allowing the exercise of any political rights (Khamis, 2011).

According to Sakr (2013), the most significant transformation in Egyptian journalism are the expanding informal online spaces, allowing journalists to challenge government disinformation. Soon after the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) took overpower, journalists faced two opposing trends: a robust one that wished to retain the old system and a liberal one that sought to meet the uprising's aspirations. Meanwhile, media start-ups recruited protesters as trainees, trying to redefine journalistic professionalism (Sakr, 2013). This was necessary, asserts Iskandar (2007), most journalists in Egypt lack the culture of serving as a watchdog or a catalyst for change, since journalism education is predominantly theoretical.

### ***Media Development in Egypt***

Media control in Egypt has always strangled media development and development journalism effort. As wonders Sakr (2013) "how rules for representation affect the likelihood of reaching consensus on professional ethics." Post 2011, NGOs concerned with development journalism aspired for more liberal laws granting them freedom to collaborate with international partners. Likewise, international initiatives sought to incorporate media managers, editors and journalists in campaigns promoting journalistic transparency and accountability (Sakr, 2013). All these attempts were halted with the crack down on NGOs and issuing of the NGOs law, which strangled international collaborations (Balz and Mujaly, 2016). As a result, all foreign media development organizations ceased from working in Egypt.

Approving and implementing the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law in August 2018 and the Media Regulation Law in July 2018, the government can now regulate and restrict online freedom of expression and jail online users seen as threatening the regime. Moreover, counterterrorism and state of emergency laws grant courts the right to prosecute bloggers and online activists for “peaceful criticism.” With those regulations, the Supreme Council for Media Regulations has the power to put citizens with more than 5000 followers on social media, personal blogs or websites under state supervision, blocking or suspending their accounts (Muslim, 2019).

Naila Hamdy (2019, personal interview) confirmed, the launch of the NGOs law has directly affected media development agencies, “who chose to pull out of Egypt because they found it is not a good time to work here.” Mostafa (2019) has witnessed several instances when media development organizations were “forced by the security to stop their activities.” This include, GIZ, Thompson Reuters and *El-Sot El-Hor* (the free voice), a website operating with Polish funding. DW is not an exception from this despite *Women’s Voices* ability to operate under those circumstances, he adds.

Some argue, journalistic training is necessary and urgent, despite performing in a tight media environment. Becker (2003) says journalists need to learn the basics and be ready to choose what to report on and how, when this is possible. Meanwhile, in the absence of international organizations, locally offered media training is positively seen by Hamdy (2019), as a good sign. Mostafa (2019), however, argues, “it is not up to the same quality offered by foreign organizations. The design of the training, the analysis of trainees’ needs used to enrich the content of training offered by foreign organizations.” Some local companies get famous journalists—lacking the training skills—to train. For many, it is more of a business, “Even when the training is offered for free, quality is not guaranteed,” says Mostafa.

### **Media Development and Women in Egypt**

The crackdown on media development, along with the absence of a consensus on media professionalism and the low status of women is reflected in the absence of gender sensitive reporting in local media in Egypt. Mona Badran (2019, personal interview), a media professor and trainer, confirms “the state media always tackle women in a negative way. When there is an attack on women, they ask questions that held women responsible rather than support them.”

As for media training on gender sensitivity, Badran noticed that “younger generations are more willing and able to learn and apply the concepts of gender sensitive reporting. The outcome and follow up reports prove more positive representation of women issues.” Menegatti and Rubini (2017) clarify, gender sensitivity is reflected in the significant role of language in defining gender, affecting gender roles in society. “Linguistic processes and verbal communication are... powerful means through which sexism and gender discrimination are perpetrated and reproduced.” Gender stereotypes are usually “attached to the corresponding social roles,” they say (p.1).

Women in the Arab world, says Sakr (2002), experience what Deniz Kandiyoti (2000: xiv) call “double jeopardy.” Not only are they subjected to large scale restrictions in civic and political participation, but also, they are denied autonomy by discriminatory laws, yielding authority to their male guardians to decide whether they work or travel. As a result, women are predominantly barred from development programs and access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This “gender divide” is an important aspect of the digital divide. As a UNDP report (2005) emphasized, “ICT can be a powerful catalyst for political and social empowerment of women, and the promotion of gender equality” (Mandour, 2009, p.9).

Meanwhile, the UN places the lack of information access the third most important issue facing women after poverty and violence (UNESCO, 2003, cited in Mandour 2009). Research

on the impact of ICT on the gender gap in Egypt indicates there is a need to adopt policies supporting women's participation, as a promising field for improving women engagement. However, women must be equipped with skills to prepare them for these roles (Mandour, 2009).

With the lack of access and participation in ICT use and production, new technologies could become a significant factor in marginalizing women (Hafkin and Taggart, 2001); however, a positive aspect of ICT is strengthening women's political empowerment (United Nations, 2005). ICT has the potential to significantly increasing women's voice and enhancing their participation in public life where they employ technology to empower themselves... raise awareness, develop networks, and increase advocacy for women's causes. ICT can thus be used to pressure policymakers to respond to women's perspectives and concerns, leading to more gender-equitable policies and social services (World Bank, 2004, cited in Mandour 2009).

According to a survey on social media impact and potential for women empowerment, most respondents felt social media could enhance women's participation in different aspects of public life. Yet, there were some doubt about the empowering effects of social media in the absence of actual changes in gender equality legislations and rights on the ground (The Role of Social Media, 2011). Muslim (2019, p. 26) coincides technology is "enabling and empowering women in environments that are politically and religiously restrictive" in three aspects, "knowledge building" despite censorship; providing a "wider range of voices and initiatives;" and inspiring women to establish "far reaching relationships and alliances which can create allies and greater interventions."

According to Muslim (2019), in the last decade, women in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region have used the internet to garner support for their work and disseminate images and information about social and political issues. "This has created a connectivity for women's rights activists where they are able to create alternative ideas around identity politics, citizenship, and political participation in mediated discursive spaces," says Muslim. As a result, women can "redefine patriarchal gender roles while questioning the sociocultural, economic, political and legal institutions constraining them" (p. 26).

## Methods

Examining the concept and theory of "media development" and "development journalism" in the professional development of women journalists in Egypt, this study analyzes *Women's Voices* project undertaken by DWA in Egypt between 2014-2018. Seeking to develop the professional and gender sensitive skills of young women journalists, *Women's Voices* has taken place through a set of intensive professional trainings, leading to the establishment of the *Masr el Nas* website, as a training hub for applying development journalism, and to ascertain the sustainability and "media viability" of the project. Deliberately avoiding politics, *Masr El Nas*, which translates as "the people of Egypt," founded by the young women journalists, has been a milieu for stories about significant people, places and traditions/events from all around Egypt.

Seeking to foster gender equality in Egypt through gender sensitive reporting is key to the reporting approach of *Masr El Nas*. Media development, development journalism and gender sensitivity goals were sought in *Women's Voices* project at two levels: (1) personal and professional development of the trainees through capacity building journalistic training, (2) applied development journalism reflected in their coverage of their local communities on *Masr El Nas* website. To examine the efficacy of each level, the methods applied include (1) in-depth interviews with the project managers, trainers and selected trainees on the project details and (2) to examine the quality of "development journalism" a thematic content analysis of the *Masr el Nas* website identifies if the themes covered addressed and served the goals of gender sensitivity, development journalism and "media development" at large.

The in-depth interviews with the trainees have taken place predominantly by telephone or through social media communication, using text and voice messages. A few audio-recorded interviews have taken place in person. The interviews have primarily addressed the following research questions, based on the project's goals, identified in next section.

***RQ1: Capacity Building and Professional Development***

How has the capacity building/professional development training affected your views, role, skills and professional performance?

***RQ2: Supporting Development in Local Communities, Women in Particular***

In what way, if any, do you support or help development in your local community, especially women?

***RQ3: Whether Mas El Nas is Reflecting or Fostering Development, Supporting Local Women***

Whether or not has the *Masr El Nas* website been positively reflecting or fostering micro-level development and supporting women in local communities?

**Case Study: *Women's Voices Project***

***Phase one: Women's Voices***

Phase one of *Women's Voices* started in 2014 with the purpose of raising the awareness of experienced mid-career women journalists regarding gender and sexuality, focusing on interpersonal skills and capacity building, says Osama Asfour (2019, personal interview), trainer and coordinator with *DWA*. "The project was planned to counter the lack of gender balance in journalism positions in Egypt," says Asfour. "The idea of *Women's Voices* is to make more voices for women in the media—by empowering women and developing their interpersonal skills so that they can hold senior positions—that is to make voices for women who have no voice!" he added.

The first phase focused on raising the awareness experienced women journalists about gender and boosting their interpersonal skills. It included what it means "to be a woman" in Egypt, the meaning of gender, women's media representation and hidden media messages about gender stereotypes. "It was clear that most women attending the workshop had never talked openly about gender barriers, lower wages than their male counterparts and sexual harassment at the workplace. Participants were also looking for ways to build their self-esteem," indicated a *Deutsche Welle* report (Egypt: Networking Women Journalists, 2014).

Participants were trained on using their body language and voice in interviews, raising their awareness of their competencies. At the end, they had to identify their next professional goals and how they are going to achieve them. To ensure sustainability, the best trainees were selected to take a Training of Trainers (TOT), so that they would be ready to pass this experience to fellow journalists. This was followed by a Coaching Training, where a group of journalists were chosen to get trained by the TOT trainees to apply what they learned while getting on-the-spot feedback from DW trainers, says Asfour (2019, personal interview).

***Outcomes of phase one***

Outcomes of phase one included founding of the *Egyptian Women's Media Union (EWMU)*, at the closing conference of 2014, and selecting the best TOT trainee in 2014, Soha Tarek, to

become DW's main trainer in Egypt, as well as Trainers' Supervisor and Chief Editor of *Masr El Nas*, from 2016 to 2018.

Tarek (2019, personal interview) says she learned in the TOT qualities that benefited her in her output throughout the journey with *DWA*. These include, (1) absorbing reactions and dealing with different personalities; (2) organizing the meeting room for a useful and active training; (3) designing and planning workshops; (4) time management; (5) the techniques of meta-plan (using colored cards); (6) the benefits of using different learning methods; (7) the trainer's body language; (8) the differences between brainstorming and energizing activities; (9) solving sudden problems during the trainings; and (10) the importance of following up after finishing the training.

As for the establishment of *EWMU*, Shahira Amin (2019, personal interview), independent journalist and board member, says "it was established to empower and support women journalists and provide training to journalists in Egypt since 2015." Lending legal, moral and professional support to media women, especially those in provinces outside Cairo where training opportunities are few, *EWMU* organized hundreds of training workshops in Suez and the Delta and Upper Egypt for young professionals - women and men - covering ethics, writing skills, conducting TV interviews, editing, and investigative reporting. In addition, in 2016, the *EWMU* was awarded Responsible Leaders' Award by the BMW Foundation, partnered with regional and international organizations, such as the Friedrich Ebert foundation, UNFPA and *Tha'era* network, says Amin (2019, personal interview).

During the Friedrich Ebert partnership and sponsorship, the *EWMU* provided training workshops covering more than fifteen provinces, and its board member were trained on sustainability and proposals' writing. Sponsored by Friedrich Ebert, the *EWMU* launched their own website to give visibility to the investigative works written and produced by their trainees. "The stories were also published by various media outlets and included award winning pieces on women's right of to their inheritance and a report on gender violence," says Amin.

Afterwards the *EWMU* partnered with UNFPA for a series of training workshops on family planning, reproductive health rights and FGM. "*EMWU* has been commissioned by UNFPA to organize a new series of workshops in Luxor and Cairo for journalists, covering family planning and birth control," adds Amin. Finally, *EMWU* has partnered with *Tha'era*, a regional network of women from social democratic parties in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia to conduct advocacy trainings for members of the parties (Amin, 2019, personal interview).

### ***Phase Two: More Women's Voices***

Phase two of the project, *More Women's Voices*, running 2015-2018, avoided some of the obstacles encountered in phase one, as some of the trainees, from governorates outside Cairo, apologized for reasons related to male superiors, fathers or husbands, who discovered they would spend a week away. *More Women's Voices*, says Asfour (2019, personal interview), sought to train women journalists around Egypt in their own locales: Aswan, Asyut, Alexandria and Port Said.

To widen the scope of training chances, trainees were selected from each of these four cities and also from relatively smaller surrounding cities. For example, trainees from Alexandria were selected from Alexandria and Beheira as well, trainees from Assiut were selected from Assiut, Sohag and New Valley, since they are closeby cities. The trainees were a mix of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years of Mass Communication students and fresh graduates. "The initial purpose of *More Women's Voices* was to inhibit gender culture and develop personal capacity at an early age," says Asfour, "so that young women journalists can be ready for the job market." In addition, the training focused on brainstorming an idea of a digital media project.

“The purpose was to create an online platform for them where they can work from their own cities,” says Asfour (2019, personal interview).

Upon finishing the capacity building training in four governorates, top performing students from each workshop attended a bootcamp in Cairo, “to validate a digital media idea and have a concept and specifications developed,” says Asfour. The bootcamp included intense workshops on conducting needs assessment, business modelling, project management and marketing, and how to structure a team, says Asfour (2019, personal interview). By the end of the bootcamp, they developed a digital platform idea, *Masr El Nas* website, and designed its specifications under the supervision and guidance of experts in media, project management, and entrepreneurship (Asfour, 2019, personal interview).

### ***Major Outcome of Phase Two: Masr El Nas Website***

Launched at the end of 2016, the *Masr El Nas* is the brainchild of *More Women’s Voices* trainees. “Taking ownership of the website is the main reason why journalists reported stories in a volunteer basis for three years,” says Soha Tarek (2019, personal interview), the main *DWA* trainer in Egypt, and Supervisor and Chief Editor of *Masr El Nas*. While Ms. Tarek herself is a byproduct of *phase one*, she became a major catalyst for change in *phase two*, guiding and inspiring students throughout the journey. “During the run-up to the launch of *Masr El Nas* website, extensive journalistic training was taking place during 2016 to produce a large variety of stories, enough to launch a website,” says Tarek. “A blog carrying the same name was initially formed to encourage the trainees to report stories and see them published online and to share them among their communities.” The stories published in the blog were republished later in the website, says Tarek.

The editorial policy of *Masr El Nas* (2016) stated that *Masr El Nas* is a non-profit website, depending solely on the voluntary work of its contributors. The main body of contributors consists of women journalists from different parts of Egypt, aiming to enhance the role of women journalists in Egypt, and giving them the opportunity to publish stories representing their unique locale. The journalistic material published in *Masr El Nas* is characterized by its “story telling” nature, emphasizing Egyptian society and its concerns, with its different social and age strata, to enhance the value of local journalism (*Masr El Nas* Editorial Policy, 2016).

Deliberately skipping politics, the website is divided into three sections: (1) “*Woshoush*” or Faces: profiles of local and influential people; (2) “*Hekayat*” or Stories: features about traditions, practices, achievements of local Egyptians, and (3) “*Foshetna*” or Our Outing: featuring pictures and stories about historical or significant places in the different governorates, not usually placed under media spotlight. “This section aims to enhance tourism in under-discovered spots,” says Tarek. In 2018, a new feature, mobile video, was introduced to the website, showing stories covered by mobile phones, after a mobile journalism (MoJo) workshop had taken place, she adds.

To run this website during 2017-2018, trainees were offered various training types: journalistic, management and technical. The last phase of training also included financial “Media Viability”—how to find a sponsor for the website, after *DWA* informed participants that the project had ended, and they will stop funding the website. In Media Viability, trainees learned to search online for funding organizations, to write proposals about the project, with the help of trainers, says Asfour. Establishing and funding of the website for two years was a serious attempt at realizing media sustainability, yet financial viability was a distant goal due to the current political circumstances, says Antje Bauer, the project manager.

Sustainability, argues Asfour, was partly realized through the amount of development achieved by the trainees, not only through the training they had, but also their lives have completely changed. “They cannot accept anymore any compromise on their personal or

professional freedom. Some of them are now working in mainstream media and advancing in their jobs,” says Asfour. As explains, Basma Rashad, one of the participants from Aswan, “It is unacceptable now that I work under limits on my freedom of expression and professionalism anymore, after the quality of journalism I experienced in *Mas El Nas*.”

## **Research Findings:**

### ***RQ1: Capacity Building and Professional Development***

Concerning how has the capacity building training affected their views, role, skills and professional performance, all respondents concurred that their vision in life, for themselves and their surrounding has immensely shifted to a more liberal open-minded approach. According to Samar Mohamed (2019), PR Officer at Change Academy, “My first lesson with *DWA* was that I should always try to reach my goals regardless of societal or gender obstacles because I am a girl from upper Egypt. I learned that I could do what I want if I just try.

Hanan Fawzy, another *DWA* trainee, says she now adheres to a more liberal approach in life. “I deserted a lot of my traditional ideas, and I now think that everyone has the right to do what they want,” she says. “I became more open to life and more self-confident and self-assured. I learned to accept my own mistakes and learn from them.” At the professional level, Fawzy says,

I became more daring to go through experiences, which requires a lot of wisdom and patience. Knowing my rights and responsibilities, when I found myself less appreciated and unable to work freely, I did not hesitate to quit a job so that I keep my self-respect and self-appreciation in everything that I do, and I don't regret it.

Ivonne Medhat, journalist from Port Said, who became a journalist at *Al Shorouk* newspaper concurs, “I owe *DWA* all the professional skills and entire journalistic cult that I apply now in my work at *Al-Shorouk* newspaper, a job that I earned thanks to *DWA* training.” The technical skills she acquired most significantly include, she says, how to manage a website and upload material gave her a unique caliber at work. Managerial wise, Medhat says, “I learned to manage differences and the different opinions among the group members, and how to make my team less stressed,” adding, “I learned from Soha so many things, at the professional and personal levels.”

Another *DWA* trainee, Rashad, says she benefited from “the multiplicity of personal and professional skills acquired through this project, beyond journalistic skills, such as business management: “finding our own project, certainly boosted my capabilities.” At the personal level, she says, “travelling on my own gave me a personal space. This was a milestone for me to realize. Now if there is training or work, I can easily travel in my own.” Another trainee, Dina El-Naggar, a journalist at *Al Masry Al Youm* in Alexandria, says her caliber make her special at work. “I am now asked to do special reports that none of my colleagues at work can do,” adding, “Now, knowing I was trained with *DWA*, I am assigned to make features using videography.” Applying a gender sensitive approach, El-Naggar says, “In the content of features, I choose a creative angle that supports women, directly or indirectly.

Trainees have also learned to be more persistent and resilient. Lamia Mohamed, another *DWA* trainee, says “I am now more determined to achieve my goals.” She explains, “I became able to face problems, to see the situations different angles, and treat them in a more logical way before taking decisions.” She adds, “I also acquired “persuasion” skills, to get my rights, and complain about the traditions and norms preventing me from getting my rights.”

### ***RQ2: Supporting Development in Local Communities, Women in Particular***

As for benefiting local communities, especially women and women journalists in their areas, (RQ2), Fawzy says, “my self-confidence made me more trustworthy for my workmates. They trust my judgment about the different professional and personal situations they face.” El-Naggar has created an online network of co-corkers, mostly women, where she shares the technical skills, she learned with *DWA*. Likewise, Lamia Mohamed, another *DWA* trainee, asserts she now has the power to help others whenever possible.

Likewise, Samar Bahnasawy says,

I support my female colleagues to become more positive and effective and ask for their rights even if they are small rights. I learned in the training to be able to find for myself and other women good job opportunities without having to go to Cairo. The trainings encouraged me to seek my dreams. I had a dream of studying Business Administration, and now I earned a scholarship from the Communication Ministry to study MBA.”

As for empowering other women, Lamia Mohamed, coincides, “I advise my friends on how to live their life without fear of facing people and defending their rights.” Mohamed adds that she helps her friends “who still cannot find their way to find it and help them find their skills and develop them.”

Dina Mahmoud, producer at *Sout Masr* channel from Aswan, says “I support every girl who faces the same societal difficulties I faced for being a girl from upper Egypt, passing on my experience and how I overcame those difficulties.” Mahmoud established a project in Aswan called *Genderist*, for women journalists to write about indigenous women in upper Egypt, and the different types of gendered suffering they face, such as the use of violence against them, discrimination, bullying, female circumcision, sexual harassment, marital rape and marriage of minors. She says, “Now I support many girls who need a lot of support to know their rights and insist on getting them.”

In addition, Medhat says she passes on her knowledge to her colleagues at work, whether they are newly hired or just trainees. “It makes me happy that I know something, and I can pass it to other colleagues and benefit them.” Being a good image for *Masr El Nas*, Medhat says, “My boss asks me to get colleagues from *Masr El Nas* to work in *Al Shorouk*. Knowing our work, he trusts we are well educated and can provide good quality journalism.”

### ***RQ3: Whether Mas El Nas is Reflecting or Fostering Development, Supporting Local Women***

As for the role of *Masr El Nas* in women’s development and societal development at large (RQ3), according to Hanan Fawzy,

*Masr El Nas* was a breath of fresh air for local working women, women journalists or local culture that nobody has ever heard of. Many women came under the spotlight through *Masr El Nas*, whether women with business startups, women with problems, or women who wished for their voices to be heard.

Societal development, says Bahnasawy, journalist from Assiut, “happened exclusively to women journalists who were received *DWA* training.” Lamia Mohamed agrees “we always shed light on issues related to upper Egypt, a blind spot for the mainstream media.” She adds,

The most viewed and read topics are the ones from upper Egypt because they are very scarce, and the mainstream media always focus on Cairo, not paying attention to issues related to upper Egypt nor humanitarian issues in general.

According to El Naggar, “I always think of women when I think of a story to write about. I think and reconsider the angle of my story to make it positive, promoting development at grassroots level.” Hoda Magdy, a journalist from Port Said, concurs, “In *Masr El Nas* we like to focus on the success stories of local women despite the hard circumstances that they face, especially in upper Egypt.” She adds, “our goal as a community media was to reach out to places and people far away from the media and break the elite-oriented centralization of media in Egypt.”

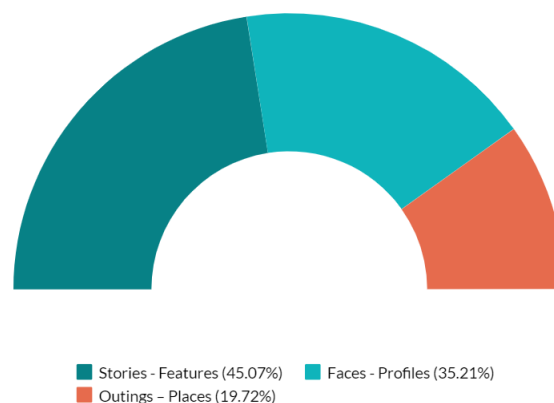
Stories of local people have inspired other local people. Rashad asserts, “people follow the development stories about other people in the same areas and use it as an inspiration to become developed themselves, by taking a similar path or starting a similar project.” She adds, “People also trust and consume from the local projects that we write about in *Masr El Nas*.”

### Thematic content analysis of the Masr El Nas website

The thematic content analysis of the *Masr El Nas* website during 2017-2018 demonstrates that the overall goals of the project were predominantly met. This feeds to some extent into the journalism development goals. Avoiding politics, the 213 stories published on *Masr El Nas* are thematically divided into three sections as follows: *Hekayat* or stories of local people (features), 96 stories (45.07%); *Woshoush* or faces, profiles of local people, 75 stories (35.21%); and *Foshetna* or our vacation about special places and outings, 42 stories (19.71%) (see *Chart 1*). According to a report by Soha Tarek, the Chief Editor, almost 65% of all stories took gender balance into account, or exclusively covered women’s issues.

The themes addressed in the features and profiles sections were predominantly about local people, especially women, who have special achievements or established a local project using a simple idea. “People used to wait for the stories about them to get published. Then, they start showing them to other people proudly. They started to feel they are doing something meaningful and worthwhile, and they became an inspiration for others too,” says Ahlam Al-Mansy, an independent journalist. Mohamed adds, “Women in rural areas have lots and lots of stories to tell. They just need to be heard. They deserve that their voice reaches out to the world.”

Chart 1 -Thematic Distribution of Stories



A detailed analysis of the themes addressed on the *Masr El Nas* website (*Chart 2*) shows that women’s issues represented the largest number of stories covered by *Masr El Nas* (36.6%). These are followed by stories about local culture, tackling norms, customs, traditions, and art (29.1%), which indicates the importance given to the unique aspects of the local culture. Following are the stories about locally established projects, male focused, representing 15% of all stories in *Masr El Nas*, which shows attention to both fostering development and realizing gender balance. Finally, food (9.85%) and history (9.38%) stories reflected special facets of Egypt’s culture and history, rarely covered in conventional media.

Stories about local women of Egypt (36.6%), shown in *Chart 2*, were thematically analyzed to explore the aspects of women’s issues covered in *Masr El Nas*. This analysis (*see Chart 3*) has shown women-related stories are predominantly about women in business who have established local projects, representing 39.7% of stories tackling women issues. This is followed by stories related to women in culture or art (24.3%), usually about women performing local traditions on different occasions or women using their talent in drawing or music to foster development. Then, comes the stories about women in general (23.07%), which include profiles with successful women or editorials by women or men, about women who influenced their lives, published in special women occasions. Stories about women’s rights (8.97%) were remarkably fewer despite its women empowerment goals, and women in sports (3.8%) made up the lowest percentage, since the website was more focused on business and development issues related to women.

According to Tarek, in 2018 the website launched two campaigns under the Hashtag *#Tell\_her\_story*. The first was in March 2018 in conjunction with three occasions: International Women’s Day – March 8; Egyptian Women’s Day – March 16; and Mothers’ Day – March 21. The second campaign was on October 15<sup>th</sup> in conjunction with the International Day of Rural Women. “The first campaign was remarkably successful as per audience interaction in social media comments, as well as the posts’ reach in social media. Some articles were published in mainstream media outlets about *Masr El Nas* and its campaign,” says Tarek. The total number of published articles in this campaign include 19 articles and three interactive videos on social media, she adds.

Geographical diversity, or the goal of getting women journalists from all around Egypt to report from their own local cities and about their local communities is meanwhile realized in the geographical distribution of stories, shown in *Chart 4*. Although the largest percentage of

Chart 2 - Themes Addressed on Masr El Nas Website

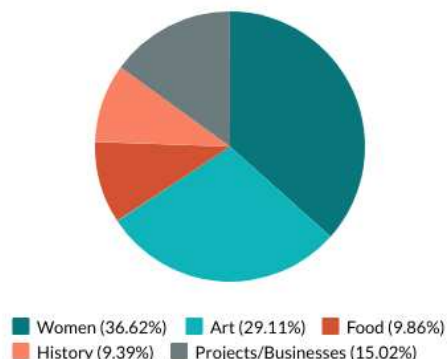
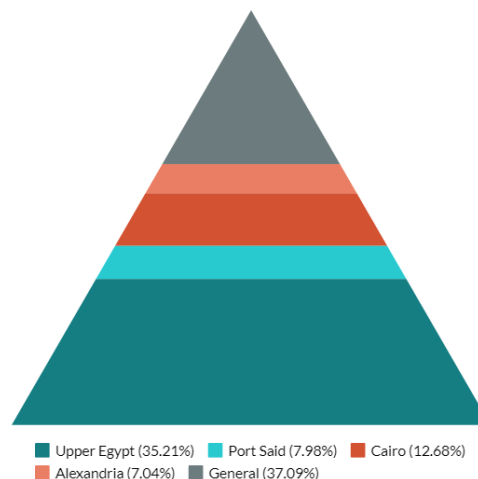


Chart 3 - Thematic Distribution of Stories about Women



Chart 4 - Geographical Distribution of Stories



stories (37.08%) are not location-based, representing historical profiles, or features on special norms or customs, yet Upper Egypt—a blind spot for mainstream media—represented the largest producing area for *Masr El Nas* stories. Stories from Upper Egypt (35.2%) came from five major cities: Aswan, Asyut, New Valley, Luxor and Qena. This indicates the website focused on the areas marginalized and less represented in mainstream media. The stories from Cairo (12.6%) were reported while students were attending training on various journalistic skills, says Tarek.

### **Discussion and Conclusion:**

Despite being a unique case study, reaching to a great extent most of the “project’s goals,” *Women’s Voices* as a media development project cannot yield powerful development in a stiff media environment. Media development necessitates a minimal level of democracy and freedom of expression, as well as persistence and involvement of all stakeholders (Wilson & Bama, 2007). As a result, *Women’s Voices* could not aim to sustain a “healthy media sector” since this necessitates a free, professional and independent media, reaching out for most people (Susman-Pena, 2012).

While the *Women’s Voices* project does not precisely reflect the goals of development communication—not focusing on state-level development—journalism development is more represented in the *Masr El Nas* website, serving ordinary people and reporting only about self-development at the grassroots level and motivating and engaging people (Banda, 2006; Wimmer and Wolf, 2005). Journalists have reported on the people as subjects and actors, considering “ecological balance” (Gunaratne and Hasim, 1996), as the content analysis shows.

Established to realize sustainability, or Media Viability, *Masr El Nas* only achieved the practical facet of media viability related to producing high quality content. Despite training on proposal writing and fundraising, once *DWA* funding ceased to exist, it was impossible for the trainees to find an alternative who would fund a media outlet amongst the new laws strangulating independent media operations, international partnerships and freedom, and especially in relation to receiving funds (Muslim, 2019).

Leaving out politics, however, *Women’s Voices*, did not train journalists on providing a critical evaluation of the government development programs and their impact on the people, nor on enhancing the media’s watchdog function (Ismail, 2013). While this was not the project’s goal, it is yet a needed skill since most journalists in Egypt lack the norm of serving as a watchdog or a catalyst for change (Iskandar, 2007). The project focused more on developing the professional journalistic and interpersonal skills of young women journalists to empower them in society and enable them to find a good job. These are also the goals of development journalism, especially in the absence of proper media education yielding skilled journalists, the scarcity of training due to new laws, and the lack of a suitable media environment. Becker (2003) asserts journalists need to learn the basics and be ready to choose what to report on and how and when this is possible.

Paradoxically, many of them now refute compromising their freedom and professionalism and seek jobs in different fields due to the sturdy media environment. One of the trainees, Fawzy, resigned from a journalism job to keep her self-respect and professional ethics. Others, now working in mainstream newspapers, struggle to incorporate gender sensitivity in their reporting and use innovative reporting techniques, such as videography. The journalists’ professional performance in the media outlets where they work indicates at least a level of ‘media viability’ has been achieved. Using advanced ICT techniques is a development milestone that *Women’s Voices* has reached, overcoming the “gender-divide” in technology plaguing most women in developing countries (Mandour, 2009), despite facing “double jeopardy” (Sakr, 2002) and bearing with the lack of gender equality legislations.

“Enabling and empowering women” in terms of “knowledge building,” providing a “wider range of voices and initiatives,” and inspiring women to establish “far reaching relationships and alliances” (Muslim, 2019) through technology is also proven in Women’s Voices. In *phase one*, the *EWMU* was established to empower and provide professional training and support for women journalists across Egypt. *EWMU* also partnered with the Friedrich Ebert foundation, UNFPA and the *Tha’era* network—a regional network of women activists establishing far reaching relationships. Since *phase two*, participants still seek funding from foreign organizations, addressing them with professional proposals, while six of them are figuring out the legal requirements to keep *Masr El Nas* online, declared Rashad (2019, personal interview).

*Masr el Nas* has served as an indirect advertisement tool for women with small projects. This shows development journalism through *Masr El Nas* has motivated the audience to *actively cooperate in development*; and defended their *interests*, most notably, women. In *phase two*, the target of developing the skills of women journalists from rural areas has been realized, earning them the capacity and eagerness to develop their communities, and their proven awareness and application of gender sensitivity. The thematic analysis of *Masr El Nas* reveals a serious attempt at realizing gender balance in the stories covered, with 65% of the stories taking gender balance into consideration, as indicated by Soha Tarek’s report.

The overall roles of development communication were realized. The *transforming role* was reflected in the liberal views that women journalists acquired and started applying in dealing with their local communities, their ability to persuade others of the importance of their work, and in pursuing a higher quality of life. This is in addition to the higher journalistic ideals that apply in *Masr El Nas* and other media outlets. This was proven through the interviews and the fact that many of the participants are achieving their potential in life, whether in their careers or in social development, such as with the *Genderist* project by Dina Mahmoud. The *socializing role* is reflected in the stories about local tradition, norms, and peculiar places around the different governorates of Egypt. *Innovation* is reflected in the innovative ideas through which they write their stories, and the skills and technologies they mastered, such as uploading material to the website, editing for the online reader, and using mobile journalism and videography in reporting.

## References

- Balz, K. and Mujaly, H. 2016. “Egypt’s New NGO Law”, *Amereller*, <http://amereller.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Client-Alert-Egypt-NGO-Law-2-Dec-2016.pdf>
- Becker, L. B., Vlad, T., Mace, N. R. and Apperson, M. 2003. Midcareer Training of Journalists: Evaluating Its Impact on Journalistic Work. *James M. Cox Jr. Center for International Mass Communication Training & Research, Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Georgia*, [https://www.grady.uga.edu/coxcenter/Activities/Act\\_2003\\_to\\_2004/Materials03-04/Midcareer0304.pdf](https://www.grady.uga.edu/coxcenter/Activities/Act_2003_to_2004/Materials03-04/Midcareer0304.pdf)
- Colle, R. 2002. ‘Threads of Development Communication’ in *Approaches to Development Communication*, Jan Servaes ed., UNESCO, Paris, 2002, 137-177.
- Choudhury, P. S. 2011. “Media in Development Communication” *Global Media Journal, Indian Edition 2*, Internet: <http://www.caluniv.ac.in/global-media-journal/Winter%20Issue%20December%202011%20Commentaries/C-5%20Sen%20Choudhury.pdf>
- DW Akademie in Egypt. 2016. *Deutsche Welle*, accessible at: <https://www.dw.com/en/dw-akademie-in-egypt/a-18496535>

- Editorial Policy of Masr El Nas Website. 2016. unpublished document
- Egypt: Empowering Women Journalists. 2016. *Deutsche Welle*, accessible at: <https://www.dw.com/en/egypt-empowering-women-journalists/a-19264911>
- Gunaratne, S. and Hasim, M. S. 1996. Social responsibility theory revisited. A comparative study of public journalism and developmental journalism. *Javnost – The Public* 3(3): 97–107. [CrossRef](#)
- Gender Profile, Egypt Arab Republic. 2013. *Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World*, accessible at: <http://iwsaw.lau.edu.lb/publications/images/Country%20Gender%20Profile%20Egypt.pdf>
- Ismail, A. 2013. *Exploring the Strengths and Limitations of Development Journalism in Malaysia*, PhD Thesis, The University of Adelaide
- Joerger, C. and Taylor, E. (ed.) 2004. *Gender Sensitivity: A Training Manual*, UNESCO
- Iskandar, A. 2007. Lines in the Sand: Problematizing Arab media in the Post-Taxonomic Era. *Arab Media & Society*, accessible at: <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=226>.
- Khamis, S. 2011. The Transformative Egyptian Media Landscape: Changes, Challenges and Comparative Perspectives. *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011), 1159–1177. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/813/592>
- Lencho, N. 2013. Communicating for Development and Democratization in Ethiopia: Journalistic Practices and Challenges. *Proceedings of the National Symposium on “Establishing, Enhancing and Sustaining Quality Practices in Education,”* 122-137
- Mandour, D. A. 2009. Impact of ICT on Gender Gap in Egypt. Working paper #004. *Working Papers Series. SRC/CIDA Research Program on Gender and Work. Social Research Center, American University in Cairo*
- Mefalopulos, P. 2008. *Development Communication Sourcebook Broadening the Boundaries of Communication*. Washington: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank
- Menegatti, M. and Rubini, M. 2017. Gender Bias and Sexism in Language. in Nussbaum, J.L. (ed.) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [CrossRef](#)
- Mollerup, N. G. 2015. *Media and Place in Revolutionary Egypt: An anthropological exploration of information activism and journalism*. PhD Dissertation. Denmark: Roskilde University
- Merrill, J. 1971. The Role of Mass Media in National Development: An Open Question for Speculation. Address given at the *Mass Political Communication Institute*, Ohio University
- Muslim, S. 2019. Shifting Dynamics of Safe Spaces for Women in Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary Egypt: A Reflection on the Article, “We are not Women, We are Egyptians” *The African Journal of Gender and Religion*, 25(2) 152-170
- Ogan, C. O. 1982. Development Journalism/Communication: The Status of the Concept. *International Communication Gazette*, 29(3) 3-13. [CrossRef](#)
- Rugh, William. 2004. *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics*. London: Praeger
- Sakr, N. 2002. Seen and Starting to be Heard: Women and the Arab Media in a Decade of Change. *Social Research* 69, 821–50.
- Sakr, N. 2013. *Transformations in Egyptian Journalism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Sakr, N. 2012. Social Media, Television Talk Shows, and Political Change in Egypt. *Television & New Media* 14(4): 322–37. [CrossRef](#)
- Schneider, L., Hollifield, A. and Lublinski, J. 2016. Measuring the Business Side: Indicators to Assess Media Viability. Discussion Paper. *Deutsche Welle Akademie*, accessible at:

- <https://www.dw.com/downloads/36841789/dw-akademiediscussion-papermedia-viability-indicators.pdf>
- Seib, P. 2007. *New Media and the New Middle East*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Shah, H. 1992. Development news: its potential and limitations in the rural United States. *The Journal of Development Communication*, 3: 9-15
- Susman-Pena, T. 2012. Making Media Development More Effective: A Special Report to the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA). *Center for International Media Assistance* , 1 (3): 1-26
- Wilson, M. and Bama O. (2007) "Media and Power: How Can the Media Hold Governments in Developing Countries, International Financial Institutions and Donors to Account?" in Charlie Beckett and Laura Kyrke-Smith (Eds.) *Development, Governance and the Media: the role of the Media in Building African Society: A POLI Report*, pp. 21- 28
- The Role of Social Media in Arab Women's Empowerment. 2011. *Dubai School of Government: Arab Social Media Report 1(3)*, <https://www.arabsocialmediareport.com/UserManagement/PDF/ASMR%20Report%2003.pdf>
- Wimmer, J. and Wolf, S. (2005) Development journalism out of date? An analysis of its significance in journalism education at African universities. *Münchener Beiträge zur Kommunikationswissenschaft* 3, May [CrossRef](#)
- World Association of Christian Communicators. 2015. *Global Media Monitoring Project*. Toronto WACC, 3

### ***Personal Interviews:***

- Ahlam El Mansy, Journalist at Masr El Nas and former DW trainee, April 13, 2019
- Antje Bauer, Project Manager with DWA, June 23, 2019
- Asmaa Basel, Journalist at Masr El Nas and former DW trainee, May 16, 2019
- Basma Rashad, Journalist at Masr El Nas and former DW trainee, April 13, 2019
- Dina El Naggar, Journalist at Al Masry Al Youm newspaper, Alexandria, and former DW trainee, April 20, 2019
- Dina Mahmoud, Producer at Sout Masr channel and former DW trainee, May 11, 2019
- Hanan Fawzy, Journalist from Alexandria and former DW trainee, May 13, 2019
- Ivonne Medhat, Journalist at El Shorouk Newspaper and former DW trainee, June 6, 2019
- Lamia Mohamed, Journalist at Masr El Nas and former DW trainee, May 11, 2019
- Mona Badran, PhD, Trainer on Gender sensitive reporting at various UN organizations as well as DWA and media professor at different universities in Egypt, May 25, 2019
- Naila Hamdy, Associate Professor of Journalism, The American University in Cairo, May 28, 2019
- Omar Mostafa, Journalist and Trainer with DWA, June 16, 2019
- Osama Asfour, Trainer and Coordinator, Women's Voices project for DWA, May 20, 2019
- Samar Bahnasawy, Journalist at Masr El Nas and former DW trainee, May 6, 2019
- Samar Mohamed, PR Officer at Change Academy and former DW trainee, May 12, 2019
- Shahira Amin, Independent Journalist and co-founder of the Egyptian Media Women's Union, May 25, 2019
- Soha Tarek, Trainer, Supervisor and Chief Editor of Masr El Nas website, May 3, 2019

---

# Headlines Readers' Avoidance Attitude Towards Visual Material? Effects of the Camcorder Symbol on Selective Exposure to Headlines

KOME – An International Journal of Pure  
Communication Inquiry  
Volume 8 Issue 2, p. 61-87.  
© The Author(s) 2020  
Reprints and Permission:  
kome@komejournal.com  
Published by the Hungarian Communication  
Studies Association  
DOI: 10.17646/KOME.75672.48

**István Kósa, Blanka Bálint, Zoltán Ambrus, Andrea Sólyom and Csilla-Dalma Zsigmond**

**Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Economics, Socio-Human Sciences and Engineering, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, ROMANIA**

**Abstract:** Two quasi-experiments were conducted to test the effects of the camcorder symbol, a “peripheral cue” attached to headlines with either low or high utility, and the role of verbal and visual cognitive style in the process of headlines selection.

Three experimental groups were exposed to online headlines with camcorder symbol of a created portal and the control group to headlines without the camcorder ( $N = 250$ ).

In both experiments students who preferred visual information processing chose more headlines with the camcorder. However, those with high scores on the verbal scale chose fewer headlines without the camcorder. In addition, those with high scores on both verbal and visual scales selected more and more headlines with low utility, avoiding those with the camcorder.

In the second experiment ( $N = 160$ ) in experimental group respondents' dominant cognitive style was primed with a camcorder. Primed respondents with dominant visual cognitive style chose more headlines with the camcorder than respondents in the control group. Priming decreased the selection of headlines with the camcorder among respondents high on both scales, and average scores on verbal scale and low on visual scale, confirmed by eye-tracker.

**Keywords:** selective exposure, Dual Coding Theory, Informational Utility Model, Elaboration Likelihood Model, eye tracking

Address for Correspondence: István Kósa, email: kosaistvan@uni.sapientia.ro

Article received on the 16th Jul, 2018. Article accepted on the 4th March, 2020.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding: This work was supported by the Institute of Research Programmes, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania [grant number 12/11/28.04.2015.]

## Introduction

Today's wide-choice and fragmented media environment has become saturated with images which serve as eye-catching cues for content selection (Zillmann, Knobloch, & Yu, 2001). Up to now, however, most research has focused on news selection based on textual cues, neglecting the proliferating role of visuals (Fahmy, Bock, & Wanta, 2014; Powell, van der Meer, & Peralta, 2019). By testing three theoretical models – the *Elaboration Likelihood Model*, the *Dual Coding Theory* and the *Information Utility Model* –, the purpose of the current study is to take into consideration both cues in question. With this aim it uses headlines, with camcorder symbols attached to them in order to detect the factors and their inter-relationship that play a role in selective exposure. An ecologically valid news setting helped the research design to be accomplished: although news providers are aware of the power of imagery, and their intention is to enhance all news items with video made on the spot, it frequently happens that the camcorder symbol, suggesting the availability of a video footage, appears next to news with low utility or subjective importance.

## Selective Exposure

The present study draws on the conceptualization of selective exposure defined by Knobloch-Westerwick (2015). She partly bases her definition on the work of Sears and Freedman, considering selective exposure to be “any systematic bias in audience composition” (1967, p. 195), and completes it with the following refinement: “(..) as well as any systematic bias in selected messages that diverges from the composition of accessible message.” (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, p. 6).

Based on selective exposure paradigm formulated by Knobloch-Westerwick (2015), the current research aims to uncover some of the factors responsible for the biases, patterns in selected messages. The paradigm in question “draws on various theoretical approaches to predict selective exposure patterns and processes”, instead of searching for causes and biases in the observed behavior (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, p. 6, see more about paradigm in book).

From this perspective the purpose of the present paper is to uncover the role of three theories in channeling selective exposure by measuring the number of selected headlines and using eye-tracking. The three theories in point are: Information Utility Model, Dual Coding Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model.

## Perceived information utility effect on selective exposure

One of the most detailed theoretical concepts of utility regarding the selection of mass media messages was described by Atkin (1973), stating that information can help individuals to adapt to and cope with environment. In this meaning, individuals may perceive that a message can be considered to carry utility and offers practical application to problem-solving needs (Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2017). In order to develop more specific predictions of selective exposure to information, Knobloch-Westerwick and colleagues developed a more precise model of utility, the Informational Utility Model (IUM) (Knobloch, Dillman Carpentier & Zillmann, 2003; Knobloch, Zillmann, Gibson & Karrh, 2002; Knobloch-Westerwick, Dillman Carpentier, Blumhoff & Nickel, 2005).

This current research is partly based on this model, which makes use of an individualized perspective of informational utility, referring only to a single person's utility at a given moment. The conceptualization of its four dimensions – *magnitude*, *likelihood*, *immediacy* and *efficacy*

– permits measuring not only perceived threats but also the opportunities carried by the messages (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015).

The impact of informational utility on selective exposure has been demonstrated by empirical research (Dillman Carpentier, 2008; Dillman Carpentier, Blumhoff, & Nickel, 2005; Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2017) summarized by Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick by showing up the role of first three utility dimensions in forming selective exposure patterns in the following way:

“When the content of a message conveys increased importance of the topic (magnitude), increased probability of the topic affecting the message recipient (likelihood), or increased temporal presence of the topic (immediacy), there should be greater selective exposure to the message due to these intensity dimensions of informational utility.” (Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2017, p. 334)

The fourth dimension, namely the perceived *efficacy* was added later to the model (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). A message expressing an increased efficacy – similar to the above-mentioned increased utility intensity – also attracts more clicks and gives individuals the sensation that he or she is able to prevent, handle threats or utilize opportunities.

Taking into consideration the additive effects of the first three utility dimensions (Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2017), the impact of high efficacy carrying messages on content selection, as well as the empirical research evidence enumerated above, the first hypothesis was formulated as follows:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1).* The higher the perceived utility of the events suggested by news, the more frequently headlines are selected. Irrespective of the presence or absence of a camcorder symbol, the subjects in the three research groups, and in the control group, will select more headlines with high utility than headlines with low utility.

### **Imagery, vividness and vigilance in news research**

Although there are approaches that also take into account positive stimuli (e.g., Wentura, Rothermund & Bak, 2000), generally negative stimuli, such as danger and threats, attain more attention (Pratto & John, 1991). This view has also been discussed within communication research first focused on news media by Shoemaker (1996), who connected the notion of vividness with news, especially with bad news. Consistent with the assumption of importance of negative stimuli, some investigations – directly linked to the current research – have made use of news illustrations. Zillmann, Gibson and Sargent (1999), for example, examined the effects of photographs in news-magazines showing that, regardless of whether the photos attached contained violence or not, consumers spent more time reading the texts that had photographs attached. However, text articles with photographs depicting threats and victimization increased to a greater extent reported reading (Zillmann, Knobloch & Yu, 2001; Knobloch, Hastall, Zillmann & Callison, 2003; Sargent, 2007); the effect of thumbnail images on headline selection was moderated by mentioning cancer or other illnesses (Kim, 2016). Layout effects were also revealed by Graber (1988), who found that formal importance cues such as larger headlines and photo illustrations promoted selective reading (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015).

These results – based on the theories linked to vividness and vigilance – could explain especially the bigger effect of negative stimuli, e.g. threatening photographs or negative news on selective exposure in comparison with positive stimuli effect. However, they cannot satisfactorily describe selective exposure, because they are based on a simpler conceptualizing

and operationalizing of the reaction against negative and positive stimuli – in comparison to IUM. For the sake of exemplification, consider only one dimension of the more complex conceptualization of the utility dimensions like the above-mentioned efficacy dimension: it refers to individual's own capacity perception of preventing, handling a threat or utilizing an opportunity at a given moment.

### **Paivio and Harshman' Dual Coding Theory (DCT)**

“One of the most influential theories concerning differences in the processing of pictures and words is the dual-coding theory” – state Amit, Gottlieb and Greene (2014, p. 344). Paivio and Harshman's dual-coding theory (1983), however, focuses not only on processing/memorizing verbal and visual information, but also on acquiring information (Blazhenkova & Kozhevnikov, 2009). DCT consider that cognition implicates the activity of verbal system responsible for dealing directly with language and of nonverbal/imagery systems important for working with nonlinguistic objects and events (Clark & Paivio, 1991). Information collected are dual encoded, e.g. both in verbal and imagery systems. DCT assumes at the same time that many situations and tasks can be conceptualized verbally or nonverbally, i.e. visually, and there are people who prefer either verbal *or* visual information processing, although human thinking is a continuous interplay between these two (Paivio & Harshman, 1983). Their preference for one of two information processing styles is called cognitive style and it is different from cognitive ability. So it may happen that someone is a habitual visualizer without efficiently solving a cognitive task based on the imaginary, and conversely, a verbalizer may not be good at resolving a linguistic task (Révész, Bernáth and Séra, 1995). According to Koć-Januchta et al. (2019, p. 1), research „results confirm neurophysiological differences between people with different cognitive styles” (e.g. Jawed, Amin, Malik, & Faye, 2018; Kraemer, Hamilton, Messing, DeSantis, & Thompson-Schill, 2014). This fact has been proved by several eye-tracking investigations, showing up differences in eye-movement patterns between people characterized by diverse cognitive style (e.g. Koć-Januchta et al., 2017; Höffler, Koć-Januchta, & Leutner, 2017).

The present research focuses, on the one hand, on Childers et al. (1985) statement: in the orientation of everyday life, verbal and visual information processing style plays a role in which of them is preferred. On the other hand, it mainly focuses on the role cognitive style plays in information and news selection, and is mainly based on Plass, Chun, Mayer, and Leutner's (1998) empirical research results. In order to analyze the students' information-selection behavior they made use of the VV-BOS (Visualizer/Verbalizer Choice Behavior Observation Scale) developed by Leutner and Plass (1998). Plass, Chun, Mayer and Leutner (1998) found that students with visual cognitive style searched mainly for visual annotations, whereas those with verbal cognitive style learned from verbal annotations. Last but not least, we take into account the findings of Koć-Januchta et al.' (2017, p. 170), namely that “visualizers spent more time inspecting pictures than verbalizers, while verbalizers spent more time inspecting texts”

Based on these findings two of the hypothesis of first quasi-experiment of the current paper were formulated as follows:

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Respondents who prefer visual information processing would choose more headlines with the camcorder symbol attached.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* Respondents who prefer verbal information processing would choose more headlines without the camcorder symbol attached.

### **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**

In this research, the camcorder symbol is considered as a formal cue, anticipating having a strong effect on directing the reader's attention to a certain headline due to its vividness.

As mentioned in the introduction, news providers cannot enhance all emerging news stories with videos, and the camcorder symbol, suggesting the availability of video footage, can appear next to news with low utility. Similar to findings in studies of photographs or videos included in articles leading to an over-appreciation of their topical importance (Zillmann et al., 1999; Knobloch, Hastall, Zillmann & Callison, 2003, and for videos Rosenstiel, 2016), we attribute the same effect to the camcorder symbol. This presumption corresponds, on the one hand, to our hypothesis that the camcorder symbol, when attached to headlines with low or high utility, amplifies the subjectively perceived utility of the news content in the eyes of the readers, and hence leads to these headlines being more frequently selected. On the other hand, according to our assumption, this is due to the fact that the readers (under the effect of these "peripheral cues", used so often and deliberately in advertising), would choose the so-called "peripheral route". In the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Priester, 1994), the "central route" is used when evaluating subjects that are well-known or emotionally close to the subject, while the "peripheral route", requiring less deliberation or attention, is used in the case of less interesting, marginal subjects – headlines with low utility (1<sup>st</sup> experimental group in the current research). In the second case, a person is more likely to be influenced by certain contextual cues, outside of the central message argument, by creating pleasant (or unpleasant) associations. These cues, often referred to as "peripheral cues" (such as color, sound, sex appeal, humor, production quality), are nowadays extensively used by the advertisers to trigger simple, but pleasurable associations with the advertised product (Sundar & Kim, 2005). Photographs and video materials can be considered such cues, as well. However, it is worth placing emphasis on the fact that the visual cue (the camcorder symbol) is used in the present research as a monosemic graphic with unambiguous and unique meaning pretested before the first quasi-experiment that did not add any new detail in comparison to graphics and photographs attached to texts.

The choice between the two cognitive routes depends on the relevance of the topic. The more strongly a person feels about a certain topic, the more motivated they will be to use their time, energy and mental capacity to elaborate on that topic. When the motivation is low, the less consuming peripheral route is taken (Petty & Priester, 1994).

Based on the above-mentioned arguments the following hypotheses were formulated:

*Hypothesis 4 (H4).* In cases where a camcorder symbol is attached to headlines with low utility, but not attached to headlines with high utility (group 1), the subjects will select more headlines with low utility due to the camcorder (peripheral cue), compared to the same headlines without the camcorder symbol (group 4).

Regarding the control group, respondents were presented the same news portal (with the same news), but no camcorder symbol.

*Hypothesis (H5).* Selection of headlines with high utility (group 2) bearing the camcorder symbol will be significantly more frequent than for the same category news in the control group.

In the absence of any theory referring to specific interactions, the effective contributions of the high perceived informational utility and camcorder – a peripheral cue in the terminology of ELM – were assumed to be cumulative.

## **Present study**

Three theoretical models are involved in the present paper with the aim of explaining the effects of visual and textual cues on selection of headlines. Two of them refer to the possible role of visual cues – the ELM and the DCT – and conceptualize them as imageries that are processed differently from the texts. More important to us, however, was that they describe differently in detail the two aspects with a role in information processing: message characteristics (ELM) and personal traits (DCT). While the latter thinks in terms of memorizing and acquiring information, the ELM underlines the capacity of visual cues to trigger attention, which determines different paths in persuasion. In order to take the advantages of both models into consideration, we involved them at the same time.

Relative to the possible interplay between textual and visual factors, we also made use of IUM. It is suggested by the authors of the paper that the camcorder symbol does not only suggest to media users the possibility of visualizing video material linked to the given headline, but also a rise of perceived subjective utility of headlines at a given moment.

Two quasi-experiments were run. Both of them were based on the same theoretical framework described above, but differed in the following aspects from each other:

1. **Experimental conditions.** Three experimental groups were used in the first research design. In the second quasi-experiment – besides the control group – there was only one experimental group that, in fact, was the same as in the first quasi-experiment third condition.
2. **Priming.** In the second experiment we primed the experimental group respondents' dominant cognitive style with the camcorder symbol to show up its increased effect in comparison with the first experimental design.
3. **Eye tracking.** In order to detect differences in eye-movement patterns between people characterized by diverse cognitive style we used an eye-tracker.
4. **Main variables.** The main variables involved in the first quasi-experiment were selective exposure, utility (IUM), cognitive style (DCT) and the presence or absence of the camcorder symbol attached to headlines (ELM). In addition, in the second research design, some other variables were involved, namely the presence or absence in priming the camcorder, fixation number and first fixation.

## **First quasi-experiment**

### **Methods**

#### *Overview*

The Hungarian-language speaking BA and MA students from a university campus ( $N = 239$ ; gender  $N = 159$  women,  $N = 80$  men; average age = 23.6) read online headlines.

Our research method utilized a laboratory quasi-experiment with a control group, during which we recorded the preference for online headlines according to headlines with high utility or low utility content, and on the possibility of viewing video footage indicated by the camcorder symbol.

The first experimental group consisted of 60 students who expressed their opinions regarding the preference – for four news items out of four headlines with high utility and four headlines with low utility – with clicks that were registered by the software. We should note that in this experimental situation we attached the camcorder symbol to four headlines with low utility; two of them positive, and two negative.

In each experimental condition we used two soft news items: two headlines with almost no utility for students as distractors.

The subjects of the second experimental group ( $N = 59$ ) had as material-stimuli 10 news items, however, in their case the camcorder symbol was attached to four headlines with high utility, two of them positive, and two negative.

The third experimental group ( $N = 59$ ) were also presented with 10 headlines. In this condition camcorder symbols were attached to headlines as follows: one to a negative headline with high utility, one to a positive headline also with high utility, one symbol to a negative headline with low utility and, finally, to a positive one with low utility.

The composition of the fourth condition, used as a control group, was identical to the two groups presented above ( $N = 61$ ). The respondents, after receiving the same instructions were required to choose from the set of four headlines with high and four headlines with low utility, presented in the same order but in this control situation, the camcorder symbol was not attached to any of the headlines.

### *Pretest*

We based the conceptualization of the utility of the headlines on the four criteria from the *Informational Utility Model* (IUM): perceived magnitude, likelihood, immediacy and efficacy of threats or opportunities.

For instance, a positive news item with high perceived individual utility was entitled: *“Increasing the chances for recently graduated students in the labour market over the next six months, in Harghita county – foreign-language competence/knowledge could be an advantage.”* (‘county X’ being the county in which the respondents’ university is located). The *“increasing chance”* referred to the high magnitude of the forthcoming event, and the high likelihood of it directly affecting students in the immediate future (*“over the next six months”*) – the highly perceived immediacy of the event. The part of the title stating: *“foreign-language competence/knowledge could be an advantage”* indicated the high efficacy – the students’ opportunity to control or influence their current circumstances with only an average foreign-language knowledge or grade.

The real headlines, collected during September 2015, were pretested on two groups of 20 respondents ( $N = 40$ ) from a nearby town. As described above, in order to answer the requirements of the four above mentioned utility dimensions, manipulated versions of the headlines were created. Additionally, some of the names and places were changed. Recipients were required to read all of the 12 headlines and mark/estimate voluntarily and anonymously on a 7-point Likert scale (with answers ranging between *very likely* and *not at all likely*) how likely it would be that they would read each of them if they appeared on a news portal. Based on the mean and standard deviation, we ranked the level of utility of headlines (high vs. low), and chose those eight which were included in the quasi-experiment, along with the two

headlines that served to veil the research interest and remained constant across experimental versions.

Since the literature review has not revealed exactly what the camcorder symbol generally indicates to news readers, we could not be sure of how it was perceived, i.e. whether they recognized it as a symbol that suggested the visualization of video material. However, from our pretest of the news we were able to reveal what they thought of it: everyone involved in the pretest stated that they recognized the symbol and that it represented the possibility of watching news coverage.

### *Experimental Procedure*

The experiment took place in the university hall, with the participation of four groups of students during October 2015. We placed six tables in the hall, far apart from each other. On one of them, we put an ACER Z5WAH notebook and the certificates of voluntary participation; on the other three, we placed the questionnaires.

We asked students to participate voluntarily and anonymously in a study, the goal of which was to test a forthcoming news portal being created especially for students in an offline environment. They then received the following instruction: “On behalf of Transindex.ro we are testing a forthcoming news portal – YouthIndex.ro – dedicated to students. Please read the headlines in the news feed in a leisurely fashion, and click on the all those you would most like to read more about. There are no good or bad choices; we are only interested in your personal choice.” We then called their attention to the fact that clicking on the hyperlink would not take them to a separate page. After each of them had made their news selections, they sat at one of the other three tables where they completed the anonymous questionnaire. When they had completed these tasks, we thanked them for their participation, and one of our students aiding in the research went to the laptop and signed out of the portal, logging the results and restarting the sequence for the next participant.

### *Experimental Materials*

*The research instruments* consisted of a set of headlines used as stimuli, the news portal, and the subjects’ data sheet. Taking into account the practice followed by different news portals, we created, with the agreement of the original regional news portal, a copy of it with minimal differences: with changed background colour, and we applied a similar camcorder symbol to the featured 10 headlines (four low utility, four high utility content and two headlines to veil the research interest). Half of every group’s members were presented the headlines in forward order, the other half were presented them in reverse order.

We recorded the selection frequency for each headline with the aid of software we had developed. This software also randomized the order in which the news items were presented for each recipient.

We ran a test experiment with 25 students to check the research design in a different university campus.

### *Paivio and Harshman’ Individual Differences Questionnaire (IDQ)*

The individual differences in the verbal-visual dimension of cognitive style were measured by the Paivio and Harshman’ IDQ test.

### *Dependent Measures*

The dependent variable was the number of clicks on the headlines with low vs. high utility. The software recorded who clicked, how many times, on which headlines and the logins and logouts from the portal. To test our hypotheses, we used the number of clicks on the headlines to measure selective exposure to headlines with low, and with high utility.

As the independent variable in our research, we used the presence of the camcorder symbol, attached to the headlines with low utility or to headlines with high utility; as quasi-independent variables we used the scores of verbal and visual scales.

## **Results**

### ***Preliminary Analyses***

The Cronbach-alpha of the shortened form on X language of The Paivio-Harshman's Individual Differences Questionnaire (1983) was calculated for both scales. Verbal scale items yielded satisfactory .71, and visual items .76 values.

### ***Exposure to Headlines with Low and High Utility***

*H1* was supported; there was a significant difference between the averages of the headlines from all groups with low and with high utility. The Paired Sample T-Test result demonstrates that the selection prior to experiment of the 10 headlines presented in the experiment was efficient, causing a large effect size ( $N = 239$ ,  $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = .16$  in the case of headlines with high utility, and  $M = 1.36$ ,  $SD = .96$ , in the case of those with low utility,  $t = 12.59$ ,  $df. = 238$ ,  $p = .001$ ; Cohen's  $d = .81$ , see Table 1 for details).

Table 1  
Selective exposure to headlines with low and high utility

	1 <sup>st</sup> experimental group: low utility headlines with camcorder	2 <sup>nd</sup> experimental group: high utility headlines with camcorder	3 <sup>rd</sup> experimental group: low and high utility headlines with camcorder	control group: headlines without camcorder
Selective exposure to headlines with low utility: nr. of clicks	$M = 1.57$ $SD = 1.03$	$M = 1.22$ $SD = .93$	$M = 1.48$ $SD = .93$	$M = 1.18$ $SD = .94$
Selective exposure to headlines with high utility: nr. of clicks	$M = 2.63$ $SD = 1.17$	$M = 2.31$ $SD = 1.11$	$M = 2.48$ $SD = 1.18$	$M = 2.48$ $SD = .15$

### *Exposure to Headlines with Low and High Utility by the Visual Scores of Respondents*

Taking into account the influence of Experimental Group Number on verbal and visual IDQ scores (see Table 2), we started the analysis with two ANOVAs to see the differences between group in IDQ scores; the results assured us of efficacy of experimental manipulation: verbal scale  $F(3, 235) = .38, p = .76$ ; visual scale  $F(3, 235) = .01, p = .99$ .

Table 2  
IDQ scores in experimental groups

	1 <sup>st</sup> experimental group: low utility headlines with camcorder, high utility headlines without it	2 <sup>nd</sup> experimental group: high utility headlines with camcorder, low utility headlines without it	3 <sup>rd</sup> experimental group: low and high utility headlines with camcorder, mixed condition	control group: headlines without camcorder
Average score on verbal scale	17.67	16.69	17.65	17.07
Average score on visual scale	22.27	22.22	22.18	22.37

In order to map the possible statistical relationship between the variables of interest, we ran a series of bivariate Pearson correlations involving the following variables: verbal scale, visual scale, utility preferences and gender. The test regarding the whole dataset together ( $N = 239$ ) revealed a significant positive relationship between verbal scale and visual scale ( $r = .17, p = .01$ ), though it could be shown up only in one of the conditions taken one by one separately: in the third condition could be detected a stronger relation between them ( $r = .38, p = .01$ ). In the 4<sup>th</sup> condition – without camcorders – there was an important negative correlation between the variables verbal scale and nr. of headlines with low utility ( $r = -.32, p = .05$ ). The correlation between the dummy coded gender and other variables did not arise – just as in the other Hungarian sample from 1995 (Révész, Bernáth & Séra). However, they found an interaction between verbal-visual scores and gender – this made us to think that our fault in showing up such a statistical relationship is due to impropriety in gender.

Testing the impact of weighting the gender variable with the SPSS tool – using “Weight Cases” function available from the Data menu – we ran a hierarchical regression with 3 steps. In each of the 3 models the partial correlations with the gender effect on the selection of

headlines with camcorder proved to be weak, but statistically significant (for Man 1st Model:  $r = .12, p = .04$ ; 2nd Model:  $r = .13, p = .04$ ; 3rd Model:  $r = .15, p = .01$ ).

Before starting the more detailed analyses, we made two transformations on the dataset. On the one hand, because there are systematic differences between the man and woman proportion in the sample, we weighted the gender variable the SPSS tool “Weight Cases”, available from the Data menu. Thus the number of participants rose from 239 to 322 (see Table 3).

Table 3  
Descriptive statistics of gender

	before weighting				after weighting			
men, whole dataset( <i>N</i> )	83				166			
women, whole dataset( <i>N</i> )	156				156			
men( <i>N</i> )	1 <sup>st</sup> condition 20	2 <sup>nd</sup> condition 20	3 <sup>rd</sup> condition 25	4 <sup>rd</sup> condition 18	1 <sup>st</sup> condition 40	2 <sup>nd</sup> condition 40	3 <sup>rd</sup> condition 50	4 <sup>rd</sup> condition 36
women( <i>N</i> )	1 <sup>st</sup> condition 40	2 <sup>nd</sup> condition 39	3 <sup>rd</sup> condition 35	4 <sup>rd</sup> condition 42	1 <sup>st</sup> condition 40	2 <sup>nd</sup> condition 39	3 <sup>rd</sup> condition 35	4 <sup>rd</sup> condition 42

Due to the big difference between men ( $N = 80$ ) and women ( $N = 159$ ) we weighted the proportion according to gender, thus the number of participants rose from 239 to 322.

On the other hand, because of the fact that the IDQ scales do not contain zero, in trying to make more meaningful the regression constant we mean-centered the variables involved by subtracting the sample mean from all measurements of those variables in the data (see Hayes, 2013).

Based on these results, we ran several hierarchical regression analyses with the first three experimental groups using SPSS to test our hypothesis. To test  $H2$ , we included variables in the following order: in Step 1 we entered the visual score, verbal score and dummy coded gender, in Step 2 the interaction terms of the first order (visual x verbal, visual x gender, verbal x gender), and in Step 3 we introduced the interaction terms of the second order (visual x verbal x gender).

$H2$  was not supported in the case of regression which was run for the hole dataset, as the result of the partial correlation between the number of headlines with camcorder and visual scores was not significant in any of the regression analyzes with 3 models – despite the fact that of the three model, the coefficients of the first two’ relationship were closed to threshold of significance: 1<sup>st</sup> model:  $r = .12, p = .059$ ; 2nd model:  $r = .12, p = .053$ . However,  $H2$  could be supported for the last two significant models – in Steps 2 and 3 – of regression in the case of the 2<sup>nd</sup> condition, and at the same time there arose the effect of verbal-visual scores on the dependent variable (see Table 4).

Table 4.  
Effect of verbal-visual scores on the dependent variable

	<i>Standardized <math>\beta</math></i>	<i>Standardized <math>\beta</math> second experimental group</i>
<i>Step 1</i>		
Visual scores	.12	.18
Verbal scores	.07	.13
Man	.13*	.16

	Model 1: $F(3, 240) = 3.10,$ $p = .02$		Model 1: $F(3, 75) = 2.41,$ $p = .07$
<i>Step 2</i>	Visual x verbal scores Visual scores Verbal scores Verbal x Woman Man  Model 2: $F(6, 237) = 1.87,$ $p = .08$	.09 .16 .04 -.01 .13*	.28* .40* .01 -.15 .16  Model 2: $F(6, 72) = 03,$ $p = .03$
<i>Step 3</i>	Visual scores Verbal scores Verbal x Woman Man Verbal x man Visual x verbal x woman  Model 3: $F(7, 236) = 2.11,$ $p = .04$	.12 .02 .03 .15* .05 .15	.36* -.02 -.09 .18 .15 .14  Model 3: $F(7, 71) = 2.16,$ $p = .04$

Note for the regression on the whole dataset.  $R$  square = .03 for Step 1;  $R$  square change = .008 for Step 2,  $R$  square = .04 for Step 3.

Note for the regression on the second condition.  $R$  square = .088 for Step 1;  $R$  square change = .077 for Step 2,  $R$  square = .011 for Step 3

The importance of gender in selection arose in the whole dataset: in every model presenting a significant correlation with the dependent variable.

We were not able to show up a moderation/interaction between the visual and the verbal scores by classical linear regression for the whole dataset, however, by using PROCESS macro – which does not allow weighting variables – we were able to detect it. We made use of a pick-a-point procedure to disclose whether the groups differed, on average, from each other on the dependent variable, (determined by 5 values of the moderator variable). The selection of headlines with the camcorder symbol depends on the verbal scores beginning only from 50% (at 50%  $t = 2.12, p = .03$ , at 75%  $t = 2.33, p = .02$ , at 90%  $t = 2.23, p = .02$ ).

### ***Exposure to Headlines with Low and High Utility by Verbal Scores of Respondents***

To test  $H3$ , we also ran a hierarchical regression. Entering the same predictors as in the case of first hypothesis, and the number of headlines without a camcorder as dependent variable, we were not able to detect a significant relationship between the verbal scores and the latter dependent variable in the case of whole dataset ( $F(3, 76) = 2.38, p = .76$ ) for the first model, ( $F(6, 73) = 1.47, p = .19$ ) for the second, and ( $F(7, 72) = 1.30, p = .26$ ) for the last model. The same situation appeared when we ran the statistical test for the separate conditions.

### ***Exposure to Low Utility Headlines with Camcorder***

Deepening the analysis, we assumed ( $H4$ ) that in cases where a camcorder symbol is attached to headlines with low utility, but not attached to headlines with high utility (group 1), more headlines with low utility will be chosen, compared to the same headlines without the

camcorder symbol (group 4). In order to test *H4*, we ran an independent sample t-test between the first condition and the control condition without camcorders. As anticipated, the presence of the camcorder increased the selection of the headlines in the first condition with low utility. Participants in first condition chose more headlines with low utility ( $M = 1.57$ ) than participants in the last one ( $M = 1.18$ ), the attached camcorder to headlines causing a very large effect size ( $d = 4.69$ ,  $t(118) = 2.12$ ;  $p = .03$ ).

#### ***Exposure to Headlines with High Utility with Camcorder***

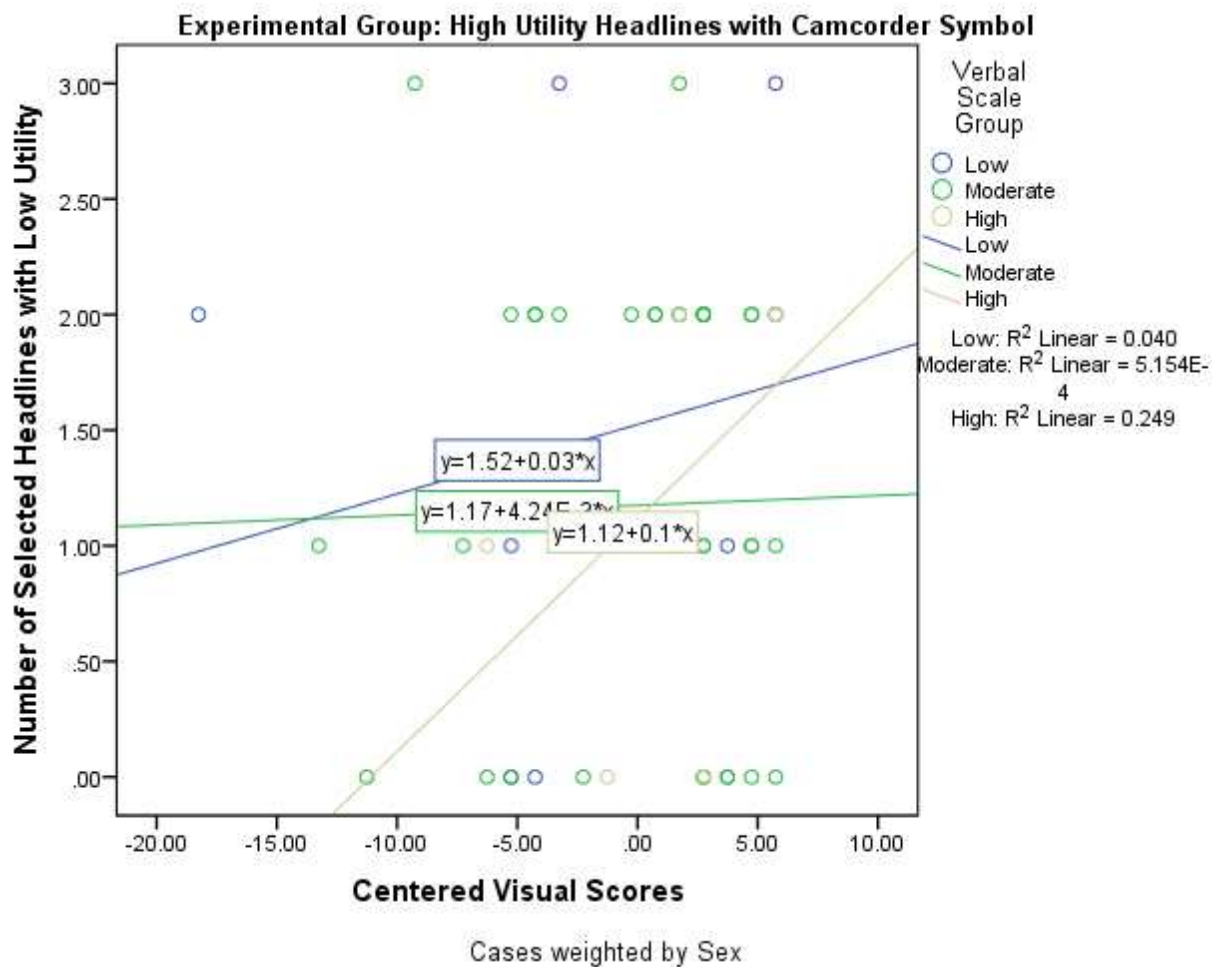
*H5* should be rejected, because the camcorder high utility headlines decreased the number of clicks in the second experimental group on headlines, all with high utility ( $M = 2.31$ ). Compared to the remaining control condition with an independent sample T-test ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $t(117) = -.84$ ;  $p = .41$ ), as well as to the mixed one ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $p = .41$ ), we can see that the lowest average value of chosen headlines with camcorder could be detected in this, in the second condition ( $M = 2.31$ ).

We were curious whether this decrease in point can be explained by the results obtained on both scales of the IDQ test (the visual and verbal). As we aimed to keep our variables continuous, we created the independent variable involved in the following way: we sorted the scores of the variable of the verbal scores in ascending order, then, after calculating the mean, we marked both the value of one SD below the mean and of one SD above the mean. Thus, we created a new nominal variable in the next column with 3 levels, but taking into account the normal distribution of the scores in dividing it. We labeled them as follows: 1, those who had low scores on verbal scale, 2, those who had average scores on the scale, and 3, those whose scores began from the value of  $M + 1$  SD.

We ran an online regression in SPSS on the whole dataset, then on each group separately to test the effect of the Verbal\_Scale\_Group predictor on the headlines with low utility, using commands as follows: Graph→LegacyDialog→SimpleScatter→Define→Set Markers by. Results show a single significant relationship, which helps us to explain why attaching the camcorder to headlines with high utility in the second condition decreased the selection of them. We detected that those who had high scores on a verbal scale test selected more and more headlines with low utility as their visual scores increase. This means that around 17% of the respondents of the second condition, i.e. 13-14 persons, chose significantly less headlines with high utility. Statistical relationship is almost strong, and is about to reach the low threshold of its interval:  $r = .4989$ , see Figure 1.

Figure 1

Avoidance attitude towards camcorder of high score respondents' on both verbal and visual scale (see brown line). Analysis performed with SPSS Version 22.



### Discussion for Experiment 1

This study aims to explore how textual cues with high and low utility (IUM), imagery cues (ELM) attached to news items, information processing style (DCT) and their interplay contribute to selective exposure. Although the impact of imagery on textual cues has been researched, and shown up especially the major role the photographs played in news selection (see Rosentiel, 2016), one novelty of the present study is that it tests the imagery effect in the theoretical framework of IUM. Using the conceptualization of IUM, it thus became possible to focus not only on the perceived threats at a given moment, but also on the possibilities in its four dimensions. Our conclusion therefore show up that the effect of the camcorder depends on the utility carried by messages, and there arose two patterns in selection mainly due to the interplay between utility and imagery:

- imagery had a small impact with small effect size on news selection compared to utility of headlines which refers to individual's own capacity perception of preventing, handling a threat or utilizing an opportunity at a given moment or in the near future. One piece of research corroborates our finding, namely of Powell et al.'

(2019) – who emphasize that headlines play a far greater role in news selection than images which have a minimal effect;

- b) There is an exception from this when attached to low utility message, when the camcorder variable correlates with it, producing a very large effect size. This finding is consistent with two research findings: Gunter (2015) reports on a supposedly related phenomenon, albeit in connection with the news memory and the visual material rather than focusing on the selection of content. When measuring the news memory researchers encountered a similar phenomenon several times (see Katz et al., 1977; Booth, 1970). In the case of television news, if visual material was associated to less important news, it was remembered better than when visual material was associated to more important news. Although not based on IUM, and using important and less important headlines, Ambrus et al. (2011) faced a similar problem: how to explain the decrease of selection of important headlines with the camcorder, while the camcorder had increased the number of clicks on the less important ones with camcorder attached.

Due to the DCT framework, there arose another pattern that helped us to explain some of our findings. We were able to show up the possible importance of cognitive style in news selection with monosemic cues. Although the match between our students' visual cognitive style and the selection of news with camcorder did not correlate in the whole dataset, a tendency could be detected in "*p*"-s a bit above the threshold ( $< .06$ ). At the same time, the statistical test proved that in some situations – in 2nd condition in our example – the visual scores can be accounted for by the selection of news with imagery. The verbal cognitive style did not play any role in selecting headlines without camcorder.

By including in analysis the verbal, the visual and the gender variables we could identify the responsible group – participants with high scores on both verbal and visual scale – for the unexpected decrease or avoidance in selection of headlines with high utility.

The camcorder symbol, when considered as a peripheral cue – according to *ELM* – did not have the predicted effect within the experimental groups where the symbol was attached only to headlines with high utility. This subject will be discussed following the second experiment results.

## Second quasi-experiment

### Overview

The same language-speaking BA and MA students from another campus of the same university read online headlines. We made the same two transformations on the dataset as in the first quasi-experiment: mean centered the variables for the same reason as in the first experiment, and, because of systematic differences between the man and woman proportion in the sample, we weighted the gender variable. The proportion of gender was in inverse ratio to the first experiment ( $N = 241$ ; gender  $N = 69$  women,  $N = 172$  men; average age = 24.2, see Table 5).

Table 5  
Descriptive statistics of gender

	before weighting		after weighting	
man, whole dataset( <i>N</i> )	172		172	
woman, whole dataset( <i>N</i> )	69		138	
man( <i>N</i> )	priming condition 85	control condition 87	priming condition 85	control condition 87
woman( <i>N</i> )	priming condition 35	control condition 34	priming condition 70	control condition 68

The quasi-experiment was based on the same theoretical framework as the first quasi-experiment, but differed in that we primed in the experimental group respondents' dominant cognitive style – verbal or visual (see Table 6) – with a visual cue: the camcorder symbol.

Table 6  
IDQ scores in experimental groups

	Primed experimental group: low and high utility headlines with camcorder, mixed condition	Control group: headlines without camcorders and priming
<b>Average score on verbal scale</b>	18.10	17.34
<b>Average score on visual scale</b>	23.16	23

One primed experimental group and one control group belonged to this experiment:

1<sup>st</sup> group: Respondents from experimental group ( $N = 120$ ) were presented also 10 headlines. Camcorder symbols were attached to headlines as follows: one to a negative headline with high utility, one to a positive headline also with high utility, one symbol to a negative headline with low utility and, finally, to a positive one with low utility.

2<sup>nd</sup> group: Participants belonging to the control group ( $N = 122$ ) read the same headlines as those in the experimental group, but they were not primed. Camcorder symbols were attached to headlines as follows: one to a negative headline with high utility, one to a positive headline also with high utility, one symbol to a negative headline with low utility and, finally, to a positive one with low utility.

### Hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1)*. Due to the priming with the camcorder symbol in the first condition, respondents choose more headlines with the camcorder symbol than in the control condition.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2)*. Respondents who prefer verbal cognitive style will be affected by the priming to a minor extent; they will not select significantly more headlines with the camcorder than those from the control group.

Respondents from the experimental group could see, in the upper left corner of the screen, eight nature photos each containing the camcorder symbol (see picture 1 in Appendix). This is in contrast to participants in the control group who had no camcorder symbol in the pictures (see picture 2 in Appendix). Every photo suggested calm which was important not only for the purpose of the experiment, but was essential especially for the participants belonging to experimental condition, because calibrating the eye-tracker one by one for each person might cause discomfort. The priming took place before browsing the news, inside the camcorder symbol was inserted the acronym of the university news portal: Youth Index TV, which, in fact, was the name of the website used for our two experiments. We used supraliminal stimuli, that is, they can watch every picture with the camcorder symbols for 4 seconds, and they succeed each other in identical between-times.

## Results

### *Preliminary Analyses*

The Cronbach-alpha of the shortened form on X language of The Paivio-Harshman's Individual Differences Questionnaire (1983) was calculated for both scales. Verbal scale items yielded satisfactory .72, and visual ones.75 values.

The significant difference in selecting headlines with high vs. low utility could be detected by using Paired-Samples T Test on the whole dataset: respondents selected, on average, 1.73 headlines with high, and .97 with low utility,  $t = 10,59$ ,  $df = 309$ ,  $p = .001$ .

The first hypothesis (*H1*) was not confirmed. Involving the Number of group variable and the number of headlines with camcorder, we ran an Independent T Test. Primed participants with dominant visual cognitive style in the experimental group selected less headlines with the camcorder ( $M = 1.32$ ) than in the control group ( $M = 1.49$ ), although this relationship was not significant ( $t = -1.56$ ,  $df = 296$ ,  $p = .11$ ). In order to find out the factors responsible for this decrease, we ran two hierarchical regressions for each condition to compare the correlations between them. In each case in Step 1 we entered the visual score, verbal score and dummy coded gender; in Step 2 the interaction terms of the first order: visual x verbal, visual x gender, verbal x gender; and in Step 3 we introduced the interaction terms of the second order: visual x verbal x gender).

Considering the three models of the primed experimental group, only the last model was significant compared to the models of the control group in which every model was significant. In the case primed experimental group only one significant partial correlation arose between the variable verbal x visual x gender and number of headlines with camcorder, a weak, negative relationship:  $r = -.21$ ,  $p = .00$ . This result suggests the possible role of the interaction term in the decreased number of headlines with camcorder. The role of the verbal and visual variable, and of the gender can be shown up also in the control condition (see Table 7).

Table 7  
The role of the gender and of the verbal and visual variable

	<i>Standardized <math>\beta</math></i> <i>Primed experimental group</i>	<i>Standardized <math>\beta</math></i> <i>Control group</i>
<i>Step 1</i>		
Visual scores	.01	.16
Verbal scores	-.08	.09
Women	-.05	.10

	<b>Model 1:</b> <i>F</i> (3, 151) = .55, <i>p</i> = .64	<b>Model 1:</b> <i>F</i> (3, 151) = 3.73, <i>p</i> = .01
<b>Step 2</b>		
Visual x verbal scores	-.15	.22*
Visual scores	-.09	.15
Verbal scores	-.12	.24
Verbal x Woman	-.01	-.31**
Woman	-.03	.16
Visual x Woman	-.17	
Visual x Male		.11
	<b>Model 2:</b> <i>F</i> (6, 148) = 1.16, <i>p</i> = .32	<b>Model 2:</b> <i>F</i> (6, 148) = 8.28, <i>p</i> = .01
<b>Step 3</b>		
Visual scores	.08	.13
Verbal scores	-.12	.20
Verbal x Woman	.08	-.30**
Woman	-.12	-.30
Verbal x man	.05	
Visual x verbal	.15	.14
Woman visual	-.10	
Verbal x visual x gender	-.37**	.09
Visual x Man		.14
	<b>Model 3:</b> <i>F</i> (7, 147) = 2.05, <i>p</i> = .05	<b>Model 3:</b> <i>F</i> (7, 147) = 7.17, <i>p</i> = .01

Note for the regression on the primed dataset. *R square* = .01 for Step 1; *R square change* = .03 for Step 2, *R square* = .04 for Step 3.

Note for the regression on the second condition. *R square* = .06 for Step 1; *R square change* = .18 for Step 2, *R square* = .00 for Step 3

As in the case of the first experiment, we made use of PROCESS SPSS macro (Hayes, 2013) to analyze in more detail the role of verbal, visual and gender variables and their possible interactions in selection of headlines with camcorder. We made use of a pick-a-point procedure to reveal whether the groups differed, on average, from each other on the dependent variable, (determined by 5 values of the moderator variable). The selection of headlines with the camcorder symbol is dependent on the verbal scores beginning only from 50% and up to 75% of it, followed by a decline at 90%, but in this case reaching even the insignificance (based on 5000 bootstrap, at 50%  $t = 2.14$ ,  $p = .03$ , CI .0028-.0653, at 75%  $t = 2.00$ ,  $p = .04$ , CI .0007-.0888, at 90%  $t = 1.90$ ,  $p = .05$ , CI -.0017-.0098).

After dividing the database into experimental and control group, surprising results arose compared even to the first experiment. Then we worked out that the respondents with high scores on both visual and verbal scale avoid the camcorder symbol, now we noticed the fact that priming with the symbol did not increase the selection of headlines with camcorder symbols, in fact, they decreased it to a significant extent.

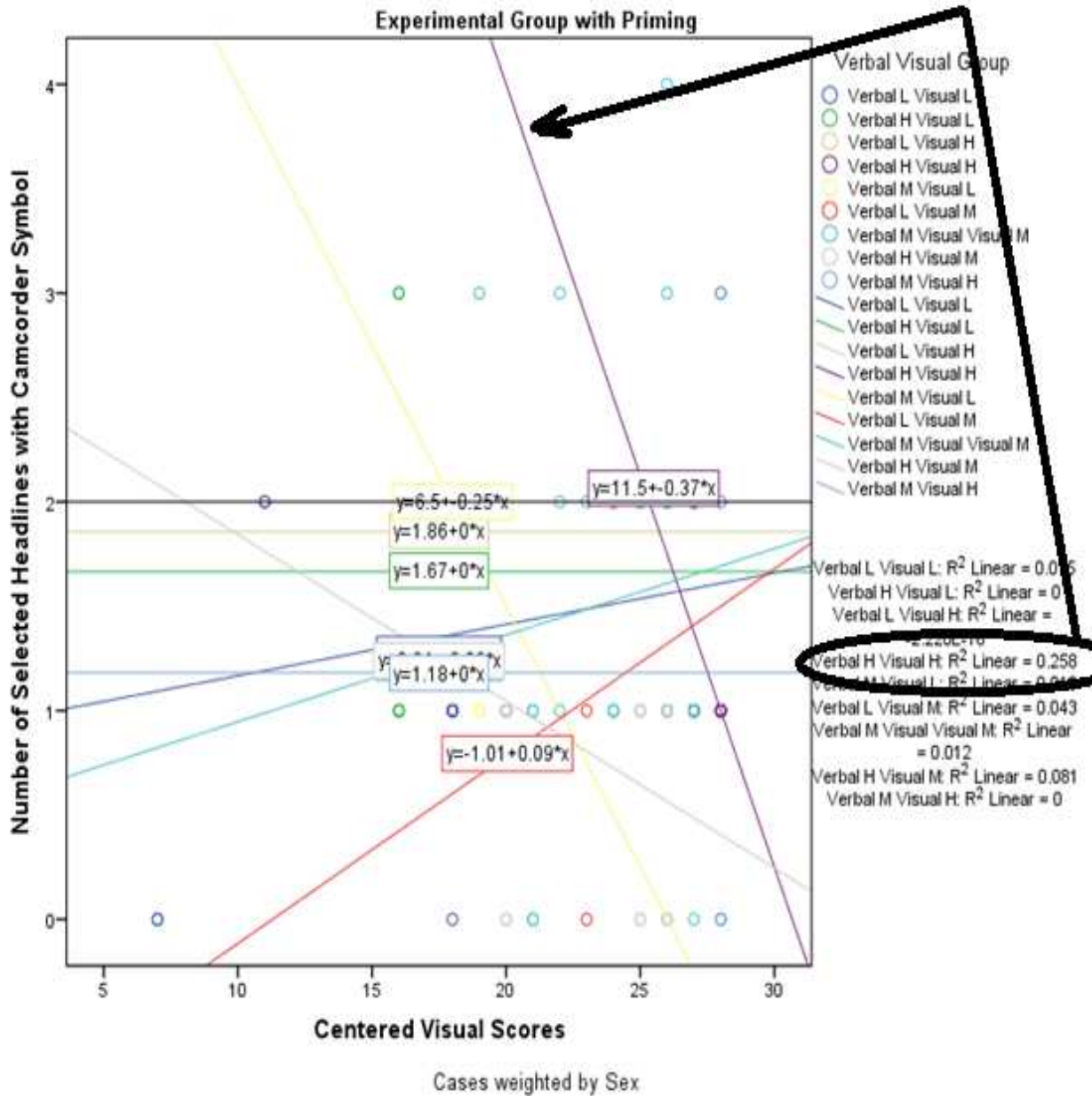
In the experimental condition primed with camcorder symbol respondents chose, on average, 1.32 headlines with the camcorder, as opposed to 1.49 in the control condition. Thus, the priming had an unanticipated effect on the selection: the value of  $p$  increases far above the .05 threshold ( $p = .87$ , Unst. Beta = -.01, *df.* 1,152). None of the other predictors involved in hierarchical regression had a significant effect on selection of the headlines in point.

Even though in control condition priming was not applied, respondents' selection of headlines with the camcorder – with high and low utility – was determined by visual scores per se:  $p=.005$ , Unst. Beta = .33,  $df$ : 1,145.

We fine-tuned our analysis and checked how respondents' cognitive style, i.e. results obtained on both scales of the IDQ-test influenced their selection of headlines with the camcorder. As we aimed to keep our variables continuous, we created the independent variable involved in the following way: we sorted the ascending scores of the variable of the verbal scores, then, after calculating the mean, we marked both the value of one SD below the mean and of one SD above the mean. Thus, we created a new nominal variable in the next column with 3 levels, but taking into account the normal distribution of the scores in dividing it. We labeled them as follows: 1, those who had low scores on the verbal scale, 2, those who had average scores on the scale, and 3, those whose scores began from the value of  $M + 1$  SD. We proceeded in the same way with the variable of the visual scores, then merged in a single variable both visual and verbal scale scores: the Verbal\_Visual\_Group nominal variable. We ran an online regression in SPSS to test the effect of the Verbal\_Visual\_Group predictor on the headlines with the camcorder, using commands as follows: Graph→LegacyDialog→SimpleScatter→Define→Set Markers by.

Those who were high on both visual and verbal scales selected less and fewer headlines with the camcorder as their scores on visual scores increased. (Verbal H Visual H, 19 respondents, 12.3%, the threshold of a strong correlation:  $r=.507$ , see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Avoidance attitude towards camcorder of high score respondents' on both verbal and visual scale. Analysis performed with SPSS Version 22.**



However, these respondents with high scores on both scales selected more and more headlines with the camcorder as their visual scores increased: an almost high correlation  $r = .47$  (Verbal H Visual H, 17 participants, 11%).

We ran a regression analysis in the same way as in the previous test, also on the headlines of high utility with camcorders for each condition. In this case an even stronger correlation than above ( $r = .56$ ) could be detected: showing that priming in the experimental group decreased the number of headlines selected with camcorder among those who had high scores on both visual and verbal scales.

The second hypothesis ( $H2$ ) was not supported. We ran a One-Way ANOVA with the Verbal Scale nominal variable – constructed taking into account the normal distribution of the scores in dividing it – as splitting criteria. Respondents with high scores on the verbal scale

differed from each other in the number of selected headlines with camcorders. Those from the primed group selected significantly less such news ( $M = 1.04$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) compared to participants from control group ( $M = 2.09$ ,  $SD = .87$ ),  $p = .04$ .

### Eye-tracking analysis

We made use of Tobii eye tracker and analyzed data collected by it. We marked the camcorder symbols attached to headlines as Areas of Interest (AOI), as well as the bigger camcorder symbol, containing the Youth Index TV acronym that served as a priming tool. It should be noted that in marking the outline of the AOIs, the AOI-s attached to headlines were extended to the middle of the last word of the headlines, AOI-s applied to the acronym were twice the size of the camcorder itself.

Two measurements were used: while the so-called *First fixation* recorded the time of the first eye fixation on the symbol in our case, the *Fixation count—include zero* refers to the number of total fixations on the previously marked areas of interest.

Although respondents rarely fixated on one of the camcorders, the effect of symbols could unequivocally be shown with the help of statistical tests. The symbols in point had an effect when participants did not fixate on them, but they had been in the field of vision – even so two typical attitudes were detected by tracking fixations:

Respondents who had average scores on both visual and verbal scales were almost exclusively those who fixated on the camcorder symbol used in priming (Verbal M Visual M,  $N = 62$ ). Of the 155 participants, 26 fixated on the camcorder symbol, from which 16 were with average scores on the two scales. The remaining 10 fixations were split between the respondents of the other five groups with different results on the verbal-visual scale. Of the nine groups, members of two groups did not fixate on the symbol at all: those who were visual-oriented in the control group avoided the camcorder symbol in the experimental condition, i.e. those who had high scores on both verbal and visual scales (Verbal H Visual H), as well as those who had average scores on verbal and low on visual scale (Verbal M Visual L, 15 respondents, 9.7 %).

Similar to the previous group, respondents with average scores on verbal scale and low scores on visual one, yielded a surprising result: while a very strong correlation was detected in the control group ( $r = .82$ ) indicating the interest for the camcorder symbol, in the experimental group no such orientation could be detected ( $r = .13$ ). Most probably this change was due to the avoidance strategy against priming.

Finally, concerning the experimental group (high on both visual and verbal scales – who had not had any fixation on the symbol), we were curious how many headlines with the camcorder were selected by clicking following the priming. We may assume the avoiding strategy based partly on the fact that only 12 headlines of high utility with the camcorder were chosen by the 19 participants. It was even more salient that respondents in this condition selected only two low utility headlines with the camcorder.

### Discussion for experiment 2

As in the high-choice media environment, every contact with media content – for example, starting television watching, listening to radio, browsing internet etc. – the very first moment of media use has an effect on the way that content will be processed and probably in many cases also on the next choice. Thus, the impact of the previously used media content on the following reactions, e.g. the effect of priming could also play an important role in news selection in an image saturated media context. It becomes even more important in the trial of finding out what happens when a media user first observes during media use an imagery, especially if the person in point has a visual cognitive style. We tried to answer these questions

involving the same variables in the analyses as in the first experiment plus an eye-tracker – as far as we know, a first in the communication research field. We could conclude that imagery priming plays an important role in the selection of headlines with camcorder symbol.

The results of these two pieces of research are consistent with each other regarding from the perspective of IUM. Results could not even be explained by dominant cognitive style alone. Taking into consideration Paivio and Harshman's statement that the verbal and the visual systems are not independent systems, and that there is a constant interplay between them, we decide to involve the two scales in analysis at the same time. As far as we know, there has not been such a trial before this experiment in any field to explain a phenomenon linked to verbal and visual processing. We were able to explain by simultaneously involving both scales of the IDQ test (Paivio-Harshman, 1983) the above mentioned avoidance.

In both experiments the typical camcorder symbol avoiders were identified: those who had high scores on both verbal and visual scales. This avoidance attitude became even stronger among these respondents when priming was applied: it decreased the number of headlines selected with the camcorder symbol. Although detected only in the second experiment, another group may probably be linked to this kind of avoidance, namely those with medium scores on verbal scales and low on visual one.

It is probable that the camcorder symbol played different roles different conditions. When attached to low utility headlines in both experiments it worked as peripheral cue (ELM) for every participant – independently of cognitive style – suggesting an increased and acceptable importance for news. However, attaching it to high utility headlines possibly made the avoiders' group(s) more suspicious about the credibility of news, and they processed them on the central route, i.e. more motivated, more critically and more regularly (ELM). Priming made them in this sense even more suspicious, and could be linked to Brehm's theory of reactance (1966), to the fear from being manipulated. This way of processing is characteristic not only to the motivated but also to the persons with high cognitive ability. Consistent with this, the camcorder avoiders in our research scored high on both scores not only on verbal and visual scales, but they probably were also with high cognitive abilities. This assumption is probably supported by Silverman's (2002) findings: children with very high scores on IQ test got excellent results on visual-spatial tasks, and also on verbal-sequential tasks.

## Conclusions

As stated in the introduction, few researchers have taken into consideration both textual and visual cues in explaining selective exposure to news. By testing three theories – the *Elaboration Likelihood Model* (ELM), the *Dual Coding Theory* (DCT) and the *Information Utility Model* (IUM) – and examining their variables side by side, the current two pieces of research have possibly made some advances in this regard.

Concerning the DCT theoretical framework, the role of cognitive style in selection of headlines may be present, even though the correlation between visual cognitive style and selection of headlines with camcorders shows only a tendency in our whole dataset – and in one condition, a statistical relationship. This result is only partially consistent with the earlier research findings from the literature that reveal an univocal relationship between preferred cognitive style in everyday actions (Childers et al., 1985) and selections of information and annotations during learning (Leutner & Plass, 1998; Plass, Chun, Mayer, & Leutner, 1998). Our finding is – first of all – probably due to specific utility dimensions of the news, which play a major role in the selection of headlines compared to monosemic visual cues. It seems very likely at the same time that this result arises from the interplay between the two factors in point, and could be extrapolated to situations that test selective exposure to news when utility

dimensions from IUM are salient. Although previous research has revealed the major impact of imagery on textual cues – especially of photographs on news selection (for instance, Rosentiel, 2016) – one novelty of the present study was that it tested their effect using the theoretical framework of IUM, hopefully nuancing the former results from the literature. For example, consistent with Rosentiel's (2016) finding, we revealed that imagery / camcorder attached to low utility headlines in our quasi-experiments worked probably as a peripheral cue (ELM), and very much increased their selection. However, we discovered that the camcorder symbol decreased the selection of high utility headlines – a phenomenon that could be partially explained by our specific usage of IDQ test.

One of the merits of our two pieces of research is that we took into consideration the constant interplay between the verbal and the visual systems (Paivio-Harshman, 1983), and involved them simultaneously in statistical analyses in both scales of the IDQ test. We have shown up not only a simple moderation between the verbal and visual variables, but we were able to involve the interplay in question, and thus detect an avoidance-pattern in the case of high utility headlines with camcorder in both pieces of research. The “avoiders” belonged to two groups of respondents: those with high scores on both verbal and visual scales, and those with average scores on verbal and low scores on visual scales. Respondents' avoidance attitudes, belonging to the second group were detected, however only in the second experiment and with the help of an eye-tracker. These attitudes remained unexplained by the current study. At the same time, using statistical analyses on eye-tracker data we were able to partially explain the possible cause of those respondents' avoidance attitudes who had high scores on the two scales in point. They were possibly more suspicious about the credibility of news, therefore processing them using the central route (ELM). Priming possibly made these avoiders even more suspicious and critical in the second quasi-experiment – their avoidance of high utility headlines with camcorder became more pronounced. The fear of being manipulated (Brehm, 1966) seems to be a plausible explanation for this phenomenon.

Albeit using other terminology – *important news* instead of *headlines with high utility* – a similar kind of avoidance of the important news (in our researches: headlines with high utility) can be found in the literature when they are associated with visual cues (see Katz et al., 1977; Booth, 1970; Ambrus et. al., 2011).

Both pieces of research have several limitations. The major limitation is that neither of the quasi-experiments were run in a real web environment: they were only very basic reproductions of the genuine website without functional links to the actual articles, and thus this environment could not really provide the results of an actual website. Therefore, the generalization of the results for the “real world” environment should be problematized; for example, participants could not access any of the video footage. Another limitation of these results is that students read news not from social media, but from a news site, which is not in line with this generation's news consumption habits. Finally, the gender variable was weighted in both pieces of research. Keeping in mind all these limitations, further research could be designed to deepen the understanding of the interplay between visual and textual cues.

## References

- Ambrus, Z., Kósa, I., & Zsigmond, Cs. (2011). Influența simbolului video asupra preferinței știrilor online. In: Iluț P. (coord.), „*Studii de sociopsihologie*”, Presa Universitară Clujeană.
- Amit, E., Gottlieb, S., & Greene, J. D. (2014). *Visual versus verbal thinking and dual-process moral cognition*. In J. W. Sherman, B. Gawronski, & Y. Trope (Eds.), *Dual-process theories of the social mind* (p. 340–354). The Guilford Press.

- Atkin, C. K. (1973). Instrumental utilities and information seeking. In P. Clarke (Ed.), *New models for communication research* (205-242). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Blazhenkova, O., & Kozhevnikov, M. (2009). The new object-spatial-verbal cognitive style model: Theory and measurement. *Applied Cognitive Psychology: The Official Journal of the Society for Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 23(5), 638-663. [CrossRef](#)
- Casas, A., & Williams, N. W. (2019). Images that Matter: Online Protests and the Mobilizing Role of Pictures. *Political Research Quarterly*, 72(2), 360–375 [CrossRef](#)
- Childers, T. L., Houston, M. J., & Heckler, S. E. (1985). Measurement of individual differences in visual versus verbal information processing. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12(2), 125-134.
- Clark, J. M., & Paivio, A. (1991). Dual coding theory and education. *Educational psychology review*, 3(3), 149-210.
- Donohew, L., Palmgren, P., & Duncan, J. (1980). An activation model of information exposure. *Communication Monographs*, 47(4), 295.
- Fahmy, S., Bock, M. A., & Wanta, W. (2014). Visual communication theory and research: Amass communication perspective. New York, NY: PalgraveMacmillan.
- Graber, D. (1988). *Processing the news. How people tame the information tide* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Johnson, B. K., & Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2017). Steer Clear or Get Ready: How Coping Styles Moderate the Effect of Informational Utility, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 61:2, 332-350. [CrossRef](#)
- Hastall, M. R. (2009). Informational utility as determinant of media choices. In T. Hartmann (Hrsg.), *Media Choice: A theoretical and empirical overview* (pp. 149-166). New York: Routledge.
- Höffler, T. N., Koć-Januchta, M., & Leutner, D. (2017). More Evidence for Three Types of Cognitive Style: Validating the Object-Spatial Imagery and Verbal Questionnaire Using Eye Tracking when Learning with Texts and Pictures. *Applied cognitive psychology*, 31 (1), 109-115. [CrossRef](#)
- Jawed, S., Amin, H. U., Malik, A. S., & Faye, I. (2018, August). Differentiating Between Visual and Non-Visual Learners Using EEG Power Spectrum Entropy. *2018 International Conference on Intelligent and Advanced System (ICIAS)*, Kuala Lumpur, 2018, pp. 1-4. [CrossRef](#)
- Kim, Y. M. (2008). Where is my issue? The influence of news coverage and personal issue importance on subsequent information selection on the Web. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52 (4), 600-621. [CrossRef](#)
- Knobloch, S., Hastall, M., Zillmann, D., & Callison, C. (2003). Imagery effects on the selective reading of Internet newsmagazines: A cross-cultural examination. *Communication Research*, 30 (1), 3-29.
- Knobloch, S., DillmanCarpentier, F., & Zillmann, D. (2003). Effects of salience dimensions of informational utility on selective exposure to online news. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 80 (1), 91-108. [CrossRef](#)
- Knobloch, S., Patzig, G., & Hastall, M. R. (2002). "Informational Utility" – Einfluss von Nützlichkeit auf selektiveZuwendungzunegativen und positiven Online-Nachrichten [Informational utility: Impact of utility on selective exposure to negative and positive online news]. *Medien- & Kommunikationswissenschaft*, 50(3), 359-357.

- Knobloch, S., Zillmann, D., Gibson, R., & Karrh, J. A. (2002). Effects of salient news items on information acquisition and issue perception. *Zeitschrift für Medienpsychologie*, 14(1), 14-22.
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2008). Informational utility. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of communication* (pp. 2273-2276). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2015). *Choice and preference in media use. Advances in selective exposure theory and research*. New York and London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S., Hastall, M. R., Grimmer, D., & Brück, J. (2005). Der Einfluss der Selbstwirksamkeit auf die selective Zuwendung zu Nachrichten [Informational utility: The influence of efficacy on recipients' news selection]. *Publizistik*, 50(4), 462-474.
- Koć-Januchta, M. M., Höffler, T. N., Eckhardt, M., & Leutner, D. (2019). Does modality play a role? Visual-verbal cognitive style and multimedia learning. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 35(6) 747-757. [CrossRef](#)
- Koć-Januchta, M., Höffler, T., Thoma, G. B., Prechtel, H., & Leutner, D. (2017). Visualizers versus verbalizers: Effects of cognitive style on learning with texts and pictures—An eye-tracking study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 68, 170-179. [CrossRef](#)
- Kraemer, D. J., Hamilton, R., Messing, S. B., DeSantis, J. H., & Thompson-Schill, S. L. (2014). Cognitive style, cortical stimulation, and the conversion hypothesis. *Frontiers in human neuroscience*, 8, 15. [CrossRef](#)
- Krohne, H. W. (Ed.). (1993). *Attention and Avoidance: Strategies in Coping with Aversiveness*. Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe & Huber.
- Lee, J. H. (2008). Effects of news deviance and personal involvement on audience story selection: A web-tracking analysis. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 85(1), 41-60.
- Leutner, D., & Plass, J. L. (1998). Measuring learning styles with questionnaires versus direct observation of preferential choice behavior in authentic learning situations: The Visualizer/Verbalizer Behavior Observation Scale (VV-BOS). *Computers in Human Behavior*, 14(4), 543-557.
- Nisbett, R. E., & Ross, L. (1980). *Human inference: Strategies and shortcomings of social judgment*. New York, NY: Prentice Hall.
- Outing, S., & Ruel, L. (2004). *What we saw through their eyes* [online document]. Retrieved from [www.poynter.org/extra/eyetrack2004/index.htm](http://www.poynter.org/extra/eyetrack2004/index.htm)
- Paivio, A., & Harshman, R. (1983). Factor analysis of a questionnaire on imagery and verbal habits and skills. *Canadian Journal of Psychology/Revue canadienne de psychologie*, 37(4), 461-483.
- Petty, Richard E., & Joseph R. Priester (1994): Mass media attitude change: Implications of the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. In Bryant, J., & Zillmann, D. (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (91-122). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Plass, J. L., Chun, D. M., Mayer, R. E., & Leutner, D. (1998). Supporting visual and verbal learning preferences in a second language multimedia learning environment. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90, 25-36.
- Powell, T. E., van der Meer, T. G. L. A., & Brenes Peralta, C. (2019). Picture power? The contribution of news visuals to politically motivated selective exposure. *Media and Communication*, 7(3), 12-31. [CrossRef](#)
- Pratto, F., & John, O. P. (1991). Automatic vigilance: The attention-grabbing power of negative social information. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61(3), 380-391. [CrossRef](#)

- Révész, Gy., Bernáth, L., & Séra, L. (1995). A Paivio-féle " Individual Differences Questionnaire" magyar változata. *Magyar Pszichológiai Szemle*, 35, 327-343.
- Rosenstiel, T. (2016). Solving journalism's hidden problem: Terrible analytics. *Center for Effective Public Management, February*, 1-18.
- Sargent, S. L. (2007). Image effects on selective exposure to computer-mediated news stories. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23, 705-726. [CrossRef](#)
- Sears, D. O., & Freedman, J. L. (1967). Selective exposure to information: A critical review. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 31(2), 194-213. [CrossRef](#)
- Sundar, S. S., & Kim, J. (2005). Interactivity and persuasion: Influencing attitudes with information and involvement, *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 5, 2. Accessed: 10 March 2014. <http://jiad.org/article59.html>
- Wentura, D., Rothermund, K., & Bak, P. (2000). Automatic vigilance: The attention-grabbing power of approach- and avoidance-related social information. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(6), 1024-1037. [CrossRef](#)
- Zillmann, D. (1999). Exemplification theory: Judging the whole by some of its parts. *Media Psychology*, 1(1), 69-94. [CrossRef](#)
- Zillmann, D., Gibson, R., & Sargent, S. L. (1999). Effects of photographs in news-magazine reports on issue perception. *Media Psychology*, 1 (3), 207-228. [CrossRef](#)
- Zillmann, D., Knobloch, S., & Yu, H. S. (2001). Effects of photographs on the selective reading of news reports. *Media Psychology*, 3(4), 301-324. [CrossRef](#)

## Appendix

### Picture 1.



**Picture 2.**



# **Political influencers/leaders on Twitter. An analysis of the Spanish digital and media agendas in the context of the Catalan elections of 21 December 2017**

KOME – An International Journal of Pure  
Communication Inquiry  
Volume 8 Issue 2, p. 88-108.  
© The Author(s) 2020  
Reprints and Permission:  
kome@komejournal.com  
Published by the Hungarian Communication  
Studies Association  
DOI: 10.17646/KOME.75672.46

**Concha Pérez Curiel**

**Department of Journalism II, Faculty of Communication, University of Seville, SPAIN**

**Abstract:** A new politics, linked to the influencer/leader and to the empowerment of the public on social networking sites, is currently marking the media agenda. In light of this, the aim of this study is to gain further insights into the polarization and influence of political messages on Twitter and levels of user participation, in a context marked by social movements and the counter-power of citizenship. Based on a triangulated methodology of quantitative and qualitative-discursive content analysis, all the tweets were quantified (3,562), selecting only those pertaining to the elections (526) posted by the pro-independence and constitutionalist candidates of the parties obtaining the highest number of votes, plus 144,382 user engagement metrics and 68 front pages of the mainstream Spanish and Catalan press. The results point to a unidirectional use of Twitter by political leaders, a higher user response rate, and the influence of the digital political agenda on its media counterpart.

**Keywords:** Influencer, political agenda, Twitter, elections, independence process, media agenda, digital users

## **Introduction**

The ways of conveying political messages on the web urgently need to be reviewed. The tweets posted on Twitter are currently characterized by their polarized and unidirectional nature not only thanks to political influencers/leaders and their parties (Fernández-Gómez, Hernández-Santaolalla, & Sanz-Marcos, 2018; Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011) but also with the collusion of new digital audiences: fan and anti-fan communities alike (Castells, 2009; Sampedro, 2014). Given this situation, the mass media has designed a parallel agenda involving the publishing of tweets, previously posted by political candidates on their personal accounts and then disseminated by their followers with “likes,” retweets, and/or comments. This alliance decides what is newsworthy on the Internet.

In this digital platform context, the type of communication that is established between users has shaped a singular hybrid public sphere (Benkler, 2015; Chadwick, 2013; Jenkins, 2008), in which hegemonic and counter-hegemonic groups vie for visibility in order to make themselves heard by employing the different mediatization processes (Hjarvard, 2013; Holton et al., 2014) available to them (Scolari, 2008).

Address for Correspondence: Concha Pérez Curiel, email: cperez1[at]us.es

Article received on the 19th April, 2019. Article accepted on the 7th March, 2020.

Conflict of Interest: The author declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement: The author wish to thank Anabel Rincón Rodríguez and Antonio Montoya Sánchez for their contribution in the digital statistical analysis, and for the Communication and Social Sciences (SEJ-619) research group for providing the author with office space and access to the SPSS software.

The independence process in Catalonia is the most recent political conflict in Spain and a determining factor in its future organization as a state. On October 1, 2017, a referendum was called with the aim of asking the region's citizens whether they were in favor of Catalonia's independence and "disconnection" from Spain (Carrasco-Polaino, Villar-Cirujano, and Tejedor-Fuentes, 2018). Despite the combined efforts of courts and law enforcement agencies to halt the poll, nearly 2.3 million people (43 percent of the electoral roll) turned up to cast their votes on 1 October [16]. The voting, nevertheless, came with unusual scenes of violence. Digital platforms satisfy a major communication need in any form of activism — spreading open information to mass-scale audiences. Yet, they also fall short of guaranteeing private, secured communications between activists when coordinating their actions in hostile environments (Poblet, 2017).

According to a report released by the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió (CEO) in 2017, 40.2 percent of the respondents believed that Catalonia should be an independent state, 27.4 percent an autonomous community, 21.8 percent a federal state, and 4.6 percent a region (CEO, 2017). When compared with the poll performed the year before (CEO, 2016), it can be observed that the number of those favoring independence and even other territorial models over the established constitutional model had increased. Besides the political parties, civic associations such as the Asambleu Nacional de Catalunya (ANC), advocating for an independent Catalan state, and Sociedad Civil Catalana (SCC), defending quite the opposite, also intervened in the debate in Catalonia. On social networking sites, they served as nodal actors and communication channels between those in favor or against a new Catalan state (Cramery, 2015; Balcells and Padró-Solanet, 2016). This situation of uncertainty came to a head with the application of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, the dissolution of the Catalan parliament, and the calling of elections on December 21<sup>st</sup>. The independence process reached a higher level of visibility in a context of mediatization and digitization than ever seen before.

Against this background, the counter-agenda promoted on social networking sites (Aruguete, 2017; Meraz, 2011; Sung-Tae and Young-Hwan, 2007; Wallsten, 2007) activated a bottom-up mechanism implicating the citizenry and civil society, with the ability to condition the media agenda (Perales-García and Pont-Sorribes, 2018) thanks to the impact and reach of its message on social media. A study on the geographical distribution of media representations in the European referendums analyzes more than 70k mentions about the Referendum of Catalonia (2017) and shows that transnational corporations from a few Western countries dominate the technologically-mediated division of space (Toth, 2018).

In turn, Twitter has become a political tool for disseminating information (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011), mobilizing the electorate (Gainous and Wagner, 2014), interacting with the public (Stromer-Galley, 2014) and individualizing and personalizing the campaigning style of political candidates (Vergeer, Hermans and Sams, 2013).

In light of the foregoing, the main objective of this study is to analyze the ways in which the political agenda affects its media counterpart on Twitter; a process that conditions the news appearing on the front pages of the press and leads to a transfer of agendas between the conventional media and their social counterparts. The intention here is to determine politicians' Twitter usage: the issues that they broach and how they influence users and the conventional media.

Employing this approach, an analysis was performed on the Catalan elections held on 21 December 2017 (21 D), in the context of the independence process (*procés* in Catalan) (Balcells; Padró-Solanet, 2019), focusing on the thematic similarities between the digital and conventional media agendas, promoted by influencers/leaders in collaboration with a civic activism fostered by the internet (Corominas, 2017).

The first hypothesis (H1) is that there was a cause and effect relationship between the tweets posted by the political candidates on their personal accounts, the most viral tweets and

the topics covered on the front pages of the press. In parallel and from a content approach, ‘independence’ was one of the main frames of the polarized messages of the candidates and their parties, the community response, and the media agenda (H2). In this vein, those pro-independence parties with influencers/leaders (Montoya and Vandehey, 2009; Pérez-Ortega, 2014; Rampersad, 2009) – whose virtue lies in knowing how to combine their tasks as influencers with the attention to and management of their political identity in such a propitious space as social media (Labrecque, Marko and Milne, 2011; Marshall and Redmond, 2016) – have put Twitter to strategic use, placing the spotlight on the Catalan independence/state conflict and marking it the agenda of their own followers, the constitutionalist parties and the press.

By using a triangulated methodology of analysis of quantitative content and comparative qualitative-discursive content, a sample of the personal Twitter accounts of the leaders of the parties obtaining the greatest number of votes (Inés Arrimadas of Ciudadanos [Cs], Carles Puigdemont of JuntsXCat, Marta Rovira of ERC/CatSí, Mikel Iceta of the Socialist Party of Catalonia [PSC], Xavier Domènech of Catalunya en Comú-Podem and Xavier García Albiol of the People’s Party [PP]) was created, including user engagement metrics (‘likes’, retweets and comments) and the front-page news of some of Spain’s and Catalonia’s mainstream newspapers (*ABC*, *El País*, *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico de Cataluña*) in the context of the 21 D Catalan elections.

Previous studies of the potential of Twitter in electoral processes (Noguera, 2013; Rodríguez and Ureña, 2012; Zamora-Medina, Sánchez-Cobarro and Martínez, 2017; Zugasti-Azagra and Pérez-González, 2015) concur that it is the most popular micro-blogging network among politicians and journalists, relegating Facebook and even their own websites to second place (Abejón et al., 2017), with statistics demonstrating the relationship between engagement and electoral success (Ballesteros et al., 2017), albeit with a unidirectional use (Graham et al. 2013) and many underused tools (Ballesteros et al., 2017; Cheng, 2017; Congosto-Martínez, 2014; Dader, 2017). There are thus more reasons in favor than against choosing Twitter as a platform, in line with the sample’s subject (who) and object (what). The options offered by Twitter versus other platforms for analyzing the online strategies of political influencers and user engagement metrics – summarizing direct messages with a maximum of 140 characters, stressing with hashtags and going viral as trending topics all influence and determine the political and media agendas – make it an especially appropriate object of study.

### **Leadership, influence and political strategies on Twitter**

The visibility, speed, and immediate response capacity offered by social media are factors that multiply the impact of political influence. With Twitter, a channel that amplifies political communication above all at election time (Campos-Domínguez, 2017), it is possible to organize campaigns with a very broad potential reach relatively cheaply and swiftly (Karaduman, 2013; Thelwall and Cugelman, 2017). Furthermore, citizens participating in the political debate can be segmented or grouped according to their ideological leanings (Congosto, Fernández and Moro, 2011), thus offering the opportunity to engage and influence different audiences (Augure, 2015). But all these yields very different results depending on the candidate and the use to which digital tools are put. Nonetheless, previous research has revealed the functionality of Twitter in political communication strategies.

In this context, opinion leaders – nowadays influencers – not only convey the messages of brands, but also those of the mass media and even political parties (Fernández-Gómez, Hernández-Santaolalla and Sanz-Marcos, 2018). Moreover, there are resources (hashtags, images, links, videos, memes, etc.) for reinforcing each tweet and fostering audience

interaction. However, that the messages conveyed by opinion leaders are mainly unidirectional, paying little attention to or ignoring the ‘likes’ and comments of users, is remarkable (Mancera-Rueda and Helfrich, 2014).

Thus, in order to explain where the power of their influence lies it is necessary to examine the personality traits and attitudes of political candidates (Rahat and Sheaffer, 2007; Sánchez-Murillo, 2005), as well as the propaganda and disinformation mechanisms of the fake discourse (Bennett and Livingston, 2018; Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Llorente, 2017) that explain where the power of their influence resides.

A snapshot of Catalonia before the 21 D elections reveals an initial scenario marked by conflict and confrontation with the central government, social unrest, the summoning of a divided society to the ballot box (i.e. the referendum held on 1 October 2017), and the application of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, thus suspending Catalan autonomy. Collateral effects such as the imprisonment of pro-independence politicians holding public office and the flight from Spain of Carles Puigdemont, the then president of the Catalan regional government and the leader of the party Junts per Catalunya, marked the height of the conflict. Previous research (Pérez-Curiel and García-Gordillo, 2018; Carrasco-Polaino, Villar-Cirujano and Tejedor-Fuentes, 2018) has confirmed, on the one hand, that despite the fact that the institutions have the traditional propaganda machine at their full disposal, social networking sites in general, and Twitter in particular, are better managed by civic associations, and on the other hand that the pro-independence propaganda is much more active and effective in getting the message across than its constitutionalist counterpart.

The mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni, 2004) and the interest shown by political parties in highlighting the personality of their leaders over their ideology (Farrell, 1996) has become the driving forces behind the personality-building process facilitated by Twitter (Rodríguez-Virgili, Jandura and Rebolledo de la Calle, 2014).

Separatism is thus framed in the electoral process and the influence of the citizenry resides in directly conveying messages to audiences and the media in favor or against the Catalan or Spanish political and legal institutions. This discourse has found its maximum expression in Puigdemont who uses Twitter tools (hashtags, mentions, links, audio-visual resources, etc.) strategically, posts messages with supplementary information and effectively engages users. He has thus managed to attract a greater number of followers who by sharing his tweets have converted his messages into front-page news in Spanish and Catalan newspapers.

This digital political communication and marketing strategy focusing on the individuality of the influencer/subject (Puigdemont) and the potential of the object (independence) and discourse propaganda, which allowed Puigdemont to eclipse the rest of the candidates – including Inés Arrimadas of Cs, the most voted candidate in the 21 D Catalan elections – on Twitter and on the front pages of the press.

Influencers can be defined as people who have the power to influence others through social or conventional media because of their knowledge, experience, credibility, and commitment. Citizens have ceased to be mere receivers of information to become prosumers, meaning that in addition to participating as spectators, they now also produce their own content (Rego-Rey and Romero-Rodríguez, 2016). The aim of these new online influencers is to attract as much attention as possible (Marshall and Redmond, 2016). In parallel, we are currently witnessing an irreversible process in which the traditional mass media are apparently being substituted by networks of individual influencers (Gillin, 2009) who are consolidating their position as political opinion leaders. In this long-distance race, the omnipresence of the influencer/leader, the ideological polarization, and the imposition of digital content on the agenda are all aspects of an information model that the media have been keen to reproduce.

## **The hybridization process of the media and the transfer and polarization of agendas**

Some politicians still see social media as information sources more than anything else, but on such sites, it is important to listen, respond and update the latest news (Giansante, 2015). Social networking sites contribute to political processes and democracy, as far as they give voice to citizens and allow them to promote their own actions (Enguix, 2017), thus creating connected multitudes (Rovira, 2017). Nowadays, it is online users, converted into gatekeepers, who create bubbles of opinion in their own communities, with mutual preferences regarding political models. Accordingly, this has triggered a crisis in the field of journalism, which still has not known how to react to this new trend in which millions of news stories are shared and reproduced on the internet. As a result, these news stories tend to be more striking and superficial (Thompson, 2017). The internet and social media only corroborate the theoretical principles of first- and second-level agenda setting (Anduiza and Bosch, 2004; McCombs, 2005; McCombs and Shaw, 1972), in which the media not only decide on the newsworthiness of topics, but also assess the substantive (the ideology of political candidates, the stances that they take on certain issues and their credentials and experience or personality) and affective (the positive or negative public opinion on the topics broached by those candidates and their discourses) dimensions.

The Pew Research Center report (2010), which compares blog, YouTube and Twitter content with that offered by the media, concludes that the most important stories and issues on social networking sites differ substantially from those to which the conventional media give pride of place. Other studies have confirmed the alignment of political blogs with political stories in the press (Adamic and Glance, 2005; Reese, 2007; Scott, 2005), for instance, on Twitter, which substantiates the continued relevance of agenda setting for digital media outlets. On the other hand, those studies disputing this position (Roberts, Wanta and Dzwo, 2002) contend that digital media has contributed to set alternative and independent agendas. In this vein, Krane (2010) performed an analysis of the content posted on Twitter by three media outlets – *The New York Times*, *CNN* and *NPR* – which reinforces the assumption that there is a direct relationship between the digital content disseminated by the media and the subjects that are most often broached by users.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to analyze the similarities between the tweets posted by politicians on Twitter and user engagement metrics, on the one hand, and the content disseminated by the conventional media, on the other, in the context of the 21 D Catalan elections. We believe that we can make a contribution to the state of the research in the field by examining the causality between the messages of the most influential political candidates vis-à-vis the Catalan independence process, the tweets most ‘liked,’ retweeted or commented on by the public and the issues making it to the front pages of the press.

The argument of the power of the conventional media to set the agenda, given the confidence and credibility that they enjoy among the citizenry, has succumbed to new processes emerging in the field of social media. This has reinforced the intermediate theory of agenda setting (Atwater and Fico, 1986), which examines the relationship between the media agenda and that set by emerging interest groups and/or social movements (Castells, 2012) in an attempt to transform ‘political, social and economic’ realities (Bermúdez and Gallego, 2011). In line with our research, their conclusions have highlighted three key aspects: the central role of institutions and/or organizations in setting the agenda; how the agenda is performed; and the participatory process (Vliegthart and Walgrave, 2008). In the social media context, the counter-agenda conditions sources and topics in the conventional media, notwithstanding the theory’s critics who hold that social media set an independent and alternative agenda (Roberts, Wanta and Dzwo, 2002) or who suggest focusing more on the interaction processes between the micro and meso levels established by political organizations (Bekkers et al., 2011). In short,

in the field of political communication, the conventional and social media agendas correspond to issues of interest to the centers of power, a trend that is ostensibly more visible at election time.

## Methodology

The independence process in Catalonia has achieved an unprecedented political and social relevance in Spain. Therefore, from a methodological perspective it is essential to identify the sources (political candidates and parties, plus the government), the facts (topics) and online (social networking sites/Twitter), and offline (the media/press) communication channels as the main variables of this study.

In view of this, the research method employed here involved analyzing the influence of the topics broached by the candidates on the media agenda. To this end, a quantitative and qualitative-discursive content analysis was performed (Van Dijk, 2015; Callejo, 2010; Flick, 2004; Krippendorff, 2004; Wimmer and Dominik, 1996), following a comparative approach (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) and using triangulation: politicians/users/the media.

The study sample focused on the campaigning before the 21 D Catalan elections, with a time frame encompassing the campaign period (5-19 December), the elections per se (21 December) and the day after (22 December). The day before the elections (20 December) when no active campaigning was allowed was not taken into account for obvious reasons.

From among the total number of tweets (3,562) posted by the political parties and their candidates, 526 relating to the elections were selected. Following this, the user engagement metrics (144,382) and the most popular tweets (44) posted by the candidates (Inés Arrimadas of Cs, Carles Puigdemont of JuntsXCat, Marta Rovira of ERC/CatSí, Mikel Iceta of the PSC, Xavier Domènech of Catalunya en Comú-Podem and Xavier García Albiol of the PP) making it to the front pages of the press (*ABC*, *El País*, *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico de Cataluña*) were analyzed. These political parties and their candidates were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- They were the most voted parties in the 2017 Catalan elections, obtaining over 90 per cent of the ballots cast.
- They define themselves as pro-independence or constitutionalist parties.
- The politicians chosen headed the list of the candidates of their respective parties.

This approach allowed for comparing the Twitter use and strategies of the different candidates and the influence of their messages on users and on the front page news in the press, selected in terms of the following criteria:

- These are reference newspapers at national and regional levels.
- They respond to a conservative position of right-wing (*ABC*), moderate Catalanist (*La Vanguardia*) and socialist liberal (*El País* and *El Periódico de Cataluña*).
- On their front pages they have dealt with the subject of the Catalan “*Procés*.”

Twitonomy was used for data sampling, while IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 24, was employed for data processing. The margin of error was calculated with Scott’s pi, reaching a confidence level of 0.98.

A typology of variables, with exclusive categories for each one, was created for the analytical procedure (Graham et al., 2013):

Table 1. Analysis protocol and typology of variables

Variables	Twitter	Press
Quantitative Variables	-No. of tweets -Frequency -User engagement metrics ('likes', retweets and comments)	- No. of front pages - Percentage of space - Frequency
Qualitative Variables	- Topic of tweet -Resources (hashtags, links, mentions, images and videos) - Relationship with the election theme	- Topic of front page - Presence or absence of the politician (images or copy) - Relationship with current affairs (elections)
Discursive Variables	-Language and propaganda variables (candidate tweets)	-Equivalence on the frontpages

Source: own elaboration

Data coding was performed using the different types of variables figuring among the options offered by the software package (IBM SPSS Statistics 24). The numerical variables, whose sole aim was quantification, such as the number of related tweets (politicians/users) and the sub variables, i.e. the user engagement metrics ('likes', retweets and comments), were classified as scale variables. The categorical variables, with only two possible answers (yes or no) and the objective to quantify the percentage of affirmative and negative cases were coded as dichotomous nominal variables (yes = 1, no = 2). This type of variable belonged to that of 'the relationship or not with current affairs' and that of 'the presence/absence of the candidate on the front pages of the press' (one variable for each newspaper). The categorical variables that could only have one answer from among more than two possible ones were also coded as nominal variables, assigning a numerical value to each possible answer (1 = a, 2 = b, 3 = c). These corresponded to the 'theme' variable. The variables related to resources of the language of propaganda (Nocetti, 1990; Thompson, 2017) are: use of labels (1), use of fallacies (2), stereotypes (3), biased attributions (4), speaking from other sources (5), selection of information (6), opinions as facts (7), Others (8).

## Results analysis and discussion

The traditional press tends to give front-page coverage to those messages posted by political candidates on Twitter that swell the numbers of their followers (whether as a result of acceptance, neutrality or rejection) and reproduce an information model that, if it works on the internet, should also do so for them. The research results have substantiated this initial premise.

An equation in which two related factors and contexts intervene was employed: *X* (politician/influencer on Twitter) and *Y* (offline press), both with the ability to influence a third supplementary factor (user/reader).

In view of the results, the design of the media agenda is determined by the relevance of a subject who, through the strategic use of online tools, manages to elicit an active and viral reaction from a number of followers, inversely proportional to the number of readers engaged by the press.

The methodological structure explains the cause and effect relationship, using triangulation to classify the results: quantitative, qualitative/discursive, and comparative/related.

### *Quantitative approach*

The politician (number of tweet) and user engagement metrics ('likes', retweets and comments) demonstrate the action of the influencer/leader and the reaction of the new audiences on Twitter, plotting a political and media map relating more to the Catalan independence process than to other issues.

With the aim of testing H1—the influence of political candidates on Twitter—and H2—the extent to which the press covers the same topics—a total of 3,562 tweets posted by Spanish and Catalan political leaders or parties were selected, of which 526 relating to the candidates and the 21 D Catalan elections was analyzed. The aim was to focus on each one of the political leaders, given that they have a greater influence than their parties and governments [see Table 2].

Table 2. Candidate activity on Twitter between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>th</sup> of December, 2017.

	Puigdemont	Arrimadas	Rovira	Iceta	Albiol	Domènech
Tweets	88	66	52	174	75	71
Minimum	3	2	2	6	3	2
Maximum	29	21	17	36	27	25
Median	16,00	12,00	9,00	19,00	12,00	15,00
Average	5,50	4,12	3,25	10,87	4,68	4,43

Limited to the first 100 cases

Source: own elaboration

As to the tweets (88) and user engagement metrics (107,205), Carles Puigdemont (JuntsXCat) stood out among the rest of the candidates. Reaping the greatest number of 'likes', retweets, and comments, he was way ahead of Inés Arrimadas (C's), the candidate who obtained the highest number of votes in the 21 D Catalan elections. The number of tweets (174) posted by the socialist candidate Mikel Iceta (PSC) is also noteworthy, although it must be taken into account that his tweets were not new content but mainly links to press releases, photos, videos and documents from a third party [Table 3]. A formula that did not have a positive effect on user response rates or interaction.

Table 3. Number of tweets, followers and user engagement metrics (on the date of sampling)

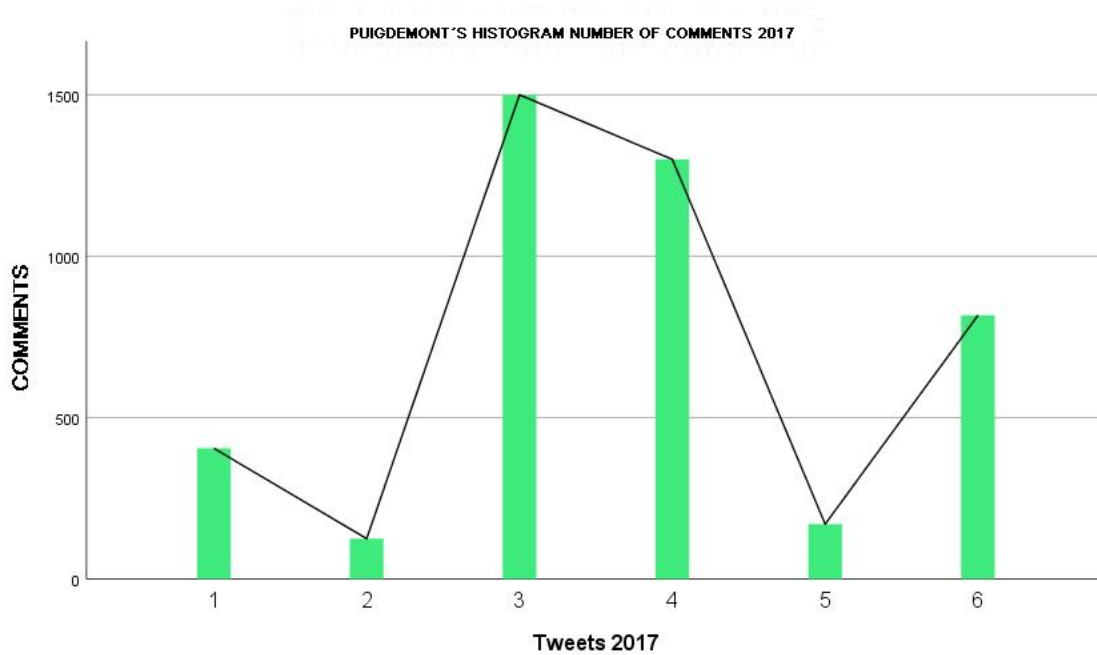
<b>Candidates</b>	<b>Puigdemont JuntsXCat</b>	<b>Arrimadas Cs</b>	<b>Rovira ERC/CatSí</b>	<b>Iceta PSC</b>	<b>Albiol PP</b>	<b>Domènech En Podem Comú-</b>
Tweets	88	66	52	174	75	71
Followers	670,056	401,319	164,232	81,210	63,160	62,345
‘Likes’	68,800	7,300	6,139	227	2,914	3,416
Retweets	34,000	3,282	2,405	216	1,988	2,117
Comments	4,317	1,549	1,235	79	2,855	1,865

Source: own elaboration

Without downplaying the ‘likes’ or retweets, comments permit the detection of (positive and negative) valences that increase depending on what is involved (topic), the tools employed (hashtags, links, photos, videos, mentions, etc.) and how these tools are employed (language resources and recourse to falsehoods, persuasion or propaganda). Comments also enable politicians to reply, thus fostering a two-way conversation, which is supposed to be one of the strengths of Twitter. However, the results reveal that the interactions between the candidates and the public were not proportional.

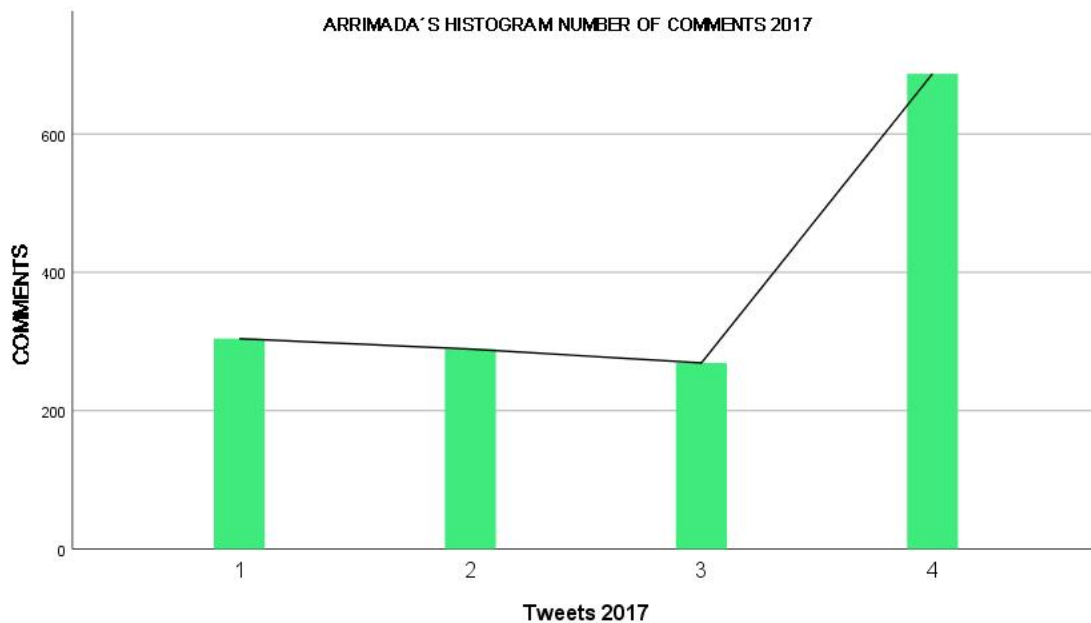
As to the accounts of the political leaders who obtained the best results in the 21 D Catalan elections, namely @InesArrimadas (36 seats) and @KRLS (34 seats), the histograms combining variables such as the number of tweets and comments received by both candidates are shown below. The peaks reveal that the pro-independence leader’s tweets elicited more than twice the number of comments (4,317) than those of the candidate of Cs (1,549), thus reinforcing the assumption that Puigdemont is more influential than his greatest rival and the rest of the candidates [see Figure 1 & 2]. Also significant is the number of comments (2,855) generated by the tweets posted by García Albiol, the PP’s candidate, versus those (79) elicited by Iceta’s, the lowest number of all. Similarly, the number of comments (7,417) corresponding to the pro-independence candidates (Puigdemont, Rovira and Domènech) surpassed that (4,483) of their constitutionalist rivals (Arrimadas, Iceta and Albiol). In other words, the higher level of participation of the followers of the pro-independence bloc did not lead to a higher level of political interaction with users.

Figure 1. Combined variables for Puigdemont’s tweets/comments



Source: IBM SPSS Statistics 24, own elaboration

Figure 2. Combined variables for Arrimadas’ tweets/comments



Source: IBM SPSS Statistics 24, own elaboration

In short, the user engagement metrics point to a high level of response on the part of the public, which is not usually the case with the tweets posted by political candidates. The tweets posted by the pro-independence candidates received a greater number of comments, which is also consistent with the data available on the interactivity of these candidates, especially

Puigdemont and, to a lesser extent, Rovira and Domènech. All of which evinces a lower level of political response and confirms the traditional model of the sole discourse, also in the digital realm.

### *Qualitative/Discursive approach*

The subject matter of the tweets, considered to be one of the study's main variables, helps to identify what politicians talk about on Twitter and how they go about this, on the one hand, and makes it possible to verify equivalences or divergences with the topics covered in the front-page news, on the other.

#### *What do politicians talk about on Twitter?*

The variables of relationship between message subject matter (i.e. tweet content) and the role that it played were defined. These were then applied to the sample to answer two questions: what the candidates talked about on Twitter and on which topics they, the users and later, the media themselves, focused.

Table 4. Variables of approach and topic

<b>Role</b>	<b>Topic</b>
Ideology	Separatism/constitutionalism
Political agenda of the electoral campaign	Campaign rallies and election results
Electoral program	Proposals, advances, developments
Media agenda	News links, videos, images
Criticism of the central government	Messages against the state, unity or the performance of the Spanish government
Criticism of the opposition	Messages against the ideology, program or statements of parties and candidates
Interaction with users	Use of the mention @ and viralization of the message
Mobilising the electorate	Asking for their vote, the attitude towards abstention
Building the candidate's personality	Human values, private life, images of internal meetings and functions
Anecdotes, curiosities, irony, humor	Personal comments or those aimed at other leaders
Miscellaneous	Unclassified

Source: own elaboration

The application of the variables allowed for comparing the main topics broached in the tweets posted and, in turn, highlighted the issues on which each one of the candidates focused.

Table 5. Aim of the tweets posted by the candidates (%)

	Arrimadas	Puigdemont	Rovira	Iceta	Domènech	Albiol
Ideology	21.3	23.4	16.8	12.1	8.3	19.1
Election results	11.8	8.5	9.8	11.0	9.6	10.8
Electoral programme	10.3	4.0	10.0	4.3	8.5	11.4
Media agenda	2.3	3.2	1.8	13.2	1.9	4.6
Criticism of the central government	2.8	17.2	16.9	14.0	15.5	0

Criticism of the opposition	16.8	15.1	14.8	9.5	15.2	16.6
Interaction with users	7.3	8.3	5.8	7.6	8.1	7.3
Mobilising the electorate	13.3	14.1	10.7	10.1	12.2	10.3
Building the candidate's personality	11.3	4.5	7.8	11.1	8.9	4.5
Anecdotes, curiosities, irony, humour	2.3	1.3	3.8	7.0	5.6	9.4
Miscellaneous	0.5	0.4	1.8	0.1	6.2	6.0

Source: own elaboration

The confrontation between the separatists and the constitutionalists is a frame that defined the 21 D Catalan elections. The tweets posted by the pro-independence candidates (Puigdemont, Rovira and Domènech) chiefly revolved around ‘ideology,’ ‘criticism of the central government,’ ‘criticism of the opposition,’ and ‘mobilizing the electorate.’ For their part, the constitutionalist bloc candidates (Arrimadas, Iceta and Albiol), while ignoring or playing down the ‘criticism of the central government,’ also focused their messages on ‘ideology’ and ‘mobilizing the electorate.’ For Puigdemont (23.4 per cent) and Arrimadas (21.3 per cent), ‘ideology’ was the main issue on the agenda, being employed as a way of underscoring their stance and the division between their parties, rather than the most frequent topics, such as the ‘electoral program’ and the ‘election results.’ It is also important to note the percentage difference between the candidates of the most voted parties (Cs and JuntsXCat) with respect to the item ‘criticism of the central government,’ specifically 16.2 per cent in the case of Puigdemont versus 2.8 per cent in that of Arrimadas, a contrast also observable in the rest of the parties, reaching 0 per cent in the case of Albiol, the representative of the central government in Catalonia at the time. The percentages registered as regards the supplementary variables such as ‘mobilizing the electorate’ and ‘interaction with users’ on Twitter show that there is no direct or proportional relationship between them. Although mobilizing the electorate is a common feature of the discourses of leaders (all of the candidates dedicated an important number of tweets to doing just that, but Puigdemont stood out among the rest with 14.1 per cent), no correlation was observed in the interaction of the candidates with their followers. By and large, the results confirm the candidates’ low level of interactivity on Twitter (only Puigdemont registered a response rate of 8.3 per cent), as opposed to the monitoring and active participation of the public.

### *How do politicians talk about on Twitter?*

The language of fallacy and propaganda is a strategy that defines the discourse of political leaders. These are mechanisms of influence that can sway the response of users and mark differences in the communication model of the candidates.

Table 6. Propaganda mechanisms on the political discourse (%)

	Puigdemont	Arrimadas	Rovira	Iceta	Albiol	Domènech	Puigdemont	Arrimadas
Use of Labels	<b>20.2</b>	6.5	0	<b>23.4</b>	0.3	<b>18.3</b>	<b>20.2</b>	6.5
Fallacy	<b>29.8</b>	<b>22.1</b>	6.3	<b>19.6</b>	<b>25.7</b>	17.4	<b>29.8</b>	<b>22.1</b>
Stereotypes	0	0.7	3.2	1.2	<b>27.2</b>	0.9	0	0.7

Biased Attributions	14.0	<b>26.4</b>	<b>18.4</b>	5.7	<b>21.4</b>	<b>29.2</b>	14.0	<b>26.4</b>
Speaking from other sources	3.1	3.5	<b>25.3</b>	<b>28.1</b>	3.1	<b>25.7</b>	3.1	3.5
Selection of information	5.6	16.3	<b>27.9</b>	3.2	5.2	4.2	5.6	16.3
Opinions as facts	<b>25.7</b>	<b>23.7</b>	16.6	16.1	16.5	2.1	<b>25.7</b>	<b>23.7</b>
Others	1.3	0.6	2.2	2.4	0.4	2.2	1.3	0.6

The percentages in bold correspond to the resources most used by each candidate

Source: own elaboration

The results confirm widespread use of these mechanisms by leaders. However, Puigdemont's role as a strategist is highlighted. The pro-independence leader especially uses fallacy (29.8), opinions as facts (25.7) and labels (20.2), which criticize the actions of the central government (f.e.see Image 1). To emphasize the message, he also uses hashtags, mentions, and links to information published in the media. As for her part, Inés Arrimadas stands out for the use of biased attributions (26.4) and opinions as facts (23.7), appealing for compliance with the law on the part of the pro-independence supporters (f.e.see Image 2).

Image 1. Fallacy and Opinions as facts



Source: [Twitter](#)

Image 2. Fallacy and Biased Attributions



Source: [Twitter](#)

Other politicians such as Albiol (PP) reach benchmark percentages in the use of stereotypes (27.2), focused on the campaign slogan: “Spain is the solution.” In addition, it frequently resorts to the issue of the exit of companies from Catalonia as a negative consequence of the conflict (see f.e. Image 3). In the case of Marta Rovira (ERC), the selection of information (27.9) and the use of other sources (25.3) stands out and focuses on the issue of imprisoned Catalan politicians. (see f.e. Image 4).

Image 3. Fallacy and Stereotypes



Source: [Twitter](#)

Image 4. Selection of information



Source: [Twitter](#)

A characteristic of Iceta (PSC) is the use of non-own tweets that include references to other sources (28.1), through links connected to the media (Image 5). Finally, Domènech (Comú-Podem) is characterized by the use of biased attributions (29.2) referring, above all, to the role of Citizens in the Catalan conflict (see Image 6).

Image 5. Speaking from other sources



Source: [Twitter](#)

Image 6. Biased Attributions and Fallacy



Source: [Twitter](#)

*How does the political message on Twitter influence the media?*

The analysis performed on the national and regional newspapers selected for the study (*ABC*, *El País*, *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico de Cataluña*) revealed that of the total number of tweets posted (526) – mostly by Puigdemont (38.6 per cent), Arrimadas (31.8 per cent) and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the candidates (29.5 per cent) – the content of 44 was then published on their front pages.

The specific issues relating to the general topic that received that greatest amount of front-page coverage in the press included the ‘application of Article 155’ (27.63 per cent), ‘Puigdemont’s flight’ (24.43 per cent), ‘imprisoned politicians’ (21.31 per cent), and the ‘exodus of companies from Catalonia’ (9.51 per cent).

Table 7. Main topics on front-page (%)

Topic	<i>ABC</i>	<i>El País</i>	<i>La Vanguardia</i>	<i>El Periódico de Cataluña</i>	Total
Article 155	<b>7.4</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>27.6</b>
Puigdemont’s flight	<b>7.9</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>7.2</b>	2.2	<b>24.4</b>
Imprisoned politicians	3.2	5.7	5.3	7.1	21.3
Legal action	2.5	4.3	4.1	<b>7.2</b>	17.1
Exodus of companies from Catalonia	3.3	2.9	2.7	0.6	9.5

The percentages in bold correspond to the topics most used by each newspaper.

Source: own elaboration

The contingency between the variables (press/topic/candidate) reflects the relevance of the Article 155 issue in both newspapers, with Puigdemont (JuntsXCat) and Arrimadas (Cs) sharing first place. The central government's decision to apply this article led to other conflicts such as 'Puigdemont's flight' and the 'exodus of companies from Catalonia,' issues covered on the front page of *ABC*, and 'imprisoned politicians' and 'legal action,' front-page news in *El Periódico de Cataluña*. The rest of the Spanish (*El País*) and Catalan (*La Vanguardia*) press registered percentages more similar to the 'relationship with current affairs' variable, regardless of whether or not the news was related to the elections. Along these lines, the issue "Huida de Puigdemont" is highlighted on the front page with a significant percentage in both media (7.1/7.2). The application of 155 generated consequences linked to the electoral advance, the dismissal of the government of Catalonia, the imprisonment of its political representatives and the flight of Puiddemont, President of the Generalitat. All these issues occupy a protagonist space on Twitter and as a result on the front pages of the press.

## Conclusion

The last elections in Catalonia (21D) were held in a context of confrontation and conflict between the political institutions of the state (the central government) and those of Catalonia (the Generalitat), between the pro-independence and constitutionalist parties, between the citizenry and also between the media themselves. The developments prior to the Catalan independence process (the referendum, the unilateral declaration of independence, the application of Article 155, the dissolution of the Catalan parliament and the election call) differed from the previous elections. In this respect, the results of this study point to the different stances taken by the candidates on Twitter, the unidirectional nature of their messages, propaganda discourse, the citizenry's level of response, and the transfer and polarization of the political and media agendas.

In view of the relationship observed between the tweets posted by the candidates (not their parties) on their personal accounts, those that engaged users most and the issues making it to the front pages of the press, H1 has been confirmed.

The conclusions linked to this hypothesis corroborate that Twitter is a platform with resources that promote information sharing, interaction, and mobilization (Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Stromer-Galley, 2014). The messages most commented by users correspond to the leaders who enhance a discourse based on fallacy and propaganda. In this line, most candidates use resources (hashtags, mentions, links) to further emphasize the message. Puigdemont performance on Twitter, which attracted the attention of his fan community and multiplied the number of comments in favor of independence, stood out among the rest. However, in none of the cases analyzed here was the response of the candidates proportional to the active participation of the public. The unidirectional nature of the messages and the lack of interaction defined the political communication model.

As to the transfer of agendas (Aruguete, 2017; Casero-Ripollés, 2015; Chadwick, 2013), there was a three-point correlation: the topics that the candidates broached most (separatism/constitutionalism, criticism/support of the Spanish and Catalan governments and mobilizing the electorate) were, in turn, those that then went viral on the internet and made it to the front pages of the press. The latter focused more on very specific issues (the application of Article 155, Puigdemont's flight, imprisoned politicians, legal action, and the exodus of companies from Catalonia) than on topics inherent to any electoral process (the electoral program, the election results, or the political agenda).

H2 was also borne out. The independence process was one of the main frames of the messages of the candidates and Twitter users, on the one hand, and the news published in the press, on

the other. This main frame was characterized by the polarization inherent to political leaders and the news treatment of the media.

The conclusions relating to this hypothesis states that topics addressed most by the candidates, followed most by users and covered most in the press referred to the conflict arising from the independence process. Moreover, the mobilization of the electorate on social media (Balcells and Padró-Solanet, 2016) was a common aim of all of the candidates, although it was the pro-independence leaders, with Puigdemont at the forefront, who managed to influence and attract a greater number of followers.

The most viral messages were posted by the pro-independence candidates, who incorporated the idea of separating from Spain and the conflict provoked by the central government (the application of Article 155, the imprisonment of a number pro-independence politicians, Puigdemont's flights, and the legal action taken). The political leaders analyzed here encouraged the public to take an active stance on the matter (Montoya and Vandehey, 2009; Pérez-Ortega, 2014; Rampersad, 2009), reflected in the user engagement metrics and especially in the comments posted on Twitter. The Catalan elections on 21 December 2017 and the issues relating to this type of process lost ground to the independence process as a frame of the political and media agenda.

Our findings underscore that the role of politicians on Twitter during electoral campaigns depends on many factors pertaining to the political and social context and the extent to which the influence of the subject (leader) over the object (topic) is decisive in attracting voters and setting agendas.

## References

- Abejón, P., Tejedor, L., Gómez Patiño, M., Risueño, I., Osuna, C., and Dader, J. (2017). El uso de webs, Facebook y Twitter en la comunicación electoral española de 2015: una mirada impresionista. In: J. Dader and E. Campos-Domínguez eds., *La búsqueda digital del voto. Cibercampañas Electorales en España 2015-16*, Valencia, Spain: Tirant Lo Blanch, pp. 75-140.
- Adamic, L. and Glance, N. (2005). The political blogosphere and the 2004 presidential election. In: *LinkKDD'05 Proceedings of the 3rd international workshop on Link discovery*. [online] Chicago: ACM, pp. 36-43. Available at: <https://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?doid=1134271.1134277> [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Allcott, H. & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31, 211-236. [CrossRef](#)
- Anduiza, E. and Bosch, A. (2004). *Comportamiento político y electoral*. Barcelona: Ariel Ciencia Política.
- Aruguete, N. (2017). The agenda setting hypothesis in the new media environment. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 28, pp. 35-58. [CrossRef](#)
- Atwater, T. and Fico, F. (1986). Source reliance and use in reporting state government: A study of print and broadcast practices. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 8, pp. 53-61.
- Augure, (2015). *Estatus y prácticas de las relaciones con los influencers en 2015*. [online] Madrid: Augure. Available at: <https://ipmark.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Informe-de-las-relaciones-con-Influencers-2015-Augure.pdf> [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Balcells, J. and Padró-Solanet, A. (2016). Tweeting on Catalonia's Independence: The Dynamics of Political Discussion and Group Polarisation. *Medijske studije*, 7(14). [CrossRef](#)
- Balcells, J. Padró-Solanet, A. (2019). Crossing Lines in the Twitter Debate on Catalonia's Independence. *The International Journals of Press Politics*, 26(5), 785-793 [CrossRef](#)

- Ballesteros, C., Zamora, R., Sánchez, P., and Gil, A. (2017). La personalización de las campañas electorales online. Las elecciones generales de 2015 (20D) a través de Facebook. In: *XXIII Congreso de la Sociedad Española de Periodística*. [online] Madrid: Sociedad Española de Periodística, pp. 191-209. Available at: [www.cuadernos.info/index.php/CDI/article/download/cdi.41.1259/pdf\\_33](http://www.cuadernos.info/index.php/CDI/article/download/cdi.41.1259/pdf_33) [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Bekkers, V., Beunders, H, Edwards, A. and Moddy, R. (2011). New media, Micromobilization, and Political Agenda Setting: Crossover Effects in Political Mobilization and Media Usage. *The Information Society*, 27 (4), pp. 209-219. [CrossRef](#)
- Benkler, Y. (2015). *La riqueza de las redes: cómo la producción social transforma los mercados y la libertad*. Barcelona: Icaria.
- Bennett, W.L. y Livingston, S. (2018): The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions. *European Journal of Communication*, 33(2), pp. 122-139. [CrossRef](#)
- Bermúdez, P. and Gallegos, A. (2011). Las teorías de la interacción social en los estudios sociológicos. *Contribuciones a las Ciencias Sociales*. [online] Available at: <http://www.eumed.net/rev/ccss/14/pbag.html> [Accessed 20 June 201].
- Cha, Meeyoung, Haddadi, Hamed., Benevenuto, Fabricio & Gummadi, Krishna.P.. (2010). Measuring User Influence in Twitter: The Million Follower Fallacy, Proc. International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media (ICWSM).
- Callejo, J. (2010). Reseña ‘Análisis sociológico del sistema de discursos’ de Fernando Conde Gutiérrez del Álamo Empiria. *Revista de Metodología de las Ciencias Sociales*, 20, pp. 246-251. [CrossRef](#)
- Campos-Domínguez, E. (2017). Twitter y la comunicación política. *El profesional de la información*, [online] 26(5), pp. 785-793. Available at: <https://recyt.fecyt.es/index.php/EPI/article/view/epi.2017.sep.01> [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Carrasco-Polaino, R., Villar-Cirujano, E. and Tejedor-Fuentes, L. (2018). Twitter como herramienta de comunicación política en el contexto del referéndum independentista catalán: asociaciones ciudadanas frente a instituciones públicas. *Icono 14*, [online] 16 (1), pp. 64-85. Available at: <https://icono14.net/ojs/index.php/icono14/article/view/1134> [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Casero-Ripollés, A. (2015). Estrategias y prácticas comunicativas del activismo político en las redes sociales en España. *Historia y Comunicación Social*, 20 (2), pp. 533-548. [CrossRef](#)
- Castells, M. (2009). *Comunicación y poder*. Madrid: Alianza editorial.
- Castells, M. (2012). *Redes de indignación y esperanza: los movimientos sociales en la era de Internet*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.
- Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió (2016 and 2017). [ceo.gencat.cat/ca/barometre/](http://ceo.gencat.cat/ca/barometre/) [Accessed 20 Junio 2019].
- Chadwick, A. (2013). *The Hybrid Media System, Politics and Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cheng, L. (2017). Efectos de comunicación política directa ‘online’ sobre la participación ciudadana en España: Un estudio experimental. In: J. Dader and E. Campos-Domínguez, eds., *La búsqueda digital del voto. Ciber campañas Electorales en España 2015-16*. Valencia: Tirant Lo Blanch, pp. 393-434.
- Congosto-Martínez, M. (2014). Viralidad de los mensajes en Twitter en las Campañas Electorales. In: *III Congreso Internacional en Comunicación Política y Estrategias de Campaña*. Santiago de Compostela: Asociación Latinoamericana de Investigadores en Campañas Electorales.
- Congosto, M., Fernández, M. and Moro, E. (2011). Twitter y política: información, opinión y ¿predicción? *Cuadernos de Comunicación Evoca*, 4, pp. 11-16.

- Coromina, O. (2017). The struggle for the story in political disputes. The case of the 9N participation process. *El profesional de la información*, 26 (5), pp. 884-893. [CrossRef](#)
- Cramer, K. (2015) "Political power and civil counterpower. The complex dynamics of the Catalan independence movement". *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 21 n° 1, p. 104-120.
- Dader, J. (2017). Campañas políticas 'online': La realidad española frente al horizonte internacional del 'tecnocabildeo'. In: J. Dader and E. Campos-Domínguez, eds., *La búsqueda digital del voto. Ciber campañas Electorales en España 2015-16*. Valencia: Tirant Lo Blanch, pp. 11-74.
- Enguix O. (2017). Impacto político e informativo de las redes sociales: esferas de actuación y comparación con los medios. *Anàlisi. Quaderns de comunicació i cultura*, 56, pp. 71-85. Available at: <http://analisi.cat/article/view/n56-enguix> [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Farrell, D. (1996). Campaign strategies and tactics. In: L. Leduc, R. Niemi, and P. Norris, Pippa, eds., *Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Fernández-Gómez, J., Hernández-Santaolalla, V. and Sanz-Marcos, P. (2018). Influencers, marca personal e ideología política en Twitter. *Cuadernos.info*, 42, pp. 19-37. [CrossRef](#)
- Flick, U. (2004). *Introducción a la investigación cualitativa*. Madrid: Morata.
- Gainous, J. and Wagner, K. (2014). *Tweeting to power: The social media revolution in American politics*. *Oxford studies in digital politics*. [Kindle] Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Giansante, G. (2015). *La comunicación política online: Cómo utilizar la web para construir consenso y estimular la participación*. [Kindle] Barcelona: Editorial UOC.
- Gillin, P. (2009). *Los nuevos influyentes*. Madrid: LID.
- Graham, T., Broersma, M., Hazelhoff, K., and van't Harr, G. (2013). Between broadcasting political messages and interacting with voters. The use of Twitter during the 2010 UK general election campaign. *Information, Communication and Society*, 16 (5), pp. 692-716. [CrossRef](#)
- Jackson, N. and Lilleker, D. (2011). Microblogging, constituency service and impression management: UK MPs and the use of Twitter. *The journal of legislative studies*, 17 (1), pp. 86-105. [CrossRef](#)
- Jenkins, H (2008). *Convergence Culture. La cultura de la convergencia en los medios de comunicación*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Hallin, C. and Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems. Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hjarvard, S. (2013). *The mediatization of culture and society*. Milton Park, England: Routledge.
- Holton, A., Baek, K., Coddington, M. and Yaschur, C. (2014). Seeking and sharing motivations for linking on Twitter. *Communication Research Reports*, 31 (1), pp. 33-40. [CrossRef](#)
- Karaduman, I. (2013). The effect of social media on personal branding efforts of top level executives. *Procedia. Social and behavioral sciences*, 99 (6), pp. 465-473. [CrossRef](#)
- Krane, M. (2010). The socially filtered media agenda: a study of Agenda Setting among news outlets on Twitter. Columbia: University of Missouri.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Labrecque, L., Markos, E. and Milne, G. (2011). Online personal branding: Processes, challenges, and implications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 25 (1), pp. 37-50. [CrossRef](#)
- Llorente, José-Antonio (2017). "La era de la posverdad: realidad vs percepción". *Uno D+I desarrollando ideas*, v. 27, pp. 8-10. [https://www.revista-uno.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ UNO\\_27.pdf](https://www.revista-uno.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ UNO_27.pdf)
- Mancera-Rueda, A. and Helfrich, U. (2014). La crisis en 140 caracteres: el discurso propagandístico en la red social Twitter. *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación*, 12, pp. 59-86.

- McCombs, M. (2005): Look at Agenda Setting: past, present and future. *Journalism Studies*, 6 (4), pp. 543-557. [CrossRef](#)
- McCombs, M. and Shaw, D. (1972). The Agenda Setting Function of the Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, pp. 176-187.
- Marshall, D. and Redmond, S., eds. (2016). *A companion to celebrity*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.
- Mazzoleni, G. (2004). *La comunicazione politica*. Bologna: Il Molino.
- Meraz, S. (2011). Using Time Series Analysis to Measure Intermedia Agenda-Setting Influence in Traditional Media and Political Blog Networks. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 88(1), 176–194.. [CrossRef](#)
- Montoya, P. and Vandehey, T. (2009). *The Brand Called You. Create a Personal Branding that Wins Attention and Grows Your Business*. London: McGraw-Hill.
- Nocetti, O. (1990). *Falacias y Medios de Comunicación. El discurso como arma*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Humanitas.
- Noguera, J. M. (2013). How open are journalists on Twitter? Trends towards the enduser journalism. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 26 (1), 95-116. Available at: [https://www.unav.es/fcom/communication-society/es/resumen.php?art\\_id=43\\_\\_\\_](https://www.unav.es/fcom/communication-society/es/resumen.php?art_id=43___) [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Pérez-Curiel, C. & García-Gordillo, M. (2018). Política de influencia y tendencia fake en Twitter. Efectos postelectorales (21D) en el marco del *Procés* en Cataluña. *El profesional de la información*, 27(5), 1030-1040.
- Pérez-Ortega, A. (2014). *Marca personal para dummies*. Barcelona: PAPP.
- Pew Research Center (2010). Generations Online in 2010 <https://www.pewinternet.org/2010/12/16/generations-2010> [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Poblet, M. (2018). Distributed, privacy-enhancing technologies in the 2017 Catalan referendum on independence: New tactics and models of participatory democracy. *First Monday*, 23(12). [CrossRef](#)
- Perales-García and Pont-Sorribes, C. (2018). «El món ens mira? Mites i realitats de la representació mediàtica del procés català a la premsa ‘nacional’ i estrangera» in Capdevila, Joaquin y Lladonosa, Mariona (eds), *Narracions mediàtiques del catalanisme. De l'Estatut del 1979 al procés sobiranista*, Barcelona, UOC, pp. 37-61. [CrossRef](#)
- Rahat, G. and Sheaffer, T. (2007). The personalization(s) of politics: Israel, 1949-2003. *Political communication*, 24 (1), pp. 65-80. [CrossRef](#)
- Rampersad, H. (2009). *Authentic personal branding: A new blueprint for building and aligning a powerful leadership brand*. San Bernardino, CA: IAP.
- Reese, S.D (2007): “The framing project: A bridging model for media research revisited”. *Journal of Communication*, 57 (1), pp. 148-154. [CrossRef](#)
- Rego-Rey, S.; Romero-Rodríguez, L.M. (2016). “Representación discursiva y lenguaje de los *youtubers* españoles: estudio de caso de los *gamers* más populares”. *Index comunicación*, 6(1), 197-224.  
<http://journals.sfu.ca/indexcomunicacion/index.php/indexcomunicacion/article/view/271>
- Roberts, M., Wanta, W. and Dzwo, T. (2002). Agenda setting and issue salience online. *Communication Research*, 29 (4), pp. 452-465.
- Rodríguez, R. and Ureña, D. (2012). Diez razones para el uso de Twitter como herramienta en la comunicación política y electoral. *Comunicación y Pluralismo*, 10), pp. 89-116. Available at: <http://summa.upsa.es/viewer.vm?id=0000030573andpage=1andsearch=andlang=esandview=main> [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Rodríguez-Virgili, J., Jandura, O. and Rebolledo de la Calle, M. (2014). La personalización de la política en la cobertura mediática: una comparación de las campañas electorales en

- España y Alemania. *Trípodos*, 1 (34), pp. 61-79. Available at: <http://dadun.unav.edu/handle/10171/40044> [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Sampedro, V. (2014). *El cuarto poder en red: Por un periodismo (de código) libre*. Barcelona: Icaria.
- Rovira, G. (2017). *Activismo en red y multitudes conectadas*. Barcelona: Icaria.
- Sánchez-Murillo, L. (2005). El marketing político y sus consecuencias para la democracia". *Comunicación y sociedad*, 4, pp. 11-38. Available at: <http://www.comunicacionsociedad.cucsh.udg.mx/index.php/comsoc/articledownload/4091/3848> [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Scolari, C. (2008). *Hipermediaciones. Elementos para una teoría de la comunicación digital interactiva*. Barcelona: Gedisa.
- Scott, D. (2005). *Tempests of the blogosphere: Presidential campaign stories that failed to ignite mainstream media*. Available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/messages/downloadexceeded.html> [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Stromer-Galley, J. (2014). *Presidential Campaigning in the Internet Age*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sung-Tae, K. and Young-hwan, L. (2007). New functions of Internet mediated agenda-setting: *Korea Journalism Review*, 1 (2), pp. 3-29.
- Thelwall, M. and Cugelman, B. (2017). Monitoring *Twitter* strategies to discover resonating topics: The case of the *UNDP*. *El profesional de la información*, 26 (4), pp. 649-661. [CrossRef](#)
- Toth, J. (2018) Platform-imperialism in science and social media: A case study of texts produced on European referendums between 2010 and 2017, *Információs Társadalom* 18(2)77-97. [CrossRef](#)
- Thompson, M. (2017). *Sin palabras: ¿Qué ha pasado con el lenguaje de la política?* Barcelona: Penguin Random House.
- Van Dijk, J. (2015). Critical discourse studies. A sociocognitive Approach. *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3(1), 63-74.
- Vergeer, M., Hermans, L. and Sams, S. (2013). Online social networks and micro-blogging in political campaigning: The exploration of a new campaign tool and a new campaign style. *Party politics*, 19 (3), pp. 477-501. Available at: <https://goo.gl/AqAnjF> [Accessed 20 June 2019].
- Vliegthart, R. and Walgrave, S. (2008). The contingency of intermedia agenda setting: A longitudinal study in Belgium. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 85 (4), pp. 860-877. [CrossRef](#)
- Wallsten, K. (2007). Agenda setting and the blogosphere: An analysis of the relationship between mainstream media and political blogs. *Review of Policy Research*, 24 (6), pp. 567-587. [CrossRef](#)
- Wimmer, R. and Dominick, J. (1996). *La investigación científica de los medios de comunicación: una introducción a sus métodos*. Barcelona: Bosh.
- Zamora-Medina, R., Sánchez-Cobarro, P. and Martínez, H. (2017). The importance of the 'strategic game' to frame the political discourse in *Twitter* during 2015 Spanish Regional Elections. *Communication and Society*, 30 (3), pp. 229-253.
- Zugasti-Azagra, R. and Pérez-González, J. (2015). La interacción política en *Twitter*: el caso de @ppopular y @ahorapodemos durante la campaña para las Elecciones Europeas de 2014. *Ambitos: Revista Internacional de Comunicación*, 28. Available at: <http://institucional.us.es/ambitos/?p=1697> [Accessed 20 June 2019]

---

## ***Curriculum vitae*: challenges and potential solutions**

KOME – An International Journal of Pure  
Communication Inquiry  
Volume 8 Issue 2, p. 109-127.  
© The Author(s) 2020  
Reprints and Permission:  
kome@komejournal.com  
Published by the Hungarian  
Communication Studies Association  
CrossRef 10.17646/KOME.75672.52

**Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva<sup>1</sup>, Judit Dobránszki<sup>2</sup>, Aceil Al-Khatib<sup>3</sup> and Panagiotis Tsigaris<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Independent researcher, P. O. Box 7, Miki-cho post office, Ikenobe 3011-2, Kagawa-ken, 761-0799, JAPAN

<sup>2</sup>Research Institute of Nyíregyháza, IAREF, University of Debrecen, HUNGARY

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Dentistry, Jordan University of Science and Technology, JORDAN

<sup>4</sup>Department of Economics, Thompson Rivers University, CANADA

**Abstract:** An academic usually has a *curriculum vitae* (CV) or CV summary (*resumé*) that highlights their professional career paths. CVs contain information which is written by the academic to signal their qualifications and academic achievements to employers, granting agencies, or promotion and tenure committees. Decision makers face numerous problems with CVs as a vehicle that carries important information, including incomplete, outdated, biased, private, as well as falsified and fabricated information. To complicate matters, decision makers themselves could be making biased decisions even when CV information is complete and accurate due to potential discriminatory practices. There is weak consistency or standardization in implementation internationally, and little verification. This paper proposes a set of guidelines for verifiable, accurate, complete, updated, and public (VACUP guidelines) CVs, whether these be private, institutional, or owned by third parties. For the effective implementation of these guidelines, a new market in which a third party certifies the CV as VACUP-compliant, is recommended.

**Keywords:** accountability; CV; portfolio; professional summary; public record; signaling; transparency

### **Why is a public *curriculum vitae* important?**

In academic circles, a *curriculum vitae* (CV) or *resumé* (i.e., a succinct CV and best fit criteria of a candidate to suit a job description; Christenbery, 2014; Hicks and Roberts, 2016) plays many important functions. It serves, in the most ideal of cases, as a summary of the important

Address for Correspondence: Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva, email: jaimetex[at]yahoo.com, Judit Dobránszki, email: dobranszki[at]freemail.hu, Aceil Al-Khatib, email: aceil[at]hotmail.com, Panagiotis Tsigaris, email: ptsigaris[at]tru.ca

Article received on the 27th Jan, 2020. Article accepted on the 9th July, 2020.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

and relevant aspects of that individual's professional background, and lists, in detail, all of the academic achievements that have defined that individual's career path as an academic, including as a method to evaluate research performance and output (Cañibano and Bozeman, 2009). A CV offers a practical and simple solution to factual professional representation and no longer needs to be presented as a hard-copy, in paper, or even on CD-ROMs, as was suggested by Galdino and Gotway (2005), but can now be presented online, as a digital CV or e-CV. Hereafter, for simplicity sake, CV is used throughout the paper. This would include, very broadly, educational awards and degrees, grants and prizes, postdoc, faculty and editorial positions, meetings, congresses and symposia as well as a complete record of publishing in both peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed publications. To non-academics, and even to some academics, a CV might represent a "vanity item" that gloats about that individual's academic past, especially for recruitment purposes. This is because there tends to be a section on skills or personal qualities that highlights – or praises – one's own positive qualities. Others consider that "inauthentic" researchers might use a CV to feign or masquerade contributions to knowledge (p. 9; Dougherty, 2018). A CV is also useful for employment and for promotional purposes, in a gender-independent manner (Steinpreis et al., 1999). Each academic has a different capacity and has achieved personal accomplishments that are unique and most certainly incomparable. In that sense, the CV should not be used as a tool for comparison, to eliminate competition, or as an exclusionary or discriminatory tool, even though it unfortunately does – often – play this role in hiring decisions. CVs play an important role in hiring decisions and discriminatory practices have been observed based on a person's name, gender and race. In a recent meta-analysis study on hiring discrimination, applicants in a minority group suffered substantial additional discrimination after a callback and significantly less job offers than those in the comparable majority group (Quillian et al., 2020). One serious consequence of discriminatory hiring practices is the falsification of CVs to mask elements (e.g., race) that might be discriminated against (Kang et al., 2016). When making assessments using a CV, individuality, career stage, research, teaching and service work loads, and not only productivity or graduate's institutional (i.e., top universities) affiliations, need to be considered, everything else equal.

False information within a CV can have fateful consequences, even years after a flawed or inaccurate CV has been used. To illustrate the importance of the CV in current misconduct cases, readers may refer to the Paolo Macchiarini case in which false information on his CV was used to secure a job at Karolinska Institutet in Sweden (Teixeira da Silva, 2017a), a fact that might not have been detected had no CV existed. However, in this day and age of rampant misconduct in research and publishing (Teixeira da Silva, 2017b), there is increasing pressure on the entire community (authors, editors, publishers, academic institutes, ministries of education, and other educational proponents) to coordinate and ensure that CVs represent much more than just a summary of an academic's past. Part of the crisis in trust in academics, born from a reproducibility crisis (Open Science Collaboration, 2015), exists as a result of lax guidelines or rules regarding CVs, or CVs that are outdated, erroneous or fraudulent (Cleary and Horsfall, 2013). Thus, this paper proposes guidelines for verifiable, accurate, complete, updated, and public (VACUP guidelines) for CVs to be a standard international model.

Regarding each of these elements, a CV needs to be verifiable and must thus exist. A CV should also be updated (Cleary and Horsfall, 2013) to reflect the latest status of an academic path. The importance of the period of updating will depend on the frequency of publication and on the discipline, with actively publishing individuals requiring more frequent updates than those that do not publish that much. Accuracy is important to reflect precise dates of positions, and correct meta-data of publications or titles held. CVs should be complete, and there should be no gaps in information, or purposefully omitted information, provided the other side is not

practicing discrimination, e.g., against minorities.<sup>1</sup> Some have even suggested listing failures, or having a separate CV of failures or career lows.<sup>2</sup> A complete list of congresses attended would allow for the assessment of the attendance of predatory congresses, provided that there exists a database of such congresses with detailed and specific criteria that define what makes them “predatory” (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2017). The risk is that the attendance of unscholarly or predatory conferences can be abused to give the illusion of scholarly participation, but used only to “inflate curricula and boost career progression” (p. 193; Cortegiani et al., 2020). Most importantly, even more so when academics are supported by public funding, CVs should be public, in an open access (OA) format, i.e., not encrypted or behind institutional paywalls or password protection.<sup>3</sup> However, there is the issue of privacy and the protection of rights.<sup>4</sup> The ability to independently verify the content of an applicant’s CV, including their publication record, has practical implications. This was demonstrated by a study that highlighted how 11% of papers listed by 20% of applicants to a trauma and surgical critical care fellowship program could not be verified (Branco et al., 2012).

### **Incomplete CVs are a source of mistrust and opacity in research and publishing**

One of the important aspects underlying the current academic crisis of trust is that individual academics have been allowed, in many cases, total freedom regarding their CVs. This has allowed the existence of a culture where non-VACUP-compliant CVs have become the norm rather than the exception, or where each individual or institution has been able to determine what information can or should appear on a CV, but often with little regulation. Consequently, any academic or member of the public that wishes to independently verify a career- or publishing-related claim regarding that academic may find a completely unregulated environment, ranging widely from no public CV to fully VACUP-compliant CVs. Since academic publishing is an international and transnational phenomenon, an international set of rules that are enforced is required, which we put forward as the VACUP guidelines. With increasing fraud, and improved methods to detect and expose fraud, which some may associate with the open science movement (McKiernan et al., 2016), comes an increase in regulations, verifications and confirmations. As a result of more complex and stringent checks, which could be equated with an Orwellian state of academic publishing, academia is becoming more “militarized” and possibly even over-regulated (Teixeira da Silva, 2016a; Grimm and Saliba, 2017; Aberbach and Christensen, 2018; Morrish, 2020). As a result, extreme events are starting to take place: academics with legendary status are falling from their status quo positions (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2016) as a result of whistle-blowing and public exposure, academic

---

<sup>1</sup> Negative aspects such as suspensions or criminal records are not usually included but would be the responsibility of an auditor: see sections on auditing, enforcement and compliance.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/apr/30/cv-of-failures-princeton-professor-publishes-resume-of-his-career-lows> (April 23, 2016; last accessed: June 20, 2020); [https://www.princeton.edu/~joha/Johannes\\_Haushofer\\_CV\\_of\\_Failures.pdf](https://www.princeton.edu/~joha/Johannes_Haushofer_CV_of_Failures.pdf) (April 27, 2016; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>3</sup> Being made public does not necessarily imply that a CV can be used by other academics to conduct research without obtaining official ethics approval. Such research may be intrusive, violate privacy or confidentiality of the individual whose CV is made available. Whether a CV that is made public is for information only or whether it can also be applied to research, without obtaining consent from the human subject of that CV, needs to be determined by a research ethics board of the institution following ethical guidelines. We caution readers that research on human subjects with publicly available information, such as a public CV, should be done in a way that protects their human dignity, privacy and confidentiality, protects free and informed consent and minimizes harm.

<sup>4</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj> (April 27, 2017; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

witch-hunts and/or take-downs are occurring at record lightning speeds (e.g., Brian Wansink case<sup>5</sup>, from career peak to career destruction, or a boom-to-bust cycle, of about 4-6 months), and highly unexpected black swan events (Teixeira da Silva, 2015) are becoming more common place. Extreme events such as these indicate that CVs are a highly unregulated aspect of academic research and publishing, and thus a potentially large source of fraud.

The fact that CVs are highly unregulated is evidenced by four high profile cases: recently, it was reported that Lisa Riccobene, a director in the Massachusetts medical examiner's office, appeared to have falsely claimed that she had a master's degree. That report came after her employer, an agency responsible for investigating violent and unexplained deaths, learned that Northeastern University had no record of her earning a master's degree in psychology.<sup>6</sup> In 2007, Marilee Jones, the dean of admissions at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T) admitted that she had fabricated her credentials stating: "I misrepresented my academic degrees when I first applied to M.I.T. 28 years ago and did not have the courage to correct my résumé when I applied for my current job or at any time since."<sup>7</sup> In 2013, Leslie Cohen Berlowitz, the head of the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences agreed to resign after revelations that she "embellished her résumé" by falsely claiming a doctorate from New York University<sup>8</sup>. And in 2015, the University of Iowa's Faculty Assembly of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences approved a motion to censure<sup>9</sup> against the incoming President, Bruce Harrel, for "violating professional ethics" by misrepresentations on his *resumé* and for failing to cite co-authors for nine of 12 publications listed on his *resumé*<sup>10</sup>. These four cases confirm that there is generally initially no background check, verification process or standard requirements for CVs of academics applying for higher education positions, despite the fact that the temptation to misrepresent, deceive or lie in order to get ahead is strong in this highly competitive sector. However, post-publication analyses can reveal erroneous or fraudulent elements, and lead to corrections and reparations, as demonstrated by these cases, or in more extreme cases, jail-time, as occurred for Macchiarini for, among other issues "lying in his CV" (Day, 2019).

By standardizing the requirements for CVs, fraud might be curtailed to some extent, dividing academics, journals, publishers and research institutes as either VACUP-compliant or non-compliant. As a likely result, there may – or should be – be negative consequences for non-VACUP-compliant entities, who will gradually be marginalized if they do not adjust to new VACUP-compliant regulations. This paper proposes VACUP guidelines as a tool to verify the professional and academic record of an author.

## Signaling theory and the role of CVs

Signaling theory was developed by Nobel Laureate Michael Spence (Spence, 1974). Signals are used by people to convey information to others in an attempt to solve an asymmetric

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2018/09/20/this-ivy-league-food-scientist-was-media-darling-now-his-studies-are-being-retracted/> (September 20, 2018; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/05/30/director-medical-examiner-office-appears-have-fabricated-credentials/lxP6swhaBC15GYKhLwTWyN/story.html?s\\_campaign=bdc:article:stub](https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/05/30/director-medical-examiner-office-appears-have-fabricated-credentials/lxP6swhaBC15GYKhLwTWyN/story.html?s_campaign=bdc:article:stub) (May 30, 2018; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/27/us/27mit.html> (April 27, 2007; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.boston.com/uncategorized/noprimarytagmatch/2013/07/25/embattled-head-of-american-academy-of-arts-and-sciences-resigns-after-questions-about-resume> (July 25, 2013; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2015/09/24/iowa-faculty-group-censures-incoming-president#.VgP-OrfwME.twitter> (September 24, 2015; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.thegazette.com/subject/news/education/higher-education/university-of-iowa-liberal-arts-college-faculty-rebukes-new-president-20150924> (September 24, 2015; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

informational problem (Connelly et al., 2011). Spence's seminal work considered education as a signaling device which is undertaken by someone (from hereafter named the "sender") in order to communicate to the prospective employer (from hereafter named the "receiver") that they have a higher ability and thus can be employed at a higher wage rate. There is an asymmetry of information between the two parties. The receiver does not know if the person is of high ability and thus productive or not. In order for the receiver to be convinced that the sender is more productive, the sender invests in a signal, education, which is costly. Education is thus a vehicle to communicate to the receiver that (s)he is of higher ability and thus deserves a higher salary. Furthermore, Spence argued that for a signal to be effective the cost of education for a high-ability person has to be lower than the cost to someone of lower ability. It is interesting that one of the first things a CV includes when it communicates information and signals quality is the past education accomplishments of the sender.

The applicant-sender wants to send information and signals that will increase their chances for the position they are aiming for. The sender decides which information and signals to communicate, via the CV, to the receiver. Usually positive information (i.e., research record sometimes using journal impact factors as signals) is communicated while negative (i.e., a criminal record, retractions, spin, *p*-hacking, manipulation of data and results, biases, etc.) are not sent to receivers as such information would reduce the chances of the sender being selected. In addition, if the sender believes that there is discrimination, they might hide some information from the CV such as age, gender and other elements associated with minority groups (Deros and Decoster, 2017; Kang et al., 2016; Foley and Williamson, 2018; Hartwell et al., 2020). The sender has an advantage in that they are true insiders of their own private information and can choose what information is signaled to the receiver and what is not via their CV. They can hide some of this information from the CV if it is to their benefit to do so. However, a VACUP-compliant CV is complete and thus no information, positive or negative, is hidden<sup>11</sup>. In addition, it would be sufficiently tone-neutral in order to avoid a skewed impression and thus would not require impression management (Waung et al., 2017). However, in order to have the sender comply and not hide information there should be a cost/penalty for hiding information that is valuable to the receiver. The cost of signaling information is fundamental for its effectiveness. A costly signal is credible. Credibility is at stake with CVs because preparation is not very costly. Moreover, for the CV to act as an effective signal of quality it must have a lower cost to high quality senders than those senders who are of lower quality or are not qualified. Introducing a penalty is to make the cost higher for those that are not qualified for the position but who attempt to misinform receivers. The above analysis assumes that the receiver is unbiased and does not hire using discriminatory practices, which might not be the case.

A CV has many similarities with financial statements that firms release. Financial statements, such as a balance sheet or income statement, are released in order to provide information. Firms who have information use financial statements as a signaling or communication device to send information to investors, lenders and creditors who lack this information but want to make decisions based on the information contained in such statements. The purpose of a CV is the same as that of financial statements released by firms, namely the transfer of valuable information from one informed party to another party that is uninformed. This comparison is expanded upon later in the paper.

---

<sup>11</sup> A 100% VACUP-compliant CV is likely impossible, as aspects such as bias, spin, and difficult to track imperfections are usually not visible until post-publication, if detected at all. It is also highly likely that not all errors can be eliminated, and there should be no punitive consequences for honest error, which can easily be reported to prospective employers. However, manipulated facts that result in an erroneous CV should have more forcible consequences, depending on their seriousness, such as rejection, suspension, job loss, etc.

### **Why is a CV an imperfect communication device and can it be improved?**

Although a CV carries information and signals to the receiver to make decisions, it is usually not sufficient. Additional signals that accompany the CV are usually required by the receiver, such as submitting a cover letter, interviewing the candidate, requesting reference letters, external assessment of the applicant's work are examples of additional information the receiver requests to make an informed decision. This implies that the CV is an imperfect communication device that is not very effective to convince the receiver that the sender is of good or suitable "quality". The more information and signals that are sent, the greater the effectiveness of signaling "quality". Information in a CV can be manipulated by the sender if there are no, or limited, costs associated with the creation of a CV. If there are no costs, senders will want to indicate high ability (i.e., skills or "quality") when in fact they may be of low ability. The cost of preparing and sending information via a CV is thus not inversely proportional to the sender's "quality". Hence there is an incentive for senders of low "quality" to make their CV look much richer than it is, in order to achieve the goal they aim to achieve.<sup>12</sup> This is why additional information beyond the CV, personal or via bibliographic information lists (Dorsch et al., 2018), is usually required. Requiring additional information increases the cost to the sender but also to the receiving party who needs time to verify and check the information and signals. How can a CV be more effective? First, it has to be made more costly to those that do not reveal the truth in their CVs. Dishonest information and signals should not be rewarded, and should have serious consequences, even punishment, if the dishonesty is intentional, provided the other side is playing fair. However, a CV that follows VACUP guidelines may effectively separate CVs of high "quality" relative to those of lower "quality". How can senders be enforced to follow VACUP guidelines? This issue is particularly relevant in the peer reviewer rewards scheme at Publons (Teixeira da Silva, 2020a). The issue of enforcement is dealt with later on in this paper.

### **Independent versus centralized CVs: real risks of bias and lack of control / enforcement**

Should CVs be independently managed at the academic's discretion, or should the location where a CV is publicly displayed be centrally controlled? Some possible answers and solutions to these questions would be related to the employment status of an academic. Retired or independently operating academics would have to independently manage their CVs, verification could be by peers and the wider academic pool or public, while control would come from potential employees, journals and publishers. In contrast, an academic who is employed by a research institute (or broadly the employer if the context is non-academic, e.g., a commercial company) would likely have to exercise self-management of their CV, but enforcement of the VACUP guidelines could be achieved by their employer. A journal or publisher that would only allow the submission of papers from VACUP-compliant authors would rely on the accuracy of the employer or research institute. As an example, a staff member in the department of human resources could be tasked with verifying that the CVs of all that institute's employees are VACUP-compliant. This would involve additional costs, no doubt, but would bring additional reputational value to that institute. Furthermore, those journals or publishers operating with VACUP guidelines would only accept

---

<sup>12</sup> We draw readers' attention to the issue of "cosmetic" changes to embellish CVs, either to enhance the visual aspect, or to create a false impression. The public face of a CV might change depending on the intended goal. For example, a person trying to score a job might use the CV quite differently to a person showing their CV on a social media platform like Facebook, ResearchGate, or even their peer review CV on Publons, where an intrinsic level of bias exists, i.e., users tend to show their best. Thus, only factual information can be checked and controlled. The rest (visual) is cosmetic.

papers from VACUP-compliant authors.<sup>13</sup> In this case, empowering publishers is not necessarily a negative aspect because it adds greater ethical responsibilities on their shoulders. To a greater extent, this ensures that individuals they allow to publish on their platforms and in their journals are valid, and that submissions are not from fake authors or identities with fake CVs. This will also provide academics additional power to hold publishers more accountable.

### **The importance of declared *versus* undeclared conflicts of interest**

Conflicts of interest (COIs) are relationships – personal or professional – that may influence the outcome of an event, whether this be related to research or publishing. Hidden COIs are thus an increasingly serious problem in academic publishing, and may be starting to express themselves in preprints (Teixeira da Silva, 2017c). Even academic papers that contain COI statements cannot be independently verified at the time of publication, by virtue of the fact that a COI is situational, and dependent on the time frame of conflicting interests (Fineberg, 2017). Hidden COIs may be exposed during whistle-blowing or post-publication peer review. In some cases, hidden COIs may lead to the retraction of published articles if the authors fail to disclose competing interests. Medical journals are especially strict about undisclosed, i.e., hidden, COIs. For example, in October 2016, *Chest*, an Elsevier journal, retracted<sup>14</sup> a study by Nieman et al. (2015) after learning about hidden COIs from a reader<sup>15</sup>, when the authors failed to report having presented in conferences sponsored by Dräger, which manufactures ventilating devices, and having received honoraria and travel remuneration from Dräger. The same authors also failed to report this COI in three more papers published in *JAMA Surgery*, which they then reported to the editor in Habashi et al. (2016). Unlike the Nieman et al. paper, which was retracted, corrections were issued for the *JAMA Surgery* papers.<sup>16</sup> An even greater risk, given the gate-keeper role that editors play in academic publishing (Teixeira da Silva and Dobránszki, 2018), are the gross lack of declared COIs by journal editors on their own CVs or on journal websites (Teixeira da Silva et al., 2019).

In the context of biomedical publishing, the hidden COIs described above are not surprising and may be more common than many would like to believe. Rasmussen et al. (2015) investigated the prevalence of disclosing COIs by 318 Danish non-industry employed physicians who authored 100 clinical trial reports, and found that 13% of the 318 authors did not disclose the trial sponsor or manufacturer of the trial drugs, when Rasmussen et al. extracted the names and COI statements of the 318 Danish non-industry employed physicians from the Danish Registry of Authorization to Practice Medicine<sup>17</sup>, they concluded that in trial reporting, 136 of the 318 authors they investigated, 43% had undisclosed COIs with any drug manufacturer. Rasmussen et al. (2015) could have used VACUP-compliant authors' CVs, had there been any, instead of having to check the Danish Registry of Authorization to Practice Medicine and extract the names and COI statements to determine whether a COI did exist or not in clinical trial reporting.

In light of the above examples, having a VACUP-compliant CV would immediately

<sup>13</sup> Multiple-author papers would need each author to be VACUP-compliant.

<sup>14</sup> See notice of retraction which describes the reason *Chest* retracted the article: “the Journal determined that the authors had not conformed to the Journal's Instructions to Authors to disclose all relevant conflicts of interest by failing to disclose major competing interests that are, in the judgment of the Journal, likely to influence interpretations or recommendations”. [https://journal.chestnet.org/article/S0012-3692\(16\)57628-4/fulltext](https://journal.chestnet.org/article/S0012-3692(16)57628-4/fulltext) (last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>15</sup> <https://retractionwatch.com/2017/01/19/undisclosed-conflicts-often-lead-corrections-not-always/> (January 19, 2017; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>16</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamasurgery/fullarticle/2547677> (December, 2016; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>17</sup> Rasmussen et al. extracted COI statements from the National Board of Health. Danish Authorisation Register.

eliminate the risks of hidden COIs, because it would allow would-be employers or academic institutional management to assess actual or possible COIs and then advise the author as to what should be stated in a published paper. In other words, rather than the author being fully responsible for the COI statement in an academic paper, there would be an interaction with the author's research institute to seek advice as to what constitutes actual or possible COIs. These would then be listed both on the VACUP-compliant CV, as well as in published academic papers. VACUP-compliant CVs and journals or publishers operating with the VACUP guidelines might eliminate the need for the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) COI form, since COIs would be covered by the all-encompassing CV.

### **What information should a VACUP-compliant CV contain?**

Below we list, in no particular order, broad and detailed aspects of a CV that would make it VACUP-compliant. These include, based on Galdino and Gotway (2005), Flannery et al. (2014), Price (2014), and Hicks and Roberts (2016)<sup>18</sup>:

- 1) A list of undergraduate and graduate degrees obtained, including the period of study (month, year), the full name of the institute and the degree obtained, and the country where the degree was obtained. Such degrees include, for the sciences, BSc, MSc, or PhD degrees, for the arts, BA, MA, or PhD degrees, and for the medical sciences, MD, licensure, residency certificate and board certification. In addition, special degrees conferred, including honorary professorships, honorary doctorates, and honorary fellowships should be clearly listed as such, i.e., as *honorary* or “by nomination”.
- 2) A list of publications (theses, reports, unpublished documents, preprints, non-peer reviewed papers, peer-reviewed papers, book chapters, and conference papers). Vanity-inducing and meritocracy-based (Vale, 2012) criteria with no or limited academic value such as the Clarivate Analytics' journal impact factor (JIF) (Teixeira da Silva and Bernès, 2018) or Elsevier/Scopus CiteScore (Teixeira da Silva and Memon, 2017; Teixeira da Silva, 2020b) should not be reported in a CV, nor should they be complemented with a wider balance of factors, such as altmetrics, or public bibliometric indexes such as the *h*-index (Cleary et al., 2013). In addition to the vanity-based argument, one of the risks is the inclusion of false positives in Google Scholar profiles which may artificially inflate the academic's *h*-index, so use of this metric in a CV, especially if it is not carefully or accurately curated, will give an inflated perspective of that academic (Teixeira da Silva, 2018).
- 3) Links to institutional e-portfolios (Baird et al., 2016; Poot, 2016).
- 4) Awards, fellowships, scholarships, grants.
- 5) Previous employment.
- 6) Short description of recent activity.
- 7) Academic services, memberships and roles in scientific and professional committees, societies, editorial boards.
- 8) Supervisor and advisor activity in higher education (MSc, PhD, postdoctoral scholars).
- 9) Collaborations: scientific, industrial, etc.. Supervisor or participant activities in all previous research projects, research funding. The description should be suitable for indicating or excluding any COIs.
- 10) Languages and the skills in them (reading, speaking and their degree).

---

<sup>18</sup> The purpose of this paper is not to provide advice on structure, style or visual aspects to improve readability; these are aspects that can be gleaned from the references indicated and from a wealth of other general CV-related literature on general biomedical science databases such as PubMed.

### **The importance of an ombudsman, public relations or liaison officer, and a research integrity office**

A VACUP-compliant CV has little value if the institution where an academic is working is unable to regulate that academic, or to liaise with academics or members of the public that might have non-VACUP-compliant CVs. For this reason, an institute should have an ombudsman, public relations (or liaison) officer (PRO), and a research integrity office (RIO) to deal with queries and/or complaints from the public, including anonymous complaints (Wager et al., 2017). False, misleading or incorrect information in a CV or in a publishing record needs to be reported to an academic, and absent any response from that academic (e.g., that academic is deceased, their email no longer works, or they simply do not respond for any reason), then a university ombudsman, PRO or RIO must be responsible for resolving such issues officially with the complainant within a reasonable amount of time. The same, but reciprocal rule, applies to an academic or member of the public that finds problems with the CV of an editor or with the CV of a member of the publishing establishment, including the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), which has been without an ombudsman since February, 2016<sup>19</sup>, which indicates that any public concerns about COPE members that arise from academics or the public cannot be suitably handled (Teixeira da Silva, 2017d). As for COPE, organizations that are supposed to have an ombudsman, but that do not, decrease trust, and display opacity in issues related to their academics. Since COPE oversees the integrity of the academic literature by its member journals and publishers, which is intricately related to CVs, thus VACUP-compliant CVs should be a serious future consideration by this and other ethical bodies.

### **Enforcement and certifying that a CV is VACUP-compliant via the private sector**

Having VACUP guidelines is good in theory, but how can they be implemented in practice? Enforcement is difficult and it can be argued that it infringes on individual rights. In addition, requiring and monitoring VACUP-compliant guidelines would be a costly activity. The costs would include resources that would be needed to devote to enforcement and monitoring the VACUP guidelines. This is especially true with small universities or in poorer countries. Who will bear these costs, the employer, the researcher or society in general? It is likely that no one will bear these costs except if there are benefits that will exceed the costs. Since the receiver does not know if the sender is telling or conveying the truth in their CV about their career and qualifications, then the receiver stands to benefit from a CV that is VACUP-compliant because the information will be verifiable, accurate, complete, updated and publicly available. Thus the receiver has an interest for CVs to be VACUP-compliant. The receiver could then ask that a CV is certified to be VACUP-compliant. Introducing a third party that will certify that CVs are VACUP-compliant for a small fee might be a possible solution. The third party is paid a fraction of the net benefits of the sender and it might be in the interest of the receiver to pay such a fee to certify that the CV is VACUP-compliant.

If certification is a possible solution to adopt VACUP guidelines, then a market needs to be established via a third-party to check and verify if a CV is VACUP-compliant. If both the sender and receiver of the information stand to benefit, then some of these benefits can be shared with the third-party. Since there is a cost for the certification process, those who are low quality or those that want to cheat by providing false information and signals would avoid pursuing certification as they would either be caught cheating or hiding information by a CV

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://publicationethics.org/news/applications-cope-ombudsman> (February 3, 2016; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

certification third-party<sup>20</sup>. Even if such individuals would be capable of deceiving the third-party, it would add to their costs to make such certification less attractive. Certification would separate those that have nothing to hide from those that want to hide information. The receiver would then require that a CV is VACUP-certified. A specialized auditor could offer advice or recommendations as to how to get a CV certified, i.e., VACUP-compliant.

Corporate scandals and accounting frauds caused a U.S. legislation to be enacted in 2002<sup>21</sup> which directs the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to require CEOs and CFOs of large publicly traded companies to certify that their financial statements are accurate and complete. Certification verifies accuracy and completeness of financial statements<sup>22</sup>. As a result, certification sends a signal to uninformed investors, lenders and creditors that the *audited* financial statements represent an accurate and complete picture of the organization. Independent external auditors are hired and get paid by the firm to certify that their financial statements and their reporting methods are accurate and comply with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).<sup>23</sup> The audit signals to the market that management has presented a true picture of financial performance and position. The auditors check and certify that the reports and methods are accurate, complete and that the internal processes are satisfactory.

In order to reduce academic scandals, legislation might be required which mandates senders to certify their CVs are VACUP-compliant. This can be done through external independent auditors. For tenure and promotion, this job is not currently performed by independent external referees who are experts in the area as they examine only the content they are given. The auditors being envisioned are different from external assessors for promotion and tenure decisions. They will be hired and get paid by the senders to certify that their CV complies with the VACUP guidelines. By having the CV audited, the sender signals to the receiver that their CV is VACUP certified, adding academic and employment “value” to the sender. Namely, such a CV would be officially verified for accuracy and completeness, updated and available to the public.

Steps in auditing financial statements are well established and the same process can be applied to auditing and certifying VACUP compliant CVs. Steps are planning the audit, assessing the environment and risk, information gathering, cross checking for accuracy and/or misreporting information, and finally reporting the results of the audit and certifying that a CV is VACUP-compliant (see hypothetical case study in separate section below).

The process starts with a contract written to audit the sender’s CV with full compliance of the sender with the auditor. The next step formalizes the procedures and timing of events of the audit. The auditor then examines the environment and policies of the institution where the sender works and assesses the risks that could lead to material being misrepresented or purposely hidden from the CV. Gathering information and cross checking to verifying information follows. This step is very important as the auditor scans the academic’s CV and examines selected documents including cross-checking with journal editors and collaborators and other platforms such as Academia.edu, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID), and Mendeley, to name a few. Once the CV is certified as meeting the VACUP guidelines, it is then made publicly available, but subjected to annual updates. VACUP certification CV would comply to Generally Accepted CV Principles (GACVP).

---

<sup>20</sup> The exception here would be a corrupt certification provider.

<sup>21</sup> See Section 302 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act: <https://www.sec.gov/rules/final/33-8124.htm> (August 30, 2002; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>22</sup> Furthermore executive managers are required to certify that there are internal controls in place with policies and processes that assure trustworthy financial reporting as well as compliance with regulations and the law.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gaap.asp> (April 20, 2020; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

It is worth quoting the conclusion of a speech on Financial Reporting and Accounting Fraud by Andrew Ceresney, the Co-Director of the Division of Enforcement of the American Law Institute Continuing Legal Education, Washington, D.C. to the US Securities and Exchange Commission on Sept. 19, 2013<sup>24</sup>: “The importance of pursuing financial fraud cannot be overstated. Comprehensive, accurate and reliable financial reporting is the bedrock upon which our markets are based because false financial information saps investor confidence and erodes the integrity of the markets. For our capital markets to thrive, investors must be able to receive an unvarnished assessment of a company's financial condition. Financial reports must provide transparency for investors, and must not obscure the truth, even if that truth is inconvenient. The last decade is full of painful reminders of how important reliable information is to investors, to markets and to regulators. And so, in a post-crisis world, the SEC must renew its focus on financial reporting and accounting so that investors and regulators receive the accurate information that sustains our markets.” That speech also concludes: “To wrap this all up, [...] it is imperative that we amplify our efforts to root out financial fraud and ensure that investors receive accurate, transparent, and complete financial information.”

Financial statements are UP (updated and publicly available for large organizations) but the problem is VAC which is equivalent to financial statements being accurate, transparent and have complete (ATC) information. If financial statements must be ATCUP so too must CVs be VACUP, to reduce academic and *résumé* fraud.

### **Enforcement and certifying that a CV is VACUP-compliant via the public sector**

The enforcement and certification of a CV as being VACUP-compliant would likely only be achieved through the public or private sector. The enforcement and certification via the private market was discussed in the previous section and can be implemented in nations that do not have the resources or public institutions to carry out these transactions as these are costly activities. In the case of government-controlled research institutes or publicly-funded research institutes, an already established government agency could serve as the auditor, while a third party could be required for privately run research institutes. As a hypothetical example, we would look at the US research and education system to offer some perspectives. We assume that three currently existing bodies that already have an established infrastructure, could be involved: the NIH (National Institutes of Health), ORI (Office of Research Integrity), and the IRS (Internal Revenue Service). The NIH would serve as the overseeing body, the ORI would be involved in compliance, while the IRS would be involved with auditing. Since the public funds these agencies through taxes, it is in the interest of tax-paying members of the public that their taxes be used to fund researchers that are acting ethically, and honestly, including having a VACUP-compliant CV. The enforcement triage we suggest brings direct benefit to tax-payers, the government, and to the education system overall.

In the above hypothetical example, let us assume that the IRS discovers, in an annual audit, fake information or errors in a CV of government-employed researcher. Who does the IRS report this error to? There are two possibilities here: a) an honest error or omission in which a short notice to the “sender” (the government-employed academic who is paid by tax-payers money) that the error needs to be fixed, thereby allowing certification to be approved; b) dishonesty, in which a lie or dishonest action is reported to an ethical entity or legal body, in this case, the NIH and/or ORI. Since both the NIH and ORI are government controlled, both would have interest in only employing academics with VACUP-compliant CVs, thus entrusting such individuals with public funding to conduct research. The receiver, or employer, which in

---

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.sec.gov/news/speech/spch091913ac> (September 19, 2013; last accessed: June 20, 2020)

this case is the US Government (via the NIH), or pockets of specialty researchers such as the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), could then decide if they employ a person, even if they have retractions. In the latter case, the employer can appreciate that a researcher was honest by reporting the retraction(s), sending also an important signal that retractions should not necessarily be met with a discriminatory response, i.e., VACUP-compliant CVs could be part of the destigmatization of retractions currently plaguing the retraction boom (Teixeira da Silva and Al-Khatib, 2020).

### **Envisioning a VACUP-compliant vs non-VACUP-compliant academic world**

As indicated earlier in this paper, academic publishing is not without fraud and criminality such as journal hijacking and identity fraud (Dadkhah et al., 2016), or falsifying data and reports to defraud the government. As a result, criminal liability, which may lead to extreme measures, including imprisonment, to counter such non-academic, dishonest or fraudulent behavior, have begun to evolve (Druzin and Li, 2011; Hickman et al., 2019). However, what has been observed is that the crisis is not limited exclusively to authors and academics, but may be extended to editors and editors in chief (EICs), journals, publishers or even research institutes that may be embracing a culture of dishonesty or fraud by abusing their journal's citations, using editorial positions to pad their CVs even though they are not pro-active, or offering protection to corrupt or fraudulent academics among author ranks, all because editors with suitable academic or ethical qualifications were not properly vetted (Teixeira da Silva, 2017e; Teixeira da Silva and Al-Khatib, 2017). The selection of inappropriate or unethical editors can only occur when they do not follow VACUP guidelines and only when VACUP-compliant CVs are publicly available for such editors can such editorial gaffes be eliminated. One example is the removal of Ashutosh Tiwari as the guest editor of a special issue of MDPI's *Sensors*, after it was discovered that he was using a fake professor title, not only for that special issue, but for other academic activities, including suspect conferences.<sup>25</sup>

As a result, as VACUP guidelines are implemented, a VACUP-compliant vs non-VACUP-compliant academic world will emerge. This will affect trust in individual academics, university rankings, and even funding by funding agencies. Open and transparent academics will reflect positively on their academic institutes and on the journals in which they publish, while VACUP-compliant editors and EICs will allow academics to trust – beyond artificial metrics with no intrinsic academic value (Teixeira da Silva and Bernès, 2018) – an editor board, and by association, a journal or publisher. Consequently, VACUP-compliant CVs will attract funding from agencies that can trust candidates and their research institutes. VACUP-compliant CVs thus have a net-positive snow-ball impact on research and on the publishing enterprise.

The existence of VACUP-compliant academics, editors/EICs, journals and publishers, and research institutes will then allow any member of the public to determine whether they are predatory (i.e., if their existence is merely to exploit the system to their advantage using opaque, dishonest, unfair or criminal/illegal strategies; Teixeira da Silva, 2013a) or zombified (i.e., they have reached such a level of corruption that they can no longer be deemed to be academic, and yet continue to exist because there is no system in place to expunge them from the system following proof of corruption; Teixeira da Silva, 2016b). In this sense, an institutional RIO is required to ensure that academics and institutional management are VACUP-compliant, while an ombudsman or PR/liaison officer maintains trust in the public domain by offering subjective

---

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/51363/title/Sensors--Journal-Pulls-Planned-Special-Issue-Due-to-Guest-Editor-s-Fake-Credentials/> (January 16, 2018; last accessed: June 20, 2020); <https://forbeterscience.com/?s=Ashutosh+Tiwari> (last accessed: June 20, 2020)

proof of the academic nature and honesty, openness and transparency of an organization's members, i.e., the academic research institute and its academics. Part of the work portfolio of an institution's PRO/liaison officer would be to ensure that publicly available CVs are accurate and updated. However, if the institution does not have the resources then it can rely on the private sector to certify a CV to be VACUP compliant, similar to private accounting firms and the industry that certifies the financial statements of small, medium and large size firms.

### **What choices currently exist for non-institutional CVs?**

There are now several privately owned non-institutional platforms that serve as informal systems for academics to show-case or represent their CVs. Some of the largest include Academia.edu, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, ORCID, Mendeley, or Loop, the latter two owned by publishers Elsevier B.V. and Frontiers Media Inc., respectively. However, the content of these CVs is controlled by the academics themselves, and even though some functions are automatic, such as the notice to include a published paper linked with a DOI into a profile soon after publication or indexing, there does not appear to be any control by the platform owners to ensure that the profiles are accurate, update, or complete, thus reducing their functionality as a tool for increasing accountability and reproducibility in academic research and publishing. Even though ORCID<sup>26,27</sup> was created as a centralized nonproprietary data-base of author identification or disambiguation (Vrabel, 2016), this centralized system is being rapidly adopted and implemented by a vast swathe of publishers hoping to reduce or erase fraudulent authors and peers from their journals, but the transition from a voluntary to a mandatory registration poses serious violations to authors' rights, such as freedom of choice or the right to protest not wishing to belong to this centralized author-registration and verification system (Teixeira da Silva, 2017f). More recently, SciENCv (Science Experts Network Curriculum Vitae)<sup>28</sup> was launched, describing itself as "A researcher profile system for all individuals who apply for, receive or are associated with research investments from federal agencies" (Vrabel, 2016), but its use is limited to the US, and to researchers associated with US federal agencies, hinting at greater accountability. Time will tell if SciENCv and ORCID are VACUP-compliant.

### **Conclusions**

There are strong parallels between the arguments for or against maintaining the accuracy of the academic record, and maintaining the accuracy of an academic's professional record, or CV. A lot of the literature (PubMed) that can be found prior to the turn of the century, and even up to about 2010, regarding CVs involves hints and tips at how to improve and promote the writing of the content and the visual aspects to make it more attractive to potential employers. Such non-academic, superficial and vanity-based factors continue to plague the true importance of an academic CV. In the current age of a biomedical science publishing landscape that may be in crisis, a CV (institutional or social media-based) can no longer simply represent a biased vanity-based self-representation of one's career. Nor should a CV be used to represent one's publishing career or conference attendance in a biased manner to eliminate so-called "predatory" publications of conferences (Cappell, 2015; Cobey et al., 2017; Moher et al., 2017), or based

---

<sup>26</sup> <https://orcid.org/> (last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>27</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ORCID> (last accessed: June 20, 2020)

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sciencv/> (last accessed: June 20, 2020)

exclusively on leading or popular databases (Negahdary, 2017), as such approaches skew the reality of a CV, offer only a positive perspective, and do not reflect a complete vision of the academic (Teixeira da Silva and Tsigaris, 2018). Similarly, the impact that publications in low-JIF journals (Donnelly et al., 2019) is irrelevant to their VACUP-compliance, as a CV should carry the list of all publications including in journals with a high, low or no JIF. Curiously, a survey among economists indicated that adding lower-tier publications to a publications record (CV) created a negative impression of the author, relative to a CV that carried only the higher-tier publications (Powdthavee et al., 2018). Using the VACUP guidelines, this paper puts forward clearer principles by which a CV should be used, what should be included, and advice regarding several aspects of CVs that are pertinent to an evolving publishing landscape. Naturally, CVs should continue to be used in their regular form, for employment or grant applications, but following VACUP guidelines, and they should preferably be integrated within a balanced quantitative system of evaluation, such as the Global Science Factor (Teixeira da Silva, 2013b), that can be independently verified. It is only when a CV is VACUP-compliant that it can be used for research evaluation and then be used for academic and scientific recognition (Youtie et al., 2013).

### **Limitations of the VACUP guidelines**

While the ideas put forward in this “prototype” paper, and while we have argued for the implementation of the VACUP guidelines for the standardization of CVs for academic, scholarly, tenure and publishing purposes, we recognize that such ideas are only of value if they gain traction and become implemented. Academia as a whole would first have to appreciate the risks to the integrity of their own literature by the existence of false elements such as pseudonymous and fake authors who publish deceptive papers, thereby eroding trust in the journals that they also publish in, in order to appreciate that a validated CV could be the first step towards an integrated ethics-based value system in academic publishing. As one example, had three Springer Nature (Springer Open) journals ([\*Advances in Difference Equations\*](#), [\*Fixed Point Theory and Applications\*](#), and [\*Journal of Inequalities and Applications\*](#)) employed the VACUP guidelines, most likely Beatriz Ychussie, a fake author, would likely not have been able to submit to these journals since Roskilde University in Denmark, would have formally validated the existence of, and the credibility of the author, in order to allow for a paper to be submitted to any one of these three journals. For clarity, Beatriz Ychussie was never associated with Roskilde University. The risk with this case – and there are a growing number of cases like it – is that the fraudulent person or group that created the fake Beatriz Ychussie is still out there and may have created other false papers, thereby polluting the scientific literature, devaluing the value of these ranked and metricized journals (2-year journal impact factor of 1.510 and 1.136 for *Advances in Difference Equations* and *Journal of Inequalities and Applications*, respectively, and a CiteScore of 1.15 for *Fixed Point Theory and Applications*) with supposed peer review. Those journals and publishers should have, as part of their social and scholarly responsibilities, detected the false entities, to ensure that submitting authors are not fake. However, editorial and publisher responsibility and oversight failed, thereby indirectly causing harm (reputational and otherwise) to other valid authors who have published in those journals. The inability of such publishing entities to effectively pre-screen valid from fake authors may be expanding the predatory publishing market (Teixeira da Silva, 2020c). Thus, only through real cases of fraud, and an understanding of the risks that they pose to all of academia, not only to editors and journals, may be the impetus for academics, editors, journals and publishers to begin to consider the VACUP guidelines as an essential part of publishing’s

academic integrity, when integrated as part of the manuscript submission process. In summary, user risk will stimulate user need and application.

Evidently, the CV of a postdoctoral student or a tenured professor might differ considerably, both in terms of work experience and publications list (quality and quantity). It would thus be erroneous to make direct comparisons between such divergent scholarly profiles in any way. At the same time, the greater the academic path, the greater the risks, so an individual who has 50 publications in their career (or in journals with lower rank) might invite less scrutiny than one with 500 publications (or in journals with higher rank). Thus, risk of scrutiny, usually of problematic literature, may understandably increase with the level of experience of an academic, leaving “lower” ranked or level academics under-scrutinized. The proposed VACUP guidelines to some extent level the playing field by expecting the information in the CV of a junior academic to be as accurate as that of a senior academic, independent of their individual achievements.

It is important to highlight that although implementing a VACUP-compliant CV is likely to discourage an underestimated number of academics from falsifying their credentials and accomplishments when applying for jobs (Phillips et al., 2019), decision makers should be cognizant of the fact that using a VACUP-compliant CV in hiring decisions is unlikely to eliminate prestige, affiliation or reputational biases which, according to Safón (2019), are influenced by university rankings. Freeman and DiRamio (2016) found that the brand and reputation of an applicant’s university influenced selection decisions, as this happens because an affiliation with a top tier university “signals to a search committee that the candidate likely has access to an influential network and has been trained to publish in top tier periodicals”. Despite their flaws and biases, rankings play a major role in hiring decisions at some universities and in particular universities that strive to increase their global rankings (Bhattacharjee, 2011).

Economic limitations of verification for universities from poorer nations should be considered. It might be very difficult for smaller institutions to have the financial resources to have positions such as an ombudsman, PRO or RIO to deal with ethics-related complaints. While it is possible that developed nations could afford such an infrastructure, this may not be the case for poorer nations. In order to overcome this financial constraint, we recommend the development of a market whose role as a third part is to certify that CVs are VACUP-compliant, or not, as discussed in the section on the enforcement and certification of the VACUP compliance of a CV via the private sector. The creation of this market will need to be monitored, but it will also create jobs for both underdeveloped and developed nations, releasing the need to spend resources on a monitoring system within the institute or via the public sector.

## References

- Aberbach, J. D., Christensen, T. (2018). Academic autonomy and freedom under pressure: Severely limited, or alive and kicking? *Public Organization Review* 18(4): 487-506. [CrossRef](#)
- Baird K, Gamble J, Sidebotham M. (2016). Assessment of the quality and applicability of an e-portfolio capstone assessment item within a bachelor of midwifery program. *Nurse Education in Practice* 20: 11-16. [CrossRef](#)
- Bhattacharjee, Y. (2011). Saudi universities offer cash in exchange for academic prestige. *Science Magazine* 334(6061): 1344-1345. [CrossRef](#)
- Branco BC, Inaba K, Gausepohl A, Okoye O, Teixeira PG, Breed W, Lam L, Talving P, Sullivan M, Demetriades D. (2012). Nonverifiable research publications among applicants to an academic trauma and surgical critical care fellowship program. *Journal of the*

- American College of Surgeons* 215(3): 337-342. [CrossRef](#)
- Cañibano, C., Bozeman, B. (2009). Curriculum vitae method in science policy and research evaluation: the state-of-the-art. *Research Evaluation* 18(2): 86-94. [CrossRef](#)
- Cappell, M.S., (2015). List predatory journal publications separately from genuine scholarly publications as standard for CVs. *British Medical Journal* 350, p.h2470. [CrossRef](#)
- Christenbery, T.L. (2014). The curriculum vitae: gateway to academia. *Nurse Education* 39(6): 267-268. [CrossRef](#)
- Cobey, K.D., Mazzarello, S., Stober, C., Hutton, B., Moher, D., Clemons, M. (2017). Is this conference for real? Navigating presumed predatory conference invitations. *Journal of Oncology Practice* 13(7): 410-413. [CrossRef](#)
- Connelly, B.L., Certo, S.T., Ireland, R.D., Reutzel, C.R. (2011). Signaling theory: A review and assessment. *Journal of Management* 37(1): 39-67. [CrossRef](#)
- Cortegiani, A., Manca, A., Giarratano, A. (2020). Predatory journals and conferences: why fake counts. *Current Opinion in Anaesthesiology* 33(2):192-197. [CrossRef](#)
- Dadkhah, M., Maliszewski, T., Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2016). Hijacked journals, hijacked web-sites, journal phishing, misleading metrics and predatory publishing: actual and potential threats to academic integrity and publishing ethics. *Forensic Science, Medicine, and Pathology* 12(3): 353-362. [CrossRef](#)
- Day, M. (2019). Disgraced tracheal transplant surgeon is handed 16 month prison sentence in Italy. *British Medical Journal* 16676. [CrossRef](#)
- Derous, E., Decoster, J. (2017). Implicit age cues in resumes: subtle effects on hiring discrimination. *Frontiers in Psychology* 8: 1321. [CrossRef](#)
- Donnelly, K., McKenzie, C.R.M., Müller-Trede, J. (2019). Do publications in low-impact journals help or hurt a CV? *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied* 25(4): 744-752. [CrossRef](#)
- Dorsch, I., Askeridis, J.M., Stock, W.G. (2018). Truebounded, overbounded, or underbounded? Scientists' personal publication lists versus lists generated through bibliographic information services. *Publications* 6: 7. [CrossRef](#)
- Dougherty, M. V. (2018). Introduction. In: *Correcting the Scholarly Record for Research Integrity. Research Ethics Forum* (Vol. 6), Springer, Cham, Switzerland, pp. 1-18. [CrossRef](#)
- Druzin B.H., Li, J. (2011). The criminalization of lying: under what circumstances, if any, should lies be made criminal? *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology* 101(2): 529-574.
- Fineberg, H.V. (2017). Conflict of interest: why does it matter? *JAMA* 317(17): 1717-1718. [CrossRef](#)
- Flannery, A.H., Winstead, P.S., Smith, K.M. (2014). Transforming the curriculum vitae as a new practitioner. *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy* 71(24): 2115-2117. [CrossRef](#)
- Foley, M., Williamson, S. (2018). Does anonymising job applications reduce gender bias? Understanding managers' perspectives. *Gender in Management* 33(8): 623-635. [CrossRef](#)
- Freeman Jr, S., DiRamio, D. (2016). Elitism or pragmatism? Faculty hiring at top graduate programs in higher education administration. *Journal of the Professoriate* 8(2): 94-127.
- Galdino, G.M., Gotway, M. (2005). The digital curriculum vitae. *Journal of the American College of Radiology* 2(2): 183-188. [CrossRef](#)
- Grimm, J., Saliba, I. (2017). Free research in fearful times: Conceptualizing an index to monitor academic freedom. *Interdisciplinary Political Studies* 3(1), 41-75. [CrossRef](#)
- Habashi, N.M., Andrews, P., Nieman, G.F., Kollisch-Singule, M., Bates, J.H. (2016). Failure to disclose conflicts of interest. *JAMA Surgery* 151(12): 1190. [CrossRef](#)
- Hartwell, C.J., Orr, T.E., Edwards, J.M. (2020). Reducing online application redundancy:

- Effects on applicant attrition and quality. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment* 28(2): 200-208. [CrossRef](#)
- Hickman, C.F., Fong, E.A., Wilhite, A.W., Lee, Y-L. (2019). Academic misconduct and criminal liability: Manipulating academic journal impact factors. *Science and Public Policy* 46(5): 661-667. [CrossRef](#)
- Hicks, R.W., Roberts, M.E. (2016). Curriculum vitae: An important tool for the nurse practitioner. *Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners* 28(7): 347-352. [CrossRef](#)
- Kang, S.K., DeCelles, K.A., Tilcsik, A., Jun, S. (2016). Whitened résumés: Race and self-presentation in the labor market. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 61(3): 469-502. [CrossRef](#)
- McKiernan, E.C., Bourne, P.E., Brown, C.T., Buck, S., Kenall, A., Lin, J., McDougall, D., Nosek, B.A., Ram, K., Soderberg, C.K., Spies, J.R., Thaney, K., Updegrove, A., Woo, K.H., Yarkoni T. (2016). How open science helps researchers succeed. *eLife* 5: e16800. [CrossRef](#)
- Moher, D., Shamseer, L., Cobey, K.D., Lalu, M.M., Galipeau, J., Avey, M.T., Ahmadzai, N., Alabousi, M., Barbeau, P., Beck, A., Daniel, R., Frank, R., Ghannad, M., Hamel, C., Hersi, M., Hutton, B., Isupov, I., McGrath, T.A., McInnes, M.D.F., Page, M.J., Pratt, M., Pussegoda, K., Shea, B., Srivastava, A., Stevens, A., Thavorn, K., van Katwyk, S., Ward, R., Wolfe, D., Yazdi, F., Yu, A.M., Ziai, H. (2017). Stop this waste of people, animals and money. *Nature* 549(7670): 23-25. [CrossRef](#)
- Morrish, L. (2020). Academic freedom and the disciplinary regime in the neoliberal university. In: Dawes, S., Lenormand, M. (Eds.) *Neoliberalism in Context*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland. pp. 235-253. [CrossRef](#)
- Negahdary, M. (2017). Live curriculum vitae (CV) of researchers based on Scopus and PubMed databases; a new method in scientometrics. *Publishing Research Quarterly* 33(3): 297-301. [CrossRef](#)
- Nieman, G. F., Gatto, L. A., Bates, J. H., & Habashi, N. M. (2015). RETRACTED: Mechanical ventilation as a therapeutic tool to reduce ARDS incidence. *Chest* 148(6): 1396-1404. [CrossRef](#)
- Open Science Collaboration (2015). Estimating the reproducibility of psychological science. *Science* 349(6251): aac4716. [CrossRef](#)
- Phillips, T., Saunders, R. K., Cossman, J., Heitman, E. (2019). Assessing trustworthiness in research: a pilot study on CV verification. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics* 14(4): 353-364. [CrossRef](#)
- Poot, A. (Ed.) (2016). Future ready. Equipping learners for the journey ahead. Pebble Learning Ltd., Telford, UK, 146 pp.
- Powdthavee N., Riyanto, Y.E., Knetsch, J.L. (2018). Lower-rated publications do lower academics' judgments of publication lists: evidence from a survey experiment of economists. *Journal of Economic Psychology* 66: 33-44. [CrossRef](#)
- Quillian, L., Lee, J. J., Oliver, M. (2020). Evidence from field experiments in hiring shows substantial additional racial discrimination after the callback. *Social Forces* (in press) [CrossRef](#)
- Rasmussen, K., Schroll, J., Götzsche, P. C., & Lundh, A. (2015). Under-reporting of conflicts of interest among trialists: a cross-sectional study. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 108(3), 101-107. [CrossRef](#)
- Safón, V. (2019). Inter-ranking reputational effects: an analysis of the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE) reputational relationship. *Scientometrics* 121(2): 897-915. [CrossRef](#)
- Spence, A.M. (1974). Market Signaling: Informational Transfer in Hiring and Related

- Screening Processes (Vol. 143). Harvard University Press.
- Steinpreis, R.E., Anders, K.A., Ritzke, D. (1999). The impact of gender on the review of the curricula vitae of job applicants and tenure candidates: A national empirical study. *Sex Roles* 41(7): 509-528. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2013a). Predatory publishing: a quantitative assessment, the Predatory Score. *The Asian and Australasian Journal of Plant Science and Biotechnology* 7(Special Issue 1): 21-34.
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2013b). The Global Science Factor v. 1.1: a new system for measuring and quantifying quality in science. *The Asian and Australasian Journal of Plant Science and Biotechnology* 7(Special Issue 1): 92-101.
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2015). The “black swan” phenomenon in science publishing. *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 5(3): 11-12. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2016a). The militarization of science, and subsequent criminalization of scientists. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Medicine* 1(2): 214-215. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2016b). Do zombie scientists and editors exhibit hubris, or blind courage? *Focus on Sciences* 2(4): 2 pp. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2017a). Ethical ramifications to the Paolo Macchiarini case. *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics* 2(4): 270-275. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2017c). Intellectual phishing, hidden conflicts of interest and hidden data: new risks of preprints. *Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education* 4(3): 136-146.
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2017d). COPE requires greater consistency and accountability. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 8(1): 11-13. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2017e). The ethics of peer and editorial requests for self-citation of their work and journal. *Medical Journal Armed Forces India* 73(2): 181-183. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2017f). ORCID: the challenge ahead. *European Science Editing* 43(2): 34. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2018). The Google Scholar h-index: useful but burdensome metric. *Scientometrics* 117(1): 631-635. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2020a). Are negative reviews, predatory reviewers or failed peer review rewarded at Publons? *International Orthopaedics* (in press) [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2020b). CiteScore: advances, evolution, applications, and limitations. *Publishing Research Quarterly* (in press) [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A. (2020c). An alert to COVID-19 literature in predatory publishing venues. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 46(5): 102187. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A., Al-Khatib, A. (2017). How are editors selected, recruited and approved? *Science and Engineering Ethics* 23(6): 1801-1804. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A., Al-Khatib, A. (2020). Ending the retraction stigma: encouraging the reporting of errors in the biomedical record. *Research Ethics* (in press) [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A., Bernès, S. (2018). Clarivate Analytics: continued *omnia vanitas* impact factor culture. *Science and Engineering Ethics* 24(1): 291-297. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A., Dobránszki, J. (2018). Editors moving forward: stick to academic basics, maximize transparency and respect, and enforce the rules. *Recenti Progressi in Medicina* 109(5): 263-266. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A., Dobránszki, J., Al-Khatib, A. (2016). Legends in science: from boom to bust. *Publishing Research Quarterly* 32(4): 313-318. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A., Dobránszki, J., Bhar, R.H., Mehlman, C.T. (2019). Editors must declare conflicts of interest. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 16(2): 279-298. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A., Memon, A.R. (2017). CiteScore: a cite for sore eyes, or a valuable, transparent metric? *Scientometrics* 111(1): 553-556. [CrossRef](#)
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A., Sorooshian, S., Al-Khatib, A. (2017). Cost-benefit assessment of

- congresses, meetings or symposia, and selection criteria to determine if they are predatory. *Walailak Journal of Science and Technology* 14(4): 259-265.
- Teixeira da Silva, J.A., Tsigaris, P. (2018). Academics must list all publications on their CV. *KOME* 6(1): 94-99. [CrossRef](#)
- Vale, R.D. (2012). Evaluating how we evaluate. *Molecular Biology of the Cell* 23(17): 3285-3289. [CrossRef](#)
- Vrabel, M. (2016). Online registries for researchers: Using ORCID and SciENcv. *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing* 20(6): 667-668. [CrossRef](#)
- Wager E, Kleinert S, Garfinkel M, Bähr V, Baždarić K, Farthing M, Graf C, Hammatt Z, Horn L, King S, Parrish D, Pulverer B, Taylor P, van Meer G (2017). Cooperation and Liaison between Universities and Editors (CLUE): recommendations on best practice. *bioRxiv* 139170. [CrossRef](#)
- Waung, M., McAuslan, P., DiMambro, J.M., Mięgoć, N. (2017). Impression management use in resumes and cover letters. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 32(6): 727-746. [CrossRef](#)
- Youtie, J., Rogers, J., Heinze, T., Shapira, P., Tang, L. (2013). Career-based influences on scientific recognition in the United States and Europe: Longitudinal evidence from curriculum vitae data. *Research Policy* 42(8): 1341-1355. [CrossRef](#)

---

## 2020 Reviewer Thank You

KOME – An International Journal of Pure  
Communication Inquiry  
Volume 8 Issue 2, p. 128.  
© The Author(s) 2020  
Reprints and Permission:  
kome@komejournal.com  
Published by the Hungarian Communication  
Studies Association  
DOI: 10.17646/KOME.2020.41

Hungarian Communication Studies Association and the KOME editorial team would like to express their gratitude to all who reacted positively to our invitation and participated in the peer review process. We are indebted to you, to your patience and generosity for letting us take some of your precious time. Your expertise is much appreciated and your efforts in providing thorough reviews and valuable comments are among the key reasons KOME becoming a successful journal recognised by the international scientific community. For this, as well as for reasons concerning accountability and transparency, we would like to publicly recognize all 22 reviewers who reviewed, in 2020, at least one manuscript submitted to KOME:

Alessandra Vitullo	alessandra.vitullo[at]unimib.it
Anna Sumskaia	anna.sumskaia[at]urfu.ru
Bruna Lessa	lessbruna[at]gmail.com
Carey L Higgins-Dobney	careyh[at]csufresno.edu
Debora Rae Wenger	drwenger[at]olemiss.edu
Emanuel Kulczycki	emek[at]amu.edu.pl
Emiljano Kaziaj	emiljanokaziaj[at]gmail.com
Eric S. Mallin	emall[at]austin.utexas.edu
Eve Ng	nge[at]ohio.edu
Janet Steele	jesteele[at]gwu.edu
Janos Toth	janos.toth[at]kodolanyi.hu
John Mills	jmills[at]uclan.ac.uk
Katerina Marazi	amarazi[at]citycollege.sheffield.eu
Masood Khoshsaligheh	khoshsaligheh[at]um.ac.ir
Mariona Sabaté Carrové	mariona.sabate[at]udl.cat
Marton Demeter	Demeter.Marton[at]uni-nke.hu
Matthew Etherington	Matthew.Etherington[at]twu.ca
Muhammad Anshari	anshari.ali[at]ubd.edu.bn
Rachel E Khan	rekhan2[at]up.edu.ph
Severine Arsene	severine.arsene[at]sciencespo.fr
Stefan Bratosin	sbratosin.univ.montp3[at]gmail.com
Stefania Manca	manca[at]itd.cnr.it