



**Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper
University of Oxford**

**LOCAL MEDIA IN BRAZIL: Draining the
newsrooms in the country's poorest region**

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Hilary and Trinity terms

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INTRODUCTION

This research broaches some aspects of the deterioration of local journalism in Brazil, more specifically in the State of Pernambuco. Located in the Northeast region, the poorest in the country, Pernambuco has a population of around 9.5 million (IBGE, 2018) and is 17th of 26 national states in GDP per capita (IBGE, 2016). Services account for 73.2 percent of the local economy; industry for 22 percent, and agriculture for 4.8 percent (IBGE, 2016).

Unlike most of the regional states in Brazil, which have no more than two relevant local newspapers in circulation, Pernambuco has three main broadsheets covering its territory. One of them is the "Diário de Pernambuco", which is the oldest newspaper still in circulation in Latin America, established in 1825.

"Diário de Pernambuco" competes in the local market with "Jornal do Comercio" (established in 1919) and Folha de Pernambuco (established in 1998). All three newspapers are owned by local businessmen, who have other business in the region. In the Brazilian Northeast, most of the publications are traditionally owned by local politicians or business people and not by the leading national media groups.

Since 2007 the same political group has continuously governed Pernambuco. This research shows how this group has managed to become politically stronger during the last decade and, somehow, reverse an unfavourable relationship with the local newspapers.

In spite of being one of the poorest places in Brazil, Pernambuco has historically had a combative and awarded local media. Until recently, local reporters had been winning the most important national journalism prizes with inspiring local stories and initiatives. This context has been changing dramatically, influenced both by the digital disruption in the media industry and by a "draining" process of the newsrooms.

Based on exclusive data collected from media outlets and on interviews, this research shows that the local reporters have been abandoning journalism (a lot of them prematurely) in one of the most impoverished areas of Brazil, where the public surveillance is paramount. These shifts have resulted in serious failings of local newspapers in addressing Community Information Needs (CINs).

Throughout five chapters, this research describes why, how and under what circumstances many journalists have been swapping newsrooms desks for political cabinets in Pernambuco. The direct effects of this movement are also shown through a comparison of the local media coverage of two remarkable episodes in the Pernambuco political life.

Inspired by some initiatives taking place in Europe, this research also includes suggestions aimed to interrupt the sharp decline in the production of local content and to reengage the population about the importance of a healthy local journalism.

KEY FINDINGS

After gathering and analysing data from two of the three leading local newspapers in the State of Pernambuco, in the Brazilian Northeast, this research found out that at least 38 percent of the reporters who left the newsrooms between 2008 and 2018 started working for local authorities: governor, mayors, congressmen, city councillors, secretaries, etc.

Based on this evidence and on interviews with 20 journalists who have changed the local newsrooms per political cabinets, we can conclude that an indirect method of media capture has been taking place in Pernambuco. This has taken place in a climate of digital disruption which has hit newspaper finances and means newsrooms struggle to retain talent.

Some of the most renowned, award winning journalists of Pernambuco are currently working for the government and that the local press is today much more docile and vulnerable than in the past.

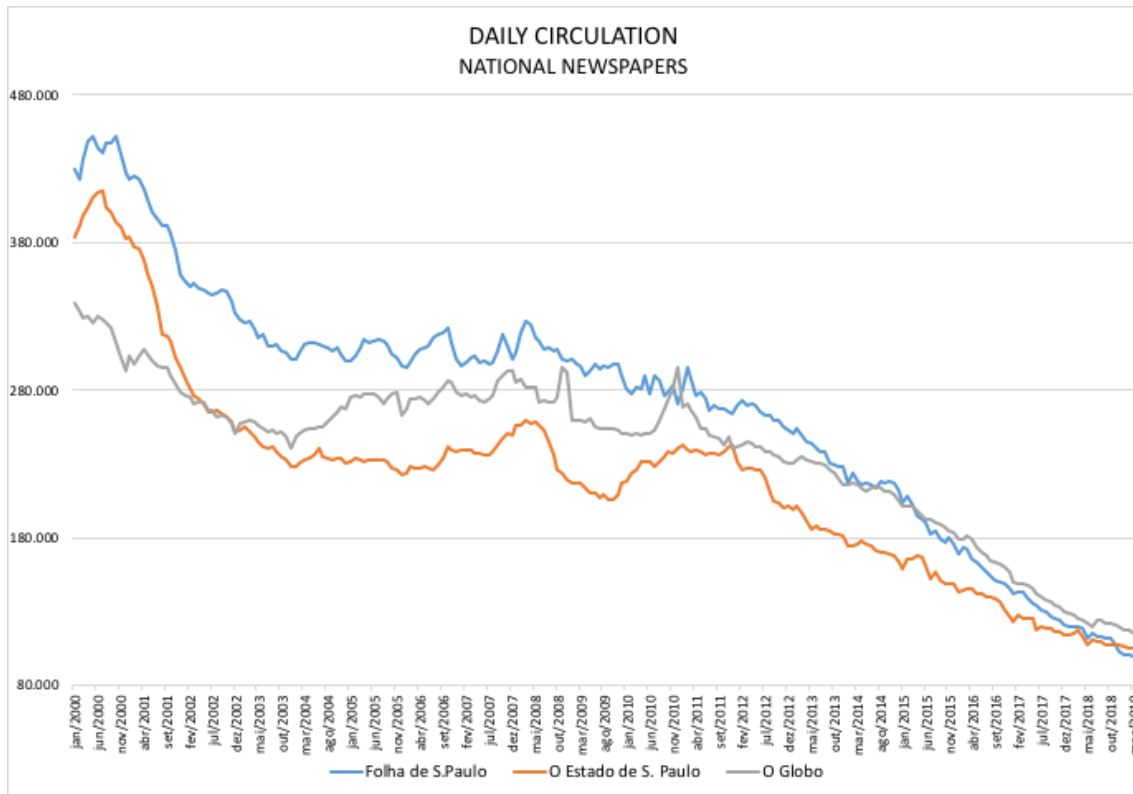
CHAPTER 1 - Newsrooms 'diaspora' in Brazilian Northeast

1.1 Media Landscape Overview

Like the rest of the world, the legacy media in Brazil have experienced serious difficulties over the last 15-20 years, particularly caused by digital disruption in the global industry. The severe dropping in the companies' revenues was roughly attenuated during a period of intense growth in the national Gross Domestic Product, which reached the sixth-largest positions in the world in 2012.

Since then, combined with a sharp downturn in the national economy, the decrease in the circulation of the leading print newspapers has intensified, reaching the lowest levels in Brazilian history. At the same time, the main news outlets have been struggling to implement viable digital strategies.

With a population of around 210 million, Brazil currently has only four national daily broadsheets, all based in the Southeast region, the richest in the country. "Folha de S. Paulo", "O Globo" and "O Estado de S. Paulo" are general publications, while "Valor Econômico" is specialized in business. The three general newspapers have lost more than 2/3 of their total circulation since 2000.



Source: IVC (National Verification Institution)

If the powerful media groups in the country, located in the richest area, are facing troubles, the scenario is even worse for smaller companies that focus on local journalism. This research is focused on the Northeast region, more specifically in the State of Pernambuco. With around 9.5 million people, Pernambuco has the second largest population in the Northeast, a region where 56 million Brazilians live.

Pernambuco has three main local daily newspapers. The oldest one is “Diário de Pernambuco”, which also is the oldest newspaper still in circulation in Latin America. The company was founded in 1825 and is currently owned by Alexandre Rands, a local economist and businessman.

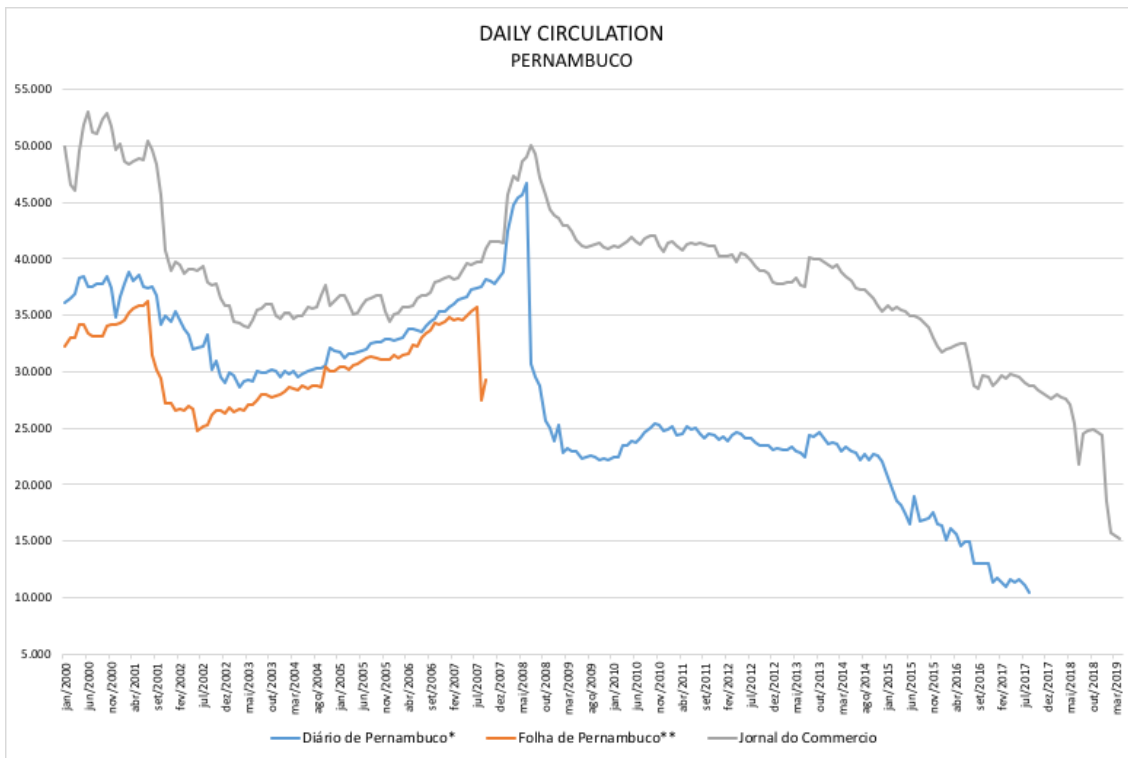
The main rival of “Diário de Pernambuco” is “Jornal do Commercio”, currently the leading local newspaper. Known to many as “JC”, “Jornal do Commercio” was founded in 1919 and since 1989 has been controlled by João Carlos Paes Mendonça, a local entrepreneur in the shopping centres market.

Finally, the third local newspaper is “Folha de Pernambuco”. Younger than its rivals, “Folha” was founded in 1997 and since then has been run by Eduardo Monteiro, another local business person, who comes from the sugarcane industry. In the Brazilian Northeast, most of the publications are traditionally owned by local politicians or business people and not by the big national media groups.

All three newspapers run similar business models, with paid print editions and free online content.

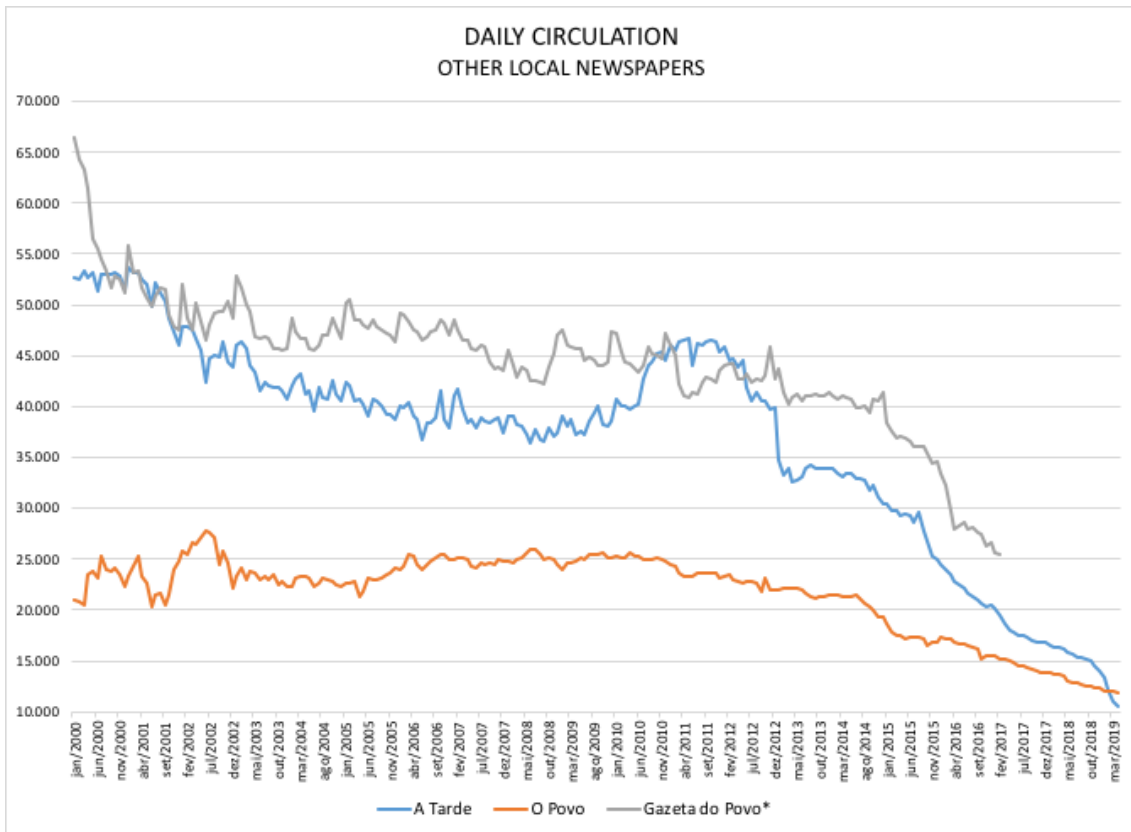
Like the national newspapers, the circulation of local newspapers in Pernambuco is continuously dropping. “Jornal do Commercio” lost 71 percent of its total circulation between 2000 and 2019. “Diário de Pernambuco” reached its prime in 2008 and by 2017 had already

lost 77.5 percent of its daily circulation. Because of the crisis, “Diário” stopped being audited in 2017. For the same reasons, the circulation figures of “Folha” stopped being audited in 2007.



Source: IVC. *audit stopped in 2017. ** audit stopped in 2007

The situation is similar for local newspapers in other states of the Northeast. Based in Bahia, the largest and most populated state in this region, “A Tarde” lost more than 80 percent of its circulation between 2001 and 2019. The most traditional local newspaper in Bahia currently publishes around 10,000 copies in a state with more than 15 million people. “O Povo”, based in Ceará, the third-largest population in Northeast, has lost 57 percent of its circulation since 2002, when it reached its prime.



Source: IVC. *print edition ceased in 2017

The graphic also shows the circulation of “Gazeta do Povo”, a local newspaper based in Paraná, a 11 million people state in the South region of Brazil. When it ceased circulation of its print edition, in 2017, the newspaper had already lost 62 percent of its circulation.

All these figures have as a natural consequence a constant decrease in the number of journalists working in the newsrooms. The media groups and the journalist unions in Brazil don’t provide trustable information, but a survey produced by an independent firm shows that at least 2,617 journalists¹ were dismissed between 2012 and 2018.

1.2 Public Power Dependence

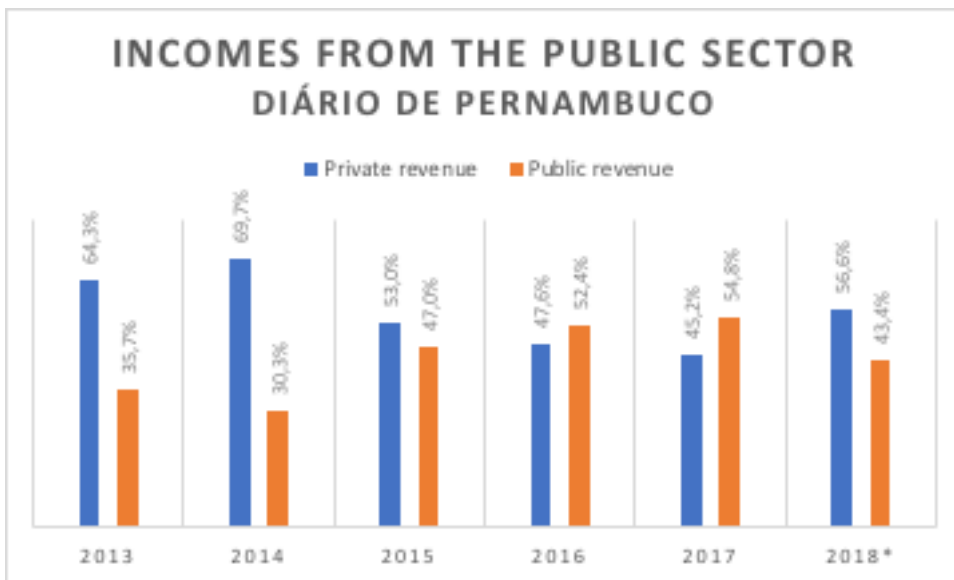
The role of the public sector as an important revenue source for legacy media has some particularities in Brazil. In addition to purchasing advertising, the main public bodies (government and state-owned companies) are relevant subscribers of news services at both the national and local levels.

In Brazil, it is common to see the federal government, as well as state and big-city administrations, signing big annual contracts with media outlets for several thousand copies a day. These subscriptions are valuable and journalists are keenly aware of their importance.

1 A Conta dos passaralhos – Volt Data Lab / <http://passaralhos.voltdata.info/graficos.html>

Dragomir (2018) says that “when the state is one of the largest ad spenders in a country and media organizations are struggling to survive, state advertising is a lifeline for many of these outlets”.

Data from “Diário de Pernambuco” illustrate the participation of the public sector in the newspaper’s overall incomes. Between January 2013 and September 2018, the public sector represented 42.4 percent of the newspaper’s total revenues. In 2017, for example, dependence reached 54.8 percent. If we consider only the money from the local government, the average dependence was 36.6 percent in the period analysed, reaching 45.7 percent in 2017.



*Until September

With the recent economic recession in Brazil and the subsequent weakening of the private sector, even the suggestion that public spending on the media may cut chills the newsroom. It seems obvious, but more dependence means less freedom.

Besley and Prat (2015) register that the degree of independence of the media is given by the difficulty with which the state is able to transfer resources to the media. The higher the transaction cost between the government and the media industry, the less likely that in equilibrium the industry is captured”.

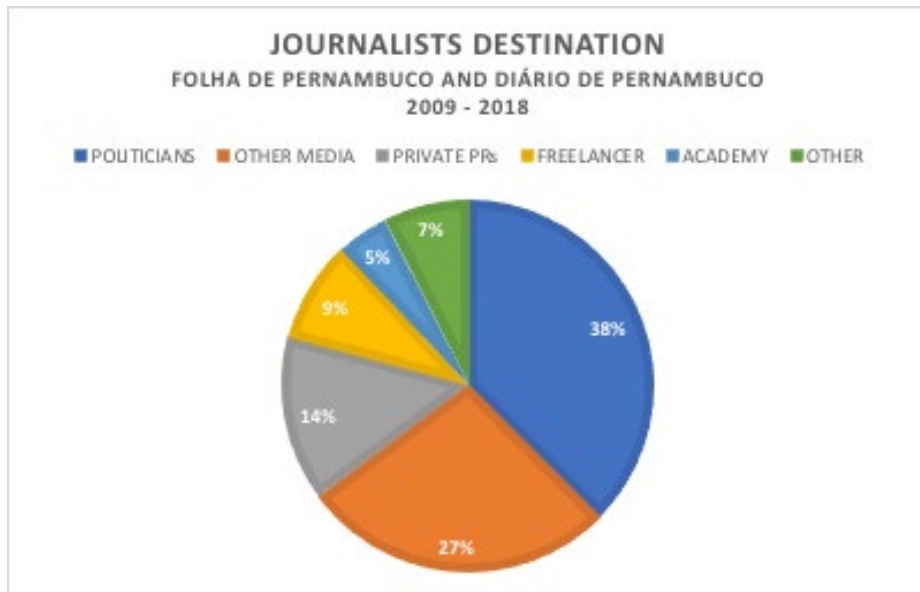
1.3 Leaving Journalism

This research uses data from “Diário de Pernambuco” and “Folha de Pernambuco” to catalogue all journalists who left these organizations during the ten years period between 2009 and 2018. The information was formally requested to the three local broadsheets, but “Jornal do Comercio” declined to share its data.

During the period analysed, 269 journalists left “Diário” and “Folha”. The first aim of this research was tracking the first position undertaken by these professionals after leaving the newsrooms. This research tracked 202 journalists through searches on LinkedIn, Facebook and Lattes², as well as direct text messages and phone calls.

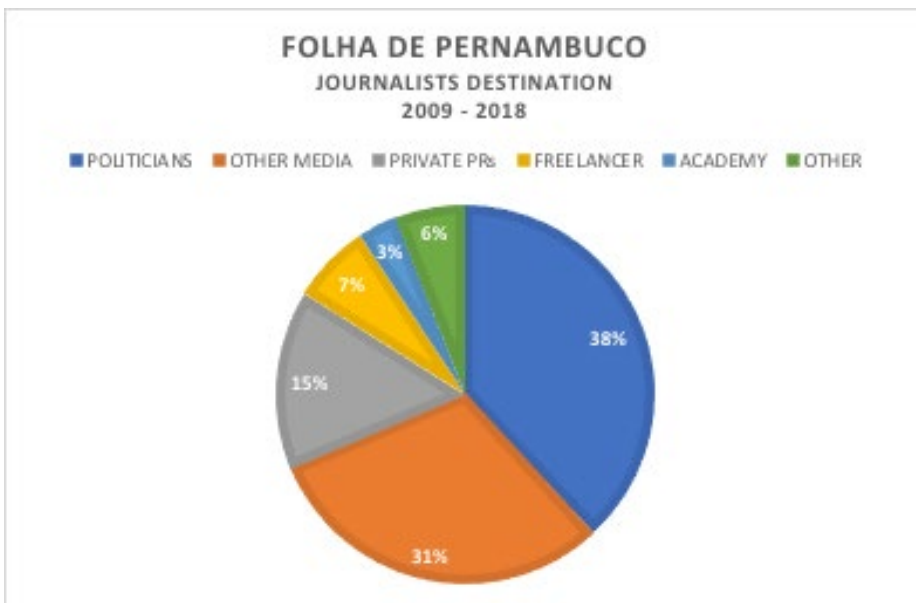
From a sample of 202 identified professionals who quit the two newsrooms, 75 (38 percent of the sample) went to work with local politicians. The main destinations were the Government of Pernambuco and the Recife City Hall. Recife is the capital of Pernambuco and the most important city.

The second major destination was the other local publications, with 55 professionals (27 percent of the sample). Private firms of public relations were the third point of disembarkation, with 29 journalists (14 percent of the sample).



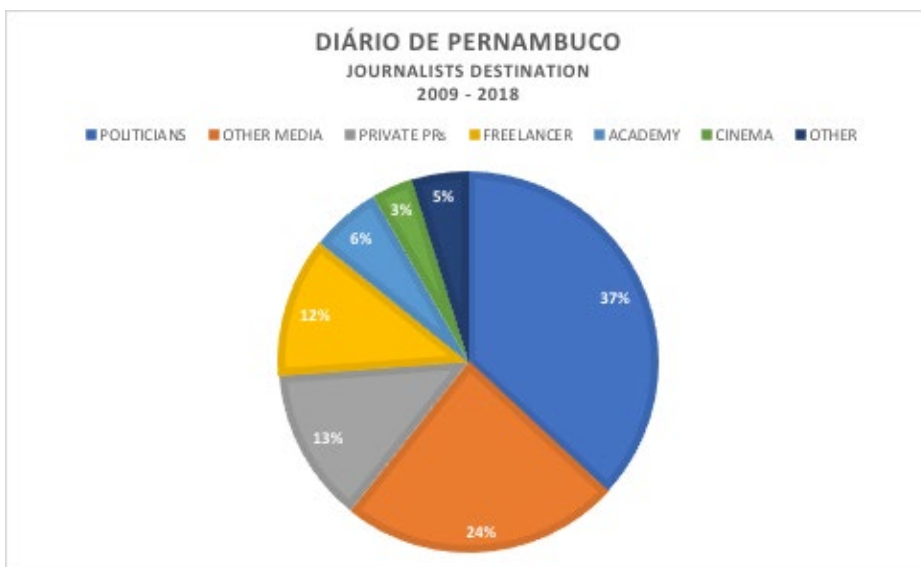
Source: Diário de Pernambuco, Folha de Pernambuco, LinkedIn, Facebook and Lattes

Comparing the numbers, we do not identify a huge difference between the newspapers in terms of emigration to the public sector. “Folha de Pernambuco”, historically considered the smaller newspaper in town, shows a bigger number of journalists leaving to other newsrooms (31 percent).



Source: Folha de Pernambuco, LinkedIn, Facebook and Lattes

From those who left “Diário de Pernambuco”, 24 percent went to work in other newsrooms.



Source: Diário de Pernambuco, LinkedIn, Facebook and Lattes

It is important to mention that many journalists left “Diário” and “Folha” to work for “Jornal do Commercio”, which is the leading local broadsheet. If this research had received the information about the reporters who left “Jornal do Commercio”, the results would probably show a higher percentage of people going to work for politicians, considering that “Jornal do Commercio” is still the most desirable option in terms of journalistic work in Pernambuco.

1.4 Signs of Media Capture

Based on discriminated data provided by “Folha de Pernambuco”, this research attested that 46 percent of the “leavers” went to work with local politicians.

These numbers, combined with the interviews discussed in the next section, point to a strategy of recruiting the best journalists from the local newsrooms in Pernambuco. This research cannot prove that there is a deliberate plan to weaken local watchdog journalism, but interviews and qualitative analysis of the newsrooms production over the years show that:

- The best professionals are now on the other side of the counter.
- The local newspapers have become much more docile.

Schiffrin (2012) argues that the rise of digital media paved the way for the decline of traditional business models. The dramatic fall in revenues due to the migration of advertising to the Internet, the massive job losses in the print industry, and the ease of free distribution damaged the quality of news and allowed for the emergence of new forms of capture.

Based on the shreds of evidence, we can recognize that an indirect process of media capture has been taking place in Pernambuco, with concerning consequences for the local democracy. This process has been happening alongside the digital disruption, which creates difficulties for identifying it properly.

During the interviews, however, some journalists who have taken up positions in the local government have perceived that, in the long term, the newsrooms of Pernambuco have become more docile.

“I believe that it was a well-succeed strategy of somehow capturing the main professionals from the newspapers, in their respective fields of work, and thus reduce the tensions of being disturbed by the journalists every single day. So then, they took just the most critical reporters, who have been doing the tougher criticism. It is obvious that this exhaust the newsrooms”, said Micheline Batista, 47, who left “Diário de Pernambuco” to work for the Government of Pernambuco.

In 2007 a group of four “Jornal do Comercio” investigative reporters founded an initiative called “PE Body Count”. At that time, Pernambuco and the capital, Recife, were leading the Brazilian ranking of murders. Responding to distrust of the government statistics, the project consisted of tracking and reporting the escalation of violent deaths. With financial support from the local Attorney Cabinet, the group managed to install an electronic panel on an important corner of Recife, screening in real-time the updated number of murders.

After more than three years of work, the project was shut down in September 2010. None of the journalists who founded the project are working for “Jornal do Comercio” or for any local media. Two of them are the current press secretaries at the Government of Pernambuco and at the Recife City Hall.

1.5 Main Reasons to Leave

One of the “PE Body Count” founders, Eduardo Machado, 42, is the current press secretary of the State of Pernambuco. He believes that the crisis in local media, and not the action of the politicians, is the main cause of the high number of journalists switching from the newsrooms to public sector offices.

“The local newspapers are getting less relevant and the few existing opportunities for journalists are in the public sector. It is the only place with a roughly suited salary. The newspapers have been collapsing, the local private PR firms are getting smaller, paying lower salaries. This (public sector) is the leftover market”, Eduardo said.

Among the 20 journalists interviewed for this research, 45 percent mentioned bad remuneration as one of the reasons for quitting their positions in the local newsrooms. The second most common justification, with 35 percent, was the lack of prospect of a good future as local reporters in Pernambuco. The invitation made by the local politicians also was mentioned by 35 percent of the respondents. Almost all have declared more than one reason to give up the reporter role.

“I didn’t want to leave. I had just arrived at ‘Jornal do Comercio’ and I was really excited. And I was 29 years old. But I received a good offer from the press secretary, an offer which I have never looked for. I was supposed to earn two times my reporter salary and it really touched me. At that time, I was not worried about this, I wished to remain in the newsroom. But I went”, said Manoel Guimarães, 35, who left “Jornal do Comercio” to work with the governor of Pernambuco.

“Nowadays, the newspaper pushes you out. It is easy to realise when the company doesn’t make efforts to hold competent professionals. When this happens, you start asking yourself what are you doing there. And you think you can be the next one to be fired. The salary question really matters, but the media outlet should not encourage you to leave, saying all the time that the things are not going well”, said Paulo Augusto Neto, 43, who left “Jornal do Comercio” to work with a local congressman.

CHAPTER 2 – Direct effects on the local journalism

2.1 – Political Overview

Pernambuco has been continuously governed by the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) since 2007. The party, theoretically left-leaning, is nationally controlled by a local clan linked to Miguel Arraes' family. He is a former governor who fought against the dictatorship in Brazil (1964 – 1985) and who was exiled in Africa for 12 years. PSB historically disputes the local power with right-leaning politicians associated with the sugar cane oligarchy.

Before his death, in 2005, Arraes nominated one of his grandsons, Eduardo Campos, as political heir. Astute and pragmatic, Campos governed Pernambuco for almost eight years as a close ally of the president. During his term, he managed to significantly weaken opposition parties and mute criticism from the local media.

In 2014, Campos announced that he would run for the presidency of Brazil. A few months after the announcement, however, he died in an airplane crash. In the wake of the accident, the PSB candidate, Paulo Câmara, won the elections in Pernambuco in 2014 and got a new term in 2018.

2.2 – Comparative Analysis

In order to measure the effects of the weakening of local media in Pernambuco, this research compared the journalistic coverage of two remarkable cases that occurred 17 years apart. The object of the analysis is two supposed corruption scandals involving the same political group, more specifically the former governor Eduardo Campos.

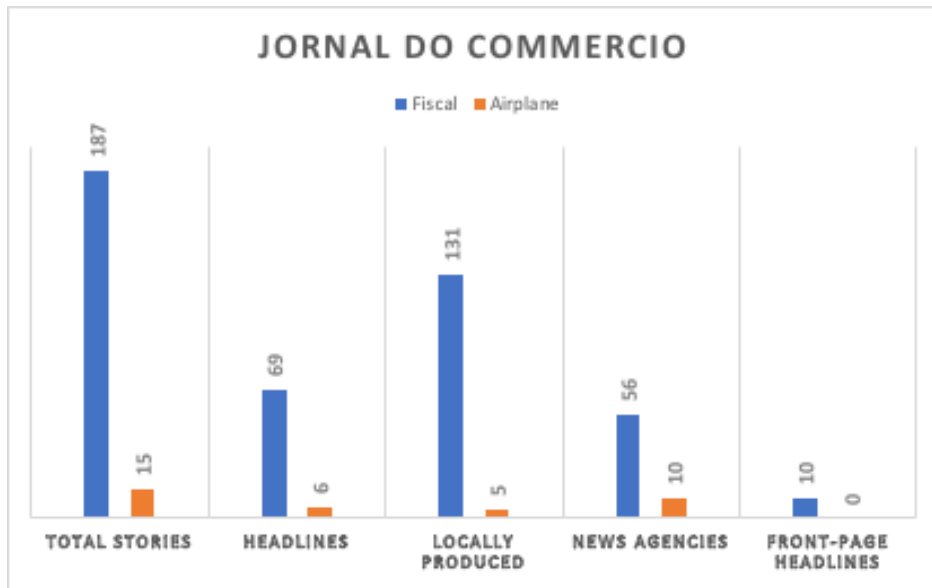
This research analysed the journalistic coverage of “Jornal do Commercio” and “Diário de Pernambuco” during the 31 days after each scandal began.

The first case is called “Escândalo dos Precatórios” and concerns allegations of financial crime supposedly committed by Eduardo Campos when he was secretary of finance in Pernambuco, under his grandfather's third administration (1995 – 1998).

Taking place in 2014, the second scandal involves the private jet used by Eduardo Campos at the beginning of his campaign for the Presidency. After his fatal crash, allegations emerged that the jet had been offered to him as a bribe.

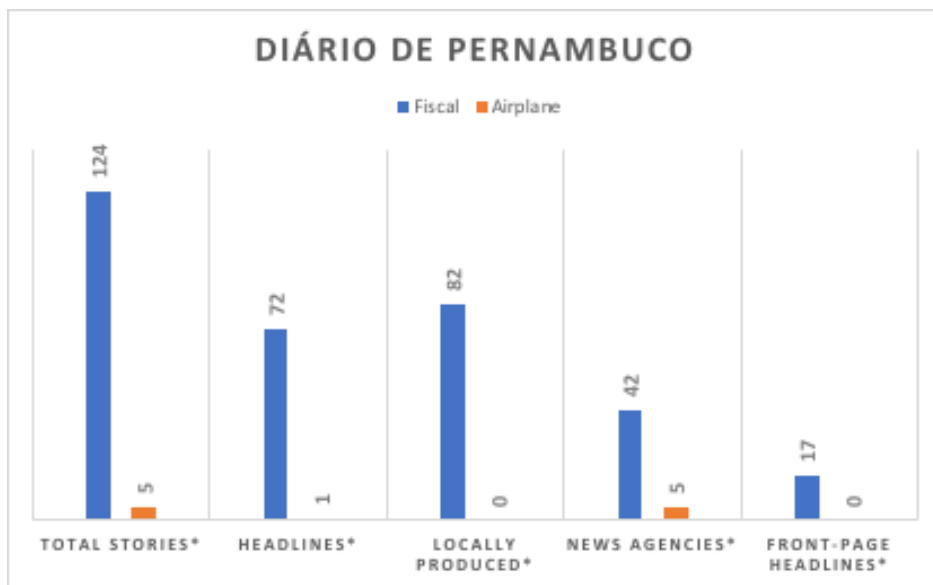
Both stories are important, concerning allegations of impropriety by a leading politician. But looking at the two leading local papers, it is clear there is a sharp decline in the number of stories, particularly those ones produced locally, between the first and second case. “Jornal do Commercio” produced 131 pieces regarding the first scandal, against only five own stories about the second case, a 96 percent drop.

When considering the premier space given to the stories, “Jornal do Commercio” dedicated ten frontpage headlines to the first scandal. The second case didn't receive any frontpage headlines.



Fiscal: from 05/03/1997 to 05/04/1997. Airplane: from 22/08/2014 to 22/09/2014

The reporters of “Diário de Pernambuco” produced 82 pieces about the fiscal scandal, whilst the second case didn’t even warrant a whole story of its own. The figures don’t consider three days in the period analyzed for the first scandal, because of problems for getting the print edition of the newspaper for those dates.



Fiscal: from 05/03/1997 to 05/04/1997 *missed 12, 17 and 18/03/1997. Airplane: from 22/08/2014 to 22/09/2014

“Folha de Pernambuco” was excluded because the newspaper was only founded in April of 1998, approximately one year after the first scandal occurred.

Both scandals took place a few months before the local elections. The results shown by the ballot boxes, however, attested the role that the news coverage plays. After the first scandal, PSB suffered a historic defeat. Just after the second case, PSB won.

It is essential to mention that there are some differences in terms of context between both cases. The most relevant seems to be the decrease in the number of journalists in the

newsrooms, caused by digital disruption. The newspapers had in 2014 fewer pages in the print edition than in 1997, which meant there was less space for stories overall.

It is also important to note that the financial scandal generated a special investigation commission at the Brazilian Parliament, from where much new information regarding the case came out. Finally, the airplane scandal took place in the middle of a human tragedy, with the death of the main character.

All these factors have undoubtedly influenced the observed drop in the number of local stories. However, it remains impossible to deny that the leading newspapers have become much more complacent with the most powerful political group in Pernambuco. The results of the comparison attest that the second scandal was practically ignored by the papers.

2.3 – Less Experience, More Vulnerability

The weakening process of the local newsrooms in Pernambuco has another relevant aspect mentioned by many journalists interviewed by this research. 70 percent of the sample (reporters who changed newsrooms for political offices) said that nowadays it is much easier to publish official press releases on the local media.

Most believed that newsrooms in Pernambuco are now filled with inexperienced journalists, who have not yet developed the ability to filter and check information before publishing. Newsroom downsizing also means the current reporters have more things to do and less time to dedicate to each story.

“Here in the City Hall, there are experienced journalists who have been for a long time in the industry and they know that some questions are not being asked. When I was working in the newsroom I used to think that the problem was here, but the fact is that the newsrooms became weaker. Now we know how to involve the reporter in a position that we wish to see published”, tells Marcela Fernanda Balbino, 30, who left “Jornal do Comercio” to work with the mayor of Recife.

“For me, as a press officer, is much better. The press release that I send today has much more chance of being published word by word than four years ago”, claims Paulo Augusto Neto, 43, who left “Jornal do Comercio” to work with a local congressman.

“In a way, now it is easier to put your story on the papers. We still have some experienced reporters who force you to convince them that some decision of the government is the best for society. But many times, this is not necessary. I send a press release, and I rarely receive some question or doubt by WhatsApp. It is easier to do”, says Gilberto Prazeres, 36, which left “Folha de Pernambuco” to work as deputy press secretary in the Government of Pernambuco.

In total, 14 out of 20 respondents said that the local newsrooms have become more tractable. Among those who said something different, four were not sure about, and two claimed that sometimes it is easier, but other times it is tougher.

2.4 – The Concept of Quality

Pernambuco’s journalists have in the past tended to win national accolades for their work, even though the media in the south of the country is better funded and closer to the seats of power. Reporters from the Pernambuco newspapers frequently won the most prestigious

national prizes, such as “Esso”, “Tim Lopes”, and “Vladimir Herzog”. These trophies used to award in-depth local stories, which now appear less frequently.

The notion of defining and measuring quality in journalism is both complex and contentious (Philip M. Napoli AL. 2017). But the people interviewed for this study said that the most direct impact of shrinking newsrooms was a fall in quality. All the 20 respondents said that the media outlets they worked for are now smaller and half of them (10) mentioned the quality of the journalism as the first victim of this process. Other answers, however, could also be related to quality, such as superficiality (3) and precarious checks (3).

“The quality of the information has sharply dropped, the journalistic process has sharply dropped, and we see now a lot of unchecked information. Many young reporters are undertaking high positions without the required experience. As a result, the quality of the stories drops. The quality of the final product sharply drops. Unfortunately, there are not outstanding professionals in the local newsrooms anymore. I see this in Pernambuco and the Northeast”, claims Arthur Cunha, 36, who quit “Folha de Pernambuco” to work with the mayor of Recife.

“Most experienced reporters quit and just some editors and interns remained. A new generation came with the shorter salaries and zero possibility of production of any kind of feature story. The direct effect of this process is that the local newspapers became less relevant”, said Eduardo Machado, current press secretary in Pernambuco and a former prize-winning investigative reporter.

A third effect of the smaller newsrooms was mentioned by four respondents in the sample. They said that because of the shrinking process, the local newspapers have become less local in their content. This specific consequence will be more widely explored in the third chapter of this paper.

2.5 – Conclusion

Based on a qualitative comparison and on interviews, this chapter shows that the legacy media in Pernambuco became less combative and more tractable with the local politicians, particularly with the group who has been ruling the state along the last 12 years. This is a result of a combination between the media disruption itself and the direct action of politicians to attract the best local reporters to the other side of the counter. The decreasing in the quality of the content is another side-effect of this process.

CHAPTER 3 – Local content needs

3.1 – Academic Concepts

Philip M. Napoli ET AL (2017) mention that the amount of journalism produced for and within the community is considered a reasonable indicator of the health of a local journalism

ecosystem. To assess the performance of the local press is pivotal to observe whether the content is original, whether it is about the local community and, particularly, whether it addresses what is called Community Information Needs (CINs).

According to the authors, the Knight Commission³ defines that the notion of CINs has been central to the ongoing discourse about the performance of local journalism. Friedland et al. (2012) provide eight categories of CINs:

- Emergency and risks
- Health
- Education
- Transport systems
- Environment and planning
- Economic development
- Civic information
- Political life

These “universal” categories do not reflect the fact that communities certainly differ in terms of the relative importance of each of these categories (Philip M. and Napoli ET AL 2017). In the specific case of Pernambuco, this research focuses on political life and economic development coverage, also considering that the other categories have also been affected by the shrinking and capture process in the local newsrooms.

3.2 – Comparative Analysis

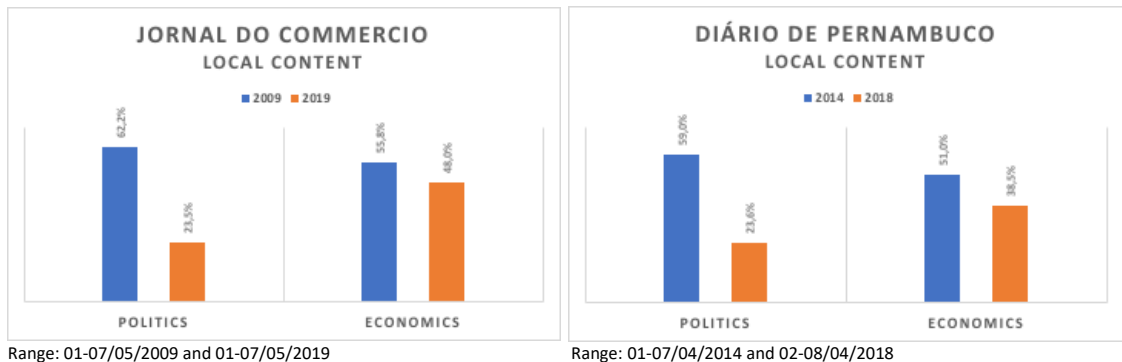
The leading newspapers in Pernambuco have become less independent, and they have also become less local. This research has compared a sample of print editions of “Jornal do Commercio” and “Diário de Pernambuco” over different periods to verify the decrease on regional content as well as the increase on national topics on the politics and economics pages, mainly derived from the wires.

In the first week of May 2009, more than 60 percent of the stories published in the Politics section on “Jornal do Commercio” broached local issues. Ten years later, in the first week of May 2019, local content was 23 percent. On the economics pages, the analysis shows a more modest fall, from 56 percent to 48 percent in the same period of comparison.

The Politics section also was the most affected on “Diário de Pernambuco”. In the first week of April 2014, local content represented 59 percent of the coverage, against 23 percent in the first week of April 2018. On the economics pages, the analysis shows a drop from 51 percent to 38 percent in the same period of comparison.

3 - Knight Commission on Trust, Media and Democracy

For methodological reasons, this paper has selected two years in which local elections took place in order not to misrepresent the "Diário de Pernambuco's" analysis. It was not possible to make the same collation with "Folha de Pernambuco" because the newspaper print digital version is not available for dates before 2017.



Looking at these figures, it is clear that the increasing use of national news bought from agencies reflects that the economic pressures on local journalism create overwhelming incentives to aggregate and repurpose existing content rather than engage in original reporting (Anderson, Bell, and Shirky 2014; Doctor 2010). This fact is amplified when the newsrooms no longer have enough experienced professionals to address CINs to the Pernambuco population.

3.3 – Main Concerns About Local Journalism

Even without previous empirical information, the majority of the journalists interviewed in this research perceived a decline in the amount of local content in the newspapers of Pernambuco. Putting it into numbers, 75 percent of the sample said that the media outlets which they worked for now publish fewer local stories than in the time they worked there.

Only 20 percent of the respondents believe that the participation of the local content remains flat and 5 percent said that it depends on the newspaper.

“The newspaper I worked for was much more local in the past. In all sections: Politics, Economy, Arts, etc. All of these sections used to be mostly local. Nowadays, it has changed. There are some days in which ‘Jornal do Commercio’ publishes only national news agencies stories”, said Eduardo Machado, a former reporter and current press secretary in Pernambuco.

All respondents said they believed regional newspaper should prioritize local issues. Among the most frequent replies, the journalists said that addressing a local point of view about the national facts is also paramount. “It doesn’t seem reasonable reading a local newspaper only to know what is happen with the federal administration”, said Manoel Guimarães, who left “Jornal do Commercio” to work with the governor of Pernambuco.

The main concern of this research is to show the impact of the decline of the local media over In this context, it is clear that the growing absence of outstanding reporters in the local newsrooms has serious implications on the public surveillance of the power.

“In general, with weaker newsrooms you no longer know if there is any social body upholding the community’s interests, exposing the government failures as well as the possible

consequences of those failures. The society gets very debilitated when has nobody to efficiently tell what is happening”, says Gilberto Prazeres, a former politics reporter from “Folha de Pernambuco” and current deputy press secretary.

When we try to bring the concept of the CINs to the Pernambuco context, more than half of the sample (55 percent) believes that the local newspapers are not delivering to the community the minimum that they were supposed to do. 20 percent of the respondents see a partial delivery and only 15 percent believes that, given the current circumstances, the local media is doing its job.

“Obviously, it is better to have a local newspaper than to not have one. But they are definitely not playing their fundamental role. It was much better even in the recent past. There will always be some bias, there will always be some forces guiding the editorial line. But all these things considered, I can say that the local newspapers in Pernambuco are far, really far, from properly assisting the population”, said Manoel Medeiros Neto, who left “Jornal do Comercio” to work for a local congresswoman.

3.4 – Digital Initiatives

As legacy media has faded in Pernambuco, some new digital local media sites have emerged. The three most relevant so far in terms of repercussion are “OP9”, “Marco Zero Conteúdo (Ground Zero Content)” and “Por Aqui (Around Here)”. All of them were spontaneously mentioned by the local journalists in this research as worthwhile initiatives and it is worth outlining them here, to show that there are still opportunities for good journalism but even here, challenges remain.

OP9 -- The most important project in terms of size, infrastructure and reach, OP9 is ruled by entrepreneurs from the private healthcare sector. The group is not originally from Pernambuco, but they have roots in the Northeast region, more specifically in the State of Ceará.

Launched in May 2018 and based in Recife, OP9 is the written media arm of a five TV channels network. The website has hired many journalists from the local media and has been acting as a digital newspaper with more focus on regional issues.

Some professionals from OP9 said that the project is not economically sustainable yet, although official data are not yet available. Only one month after the launch, OP9 has fired one of its most prestigious investigative reporters, sticking to a request from the Government of Pernambuco. The reporter, called João Valadares, had been writing critical pieces regarding the local administration.

Marco Zero – “Marco Zero” is an association of investigative journalists dedicated to the production of local feature stories. The initiative is funded by some international organisms and provides services such as consultancy, workshops and lectures. In order to maintain editorial independence, Marco Zero do not accept advertising or sponsorships from governing, state-owned companies and private companies.

Por Aqui – “Por Aqui” is a collaborative hyperlocal / citizen-reporter start-up aiming to engage the community to share information and stories regarding their own neighbourhood. “Por Aqui” had a partnership with a website controlled by “Jornal do Comercio” in order to boost the posts. Under economic pressure, the project was shut down in 2018.

3.5 – Conclusion

This research showed that the amount and quality of local content in the leading newspapers of Pernambuco has declined sharply in the last ten years. In the politics sections alone, the presence of locally produced news declined from around 60 percent to something like 20 percent in “Jornal do Comercio” and “Diário de Pernambuco”.

The local content is being replaced by news bought from news agencies, which are based in the Southeast region of Brazil and more dedicated to national and international topics. The declining of local content makes it harder to deliver what some academics call Community Information Needs (CINs). The non-fulfilment of some CINs in Pernambuco jeopardize the pillars of the local democracy.

Most of the journalists interviewed in this paper confirm that local news coverage is shrinking and local media does not give the population the information it needs.

There are some digital initiatives trying to fill this space, but they are still struggling to become economically viable. The three more important in terms of repercussion are still struggling to become economically viable.

CHAPTER 4 – What they miss

4.1 – Media Outlets Failures

The majority of the journalist interviews for this research reveal feelings of disappointment, frustration and grief when talking about the premature ending of their careers as daily newspapers reporters. Almost all of them have mentioned that their former employers did not make enough efforts to retain them and some said that, on the contrary, they were encouraged to leave.

The problems mentioned had a crucial contribution to the process of indirect capture of the local media discussed in this research.

The main complaints:

- Too heavy a workload
- Poor salaries
- Lack of professional prospect
- Declines in editorial independence

Journalists have lost enthusiasm for their work. The newspapers cut back on investigations and journalists have not been able to travel to report on their communities. Coverage has been limited to the Recife area, which covers fewer than 17 percent of the population and 1 percent of the state's territory. Not even the presidential visits to Pernambuco, formerly one of the most important local journalistic events, were being covered.

In addition, the progressive wave of departures of a lot of experienced journalists left the younger journalists without professional mentoring and overwhelmed by responsibilities. The smaller teams started imposing longer work hours at the same time with no overtime. The result of this process is more pressure to do the things quickly, with direct effects over checks, analysis and contextualization.

There is a general perception that the current main concern of those in charge of the newsroom is no longer do good journalism, but deliver the newspaper on time and do not disturb those who guarantee the revenues.

“The worst part is to deal with these challenges every single day and then realize that the newspaper is not worried about giving you conditions to do your job. The worst part is to see they don't recognize our efforts to do a better newspaper. Those in charge of the newsrooms nowadays are only compromised input the paper on the streets on time”, said Paulo Augusto Neto, who left “Jornal do Commercio”, to work for a local congressman.

“Leaving was not my plan. I was struggling to pay my bills, but my job was essential for me, and I had never thought of looking for another role. But I received a good offer from the City Hall, and that was a quite hard decision. When I was about to accept, the newspaper offered me a contract with more hours. After 15 years there, they were offering me more work? After that, it was impossible to stay”, says Bruna Cabral, who left “Jornal do Commercio” to work at the Recife City Hall.

Many journalists also said there was more interference in their investigations. Many said in their interviews that many topics were considered out of bounds, particularly when they involved the most powerful people in Pernambuco.

“We had a good editor, but a lot of stories could not be published because it would be compromising to the local judiciary. The stories went to the spike, even though we were always trying to find ways to publish in ways that do not affect that much the newspaper’s interests”, said Marcela Balbino, who left “Jornal do Commercio” to work at the Recife City Hall.

“The newspaper is becoming a government gazette. During my time there, we had three to five people in each section and that was already insufficient. Now they have one or two. The newspaper is very muzzled and the effect over the content is noticeable. The newspaper cannot criticize the mayor or the governor”, said Tercio Amaral, who left “Diário de Pernambuco” to work with a local congressman.

4.2 – What They Miss

The journalists interviewed said they missed the essence of being a journalist. Seeking, interpreting and telling stories to the society. Having privileged access, investigating power, giving a contribution. Interacting with the more experienced journalists, learning from them. The newsroom environment.

This research has only interviewed journalists who decided to leave the newsrooms to work for the public sector. Even though they chose to quit journalism, most speak with sorrow and nostalgia about the premature ending of an idealized career.

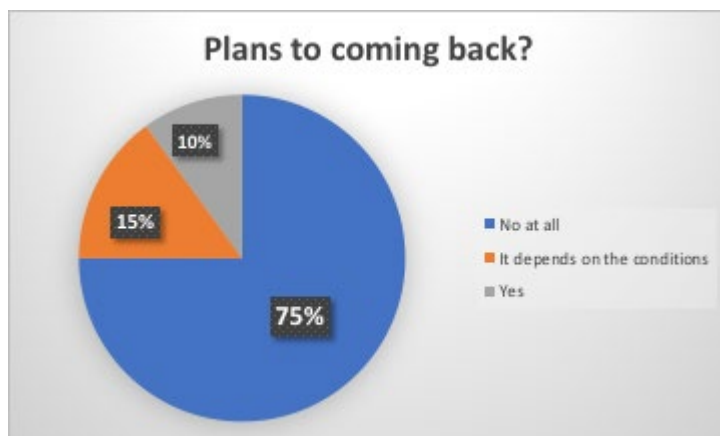
Gabriela Lopez gave up her journalism at 25 years old when she left “Jornal do Commercio” to work for a local authority. “I used to love reporting, I still love, actually. I used to love the routine, to talk with people, investigating, seeking stories. I will really miss it”.

“My time in the newsroom was the happiest in my professional life. The routine of political coverage, hunting scoops every day, having access and talk with politicians, learning, investigate, traveling all regions of Pernambuco. Professionally speaking, that brought me real happiness”, said Arthur Cunha, who left “Folha de Pernambuco” to work for the Mayor of Recife.

“I worked closely with older reporters, people with more experience. So, it was easier to learn. I had a lot of colleagues I really admired, people who deeply know the past, the past governments. The newsroom used to be an information exchange environment. Memory is crucial for journalism, and we are losing it”, said Jorge Cavalcanti, who left “Jornal do Commercio” to work for a city councilor.

4.3 – Plans to come back?

But despite this, the vast majority of the journalists interviewed for this research did not entertain the possibility of coming back to the local newsrooms. 75 percent said they would never return to journalism. 15 percent of the respondents said that they could consider going back under certain conditions, and 10 percent said they have plans to be a reporter again in the future but as entrepreneurs.



Among the most cited required conditions to consider coming back, the journalists have mentioned better salaries, an innovative editorial guideline and suitable resources. Looking to the state of local journalism in Pernambuco, it is possible to say that those preliminary conditions are getting farther from reality than closer.

CHAPTER 5 – RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 - Overview

It is clear that local journalism in Pernambuco is in crisis. The downsizing of the newsrooms, the reduction of pages in print editions, as well as the sharp cutting of operational expenses, have been working only as a strategy of postponing the complete collapse of the publications.

After six months of studies and observations, this research has identified some initiatives in the European market that could guide the media from Pernambuco to rethink their strategies and to pave a road towards the future of sustaining local journalism.

The first recommendation sounds quite obvious, but it is the most important: Local newspapers should get back to being local. The figures presented in this research have shown that only around 20 percent of the politics pages in “Jornal do Commercio” and “Diário de Pernambuco” focus on local issues. That is worrying.

The lack of local facts, on local politics, creates the potential for a “democratic deficit” in which many citizens would not have access to the information they need to actively engage in their communities (Jenkins, Graves 2019).

Considering the particularities of the media industry in Brazil and in Pernambuco, it is possible to consider that some projects and initiatives taking place in Europe could be partly used or even adapted in order to recover the interest of the community in journalism.

This research has observed more closely three projects with a focus on local journalism, two of them from the United Kingdom (The Bristol Cable and The Bureau Local) and one from Spain (La Voz de Galicia). The idea here is that their main ideas could be adapted to the Pernambuco reality in order to:

- Reduce dependence on government funds
- Recover editorial independence
- Foment collaboration journalism
- Bring the community back to the news

The success of the collaborations depends not only on creating high-quality journalism but also on recruiting dedicated partners with shared goals (Jenkins, Graves 2019).

5.2 – Case Studies

The Bristol Cable: A cooperative local publication based in Bristol, a city with around 500,000 people in England. Established in 2014, the project works in a membership model, through which the participants can also act as reporters or sources of information. According to the most recent figures available, the project is 90 percent funded by grants and by its members but also makes money from advertising, merchandising and events.

The Bureau Local: Started in 2017, it is a collaborative network, based in London but with members around the UK, that specializes in large-scale, data-driven investigations that can be adapted locally by journalists in different parts of the country. This means producing a large national data set and working with reporters to localize information to their area, by providing

reporting guides and other resources to help them cover stories that might otherwise be beyond their reach. The project received funding from Google Digital News Initiative.

“La Voz de Galicia”: An established newspaper based in northern Spain which has been using a couple of software to curate local and hyperlocal stories through social media networks. The software drills down into social media feed keeping the newspaper in touch with what local people are reading and posting about. This project was also supported by Google Digital News Initiative.

5.3 – Adopting and Adapting

Testing a membership model could be interesting for both legacy media and startups in Pernambuco. The local population are proud of their culture, so there is potential for engagement in a truly local initiative. The declining in the public interest for journalism probably has the reduction in the local content as an important factor.

The crisis in the local newspapers has another effect, which is the concentration of the news in Recife. Even concentrated in the capital, the population from Pernambuco more inclined to consume news has a close and emotional relationship with the rural area of the state, but this region simply disappeared from the pages. In this context, the Bristol Cable’s model could be tested in order to encourage the participation of the public, diversifying stories and characters.

Through a membership model, working hybrid with a citizen-reporter initiative, the wider integration of the territory could happen without big expenses. It would not be necessary, for instance, to have fixed correspondents in the countryside or frequently send reporters from Recife.

The use of social media as a source of local stories sounds also really promising to the Pernambuco reality. Brazil is one the global leaders in the use of social media and efficiently tracking what the people are saying there, following “La Voz de Galicia” model, would probably bring a lot of good stories.

Pernambuco can have a relative advantage in terms of technologic innovations in the media industry. Based in Recife, “Porto Digital” is one of the leading technology parks and innovation environments in Brazil. Its main areas of work are Software, Information and Communication Technology as well as Creative Economy, with emphasis on such segments as games, multimedia, cine-video-animation, music, photography and design. There is a potential of partnerships with Porto Digital, aiming to implement innovation in the local media, which should be pursued.

5.4 Other Possibilities

The local media in Pernambuco should adopt more effective strategies to attract young audiences. The current use of social media, videos and podcasts seems to be somewhat formulaic. It should be possible to better select and split local content across the different social media and improve the quality of videos and podcasts without spending too much,

In order to get back to being local, editors should pick national and international content more carefully, and publish fewer but more relevant stories.

The diversification of the newsrooms, including more journalists from the countryside of Pernambuco, could also help to amplify the content and bring fresh ideas.

Briefly, this research has the following recommendations:

- Give priority to local stories
- Bring the countryside back to the news
- Better curation of national and international content
- Testing some model based on audience funding
- Testing some collaboration journalism strategies
- Use of technology to track local stories on social media
- Partnership with “Porto Digital”
- More diversification in the newsroom profiles
- Quality improvements for videos and podcasts

METHODOLOGY

1. Database

The main findings of this research are the result of an analysis of data collected from two of the three daily newspapers circulating in the state of Pernambuco. The resulting database has information regarding the journalists who left the respective media outlets between 2009 and 2018 (10 years).

The analysis of this data – organized in spreadsheets – aimed to find out how many professionals have left the media organizations in order to work with local authorities, such as governor, mayors, congressmen, city councillors, secretaries, etc.

“Diário de Pernambuco” and “Folha de Pernambuco” have provided files with the following journalists’ information:

- Name
- Date of Birth
- Role
- Date of hiring
- Date of leaving

“Folha de Pernambuco” included additional information regarding the reason for leaving: firing or resigning. This splitting is important to emphasize one of the most important findings of this research.

The current leading newspaper in Pernambuco, “Jornal do Comercio” declined to share its information. A collaboration of this important newspaper would probably strength the main finding of this work.

For methodologic reasons, this paper considered only data of reporters, columnists, editors, assistant editors and executive editors. Although enclosed in the files, information regarding teams of photographers and designers has been excluded.

In order to properly identify the job position undertaken by the journalist immediately after leaving the newsroom during the period analysed, this research got information from:

- LinkedIn accounts
- Facebook accounts
- Lattes Platform (web-based query interface maintained by the Brazilian Government)
- Phone calls
- Text messages

2. Qualitative analysis

Aiming to verify the direct effects of the crisis in the local media in Pernambuco over the daily news, this research compared the news coverage of two corruption scandals taken place with a gap of 17 years between each other.

This comparison considered the print edition of two local newspapers (“Diário de Pernambuco” and “Jornal do Comercio”) throughout a continuous period of 31 days started when the first story came up.

The research has considered the number of:

- Pieces (overall)
- Inside-page headlines
- Front-page headlines
- Locally produced stories
- Stories from news agencies

3. Interviews

This research is also based on Skype and face to face interviews with 20 journalists who left newsrooms in Pernambuco to work for local politicians between 2009 and 2018. They have replied a survey with 19 questions with an average duration of 35 minutes.

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