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Editorial

This is the 13th issue, no. 1 of *Styles of Communication*, the international journal which is published annually by the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies (University of Bucharest, Romania) in cooperation with the Committee for Philology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Wrocław Branch, Poland. From 2009 to 2014, *Styles of Communication* was published by the “Danubius” University of Galați, Romania.

The main purpose of *Styles of Communication* is to show the unity existing within global diversity. As communication implies, besides the transfer of information to others and the decoding of the others’ messages, the production of meaning within (non)verbal texts/objects is closely connected to interculturality, creativity and innovation and it needs a refining of styles in order to avoid misunderstandings.

This issue is a plea for interdisciplinarity as its aim is to include different perspectives on cultural studies, coming from different fields, such as linguistics, semiotics, literature, ethnography and advertising.

Styles of Communication is indexed by ERIH PLUS, Index Copernicus, DOAJ, Genamics Journal Seek, EBSCOhost databases, and it is recommended by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

This issue is focused on various approaches to communication studies.

We would like to see this journal as an ongoing project in which future issues may contribute to the exchange of research ideas representing broad communication - oriented approaches.

Camelia M. Cmeci
Piotr P. Chruszczewski

Applications of Virtual Reality in Communication. A Top-Journals Theoretical Overview

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ABSTRACT. As technology is increasingly used in many domains, the way it effects social sciences becomes of great interest. The aim of the paper is to offer a theoretical overview on the way Virtual Reality (VR) is used in the communication domain in the last decade and within the top-impactful journals. The sample consists of scientific articles from 25 high-status journals within the field. In the endeavor to offer a longitudinal perspective (2010-2020 timeframe), the overview intends to focus on the main thematic patterns, on the most used theories and models, on the methodological design features, and on the technical approaches that guide the VR research in communication. The relevance of the paper is twofold. On one hand, it offers a comprehensive summary on the state-of-the-art existing interests and tools used in VR in communication research. On the other hand, it sets future research perspectives and can serve as a guide for scholars aiming to initiate VR investigations in communication.

Keywords: virtual reality, communication, top-impactful journals in communication, technology, literature review.

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1. Introduction

As technology is rapidly developing, Virtual Reality (VR), although initially perceived with skepticism, starts to gather an increasing role in the society (Harley, 2019). Since the '90s, helping the specialists create realistic and easy replicable experimental settings, VR applications are found in film and entertainment industry, in architecture and

design, in education and training, in military domain, or in social psychology (Biocca, Laurie & McCarthy, 1997; Blascovich et al., 2002). VR is also beginning to exert a consequential impact on some disciplines such as advertising, public relations, and communication. The considered implications of VR have encouraged communication specialists to examine the interdisciplinary facets of this technology and the consequences generated by the VR technology use. Therefore, an overview on the recent state-of-the-art literature approaching VR in communication becomes of great interest.

VR is considered an emerging technology that has the capability to immerse an user into a synthetic environment in real time (Egliston & Carter, 2020; Fraustino et al., 2018). By owing its birth on other technologies, VR is considered an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, technology (Biocca, Laurie & McCarthy, 1997). On its early stages, VR has been frequently associated with an interface hardware, an application, an industry (e.g., entertainment), or with an environment developing around VR technologies, as cyberspace. However, later, VR is increasingly referred to not by using the concept of “technology” but by using the syntagm of “emerging communication system” (Biocca & Levy, 1995).

Although VR has been portrayed as a medium, with a focus on technology, the communication research asks for a softer and more experiential-driven definition. The technology-focused description fails to offer insight on the process and effects of the use, to provide a conceptual framework and an aesthetic, and to develop a method for consumers to rely on experiences with the setups (Steuer, 1995). Thus, the experiential approach refers to “a real or stimulated environment in which a perceiver experiences telepresence”, the mediated perception of a background (Steuer, 1995).

Virtual reality and *immersive virtual reality* concepts, due to their oxymoron, have sometimes been replaced with the term *virtual environment* (Blascovich, 2002). Virtual environments (VEs) imply an artificial sensory and immersive background that give the feeling of reality and in which the individuals perceive themselves as being included and interacting both with the setting and with each other (Blascovich et al., 2002). It establishes a connection between the user and the device due to the sense of presence, which allows the user to feel oneself inside the virtual world (Mabrook & Singer, 2019).

To gain a more profound perspective on the way VR is operationalized in the communication domain and on its implications, the present study aims to offer a broad theoretical overview on the research being published in the top-impactful journals. The paper intends to longitudinally comprehend trends in VR research published from 2010 to 2020. In order to collect data, 62 studies from 25 academic Clarivate top journals from the communication domain are analyzed. The research questions are the following:

- RQ1. Which are the main research interests and thematic approaches regarding the use of VR in communication journals?
- RQ2. What theories and models are applied to examine the use of VR in the communication domain?
- RQ3. Which methodological designs and technical features are preferred when focusing on the implications of VR?

The relevance of this approach is twofold. On one hand, the theoretical overview aims to offer a comprehensive picture of what is already written on the topic at the highest scientific level and to spot the main gaps that still need to be fulfilled. On the other hand, this endeavor has, as a final aim, the purpose to develop an evolutionary perspective on the way VR is used in communication domain and to design future trends that can guide and inspire further valuable research. The reader will be able to better understand the research directions, how VR is conceptualized in communication, which are the main theories and models that suits its approach, and which are the most used methods and designs.

2. Defining virtual reality

The names of Ivan Sutherland and Jaron Lanier are strongly related to VR. While, in the '60s, the first one has developed computer graphics and early 3D head mounted displays, the second one has originally coined the VR concept (Biocca, Laurie & McCarthy, 1997). Thus, the concept of VR has been first introduced by American VPL Research in 1989 as a description of the technology of computer simulation (Zhou & Deng, 2009).

In order to define VR, which proves not to be a simple task (Barnes, 2017), the etymology of the words is needed. The term "virtual" has its origins from Latin, which indicates a certain effect produced by a force and exists in essence, but is not real (Sherman & Craig, 2019; Yoh, 2001; Zhou & Deng, 2009). Since VR introduction, several researchers have been trying to offer a complex definition of the term and some of them have tried to compress various definitions of it. An example is Mandal (2013), who, on her study in 2003, offers a series of definitions of VR from different authors, concluding that, in fact, VR is nothing more than a three dimensional computer-generated environment that allows the user to interact with a simulated world. According to the dictionaries' definitions, VR is an environment through which an user can have several experiences that simulate reality (Barnes, 2017; Franchi, 1994; Portman et al., 2015; Yoh, 2001).

Another perspective in defining VR is the user's experience, as humans have the ability of interacting with something that is imaginary, but, at the same time, is genuine in existence. This perspective offers the public an exhaustive description of the user's involvement in the experience, as the subjects interact directly with stimuli that can be either visual or auditory. This new technology has the capacity to introduce the users into a virtual environment so they can be completely distracted from the real world by having the opportunity to encounter several contexts linked to different stages of their lives, such as past, present or future (Hand, 1996; Kardong-Edgren et al., 2019; Mandal, 2013).

Virtual environments imply digital multiple layer sensory information that create the feeling of real surroundings, experiences, and profound engagement at the levels of seeing, hearing and feeling (Blascovich et al., 2002; Ahn & Bailenson, 2011; Ahn, 2014; Ahn, Bailenson, & Park, 2014). Being considered as richer and more persuasive than the traditional media, virtual environments remove the boundary between reality and virtual space (Blascovich & Bailenson, 2011; Ahn et al., 2015).

Biocca, Laurie and McCarthy (1997) stress that VR, rather than being defined by a specific technology, is defined by a cluster of interactive technologies and techniques that create user experience inside a virtual environment. By creating an illusion for the senses, it is designed to augment human performance and intelligence.

In general, given the fact that each study reveals and emphasizes different features of VR, scholars show that VR can be defined through its most important characteristics, such as immersion, presence, and interactivity (Bamodu & Ye, 2013; Barnes, 2017; Craig et al., 2009; Guttentag, 2010; Macpherson & Keppell, 1998; Mandal, 2013; Ryan, 2003). Together and increased, immersion and presence can give the users the impression that any mediation is suspended (Markowitz et al., 2018).

Immersion, conceptualized as the objective unit and defined as the level to which technology provides a vivid illusion of reality using sensory information (Slater & Wilbur, 1997; Ahn, Le & Bailenson, 2013), can lead to different presence experiences, the subjective unit, and, thus, to interactivity (Ahn & Bailenson, 2011). Immersion implies how well technology manages to estimate actions and movements in the virtual setting (Markowitz et al., 2018). The equipment used while experiencing VR, as head-mounted-displays, gloves fitted with sensors, computer monitors, hand tracking systems, simulators, or controllers allow users to have a complete immersive experience (Barnes, 2017; Mandal, 2013; McMillan et al., 2017; Steuer, 1992).

From its early stages, virtual reality's definition comprises references to the idea of presence. It has been described as an environment in which a perceiver experiences telepresence (Slater, Usoh, & Steed, 1994). The psychological construct of presence, or simply "being there" (the perception of oneself of being present within an environment) is considered as central to human experience within the immersive virtual environments (Blascovich, 2002; Cummings & Bailenson, 2015). It is believed that a user effect, or her/his sense of reacting in a similar way as in reality, and the applications' effectiveness can be magnified through an increased sense of presence (Cummings & Bailenson, 2015). The fundamental idea of presence is that users should perceive the environment rather as a visited place than an imagined one (Slater & Wilbur, 1997). Alongside, social presence implies an interpersonal environment in which the presence of others may be implied or imagined (Blascovich, 2002).

As research suggest that individuals use to treat their virtual experiences as being real, through immersion and presence, VR can be used to evaluate both common (mundane physical characteristics in social dynamics) and fantastic (imaginary situations as, for example, changing the race of the user) experiences, reactions, and behaviors (Markowitz et al., 2018). Completing the states of immersion and presence, interactivity is defined as the extent to which an individual participates in a setting and modifies in real time the content of the mediated environment (Steuer, 1995).

Connecting the aforementioned factors and converting the users into an integrated part of the system, VR can be considered a communication medium (Boyd & Koles, 2019; Portman et al., 2015). At the same time, an exchange of actions is established. From this point of view, the user operates the equipment, while one gets back a feedback based on

sensors, settling a relation between the two parties (Craig et al., 2009; Latta & Oberg, 1994; Pantelidis, 1993; Yoh, 2001).

Regardless of all different approaches in defining VR, most of the researchers underline the same aspects. Features like user's experience, interactivity, immersion or virtual environment are universally reiterated in most of VR definitions (Boyd & Koles, 2019; Kardong-Edgren et al., 2019; Mandal, 2013). Even though a pattern has been formed in defining VR, there are certain debates that revolve around this technology. They generate contradictory opinions, from the name itself, "which links two apparently opposite terms" (Fuchs et al., 2011), to several statements made by technology non-lovers that link VR with enslaving, with Paleolithic art, or with the impossibility to distinct between fiction and reality (Ryan, 2003).

In the light of these insights, specifically studying the communication field perspective becomes relevant. The methodological part offers a systematic approach on the way VR is encompassed within communication, either we discuss on human-computer interaction, or advertising, new media, journalism, and health.

3. Method

The present theoretical review includes literature on VR topics published in the communication field from 2010 up to 2020, as this research field has experienced rapid grown especially during the last decade. The search process considers top academic journals, Q1 and Q2 Clarivate ranking, which could be found in Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) according to Journal Citation Reports 2019, the edition from 29th of June 2020. Within this report, the Communication area has been studied. Since academic journals are considered the most valuable sources for academic papers in terms of information validity, research quality and awareness in the academic field, scientific papers tend to use them as a criterion in samples (Kim et al., 2010; Zhang & Leung, 2014). Thus, the most visible and impactful communication journals have been selected for the analysis.

Eligibility criteria for the present study are the following:

- (1) Topic of research: studies related to the use of VR in the communication domain
- (2) Type of research: full research papers (qualitative, quantitative, mixed, or literature reviews) published in Q1 and Q2 Clarivate ranking
- (3) Date of publication: studies published between 2010 and 2020
- (4) Language of publication: studies written in English

The studies that have been *excluded* are either written in other languages than English (as French or Italian) or, although mentioning the specific technology part, are not integrating VR.

Regarding the *search strategy*, all the journals have been hand-searched and all relevant VR-related articles have been included in the sample. Based on the ranking from the Journal Citation Reports (2019), the search has been done within each of the 46 listed communication journals from Q1 and Q2 quartiles. Each journal's archive has been used

and each issue has been considered. Within each issue, all the articles have been manually screened based on the title and abstract. The selected articles are following the criteria of (1) discussing the use of VR in specific communication contexts and (2) reporting a validation of the use of VR.

In the end, a total number of 25 journals and 62 scientific articles have been selected for this study (Table 1).

Table 1. The journals and articles included in the analysis

No.	JOURNAL	NUMBER OF ARTICLES	SOURCE
1.	Journal of Advertising	2	Ahn & Bailenson (2011); Besharat et al. (2013)
2.	Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication	7	Jung (2011); Goel, Prokopec, & Junglas (2013); Sivunen & Nordbäck (2015); Won et al. (2015) Ahn et al. (2016); Kim (2016); Aymerich-Franch et al. (2017)
3.	Communication Methods and Measures	3	Williams et al. (2011); Weber, Behr & DeMartino (2014); King et al. (2019)
4.	Journal of Communication	1	Peña & Blackburn (2013)
5.	New Media & Society	6	Lee, Chung & Lee (2012); Lin, Wu, Tao (2017); Heineman (2016); Saker & Frith (2018); Kruzan & Won (2019); Egliston & Carter (2020)
6.	Digital Journalism	5	Sánchez Laws (2017); Baía Reis & Coelho (2018); Kang et al. (2018); Hassan (2019); Palmer (2020)
7.	Communication Research	2	Wang et al. (2011); Schouten, van den Hooff, & Feldberg (2016)
8.	International Journal of Advertising	1	Song et al. (2020)
9.	Human Communication Research	2	Van Der Land et al. (2015); Afifi et al. (2016)

10.	Media Psychology	5	Wirth, Hofer & Schramm (2012); McGloin, Farrar & Krcmar (2013); Rooney & Hennessy (2013); Cummings & Bailenson (2015); Reinhard et al. (2019)
11.	Information Society	1	Schulzke (2014)
12.	Journalism Studies	2	Mabrook & Singer (2019); Van Damme et al. (2019)
13.	Science Communication	1	Oh et al. (2020)
14.	Public Relations Review	1	Fraustino et al. (2018)
15.	Telecommunications Policy	1	Shin (2010)
16.	Journal of Advertising Research	1	Spielmann & Orth (2020)
17.	Media Culture and Society	1	Saker & Frith (2020)
18.	Health Communication	1	Ahn (2014)
19.	Communication Theory	3	Williams (2010); Bourdon (2019); Hardy (2020)
20.	Environmental Communication	3	Schroth et al. (2014); Greussing, E. (2019); Breves & Heber (2019)
21.	Convergence	6	Plesner & Horst (2012); Nagy & Koles (2014); Golding (2017); Harley (2019); Parker & Saker (2020); Wallis & Ross (2020)
22.	Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media	1	Kang (2020)
23.	Journal of Health Communication	1	Ahn et al. (2015)
24.	Journalism	3	Ambrosio & Fidalgo (2019); De Bruin et al. (2020); Nielsen & Sheets (2019)
25.	Communication Monographs	2	Behm-Morawitz, Pennell & Speno (2016); Barreda-Ángeles, Aleix-Guillaume, & Pereda-Baños (2020)

3.1. Coding process

Each article has been analyzed based on the following components: general information (year of publication, journal title, article title and authors), primary topic and context of the study, research aim, theoretical background (i.e., theories/ concepts/ models/ scales), research methods, technical aspects, and results. *Journal title and year of publication* is coded in order to comprehend the trends in VR communication research over time. *Primary topic and context* indicate the main subjects that each of the articles intend to investigate. Based on the previous literature, VR is known to have an extensive applicability potential, as it is used in several domains such as: education, medicine, army, marketing and tourism, computer games, animations etc. (Bessis & Dobre, 2014; Chiou et al., 2008; Kassaye, 2007; Marasco et al., 2018). The present coding's purpose is twofold: first it aims to indicate the fact that one important feature of VR is malleability, as it can be operated on several topics, and second to emphasize the most common topics. *Research aim* is coded in order to observe if there is a pattern followed in understanding the use of VR, the trends and the research interests of the authors. The *theoretical backgrounds* of the studies aim to help in better comprehend which are the main concepts associated with VR and which theories and models are being discussed. The *research methods* used in VR communication research are classified into qualitative and quantitative methods (Smith, 1983). While the qualitative methods include the interview, the focus group and the reviews, the quantitative methods include the experiment, the survey and the content analysis. If a study operates more than one method, each research method is coded individually. The *technical aspects* point out which are the most frequent devices and systems used in VR communication research. Considering the *results* part, comparisons between different studies have been operated, the final aim being that of emphasizing the VR contribution and impact in the field.

4. Results

The research provides a complete overview of articles regarding VR in communication field published between 2010 and 2020. As the following figure shows, during the first eight analyzed years, the number of articles is low, with an average of 4,22 articles published per year. However, within the last two years, there is an increase to twelve articles per year, proving both a technological development and an augmented interest in combining VR technology with social sciences.

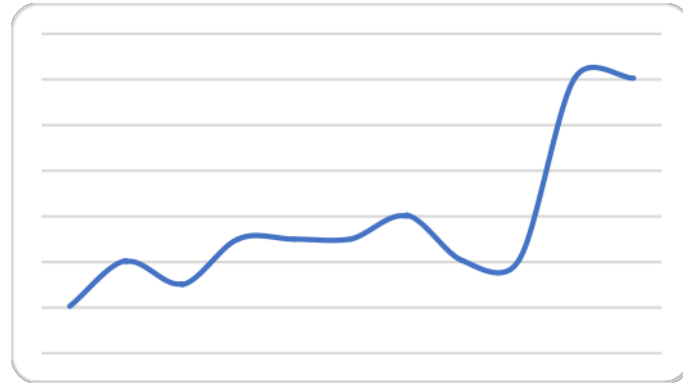


Figure 1.
The time-frame evolution of articles on VR and communication

4.1. Primary topics

Zhao (2009) emphasizes that VR technology can be segmented in three categories. First, training and drill refers to the replication of the reality to simulate certain operations. Second, planning and design are used to predict or estimate phenomena and objects that do not exist, to provide rationality to planning and design. Finally, display and entertainment refer to the ability of the technology to simulate real or imaginary objects for an audience that can engage in various activities (Zhao, 2009). Based on this perspective, Berntsen et al. (2016) divide the three categories in a different manner, as follows: health, exploration and presentation, and environment. As a follow up of these taxonomies, the present study aims to classify VR in the following categories: medical sector, media field, technology exploration and entertainment (Table 2).

The medical sector refers to mental, emotional, and physical health, so it encompasses the academic articles that use VR in the health field. The media category consists of all the results which offer a comprehension of how VR is used nowadays in media communication and how this technology aids in influencing the public. The technology exploration and entertainment refer to the multitude of functions that VR has. In this context, the findings are related to the systems developed through this type of technology.

Table 2. The distribution of articles based on topic

TOPIC CATEGORY	NUMBER OF ARTICLES
Medical field	5
Media field / journalism	15
Technology exploration and entertainment	42

In the medical field, VR is used in many branches of medicine from psychiatry, as it has the capability to aid in healing of mental disorders, anxiety or other neurological or behavioral diagnosis. It is also used in therapies, as controlled stimuli, in medical education, as simulator for students, and in locomotor diseases. Lately, VR has become a more important tool in medicine, due to the fact that it provides different sensors, like electroencephalogram, or other advancements that can help in cancer disorder (Berntsen et al., 2016; Dores et al., 2012; Moline, 1997; Riva, 2002).

Regarding the media section, VR is prominently represented in journalism. Even though it is in an elementary stage (Kang et al., 2018), it contributes to creating a different approach of understanding the news (Sánchez Laws, 2017). This is possible by engaging the public in the narrative construction, through the feedback provided by the user after the experience (Baía Reis & Coelho, 2018; Mabrook & Singer, 2019; McRoberts, 2018; Palmer, 2020; Van Damme et al., 2019). Moreover, through this connection and having the public indirectly intervening in the story, a feeling of empathy is created (Hassan, 2019; Sánchez Laws, 2017).

The technology exploration and entertainment section refers to the capability of VR to offer the users the possibility of experiencing situations that are very much alike to the real world (Ahn et al., 2016). Virtual reality proposes various applications or systems that contribute from the entertainment of the public, such as movies (Rooney & Hennessy, 2013), sports simulators (Lee et al., 2012), tourism (Marasco et al., 2018), art (Parker & Saker, 2020), games or social media platforms, to the improvement of the quality of work, through applications or business platforms (Goel et al., 2013; Jung, 2011) or other methods to connect to the virtual world, such as activities for the senior citizens or “virtual driving simulation” (Berntsen et al., 2016).

The findings show that VR tends to be studied mostly in the exploration and entertainment sector. Considering the technology exploration and entertainment section as being extensive, a considerable number of academic articles are integrated in this direction.

4.2. Research aims

This section provides a complex picture of the research interests of the authors. Thus, there are identified several researches' aims (Table 3). Although, depending on the research topics, they are overlapping, these perspectives help in developing a comprehensive overview and trends along the analyzed years. The first research direction is rather a general one that aims to better understand the use and the adoption process of the VR technology. The early studies aim to validate classical technology acceptance models, as TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) (Wang et al., 2011) or UTAUT (Unified Theory of Acceptance and The Use of Technology) (Shin, 2010). Later research not only that assesses the role of VR technology on individuals' belief, attitudes and adoption (Kang, 2020), but evaluates the way certain technologies, as eye-tracker (King et al., 2019) or Oculus (Egliston & Carter, 2020) are suitable for VR in communication domain. Another important research perspective is that of using VR in gaming. In this respect, video game

interactivity (Weber, Behr & DeMartino, 2014) and audience appeal are being measured (Lin, Wu & Tao, 2017).

A set of soft research directions are those related to issues individuals are being confronted with in day-to-day life: social issues, global issues, and health issues. Studies approaching social issues focus on topics as aggression (McGloin, Farrar & Krcmar, 2013), violence, interpersonal trust (Rothmund et al., 2015), racism, or discrimination (Behm-Morawitz, Pennell & Speno, 2016; Harley, 2019). Climate change (Schroth et al., 2014; Greussing, 2019; Oh et al., 2020) and disasters' perceptions (Fraustino et al., 2018) are global topics studied with the help of VR. Health communication domain is still in its infancy, only two studies being available in our sample. While one of them explores obesity (Ahn, 2014), the other one focuses on the use of virtual pets in promoting physical activity in children (Ahn et al., 2015).

Identity development in virtual reality environments is another comprehensive research direction. While incipient studies aim to develop mapping principles and to examine the extent to which behaviors in one space are consistent with behaviors in another (Williams, 2010), more recent readings focuses on analyzing situations in which users inhabit animals' body (Ahn et al., 2016) or humanoid robots (Aymerich-Franch et al., 2017). Changes in the identity of the avatar can help in better understanding the way individuals perceive their self and body in different setups. Virtual surroundings are appropriate environments in which interpersonal relationship and performance can also be tested. Thus, there are studies that use such setups in better understanding interaction between avatars (Goel, Prokopec, & Junglas, 2013; Sivunen & Nordbäck, 2015), decision-making process (Schouten, van den Hooff, & Feldberg, 2013), or team performance (van der Land et al., 2015).

The creative possibilities of VR are clearly seen in studies that evaluate people's effects and reactions in different immersive setups. There are studies that transpose individuals in spaces as golf setting (Lee, Chung, & Lee, 2012), library or cafes (Peña & Blackburn, 2013), nature (Breves & Heber, 2019), cinema (Rooney & Hennessy, 2013), or museums (Parker & Saker, 2020). This spatial transfer aims to help examine enjoyment, perceived value, behavioral intention, satisfaction, attention, commitment, arousal, recognition, or recall.

Advertising is a communication sub-domain that can fully benefit from the development of VR in creating more suitable strategies. In this respect, the existing studies compare endorsing and self-endorsing (Ahn & Bailenson, 2011), expose the consumer to brand features and measure affective, cognitive and behavioral reactions (Besharat et al., 2013), or try to understand users' experience with the brand based on different media devices (Song et al., 2020).

One of the richest research directions contains studies that aim to better understand journalistic activities through the lens of VR. In this respect, concepts as journalism as an empathy machine (Sánchez Laws, 2017; Hassan, 2019), news credibility (Kang et al., 2018), or news audience engagement (Palmer, 2020; De Bruin et al., 2020) are being tested in correlation with telepresence and sense of presence.

Table 3. An overview on the aims of VR studies in communication

TECHNOLOGY USE AND ADOPTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Validates a model of consumer acceptance in the context of MVNOs using the unified theory of acceptance and the use of technology (UTAUT) (Shin, 2010). Explores how virtual worlds are rhetorically constructed as innovative spaces for communication (Plesner & Horst, 2011). Studies which factors influence individuals continued use of social virtual worlds (Jung 2011). Tests the original technology acceptance model and compares it with an alternative model (Wang et al., 2011). Reflects on the theoretical mechanisms by which the variations in source attribution (multiple sources vs. single source) and specialization (multifunctionality vs. single functionality) of Internet of Things (IoT) devices impact the quality of human–IoT interaction (Kim, 2016). Argues on VR as an apparatus itself, a body for the user, rather than a simulated setup (Golding, 2017). Conceptualizes mobile virtual reality (MVR) as a connective tissue between the two sequential tropes of MCS (physical distraction and spatial enhancement) and introduces the concept of ‘dislocated space’ as a way of understanding the embodied space MVR might configure (Saker & Frith, 2018). Proposes a theory of mediated presence, made possible by technology (Bourdon, 2019). Provides an overview on eye-tracking with the aim of improving the quality and reporting of eye-tracking research communication (King et al., 2019). Introduces the concept of coextensive space (relationship between the physical, digital and concrete reality) (Saker & Frith, 2020). Explores the Oculus suite of virtual reality (VR) technologies (Egliston & Carter, 2020). Examines how adoption factors are associated with an individual’s belief, attitude, and system adoption of virtual reality spectatorship (VRS) (Kang, 2020).
GAMING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discusses the methodological, measurement and organizational challenges of the Virtual Worlds Exploratorium project (a study on communication-related behaviors using data from massively multiplayer online games) (Williams et al., 2011). Develops a theoretical model of video game interactivity and tests a multidimensional scale to assess video game interactivity (Weber, Behr & DeMartino, 2014). Reviews on games studies in VR (Heineman, 2016). Examines the audience appeal of survival horror games’ content in a VR (Lin, Wu & Tao, 2017).
SOCIAL ISSUES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigates the influence of video game realism and controller naturalness on aggression (McGloin, Farrar & Krcmar, 2013). Investigates the psychological processes underlying short- and long-term effects of video game violence on interpersonal trust (Rothmund et al., 2015). Examines the effectiveness of the use of virtual racial embodiment in a digital gaming application for reducing bias against a non-dominant group (Behm-Morawitz, Pennell & Speno, 2016).

- Tests the role of mothers' communication on adolescents' cardiovascular response to threat (Afifi et al., 2016).
- Assesses the rise of contemporary VR within the overlapping, contemporaneous contexts of video game culture and the misogynistic gamergate movement (Harley, 2019).

GLOBAL ISSUES

- Focuses on recognizable representations of climate change's local impacts within an interactive game environment (Schroth et al., 2014).
- Assesses effects of media modality (traditional unidirectional video content vs. 360° omni-directional video content) on attitudes toward the disaster communication content (Fraustino et al., 2018).
- Investigates how an immersive 360-degree climate change-based photograph affects individuals' knowledge acquisition and perceived message credibility (Greussing, 2019).
- Compares pro-environmental 360-degree videos and unidirectional videos in their persuasive effectiveness, having as a moderator the degree to which individuals believe they can influence the effect of global warming (Oh et al., 2020).

HEALTH COMMUNICATION

- Explores the role of immersive virtual environment in enhancing personal involvement with the issue of soft-drinks consumption and obesity (Ahn, 2014).
- Studies the use of virtual pet to promote physical activity in children (Ahn et al., 2015).

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT / EMBODIMENT

- Develops a mapping principle (the extent to which behaviors in one space are consistent with behaviors in another) (Williams, 2010).
- Explores patterns of identity development in virtual worlds, with the aim of introducing a conceptual model of virtual identity (Nagy & Koles, 2014).
- Analyzes virtual worlds and massively multiplayer online role-playing games (Schulzke, 2014).
- Examines the effects of remapping movements in the reality onto an avatar that moves in new ways (Won et al., 2015).
- Tests how different modalities increase environmental involvement when users inhabit animals' body (Ahn et al., 2016).
- Studies a haptic (touch) illusion during embodiment of a humanoid robot (Aymerich-Franch et al., 2017).
- Analyzes the Proteus effect (changes in attitude and behaviors in respect with identity cues of the avatar) of avatar age on post-embodiment walking speed (Reinhard et al., 2019).
- Assesses embodiment to compare the effects of VR and social media on the perception of self and body (Kruzan & Won, 2019).
- Investigates how VR is being used to create space and capacity for Indigenous creatives to tell their production stories (Wallis & Ross, 2020).

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AND PERFORMANCE

- Evaluates how 3D virtual environments (3DVEs) and avatar-based interaction support shared understanding and group decision making (Schouten, van den Hooff, & Feldberg, 2013).
 - Investigates how 3D virtual words (perceived colocation and perceived coaction) influence behaviors in group tasks (Goel, Prokopec, & Junglas, 2013).
 - Explores how avatar appearance influences virtual team performance (van der Land et al., 2015).
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- Analyzes virtual environments' (VE) meetings (shared collaboration space and avatars) and globally distributed team (Sivunen & Nordbäck, 2015).
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IMMERSION TO DIFFERENT SETUPS

- Evaluates the roles of emotional involvement and trait absorption in the formation process of spatial presence in a virtual environment (Wirth, Hofer & Schramm, 2012).
 - Examines the effects of presence (enjoyment, perceived value, and behavioral intention) when respondents played a golf game using virtual golf simulators (Lee, Chung, & Lee, 2012).
 - Investigates the effect of stereoscopic realism (3D effect) on viewers' attention, emotion, and satisfaction in cinema (Rooney & Hennessy, 2013).
 - Analyzes how virtual environments (a virtual library and a cafe) affect interpersonal perceptions among unacquainted partners (Peña & Blackburn, 2013).
 - Investigates whether viewing immersive 360° nature videos can impact individuals' commitment to the environment (Breves & Heber, 2019).
 - Explores the impact of VR on the spatial and social experiences of art museums (Parker & Saker, 2020).
 - Reviews embodied cognition theory by emphasizing embodied mental simulation imagery and visualization (Hardy, 2020).
 - Studies the effects of immersive presentation of nonfiction omnidirectional video on audiences' cognitive processing (arousal, attention, recognition, and recall) (Barreda-Ángeles, Aleix-Guillaume & Pereda-Baños, 2020).
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ADVERTISING COMMUNICATION

- Compares endorsing and self-endorsing (the portrayal of potential consumer using the product) as advertising strategies (Ahn & Bailenson, 2011).
 - Examines if associating a brand with virtual attribute experience (VAE) by exposing consumers to the brand name and the virtual experience simultaneously has a positive effect on brand recall, brand extension acceptance, overall attitude, and purchase intention (Besharat et al., 2013).
 - Explores the role of 360-degree virtual tours in offering realistic content for the consumers and in overcoming the lack of authenticity and the manipulative intent of advertisers (Spielmann & Orth, 2020).
 - Examines whether the effect of VR advertising vary based on different media devices, what is the influence of virtual representation of the self (VRS) in VR ad, and whether self-presence mediate the correlation between VRS and user's experience with the brand (Song et al., 2020).
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JOURNALISM

- Evaluates whether immersive journalism can enhance empathy (Sánchez Laws, 2017).
 - Investigates if telepresence in VR news consumption can affect news credibility (Kang et al., 2018).
 - Theoretically analyzes the main concepts, uses, opportunities and limits of immersive journalism (Reis & Coelho, 2018).
 - Proposes three conceptual approaches to examining VR journalism: Actor-Network Theory, normative theory, and a sociological perspective on journalistic work (Mabrook & Singer, 2019).
 - Measures whether 360° international disaster news leads to a higher sense of presence, enjoyment, subjective involvement towards the topic, and engagement with the victims
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(Van Damme et al., 2019).

- Studies whether VR, as a post-mobile wave of technology, can create a new journalism's empathy machine (Hassan, 2019).
- Evaluates the narrative elements that are modified by the intervention of VR and the peculiarities caused by its introduction in the journalistic communication process (Ambrosio & Fidalgo, 2019).
- Investigates how media users perceive virtual reality technology in journalism from a gratification perspective (Nielsen & Sheets, 2019).
- Assesses how do the form and content of the New York Times' 360-degree videos increase telepresence by augmented vividness and interactivity and reflects the tension between traditional notions of journalistic authority and the need to engage with news audience (Palmer, 2020).
- Investigates to what extend immersive techniques are used for journalistic productions targeted to news audiences (De Bruin et al., 2020).

Based on the research aims of the analyzed articles, there is one pattern that needs to be mentioned. It can be observed that an important number of articles use as an independent variable the VR technology, this having the ability to generate several responses or to amplify certain experiences. For example, Breves and Heber (2019) in their study hypothesize that the VR condition (as an independent variable) will increase the level of spatial presence for the participants that will experience immersive nature videos, in comparison with the participants that will experience regular nature videos. Moreover, the first group of participants will report a higher level of connection to the environment than the second group of participants. In the study of Rooney and Hennessy (2013), the 3D condition is predicted to increase the level of attention toward a movie, the level of emotional intensity and the level of overall satisfaction. Or, Schouten et al. (2016) predict that efficiency, consensus, process satisfaction, outcome satisfaction and cohesion will be higher in the virtual condition than in the regular condition.

Table 4 longitudinally encapsulates the main topics approached by scholars since 2010. While the first attempts are characterized by a more general perspective on VR, 2012 brings interest in emotional side of this technology. Since 2014, researchers show an increased attention on health issues and children behavior. The latest studies are both focused on well-being and empathy and connect the VR technology with very specific topics, as climate change, social media, human rights, or advertising.

Table 4. The topic evolution in the VR and communication articles

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Mobile virtual network operation services Mapping	Endorsing in virtual environments Virtual presence Video games	Perceived enjoyment in virtual environments Emotional involvement	Virtual presence Virtual environments and interpersonal	Virtual social presence Video games Virtual team work Health	Virtual body movement Immersive technology Virtual pets in children's

principle	Online community participation	and spatial presence Virtual architecture	perceptions Virtual team work 3D movies and emotional intensity Video games	promotion campaign Visual climate change communication Virtual identity	activity
2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Virtual nature involvement Parental attachment Internet of Things interaction Video games Racial embodiment	Haptic sensation of humanoid robot Video games Immersive journalism Embodiment	Mobile virtual reality Immersive journalism Spatial presence and disaster video content	Visual behavior Embodied well- being Empathy Avatar embodiment Immersive journalism Immersive nature videos 360-degree photography and climate change credibility History of mediated communication Oculus rift evolution	Facebook virtual reality Human rights and immersive journalism VR advertising and self-presence Environmental self-efficacy Advertising content and virtual tours Physical and digital space symbiosis Embodied cognition Virtual art museum Indigenous VR work Adoption process of VR Immersive journalism	

4.3. Theoretical perspectives

Approaching an interdisciplinary perspective, the use of VR in communication needs a comprehensive conceptualization. Thus, this part presents the main concepts used when defining VR and the main theories and models that serve the above-described research aims.

Immersion is the key concept exposed in the VR related literature. It refers to the capability of a specific technology, in this context the VR technology, to produce feedback at the user's actions in a manner that resembles to the real world (Ahn & Bailenson, 2011; Baía Reis & Coelho, 2018; Barreda-Ángeles et al., 2020; Behm-Morawitz et al., 2016; De Bruin et al., 2020; King et al., 2019; McGloin et al., 2013; Nagy & Koles, 2014; Nielsen &

Sheets, 2019; Oh et al., 2020; Paíno Ambrosio & Rodríguez Fidalgo, 2019; Parker & Saker, 2020; Schouten et al., 2016; Spielmann & Orth, 2020).

The idea of immersion can be linked to both time and space. On one hand, cognitive absorption represents the way in which a person who is absolutely involved in a certain task loses the sense of time (Goel et al., 2013). On the other hand, the coextensive space (Saker & Frith, 2020) denotes the meeting point between three types of reality: the physical reality, the digital/virtual reality and the concrete reality. While virtual world refers to the virtual experiences of the users and to their interaction when connected to technology (Jung, 2011), virtual identity breaks down the interaction into three levels (Nagy & Koles, 2014). First, the individual level is characterized by the elements that distinguish one individual from another at the level of virtual distinctiveness construction. Second, the micro-level stresses on the way different identities are manifesting into the immersion process. Finally, the macro-level refers to the way users are shaping the virtual community and, the other way around, how the latter shapes the individual self-identities (Nagy & Koles, 2014).

An essential contribution to immersion has the concept of interactivity. Interactivity refers to the user's involvement in the virtual experience, as he can contribute, through his responses, at the action on the screen (Ahn & Bailenson, 2011; Oh et al., 2020; Spielmann & Orth, 2020; Steuer, 1992; Wallis & Ross, 2020; Weber et al., 2014).

Strongly related to immersion and interactivity, presence is another concept which gained popularity among the scholars. Presence, in its terminology indicates 'the feeling of being there' (Lau & Lee, 2015), but in the technology context, it has different means. The first one is the spatial presence or telepresence which indicates "the feeling of being there" when interacting with a mediated environment (Besharat et al., 2013; Bourdon, 2019; De Bruin et al., 2020; Fraustino et al., 2018; Kang et al., 2018; Spielmann & Orth, 2020; Steuer, 1992; Suomala et al., 2012; Wirth et al., 2012). Another meaning of presence is the social presence which designates "the feeling of being with someone" in a mediated environment (Jung, 2011; Suomala et al., 2012). There have been identified three characteristics of social presence: the co-presence, the psychological involvement and the behavioral engagement (Sivunen & Nordbäck, 2015). The third meaning of presence is self-presence. This concept is a mental state in which the virtual self can be experienced in either sensory or non-sensory pathways. In this context, the users may encounter difficulty in differentiating the real self from the virtual self (Song et al., 2020). Strongly related to presence, the concept of embodiment explains the transposition of the users into the virtual entity during the virtual experience (Ahn et al., 2016; Hardy, 2020). Moreover, Behm-Morawitz et al. (2016) introduce the virtual racial embodiment concept, which refers to the process of embodying an avatar whose entity or race is obvious.

Considering the mixture between the self and the environment, Ahn et al. (2016) discuss three important concepts. First, the inclusion of nature in self has as a point of reference the connection between the individual and the natural environment, as being a cognitive self-representation. Second, the idea of self-other merging outside interpersonal interactions demonstrates that the virtual environment is an important tool in developing a

more positive behavior in the context of interpersonal perspective, than using traditional means of perspective taking. Finally, learning through direct experience emphasizes that for a better understanding of the theory, the practice is needed (Ahn et al., 2016).

A considerate number of theories have been identified within the analyzed sample. The table below (Table 5) summarizes these theories by grouping them into three categories: psychology or human behavior theories, media related theories, and technology acceptance theories. They have been usually used in a hybrid format within the analyzed studies through different combinations, depending on the purpose of each research.

Table 5. An interdisciplinary overview on the theories and models used in VR and communication research

PSYCHOLOGY / HUMAN BEHAVIOR THEORIES	
Theory of Reasoned Action (Hardy, 2020; Lee et al., 2012 & Wang et al., 2011), Theory of Planned Behavior (Hardy, 2020; Lee et al., 2012 & Wang et al., 2011), Social Cognitive Theory (Hardy, 2020; Oh et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2011), Social Learning Theory (Hardy, 2020; Oh et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2011), Theory of Empathy (Hassan, 2019; Sánchez Laws, 2017), Cue-Summation Theory (Besharat et al., 2013), Classical Conditioning Theory (Besharat et al., 2013), Per Distraction-Conflict Theory (Goel et al., 2013), Evaluation-Apprehension Theory (Goel et al., 2013), Self-determination Theory (Weber et al., 2014), Theory of Behavior Settings (Peña & Blackburn, 2013), Circle of Action Theory (Hassan, 2019), Attachment Theory (Afifi et al., 2016), Theory of Embodied Cognition (Wirth et al., 2012),	Theory of Mental Models (McGloin et al., 2013), The Self-perception Theory (Reinhard et al., 2019), Normative Theory (Mabrook & Singer, 2019), Deepening and Refocusing theory (Fraustino et al., 2018), Construal level theory (Ahn, 2014), Perceptual Symbol Theory (Hardy, 2020), Balance Theory (Hardy, 2020), Social Identity Theory (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2016), Classical Conditioning Model (Sánchez Laws, 2017), Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) (Van Der Land et al., 2015), Biopsychosocial Model of Challenge and Threat (Afifi et al., 2016), Spatial Situational Model (Wirth's et al., 2012), Conceptual Model of Virtual Identity (Nagy & Koles, 2014), Model of Avatar Choice (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2016)
MEDIA THEORIES	
Media Richness Theory (Schouten et al., 2016; Sivunen & Nordbäck, 2015; Van Damme et al., 2019),	Model of Suspense (Lin et al., 2017), Model of Immersive Journalism (De Bruin et al., 2020; Paíno Ambrosio &

Uses and Gratifications Theory (Kang, 2020; Nielsen & Sheets, 2019; Van Damme et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2011), Theory of Social Presence (Bafa Reis & Coelho, 2018; Sivunen & Nordbäck, 2015), The Actor-network Theory (Mabrook & Singer, 2019; Plesner & Horst, 2012), Theory of Mediated Presence (Bourdon, 2019), Message-Channel-Receiver Model (SMCR) (Kim et al., 2016), Modality, Agency, Interactivity, and Navigability (MAIN) (Kim et al., 2016), Model of Priming Effects (Peña & Blackburn, 2013),	Rodríguez Fidalgo, 2019), Networked Crisis Communication Model (NCC) (Fraustino et al., 2018), Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model (SMCC) (Fraustino et al., 2018), Harold Laswell's Model of Communication (Paño Ambrosio & Rodríguez Fidalgo, 2019), Circular Model of Communication (Paño Ambrosio & Rodríguez Fidalgo, 2019), Limited Capacity Model for Motivated Mediated Message Processing (LC4MP) (Barreda-Ángeles et al., 2020)
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TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE/ADOPTION THEORIES

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Wang et al., 2011),
 Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Shin, 2010; Wang's et al., 2011),
 Theory of Hybrid Space (Saker & Frith, 2018),
 Theory of Telepresence (Kang et al., 2018),
 Social Information Processing Theory (Van Der Land's et al., 2015),
 Theory of Model Matching (McGloin et al., 2013),
 Indigenous Theory of Virtual Reality (Wallis & Ross, 2020)

In the following, the most frequently used theories in the studied research sample are briefly presented.

Within the **psychology and human behavior category**, the most frequently used theories are the Theory of Reasoned Action and the theory of Planned Behavior. The *Theory of Reasoned Action* is found in the studies of Hardy (2020), Lee et al. (2012) and Wang et al. (2011). This theory explains the link between the attitude and behavior, as it anticipates the individual's action based on their prior behavioral intentions. The same authors mention in their studies the *Theory of Planned Behavior*, which connects the beliefs to the behavior through three major components: the attitude, the perceived behavior control and the subjective norms. Another important theory that has been used is *The Social Cognitive Theory* that began as *Social Learning Theory*. It suggests that an individual's behavior can be influenced by other individuals' behaviors, as humans have the ability to reproduce a certain behavior (Hardy, 2020; Oh et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2011). In the same respect, Hassan (2019) and Sánchez Laws (2017) mention in their papers the *Theory of Empathy*. This theory has been first presented by Hoffman (2000) and it is described as a process of knowledge accumulation which implied five mechanisms: mimicry, classical conditioning, direct association, mediated association, and role talking. These psychology theories emphasize that the human behavior, in the context of VR use, can be influenced by prior beliefs, attitudes and intentions, by perceived control, and by social conduct of others.

The media theories complete the psychological approach by underlying the key role of media types in transmitting a certain content and in generating certain reactions. Thus, *The Media Richness Theory* refers to the fact that media has the capability to enrich the experience of presence because of its features, becoming an important tool in determining the performance of a task (Schouten et al., 2016; Sivunen & Nordbäck, 2015; Van Damme et al., 2019). *The Uses and Gratifications Theory* mention the media users, specifically the fact that they make particular choices in order to satisfy their needs (Kang, 2020; Nielsen & Sheets, 2019; Van Damme et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2011). Other papers adopted the *Theory of Social Presence*, that refers to the capability of the media to transmit social cues (Baía Reis & Coelho, 2018; Sivunen & Nordbäck, 2015). In the VR context, *The Actor-network Theory* is considered to be a useful modality of integrating the technology in the process of news-making, as it examines the nature of the agency and how events take place (Mabrook & Singer, 2019; Plesner & Horst, 2012).

The technology related theories give a more particular perspective to all the approaches. The most frequently used theory is *Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)*, introduced by Davis (1986). This model aims to explain the way in which the users perceive, accept, and adopt the technology. TAM assumes two different principles: the perceived usefulness (PU), which indicates the probability that by using technology will increase the work performance and the perceived ease of use (PEOU) that suggests the degree to which the use of a certain technology is effortless (Wang et al., 2011). This model contributes to the development of the *Unified Theory of Acceptance and the Use of Technology (UTAUT)*, which explains the users' intention to use an information system and their behavior after the use (Shin, 2010; Wang's et al., 2011).

4.4. Methodological perspectives

Based on the presented theoretical background, this part of the paper aims to offer an inclusive methodological overview used in the analyzed sample. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used. The following table (Table 6) summarizes the research methods. While the qualitative methodologies are rarely used, theoretical reviews and experiments are the more frequent. This situation might be due to two realities. On one hand, the use of VR in communication is a new domain, meaning that sustained theoretical background is needed. On the other hand, being a very pragmatic domain and implying the use of certain devices, experimental situations are the most appropriate for understanding perceptions and intentional behaviors.

Table 6. The research methods used in the VR and communication articles

RESEARCH METHOD	NUMBER OF ARTICLES
Theoretical reviews	19
Interview	3
Focus-group	1
Experiment	32
Survey	6
Content analysis	3

The theoretical reviews studied can be split into two categories. First, there are studies that discuss new concepts or the present evolutions. For example, there are comprehensively examined notions as embodied cognition (Hardy, 2020), embodied space in the context of mobile virtual reality (Saker & Frith, 2018), virtual identity (Nagy & Koles, 2014), or immersive journalism (Reis et al., 2018). At the same time, Schulzke (2014) theorizes virtual worlds and explains why these places have become mirrors of real-world economic relations. In terms of evolution, Booth et al., (2016) present the development of VR, while Saker & Frith, (2020) explore the theories surrounding VR, including virtuality, immersion, and presence. Egliston & Carter (2020) discuss the Oculus suite of VR technologies.

Second, there are studies that offer a theoretical perspective on the effects of immersive technologies. In the context of self and body perception, Kruzan & Won (2019) study the effects of VR and social media. Regarding technological impact, Ambrosio & Fidalgo (2019) stress on the way in which information in the media field can be spread to public through immersive devices, while Hassan (2019) and Mabrook & Singer (2019) make an analysis on post-mobile wave of technological change in journalism.

Individual and group interviews are trying to study more in-depth topics as news consumption (e.g., Iraq war) and gratification (Nielsen & Sheet, 2019), the use of VR in museum visits (Parker & Saker, 2020), and blogs' content and Second Life experience (Plesner & Horst, 2012). Content analyses are mainly focused on the study of VR blogs (Plesner & Horst, 2012), and on 360-degree videos used by New York Times, to better understand vividness and interactivity (Palmer, 2020).

Considering statistical approaches, a large set of inventories have been used for measuring perceptions or cause-effect relationships. The following table (Table 7) summarizes the inventories used in the analyzed studies.

Table 7. An overview on the used inventories in VR and communication studies

SELF AND SOCIAL PERCEPTION	MEDIA AND CONTENT PERCEPTION	VR EXPERIENCE PERCEPTION
Perceptions of certainty about the relationship scale (Peña & Blackburn, 2013) Perceived conversational involvement scale (Peña & Blackburn, 2013) Perceived partner warmth scale (Peña & Blackburn, 2013) Perceived self-disclosure scale (Peña & Blackburn, 2013) Personal task participation scale (Goel et al., 2013) Co-presence scale (Schouten et al., 2016) Social attraction scale (Van Der Land's et al., 2015) Satisfaction scale (Rooney & Hennessy, 2013) Self-reported distraction scale (Rooney & Hennessy, 2013) Sleepiness Scale (Reinhard's et al., 2019) Distant suffering scale (Van Damme et al., 2019) Subjective involvement scale (Van Damme et al., 2019) Mood state scale (Spielmann & Orth, 2020) Social influence scales (Kang, 2020)	News perception scale (Kim et al., 2016) Perceived conversational effectiveness and appropriateness scale (Kim et al., 2016) Unidimensional credibility scale (Kang et al., 2018) Self-referencing scale (Ahn & Bailenson, 2011)	Spatial Presence Experience Scale (SPES) (Breves & Heber, 2019) Telepresence scale (Besharat et al., 2013; Kang et al., 2018) Presence scale (Ahn & Bailenson, 2011; McGloin et al., 2013) Interactivity scale (Weber et al., 2014) Perceived user-to-system interactivity scale (Weber et al., 2014) Immersion scale (Schouten et al., 2016) NIS Skin Color Scale (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2016) Self-presence scale (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2016) Extended self-presence scale (Van Der Land et al., 2015) ITC-Sense of Presence Inventory (ITC-SOPI) (Rooney & Hennessy, 2013) Innovativeness scale (Kang, 2020)

Usually, the studies are mixing two or three inventories as they try to measure both the self-perception and the perception of the environment. The inventories can be grouped in three categories, depending on the domain they are studying. First, self-evaluation inventories are usually measuring participative behavior, social attraction, mood, and post-embodiment state. Second, media and content perception scales provide information on credibility in the transmitted news, on the quality of the disseminated information, or on the influence of a brand on the participants' attitude, behavior, and experience. Finally, VR experience perception scales are measuring four categories of aspects: (1) the level of reality in the mediated environment, the perceived presence, the

level of immersion, the level of distraction from the content, the level of connection of the participants with their avatars as an extension of the self; (2) the participants' potential behavior and users' efficacy; (3) the interactivity level in video-games; and (4) the perceived level of innovativeness regarding the use of a new technology.

By using these scales, opinion surveys and experiments have been designed. Opinion surveys are usually studying intentions to use VR by applying Technology Acceptance Model (Shin, 2010; Wang et al., 2011), Psychological motivations for game play (Williams et al., 2011); perceived enjoyment, value, and intention in golf simulation (Lee et al., 2012), and general VR adoption attitude (Kang, 2020).

At the experimental level, there is a large set of variables involved. Table 8 presents a systematic overview on the independent and dependent variables used in causal relationships.

Table 8. The independent and dependent variables used in causal designs

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	DEPENDENT VARIABLES	SOURCE
Social presence	Satisfaction with a virtual environment, Continuance intention, Perceived autonomy	Jung, 2011
	Attitude toward the devices, Evaluation of the information transmitted by the devices	Kim, 2016
Telepresence	Perceived authenticity	Spielma & Orth, 2020
	Recall of a brand, Attitude toward that brand, Willingness to buy	Besharat et al., 2013
System immersion	Sense of presence (in disaster news), Levels of enjoyment, Engagement with distant suffering	Van Damme et al., 2019
	Spatial presence, Body transfer, Inclusion of nature in self/ environmental connectedness	Ahn et al., 2016; Breves & Heber, 2019
	Arousal	Barreda-Ángeles et al., 2020
Self-endorsing	Brand attitude, Purchase intention, Self-brand association	Ahn & Bailenson, 2011
3D vs. 2D	Perceived enjoyment, Perceived value, Behavioral intention	Lee, Chung, Lee, 2012
	Telepresence, (News) credibility	Kang et al. 2018
	Level of attention (film), Level of emotional intensity, Level of overall satisfaction (film experience)	Rooney & Hennessy, 2013
	Interactivity, Perceived fun, Credibility, Spatial presence	Oh et al. 2020

	Levels of physical activity, Intentions for future physical activity	Ahna et al., 2015
	Liking the ad, Attitude toward the advertised brand, Intention to purchase the advertised product	Song et al., 2020
Virtual decision room vs. computer mediated communication (CMC)	Social presence, Immersion, Shared understanding, Efficiency, Consensus, Process satisfaction, Outcome satisfaction, Cohesion	Schouten, van den Hooff, Feldberg, 2013
Emotional involvement in VE	Sense of spatial presence	Wirth, Hofer, Schramm, 2012
Team members' avatar (similar avatar vs. different avatars)	Performance, Social attraction, Group identification, Trust	Van Der Land et al., 2014

Regarding the independent variables, there are three categories encountered: variables related to the level of immersion in the virtual environment or to the use of 2D vs. 3D communication, variables that are measuring initial emotional state, and variables related to the similarity of the virtual presence/avatar.

The map of the dependent variables is more complex, mixing attitudes, cognitive reactions, and behavioral intentions. At the attitude level, the variables can be grouped into: (1) attitudes towards the virtual interaction (satisfaction, perceived autonomy, perceived authenticity, enjoyment arousal, level of engagement, social presence/body transfer, attention, interactivity, or credibility); (2) attitudes towards the device; (3) attitudes towards the content (brand attitude, attitude on the information transmitted); and (4) attitudes towards the group interaction (consensus process satisfaction, cohesion outcome satisfaction, performance, social attraction, group identification, trust). At the cognitive level, recall on the brand is being measured. At the behavioral level, studies are interested in analyzing continuation intention to use the VR and willingness to buy.

Results show that VR has influence on people's minds and how they perceive the human body, becoming a daily repertory of communication by having the capacity to engender certain feelings of closeness from distance. VR is an important tool for improving the levels of spatial presence, social presence, body transfer and embodiment. In the journalism field, VR has also made changes concerning the modality of transmitting the news, as the journalism domain has started to use this technology, even though some researchers have claimed that, at present, the level of public immersion is limited. There are also articles that emphasize the fact that VR increases the team performance and the interest of performing certain actions at children. At the same time VR has potential on increasing the levels of brand recall, purchase intentions and brand learning.

Yet, there were studies that conclude that VR devices may not improve the experience, especially when referring to the advertising industry, since the users respond to the advertised product rather than to the presence of the technology. Moreover, in some instances, VR is a diversion because it decreases the users' level of knowledge.

Nevertheless, considering all the pros and cons of VR, some studies underline the fact that VR can be considered a future technology that can be utilized in different domains for improving the quality of work.

4.5. Technical aspects

For a complete image of the analyzed studies on VR in communication, the technical aspects are being emphasized. Table 9 indicates five different technical categories: head-mounted displays (HMDs), softs/systems, games, videos, and other devices.

Table 9. A summary on the technical assets used within VR and communication research

HMDs	nVisorSX, nVisorSX111, Oculus Rift, HTC Vive VR machine, Facebook-backed Oculus Rift, Google cardboards, Samsung Gear VR, Oculus Rift Development Kit 2, Oculus Rift S, Oculus Quest, Oculus Go
SOFTS/SYSTEMS	Photoshop 2, Worldviz Vizard, Worldviz PPTH head tracker, Open Natural Interface body and head tracker, VR golf simulator, YouTube, NYTVR app, Times` mobile application, GOM Player, Oculus mobile platform, Avatars, AcqKnowledge software, Mindware software, Skeletal tracking, Chrome browser, WordPress, SecondLife site, Microsoft Kinect for Windows
GAMES	EverQuest II, VR survival horror game, Don King`s Showtime Boxing, First Delta environment game, The Sims social
VIDEOS	Under the canopy-Jaunt VR, 360° video
OTHER DEVICES	Logitech UE Boom speakers, Monitor, Sony Play Station VR, Play Station 2, Iphone 6, Samsung Galaxy S6, Samsung Galaxy S7, Minnesota Independence Cardiograph (Model 204 B), Cartonics (Model 7000) wired blood pressure monitor, Impedance cardiograph (ICG)), Electrocardiograph (EKG), Wii console, GoPro Hero 3 camera, Mac Computer, TV, Laptop, Biopac MP-150

5. Conclusion

The present study examines the studies on VR published in the field of communication from 2010 up to 2020 with the purpose of approaching the VR trends within the most impactful and visible communication journals. The results show that the number of published articles has increased starting with 2019, which demonstrates that VR starts to generate interest in the communication domain, implicitly in the communication research and literature. Based on a sample of 62 scientific articles, the aim of the present literature review is threefold.

First, the inquiry is focused on the thematic patterns regarding the use of VR in communication journals and how they have evolved (RQ1). Most of the studies have their

topics in the technology exploration and entertainment context, as many articles illustrate applications of the use of VR which provide entertainment for the users. Concerning the directions of interest, the followed patterns and the trends, the results suggest several directions of interest: behavioral intention, health, games, technology adoption and acceptance, journalism, emotions, presence, arts, perceived colocation, self-endorsing, brand recall, user's satisfaction, nature, embodiment and team performance. At the evolution level, since the first papers in the field are approaching VR in general manner, latter articles are emphasizing on the use of VR in health and mental health issues, as well-being or empathy, and on other very specific and up-to-date sub-domains, as climate change, social media, human rights, or advertising. There is an extensive increase both in the number of articles and in the topics of interest throughout the analyzed years.

Second, the study aims to develop a map of the theories used when talking about the link between VR and communication domain (RQ2). A vast number of theories have been identified within the analyzed sample. They have been grouped in three categories: psychology or human behavior theories, media related theories, and technology acceptance theories. These theories are usually mixing among themselves to explain perceptions and intentions. The most used theories are Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behavior, Media Richness Theory, Uses and Gratification Theory and Theory of Social Presence, and Technology Acceptance Model.

Third, the review intends to offer an overview on the methodological designs and technical features that are preferred when focusing on the implications of VR (RQ3). The review reveals that the experiment is the most exploited research method. This result indicates that VR is a perceptible technology, and it can generate responses through direct interaction. The methodological designs are mainly focusing on finding relevant causes at three levels: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. Linked to the research methods are the technical aspects. In addition to the specific devices of this type of technology, other devices or systems are needed to complete the research methodology. This indicate that VR is not an elementary technology, but a technology that in turn involves a multitude of other subassemblies that make virtual experience possible.

The conclusions of the studies reveal that even though VR is a new interest direction for communication scholars, it can generate contradictions among them. VR can contribute to research results in both positive and negative manners. Furthermore, the conclusions assigned some accurate research directions in which VR can have applicability, directions that are still in the process of shaping and directions in which VR has lesser extent.

Even though literature on VR topic in social sciences is on its early stages of development, the present paper contributes to the development of VR literature in the field of communication, by offering a synthesized review of the existing contributions in the domain. Furthermore, this paper aims to inform scholars about all developments in the context of VR in communication, serving as a guide.

The main limit of the paper refers to sampling procedure. The study analyzes only academic articles published in top international communication journals (Q1 and Q2 Clarivate quartiles), excluding other types of publications, and other international valuable databases.

Nevertheless, the current review may lead to future research, as it identified certain areas for enhancement. A consideration would be introducing the VR technology in corporations' communication departments, to generate more notoriety about this type of technology among consumers, through the exposed content. Another consideration would be integrating it in the university curriculum for the specialized departments of communication an exclusive subject about VR, so that the future specialists in the field can have the opportunity to prepare for all the challenges on the market.

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Adoption and Use of Social Media in the Newsroom Operations of Selected Television Stations in Nigeria

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Abstract: Just about two decades or more ago, journalists and audience relied heavily on direct sources and heavily relied on them for firsthand information on happenings. Whereas journalists relied on people (sources) and events for news, audience patiently waited for journalists to process news and get them delivered at news time. However, all that has changed in modern times – and the phenomena responsible for that are technological innovations such as the new media, of which social media is part and parcel. Advancement in technology is bridging the gap and ensuring things are done differently. Social media is gradually gaining the influence of being a major source of news for all – audience and journalists alike. The innumerable ways newsroom staff explore possibilities of the technology is what this research sought to unravel. With the use of survey methodology, the study investigated specific ways social media is affecting newsroom operations of television stations in Nigeria. Findings of the research show that social media adoption in the media organisations studied is reasonably high and the platforms serve as sources of news just as they are equally used for news dissemination. The study recommends that while the adoption is necessary, users of social media (especially journalists) must be wary as platforms can easily be used to spread unverified information and outright misinformation.

Keywords: new media, audience, journalists, use, broadcast.

1. Introduction

The new media, internet and associated technologies are now part of everyday life for people all over the world. Whether it is keeping up with friends, relatives and loved ones through chats, video or voice calls, or accessing news at the fingertip, or surfing the internet to get information about virtually everything, technology is in no small measure changing the way people live their lives and perform tasks. Such migration from what we used to know to what it is now, coupled with the role of technologies in the mix, is attracting discourse in academic circles. Journalists and media organisations are, however,

not left out in the conversations as they are also direct recipients of the development, just as the constant changes witnessed therein and there from can only be described as “sweeping”.

In the 21st century, ICTs provide the required platforms for the processing and dissemination of information (Idowu, Oladejo, Balogun & Sarumi, 2019). Social media draws its strength from the Internet, and has been categorised by different scholars as new media platform (Agbawe, 2018). Since the advent of social media, journalism and the media landscape have not remained the same. This, notwithstanding, is a subtle way to caption the sweeping impact of technological innovations on the media industry. From time immemorial, technological improvements have always been received by the media with mixed feelings. On one hand, the media sees promising input that technology brings, and on the other, jobs get threatened. However, technology has always been channeled towards positive usage and adoption has always turned out to be the way forward for the media.

Social media has changed information management in dramatic ways. For example, ways that people search for information online or virtual platforms are completely different from older methods. According to Didiugwu, Ezugwu and Ekwe (2015), new media has brought about a drastic change in the way people search for, process, publish, store and consume information. The much talked about new media innovations include social media. Just like other technological breakthroughs, social media has revolutionised information management in its entirety. Journalism is being impacted by the very presence of certain social networking sites such as Facebook, Google news, Twitter and many more (Rodman, 2009, as cited in Talabi, 2011).

A recent report by DataReportal (2021) revealed that 33 million people in Nigeria actively use social media. When matched with the country’s population of 208.8 million people, the figure of social media users in Nigeria represents 15.8 percent of the entire population (Kemp, 2021). Relatedly, there are 7.8 billion people in the world, and 4.2 billion – which is a representative of 53.6 percent of the total population are active social media users (John, 2021). A careful look at Nigeria’s usage statistics, would make one wonder why the figure is meagre when compared to the 104.4 million Nigerians the report claims are internet users. However, the focus of this research was to assess the adoption of social media in the newsroom operation of select television stations in Nigeria. In line with this, journalists who make use of social media platforms were sampled.

Social media forms part of the much talked about electronic communication and is so far seen as the environment with the highest activity on the internet (Lynne, as cited in Apuke, 2016). What attracts such activity is the interactivity feature of social media. As people stay on the internet to communicate with loved ones and friends, and as issues are discussed, so are high activities recorded on virtual platforms. Such activities also get people glued as they continue in their engagement with friends, family and acquaintances over a long period of time. According to Lewis and Molyneux (2019) social media has a vast diffusion which makes it a useful tool for “social life at large and news in particular” (p. 2586). Social media platforms as sources of news continue to grow, and both journalists and audience have come to terms with the reality as to the importance of the technological evolution (Agbo & Chukwuma, 2016).

Amongst the several possibilities of social media is its ability to turn everyone to content creator. Citizen journalism thrives more on social media as many persons cannot afford a transmitter to broadcast radio or television signals on a one to one or one to many bases. However, with internet access and the use of varied social media platforms, a mobile phone can be used as a transmitter with capacity to broadcast news and similar contents. In like manner, the journalist can (on the authorisation of line editor or supervisor) post media content on behalf of his media organisation – either on officially recognised handle or page, or on a personal account with link provided for audience to also visit official organisation's page or handle for more reports.

Social media also integrates multimedia capabilities. Video, pictures, text, 2D and 3D contents can be uploaded with the help of social media allowing journalists and media organisations to maintain contacts with their audience. Generally, new media technologies give flexibility to the media to keep their audience informed whether news time or not – such audience members who may not have the luxury of time to watch television or listen to radio as the case may be (Igyuve, Inobemhe, Udeh & Ugber, 2020). In other words, audience members can choose when to listen or watch media programme as new media technologies provide the capacity to store and retrieve media content through the internet. For example, through Podcast and YouTube (both with capacity to serve as archives with the help of the Internet), audience of broadcast media organisations can catch up with any programme or missed news broadcast.

Reporters and other journalists also have the flexibility of making use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and many more to file in reports to the newsroom as the news breaks (Ogundele, 2013). What was obtainable decades ago was that journalists had to join a queue to be able to use a single available fax machine to send news back to their respective media organisations. However, social media has bridged such gaps and provided the on-site journalist with the capacity to broadcast news instantaneously (Nielsen & Schröder, 2014; Cherubini, 2018). The Nigerian journalist knows the importance of social media just as much as he knows what a shift in technological era holds for the practice (Apeh, 2016). It is based on this premise that this study sought to research the adoption and use of social media in the newsroom operations of selected television stations in Nigeria.

2. Statement of the problem

At every stage in technological evolution, the media of the era always rely on technologies to reach the audience. From simple tools such as writing pen and paper to that of the printing press, and then later the era of the transmitters, journalism has always thrived on technologies. Before the advent of new media, the reporter relied on old journalism tools such as telex, facsimile, standard typewriters, microcassettes recorder, and so much more (Abu-Fadil, 2017). However, in modern times, the computer has replaced the old typewriter, mobiles phones can now perform the exact function of the tape recorders while the internet and social media now serves as newsgathering and dissemination tools.

Newsroom operations involve newsgathering, processing and dissemination (Igyuve et al., 2020). The Nigerian journalist has struggled overtime with news management – gathering, processing and dissemination, due to lack of modern or adequate tools (Santas & Ogoshi, 2016; Eludu & Emeka, 2016). While their counterparts in development world have gone far in the adoption of new media in the newsroom, several news outlets and personnel in developing countries such as Nigeria are still struggling with the adoption of these innovations in their operations. Therefore, this study assesses the adoption of social media in the newsroom operations of television stations in Nigeria.

3. Objectives of the study and research questions

From the above stated problem, this study will therefore pursue the following objectives:

1. to identify the social media types or platforms used in newsroom operations of the selected media organisations in Nigeria;
2. to determine their uses in the newsroom operations of the media organisations in Nigeria;
3. to ascertain the level of adoption of the identified social media platforms;
4. to determine the impact of the adopted social media platforms in the newsroom operations;
5. to identify the challenges in the adoption and usage of social media in newsroom of the selected stations.

Research questions. From the stated objectives, the following research questions have been formulated to guide the study:

- RQ1: What are the social media platforms adopted in the newsroom operations?
RQ2: What are their uses in the newsroom operations?
RQ3: What is the level of adoption of social media in the organisations under study?
RQ4: What is the impact of the adoption of social media?
RQ5: What are the challenges in the adoption and usage of social media?

4. Review of literature

Literature abounds on the adoption and use of social media in newsroom operations. In a study by Apuke (2016), journalists were found to be familiar with social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. However, the study revealed that Facebook is the most popular social media platform amongst journalists in Jalingo metropolis. The study also acknowledged that social media types are numerous – it identified Twitter, and YouTube as other social media forms known to journalists in the area of focus. The study sought to find out the adoption of social media by journalists in Jalingo, Taraba State Nigeria.

The most common types of social media available include discussion forums, social networks, networks that specialises on image sharing, bookmarking networks, publishing and blogging sites, networks with speciality in consumer review, networks that specialise on economy sharing, social shopping networks, and video hosting networks (Indeed Career Guide, 2021). Similarly, Go (2019) provided a list of the types of social media. According to Go, social media types include news websites, networking websites, photo and video sharing sites, microblogging websites, review sites and social media for everyone such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, Yelp, and Google business. Hanley (2014) finds that Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube are among the social media used at a local television station.

Based on identified types, social media has varied uses. Social media news sites provide users with links to access articles, videos, podcasts and so on (Go, 2019). The amazing thing about this capability provided by social media is that traditional news outlets can also take advantage of available features to share news content with a wider audience. Apuke (2016) reveals that journalists make use of Facebook (which is a social media type) because of its wider coverage and the opportunity to access news sources. This finding implies that journalists take advantage of social media as a source of news. In a 2021 digital report (John, 2021), it was found that Google received the highest visits from Nigerians over the period covered with over 220 million hits. The implication of this is that Nigerians make use of the internet for varied reasons ranging from google search to research and even dating.

WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook messenger, Twitter, Telegram, LinkedIn, Tiktok, and Snapchat top the list of the most used social media platforms in Nigeria (John, 2021). John further reveals that WhatsApp boasts of 93 percent of total social media users in Nigeria. With this figure, WhatsApp remains the most popular social media messaging application known to Nigerians. Agreeing, Didiugwu Ezugwu and Ekwe (2015) quoting Tomno (2012) reveal that the most commonly used social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google Plus, Quantcast, Instagram, VK, Flickr, Vine Rank, Meetup, Tagged, Ask.fm, and Classmates.

A study by Didiugwu et al. (2015) revealed that Nigerian journalists' use of social media platforms was inadequate despite the abundance of platforms from which they could choose. This was reflective of the opinion of 48 percent of total respondents to the survey. However, 40 percent of respondents claimed that Nigerian journalists make adequate use of social media. In other words, the study found out that Nigerian journalists do not have adequate access to social media platforms.

New media have played significant roles in the transformation of journalism practice to the extent that the internet has assumed a significant position with regards to being a major source of information (Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2013). The impacts of social media are innumerable as research reveals that journalists chose social media as journalism tool because with them, reports can be filed in from anywhere, just as much as they have made news monitoring a seamless process (Apuke, 2016). According to Idowu et al. (2019), social media use increases information supply. Platforms also help journalists and media organisations keep up with their audience as through alternative platforms, they can

always get in touch. Apuke (2016) observes that social media helps journalists in Nigeria to explore various sites regularly. In contrast, a study by Didiugwu et al. (2015) revealed that social media has impacted negatively on the performance of journalists in Nigeria.

Social media also comes with challenges, whether in their adoption or usage. Generally, some challenges that come with the use of social media include fear of privacy invasion, inability to cater for those with disability, problems of commercial advertising, the challenge of making terms of agreement a prerequisite to creating a profile or owning an account, and susceptibility to deception from users across spectrum (Kasturi & Vardhan, 2014). Challenges such as acquisition of knowledge and skills, financial difficulties, power supply issues, and uncoordinated cyber knowledge also bedevil journalism in their quest to adopt new media technologies (Nwanne, 2016).

5. Research method

This research adopted both quantitative and qualitative survey. Due to the nature of the study, the researcher purposively selected four television stations in Nigeria – two apiece from Southern and Northern regions of the country. Staff of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) headquarters, Abuja and Lagos, African Independent Television (AIT), headquarters, Abuja and Lagos are the primary selected population for the study. The four broadcast stations were selected for even geographical spread – two apiece from Southern and Northern Nigeria. Another reason for the selection was to achieve a balance in term of ownership. Whereas, NTA is public-owned media organisation, AIT is privately-owned.

Based on data from the Human Resources Units/Departments of NTA and AIT, the total number of journalists stands at 204. The technique for this survey is total population sampling. According to Glen (2018), total population sampling is a type of purposive sampling technique which affords the researcher opportunity to survey the entire population, and it is only possible when it is of a manageable size. Morris (n.d.) states that once a population shrinks – say less than 300, it is most advisable to survey everyone in the population. Questionnaire is the instrument of data collection. Whereas the questionnaire was directly mailed to some respondents, others received the link to the survey through their WhatsApp lines.

6. Results

Online survey was created and opened between 10th –29th February, 2021 and as of the time the researchers stopped accepting responses, 198 responses had already been received. Implication of this is that the study received a response rate of 97% within the period.

6.1. Bio-data of respondents

Available data from the online survey shows that 110 (55.6%) respondents are male while 88 (44.4%) are female. Data on age distribution of respondents reveals that 54 (27.3%) are within the age bracket of 18-25, 67 (33.8%) of them falls within ages 26-35. In addition, 46 (23.2%) are between 36 and 45 years of age, while 31 (15.7%) are of ages 46 and above.

For respondents' educational backgrounds, data analysed from the gathered information indicate that 30 (15.2%) are either GCE A level/NCE or National Diploma holders, 139 (70.2%) possess a minimum of Higher National Diploma (HND) or Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree, while 29 (14.6%) indicated that they are MSc holders. Whereas, 70 (35.4%) indicated that they are single, 100 (50.5%) indicated they are married. However, 28 (14.1%) did not disclose their marital status as they indicated that they prefer not to say.

A total of 47 (23.7%) out of the total respondents of 198 indicated they are staff of African Independent Television Abuja (headquarters), 49 (24.7%) said they work with the Lagos headquarters of the same organisation. Relatedly, a total of 52 (26.3%) respondents indicated that they are staff of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Abuja headquarters while 50 (25.3%) said they are in the Lagos studios of the organisation.

Table 1. Knowledge of social media

S/N	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	196	99%
2.	No	0	0%
3.	Not sure	2	1%
Total		198	100%

Source: authors' elaboration

Table 1 presents data from the question that interrogated respondents' knowledge of social media. 196 (99%) of the respondents have knowledge while 2 (1%) indicated they are not sure of having knowledge of social media. This indicates that respondents have adequate knowledge of social media.

Table 2. Types of social media used in newsroom operations

S/N	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Facebook	5	2.5%
2.	WhatsApp	13	6.6%
3.	Twitter	9	4.5%
4.	YouTube	7	3.5%
5.	Telegram	5	2.5%
6.	Others	4	2.1%
7.	All of the above	153	77.3%
8.	None of the above	2	1%
Total		198	100%

Source: authors' elaboration

Data available in table 2 show that 5 (2.5%) said, Facebook is the social media used in newsroom operations of their media organisations, 13 (6.6%) said the social media type is WhatsApp. Similarly, 9 (4.5%) indicated that Twitter is the social media type popular within their organisations, 7 (3.5%) selected YouTube, another 5 (2.5%) selected Telegram, 4 (2.1%) respondents believe other social media types not listed are adopted in their newsroom. However, 153 (77.3%) believe all the aforementioned social media types are adopted for newsroom operations in their organisations while 2 (1%) do not think any of the listed are adopted social media. Data show that respondents are familiar the social media types as provided in the questionnaire.

Table 3. Usefulness of social media in newsroom operations

S/N	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Strongly agree	100	50.5%
2.	Agree	80	40.4%
3.	Strongly disagree	10	5.1%
4.	Disagree	8	4%
Total		198	100%

Source: authors' elaboration

Data from table 3 above show that 100 (50.5%) respondents strongly agree that the adopted social media are useful in newsroom operations, 80 (40.4%) agree, 10 (5.1%) strongly disagree while 8 (4%) disagreed. Data reveal that social media have become really useful in newsroom operations which include newsgathering, production and dissemination.

Table 4. Respondents' views on the uses of social media in the newsroom.

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Sources of news (newsgathering)	8	4%
For news dissemination	10	5.1%
To communicate and get feedback from audience	5	2.5%
Serves as virtual meeting point for journalist and other newsroom staff	15	7.6%
All of the above	158	79.8%
None of the above	2	1%
Total	198	100%

Source: authors' elaboration

Data in table 4 above indicate that social media are sources of news, being a position of 8 respondents representing 4%. That social media is used for news dissemination is the opinion of 10 (5.1%) respondents, 5 (2.5%) said social media are used to communicate and get feedback from audience. Meanwhile, 15 respondents representing 7.6% said social media serves as virtual meeting point for journalists and other newsroom staff. A total of 158 (79.8%) indicated that social media is used for all of the points itemised in the questionnaire, while 2 (1%) said social media is not used for any of the itemised functions. This means that social media are useful for the very traditional media activities and more as respondents agree that platforms serves as meeting point for all newsroom staff.

Table 5. Respondents' views on whether the adoption of social media in their organisation is the reason why they have access

S/N	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	8	4.1%
2.	No	185	93.4%
3.	Prefer not to say	3	1.5%
4.	Not sure	2	1%
	Total	198	100%

Source: authors' elaboration

Data available in table 5 show that 8 (4.1%) said the adoption of social media in their organisation is the reason why they have access, while 185 (93.4%) did not agree. 3 (1.5%) prefer not to say, and another 2 (1%) were not sure if the adoption is the reason for the access they have. This shows that staff have gone the extra mile to gain access to social media platforms regardless of whether the media organisations provide support for

acquisition of enabling gadgets of technologies or not. Gadgets or services such as mobile phones, computer, internet services are all needed for anyone to gain access to social media platforms.

Table 6. Respondents' views on the extent of social media adoption in their organisation

S/N	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Very much	119	60%
2.	Moderately	56	28.3%
3.	Not so much	15	7.6%
4.	Not at all	8	4.1%
Total		198	100%

Source: authors' elaboration

On what extent social media has been adopted in media organisations studied, data in table 6 above show that 119 (60%) of the total respondents believe that adoption is very much, while 56 (28.3%) think the adoption is moderate. 15 respondents representing 15 (7.6%) believe the adoption is not so much while 8 (4.1%) think they are not adopted at all. This indicates that the media organisations studied have adopted social media in their operation since they are adjudged useful by staff.

Table 7. Respondents' views on whether social media have impact on newsroom operations.

S/N	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Strongly agree	65	32.8%
2.	Agree	127	64.2%
3.	Strongly disagree	3	1.5%
4.	Disagree	3	1.5%
Total		198	100%

Source: authors' elaboration

Data in table 7 show that 65 (32.8%) strongly agreed that social media has impacted newsroom operations of their organisation, while 127 (64.2%) agreed. Meanwhile, 3 respondents which is a representative of 1.5% of the total participants in the survey strongly disagreed while 3 (1.5%) simply disagreed that social media has any impact on newsroom operations of their organisations. From the data in the table, we can see that social media has impact on newsroom operations of the selected media organisations.

Table 8. Impacts of social media on newsroom operations

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Timely newsgathering and delivery	4	2.1%
Interactivity of the platforms enables immediate feedback	8	4%
Serves as alternative in the case of electronic failure (backup capabilities and broadcast channels)	6	3%
Reduces the stress of associated with old traditional tools	9	4.5%
Enables multimedia and across media news dissemination (multimedia journalism and simulcast possibilities)	15	7.6%
Helps in bridging the gap between journalists on the field and newsroom crew members	16	8.1%
All of the above	134	67.7%
None of the above	6	3%
Total	198	100%

Source: authors' elaboration

Data in table 8 reflects respondents' views on the impact of social media on newsroom operations of the studied television stations. 4 (2.1%) think social media platforms are responsible for timely newsgathering, 8 (4%) believe interactivity of the platforms enables immediate feedback, 6 (3%) think that social media being an alternative in the case of electronic failure is the way they have impacted newsroom. Respondents totaling 9 (4.5%) are of the opinion that social media reduces stress associated with old traditional tools, 15 (7.6%) think social media enables multimedia and across media dissemination (multimedia journalism and simulcast possibilities), while 16 (8.1%) believe social media helps in bridging the gap between journalists on the field and newsroom crew members. Meanwhile, 134 representing 67.7% think all the itemised options are the ways social media impact the newsroom of their organisations, while 6 (3%) believe social media has no impact on newsroom operations at all. This shows that social media comes with numerous advantages of which bridging the gap between journalists on the field and newsroom crew is considered the greatest. However, respondents all agreed that timeliness, opportunity for feedback, backup capabilities, easing of stress due to ease-of-use are other positive impacts of social media on newsroom AIT and NTA.

Table 9. Respondents' views on if there are challenges associated with social media adoption and usage in newsroom operations

S/N	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	189	95.5%
2.	No	3	1.5%
3.	Not sure	3	1.5%
4.	Prefer not to say	3	1.5%
Total		198	100%

Source: authors' elaboration

Data in table 9 above present respondents' views on whether there exist visible challenges with social media adoption and use in the newsroom of their organisations. While 189 (95.5%) indicated "yes" – meaning there are challenges, 3 (1.3%) said "no" – which means there are no challenges. However, 3 (1.5%) said they are not sure while 3 (1.5%) prefer not to answer the question posed in the questionnaire. This shows that there are challenges associated with social media adoption and usage in the newsroom operations of NTA and AIT Abuja and Lagos.

Table 10: Respondents' views on visible challenges

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate funding	19	9.6%
Power supply challenge coupled with lack of alternative power source	15	7.6%
Delay in requisite skill acquisition (on advanced social media use) by some journalists	10	5.1%
Lack of incentives to enable journalists acquire new social media access tools or repair faulty ones (Tools such as mobile phones, personal computers tablet computers and so on)	20	10.1%
Ethical considerations	20	10.1%
All of the above	105	53%
None of the above	9	4.5%
Total	198	100%

Source: authors' elaboration

Data in table 10 above are responses to the question that sought respondents' views on the visible challenges with adoption and use of social media in their respective

media organisations. Data show that 19 (9.6%) respondents are of the opinion that inadequate funding is a challenge, 15 (7.6%) think power supply challenge coupled with lack of alternative power source is the challenge, while 10 respondents representing 5.1% believe delay in requisite skill acquisition on advanced social media use by some journalists is the challenge. 20 (10.1%) respondents think the challenge has to do with lack of incentives to enable journalists acquire new social media access tools or repair faulty ones, 20 (10.1%) believe ethical considerations is the challenge, and 105 (53%) are of the opinion that all the itemised points are the challenges with social media adoption. However, 9 (4.5%) do not believe any of the points raised pose any challenge to social media adoption. This is indicative that media organisations in Nigeria face challenges in the adoption of social media in their newsroom operations.

7. Discussion of findings

The study found out that journalists in Africa Independent Television and Nigeria Television Authority have knowledge of social media as majority of them are familiar with platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram and others. It means journalists in the Nigerian media have adequate knowledge of the new media innovation – social media. This finding aligns with previous studies that find that journalists and media organisation know about new media and social media in particular (see Apuke, 2016; Igyuve et al., 2020). For journalists to make use of social media platforms, they must have adequate knowledge of the particular technologies. In other words, for adoption to take place, there must be knowledge of the technologies.

This study also found out that the adopted social media platforms are useful in the newsroom operations of the selected broadcast media organisations. Journalists in the newsroom of AIT and NTA adopt the platforms as they serve as sources of news and can also be used in news dissemination. Relatedly, a similar study finds that new media technologies aid media organisations to get news to the audience even before the traditional “news time” (Igyuve et al., 2020, p. 256). In agreement, Guanah and Ojo (2018) aver that getting the latest news to the audience is a goal by media organisations and that social media such as Twitter can help in this regard just before the traditional news outlet will report same news content at news time. Therefore, audience members can access news on-the-go without having to wait for news time, and do not necessarily need to depend on a television or radio set before they can get breaking news from their preferred news source. This study finds that social media platforms are useful in the sampled media organisation in the area of feedback from audience, and can also serve as meeting point for journalists and other newsroom staff.

On the motivation factors behind journalists’ access to platforms and tools that power social media, findings of this study found that those who have access are self-motivated and self-sponsored. In other words, the gadgets through which journalists have access to social media are personal belongings and were bought by individual users and not

some form of incentives from the organisation. This aligns with findings of a study by Gapsiso and Wilson (2014), that mobiles phones used by journalists of Borno Radio and Television (BRTV) are bought by individuals for personal use but had to channel same to work for their media organisation. However, on both sides – at the level of journalists and at organisations' level, the adoption of social media for newsroom operations is adequate.

Findings from the online survey also reveal that social media has impacted on newsroom operations of Africa Independent Television – AIT, as well as the Nigeria Television Authority – NTA. Explicating on the areas of impact, respondents agreed that social media has impacted newsroom in the areas of timely newsgathering and delivery, immediate feedback as a result of interactive features that come with them. This aligns with the position of Hanley (2014) that social media such as Facebook serves as platform where television stations get instant feedback from their audience. Again, audience members can interact with one another and with the media organisation the platforms. Social media also comes with back-up capabilities as they serve as alternative broadcast channels in case of electronic and mechanical failure. Social media also reduces stress associated with traditional tools, and enables multimedia and across media news dissemination. The gap that hitherto existed between journalists on the field and newsroom crew members has been bridged as a result of technological innovations – and social media is part of such improvement.

However, there are some challenges with adoption and use of social media for newsroom operations. Challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of alternative power source and epileptic power supply, delay in requisite knowledge acquisition on advanced social media usage on the part of some journalists are seen to be standing on the way in the adoption of social media for newsroom operations in the studied media organisations. These findings align with those of Wilson and Gapsiso (2009), Gapsiso and Wilson (2010; 2014), and Haliso (2011). In addition, this study, however, finds that lack of incentives to enable journalists get new social media access tools such as mobile phones, personal computers, tablet computers and many more, or to repair faulty ones, is posing as challenge to adoption and use of social media in newsroom operations of the studied media organisations – AIT and NTA. The study also identified ethical consideration as a factor in social media adoption. Unlike citizen journalists, traditional media journalists are bound by certain ethical considerations as they must be wary of the use of platforms to avoid being axed by their respective organisations or regulatory agencies.

8. Conclusion

The level of adoption and use of social media amongst journalists in the media organisations studied is of a reasonable extent. The platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp serve as newsgathering and dissemination channels for journalists and their media organisations. Media organisations in Nigeria such as AIT and NTA use social media as alternate broadcast platforms just to ensure their audience do not miss anything – modern broadcasting entails an all-inclusive approach to the practice. Therefore, with

available technologies, subsequent adoption and use, audience members who are not opportune to stay by a television set can access news through their mobile devices – either from the television websites or their social media handles. All these capabilities are new media technologies innovation of which social media is an important aspect.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereunder outlined:

1. Journalists, news organisations and users who rely on social media as sources of news should be wary of the powers of the platforms, where manipulations of high standards are enabled and rife. There must be a fact-checking process before posting news generated from social media. Unlike the traditional media forms, social media influencers and users are not bound by any ethical considerations and could afford to be inconsiderate.

2. Media organisations should embark on programmes to ensure acquisition of tools for journalists to aid them in carrying out their duties. Such tools should be customised and strictly for the purpose they are meant for. That way, journalists can have access to social media platforms on dedicated gadgets and this will enhance performance and turn-around time in news gathering.

3. Training and re-training of staff on adoption, deployment and use of new media technologies should be made a priority. Media organisations should take cognizance of the notion that technology remains the future of broadcasting. Therefore, technological advancement must be seen as opportunities to serve the audience better and be embraced after a careful assessment of the pros and cons.

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The Transformation of Radio Journalists' Strategies in the Soviet Lithuania

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Abstract. After the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania in 1940, the only radio operating in Lithuania came under total Soviet control. A multi-level censorship mechanism controlled people working on radio. In the late Soviet decade, The Perestroika and Glasnost policies launched by Soviet leader Gorbachev allowed Lithuanian radio workers to test the limits of the censorship mechanism. The liberation movement that began in 1988 in Lithuania also contributed to this. This study aims to determine how the individual strategies of people working in the Soviet Lithuanian radio field changed during the late Soviet era (1980–1990). In this study, based on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, radio is understood as a field where each participant acts according to an individual strategy.

Keywords: journalists, strategies, Soviet, Lithuania, radio.

1. Introduction

The radio of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (Lithuanian SSR)¹ was an important propaganda mechanism during the Soviet period in Lithuania (Aleknonis, 2006, p. 73). During the first Soviet occupation (1940–1941), the Soviet government began an intensive expansion of radio in Soviet Lithuania, which lasted until the end of the second occupation (1944–1990) (Blynaitė, 2016, p. 151). According to sociological research done in 1982, radio receivers were owned by 97.6 per cent of the inhabitants of the Soviet Lithuania (Štikelis, 1983, p. 192). The Soviet propaganda mechanism involved many public discourse creators: writers and journalists who often did not only have to take up the role of the spreaders of the Soviet ideology but also decide on a strategy used within their field. In the early Soviet era, people who worked on Soviet Lithuanian radio mostly followed a conformance strategy (Aleknonis, 2006, p. 83). Journalists had to follow communist ideology

¹ Lithuanian radio broadcasts began in 1926. In 1940 when the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania, radio was included in the Soviet All-Union Radio Committee in Moscow. The Soviets replaced radio management and staff, founded agitation and propaganda editorial offices. In 1941 when Nazi Germany occupied Lithuania, radio was taken over by the German civil administration. After the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania for the second time in 1944, the radio became a part of the Soviet All-Union Radio Committee again. During the entire occupation of the USSR, Lithuanian radio was strictly controlled and censored. In 1988 a liberation movement started in Lithuania, resulting in Independence in 1990 (Aleknonis, 2006, pp. 35–114; Blynaitė, 2016, pp. 150–406).

and censorship mechanism when creating the shows (Aleknonis, 2006, pp. 84–85). Although the official censorship functioned in Lithuania almost up to the restoration of Independence (1990), in the last decade of the Soviet period (1980–1990), certain favourable conditions appeared for the change of action strategies in the field of the Soviet radio. Journalists could try limits because of Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika and Glasnost policy (Blynaitė, 2016, pp. 372–398).

Recently, more and more studies are being published that analyze the micro-level of the Soviet period in Lithuania (1940–1990) (Vaišnys, 2020; Šulcė, 2015; Ivanauskas, 2015; Ramonaitė, 2015; Vaiseta, 2012). It is important to note that these studies, unlike the previous ones, are oriented towards the little-studied individual level, which seeks to elucidate the behaviour strategies of a person living in the Soviet system (Mažeikis, 2010, p. 325).

Among the micro-level research in the post-Soviet space, it is necessary to distinguish between works of independent Russian researchers at the Levados Research Center in which the Soviet man is studied in various aspects (Gudkov, 2010; Gudkov, 2008). Alexei Yurchak explored how individuals living in the Soviet Union behaved in the late Soviet times. (Yurchak, 2006). When analyzing micro-level studies carried out in Lithuania, it should be noted that many of them are oriented towards the literature field. Tomas Venclova raised the idea of an internal censor in writers' minds in 1985 (Venclova, 1985). The latter narrative established itself in the field for several decades after restoring the Independence of Lithuania. A book of memoirs, *Writer and Censorship*, written in 1992, includes all representatives of the censor mechanisms (Glavlit, publishers, writers) memoirs and predominantly revolves around two types of narratives of adaptation to the rules (Sabonis, 1992). However, it is essential to mention that later Kęstutis Girnius criticized these memoirs, claiming that they justified adaptation. He was also one of the first to discuss the fact that the Lithuanian Soviet-era society is idealized by presenting it as a resistible one (Girnius, 1996). An even bigger break came about a decade ago when Nerija Putinaitė began to criticize the adaptation strategy often used in the Soviet era (Putinaitė, 2007). In recent years, this type of publication has become more prominent: Tomas Vaiseta's *Society of Boredom, Ideology and the Everyday in Later Soviet Period (1964–1984)* (Vaiseta, 2012), a collective work *Invisible Society of Soviet Era* (Ramonaitė, 2015), Vilius Ivanauskas's *Framed identity: Lithuanian Writers in the "Friendship of Nations Empire* (Ivanauskas, 2015) etc. Although the authors' conclusions do not necessarily coincide, several strategies can be distinguished from the above-mentioned works, which can be considered meaningful due to their repetition: adaptation, collaboration, resistance, framing, boredom. The field of radio journalism and its relation to the censorship mechanism is essentially unresolved, except for episodic cases, which are usually other parts of the study. For example, Žygintas Pečiulis, who studied the content of the Soviet Lithuanian television program, among other sections, analyzed how the staff of the mass propaganda agency assessed their relationship with the Soviet system (Pečiulis, 2013), Andrius Vaišnys studied the transformation of Soviet journalism in Lithuania based on content analysis and archival documents (Vaišnys, 2020). Focusing on the radio field, it should be noted that significant attention has been paid to foreign radio stations

broadcasts to the Soviet Union, the “Voice of America”, “Radio Free Europe” (Zakšauskienė, 2019) or radio interference cases (Pleikys, 1998). As far as the employees’ radio is concerned, it is essential to note the memoir book, written by the chairman of the Radio and Television Committee (Januitis, 1998). However, any more profound research is lacking.

2. Theoretical framework

The research relies on Pierre Bourdieu’s Field Theory.² The essential element of Bourdieu’s theory is the field. Bourdieu explains it as a network of objective relationships between positions or arrangements where specific logic is followed (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2003, p. 131). Because Bourdieu sees the society differentiated into many semi-autonomous fields, in principle, in any area: politics, art, science, etc., the field structure can be customized (Benson, 1999, pp. 463–498). Bourdieu himself long regarded the field of journalism as part of the political field and did not consider this journalistic field autonomous. For the first time, Bourdieu separated the journalistic field in a book, “On Television”, examining the commercializing French TV field (Bourdieu, 1998). However, the journalistic Field, which Bourdieu refers to as the microcosm, is characterized by a low level of autonomy, but the distinction of the field is that it has a mediating effect since they have the opportunity to enter and analyze other fields and later publicize it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2003, p. 29). Unlike other fields of culture, the journalistic field is much more dependent on external forces such as the field of economy or politics, which is in power with the journalistic field (Schirato, Webb, & Danaher, 2020, p. 184). It should be noted that speaking about the dependence of the field of journalism on the political field, Bourdieu points out that the communist system is an exceptional case. It can be claimed that the radio field was much more politically dependent than other fields of journalism since it was controlled both internally and externally.

First, the radio was structurally owned by the government and “became one of the many boards of the Ministry of Culture” (Januitis, 1998, p. 35). Secondly, it was developed as an analogue of the Moscow radio, starting with the same broadcasts, ending with the Moscow radio rebroadcasts (Aleknonis, 2006, p. 85). Thirdly, radio recording equipment was installed in 1948, and since then, the program has been broadcasted pre-recorded, it was easier to censor. Fourth, there was a strict censorship mechanism within the radio field, with the central axis being the censorship institution Glavlit (Aleknonis, 2006, p. 84). It is important to emphasize that Bourdieu researched the field of journalism, but not radio. Radio Field in the present work is treated as a separate field to which Bourdieu’s practices of journalism field are applied. A decision was made because Lithuanian SSR radio of the Soviet Era was one of the leading media tools.

² The term field was first mentioned in a Bourdieu article “Champ intellectuel et projet créateur” (1966). Also the basic principles of Bourdieu field theory were developed in these works: “Genèse et structure du champ religieux” (1971) and “Une interprétation de la théorie de la religion selon Max Weber” (1971) (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014).

The objective of this article is to analyze the structure of the relationship between journalists in the radio field and investigate how the individual strategies of acting in the Soviet radio field changed during the late Soviet period (1980–1990).

3. Methodology

The present research uses the method of oral history (Thompson, 2000; Thomson & Perks, 2015) that relies on in-depth interviews with event participants remembering a certain period of history. The oral history method allows to see how field participants saw specific events, reveal new research spaces, concentrate on deeper layers, and make assumptions about subjective factors, which are often difficult to reveal based on documents (Thompson, 2000, pp. 21–28). It should be noted that the opinions of scientists on the reliability of the method differ. Positivists question whether informants can objectively recall the historical events in which they participated. There is also a risk that the informant will take over the currently formed collective narrative, knowing how to talk about specific events in advance. The events are also remembered nostalgically. Another risk is the researcher's and informant's bias (Thomson & Perks, 2015, p. 9). Proponents of the method at the time argue that the subjectivity of memories allows to reveal the connections between the present and the past, between the individual and the past, and between individual and collective memories (Yow, 2016).

In order to reveal how the participants of the field saw themselves the transformation of Soviet Lithuanian radio in the late Soviet era, the method of oral history is used in this research. Nineteen semi-structured in-depth interviews with individuals who worked during the last decade of the Soviet period in Lithuanian SSR were conducted during the study (one part of those started working before 1985, while another part started working after Gorbachev came to power in 1985) (Kupetytė, 2018). During 1980-1990 the Lithuanian SSR radio consisted of three departments: Planning and Release Department, Announcers' Department, Sound Directors' Department. There were also eight editorials: Propaganda Editorial Board, Information Editorial Board, Children and Youth Editorial Board, Literature and Drama Editorial Board, Music editorial Board, Editorial board of Foreign Broadcasts, Editorial Board of Broadcasts in the Russian Language, Folk Recordings and Artistic collectives' Editorial Board (however, this editorial is not included in the study because it was technical and did not create content).³ All informants agreed that the interviews were recorded and permitted to use the material for scientific purposes. All the interviews were in Lithuanian and the excerpts for this study were translated by the author.

³ Compiled by the author based on the telephone book (1989) of the State Television and Radio Committee of the Lithuanian SSR. Personal archive of the employee of the Lithuanian National Radio and Television.

Table 1. List of Research Informants

Name Reference	Gender	Department/Board	Position	Started working
Informant 1	Male	Propaganda Editorial Board	Correspondent, editor	1985
Informant 2	Male	Propaganda Editorial Board	Correspondent, editor	1981
Informant 3	Male	Information Editorial Board	Head of the department	1965
Informant 4	Female	Information Editorial Board	Correspondent, editor	1977
Informant 5	Female	Information Editorial Board	Correspondent, editor	1971
Informant 6	Male	Announcers' Department	Announcer	1971
Informant 7	Female	Announcers' Department	Announcer	1974
Informant 8	Male	Announcers' Department	Announcer	1978
Informant 9	Female	Literature and Drama Editorial Board	Correspondent, editor	1981
Informant 10	Female	Children and Youth Editorial Board	Deputy Editor-in-Chief	1978
Informant 11	Male	Children and Youth Editorial Board	Correspondent	1985
Informant 12	Female	Editorial board of Foreign Broadcasts (programs in English)	Head of the department	1973
Informant 13	Male	Editorial board of Foreign Broadcasts (programs in English)	Correspondent, editor	1985
Informant 14	Female	Editorial board of Foreign Broadcasts (programs in Lithuanian)	Issuer	1985
Informant 15	Female	Editorial Board of Broadcasts in the Russian Language	Secretary in charge	1977
Informant 16	Female	Planning and Release Department	Head of the department	1976
Informant 17	Female	Music editorial Board	Head of the department	1979

Informant 18	Female	Sound Directors' Department	Sound director	1984
Informant 19	Male	Head Department	Vice-Chair of the Committee	1979

4. Results

4.1. Structure of the relationship between the journalists in the radio field

After analyzing the structure of employees' relations in the Soviet Lithuanian radio field, it can be stated that journalists competed on the radio for *career* and *recognition*.

By analyzing the *career* dimension of the period before 1987, it can be argued that the field participants were divided into those who wanted to take a leading position and those who did not pursue a career. It should be noted that journalists were raised from a correspondent to senior editor position or from a third to first category of announcer depending on the years they had worked in the past. At that time, senior positions were directly related to Communist Party loyalty. Journalists who wanted or were forced to become promoted to a higher position had to join the Communist Party. In general, field members who held a higher post can be divided into three categories:

1. *Strived for a career and were loyal to the party*: "[...] A deputy who is presently deceased would say: "Party is first, family is second."⁴

2. *They wanted a career but were not loyal to the party*: "[...] they forced me because I had a career [...] you know, from a junior editor to a chief editor, I was eventually forced."⁵

3. *They did not seek a career but were forced to pursue and join a Communist Party that they were not loyal to*: "[...] I did not show any initiative, but the secretary of the party would say that [...] she works very well, is honest, she should be accepted to the party [...] I thought what to say if I get proposed to join the party because once you get offered, it is not appropriate to decline. [...] the queue never came because there were people who wanted [...] those who wanted to make a career."⁶

It should be noted that, in general, field participants who did not seek to join the party considered entrants as careerists, rather than ideologically loyal to the Communist Party:

"[...] We all knew that here it means she is a careerist because, you know, joining the party was not an ideological step, it was purely a career plan, and everyone knew it, they looked with such a contempt like, well, a careerist joined the party, not that I believe in those ideals."⁷

⁴ Informant 5. The interview was recorded on December 13, 2017.

⁵ Informant 10. The interview was recorded on December 22, 2017.

⁶ Informant 4. The interview was recorded on February 12, 2017.

⁷ Informant 15. The interview was recorded on November 27, 2017.

Analyzing the *career* dimension after 1987 could be said that many people taking leadership positions have withdrawn from the field themselves. At that time, new admissions were no longer so closely related to the party affiliation. Although at the time the persons were still assigned to the highest positions by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, other newcomers to managerial positions were no longer required to join the party:

“I had just started to work as a regular editor, while he says to me: “You know, in this office, it is like that: if one is stupid, he will be the biggest boss. [...] Apparently, they were all appointed; I remember them all. Later, intelligent people started to come in, but the first was obedient guys who had to settle. This was almost a political job. [...] I was not a member of the party.

[...] And when you were not in charge of the department, you were not asked to join the party?

No, no, no. Already, as I say, [...] it was sometime just before, maybe a year or two left until the restoration of Independence of Lithuania.”⁸

In conclusion, it is essential to note that taking up high positions was not considered an achievement in the perspective of those field members who had a more critical relationship with the Soviet system. In this case, the opportunity to avoid joining the party was considered an achievement.

Analyzing the *recognition* dimension could be stated that during the whole research period (1980–1990), announcers dominated the position of journalists: “[...] it was the highest level [...]”⁹

First of all, the announcers gained an exceptional situation because they were the only ones who could talk in live broadcasts¹⁰:

“[...] When you make a mistake on air, you are on the rise of that shame [...], but much power has been given to the announcer. Well, when Chernobyl’s electrical power plant exploded, there was half an hour’s news; we received that message before the end and had to decide at our discretion.”¹¹

Secondly, the announcers, who were heard on the live stream, were quite well known for the significant coverage of the Lithuania SSR radio audience.

“For example, there are many actors, and reporters are lacking, and still, even our voices, whisper something very quietly, and they all hear [...] And from morning till night, some of those points (auth. radio, which in the Soviet times was installed in all the houses as it stood) and come to the clinic reception desk and you get your name.”¹²

It is important to note that the announcers, because of their reputation, had a relatively sizeable symbolic capital, which in the Soviet period could be converted into

⁸ Informant 12. The interview was recorded on November 16, 2017.

⁹ Informant 7. The interview was recorded on October 7, 2017.

¹⁰ Although radio broadcasts were recorded in advance during the Soviet era, news reports were read live on the air. As a result, highly credible individuals were hired for the position of the announcer.

¹¹ Informant 7. The interview was recorded on October 7, 2017.

¹² Informant 7. The interview was recorded on October 7, 2017.

social, and later economic capital, both inside the Lithuanian SSR radio field and the outside. By analyzing more widely, the announcers, due to their popularity outside the radio field, could easier connect with people who had access to economic capital, such as deficit goods:

“So, we would get coffee [...] mayonnaise, while peas and cucumbers were for the New Year, and the tables were so, we would bring, as we were already rich and would get everything.”¹³

It is important to note that the announcers felt their advantage over other field players inside the field as well. On the one hand, it was expressed through relationships between people:

“[...] Yes, it was an exceptional caste. [...] For example, operators were the low link [...]”¹⁴

On the other hand, the announcers could convert their prominence into the radio field into clearly visible privileges. For example, they received a higher salary than other field participants, could go on a holiday for two months and were served without a queue.

When analyzing the position of journalists who created content, it should be noted that in this case, the period should be divided into two parts: until 1987 and after 1987. It is important to note that the symbolic capital of journalists who created the content until 1987 was significantly lower than the announcers. On the one hand, according to the informants, they did not create journalistic content for which the audience could appreciate them. On the other hand, journalists did not have access to the direct airing or, in other words, they lacked the familiarity that the reporters had acquired. It can be argued that many journalists before 1987 worked in the radio field for economic capital. First of all, salaries were relatively high compared to the salaries received in Soviet Lithuania. In addition, it should be emphasized that journalists could turn out avoidance of criticism to material values, but it is important to note that the use of such opportunities depended on the journalist himself/herself:

“It was possible to sell oneself, for reporting it was always possible to lunch for the government's money [...] we go to the base to have a look around and there we also have Czech beers, and “Fanta”, and “Coca-Cola” [...] there are coloured TV sets [...] we were led to believe: do not make a critical report, but everything you see here you can buy.”¹⁵

The acquisition of symbolic capital among journalists who prepared content before 1987 can consider journalist competitions held in the Soviet Union which, on the one hand, were ideologized but on the other hand, were related to specific abilities of journalistic work which were valid both in the Soviet system and in the present times:

“[...] I, for example, personally have not written one sentence to anyone myself. There were times when journalists wrote for interviewees what to say. [...] I have not written one sentence, people talked to me, and I have won two young

¹³ Informant 7. The interview was recorded on October 7, 2017.

¹⁴ Informant 7. The interview was recorded on October 7, 2017.

¹⁵ Informant 1. The interview was recorded on October 12, 2017.

journalists' competitions. [...] Therefore, I think that even at those times vitality was still appreciated although perhaps others did something more creative, more inventive [...]."¹⁶

It should be noted that since 1987 journalists who created the content have acquired much larger symbolic capital. First of all, it can be linked to the retrieved live broadcasts, in which journalists who prepared the content spoke directly. However, the decisive factor should be considered to be the emergence of critical reports. It can be said that during that period, journalists who started critical reporting gained much greater social capital. It is also necessary to emphasize that before 1987 the radio field was often a workplace due to economic capital, i.e. high wages or social ties, which were later converted into the possibility of purchasing lacking goods etc. After 1987, social capital became the dominant form of capital; as radio audiences have grown significantly, journalists have become well-known and listened to. It is important to note that, according to the informants, at that time, they began to work on journalistic work:

"[...] True journalism began which was once an ideological organization [...] I do not consider the work I worked in the Soviet times' journalism; it is far from journalism. Furthermore, around nineteen-eighty-eight it was just the beginning of it."¹⁷

Also, it can be said that infiltrated persons worked in basically all radio departments. Therefore, when analyzing the relations between the field participants, it should be noted that an atmosphere of mistrust prevailed:

1. *It was speculated which individuals were infiltrated:*

"[...] I have the feeling that while you cannot see the paper, you cannot tell; there were speculations as if all were naming, as if all we were talking about the same thing, as if partially open, but there was no evidence."¹⁸

2. *It was known who was infiltrated:*

"[...] they would tell, literally showed you, do not chatter near him. The anchors caught one of their own."¹⁹

3. *The infiltrators themselves would reveal their identity:*

"[...] some of them would publicly show off those certificates, but they also needed to be seen very vaguely; there were a lot of them."²⁰

However, it is important to note that there was still an atmosphere of mistrust and fear, even knowing which individuals were infiltrated. Firstly, it was known that the participation of these people in the field was inevitable. Journalists were afraid to speak openly to each other; there was a constant fear of being contacted. It could be stated that occasional cases of snitching occurred in the radio field:

"[...] it was a fact that there were snitches, things were getting reported because then we would celebrate parties with food, with drinks, then it was not permitted, you know, and one time, I only remember that the commission came to us during a

¹⁶ Informant 4. The interview was recorded on December 2, 2017.

¹⁷ Informant 15. The interview was recorded on November 27, 2017.

¹⁸ Informant 14. The interview was recorded on October 10, 2017.

¹⁹ Informant 3. The interview was recorded on October 31, 2017.

²⁰ Informant 3. The interview was recorded on October 31, 2017.

party, it was someone's birthday, I am wondering if it was mine, do not know, but we knew what was what, we knew [...]."²¹

During the last years of the Soviet rule in Lithuania, the attitude towards these people changed, and their participation in the field was not being viewed as naturally as before:

"[...] In those last years, my broadcasts were independent, I already did, as they say, about the topical issues of political life [...], and there emerged this guy that we called "the chicken", an editor said for that agency's reasons to interpret, what I have in mind, what I will do, whom I will speak about from Lithuanian political figures [...] while I lost my patience and went to those who could solve it, I made myself independent of the editorial, I separated as a post, but I overcame it."²²

To sum up, it can be argued that infiltrated persons in the Lithuanian SSR radio field created a climate of distrust among the participants of the field.

4.2. Change of operational strategies in the radio field

Based on Bourdieu's field theory, the kind of action strategy that a person who comes to the field chooses depends on his past experiences: education, family, etc. It is important to note that in the subject of this work, the employee's relationship with the system was greatly influenced by how the Soviet system was viewed in his family, at school, the period a person began to work on the radio, and what attitude predominated in a particular editorial. It can be said that those workers whose relatives did not criticize the Soviet Union more naturally accepted work in a propaganda institution:

"[...] It will look strange, I did not even know the real history of Lithuania as it was, because our school did not teach us these things [...] our mother was one of the wealthy farmers, her brother was shot, and her mother and sister brought to Siberia [...] mother [...] did not tell the truth."²³

It is essential to mention that it became much more challenging to adapt to the rules of the radio field game concerning those workers who came to the radio field with a critical experience of the Soviet system:

"Often, my grades in the trimester were the highest, but the marks for behaviour were unsatisfactory because I talked all the time. [...] It did not seem right to me that I was told I could not go to church, [...] if I had been working for the Soviet authorities for a very long time, I would probably have not worked because, for example, in my family, it was thought that any cooperation with the Soviet media, the press is a cooperation with the government."²⁴

After analyzing the operating strategies, the period from 1980 to 1990 should be divided into three parts: *until 1985, from 1985 until 1988 and from 1988 until 1990*. These stages precisely can be considered fracturing moments when the radio field's operational

²¹ Informant 12. The interview was recorded on November 16, 2017.

²² Informant 3. The interview was recorded on October 31, 2017.

²³ Informant 16. The interview was recorded on December 19, 2017.

²⁴ Informant 1. The interview was recorded on October 12, 2017.

strategies are essentially changed. It is important to emphasize that the choice of the operational strategy came not only from the employees' initiative. The Soviet radio field was very inert for a long time and functioned as a sophisticated, Soviet-based apparatus. Historical circumstances, such as Gorbachev's coming to power or the emerging liberation movement of Lithuania, were the main factors influencing new strategies.

Analyzing the radio field operation strategies until 1985 should be noted that most agents chose *conformance* strategies (shifting into Bourdieu's field theory accepted the prevailing rules of dominance: to respect the mechanism of censorship, adhere to an ideology, etc.) or *double life*. However, it is essential to mention that in both cases (the case of conformance and double life), specifically in the field of radio, this meant the adaptation to the same rules of the game but the outside strategy of action in these two cases varied. In the first case, field players adhered to the game's rules naturally, without questioning the morality of their origin. As already mentioned, this was largely influenced by the experience the agents previously had before coming to the field:

"You need to adapt to it; otherwise, it will crush you in one way or another."²⁵

It is important to note that a significant part of journalists' choice of such a strategy (evaluating it from today's perspective) is trying to legitimize the spirit of the era, fear, or the fact that everyone behaved like this:

"The person who did not live then does not imagine how it was, it is impossible, you know, like at a concentration camp, it is impossible to rebel, you have no tools, although there were those who rebelled. [...] Did we do something? I do not think so. [...] or maybe we did, you know, my sin is such, but later I tried to reverse it in all possible ways, well, that is how it was."²⁶

When analyzing the *double life strategy*, it should be noted that these individuals also adapted to the rules of the radio field, in some cases even stronger than before, but their strategy in personal life did not coincide with the strategy at work:

"[...] We were reading a complete lie, this was the most shocking [...] There was an episode when I was in an elevator, and I had an underground magazine [...] With me was Mitalas, Deputy Chairman of the Committee. I looked at them and thought that if they only knew what I have with me right now, after a week, all of the opposing voices would come from the other side."²⁷

The choice of a double life strategy in extreme cases poses a high risk. It is necessary to discuss the case when a radio announcer published an underground magazine. When the KGB captured this case, the journalist was forced to leave work and could only return after the restoration of Lithuania's Independence. Another important aspect is that some field players generally did not consider what they did before 1985 as a journalistic work and considered adaptation as an opportunity to make money or, transferring to what in Bourdieu's theory would be labeled as economic capital:

²⁵ Informant 3. The interview was recorded on October 31, 2017.

²⁶ Informant 15. The interview was recorded on November 27, 2017.

²⁷ Informant 6. The interview was recorded on November 3, 2017.

“[...] I travelled a lot, I travelled throughout the Soviet Union to Baikal. You understand I have been to all the seas, that is why you were working, spending that month in a good way. [...] we earned well; it was the best work.”²⁸

In 1985, when Gorbachev came to power and after the declaration of Perestroika and Glasnost or publicity policy, journalists were given preconditions for less restrained speech and criticism. However, it must be said that the mechanism developed over the past decades in the Lithuanian SSR radio continued to act inertly:

“It seems [...] that perhaps these social processes went faster than the radio itself. The radio was catching up to all this. [...] to go over what you did for many years, to change everything, it was quite difficult.”²⁹

Analyzing the reasons for such an operational strategy could be argued that, first of all, those in leading positions did not tend to change anything or could not accept changes. Second, part of the workers were afraid that the changes announced by Gorbachev were temporary, so they chose the *anticipation* strategy, thus essentially without altering their previous strategy of action (conformance), but also without prejudice to those who opted for a different mode of action. However, some journalists chose a new strategy called *testing boundaries*. In general, the boundary testing strategy should be tied to the change in the power position field. If before 1985 journalists followed the instructions of the directors without questioning them, after Gorbachev's coming to power, journalists themselves took the initiative to change the game rules of the field, i.e. to criticize, to switch to the direct airing:

“It was necessary not to be afraid to take a risk, to force yourself in and then all those cracks would open.”³⁰

The strategy of *testing the boundaries* was most often chosen among the young journalists coming to the radio after 1985 and Gorbachev's coming to power. When analyzing why young journalists chose this kind of strategy, it could be argued that it seemed self-evident to try out the boundaries in many cases. This can be attributed to the fact that the whole atmosphere was looser at the time, employees no longer faced a highly rigorous mechanism of censorship, and a subjective fact felt significant influence that journalists were young:

“At that time, I was just humbly dreaming about that Independence, and let us say it was just a vision, and I made that program, I do not remember now how it happened that perhaps it did not catch chief editor's eye or someone did not listen at that time, so it went on air [...] The next day I was called for a serious talk by the same radio director. He says, “Is your head all right? [...] Let us say, I adapted to that ideology, when I needed to, and when I found the opportunity, I tried to make fun of it.”³¹

When analyzing *anticipation* strategy, it should be noted that it would be determined by fear and uncertainty whether changes in Soviet Lithuania will happen in

²⁸ Informant 15. The interview was recorded on November 27, 2017.

²⁹ Informant 16. The interview was recorded on December 19, 2017.

³⁰ Informant 3. The interview was recorded on October 31, 2017.

³¹ Informant 11. The interview was recorded on November 15, 2017.

most cases. It can be argued that the longer a person has worked on the radio, the more he mainly chose the anticipation strategy:

“During the breakup, they took this subject very harshly. [...] It was hard for them. Maybe because of their experience, they were afraid that see, it was not the first time like this, the warming up was under Khrushchev's rule, and then the time of repression would come again.”³²

When examining the leadership position, it can be argued that they did not initiate changes but did not apply strict sanctions too:

“Our heads of departments and chief editors, if they had not changed, they were not such abrupt changes in Lithuania as there had already been in Moscow, say, but they simply bit their teeth and would let it pass.”³³

When analyzing the development of strategies in the radio field from 1988 to 1990, it should be noted that the strategies have changed the most; thus, the most dominant strategy can be considered the strategy of *shift*. However, it is essential to note that this strategy had to be unconditionally accepted by the field participants in many cases. Otherwise, a person had to *retreat* from the field in general. However, the new prevailing shift strategy was unacceptable for the retreated ones; some people were withdrawing because their previous strategy completely crossed with the new one, which is why it was applied between people who previously occupied the leading positions. As already mentioned, at that time, there was a time of change of leaders as well, and the new ones no longer required the party dependence:

“Well, this was the biggest hit to our leader [...] he was a member of the party and his entire career was based on that [...]. Now I imagine how shocked he was. [...] He was building a house, everything went well, and suddenly it was that Gorbachev with his Perestroika and his rebirth. To him, he felt that the end was coming, but he would have adapted to the present conditions.”³⁴

It should be noted that journalists made the most challenging changes from the department of broadcasts in the Russian language. It is important to notice that those in the radio field who in the long run stayed loyal to the Soviet regime began to feel pressured by other players of the field:

“The Russian language editorial had a tough decision to make, it was challenging for them to admit that this happened, and the oldest editor said: [...] Well, it cannot be that everything will come back like it once was, and so they did not prepare any kind of material for a while. The program had to start at 3 o'clock, and we had agreed that one day they would start. I said, “Do as much as you can, even ten or fifteen minutes. Several minutes were remaining, but I see that no one is coming to the microphone.”³⁵

When analyzing the strategy of shift, it is important to note that journalists could follow it by an increasingly weaker censorship mechanism:

³² Informant 1. The interview was recorded on October 12, 2017.

³³ Informant 1. The interview was recorded on October 12, 2017.

³⁴ Informant 15. The interview was recorded on November 27, 2017.

³⁵ Informant 16. The interview was recorded on December 19, 2017.

“I remember it no longer needed to encrypt; there was a time when it was even said that, no, these texts are not needed here, just make some sort of scenario map.”³⁶

Although, as already mentioned in this article, during the year of the Liberation Movement in Lithuania, several attempts have been made to control the radio field from the outside, while the system of censorship within it was getting weaker. For example, texts were no longer encrypted, and they were not subsequently verified by Glavlit, although such an institution still functioned. However, the strategy of change cannot be considered unconditional. Although the overall strategy of the whole field was to fight against the Soviet system, nonetheless, the instinct of self-reliance that the old system could return and part of the strategy of human change was followed not because it was the most acceptable strategy but because it was dominant. It should be noted that in the case of this work, changes in the field have not been homogeneous. The pace and scale of the change highly depended on subjective factors such as age, cultural capital: the use of Western media, accounting, etc. Editorial of broadcasts for foreigners can be taken as an example. It played a significant role in the Soviet propaganda mechanism, but the changes that began in this editorial were the fastest.

5. Conclusion

After analyzing the operating strategies of the Soviet Lithuanian radio field participants, it can be stated that the strategy chosen by the journalist strongly depended on personal experience, i. y. how the Soviet Union was perceived in the family or school, how many relatives suffered from the Soviet crimes. In the late Soviet era (1980–1990), there were two turning points that strategies changed essentially. The first breakthrough occurred in 1985. This break can be attributed to Gorbachev’s policies on Perestroika and Glasnost. At that time, some journalists of Soviet Lithuanian Radio began to check the effectiveness of Soviet censorship. However, even though Glasnost’s policy provided opportunities for more free speech, in principle, the radio field was inert for some time, and most journalists did not change their strategies. The second turning point began in 1988 when most journalists opted for a strategy of shift. At that time, the Lithuanian liberation movement also began, which significantly impacted the change in strategy. However, it should be noted that when analyzing the relationship structures between radio workers, some journalists switched to a strategy of a shift in 1987. For example, their initiative began broadcasting live radio programs that had not been allowed for long. Also, the journalists seeking to occupy higher positions no longer joined the Communist Party. In those years, some field participants began to see their work as real journalism. Until then, many claimed to work solely for financial reasons.

³⁶ Informant 9. The interview recorded on December 20, 2017.

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Communication Freelancers, Facebook Groups and COVID-19. A Qualitative Analysis. Research Report

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1. About the study

The study looked at the relationship between communication freelancers and online communities, in particular Facebook groups populated by communication professionals. We were interested in the dynamic of the group, in knowledge production and knowledge sharing, as well as in the challenges faced by communication freelancers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the role of Facebook groups during this particularly difficult time.

2. Data collection status and participants

Our study conducted 19 directed interviews with freelance professionals, members of Facebook groups, and 3 interviews with group administrators. The interviews were self-applied, based on an interview questionnaire. 22 communication freelancers took part in the study, out of which 20 women and 2 men, all with different and varied professional expertise and level of experience.

The freelancers were invited via the Facebook groups to take part in the study and the interview questionnaire was sent to those that expressed their interest and availability to participate. Upon receiving their written responses, we de-identified and anonymised all interviews by using numbers as pseudonyms. We also anonymised the names of the Facebook groups, in order to keep the identity of the participants untraceable.

3. Findings

3.1. Professional identities as communication freelancers

In order to explore a professional community, it is first necessary to determine the professional identities, as communication freelancers, of those who make up the community. Our research focused on four dimensions:

- A. freelancer vs employee status
- B. reasons for becoming a freelancer
- C. level of experience
- D. expertise

A. Freelancer vs employee status

The answers our participants provided through the interview questionnaire pointed to two different employment configurations:

- a. *mixed work scheme*, blending freelance work with employed work (either part-time or full-time),
- b. *fully freelance status* (occasionally considering going back as an employee because of the impact of COVID-19).

B. Reasons for becoming a freelancer

The answers are varied, but they point to a common profile and a need for fundamental changes regarding 1) employment, 2) professional development, 3) work/life balance and health. These reasons are oftentimes mentioned together, in a cause and effect relationship where one is difficult to separate from the other. What stands out is the constant accumulation of the different configurations of these reasons and freelancing being perceived as a professional reset.

- Fundamental change regarding employment,
- Fundamental change regarding professional development,
- Fundamental change regarding work/life balance and health.

The COVID-19 pandemic was also cited as a reason behind the employee/freelancer switch.

C. Level of experience

We asked about the level of experience, both from a professional and a freelance point of view. The majority of the answers we received come from professionals present in the communication industry, in various capacities, for 10+ years, with some going even above 15 or 20 years. It must be mentioned that, as this was not a quantitative research, the profile cannot be generalized and this level of experience characterises only our respondents.

The majority of our respondents have been acting in a freelance capacity for around a quarter up to half of their professional life in communication. We received

answers from only one person whose freelance activity represented 100% of their professional life in communication.

D. Expertise

We explored two dimensions: 1) what areas the members of professional communication communities have expertise in and 2) how they maintain their expertise level.

The areas of expertise are extremely diverse: PR, Marketing, Digital marketing, Leadership and Management within marketing and PR agencies, Consumer PR, Brand identity, Consultancy, Content creation, Corporate communication, Crisis communication, CSR, Employer branding, Event and project management, Internal communication, Media relations, Public relations, Sales, Social media, Strategy.

Our participants mentioned these **sources and activities** as the ones that they use in order to maintain their expertise at the level they require (alphabetical order, no quantitative hierarchy):

- direct client interactions,
- formal education (e.g.: MBA),
- industry events, seminars/webinars, workshops, conferences,
- industry publications/websites and newsletters (e.g.: PR Week, PR News, Vuelio, ResponseSource, Campaign Live),
- media databases,
- mentors,
- newsletters from professional associations (e.g.: PRCA, CIPR),
- relevant courses and training organised by professional associations,
- relevant courses organised by industry platforms (e.g.: HubSpot Academy)
- seasoned professionals sharing their expertise on social media, at industry events and through interviews,
- shared practices, discussions, and consultations with other professionals,
- social media communities/groups,
- specialised books and articles,
- webinars and podcasts.

3.2. The impact of COVID-19

Many survey reports and research findings have emphasised the dramatic effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had upon freelancers (Hickman, 2020).

We asked our participants what were **the most relevant forms of impact of COVID-19 on their professional activity**. These were the highlighted key-areas: a massive slowing-down of the activity, losing a staggering percentage of their contractual work (even up to 80%), reducing their range of activities to social media and copywriting, a high level of uncertainty in media relations (e.g. journalists furloughed, press outlets folding) and even abuses coming from clients (e.g. delays in payment, pressure in outputs delivery).

The impact of COVID-19 was different for every professional category (Pulignano et al., 2021). However, for most of our participants, as communication self-employed professionals, the image is definitely meager: the social and financial insecurity, the increase in market competition, and clients' abuses were complemented by a decrease in the possibility of achieving their contractual targets. For some of them, the pandemic saw a drastic loss of contractual activities, for others, a great limitation to online (content, social media, copywriting) and technical activities (e.g. delay of strategic programmes/campaigns).

Another dimension we investigated was *the impact of COVID-19 on the professional Facebook group* of which our participants were members and these were the most relevant aspects: a) an increase of collective anxiety; b) increased number of freelancers without contracts; c) increased membership in the Facebook group; d) more supportive and helpful than ever (for the information provided, guidance, advice, lived experiences, administrative freelance, and self-employed work, but mostly "camaraderie").

3.3. The relationship with communication freelancers Facebook groups

The relationship between freelance professionals and Facebook groups dedicated to the industry is at the core of our research. The interview questionnaire our participants received addressed three dimensions:

- A. reasons for joining
- B. reasons for (active) participation
- C. knowledge sharing practices within the communication freelance Facebook group

Here are the main observations drawn from the analysis of our participants' answers given on these three dimensions.

A. Reasons for joining

There are three core reasons for joining the group: networking, support, and socialisation. Networking was mentioned in relation to contacts, information, and possible collaborations; the group is considered a balancing factor for the lack of professional contacts (and expertise in a particular field). Support is seen as both professional and personal: members joined looking for advice (received and, later on, given) or to check their ideas with someone else, but also received reassurance and fulfilled part of their need of belonging to a professional community. This feeling of isolation is mentioned repeatedly, therefore socialisation is seen as a third core reason for joining.

B. Reasons for (active) participation

While the reasons for joining carry through as reasons for staying and (actively) participating in the discussions (to be sure, some prefer to sit on the side-lines and "listen"), there are other reasons, both informational and relational, that motivate the members of the Facebook groups in their online engagement with the professional communities:

- information gain,
- pre-testing ideas,
- camaraderie and sanity checks,
- industry insights,
- professional and personal connections.

C. Knowledge-sharing practices

As both the level of professional experience and freelance experience vary among our participants, it was foreseeable that the role Facebook groups would play for each category would vary as well. Therefore, the Facebook group is seen as particularly useful for debutants in terms of knowledge exchange and for advanced freelancers in terms of best practice sharing (contracts, client management) and industry dynamics (price trends, legal context transformations).

3.4. Administrators' perspectives

The Facebook groups' moderators or administrators have also been asked to provide their perspectives on the following key points. The findings of this section are outlined as follows:

- A. the Facebook private group as a necessary supportive community
- B. specific features of group's membership composition
- C. the role of the administrator
- D. members' communitarian behaviours
- E. the impact of COVID-19 onto the community's dynamics: "desire to help"

We, therefore, interviewed both current and former administrators, as well as administrators fulfilling different roles.

A. The Facebook private group as a necessary supportive community

When it comes to the reason for initiating the group, both groups' initiators have mentioned that the newness of freelancing, as a working format, generated specific needs for self-employed communication professionals, such as the lack of appropriate content for freelancers, lack of support group, lack of accountability for employers/clients.

Trust is a major implicit norm, as the information which is shared within the group is deemed to be very sensitive. For this reason, both Facebook groups have a very high social function, as all members understand the role and the value of trust, especially when it comes to sharing professional practices and information about clients, etc.

B. Specific features of group's membership composition

Both Facebook groups have a large majority of professionals coming from communication and creative industries (e.g. Public Relations, marketing, advertising, design, social media, web design, etc.).

The communication freelancers represent the core of both Facebook groups. Hence, the focus is double: on freelance practices and on communication-related content (e.g. deliverables, trends, shifts caused by COVID-19, etc.).

C. The role of the administrator

The administrator as the gatekeeper of the community: The administrators see the groups as tight communities, as their role has always been to build and preserve a group's integrity and legitimacy.

The administrator as the listener of the community: Listening to the community is one of the main functions the administrators use and employ on a current basis.

D. Members' communitarian behaviours

The administrators also emphasised belonging communitarian practices of groups' members:

a) when advice is being asked, experienced members respond, help and support the member in need (as they said, this is a "take what you need, give what you can" type of attitude);

b) when there are absurd proposals/discussions or threads, members ally to explain why that approach is wrong;

c) when other members have mentioned personal issues (family troubles or issues with clients), they always received advice and offers of help;

d) unique opportunities only for group members (e.g. tickets for events, meet-ups, subscriptions for specific freelance services, etc.);

e) reporting posts which they see as breaching the rules and spirit of the Group. However, in general, the groups' administrators appreciated the fact that, usually, the tone is calm and views are well-argued.

The identity of the group in comparison with other online professional groups: the groups' administrators focused in their answers on the informal character of the Facebook private group they managed as a great distinctive feature. Due to this ethos, "members of the Facebook group feel much less inhibited, in my view. There is a huge element of trust, that others will keep their confidence and treat them respectfully. There is no such thing as a silly question and they are likely to get a kind reply. I haven't witnessed bullying or belittling in the group." (Respondent 9)

E. The impact of COVID-19 on the community's dynamics: "the desire to help"

The intrinsic feature of the Facebook groups we analysed, the support, became vital and essential during COVID-19. The group administrators mentioned 1) support and help for those clients/industries which have been most impacted by the pandemic and several lockdowns (by providing services *pro bono*, etc.) or 2) support for their freelance peers, through intensive collaborations and projects.

One administrator mentioned using the group as a platform to support lobbying within the PR industry to highlight how freelancers' business has been affected.

The online has replaced the previous networking contexts which brought members together.

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