Emerging Perspectives: An Overview of Alternative Digital Media and Migrant and/or Racialised People in Portugal

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Abstract

Alternative digital media form part of an effervescent movement to create media organisations, offering an important counterpart to the tendency to concentrate information production within a few institutional conglomerates. In Portugal, while these media outlets have gained prominence in academia, there are still few studies addressing the issue from the perspective of migrants and/or racialised people. In order to address this gap and provide an in-depth overview of the digital alternative media ecosystem in Portugal concerning these social groups, this article presents discussions informed by analyses based on a mapping of digital alternative media related to migration and/or racialised people. Various aspects are examined, such as the relationship between their foundation and the historical and social contexts in Portugal over the last few decades, the challenges of operating with small teams, and the problems associated with adopting different funding strategies. Thus, this analysis contributes to a critical discussion of pressing issues that shape the debate on the role and significance of the participation of this underrepresented group of the population in the media in Portugal. The goal is to foster a more inclusive, diverse and representative media ecosystem that reflects the country's social and cultural diversity. It offers a critical examination of the role and significance of involving this segment of the population in the media in Portugal, aiming to promote a media ecosystem that is more inclusive, diverse, and representative of the country's social and cultural diversity.

Perspectivas Emergentes: Um Panorama Sobre Mídias Alternativas Digitais e Pessoas Migrantes e/ou Racializadas em Portugal

Resumo

As mídias alternativas digitais fazem parte de um movimento efervescente de criação de órgãos de comunicação social, oferecendo uma contrapartida importante diante da tendência de concentração da produção da informação em alguns conglomerados institucionais. Em Portugal, apesar dessas mídias terem ganhado destaque na academia, ainda são poucos os estudos que abordam a questão a partir do recorte das pessoas migrantes e/ou racializadas. De modo a preencher essa lacuna e a oferecer um panorama aprofundado do ecossistema midiático alternativo digital em Portugal no que toca esses grupos sociais, este artigo apresenta discussões norteadas por análises feitas a partir de um mapeamento de mídias alternativas digitais relacionadas com as migrações e/ou pessoas racializadas. São abordados diferentes aspectos, como a relação entre a sua fundação e os contextos históricos e sociais em Portugal ao longo das últimas décadas, as implicações da operação com equipes reduzidas e as problemáticas associadas à adoção de diferentes estratégias de financiamento. Como resultado, desenvolve-se uma problematização necessária de questões prementes que contribuem para o debate acerca do papel e importância da participação desta franja da população nas mídias em Portugal, de forma a fomentar um ecossistema midiático mais inclusivo, heterogêneo e representativo da diversidade social e cultural do país.

Palavras-chave

mídias alternativas, ativismo, pessoas racializadas, migrações, Portugal

1. Introduction

Media emerge from a variety of needs, contexts, and communities, operating within diverse and sometimes complex social, political and economic environments, as is the case in Portugal today. With the rise of anti-immigration rhetoric and the political ascent of far-right parties in the country (Lusa, 2023; Nunes, 2024; Zanetti & França, 2023), both territorial and symbolic borders are being reinforced concerning various social groups. Additionally, numerous studies have demonstrated the persistence of the Lusotropicalist myth in Portuguese society and its links to expressions of racism and xenophobia (e.g. Brasil & Cabecinhas, 2019; Ramos et al., 2020), as well as the resistance to including the ethnic-racial issue in statistical surveys in Portugal (Posch, 2022).

Despite this context, historically marginalised social groups are developing strategies to make themselves heard, voicing experiences that contribute to the decolonisation of knowledge and challenge the dominant national narrative (Anderson, 1983). This aligns with the growing anti-racist movement in Portugal, which includes migrants and especially racialised people, who are progressively asserting their presence in the public space and media, adopting various strategies to enhance Black representation in the Portuguese media. These strategies include interviews, public statements, opinion columns, or even the creation of their own media platforms. In this way, several media outlets deemed alternative seek to highlight the narratives of excluded social groups, focusing on the interests, concerns and demands of marginalised communities (Ihlebæk et al., 2022).

In Portugal, although alternative media are gaining prominence in academia through case studies that aim to deepen the understanding of the discursive and political

implications of their actions in certain social contexts (e.g. Antunes, 2023; Fernandes, 2019), there are still few studies that approach the issue from the perspective of social groups marginalised within the media environment, such as migrants and/or racialised people. In order to address this gap, this article examines the growing alternative media scene in Portugal, which is increasingly visible within the Portuguese media ecosystem and creating space in the public sphere for emerging perspectives on the pressing agendas of marginalised social groups. It focuses on alternative digital media that are composed of (or include on their editorial team) migrants or racialised individuals, as well as those that centre on their experiences as a central theme. This paper, therefore, presents an analysis based on a mapping of alternative digital media related to migration and/or racialised people in Portugal published by Correia Borges et al. (2024).

These reflections allow for a deeper understanding of digital alternative media concerning migrants and/or racialised people. Thus, it aims to contribute to a critical examination of the role and significance of including migrants and racialised people in the media in Portugal, fostering a more inclusive, diverse, and representative media ecosystem that reflects the country's social and cultural diversity.

2. The Digital Alternative Media Ecosystem and Migrants and/or Racialised People in Portugal

The literature addressing the relationship between media[1] and migration is extensive, encompassing publications on concepts such as "diasporic media" (Bozdag et al., 2012), "ethnic media" (e.g., Cabecinhas, 2008), or "media of migrant minorities" (Navaz & Ferrer, 2012). In Portugal, despite the interest in exploring the relationship between these two subjects over recent decades, there are still few studies specifically focusing on migration and/or racialised people in the country. Most publications on the subject consist of case studies focusing on some of the most prominent digital alternative media within these themes (e.g., Fernandes, 2015). Additionally, there are recurring works that examine the topic from specific theoretical perspectives, such as entrepreneurial journalism (e.g., Bonixe, 2022) or start-ups (e.g., Crespo et al., 2020). Conversely, only some studies expand our understanding of this relationship by characterising these alternative digital media and providing a broader overview of their creation and journalistic practices within the Portuguese and global media ecosystems. As a result, little is known about the discourses and narratives conveyed by these media, as well as the involvement of the social groups under consideration in this process. Existing studies have focused on the association between alternative media and counter-hegemonic narratives in a broader context (e.g., Carneiro, 2017).

Despite these shortcomings, alternative digital media have been increasingly gaining prominence in both the media ecosystem and academia over recent years. This trend has been particularly notable in recent decades, as Portugal has undergone a transition

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[1] Consistent with other studies, we use the term "media" from an institutional bias, referring to the organisations and broadcasting companies that operate electronic media — responsible for the mediation that underpins the mechanics of communication (Morley, 2008).

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where traditional media[2] have been making way for the Internet and online social platforms in the dynamics of information production and consumption (Moreno-Castro & Paisana, 2022). This shift has been especially significant among younger audiences (Newman et al., 2023), leading to a notable increase in the establishment of digital alternative media outlets (Teixeira & Jorge, 2021).

When examining various aspects of alternative media, several distinct concepts emerge. For instance, Downing (2001) discusses the notion of *radical media*, while Bailey et al. (2008) introduce concepts like *community media*, *civil society media*, and *rhizomatic media*. Carpentier (2011) explores the idea of *participatory media*. In the realm of journalistic alternative media, new terms have emerged, such as *reparative journalism* and its connection to trauma (Rentschler, 2010), *entrepreneurial journalism* led by journalists (Vos & Singer, 2016), and in the context of Portuguese language journalism, terms like *jornativismo* (journalism-activism; Prudencio, 2006) and *peripheral media* (Levy, 2018).

Despite the range of concepts used to describe them, "alternative" media are considered to be those media organisations that aim to provide alternatives to the hegemonic symbolic constructions produced and disseminated by mainstream media[3]. They operate based on different structures and values of news production and access compared to traditional media (Atton, 2002). These initiatives have the potential to reconfigure communication technologies and (re)mediate communicative practices in terms of expression, interaction, social relations, and meaning (Lievrouw, 2011). Prioritising new technologies for distributing and disseminating content through smaller journalistic structures (Teixeira & Jorge, 2021), these media are developed and managed with a participatory approach involving social actors from civil society (Bailey et al., 2008)[4]. They feature disruptive narratives and formats and focus on significant issues for minority communities (Crespo et al., 2020). In terms of discourse, alternative media play a role in shifting the focus of news production from the information market to the public and communities, creating spaces to tell stories from new perspectives and narratives (Chaparro-Escudero et al., 2020). These fresh viewpoints often emerge from various sectors of society, enabling individuals with diverse professional backgrounds to contribute to the media landscape.

The growing presence of these media in global media ecosystems is part of a broader context often interpreted as a crisis in journalism. Accelerated by technological

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[2] We use the term to refer to mass media that engage with their audiences according to pre-Internet communication models, including the emergence of new media (e.g., print media such as newspapers and magazines and broadcast media such as radio and television).

[3] The concept of *mainstream* is subject to multiple interpretations, particularly in the realm of digital journalism (Steensen et al., 2023). It is often linked to notions of commercial and hegemonic media (Frischlich et al., 2023) and associated with traditional media outlets. For this paper, we use the term *mainstream* in line with Chomsky's (1997) concept of the "media elite", which refers to media associated with large corporations that hold a dominant position within the power hierarchy of private enterprise. Because they have greater financial resources, they set the agenda (McCombs, 2004) and define the frameworks from which other media approach various issues. They determine which topics receive media attention and how they are communicated and represented.

[4] While this influence was previously observed with other media, such as community radio, it has been amplified in alternative media through enhanced interaction and the democratisation of digital reach.

advances, decreasing attention spans, and waning audience trust in traditional media (Fuller, 2010), this crisis has prompted revisions across various dimensions of journalism, from business models to journalistic practices (Fuller, 2010). While traditional media typically rely on business models that concentrate wealth within a few large organisations or conglomerates, with advertising as their primary source of funding (Herman & Chomsky, 2002), alternative media challenge this paradigm by developing new business models. These models focus on integrating the economic activities of information production into the lives of those directly involved in the process (Atton, 2002). They thus align with the concept of "self-managed media" (Downing, 2001), which operate and sustain themselves over time with minimal budgets and a business structure the team itself manages.

In this media ecosystem, it is crucial to understand how alternative initiatives to the mainstream interact with social causes and movements, including those involving migrants and/or racialised people. According to the International Organization for Migrations (s.d.), a migrant is someone who "moves away from their usual place of residence, either within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons". When this displacement takes place between culturally diverse territories, there are frequent cases in which the migrant goes through socio-cultural processes where racialisation dynamics function as mechanisms for preserving social power hierarchies. In Portugal, except for the Romani community, the majority of individuals who self-identified[5] as *Black*, *Asian*, *"Gypsy,"* or of *mixed origin or affiliation* in 2023 had an immigrant background[6]. Specifically, 90.3% of Black people, 83.7% of Asian people, and 69.2% of those with *mixed origins or affiliations* reported such backgrounds (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2023).

When the agenda focuses on migrants and/or racialised people, the communication practices of alternative media are more likely than those of mainstream media to contribute to the empowerment and enhanced civic engagement of communities that are often excluded or marginalised from society. According to Anthias (1998), social divisions based on the concept of "race" often reflect a dichotomous relation constructed

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[5] In the survey mentioned above, participants answered a question about their ethnic self-identification based on a pre-established list. They could select more than one option to indicate the group(s) to which they felt they belonged. The choices included Asian, White, Gypsy, Black, mixed origin or belonging, other, "prefer not to answer" and "do not know". The question was accompanied by the following instruction: "Consider the characteristics or traits that define your personal and family history and origin, including aspects of culture, geography, religion, customs, and your sense of belonging to a community or group" (Barbio et al., 2024, p. 13). It is important to note that the survey did not adhere to some of the recommendations proposed by the Census 2021 Working Group — namely, the inclusion of more detailed ethnic-racial categories and subcategories, and did not provide an open space for respondents to indicate origins not included in the questionnaire (Alto Comissariado para as Migrações, 2018). Sociologist and anti-racist activist Cristina Roldão, a member of the 2018 working group, also critiques the survey for its superficial treatment of social discrimination and its failure to adequately address the intersection of migration and ethnic-racial issues (Roldão, 2024).

[6] The study at issue defined "people with an immigration background" as those born outside Portugal or those born in Portugal with at least one parent or grandparent who was born outside the country. On this topic, when discussing new policies for producing knowledge on migration, Amelung et al. (2024) examine the category "migratory background", including its extension to parents and grandparents which, as illustrated by the data from the German Federal Statistical Office (*Statistisches Bundesamt*), statistically classified individuals born and raised in the country as "foreigners", thus shaping assumptions about their (non)national belonging.

through the opposition "White/Black", suggesting that "all White people are one thing and all Black people are another" (p. 516). However, the dynamics of racialisation today extend beyond this exclusively binary view. It is essential to examine not only how differences based on the concept of "race" are constructed but also what meanings are attached to them and how these meanings are used to create and perpetuate racism (Gonzalez-Sobrino & Goss, 2019).

Van Dijk (1991) argues that in societies predominantly composed of white people, the media play a role in reproducing racism, perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices about minority groups to varying degrees. In the Portuguese media ecosystem, the racialisation (and representation) of minority and marginalised social groups, such as racialised individuals and migrants, align with the negative and stereotypical perspectives prevalent in the global press: these groups are often portrayed as a problem or threat and are frequently associated with discourses of crime, violence, and conflict (van Dijk, 1991).

Overall, the Portuguese mainstream and hegemonic media have continued to perpetuate discourses that construct and represent identities in ways that crystallise negative profiles about migrants and/or racialised people[7]. Just over a decade ago, Borges (2011) noted that "newspapers in Portugal still do not appear to understand the complexities surrounding immigration fully, nor are they sufficiently aware of how certain framings of journalistic stories can lead to prejudiced and discriminatory interpretations". Research indicates the presence of in/visibility dynamics in the content produced by mainstream media (e.g., Posch & Cabecinhas, 2023). Furthermore, there is still a tendency to ethnicise the image of migrants, such as Black people, for example, those from Portuguese-speaking African countries, or individuals from Romani communities (even those of Portuguese nationality), labelling them as "others" or "outsiders" (Borges, 2008; Brasil & Bonomo, 2021), a scenario that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Santos & Santos, 2021).

Despite the limitations in studying immigration issues in Portugal, including the reliance on generic statistical data about migrants, the topic has long garnered attention from academia, the media, and civil society. This focus intensified during key historical moments when the socio-cultural impact of a multicultural migrant population within Portuguese society became more evident (Padilla et al., 2015). The migrant population plays a fundamental role in the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of Portugal, a country currently experiencing what Isabel Almeida Rodrigues (2022), the former Secretary of State for Migration, described as a "demographic winter," referring to the negative population balance recorded the previous year. In a country where 1.4 million people have an immigrant background (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2023), this issue is intertwined with a complex web of factors, including Portugal's colonial past and

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[7] For example, consider the police assault on Cláudia Simões in January 2020 and the legal case against Mamadou Bá, which concluded in 2023. These incidents were reported differently by mainstream and alternative media. In the case of Cláudia Simões, mainstream media typically depicted the incident as a dispute that escalated into a physical altercation (Santos, 2023), with a focus throughout the coverage on the legal proceedings (Baião, 2023). In contrast, alternative digital media conveyed a greater sense of social urgency, framing the incident within a broader socio-historical context of racism in Portugal (Afrolink, 2023; Cardoso, 2023; Independent Media Centre, 2023).

its global economic and cultural relations.

3. Characterisation of Alternative Media in Portugal Related to Migrants and/ or Racialised People: Analysis and Discussion

Below, we present discussions derived from the quantitative analysis of aspects highlighted in the mapping of Portuguese digital alternative media related to migrants and/or racialised people developed by Correia Borges et al. (2024) conducted in October 2022. This mapping results from a search for alternative digital media identified on various Google-indexed websites and lists dedicated to the topic. It forms part of a comprehensive survey aimed at creating a database of Portuguese alternative media that address migration, particularly those with a decolonial approach. The aspects analysed include year of establishment, geographical bases of activities, team size, funding sources, main topics covered, and presence on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X, along with their follower counts.

An initial point to highlight is that the Portuguese Regulatory Authority for the Media does not regulate most of the alternative media outlets mapped. This lack of regulation could be seen as an effort by these outlets to maintain complete independence by avoiding ties with other regulatory bodies. Among the alternative media outlets mapped, eight have their publications registered with the Media Regulatory Authority (*A Batalha*, *Revista Gerador*, *Shifter*, Divergente, and Afrolis, the latter of which has had its registration suspended). Additionally, three are registered with radio operators: RUM – Rádio Universitário do Minho, RUC – Rádio Universitária de Coimbra, and RUA FM – Rádio Universitária do Algarve (Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social, 2024).

When examining the media outlets based on their year of establishment, we find that the oldest one identified in the mapping is *A Batalha*, which was founded in 1919. As a newspaper focusing on topics like politics, anarchism, and social justice, it remained the sole alternative media outlet in the country for over seven decades. This prolonged period of exclusivity may have been significantly influenced by the restrictions imposed during the Estado Novo regime (Cabrera, 2022). In the latter half of the 1980s, the establishment of alternative media initiatives was spearheaded by academic associations working closely with local university administrations (Teixeira & Silva, 2009). In 1986, RUC – Rádio Universitária de Coimbra was founded as the first alternative media outlet in democratic Portugal, coinciding with the country's entry into the European Economic Community, now the European Union, followed by the foundation of *Jornal Universitário do Porto* (1987). Continuing within the academic setting, the establishment of RUM – Rádio Universitária do Minho in 1989 followed shortly after.

The new century introduced new forms of communication, including the advent of the 'blogosphere' in 1999, the democratisation of the Internet (Kim, 2005), and new social challenges emerging from a world increasingly connected online. These developments had a significant impact on the media, including the crisis triggered by the Great Recession, which began in the United States with the subprime mortgage crisis (Pereira,

2021). This combination resulted in the erosion of institutional exclusivity and the emergence of autonomous, independent, and low-cost platforms, as Sandvoss (2010) theorised. This decade was also pivotal for the digital transition of media content in the country, a shift reflected in several of the alternative media outlets mapped, which lack a physical geographic base and indicate that they operate entirely online. In Portugal, 1999 saw the emergence of the Centro de Média Independente (Independent Media Centre), part of an international non-profit alternative media network with an open publishing system (Platon & Deuze, 2003). This was followed by the founding of RUA FM – Rádio Universitária do Algarve in 2002 and, later, Rádio Zero in 2008, established by the Students' Association of the Instituto Superior Técnico, continuing the tradition of university-based media initiatives.

In 2010, two new platforms emerged: Buala and Dezanove. Buala, focusing on Afro-descendant content, revived a tradition interrupted by the Estado Novo regime, becoming one of the first to produce Lusophone Afro-descendant content[8]. Dezanove, one of the early LGBTQI+ platforms, operates without a specific geographical base. In 2012, *Jornal Anarquista*, based in Évora, and *Jornal Mapa*, with national coverage, were also established.

In 2013, there was an exponential increase in the number of platforms, with the launch of five new ones: *Revista Manifesto* and *Shifter*, both based in Lisbon; PTrevolutionTV and Guilhotina.info, which operate without a physical base; and Hedflow, an international channel serving as a digital link between Portugal and Brazil, similar to CMI. This surge can be attributed to several factors, including the widespread adoption of smartphones, which facilitated easier access to, production, and sharing of information, as noted by Harlow and Harp (2013). Another significant factor was the peak of Portugal's economic crisis, with 2013 marking the year when the highest number of people left the country (120,000), reflecting the severity of the crisis (Pires et al., 2020). Alongside rising emigration and unemployment, there was a notable increase in public protests against the government's austerity measures (Accornero & Pinto, 2015). This connection becomes more apparent when we consider that the media outlets established during this period also carried an oppositional political stance in their content, reflecting the political and social climate of the time.

Thus, we can distinguish two distinct phases of alternative media in Portugal: before and after 2013. The economic crisis significantly impacted mainstream media, leading to cuts in advertising, widespread unemployment, and increased levels of precariousness (Bastos, 2014). Between 2014 and 2017, ten platforms were established: Afrolis, Bantumen, Divergente, esQrever, Fumaça, *Revista Gerador*, Libertária, QiNews, Revista Rua, and Tranquiflow. This period saw an expansion beyond the Lisbon metropolitan area into regions with significant populations of African descent, migrants, and/or racialised

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[8] It is important to note that the racial and migratory dimensions were already significant when these media outlets were established. At the beginning of the 20th century, during the period between the First Republic and the rise of the Estado Novo, Portugal had at least 12 print periodicals focused on themes related to the African and Afro-descendant populations, including titles such as O Negro, A Voz D'Africa, and Tribuna D'Africa (Roldão et al., 2023).

individuals, such as Libertária in Almada. In 2019, the stabilisation of Portugal's socio-economic conditions, which improved people's living standards, was reflected in the thematic nature of the media landscape. Media outlets began to focus on more specific topics and reduced their previously activist and protest-oriented content. During this year, four new platforms emerged: Afrolink, Comboio Suburbano, Crónico, and O Lado Negro da Força. Among these, only Afrolink highlights its base in Lisbon, underscoring the trend of digital presence over physical location.

In 2020, only three new media outlets were founded: Duas Linhas, Interruptor (based in Queluz), and Mensagem. The latter produces content in Cape Verdean Creole and identifies as a digital newspaper based in Lisbon, thus bridging global reach through communication in different languages and stories with a focus exclusively on Lisbon realities. In 2021, two additional portals emerged: Página Um and Setenta e Quatro, both based in Lisbon. Notably, at least three of these new channels address the COVID-19 pandemic in their initial publications, reflecting a response to the increased need for diverse discourses prompted by the pandemic.

Examining the geographical distribution of the mapped media, we find that only six out of the 18 districts in mainland Portugal hosts this type of media. Among these, the Lisbon district is the most dominant (15), including Amadora and Queluz, each hosting one platform. Évora (one) represents the southern part of the country, followed by Braga (two), Porto (one), and Coimbra (one). Notably, there are no alternative media based in the Autonomous Regions of the Azores or the Autonomous Regions of Madeira.

Many of the mapped media outlets are concentrated in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, which also has the highest population density of individuals who identify as Black (69.9%), mixed origin or belonging (48.8%), or Asian (34.7%). Additionally, the Lisbon district has the highest density of documented migrant residents in the country (Lopes & Machado, 2023). Given that one of the defining features of alternative media is to highlight minority causes and perspectives, it is telling that nearly half of the media outlets mapped in the study are based in Portugal's most multicultural region. This region, with its high density of diverse communities, is where many projects and initiatives emerge to challenge and diversify mainstream media narratives. Additionally, it is noteworthy that sinalAberto, a media outlet with a strong Lusophone dimension and team members from various Portuguese-speaking countries, is located in Coimbra. This city has historically attracted individuals from former colonies due to its prestigious university.

In terms of team size, 18 of the 36 mapped alternative media outlets operate with small teams, typically comprising fewer than 10 individuals. This characteristic is common within digital alternative media, driven by factors such as limited funding and the high level of personal and political commitment often involved in their creation and upkeep. In Portugal, many alternative media outlets originate from the efforts of journalists, exemplified by platforms like Fumaça (Bonixe, 2022).

In defining themselves, many of the mapped media organisations emphasise a sense of community, political-cultural journalism, and self-management. These outlets are often composed of socially engaged individuals who view journalism as a critical

voice in society. Their teams frequently consist of volunteers and precariously employed staff (Antunes, 2023). In this context, a small staff can lead to editorial choices being significantly shaped by the personal interests of the team members. When asked about the criteria used to choose stories for Divergente, Sofia de Palma Rodrigues, journalist and executive editor, explained that her small team's topic choices are primarily driven by individual interests, reflecting an approach centred on personal preferences, despite acknowledging the existence of overarching agenda-setting that shapes the media's coverage of key topics (Antunes, 2023).

Another aspect analysed was what we term presence on digital social networks, gauged by the alternative media's number of followers on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X. Beyond enabling representation and self-representation without mediation by mainstream media, the Internet facilitates the connection and organisation of dispersed networks of people and activists both locally and across national political borders (Bailey et al., 2008). In Portugal, digital social networking platforms have been leveraged by journalism media to enhance interaction with audiences (Francisco, 2010). They have become a key tool for social movements in their activism (Trindade & Luvizotto, 2022).

Among the 36 alternative media outlets mapped, 33 have a Facebook page, 31 maintain an Instagram page, and 26 are active on X. Despite serving niche audiences, the combined follower counts on these platforms can be substantial. For instance, some outlets exceed 50,000 followers across these platforms (Mensagem, Fumaça, *Revista Gerador*, RUM – Rádio Universitária do Minho and Shifter), or even 300,000 (Bantumen).

A digital presence on social networks is now perceived as almost imperative — largely driven by contemporary social pressure to maintain profiles on platforms of some of the big techs controlled by major technology oligopolies. While a digital presence facilitates greater proximity and interaction with audiences, these platforms also (re)produce social inequalities, as noted by Silva (2022) in his concept of "algorithmic racism"[9]. In the Western context, the pervasive belief that "everyone" is on social networks encourages media to seek reach and engagement on these platforms, even though, structurally, they embody ideological values contrary to those questioned by many of the alternative digital media outlets. Furthermore, the use of digital social networks is tied to data collection that is constantly updated and enables forms of exploitation, oppression and political, ideological and subjective control, among other negative impacts of what Lippold and Faustino (2022) conceptualise as "digital colonialism". Digital colonialism thus revolves around the accumulation of data, which turns the so-called "Global South" into a source for information extraction and consumption of outdated technology. Meanwhile, the

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[9] Silva (2022) conceptualises algorithmic racism as a contemporary manifestation of "structural racism", wherein emerging digital technologies — such as social networks, search engines, and artificial intelligence — are shaped to the detriment of minority groups. According to the author, it is part of a broader context of "codified racialisation" (Silva, 2023, p. 187) that encompasses aspects such as "the racial selectivity of technical positions in programming companies, the unequal social distribution of prestige among digital content producers on the Internet and the naturalised codification of racist discourses and aesthetics in social media and digital image banks" (Silva, 2023, p. 187). In this sense, algorithmic discrimination could shape future power dynamics by "adding more opacity to the global exploitation and oppression that have persisted since the colonial project of the 16th century" (Silva, 2022, p. 69).

"Global North" profits by selling, storing, and processing this data for its own advantage.

Regarding the financing of these initiatives, while most of the media outlets mapped do not commonly diversify their income sources, they sustain themselves financially in various ways. Particularly noteworthy is the support from readers through donations (14), which has emerged as a significant method for financing media that provide independent and alternative narratives (Vara-Miguel et al., 2021). Other significant means of fundraising for the alternative media mapped are advertising (six), European funding (five), organising events (four) and direct sales (four). European funding is expected to become a more prominent source of support, underpinned by a proactive effort from the European Union to develop initiatives for journalistic media in Europe, such as those outlined in the Media and Audiovisual Action Plan issued in 2020 and the awarding of grants that include a clause ensuring editorial independence for recipients (European Commission, 2024), to safeguard the relationship that authors such as Dragomir (2018) establish between funding and agenda-setting.

It is also worth noting that advertising serves as a primary source of funding for some of the alternative media (six), suggesting that at least some of the initiatives mapped continue to operate within the traditional business model of journalism — a model that is often scrutinised due to its intersection with issues such as editorial independence and freedom (Bailey et al., 2008; Teixeira, 2022). The financing of five of these media outlets by private sector companies such as Google, Facebook, and WordPress also warrants attention. While this has become a significant means of sustaining journalism in recent decades, some scholars argue that this relationship represents a form of "capture" of alternative journalism by large corporations (Bell, 2021) or an attempt to "platformise" it (Jurno & D'Andréa, 2020). This dynamic can be seen as an effort by the private sector to integrate itself into multiple levels of the information industry ecosystem (Papaevangelou, 2024).

Regarding the central themes[10] covered by alternative media, the arts and culture category appears most prominently (30). This prominence may be related to the inclusion of both generalist media and those dedicated to specific themes within the mapping. Additionally, it may also reflect a strategy of agenda accommodation by alternative media to legitimise themselves as competitors to mainstream media (Freudenthaler & Wessler, 2022). Next, the mapped alternative media focus on three equally important themes: social justice (17), politics (16), and current affairs (15). These themes reflect the nature of alternative media in challenging the narratives constructed by mainstream media and those in positions of power. They often address criticisms of these representations or

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[10] The themes were grouped as follows: Anticapitalism (anticapitalism; anticapitalism and anarchist policies), Art and Culture (art; audiovisual; culture; counterculture; literature; music; talent), Current Affairs (current affairs; critical journalism; world; news), City, Science, Colonialism, Sport, Education, Events, LGBTQIA+ Experience (news related to LGBTQIA+ issues), Black Experience (Black culture; Afro-descendant experience; Black and immigrant experience; hip hop and urban culture), Topical Stories, Climate Justice, Social Justice (anti-racism; social causes; human rights; social justice; news about social justice; news about political demonstrations on the themes of social and climate justice, especially in Portugal; social justice issues; social issues; political and social representations), Lifestyle (lifestyle; personalities), Lusophony, Academic World, Business, Politics (democracy; emerging states; politics; policies; left-wing policies; progressivism), Gender Issues, Flavours, Society, Technology and Travel.

provide alternative perspectives based on distinct values, contexts, access and methods of news collection (Atton, 2002). The prominence of these themes also aligns with the characteristics of alternative media audiences, who often describe themselves as "agenda critics" (Schwarzenegger, 2023, p. 858). Generally, alternative media outlets' audiences seek impartial narratives and a clear distinction between fact and opinion (Schwarzenegger, 2023). They tend to be highly critical of mainstream media, viewing it with scepticism and turning to alternative media for the sense of knowing more and "knowing better" (p. 858).

Although the mapped media outlets address social causes with a critical stance and a sense of urgency, topics directly related to migrants and racialised people are not widely covered — for instance, only six of the media outlets address the theme "Black Experience". This gap may suggest a possible disconnect between the perception of colonial influences on current migratory and racial issues in Portugal and the processes of identity formation and negotiation among certain social groups in Portuguese society.

On the other hand, platforms focused specifically on racialised issues, such as Afrolis, Afrolink, and Buala, might not attract a broad, socio-demographically diverse audience. Similar to mainstream media, alternative media encode their messages (Hall, 2005) according to counter-hegemonic discourses. When there is a mismatch between the codes of alternative media and their audience, it can lead to "distortions" or misinterpretations of the content (Hall, 2005), which may hinder the effective communication of their messages. Additionally, the news consumption habits of the Portuguese population must also be considered. According to Cardoso et al. (2023) in the *Digital News Report 2023*, 15.7% of Portuguese actively avoid the topic of "identity causes (e.g., racial, gender issues, etc.)". Consequently, media such as these often cater to a niche audience that may already be inclined toward racial issues.

4. Conclusions

This paper presents an analysis of alternative digital media focusing on migration and/or racialised communities in Portugal. It highlights that the establishment of these media outlets is deeply rooted in broader contexts and cannot be dissociated from contexts such as the Salazar dictatorship, academic associations and the emergence of new information and communication technologies, particularly the Internet. The analysis also acknowledges the increasing prominence of social, ethnic, and racial issues linked to the rise in immigration to Portugal and the independence of former Portuguese colonies in Africa during the 20th century.

Although the geographical bases of these media outlets mirror the demographic asymmetries of migrants and/or racialised people in Portugal, the fact that many operate with small teams underscores both the challenges and opportunities within these initiatives. Small teams allow for a greater diversity of voices and places of speech (Ribeiro, 2017) in the Portuguese media landscape. This diversity is evident in the themes covered by the mapped alternative media, which predominantly focus on culture, including

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counterculture and social causes. However, issues directly related to the experiences of migrants and/or racialised individuals, particularly in connection with historical and cultural contexts of a shared colonial past, are generally underrepresented. This reflects ongoing difficulties within Portuguese society in fostering and engaging in critical discussions on these significant issues.

When examining their presence on digital social networks, it is noteworthy that, despite X being the platform where the Portuguese most consume news from alternative brands or journalists (OberCom, 2023), Facebook remains the social network with the largest presence for the mapped digital alternative media. This observation prompts reflections on the communication strategies adopted by these media, including the challenge of addressing "algorithmic racism". Additionally, while digital alternative media organisations are funded through a variety of sources, few utilise multiple funding sources simultaneously. Concerns have been raised about the interplay between funding, autonomy, and media activism, as well as the influence and role of big tech in journalism.

The interpretation of the results and the conclusions drawn from this analysis must consider the study's limitations. Focused on specific aspects of a mapping elaborated in October 2022, it does not encompass media established after this period. Future research could explore additional dimensions, such as the inclusion of migrants and/or racialised people in alternative digital media founded during earlier periods, particularly when immigration and the presence of racialised individuals in Portugal were minimal, especially until the mid-20th century (Buettner, 2020). It will also be crucial to monitor how funding influences the activist practices of alternative digital media. Future studies should focus on the content produced by these media outlets, examining how they address the interests of migrants and/or racialised people and the languages used in their communication. This analysis will help elucidate the connection between the content shared on these platforms and the underlying logics of coloniality and racism that affect them.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

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Biographical Notes

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Emerging Perspectives: An Overview of Alternative Digital Media... · Patricia Posch, Gessica Correia Borges, Chisoka Simões & Carla Cerqueira

— *Migrações, Media e Ativismos em Língua Portuguesa: Descolonizar Paisagens Mediáticas e Imaginar Futuros Alternativos* (MigraMediaActs — Migrations, Media and Activism in Portuguese: Decolonising Media Landscapes and Imagining Alternative Futures; PTDC/COM-CSS/3121/2021). Her research often explores themes such as decolonial activism, oral history and Black women. A self-taught writer from a young age and a poet at heart, Gessica has had her work published in Brazilian anthologies, including Poetas Negras Brasileiras (2021). She is also an active member of Portuguese anti-racist collectives and associations such as União Negra das Artes.

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