Portuguese radio-news and Internet – There’s a new role for citizens?

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RadioMorphoses
Introduction

1 The migration of radio to digital platforms has changed work routines, production practices and the relationship between journalism and audiences. In general, the media have sought to adapt to this new situation which requires policies and strategies in order to integrate the users themselves into the news production process. In theory, easier access to the Internet has created new opportunities for the participation of the users in public discourse, and so, increasing user participation helps create better citizenship.

2 In this article we cross two theoretical frameworks: radio itself has been changed as a consequence of its migration to digital platforms, which has created new forms of expression and interactivity (Cardoso, 2010; Carpentier, 2007), and the emergence of new forms of user participation in media contents as a result of an easier access to digital platforms (Dahlgren, 2011; Dahlberg, 2011; Esteves, 2010).

3 Our analysis focuses particularly on understanding how Portuguese news radio stations use new platforms, namely the Internet and social networks, to promote the participation of users in engaging and shaping news content. By analysing the radio coverage of six different events, our aim is to identify what kind of strategies are being used by Portuguese news radio stations to promote user participation.

4 The purpose of this paper is therefore, to analyse the conditions under which Portuguese news radio stations, namely the public station, Antena 1, the Catholic station, Renascença and the all-news station, TSF, provide the tools that allow citizens to participate in the discussion of public issues. The events analysed were: the campaign for the Portuguese Legislative elections in 2009, the Pope’s visit in 2010, the campaign for the Portuguese Presidential elections in 2011, the Euro 2012 and the local elections in 2013.
Radio and Internet

Much has been written on the transformations experienced by the radio environment and its migration to digital platforms. The very essence of the radio, as it has been traditionally associated with sound, has been questioned. The radio, like other media, faces a set of changes which to be fully understood must be properly framed in a new media ecosystem which includes the Internet and all its dimensions. With this broader perspective we do not intend to dissociate the radio from its sound component, but rather consider it as expanding across multiple platforms which in addition to its genetic characteristics, have linked its use to various other digital tools.

The radio can no longer be limited to its «geographical coverage, nor by changing concepts as simultaneity and instantaneity of the service. And neither by its nature strictly based on sound. All these notions are becoming obsolete», stated Ricardo Haye (2011).

By expanding on the Internet, radio began to have a new and different storyline from that of the past. Radio messages reach many parts of the world with lower costs (Saíz, 2002: 28); it establishes a relationship between listeners and new tools which were not available before, such as chats, online discussion, digital archives, and listeners' comments on the news. Ultimately, the radio encourages experimentation with new forms of expression beyond sound, such as the use of video, colour and infographics. Radio companies are present with more or less dedication on digital platforms. They have created websites, Twitter and Facebook pages and started production for mobile devices such as iPads and mobile phones.

As suggested by Cebrian Herreros (2011); «the radio of today has expanded its own communicative fields and has been competing through a complex set of communication platforms». Reports that were produced on the radio in several European countries and the United States emphasize the multiplatform dimension of radio. One of those reports was prepared by the Swedish Radio and TV Authority, and it comes to the conclusion that «currently, the radio works in various forms and uses multiple distribution platforms. Without a doubt it will be like so also in the future» (2008: 20). Similarly, a report on the future of radio communication prepared by the Observatory for the Media in Portugal states that «(...) the definition of radio cannot be restricted to the indexation into its media or technology support. The radio is primarily a communication style, it does not require radio waves to fulfil its role anymore» (Obercom, 2010: 11).

Media and user participation

Consuming news today is different from what it was a few years ago. Users' access to digital technology has created a new media environment in which everybody is, in theory, able to participate and contribute to aspects of the news production.

According to the 2010 report by Pew Internet, Americans are changing the way they consume news. One of these changes involves participation. The report states that «37% of internet users have contributed to the creation of news, commented about it, or disseminated it via postings on social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter ». 
The report concludes that two technological trends are influencing news consumption behaviour. Firstly, the advent of social media such as social networking sites and blogs has helped the news to become a social experience in fresh ways for consumers. And secondly, the ascent of mobile connectivity via smart phones has turned news gathering and news awareness into an anytime, anywhere affair for a segment of avid news watchers. As Jane B. Singer and David Domingo point out in their book, «new participatory formats appear all the time; by the time you read this, there will be a dozen new examples that don’t even exist as we write» (2011: 2).

Across a range of concepts and formats, enhanced participation options increase the possibilities for involvement of the audience and has opened the possibility for a more democratic public discourse. Carpentier (2011) distinguishes between access, representation and interaction from participation, which implies forms of engagement. The democratic perspective of user participation is extremely important given that it represents an indispensable dimension to the functioning of democratic societies, which are based on a culture of civic participation (Dahlgren, 2011, Esteves, 2010).

Esteves believes that «citizens perceive that there is the possibility for a more active involvement in decision-making processes within a very different framework of interaction from that provided by more conventional communication technologies» (Esteves, 2010: 187).

We will explore in our study the idea, sustained by several authors (Carpentier 2011; Esteves, 2010; Dahlgren, 2011) that participation represents a way to consolidate a process of deliberative democracy. The concept asserts that decisions are taken by following processes of public discussion and it is in this context that the media have an important role to play. According to Sjölander & Jönsson (2012: 51) «mediated participation is thus seen as a form of political participation, and participation as a prerequisite for deliberation».

Although, even in a democratic dimension, user participation is a very complex process which demands questions in a cultural, social, political and economical level. Various authors contribute with a critical view about it. That is the view of Lincoln Dahlberg (2011), who argues that the economic factor should be invoked when the question is to access to the Internet. He says: «Even after a couple of decades of decreasing costs and increasing diffusion of digital technology, it is clear that there are still significant digital divides in access» (2011: 87). Thus, there are a number of factors that, in addition to the technological potential that the Internet offers, interfere with how people access the Internet and participate using the tools provided by the World Wide Web. Peter Dahlgren (2011) stresses the importance of the media, along with other mechanisms such as the popular vote, for the participation of citizens and thus to contribute to what he calls «good democracy» (2011: 17). The author reinforces the idea that the function of the democratic public sphere, which is strongly mediated, is realised by providing citizens with the communication they need to influence decision making.

But what truly matters in our perspective, is determining the extent to which individuals are actually taking advantage of new technologies in order to increase their participation in the democratic process. The amount of instruments and tools made available to citizens so they involve themselves in the public space can actually increase the degree of expectation about this influence, but the truth is that part of the participation is conditioned by a number of other factors namely social, cultural or
simply opportunity. It appears that similar to what happens in the offline world, online participation, understood as the use of solid and informed argumentation, while it can contribute to the improvement of the democratic process, remains very low (Dahlgren, 2011: 12).

Alfred Hermida underlines the complexity of the process of user participation referring that «it results from complex interactions involving the professional culture of journalism, as well as both journalists’ and users’ understanding of the Internet and expectations about the potential of the technology» (2011: 31). In fact, there is technology enough to allow user participation but that doesn’t mean that this participation really occurs. As Natalie Fenton pointed out, the space available on the Internet gives rise to the potential for a plurality of news production, opening up news production to all citizens: «However, multiplicity does not always translate into diversity» (Fenton, 2009: 9).

Methodology

In this article it is our aim to analyse the conditions under which Portuguese radio news stations Antena 1, TSF and Renascença provide listeners with the tools to effectively express themselves through the media. We follow the suggestion of Alfred Hermida and Thurman (Hermida, 2011) which sees comments, forum, polls, comments on Facebook, citizen media (such as photographs, videos, etc.) and blogs as the main tools for user participation.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

- Q1: Which tools are Portuguese news radio making available for user participation in news content?
- Q2: How do users participate in the news content of Portuguese news radio stations’ websites and social networks?
- Q3: Is there an evolution in Portuguese news radio in the promotion of user participation?

To answer these questions, we analysed the content of the websites and the Facebook pages of the main Portuguese news radio stations – Antena 1, TSF and Renascença – in the period of the journalistic coverage of six important public events. The observation was made according to the following model:

1. a) Legislative Elections in 2009 – 12 days of analysis which correspond to the days of the electoral campaign.
2. b) Visit of the Pope in 2010 – 4 days of analysis which correspond to the entire visit to Portugal.
3. c) Presidential Elections in 2011 – 12 days of analysis which correspond to the days of the electoral campaign.
4. d) European Football Championship in 2012, commonly known as Euro 2012 – Analysis of websites and Facebook pages during the days of the matches of the Portuguese football team.
5. e) Local Elections in 2013 – 12 days of analysis which correspond to the days of the electoral campaign.
6. f) European Elections in 2014 – 12 days of analysis which correspond to the days of the electoral campaign.
These six events were chosen for their importance to Portuguese society. Major Portuguese newsrooms, whether radio, TV or newspapers, mobilised themselves to report these events. The regular programming was interrupted by live broadcasts, resources were mobilised and special programming was created. This special coverage included the websites and Facebook pages of the three main Portuguese news radio stations.

Portuguese radio and user participation

Based on our observation of the websites in the six years of this study, Portuguese news radio stations do not have a wide range of tools for participation in news content. The most common form of participation is posting comments on the news, stressing, as mentioned by Alfred Hermida regarding other media, that comments were the most widely offered user participation options at the newspapers analysed. The author interviewed journalists from various newspapers in France, Belgium, Canada and the USA, and concluded that they see comments «as a significant tool to enable users to discuss the news content produced by professional journalists» (Hermida, 2011: 25). According to our observation, participation in Portuguese news radio websites follows the same strategy. However, the observations allow us to come to the conclusion that the policy regarding user comments is different in each radio station analysed. This means that, while Antena 1 did not always allow audiences to post comments on the news, Renascença and TSF allowed, over the six periods analysed, audiences to comment on the news posted, as shown on Table 1.

Table 1 – Tools available for user participation on the website

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Antena 1</th>
<th>TSF</th>
<th>Renascença</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009 election</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>Comments posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 Pope’s visit</td>
<td>Sending photos to the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 election</td>
<td>Not available for participation.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro 2012</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 local elections</td>
<td>Not available for participation.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The reluctance of radio stations to fully open their space for user comments can be justified by the loss of quality of information due to less appropriate user comments on the news. Zvi Reich believes that this reluctance is disappearing and this has led media to provide this tool more often, as it is popular among readers and responds to the desire of individuals to express themselves through the media (2011: 97). Hence, the policy of Portuguese news radio stations is to clarify the rules for posting comments, as it is shown by the following examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2014 European election</th>
<th>Not available for participation</th>
<th>Comments on posts on the website.</th>
<th>Comments on posts on the website.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

All comments will be mediated, therefore their publication may take some time. Comments submitted must meet the publication criteria set by Renascença. Comments must not: violate the fundamental principles of human rights, offend the reputation of others; contain allegations about the private lives of others, contain inappropriate language. Comments which break these rules will not be published. (From the Renascença website)

However, we can see from the excerpt below that TSF has different policies from those of Renascença’s:

Note: Comments will not be edited prior to their appearance on the website and are the sole responsibility of their authors. Refer to User Conduct provided in the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. TSF reserves the right to delete comments that do not comply with these rules. (TSF website)

Table 2, allows us to understand how users used the tools for participation. Renascença rarely gets feedback from users despite the fact that the tool to do so is available, and this only occurred in the course of news coverage of the 2012 European Football Championship. Despite being a Catholic radio station, we did not find comments on the news available on the website during the coverage of the visit of the Pope Benedict XVI to Portugal. TSF, according to our study, is the radio with the most involvement from users. This radio station obtained feedback from users on virtually all the news posted on the website during the coverage of the six events studied in this article. A common aspect of the six news stories analysed is that in all of them most of the news does not have any comments from users, multiple news items have fewer than 5 comments and few exceed 20 comments. Another aspect that seems important to point out, is that the comments observed rarely involve a discussion among users. That is, users comment but they do not respond to each other. So there is no conversation between users. The existence of criticism, particularly in comments seen in the news about election periods is another aspect that should be noted for being very frequent, as shown in the following example:

Because the European elections have no interest for Portugal, except for the salaries of the European Parliament members, I will vote blank! (TSF website, May, 14, 2014)
Table 2 – User participation on the radio station’s websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Antena 1</th>
<th>TSF</th>
<th>Renascença</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009 election</td>
<td>No comments found.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>No comments found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 Pope’s visit</td>
<td>Users sent photos of the public events</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>No comments found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 election</td>
<td>Not available for participation.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>No comments found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro 2012</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme. Criticising the team, suggesting players, supporting the team.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on the webpage dedicated to the theme. Support the team. Criticise other comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 local elections</td>
<td>Not available for participation.</td>
<td>Comments on posts on news contents. Criticising the candidates.</td>
<td>No comments found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 European elections</td>
<td>Not available for participation.</td>
<td>Various comments found, mostly criticising the candidates.</td>
<td>Few comments found, specially criticising the candidates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

User participation in the three major Portuguese news radio stations is, as seen from the news coverage of six public events, almost entirely limited to comments. We found an exception to this was the visit of Benedict XVI, when the Portuguese public radio stations asked users to send photos of the event. The photos were sent to the newsroom e-mail account and then they were selected and posted on the website.

An opportunity called Facebook

Table 3 demonstrates how strong social networks for Portuguese radio news stations are, regarding user participation. As is clearly shown, since Portuguese radio news began to have a presence on social networks towards the end of 2009, Facebook begun to be a part of the global strategy for covering journalistic public events. Effectively, social networks represent a turning point regarding user participation in news content in the case of Portuguese news radio stations.

It should be noted that the three stations have different policies, not only for the use of their websites, (as shown in the previous point,) but also on the use of Facebook pages. While TSF posts all its news content on Facebook, allowing comments, Renascença chose to use this social network only for the promotion of the coverage of events. The
exception was the coverage of Euro 2012, the news coverage of which on Renascença was also posted on Facebook.

Table 3 – Tools for participation on Facebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Antena 1</th>
<th>TSF</th>
<th>Renascença</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009 election</td>
<td>Not available.</td>
<td>Available for commenting on news content.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 Pope’s visit</td>
<td>Comments on Facebook.</td>
<td>Available for commenting on news content.</td>
<td>Not available for news. This Radio uses Facebook just for programming, not for journalistic content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 election</td>
<td>Comments on Facebook.</td>
<td>Available for commenting on news content.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro 2012</td>
<td>Available for commenting on news content.</td>
<td>Available for commenting on news content.</td>
<td>Comments on the news content on Facebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 local elections</td>
<td>Comments on the news content.</td>
<td>Comments on the news content.</td>
<td>Not available for news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 European election</td>
<td>Comments on the news content.</td>
<td>Comments on the news content.</td>
<td>Not available for news.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facebook opened a new window for user participation, which is clear in the case of the visit of the Pope, in 2010, the presidential elections in 2011, Euro 2012 and the local elections in 2013. The exception was the European elections, when radio stations chose not to post as much news as they did for the other events analysed. One interpretation for this situation has to do with the limited attention given to European elections by the Portuguese media.

In the case of all the other four events, users used Facebook to comment on the news, share information, post photos and discuss the issues related to them. Radio Renascença is the exception, since, in this particular case, Facebook was not used to post news content. The exception was the coverage of Euro 2012.

Table 4 – User participation on Facebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Antena 1</th>
<th>TSF</th>
<th>Renascença</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009 election</td>
<td>Not available.</td>
<td>Available for commenting on the news.</td>
<td>Not available for news. This station uses Facebook just for programming, not for journalistic content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Comments on Facebook:</td>
<td>Available for commenting on the news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Pope's visit</td>
<td>users criticised and praised the Pope. Discussions about the visit and its cost.</td>
<td>Available for commenting on the news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>election</td>
<td>Comments on Facebook.</td>
<td>Available for commenting on the news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Euro 2012</td>
<td>Available for commenting on the news. Users criticising the team, suggesting players, giving support to the team.</td>
<td>Available for commenting on the news. Users criticising the team, suggesting players, giving support to the team. Complimenting the radio station and the journalists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>European elections</td>
<td>Available for comment, however the station rarely posted news about the European elections and as such the number of reviews was minimal.</td>
<td>Available for comment, however the station rarely posted news about the European elections and as such the number of reviews was minimal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32 Facebook was also used as a platform to discuss public affairs, but we are not yet talking about a conversation, as Gillmor (2005) called it, given that journalists not take part in the discussion. Taking advantage of its spontaneity, users could easily get in touch with the radio station and with the journalists and participate in the discussion of public affairs. As Antony Mayfield (2008) said in his e-book What is social media? social networks are useful tools in terms of promoting participation, given that they encourage contribution and feedback from everyone who is interested. Also, social networks are open platforms as they contribute to feedback and participation by allowing user intervention on media and promoting a conversation between users and media producers.

33 However, since that participation in Facebook is not moderated, there is the risk of users posting inappropriate comments.

34 Pope Benedict XVI's visit was one of the events analysed that generated the most comments and discussion between users, particularly in the cases of TSF and Antena 1, as noted in the following example taken from Portuguese public radio:

« >Post – Spokesman of Pope Benedict XVI keeps positions on abortion and gay marriage.
« >User 1 – (...) Church, whether you like it or not, is the largest charitable
organization in the world. Go see the numbers and confirm. If today the Catholic Church stopped all its social activity, it would be a social disaster. So, before you comment, you should think about that. You and many others. « »User 2 – (...)
the problem is the lack of supervision in certain social activities of the Church ... because if what happens in certain institutions owned by the Catholic Church happen in private, they would be forcibly closed! This is the major problem!
(from the Portuguese public radio Facebook, 12th May, 2010)

Effectively, our observation revealed that participation in Facebook was more spontaneous, but less argumentative than in the websites. Users commented on the topics but generally didn’t use sustainable positions. Sometimes, users just left a comment criticising or even replying to another comment.

Conclusion

Our argument in this study is that Internet created an opportunity for a more democratic participation in media content (Dahlgren, 2011; Esteves, 2010; Gillmor, 2010). This happens because it is easier for individuals to have access to the digital platforms. Also, radio, as well as all the traditional communication models, is facing challenges that stem from the development of the Internet and its use for the production of content in media organisations.

The Internet opened a window for more debate and user participation and also provided a higher level of engagement with citizens. Traditional media realised that they had to provide users the necessary tools so they can move from a passive position to a more active one regarding their participation in the discussion of public affairs.

Our research considers that the media have a mission to promote discussion, thus providing audiences with knowledge and promoting pluralism and diversity in the public debate on public issues. In this article we analysed which tools Portuguese news radio stations use on their websites and Facebook pages in order to facilitate and encourage users to participate.

The Portuguese news radio stations analysed have different policies regarding the provision of tools that promote user participation. Antena 1, a public radio station, created a Facebook page, but did not always provide tools for participation on the website, while Renascença did the opposite, focusing on its website, only using Facebook for programme information rather than news content.

As for the various possible forms of participation, and although we are talking about radio, in none of the cases analysed here could users contribute with sound. The most common forms of participation are comments on news and, more rarely, photographs of public events. The Portuguese radio stations analysed in this article showed no significant development over the period of the study in terms of extending the possibilities of participation by users. In other words, the policy of each of the stations remained stable in the six years of the study, namely, not promoting forms of participation other than comments on the news, both on the website and on Facebook.

Moreover, users themselves have not yet introduced into their relationship with radio the use of these new platforms. This is clear to see on the websites and Facebook pages of Renascença and of Antena 1. Users participate by posting comments on the news, often resorting to a phatic communication rather than opinions based on valid arguments.
As suggested by Alfred Hermida, even though the technology brings a host of new features to traditional media, when considering migration scenarios, in this case radio, we must not forget the dynamics created and followed by the professionals. Social, cultural and organizational factors are very important and “the way participatory tools are implemented and managed in newsrooms is not just determined by the availability of the technology; it is also shaped by the newsroom ethos, that varied somewhat from place to place” (Hermida, 2011: 31).

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ABSTRACTS

Radio is changing due to its presence on the Internet, so this article focuses on understanding how Portuguese radio news uses new platforms to promote user participation. The study analyses the online tools available on the websites and in the social networks of Portuguese news radio and explores user uptake of these tools. We came to the conclusion that news radio stations in Portugal have different policies regarding user participation. Also, users themselves have not yet adopted the Internet for participation.

Cet article contribue à la compréhension de la manière dont les radios d’information portugaises utilisent les nouvelles plateformes pour promouvoir la participation des utilisateurs. L’étude analyse les outils en ligne présents sur les sites et les réseaux sociaux des radios d’information au Portugal. Nous concluons que les radios étudiées ont des politiques différentes concernant la participation et que les auditeurs eux-mêmes n’ont pas encore adopté Internet pour y participer.

La radio está cambiando debido a su presencia en Internet por lo que este artículo se centra en la comprensión de cómo la radio de noticias portuguesa utiliza las nuevas plataformas para promover la participación de los usuarios. El estudio analiza las herramientas en la Internet utilizadas para la participación de los usuarios disponible en los sitios web y en las redes sociales de las radios de noticias portuguesas. Llegamos a la conclusión que las radios de noticias en Portugal tienen diferentes políticas respecto a la participación de los usuarios. Además, los propios usuarios aún no han adoptado el Internet para la participación.
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Mots-clés: radio, journalisme, Internet, participation, Portugal
Palabras claves: radio, periodismo, Internet, participación, Portugal
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