

## Chapter 4

### Radio news on the internet: is sound still dominant?

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#### **Abstract**

Radio on the internet is no longer just something to be listened to. It has become part of a hypermedium, where diverse elements of multimedia communication found in other genres and contrasting modes of address are brought together in an interactive and non-linear narrative. It is often now more of a production for the eyes than for the ear. Nonetheless, sound still seems to be the dominant element in news on national radio station websites in Portugal. This chapter examines the journalistic content of three such Portuguese radio station websites, examining the use of sound and other multimedia elements within them. It explores over a period of five years the evolution of the use of audio, video, still images and infographics on the news pages of the three websites.

The research underpinning the chapter is part of the externally-funded Portuguese project Net Station: Shaping Radio for the Web Environment. A major concern of the project is to identify convergence of media elements and genres where it exists and to determine to what extent these elements are interrelated. Moreover, the chapter will consider whether radio stations are effectively enhancing the multimedia narrative and diversifying the resources at its disposal or missing an opportunity.

**Keywords:** news, internet, websites, multimedia, journalism, Portugal

## Introduction: From sound medium to hypermedia

For almost a century radio consisted only of sound, but today we ask whether sound is still dominant in radio news on the internet. Scholars long claimed the only connection that radio established with its audiences is through its codes, which are purely auditory (Crisell 1994: 5), that radio interprets the universe from a sound perspective (Herreros, 1995: 313), it represents the world to the ear (Arnheim 1980: 27), that it is an 'acoustic experience' (Lazarsfeld 1946: 38) and that 'radio speaks to us' (Adorno 2006: 77). Live or recorded sound is an essential journalistic element in the discourse of radio news, and the most important in broadcast radio, because we can only listen to the news on radio. We let sound transport us to the scene of an event or bring us face-to-face with the people in the news. On the internet, however, there is a form of radio journalism that consists of more than just sound. If we take as a reference point the notion of journalism as a map from which to view the world (Kovach & Rosentiel 2001), the potential for hypertextual, interactive and multimedia navigation of the internet multiplies this concept, irrespective of the nature of the core medium presenting itself on the web.

In radio we conceptualise sound journalism, while on the internet we can refer to hypermedia journalism. If radio is expression through sound, internet radio is simultaneously sound, multimedia and interactive expression (Herreros 2008: 63). It encompasses not only one form of expression but several, one which is intrinsic to radio - that is, sound - and now others which are intrinsic to the new medium or platform. It is the radio of our time, being both multimedia and multiplatform, because radio is not an island, as stated by Herreros (2011: 69), but it implies a permanently evolving communication ecosystem. Haye (2011:19) brought it closer to the concept of transmedia, as regards the confluences and intersections of media technologies and industries in which the content is interwoven through the actions of the audience - that is to say, when they interact with narratives with 'multiple entry points' that develop engaging narratives, thus generating an 'immersive experience'.

## Digitisation and its consequences

From the analogue domain, radio has evolved through digitisation to something new, making the recording, editing, broadcasting and distribution of sound faster and more efficient in professional newsroom workflows. It was a second industrial or technological revolution, as suggested by Hendy (2004:48), that paved the way for digitisation, convergence and interactivity on this adaptable and still relatively new platform, the internet. If, on the one hand, digital technology favours diversification of content and the emergence of new narratives, on the other hand the ease in transferring content from one medium to another makes it more prone to the risk of simply replicating content (Starkey & Crisell 2009:125-6), which is aggravated in the context of concentration of media ownership, ultimately at a global level. These two authors highlight another impact of digitisation to which they attribute greater importance, 'a convergence of previously separate media', where everyone can see, read and listen to the news from a mobile device. Although some radio content can be displayed as text or images on a screen, some researchers continue to argue that it is still the sound that distinguishes it from other media. That is, sound still remains as its essence (Starkey & Crisell 2009; Herreros 2011). Sound is the essence of radio's identity, irrespective of the means, platform or device through which audiences accesses its content. In particular, it

is the predominance of sound that distinguishes web radio from other online media forms, as all are multimedia and interactive, but only radio has the resources to offer new auditory experiences, as well as other sound creations born from the fusion of the radio with the web. In fact, sound is a secondary element in online media that normally emphasises the primacy of the image at the expense of audio recording. Sound may even be the predominant resource in some radio websites, but now it is just an option and not all radio websites or web radio stations privilege it in the design of their homepage or graphically highlight the presence of audio alongside to the text. Radio has reached the screens, where the first contact is now visual. It can be seen, read and eventually listened to, but listening is only an option here, unlike with broadcast radio.

In online editing manuals, audio seems more like an extra that accompanies, illustrates or complements the text. Despite the theories of hypermedia interconnection, in practice, sound does not come in a logic of integration, but instead of separation as, indeed, happens with other audio-visual components. In a multimedia context, radio (and its journalistic content,) absorbs and enhances the characteristics attributed to the internet as a means of communication and transmission: hypertext, multimediality and interactivity - features that interconnect or combine to create a new language and a new discourse. Radio unites sound with new resources, becoming a hypermedia product. That is, hypermedia is the result of applying interactivity to multimedia systems that are interconnected in a network. Of the internet, we rarely talk, in the pure sense, about newspapers, radio or television but instead we conceptualise a new means of communication with a narrative and a language of its own. The internet enabled the possibility of combining in a single message text, images and sounds, all in a dynamic interconnection and integration of various expressive resources. Therefore, we rarely speak of each individually or consider them in isolation. The journalistic product on the web is a result of their articulation together, and their evolution and exploitation by users, through the proliferation of interactive tools and features often called Web 2.0. Radio, more than any other medium, identifies and strengthens itself with new means of dissemination, communication and expression. It is through these new electronic channels that it transforms itself, ceasing now to be an exclusively auditory means of communication and expression. Radio websites try to be more appealing, not through sound, but through the diversification of content and resources used, through design, colour and image, and by offering more than just that which is broadcast. Nevertheless, sound content does not often include much more than that which was already broadcast. In particular, there are few signs of new sound narratives, even at an embryonic stage.

Newspapers, radio stations and television channels adopt similar strategies and offer similar content, using multimedia resources to capture and secure the user's attention. Image and video are often referred to as key elements in the launching or relaunching of websites, even those published by radio stations. The internet continues to stimulate competition among media to attract and maintain the public's attention, just as early on in this revolution Priestman raised a very pertinent question, asking what given pictures really add to the radio (2002: 48). Radio has found its place in the evolution of media, and the multimedia challenge that the internet has initiated focuses more on the behaviour of audiences and how they appropriate the new media. Radio's evolution on the internet is more than a visual phenomenon, so we must take into account how it is used and 'the challenges multimedia structures represent' (Oliveira *et al* 2012: 4).

In Portugal, radio ventured onto the internet in the mid-1990s, and despite digital production and distribution allowing quick processing and then distribution of sound on the web without changing too many routines in the newsrooms, only more recently have large numbers of radio stations truly begin to invest in production for the platform. Studies of the relationship between radio and the internet show that there are differences compared with other media. 'In fact, it can be complementary since radio is the one medium that easily adapts itself to Web 2.0 and, furthermore, amplifies the social networks' (Cardoso *et al* 2009). Throughout its history, radio has survived new challenges and has been able to adapt to new technologies by integrating them - a resilience already dubbed Radiomorphosis (Fidler 1997). Even so, in the internet age it is well known that radio is still not able to take advantage of all the potential of the web (Bastos *et al* 2012: 104), nor of the characteristics they share. Journalists were until now only concerned with sound as contributing to news values, but now they must take care to narrate events using more than just sound. A new professional role is that of 'interactive multimedia journalist' (Garrand 2006: 23) or even a 'net handler' (Saiz Olmo 2005). A study of Portuguese radio reporters and their relationship with the internet concluded that most agree that the multimedia component is very important in the presentation of news on the websites of their respective radio stations (Bastos *et al* 2012: 108). Nevertheless, multimedia elements apparently have a limited role on radio websites; sound remains the most common resource, although it is losing ground.

### The Portuguese radio sector

For this study we selected three national radio stations: the public broadcaster RDP Antena 1, the Catholic broadcaster Rádio Renascença and the private broadcaster TSF with its all-news format. RDP Antena 1 is the heiress of the National Radio created in the 1930s. It is a public radio station, and part of the public media group Rádio e Televisão de Portugal, along with the public television service RTP. The state-owned group runs various free-to-air (FTA) and cable TV channels, as well as the radio stations Antena 1, Antena 2, Antena 3, RDP Africa, RDP International, RDP Madeira and RDP Açores, as well as several web radio stations. They can all be found on a single website, RTP, meaning radio and television of Portugal. The site uses the address of the television service, through which one accesses the radio pages that do not have their own URLs. Rádio Renascença (RR) was born in the 1930s, and it is owned by the Portuguese Catholic Church, being also part of 'r/com', which groups other radio stations in the group, namely RFM, Mega Hits and Radio Sim. On the internet, each station has its own page, being separate but linked to the others. On its website, RR distributes a newspaper in .pdf format, *Página 1*, and it also has a WebTV called V+. TSF Rádio Jornal was born as a pirate radio station in the 1980s in Lisbon. It is a private radio station with an all-news format, the only of its kind in Portugal. TSF is part of one of the largest national media groups, Controlinveste, which owns some of the daily newspapers with the largest national circulations, *Jornal de Notícias* and *Diário de Notícias*, and the sport television channels of Sport TV which is distributed on cable. Despite not having a national radio frequency, it broadcasts to the entire country using a network of enough local and regional stations and frequencies to provide coverage. The three radio stations built their websites in the second half of the 1990s.

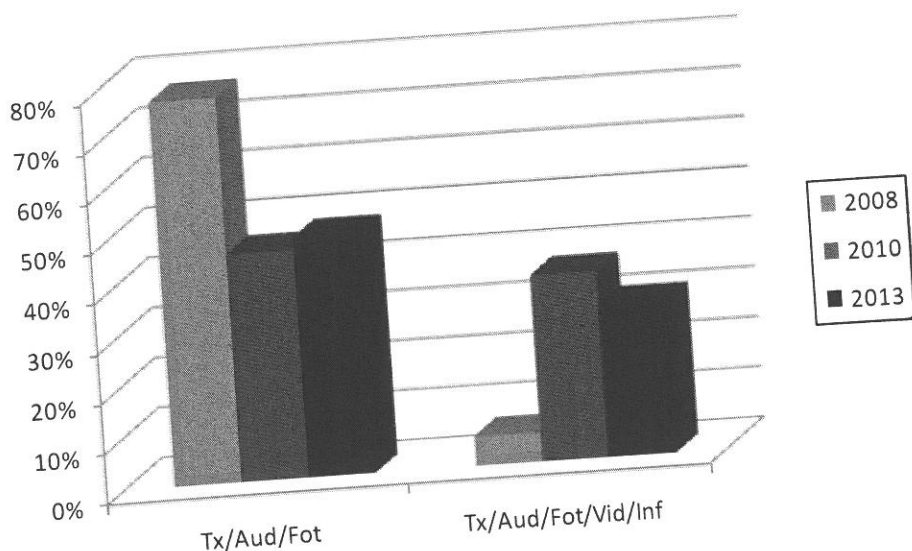
## Methodology and results

The goal we set ourselves was to establish whether there is a predominance of sound in relation to other multimedia elements on the news websites of the Portuguese radio stations. Therefore, the analysis focused on the frequency and evolution of various items posted online. The sample consisted of the top stories on the opening page of the websites. A week was randomly chosen in the years 2008 2010 and 2013, and data collection was performed from Monday to Sunday, with three daily census points that corresponded to major periods of web access according to the Netpanel of Marktest, a Portuguese company that measures audiences. These were 09:00 to 10:00, 15:00 to 16:00 and 22:00 to 23:00. We selected the websites of the three radio stations, RDP Antena 1, Rádio Renascença and TSF because they emphasised news content either on air or online. Given the importance of these criteria, we excluded music-oriented radio stations, local radio stations and stations that exclusively distributed on the web. In all, 1,127 news items were analysed.

In the period analysed, it was clear that audio was still the most frequently-used element of the news websites of the three stations. Text with audio and audio with still images amounted to 76.9 per cent in 2008, 45.5 per cent in 2010 and 47.9 per cent in 2013. Audio was still a predominant element, not only because alone it still had a high occurrence, but also because news with video or infographics usually had one or more audio elements. Excluding text-only and video-only news, the items with audio, even if combined with other elements, result in high percentages: 82.8 per cent in 2008, 68.8 per cent in 2010 and 51.6 per cent in 2013. Noticeably, sound was present in most of the news items over the three years, although it was losing ground to video and text-only news. Two factors contributed to this result: RDP only featured news with audio, (a single clip,) and only in 2010 did it add still images or the radio station's logo to news items. On all the sites the audio uploaded to the news page had been broadcast or edited from what was recorded for the radio, so it required little additional production outside the usual routines of the newsroom, which posted it on the website soon afterwards.

However, the percentage of text-only news was still high: in 2008 and 2010 it remained at 17 per cent, but it rose to 21.8 per cent in 2013. This increase is significant as it indicates a tendency to not include any multimedia elements in some stories, which may have different interpretations that only time can clarify. Some are last minute text-only stories which may explain in part the lack of audio or other multimedia elements that only emerge after an update. Another explanation may lie in the nature of the stories, (politics and the economy,) and in the sources used, which are often official documents, reports, newspapers and other written sources, so the first iteration of the story is often text-only news, with other multimedia elements being added only later. This scenario was especially common in the week in 2013, when most of the news content was related to the political and economic crisis that Portugal was experiencing. There is another factor to take into account, which can only be confirmed in the long term. On the one hand, we saw the urgency to publish news that impacts upon people's daily lives, but on the other, there is evidence that internet users may want to quickly access information and move on to the next item without wasting much time, grasping the title and headline and skimming the body of the text. In particular, one option is to just read the text, which can lead the radio stations to under-invest in the multimedia elements which

require longer and costlier production time. Regarding the use of audio-visual resources, the overall percentage indicates a significant increase from 5.9 per cent in 2008 to 37.1 per cent in 2010, but in 2013 it recorded a decrease to 30.3 per cent. In other words, we have seen an increase in text-only news, (or text and still images,) and news with audio, (or audio and still images), and although there was significant growth of multimedia elements in news at first, there was a decrease in the last year being studied.



**Figure 4.1: Use of different elements in the sample, with and without moving images per year**

Video was present on only two of the websites analysed, Rádio Renascença (RR) and TSF. In 2008 RR did not post videos, in 2010 it started to offer three videos in a highlighted section, and by 2013 it had already begun streaming V+, the video channel that on its homepage had a box with five videos. On RR videos were from the news of the day, and since 2012 there has been a daily news video. They are either RR-produced videos or from a news agency in the case of international news, for which the station has no reporter or correspondent on site. V+ has a page where videos of news, programmes and sport intentionally appear in different channels. Initially, on TSF, most videos were reports of issues that were not current. They were almost always 'best of' news reports with audio and video versions, news in brief, programmes or columns of station editorials. Only after 2010 did TSF start to include videos of the news of the day, although they were not RR-produced, but videos from the Portuguese news agency LUSA or SportTV, which belong to the same group as the radio station. There were even videos of great interviews previously broadcast on the radio and published in newspapers of the group. Most of these videos are not in the Highlights of TSF's homepage, but in other sections. In the final sample, videos from non-journalistic programmes, posted with greater emphasis on the homepage, were not included.

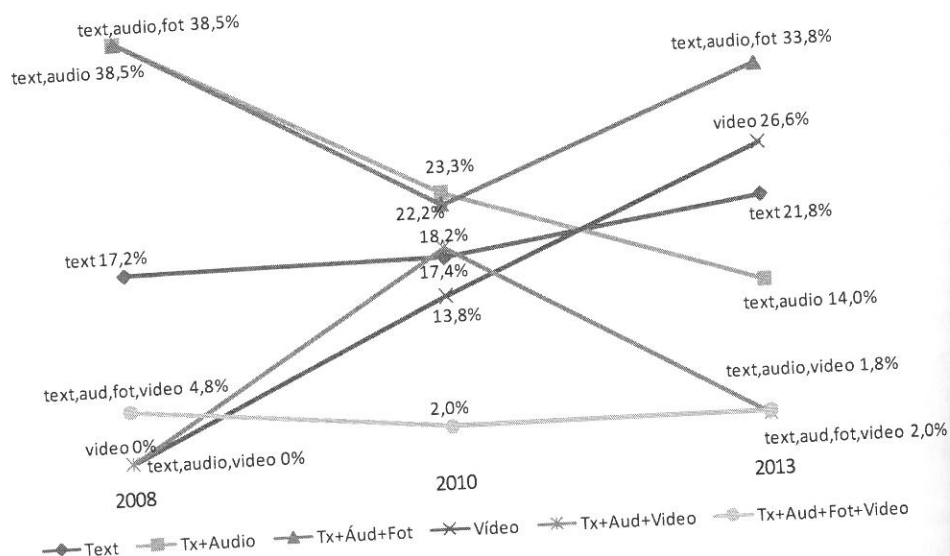


The audio news page of RDP has no video, but video is the main element on the website of the group Radio and Television of Portugal, which is dominated by the video content of RTP, the public television station, within whose site the radio pages are integrated. However, there is no interconnection on the website between the content of the radio station and of the television service. Both are displayed on the homepage of the website, but then each brand is accessed from its own page, RTP or RDP. These features contribute to the results obtained against each parameter analysed, and simultaneously reflect the brand and the editorial line of each radio station on their respective websites. The use of all elements was changed over the period surveyed, due to the renewal or modification of the websites or the integration of new elements, sections or features, greater or lesser investment in online staff, and consequently in the presence of radio on the internet. The infrequent use of infographics or other non-text-based elements, such as audio, video, and the still image was very noticeable. Regarding the results, in 2008 news with infographics represented 1.1 per cent of the total, in 2010 it was 3.1 per cent and in 2013 no examples were found in the week analysed. In 2008 'multimedia news' that would integrate various elements amounted to 1.1 per cent, but in 2010 and in 2013 not a single one was recorded in the highlighted sections of the three radio station websites. In other words, the so-called multimedia narrative is not a significant feature of the radio stations' websites, and in two of them, (not RDP due to the nature of the website,) the different elements do not appear integrated into the text, as there is no real hypertext nor hypermedia narrative. The elements appear in juxtaposition, flanking the text, in isolated boxes for audio, video and so on, as if they were different versions of a news story. In short, there is not a hypermedia narrative with its own language, but instead, the sum of separate items of sound and image.

The top stories are usually more immediate current news, hence the lack of infographics or images, since the time needed to produce them would mean delaying posting the story. This may also be one of the reasons for the predominance of audio, because it has already been broadcast, and so can be rapidly posted on the website. The production and post-production of a video is also slower than producing just sound or text. It is also necessary to take into account that the diversity of multimedia elements requires equipment and staff with specific skills other than those in the traditional radio newsroom. In addition, there is another factor that should not be overlooked: now, the radio journalist has to not only keep in mind news values relating to sound, but also to consider whether there is any visual perspective to stories. All these factors may contribute to a still cautious use of audio-visual elements. Infographics were the least used element in the period analysed, and among highlighted stories they only appear on a single website, RR. TSF also posts some infographics or photo galleries, but usually elsewhere on the page, often for feature stories that integrate themes or special reports involving some advance planning, which is more consistent with the production time for infographics.

In the three years analysed, there has been a gradual evolution of the use of multimedia tools, especially in integrating video. As shown in Figure 4.2, video is the element that most evolved over the period analysed. With none recorded in 2008, it rose to 13.8 per cent in 2010 and to 26.6 per cent in 2013. In 2008 there was no instance of news with text, audio and video, but in 2010 18.2 per cent was recorded, yet in 2013 that figure decreased to 1.8 per cent. This was due to many videos being posted without other

associated elements. That is, they were just video reports, which is largely due to the appearance of the Web TV channel of one of the websites and the football section of another that sometimes publishes videos of goals or summaries of matches, adding just the audio later. Text-only news with audio declined over the period analysed, from 38.5 per cent in 2008 to 23.3 per cent in 2010, and 14 per cent in 2013. This corresponds almost entirely with the RDP public station that initially had only text and audio, beginning by 2013 to post, although not always, a still image relating to the event. For this reason, text-only news with audio and still image fell in 2010 but returned by 2013 to identical values to those in 2008. Still images are often used only among the Highlights of the homepage, so the news page does not always have images.



**Figure 4.2: Change in the use of different multimedia news elements in news stories on radio station websites**

Photo galleries with or without sound or slideshows are not very common on the three websites, either in the highlights or elsewhere. There are some examples on blogs associated with dossiers or special programmes, but not on a daily basis. Radio creates images through sound, but it is not used to dealing with the physical image, and although there are newsrooms with video journalists, there are no photojournalists. This will be one of the reasons leading to a new cyberjournalistic genre not often used, because the production time needed does not synchronise well with the more immediate present. Of the few examples found, we noted two findings: the photographs were from radio journalists or from news agencies. On one of the websites, especially for news of accidents or natural disasters, photographs are posted by journalists sent to the location, who first photograph with the phone and then record the sound - a clear reversal of the priorities of the radio journalist, who is now becoming multimedia in nature and where



image has become a news value, just like sound. The priority is to tell the news by using the tools they have at their disposal, depending on the platform which first breaks the news to the audience. However, many stations still choose to broadcast breaking news in the traditional way and only then post it on the internet, but sometimes websites published some aspects of running stories and only later added them to the newscast. For some news stories it is common for one of the websites to appeal to their listeners and internet users to send photos of a blizzard, a flood or a fire. Photographs are published after being checked by an editor or another journalist who selects them. A curious result is the increase in text-only news, as discussed previously. In 2008 and 2010 it remained at around 17 per cent but by 2013 it had risen to 21.8 per cent. The percentage of stories which included various multimedia elements fell, which could mean that the stations' investment in hypermedia narratives with new languages is losing ground, from 4.8 per cent in 2008 to only 2 per cent in both 2010 and 2013. In other words, there is now more text and less multimedia.

## Conclusion

Sound is still the most widely-used multimedia element on the websites of the three Portuguese radio stations analysed, extending to the web the main raw material of traditional radio. There is a predominance of sound, but there has been a gradual convergence of approaches and languages, albeit juxtaposed but with the various elements separate from each other, and not in a truly convergent hypermedia narrative or any kind of narrative or language with its own and distinctive characteristics. Furthermore, there is no evidence that leads us to identify the existence of new sound or hypermedia narratives, on any of the three sites analysed. We simply found three different ways to present the news that reflect the editorial line of the radio station and its brand. There is also the extension to the internet of the original broadcast audio, without a real distinction being made between the different distribution platforms. Sound predominates, although increasingly less so, as video has gained ground, but there is more and more text-only news and less news that uses a range of multimedia elements. There is clearly an underusage of the potential of the internet, which can be due to multiple interconnected scenarios, including a lack of human resources or technical staff and specific training, a lack of investment, insufficient advertising revenue, radio professionals' resistance to or difficulty in adapting to the new environment, the absence of a long-term strategy for online content, and the recent crisis in the media sector in Portugal, which has led to substantial cutbacks in newsrooms.

After more than 15 years, we can say that in Portugal radio on the internet is still in an 'experimental' phase in which each radio station chooses its own path. The sample represents three stations with three different websites, with structures, usability options, design, content presentation and elements that reflect different visions of what may be the website of a radio station. Each website follows a path and then tries and tests possibilities which it abandons, adopts or transforms. What we see, read and listen to from radio stations on the web does not necessarily result in consciously outlined strategies and options for the digital domain, but is the result of newsroom routines, the technical, human and logistical possibilities of each station, the challenge of faster information delivery, and how the internet is still seen in the radio sector. That is, as a complement to traditional broadcasting that continues to be the most important

platform. Despite the trend towards greater use of multimedia elements, more so in some websites than in others, the truth is that a decade and a half after the entry of Portuguese radios onto the internet, their hypermedia possibilities are still underused.

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