

Local News and Geolocation Technology in Portugal

Subjects: Communication

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New projects have recently emerged to develop geolocation technology for the publication of local news in Portugal. These types of new initiatives open the possibility to explore new media perspectives, identifying emerging directions and opportunities to develop more competitive ways to publish local news. In this work, we study these ideas and to what extent they can be used to cope with the challenges that the local Portuguese press is currently facing. We provide local news editors with information to further develop their e-participation and news publishing activities. To this end, we present 10 indicators that measure geolocation technology that has been successful in providing attractive services to local consumers. Lastly, we analyze five Portuguese apps by means of the proposed guideline. Our work shows that the use of geolocation technology has a great potential for local journalism in Portugal but nevertheless we still find flaws in their implementation.

Keywords: geolocation technology ; news publishing ; local journalism ; Portugal ; social dimension of news publication ; public access and engagement

1. Introduction

Local journalism constitutes an integral part of local life, where the journalists not only report local events but stimulate local debates and keep a watchful eye on those in power. However, over the last decade, the local press has been transitioning to a more digital environment, which, in turn, has produced a decline in the number of local newspapers and local journalists ^{[1][2][3]}. While in 1998, there were 1153 local media outlets in Portugal, this figure decreased to 790 in 2016 ^[4]. For this reason, an increasing number of journalists and researchers have raised concerns about the social implications of this transition. Significant cuts in local journalists' staff could affect the plurality of news sources, the visibility to local citizens, and therefore, produce a democratic deficit at the local level ^[5].

In Portugal, the position of the local press has recently become more severe as much of the financial support has been reduced ^[1] and now, because of the impact of COVID-19, the sector is heading to an agonizing scenario that only gets worse with each passing day (^[6] Portuguese Journalist Union, 2020). This is particularly dramatic since, historically, the local press has played a central role in the country, having around 50% of the national share market ^[7].

The digitalization of local newspapers and, in particular, the rise of technologies based on geolocation technology, has completely changed the way in which the sector operates. This has led many local Portuguese press organizations to close their doors due to their inability to adapt to this new context and to understand the preferences of online users. However, while many local newspapers are facing difficulties, new and innovative forms of news content and information access started to gain prominence in some countries, including Portugal ^[8]. Even if only residual, the production of mobile news appears as a new experience carried out by local journalists ^[9]. Funded by private large corporations, such as Google or the European Journalism Centre (EJC) in partnership with the Facebook Journalism Project (FJP), new projects have emerged in Portugal to develop applications oriented towards fostering local journalism ^[10]. This type of new initiative opens the possibility to local Portuguese media organizations and journalists to seize advanced technological tools that allow them to explore new mediascapes and provide customized and modern services.

The features that persist in local areas of the country can be beneficial to the maintenance and stability of the local press ^{[11][12]}. In this context, the cultivation of proximity and preservation of identity, cultural and historical ties are of the greatest importance. Additionally, the presence of faithful subscribers and, in the case of Portugal, the proximity to the immigrant/emigrant communities, play a crucial role in the Portuguese context. In this work, we analyze the situation of journalism in Portugal and study how the irruption of geolocation technology posed new challenges and possibilities to this sector. We examine how the Portuguese cultural and socio-economic idiosyncrasies can be used by local journalism to provide personalized appealing services to local communities using geolocation functionalities. In this work, we focus on local newspapers and do not consider other local media, such as radio, television, or online-only news organizations.

2. Results and Discussion

The results show that none of the applications have even met half of the criteria proposed in this study. The applications that performed better in the analysis were *Repórter no Mundo* and *Dnotícias*, gathering three positive criteria for each one. According to the results presented in **Table 1** (below), no platform complies with the first four analysis criteria.

Table 1. The criteria met in the applications considered in this study.

	<i>Repórter no Mundo</i>	<i>Diário do Minho</i>	<i>Açoriano Oriental</i>	<i>Dnoticias</i>	<i>Diário de Coimbra</i>
1. Offers options to receive local information, such as here, nearby, or anywhere.	-	-	-	-	-
2. Proximity news alerts	-	-	-	-	-
3. Visualization tools, such as online mapping	-	-	-	-	-
4. Tasks of local news	-	-	-	-	-
5. Guest posts of localnews	✓	-	-	-	-
6. Gallery for send videos or photos	-	-	-	-	-
7. Spaces for interaction between users from the same location	✓	-	-	-	-
8. Location-based advertising	-	✓	-	✓	-
9. Social Media	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10. Support for users	-	-	-	✓	-

Only indicator 14 (Social media) was satisfied by all the apps. The app *Repórter no Mundo* provides incentives for users' participation, giving different levels of titles to users, such as “correspondents” or “senior correspondents”, according to the number of news published. Next, we provide a more detailed analysis of the indicators considered in this work for each app.

Regarding the news, the apps failed to comply with indicators 1, 2 and 3. There are no options to receive local news, like “here”, “nearby” or “elsewhere” (indicator 1), alerts to users about news near them (indicator 2), news edition features like online maps (indicator 3). Therefore, even though geolocation technologies are a key element to explore new possibilities to provide content based on proximity, these tools are little explored ^{[13][14]}.

We noted that the applications analyzed do not provide geolocation features to encourage public engagement, failing to meet criteria for indicators 4, 5 and 6. Resources, such as the ones described in indicator 4 or guest posts in indicator 5 are not available to foster content creation in the local news context. Although the *Diário do Minho* app has a gallery with photos and videos, these cannot be uploaded with geotags, thus failing to meet the criteria for indicator 6 (**Figure 1**).

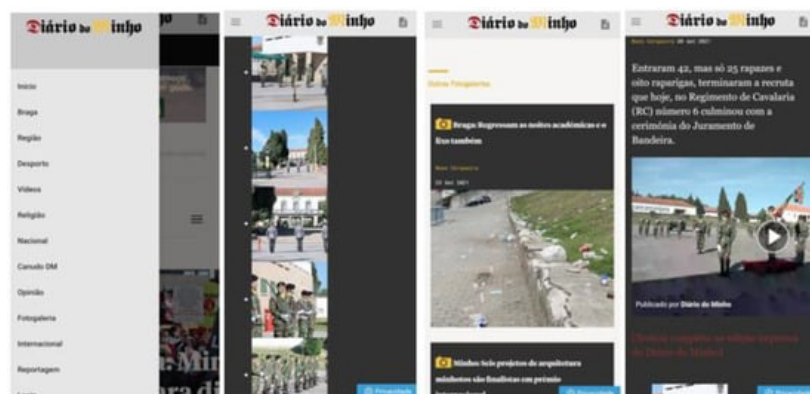


Figure 1. Video or photo galleries of the app *Diário do Minho* without geo-tagging system.

The *Repórter no Mundo* app was the only application that uses guest posts and spaces for interaction among registered users in the same location, as described in indicators 5 and 7. This application's menu features a section called "Community" in which the newspaper editors propose 7 guest posts. These posts address topics related to Portuguese immigrants and the local community. Users are invited to cover information on the topic in question, give their opinion, write news and interact with users registered on the platform. During our analysis, we observed that the application provides a specific incentive for public participation: recognition. In this way, the reader who frequently produces news publications will receive the title of "correspondent". Thus, according to the number of news published, users will be able to further improve their title, which ranges from "candidate to correspondent" to "senior correspondent" (Figure 2).

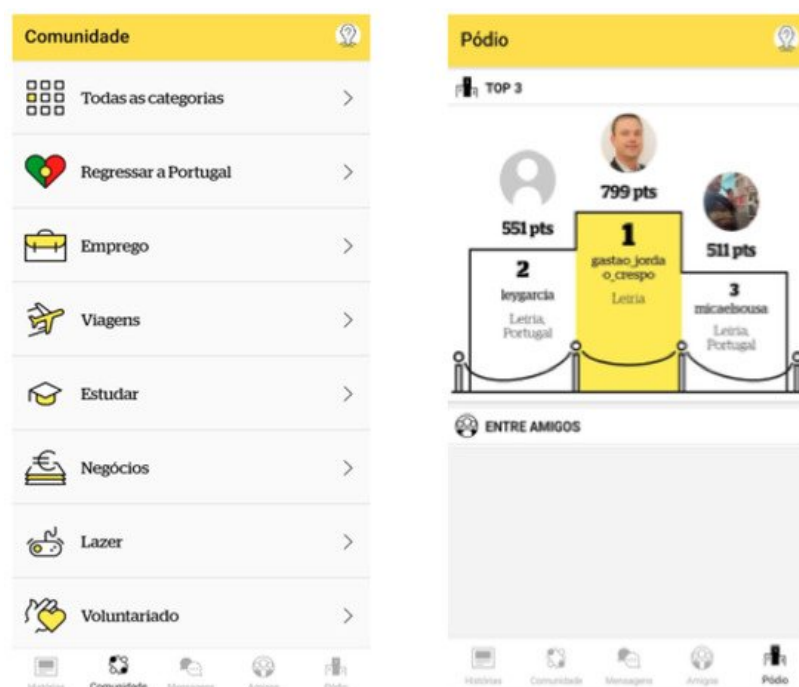


Figure 2. Guests' posts and spaces to foster public participation in the app *Repórter no Mundo*.

Regarding indicator 8, we noted that the *Diário do Minho* and *Dnoticias* applications do display advertising based on the user's location. Despite little investment in resources regarding the participation and interaction of users in the assessed applications, all of them use social media to share content, thus gathering a positive evaluation for indicator 9. Although the use of social media facilitates the sharing of content ^[15], the lack of environments developed exclusively for public interaction and participation in the evaluated apps, except for the *Reporter no Mundo* app, represents an important flaw.

Lastly, for the user's support (indicator 10), we noticed that there is little effort to provide this type of resource in the assessed applications. Only the *Açoriano Oriental* app has a visible area with contact information for the app's editors with phone numbers, e-mail addresses and technical support. Issues arising from registration or when uploading photos or videos frequently occur, and it is important to provide a technical support area to help less experienced users.

3. Conclusions

We have reviewed the current situation of the local press in Portugal, and we have analyzed the theoretical framework to present a novel assessment tool based on the definition of 10 indicators. This provides us with an effective guideline that allows us to assess the use of mobile apps by local journalism, regarding digital resources that delve into location information. In this way, we reached the second objective established for this work, presenting a methodology that allows local journalists to improve geolocation resources following the criteria used to validate each indicator.

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