

MEDIATION



Biannual
publication
of Fondation
Hirondelle

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH INFORMATION AND DIALOGUE



Building trust and staying connected

The media are intermediaries, creators of links. But this link is not easy to build, even after the advent of audiovisual media and digital platforms. We need a framework, an ethical approach to create trust and mutual respect between the people transmitting and receiving information, so that the information is reliable, useful, understood and believed. In crisis zones and periods of tension, this link is all the more important and must be anchored in a proximity between the media, its journalists and their audiences. This proximity is illustrated by the choice of subjects and the way of dealing with information close to people's concerns, in understandable language. This proximity is also reflected in spaces of expression and speech that are inclusive, responsible and open to populations who have no other means of publicly expressing their needs and opinions.

For more than 26 years, this organic, horizontal proximity between Fondation Hirondelle's media and their audiences has made it possible to confront the divisions in the countries where we work and to recreate links and spaces of trust within weakened societies.

Caroline Vuillemin
General Director

A woman speaks to a Radio Ndeke Luka journalist, Central African Republic, April 2021. © Gwenn Dubourthoumieu / Fondation Hirondelle

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF THE PUBLIC

Faced with a major crisis of confidence since the beginning of the 2010s, traditional media are multiplying initiatives to try to reconnect with their audience, even giving them a real role in the production of information.

Historically low for the past decade, global trust in traditional media fell further in 2021, the second Covid year, to a low of 53%.¹ Below 40% in some countries with a great journalistic tradition like the United Kingdom, France and Japan, trust in the media does not exceed 44% in large countries in the South, such as Nigeria. "Mistrust of the media, the rise of 'fake news', a drop in circulation, increased concentration in the sector, and competition from online platforms: the media are facing a profound crisis that is weakening them and affecting their development," note Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel, David Gerber and Laura Amigo, professors of journalism at the University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland). To survive or, even better, to develop again, "the media have realized that they must imperatively reconnect with their users".

The LINC (Local, News, Innovation, Community) research project, which these professors are

coordinating, has for the past three years identified more than 550 initiatives taken by local media in French-speaking Europe to re-establish a bond of proximity and trust with their audiences. It is compiling a database of these initiatives, ranging from increased observation by readers of the editorial process, to real co-creation in certain journalistic investigations. The challenge is to move from a traditional vertical logic to a more horizontal logic of engagement, where audiences have more confidence in the information they get because they are more involved in its development. As a result, they are also more inclined to participate financially in the production of this information.

The LINC project is not isolated. The writings of university academic Jake Batsell on "engagement journalism" since 2015 in the United States, the case studies of European media by the Engaged Journalism Accelerator based in Maastricht (Netherlands), the consultations conducted jointly in France by technology companies and local media, and the research of the Membership Puzzle Project (New York) on media all aim to turn readers into real members of a community. This work echoes the concerns of the Fondation Hirondelle, which, since its creation in 1995, has never ceased to renew the link of proximity and usefulness that it maintains with populations facing crises in each of the places it works. ■

(1) Source : Edelman Trust Barometer 2021

Interview



ENGAGING THE PUBLIC IN PRODUCTION

Radio Ndeke Luka listeners speak during a focus group in Bangui, Central African Republic, March 2021. © Gwenn Dubourthoumieu / Fondation Hironnelle

© Mario Cafiso



Nathalie Pignard-Cheyne,¹ director of the Journalism and Media Academy at the University of Neuchâtel, directs the LINC (Local, Innovation, News, Communauté) project, which lists the initiatives of local media in French-speaking Europe aimed at involving the public in production of information.

How did the LINC project start?

Nathalie Pignard-Cheyne: For the past 30 years, there has been a tendency for the media to want to get closer to their readers and more broadly to citizens. The Public Journalism (or Civic Journalism) movement, conceptualized by Jay Rosen and Davis Merritt in the United States, was a response in the 1990s to the growing elitism of the media and their distance from the field. In the 2000s, with the advent of

digital technology, the mass media opened their websites to personal blogs and content sent by readers. It was a first golden age of participatory journalism, but this trend has faded. In the current context of crisis, I thought it would be useful to see how local media, which are by definition media of proximity and connection, were taking advantage of digital technology to rethink the links with their audiences; do technologies favour proximity and connection, or should we on the contrary extract ourselves from them to re-establish trust with our readers? Funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation allowed us to bring together a dozen researchers to analyse the initiatives that local media in French-speaking Europe (France, French-speaking Belgium, French-speaking Switzerland) are implementing to reconnect with their audiences: the LINC (Local, Innovation, News, Community) project was born. Between the end of 2018 and the end of 2020, we identified 550 initiatives implemented by just over 140 media outlets, which we compiled into a database.² We supplemented this quantitative study with eleven qualitative case studies

What are the initiatives you analysed about?

The most numerous initiatives are editorial, for example public consultations on topics to be

covered and calls for contributions on reports or investigations. The golden age of participatory journalism seems to be revived through these local media initiatives, but with a major difference: the public's intervention is now much more managed and integrated into the work of journalists, as for example in collaborative investigations. A prominent example is the #BalanceTonTaudis campaign, launched by the daily newspaper *La Marseillaise* in the aftermath of a building collapse that killed eight people in November 2018 in central Marseille. The idea was to involve citizens not only in the compiling of information - everyone was invited to name and document a building at risk of collapse - but also in a process of questioning politicians to make things change. Based on the information gathered, *La Marseillaise* ended up organizing a hackathon-like event involving architects, urban planners, residents of the affected neighbourhoods and public decision-makers to help solve the problem.

What we discovered more generally is the turn taken by several local media towards engagement journalism, in the sense that the media both engages the public in the

We have discovered the turn taken by several local media towards engagement journalism

(1) Nathalie Pignard-Cheyne is a member of the Fondation Hironnelle Board. (2) <https://www.unine.ch/ajm/recensement-linc>

editorial project and also jointly engages the newspaper and its audiences towards action on social well-being. This is a trend that can be seen both in so-called pure player media and in older local media, which have taken advantage of the crisis linked to the digital shift to engage in introspective reflection on their role in society. The Centre France group, based in Clermont-Ferrand, recently created a position for an editor in charge of audience engagement, associated with a CSR (corporate social responsibility) approach. But engaging audiences also means asking them to finance the medium not by a simple act of purchase or subscription, but by an act of membership. This implies, in return, that the media commits itself to deal with a certain number of important issues for its public, or even to defend causes (often societal). Through these initiatives, we also observed the great efforts made by local media to work transparently with their audiences. Opening the editorial offices and inviting the public to come and meet the journalists is a frequent practice. It is based on the observation, expressed by several local media, that mistrust of information is often fed by ignorance, especially among young people, of how information is produced. The Geneva-based television channel Léman Bleu has decided to train young citizens and members of NGOs in the rudiments of journalism (working on sources, making of a project...) so that they themselves are capable of reporting. We see here a conjunction between the desire to be transparent and participation.

Local media are the media par excellence of social linking

Can social networks, despite their biases, be tools for local media wishing to get closer to their audiences?

Yes and no. We have observed that some local media, such as the television channel Matélé in the province of Namur in Belgium, have a very active use of social networks and in particular of the different affinity or geographical groups they find there, in order to better achieve their local implantation. Other local media seem to be more interested in extricating themselves from dependence on them, by creating their own tools for dialogue with the public. During the March-May 2020 lockdown in France, *Nice-Matin* issued calls for reader questions on Covid-19. The media's answers to these questions, which came in large numbers, were shared as valuable health information about this then little-known disease. They were so successful

that they allowed this local media to extend its readership far beyond the Nice area. This is one of the advantages of digital technologies. However, several local media have told us that the crisis in paper distribution and the economic restructuring that has ensued over the last 20

years has weakened their local roots; the networking of the territory remains a central issue and the physical meeting of people an important lever. In short, local media appear through this study as the media par excellence of social linking. ■

Burkina Faso: Participatory information in response to the Covid-19 crisis

There are 1.4 million internally displaced people in Burkina Faso.¹ They suffer from humanitarian, security and health deficiencies, which makes them particularly vulnerable to misinformation. In this context, Fondation Hironnelle launched a study in partnership with the British NGO Elrha to understand how the country's radio stations can respond to the information needs of these people during the Covid-19 crisis.

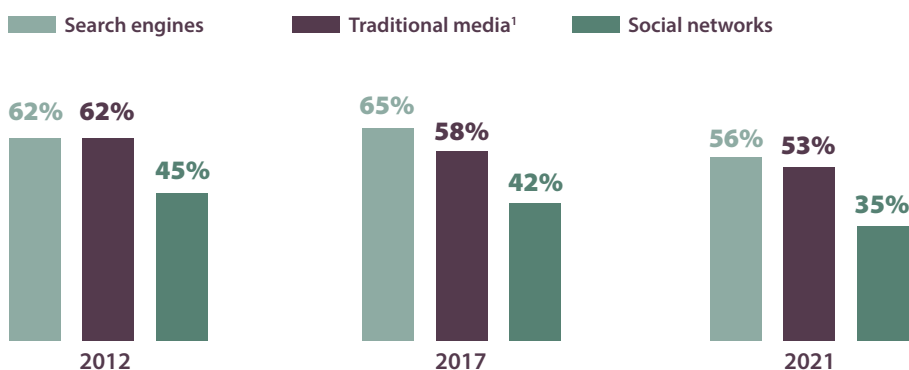
Between June 2020 and September 2021, Dr. Emma Heywood of the University of Sheffield and Dr. Lassané Yaméogo of Burkina Faso's Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique worked with displaced people in three regions to find out what misinformation about Covid-19 they were exposed to. These consultations were conducted notably via WhatsApp, as well as other means, in order to include a larger number of hard-to-reach people and avoid physical contact in this health context. The researchers' analyses were then transmitted to Studio Yafa, Fondation Hironnelle's radio project in Burkina. Studio Yafa journalists were then able to address misinformation affecting displaced people, to better meet their information needs in their broadcasts through a network of local radio partners across the country.

"Providing accurate, regular, and timely information about Covid-19 is critical for vulnerable groups such as IDPs," explains Dr. Emma Heywood. *"Radio is often their primary source of information". Working with "a trusted Burkina radio source, and through participatory collaboration,"* not only *"raises [awareness] of best practices related to the Covid-19 crisis for this population, but also [gives] these communities a voice."*

(1) United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, August 31, 2021.

Historically low trust worldwide in all sources of information

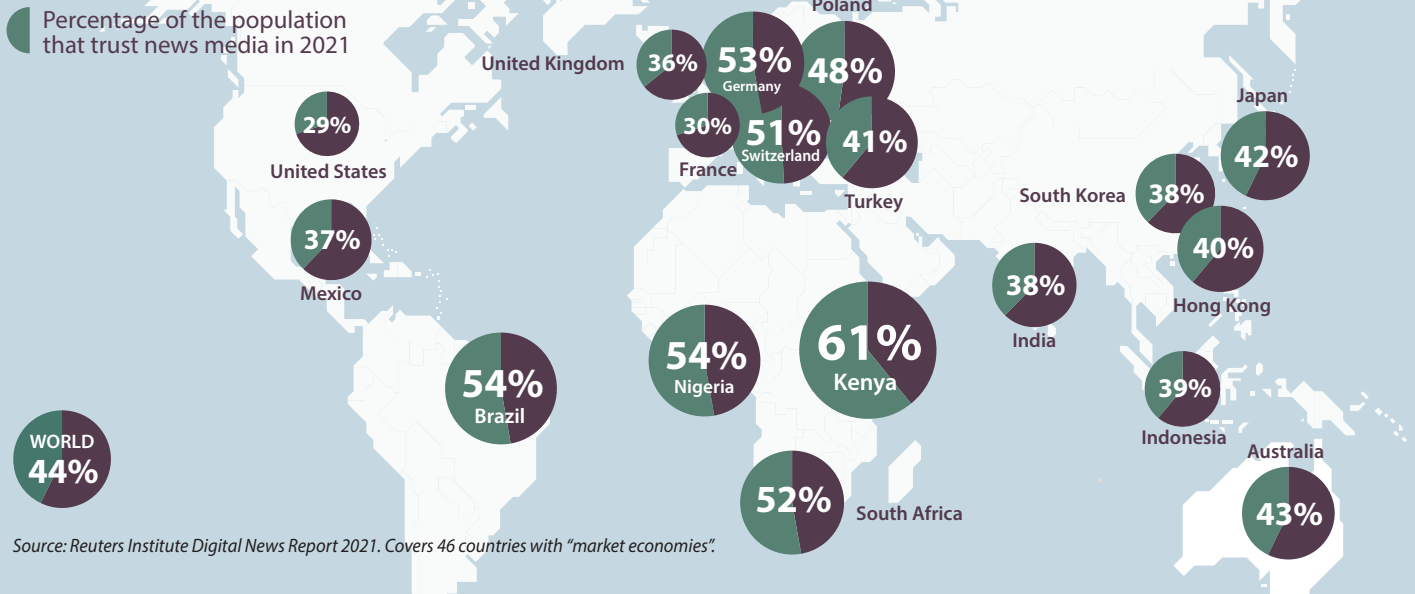
Trust worldwide in media and other sources of information



Source: Edelman Trust Barometer 2021. Covers 27 countries with "market economies".
 (1) Printed media, news websites, radio and television.

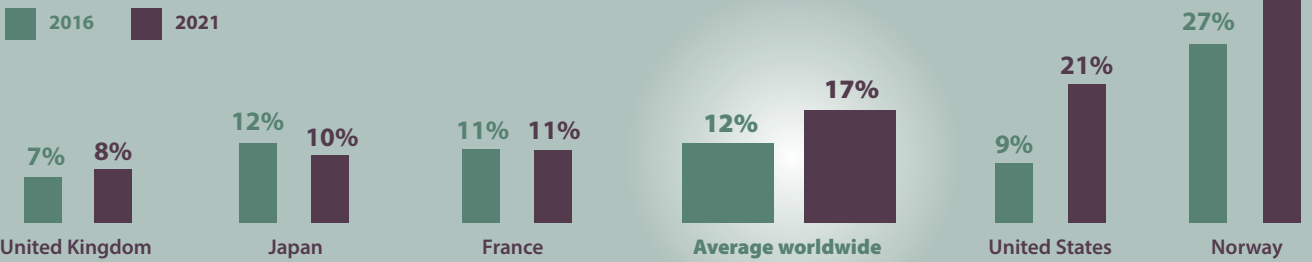
Big Data

Low trust worldwide in media



Paying for online information: a slow and uneven rise

Proportion of the population who paid for online information at least once during the year



Media responses focused on the public

550 initiatives taken in 2019 and 2020 by **140** local media in francophone Europe aimed at rethinking relations with the public

Source: LINC project (University of Neuchâtel)

189 European media explicitly base their development on a **community of readers** involved in their share ownership, editorial procedures, broadcast, impact or paying membership

Source: Engaged Journalism Accelerator (Maastricht), survey carried out from August 2018 to January 2021 across the whole European continent.

27 to 30% of daily visits to the website of regional newspaper Nice-Matin dedicated to dialogue with the editorial team since this section was introduced in March 2020 (first Covid-19 lockdown in France)

Source: Nice-Matin

76% of online media managers worldwide think that **subscriptions** will be the **main source of revenue** for their media in 2021

74% of online media managers think **their audience** is the **best source of innovation** for their media

Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Project, January 2021. Survey of 234 in 43 countries.

Our experience

NEWS THAT CONNECTS WITH THE PEOPLE



A Radio Ndeke Luka journalist reporter on the streets of Bangui, March 2021. © Gwenn Dubourthoumieu / Fondation Hirondelle



Brice Landry Ndangoui, editor-in-chief of Radio Ndeke Luka, Fondation Hirondelle’s media outlet in the Central African Republic, talks about how this radio station, the most listened to in the country, has been able to create a bond of trust and proximity with the population in the face of crises.

For 21 years, Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL) has been a benchmark radio in the Central African Republic (CAR). In a context of chronic conflict where the population is very distrustful of institutions, how has it built a bond of trust with its listeners?

Brice Landry Ndangoui: It is true that Radio Ndeke Luka has become a benchmark radio in the Central African Republic: 84% of Central Africans aged over 15 listen to it every week, and its website is the most visited media site in the country. Our radio is known throughout the CAR for broadcasting “true information”. This trust is based on the close relationship we have created

with our listeners by focusing our programmes on meeting their information needs. To identify these needs, we organize consultations in several cities of the country, via focus groups, on the expectations inhabitants have of RNL. During these consultations, many people over the age of 60, for example, have said they felt left out of our programs. So we created a new programme, “Tango ya Bawendo” (“Old Times”), where older people tell their experiences of the Central African Republic as they lived it in their youth. This programme is very popular with the elders, but also with young Central Africans.

RNL is a national radio station that broadcasts from the capital Bangui. In a country where communication is very poor, how can it make the voice of the most remote inhabitants heard?

To meet this objective, we have done two things. First we introduced two live call-in programs: every morning, “Balaô BêAfrika” (“Good morning, Central African Republic!”) gives a voice to the Central Africans who are farthest from the capital, who can thus greet their parents or relatives on the air; and in the evening, another program, “Lasso Na BêAfrika” (“Today in Central African Republic”) gives a voice to people in the interior of the country, who talk about their concrete problems and their life situations. Consultations with listeners have allowed us to develop a thematic dimen-

sion in this programme, tackling a new issue each evening, such as the problem of lack of roads throughout the country. Second, thanks to the aerial means provided by UNHAS,¹ we regularly send our journalists based in Bangui to report for several days in the most remote areas of CAR.

In CAR, as elsewhere, social networks are used as platforms for propaganda. In this context, how can RNL continue to provide reliable information?

Disinformation, that is dissemination of messages that distort the facts, is gaining ground on social networks in CAR, with an unprecedented scale since the entry into play of some of the country’s bilateral partners. In 2020, some Facebook accounts or WhatsApp groups reported, for example, that the European Union’s humanitarian aid in the face of the Covid pandemic was designed to spread the virus in the country. The campaign for the presidential election in December 2020 also saw massive misinformation on social networks. In response, RNL launched the #StopATènè (“Stop Disinformation”) project, a fact-checking webpage that brings together radio and other journalists, bloggers and civil society leaders. This initiative has allowed us to identify not only many distorted facts but also those who fabricate them. We are giving the #StopATènè articles a radio format, in order to reach a much wider audience and thus counteract the rumours that spread like wildfire by word of mouth in the Central African Republic. ■

Getting the voices of the most isolated populations heard

(1) Humanitarian air service of the United Nations.

Eyewitness

JOURNALISM FOCUSED ON SOCIAL UTILITY AND MEDIATION

Independent journalist, **Anne-Sophie Novel** is author of the book "The Media, the World and Us" (Actes Sud, 2019). In it, she explores new "ways of doing" through which media around the world are trying to re-engage with their audiences.

What do the media initiatives you're interested in have in common?

Anne-Sophie Novel: These are initiatives by journalists around the world to try to build a new dialogue with their audiences to better recount the world they perceive. This is happening in a context of digital change that is shaking up the economy and media formats. The documentary was edited during the Yellow Vests crisis in France, which confirmed the immense distrust that had developed in that country between the media and a large part of the public. In my book, but also in the documentary "The Media, the World and Me"¹ and the video series "Media: the great reinvention?" that I made for the National Audiovisual Institute in 2019, I focused on what I call new "ways of doing". There are five of them: a return to media that are primarily financed by their readers, not by their shareholders or advertisers; fact-checking journalism, in the face of the online profusion of false information; constructive or solutions journalism, in the face of the media's tendency toward an anxiety-inducing narrative of the world; data journalism, to make the abundance of public data online accessible and readable by the greatest number; and finally, a return to investigative journalism over time, in the face of the shortcuts of continuous news.

**New initiatives
to create
dialogue
between
audiences
with opposing
views**



Anne-Sophie Novel © Julie Rey

Among these media initiatives, which ones do you think guarantee the most lasting link between the media and their audiences?

Respecting the fundamental values of journalism - ethics, keeping in touch with what's happening on the ground, taking time to investigate, verification of information - remains in my opinion a necessary condition for the public to trust the media. But the current possibilities allow us to go further: transparency on the journalistic method and conversation with the public are the keys to a new media culture focused on social utility. Faced with the numerous divisions created by social networks, it is possible to develop journalistic techniques of mediation that allow everyone to express themselves and to be heard. Two recent examples stand out for me. In 2019 in France, media outlets experimented with methods of interviewing Yellow Vests that, through reformulations by journalists and validations by the people concerned, guaranteed the interviewees a faithful rendition of their words. In June 2017, the "Deutschland schpirt"² initiative set up online by Hamburg weekly Die Zeit enabled 1,200 of its readers with totally opposing political views to engage in face-to-face dialogue online. But the media, which is very diverse and often suffers from the public's undifferentiated distrust of journalists and institutions, cannot do everything. In a world that is often divided, they are also dependent on the public and their willingness or not to be exposed to otherness. ■

Fondation Hironnelle is a Swiss non-profit organization which provides information to populations faced with crisis, empowering them in their daily lives and as citizens. Through our work, millions of people in war-affected countries, post-conflict areas, humanitarian crisis and societies in democratic transition have access to media that speak to them and give them a voice.

Impressum

Mediation

Biannual publication of Fondation Hironnelle

Director of publication:
Caroline Vuillemin

Editors:
Nicolas Boissez
Benjamin Bibas /
la fabrique documentaire

Graphic design:
Marek Zielinski

Translation:
Julia Crawford

Printing:
Groux & Graph'style

Avenue du Temple 19C
1012 Lausanne, Suisse

hironnelle.org
info@hironnelle.org
T. + 41 21 654 20 20

Crédit Suisse AG
IBAN :
CH05 0483 5041 8522 8100 5

ISSN 2624-8840 (Print)
ISSN 2624-8859 (Online)

(1) Les Médias, le monde et moi (Anne-Sophie Novel et Flo Laval, mars 2019) : Lesmediaslemondeetmoi.com.

(2) "Germany Talks". Initiative taken up since then in other countries on the platform MyCountryTalks.org