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DOES JOURNALISM EDUCATION MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
A case study of journalism students' media use habits and practices.

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ABSTRACT

Do journalism students read newspapers? Are they aware of what is happening around the world and in their own countries? Keeping track of current affairs and their developments is one of their concerns? Do they use the media to do it? If yes, how do they interpret and value the news? What's their opinion about journalism? How do they value journalism as a profession? Is journalism students' behavior different from other students, when it comes to using the media? If not, should it be? Should journalism education programs include these dimensions as part of their curricula? Do habits and uses of media differ along the way? Do journalism education programs make a difference?

These are some of the concerns that we face as journalism teachers, having to create and develop programs, curricula and strategies for journalism education. Although we were convinced that the products of media and current affairs should be brought to class, also as an item for students' evaluation, we felt the need to gather empirical data to test and improve our teaching methods. That's how we first came up with the idea for a survey about students' habits of media use, back in the year 2000. Since then, we have been developing a research in the form of a case study at University of Minho. So far, we have implemented the first part of the survey, an exploratory study, which enabled us to gather and analyze data about graduation students' habits and representations, from 2001 to 2005, and to test the instrument we created (questionnaire).

1. Introduction - Researching journalism education and journalism students: approaches and perspectives

Public debate about the quality of journalism, especially concerning ethical issues and their relation with journalists' training and education, usually emerges to discuss media coverage of big events. Most times, this debate points out journalists' errors, ways to avoid or prevent them, and education and training are usually pointed out as ways of improving journalism quality.

More than a resource to improve journalism quality, and departing from a functionalist sociology's point of view, education is one of the criteria that define a professional activity: "a profession presupposes the existence of formal conditions to accede the activity (diploma or certification)" (Neveu, 2005, p.25). Although no specific type of education is required to become a journalist in Portugal[1], it's still valid the notion that a given knowledge about the exercise of the profession is necessary, even if it is acquired in a more informal way, by socialization in the newsroom.

In a brief literature review, we can find different levels of analysis and perspectives for the study of journalism education. From an international and cross-national perspective (Frölich & Holtz-Bacha, 2003), and from a political economy point of view, we can try to distinguish and compare different systems, traditions, policies and concepts of journalism education, in order to find common grounds and tendencies, in a given geographical space. Other

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[1] To become a journalist, as defined by "Estatuto do Jornalista", one must have at least 18 years and be in full use of one's civil rights. Then, after an internship in a newsroom, with a positive evaluation, one must require the certification. For Portuguese law, a journalist is someone that performs activities of research, gathering, selection and treatment of facts news or opinions, producing text, image or sound, meant to be distributed by the press, news agency, television or radio networks or any other form of electronic distribution, as long as it's one's main occupation, permanent and financially rewarded.

investigations gather and analyze data (at national level) to characterize the field of journalism education, evaluating its development, in terms of enrollments, programs and the socio-demographics of students and faculty members (Kosicki & Becker, 1998; Riffe, et al., 1999; Becker, et al., 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004). In our opinion, these are important and valuable investigations for the enlighten of political decision at a government level, especially in cases like Portugal, where public universities have very few autonomy in deciding the number of students that will be admitted each year (*numerus clausus*) and departments must follow strict rules (ratio teacher/student) when hiring teachers. Also at the level of the European Union, the comparison of different contexts becomes important in trying to create common education structures, as an effort to enhance mobility and collaboration opportunities, being Bologna Declaration a very good example of this purpose.

Other authors debate journalism education focused on its nature. They debate possible paradigms for journalism curricula and the development of journalism as a discipline. This discussion can include the construction of an ideal curriculum, which "calls for a careful examination not only of the elements of journalism, but also an examination of the nature and relevance of university disciplines" (Adam, 2001, p. 326); or the relationship between academic knowledge and professional skills, in favor of an education "which enables them [journalists] to put themselves and their society in perspective; find out anything and question everything" (Burgh, 2003, p. 110); or even an approach that defends the need to redefine journalism education as an object of study, framing it "as an institutional practice of representation with its own historical, political, economic and cultural conditions of existence" (Skinner, Gasher & Compton, 2001, p. 357).

We can also find a number of investigations, mostly case studies, concerned with a better knowledge of students' attitudes, values or perceptions about the profession (Keel, 1998;

Peters, 2001) or even their media use habits (Bressers & Bergen, 2002; Schwingel, Melo & Figueiredo, 2005).

Other investigations focus on the effects of journalism education on students, whether we are dealing with their attitudes and views about journalism and ethical behavior (Ball & Hanna, 2004; Ball, Hanna & Sanders 2005) or the way education influences journalists perceptions of their role (Schultz, 2002). Our investigation is also focused on the issue of journalism education possible effects, but were interested in finding out possible alterations is students' media use habits (Marinho & Pinto, 2004; Marinho & Pinto, 2005).

Our survey departs from three major premises:

- Media literacy, in general, is essential to democracy and citizenship, but it is even more crucial when it comes to journalism students, as the future producers of journalistic content. In this discussion, we must acknowledge the importance of the quality of the journalism that is taken as reference by these students. This premise that education is crucial to democracy is discussed and sustained by authors such as Adam (2001) or Burgh, for whom "how journalists are formed should matter to the wider society which depends upon the quality of its journalism for the efficacy of its institutions and for understanding in every sphere" (Burgh, 2003, p. 95). In this context:

> "(…) democracy is concerned operationally with constituting authority and providing
> citizens with the equipment to watch and evaluate the exercise of that authority.
> Journalists, amongst others, provide information and thought on which consciousness of
> the state and its officers is formed. More broadly, journalists are prominently involved in
> the formation of social consciousness in the name of the public" (Adam, 2001, p. 316).

- Therefore, there is a relationship between the concepts of what is journalism (as a profession), the notion of what is quality journalism and the idea of what could be a model of journalism training and education.

- When we consider "media use habits" we view them as cultural habits, as a part of the socialization process. Therefore, we are talking about the cultural practices of people in general, including journalism students. To study the relationship between journalism education programs and students' practices and habits, we must compare results of people in general and journalism students.

2. Minho University: a case study of journalism students' media use habits and practices

2.1. The Project in Context

This is an investigation of journalism students' media use habits and practices. We were driven to develop such a project because we firmly believe that the "formal education" and training of future journalists must involve contacting the media, paying attention to the news and to current affairs and developing a critical thinking towards journalistic products. This is a concern that must be translated not only in recommendations to journalism students, for them to pursue outside the class, but also in the development of journalism courses and programs that bring the media into the classroom and evaluate students also by their capability to discuss the news and their quality.

To understand the project's guidelines it's helpful to introduce some very brief comments on the Portuguese education system, and journalism education policies in particular. Then we will present an overview of Minho University and its program for communication and journalism studies, our case study.

Portuguese superior education system (private or public) is organized in university and polytechnic education. The first one has been more centered in a theoretical basis, whereas the second has a more practical emphasis. This is also true for communication and journalism education, a field which has been developed in Portugal in the late 25 years (the first university graduation program was created in 1979).

At the same time, other non university programs were developed by other education and training institutions, such as Centro de Formação de Jornalistas and Centro Protocolar de Formação de Jornalistas, more devoted to developing training programs for professional journalists.

Since then, the field has expanded and we can now identify 28 higher education programs (university and polytechnic) that claim to train students for the exercise of the profession of journalist, although most of them are denominated as "communication studies". This expansion is not typical of journalism and communication studies, but "can only be understood within the overall expansion of superior education in Portugal in recent years" (Pinto & Sousa, 2003, p. 178). As stated by these authors "the growth has been particularly significant in the private sector; the public sector, although growing considerably, could not absorb a great number of candidates from higher education" (p. 178). This has been changing in recent years, for private and public sector, which are now dealing with a surplus of vacancies in some areas. This is not the case of Journalism and Communication programs, at least in the case of the public sector, where candidates keep filling all the available positions.

 In recent years, university programs have been going through a process of reorganization, derived from the need to meet demands from "Bologna Declaration". This has not been overall a pacific process and universities haven't been following the same guidelines in conducting their reorganization policies. This also happens in the communication/journalism field where consensus hasn't been reached. So far, programs have been reviewed according to different concerns and in favor of each university's political options. In some situations, like our case study, reviews still haven't been implemented.

Despite this lack of consensus, we must acknowledge that this is a determinant process for higher education Portuguese system. Among other objectives, the Declaration considers of primary relevance the "promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance"[2]. We find this particularly important because, as stated above, we believe journalism quality and journalism education quality are related concepts. Because of this, we believe Bologna should be a crucial moment to debate journalism education quality models at a national level, in

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[2] Joint Declaration of The European Ministers of Education, convened in Bologna on the 19th June 1999.

order to redefine and focus the ongoing program reviewing process. This debate should involve teachers, journalists, journalism students and education institutions, in order to overcome barriers and misconceptions of each others' role and contributions, especially in the case of the traditional opposition between journalists and journalism teachers.

As for Minho University, it's a public organization which offers a "Social Communication" graduate degree, integrated in a Social Sciences School and, more specifically, in a Communication Sciences Department. This is a 5 year program, set up in 1991, with a strong social sciences and theoretical basis, like most programs in Portuguese universities. There is a project for the program's review, according do Bologna, but it still hasn't been implemented.

The program's first two years are mostly devoted to sociology, methodology, semiotics, economics, communication theory or computers' courses, all attended by communication studies students. These types of courses are maintained during the all program, with the progressive introduction of courses related to communication specific areas, including Journalism.

This happens at the middle of the program, with the introduction of Journalism, Public Relations, Advertising and Audiovisual Production and Direction. At this point, students much choose 3 of these courses. The Journalism course curriculum is structured with the purpose of bridging theory and practice. The most important subjects of journalism sociology are presented and discussed, aside with some practical exercises and skill based lectures. Part of the proposed exercises implies the observation and critic of published material; another aspect has to do with exercises in class and then students are motivated to publish outside the classroom – in newspapers, radio or TV networks, or in their own weblog[3]. At the beginning of every lecture current events and its media coverage are discussed. All this aspects are considered in students' evaluation.

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[3] Students create a weblog, as a way of publishing their work, given the difficulties that sometimes arise when they try to publish in the media.

In the 4th year, students must choose 2 of the previous specialized courses, but now they are practice oriented. They are called Laboratories and in the case Journalism Laboratory students develop skills for reporting in newspapers, radio and TV (some attention is also given to the digital environment) and are evaluated by their products and their performance.

Finally, in the last year of the program, students must choose only one specific arena (of the two previous laboratories), which determines their curricular internship. For students who choose Journalism, they will first attend a Journalism Course, devoted to prepare them to the entrance in the marketplace, with lectures from professionals from different media. Then, during second semester, they will have an internship in a newsroom (newspaper, television or radio, according to their choice). In the end, they must write and present a report about their experience.

For journalism students, the program develops in a "narrowing process", from a social sciences and communication centered education to a journalism based education, ending in a practical experience, by working in a newsroom.

Although students are encouraged to develop training experiences during their graduation program, they must do it outside the Communication Department, because the Department doesn't have any projects in this field. Nevertheless, students work, some of them as a full time occupation, in newspapers, radios (Minho University owns a radio station – RUM) or TV networks, along the 5 years. Some of them have even created their own news projects and most of them occasionally collaborate with media organizations. These are all informal education activities, although teachers encourage journalism students to pursue them and value this type of activity.

Despite some lack of resources (human, technical and financial) the Communication Department has tried to implement ways of providing students sufficient resources to allow them to develop media use habits and to keep track of current events: a Journalism Lab, with

computers to access the internet; an Audiovisual Laboratory and a "Press Room", where students can find the most important newspapers and news magazines, available for reading.

As for Minho University, we can mention an effort towards a "technological environment", which should enable students to fell at ease with digital resources. A national project called "Virtual Campus" has been developed in the University, enabling technological developments in several arenas such as bureaucratic processes, consultations, scientific publishing and web access (wireless). Every teacher and student has an e-mail account and a login to perform a great variety of activities. This makes it (at least in theory) much easy to acquire technological competences, and reinforces Journalism students' capabilities to access information and manipulate new technologies.

This is the context in which this project has been developed. We are convinced that understanding this context is important to the interpretation of some of the empirical results.

2.2. Research Questions and Hypothesis

The main research question that guides our survey argues *the extent to which "formal education" influences journalism students' habits and practices of media use*. By "formal education", we mean everything that as to do with knowledge and practices transmitted in journalism courses: assignments, readings, debates, etc. This concept is operated by the independent variable "Level of Formal Education", which expresses students' progress along the graduation program (from de 1st to the 5th year)[4].

Therefore, our general hypothesis is that *we believe there is an association between "level of formal education" and journalism students' media use habits and practices* and if this is true, then:

- H1: *Reading habits (written press) will tend to increase along the level of formal education.*
We believe higher demands from formal education will drive students to be more alert and to seek for more information about current events. This implies seeing, earring and reading the news. Since formal education becomes more demanding along the way, we expect that students will meet that demand. Another justification lies on the fact that a part of journalism courses' syllabus and assignments implies critical analysis of published material, which should develop students' contact with media and, therefore, increase their reading habits.

- H2: *"Older" students will tend to choose more "hard news" as current events than "younger" students.*

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[4] This differs from the variable "School Year", which refers to the chronological series of "civil years".

The reasons stated above will create the need for information about "harder" subjects. We could also anticipate that a better knowledge of the process of making news will enable students to make better judgments about news quality, which would make them become more interested in "hard news". For this purpose, we will consider hard news events related to politics, economics, social politics, international, science and soft news events related to sports, life style, fait divers and police cases.

- H3: *Opinion about Portuguese journalism will tend to become more negative along the level of formal education.*

Becoming more aware of the "journalistic arena", and of the organizational (and economical) environment that surrounds it, students will develop a higher level of criticism towards the news. A better knowledge of the way news are made and of professional constraints may create a "criticism effect" towards the news, newsrooms environment and journalism in general.

This model implies considering "formal education" as the explaining factor of variations that occur in students' media use habits and practices. Although the model cannot account for the effect of other variables, we acknowledge their existence and possible effect. For the purpose of this discussion, we will consider the variable "informal education", which gathers different categories of possible effects, such as: the influence of family and friends; the natural "aging process", which implies higher levels of maturity and the alteration of interests and habits; the social, political and economical context; and also students' initiative in the learning process, translated, for instance, in non-curricular internships, visits to newsrooms, etc. Because they are outside the scope of this survey, these variables will not be measured.

Next, we'll discuss the methodological framework of this project, for a better understanding of its limitations and possibilities. Following data presentation, we'll focus on the hypothesis' discussion.

2.3. Methodology: sampling, data collection and methodological issues

To collect data for this project, we created and applied an anonymous questionnaire (Appendix 1), structured in 15 questions (including demographic variables), mostly in a "closed answer" format. Along the project, the questionnaire was slightly adapted, to meet the need to clarify some of the questions, but we can say that no significant changes were introduced.

As we have previously explained, we gathered data every "School Year" (in October), inquiring students at the very beginning of their graduation (first year), in the middle of the graduation (third year) and at the end (fifth year). This model allows comparisons from different perspectives: the progress of the same group of students along the graduation (first, third and fifth year); all the students in different years (2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005); and three groups of students (first, third and last year of the graduation), each year (2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005).

"School Year"	"Level of Formal Education"				
	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th year
2001/2002	███		▥▥▥		▨▨▨
2002/2003	▨▨		▤▤		▰▰▰
2003/2004	▓▓		███		▥▥▥
2004/2005	▥▥		▨▨		▨▨
2005/2006	▨▨		▓▓		███

Table 1- The model for cohort analysis of students' media use habits

We used "typical cases", or "intentional", sampling, which is a type of non-probabilistic sampling. We chose one course in each year (1st, 3rd and 5th)[5], and asked the teacher to give out the questionnaire (in the classroom, all at the same time), although in some cases (very few), we were present because we were the courses' teacher. Nevertheless, we do not believe that our presence or absence constituted a disruption in the inquiring process.

Data that support our discussion were collected from 650 respondents, distributed by "School Year" and "Level of Formal Education". As Table 1 shows, 5th year students have a lesser relative weight in the sample. This is due to the fact that, as we have previously referred, these are only journalism students that have decided to have their curricular internships as journalists.

"School Year"	"Level of Formal Education"			
	1st year	3rd year	5th year	Total
2001/2002	64	60	31	155
2002/2003	29	67	29	125
2003/2004	49	53	28	130
2004/2005	59	43	29	131
2005/2006	39	50	20	109
Total	240	273	137	650

Table 2 – Sample distribution by "School Year" and "Level of Formal Education"

"School Year"	"Level of Formal Education"		
	1st year	3rd year	5th year
2001/2002	77%	69%	91%
2002/2003	28%	80%	94%
2003/2004	58%	57%	88%
2004/2005	69%	52%	91%
2005/2066	46%	80%	57%

Table 3 – Percentage of respondents, considering enrolments

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[5] We chose classes with higher enrolments, to ensure we would gather a "sufficient" number of respondents. Nevertheless, a number of students may not attend class this specific class on the relevant day, which we assume as an handicap. Because we do not want them to discuss questions, to avoid "contamination", and also because we want students do fill the questionnaire early at their arrival, we must assume the risk of having, in some cases, lower response rates.

With the exception of 1st year, 2002/2003, and 1st year, 2005/2006, all response rates are above 50%. In few cases we have rates above 80%. Regardless of this, we believe the cases that constituted the sample represent efficiently our survey's population.

When addressing methodological issues we must highlight the difficulties posed by the "cohort model". The most controversial aspect has to do with difficulties that arise from keeping respondents' anonymity, which prevents us from pairing questionnaires. Because of this, we can't really tell if we're dealing with the exact same students along the way: we can't be sure if the 1st year respondents in 2001/2002 are exactly the same in the 3rd year 2003/2004 and in the 5th year 2005/2006. We expect there's a high possibility that most of them are, but there's no statistical evidence for this. Also because of this, we must admit that some of the students may have answered the questionnaire, at the most, 3 times. If this is true, then some of the 650 respondents are, actually, the same people. Nevertheless, for statistical purposes, we must consider them as individual and distinct respondents.

Another methodological issue derives from handling the questionnaires in October. As explained above, we try our best to question 1st year students at their arrival. Because of this, they end up answering our questions in early October, three months before the end of each "civil year". This circumstance can become a problem when we're evaluating the respondents' selection of currents events, as shown in the following section. While looking at Table 4, we should be surprise to see that the "Tsunami" isn't mentioned as one of the most important (if not the most important) events in 2004. This happens because the event occurred in the 26th December 2004, while the inquiry took place in October, before the Tsunami.

While conducting the survey, some adaptations were introduced in the questionnaire, as mentioned previously. Most of them had to do with the construction of questions. At this point, we have identified other difficulties concerning data analysis and a new version of the questionnaire is being prepared, as discussed further. We have also reason to believe there

was, in some situations, a "contamination effect", that we can't measure or even prevent, although, at the beginning of the session, students are asked to answer only according to their own views and knowledge.

Another important limitation we intend to surpass has to do with the inexistence of control groups. To be able to say that these students' characteristics are typical, we should be able to compare our results with samples collected from non students, different graduation degree' and journalism students from other universities. At this point that is not possible, but it's being considered in the process of redesigning the survey.

Sampling also involves some limitations, mainly because with non-probabilistic samples no statistical extrapolation is possible, which prevents us from proceeding to statistical inference. Regardless of all these conditions, we believe it's possible to assume most of the characteristics of our sample as parameters for the studied population.

2.4. Data presentation and discussion

2.4.1. Sample overview: students' general profile and data presentation

In a total of 650 respondents, we have 517 females (79, 7%) and 132 (29, 3%) males. From what we know about gender distribution in communication and journalism graduate degree programs, we have reason to believe that this is a fair representation of reality. We must also remember that gender distribution in Portuguese universities also shows that women are the majority of students. As for age distribution, it varies between 17 and 36 year old, but 87% of students have 22 years or less. Most part of respondents lives in a rented apartment with colleagues (42, 2%) or with their family (38, 5%).

Before discussing our hypothesis, we would like to present some of the data collected concerning students' habits and uses of media. Only 4 of the 650 students declare they are not concerned about keeping track of current affairs and their developments. As for their motives, they claim that "they are tired of news and of the exploitation of news", that they "do not remember to do it" and because "current affairs are depressing" and "full of disgraces and deception". None of these are 5th year students. We believe that we are dealing here with a "desirability effect" that leads the respondents to answer according to what they think it would be the proper behavior for a communication or journalism student. Had the question been proposed in different terms,[6] answers would most certainly been different.

For those who keep track of current affairs, television is, by far, the most used media, chosen by 80, 7% of respondents. Next comes the press, with 11, 2 % of choices, followed by the internet (4, 3%) and radio (3, 8%). These data are consistent with the data of several reports that have been published in recent years, by different organizations about Portuguese people in general. In 2002, Eurobarometer revealed that television was the most reliable media for Portuguese (above the European average). In 2004, the European Interactive Advertising Association confirmed that television was the favorite media for Europeans to gather information about current affairs and also in 2004 Marktest, the Portuguese audience research company, revealed that Portugal was, among all the members of the European Audiovisual Observatory, the country with the highest percentage of TV sets ownership (in 70, 6% of Portuguese homes there would be, at least, 2 TV sets).[7]

Almost a quarter of students (24, 5%) declare they do not have the habit of reading any daily newspapers. As for the ones that read them 36, 6% read "Público" and 20, 5% "Jornal de

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[6] This is one of the questions that have been altered in the revised version of the questionnaire. Instead of a yes/no answer, we now propose a scale, in order to allow respondents to make a more truthful choice.
[7] These data were published by Portuguese newspapers.

Notícias" ("Diário de Notícias" gathers only 4, 6% of choices")[8]. If we consider sports as a category, we have 7, 1% of readers and 5, 8% for regional newspapers. Only 27, 1% are daily readers: 56% of them read a daily newspaper 2 or 3 times a week; 13, 3% do it once a week and 3, 6% do it more rarely. When it comes to the weekly press, 44, 4% of respondents do not read any newspaper or magazine; 25, 5% read "Visão" (a news magazine) and 13, 2% read "Expresso" (a quality newspaper). Among the ones that read, 56, 6% do it once a week, 33, 9% once or twice a month and 9, 4% do it more rarely.

Evidence for a "displacement of newspaper reading by television viewing" has been referred by other investigators, such as Peiser: "younger cohorts not only show higher levels of television viewing and a more favorable attitude toward television, but they also tend to read the newspaper less regularly than older cohorts" (2000, p. 202). Even of in a different survey context, our data seem to follow this direction.

In another section of the questionnaire we tried to gather information about the way students remember, select and value current events. In Table 4 we display data regarding the 2 most important international[9] events of each year, as chosen by the respondents[10].

As Table 4 shows, we have 3 to 6 events a year with more than 10 references each and a considerable sum of "other events", which might express some dispersion in the choices of students. In general, every year we can observe that one event distances from others in terms of choices. In some cases (2001 and 2003) it seems that there is an overwhelming event ("September 11th" and "war in Iraq") that "crushes" the others and unbalances the list. So far, we can't fully explain these results, but we came up with some possible "common sense"

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[8] These can be considered quality newspapers.

[9] We also gathered data about national events, but given the conference context, we find it more interesting to present only international events, that can be better understood by all.

[10] Because a great number of current events were quoted, we had to apply a criterion to create categories: we decided to consider as categories events quoted at least by 10 respondents (with the exception of the event "Election in East-Timor"). The respondents were asked to choose the 2 most important international events of the year, without any order of importance and regardless of their opinion about the events.

explanations. As for the dispersion, we believe that might have something to do with personal tendencies for a certain subject. There are always some unsurpassable events (probably the first event mentioned by each student[11]) but then respondents tend to choose a subject that they remember because of their personal believes or interests, which explains, on one hand, the small group of 3 to 6 major events, and, on the other hand, the diversity of "other events". Another possibility has to do with the effect of recent exposure to the events. According to this possibility, students would tend to remember and value events that occurred close to the day when they answered the questionnaire. To test this hypothesis, we could create a "date of occurrence" variable, so we would be able to measure the proximity effect on the choices.

	International Events	References
2001	September 11th	145
	War in Afghanistan	47
	George Bush's election as US president	18
	Murder of Portuguese tourists in Brazil[12]	13
	Israel/Palestinian conflict	12
	Election in East-Timor	9
	Other events	43
2002	US's battle against terrorism	68
	Terrorist act in Bali	37
	Israel/Palestinian conflict	20
	World Football Championship 2002	18
	Euros' (currency) circulation in Europe	17
	Other events	69
2003	War in Iraq	119
	Death of Sérgio Vieira de Melo (terrorism in Bagdad)	11
	Israel/Palestinian conflict	10
	Other events	78
2004	March 11th	58
	Olympic Games	48
	Beslan Sequester	42
	War in Iraq	35
	Terrorism	15
	Other events	49
2005	Katrina	52
	London's terrorist acts	38
	Pope's death	21
	Natural catastrophes	17

[11] Although we gave no indications as for an order of importance, we can't be absolutely sure that, even unconsciously, students didn't apply that logic when they answered.

[12] This reveals a misunderstanding of the concept of "national/international". We departed from an "impact of the event and its' consequences" criterion. Because this was not clearly explained, some of the students considered a "geographical" criterion, according to which an international event could be one that occurred outside Portugal, regardless of its' impact being only national, as long as it involved Portuguese citizens. This explains why such a particular event could be considered an international one.

	Bird Flu	16
	Colons' retrieval from Gaza	10
	Other events	38

Table 4 – List of International Events

It's true that all major international events mentioned were largely covered by Portuguese media, but we can't claim that this variable influences the students' choices, because we didn't ask anything about the way the information came to their knowledge. A brief overview of Table 4 reveals that issues related do "safety" (individual or collective), in its various forms, are very present as well as politics and economy, but there's also room for sports celebrations, probably as strong opportunities for "universal" celebration and decompression: the Olympics and the World Football Championship.

Another section of the questionnaire inquired students about their opinion of Portuguese journalism. The majority of respondents (58, 7%) declared a "positive" opinion; 13, 2% went for "negative" and almost a quarter (24, 6%) chose the option "neither negative nor positive", which was rather surprising, considering we're dealing with communication and journalism students, whom we would expect to have an opinion on this subject. Extreme positions, "very negative" and "very positive", gather only, respectively, 2% and 1, 4% of choices.

Next, students were asked to choose from a number of items about journalists' skills the ones they identified the most with (they were allowed 3 choices). Table 5 shows the results:

A journalist should be…	Frequency
… unbiased	444
… truthful	359
… cultured	248
… creative	104
… resourceful	99
… take sides[13]	1

Table 5 – Frequency for journalists' most valued skills

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[13] A probable explanation for the lack of choice for this journalistic skill may have something to do with a bad choice of words, in the construction of the question. The Portuguese expression that we selected did not express our real aim, which was more in the sense of stating that a journalist should "defend causes". In the revised version of the questionnaire this has been corrected.

Finally we inquired students about their views on the relationship between journalism and the internet. The majority (65, 1%) considered the internet as "innovation to journalism"; 60, 8% view it as "an information source"; 41, 4% think it's another arena for the profession and only 5, 1% considers it "a threat to journalism".

Trough this descriptive approach, we are trying to give an overview of the project as a hole. In the following section we will discuss our data in light of the above proposed hypothesis. For that, we will only use the specific variables, as mentioned in the hypothesis.

2.4.2. Discussion of hypothesis: does journalism education make a difference?

We'll proceed discussing our hypothesis, as stated above. The general hypothesis that guides the survey is that *we believe there is an association between "level of formal education" and journalism students' media use habits and practices.* This general hypothesis presupposes three "sub-hypotheses", which imply the association of a set of variables. For methodological purposes, we will depart from these "sub-hypotheses" to organize our discussion around them.

- H1: *Reading habits (written press) will tend to increase along the level of formal education.*
To verify this assumption, we crossed "level of formal education" with 4 other variables: "daily press reading habits"; "daily press reading frequency"; "weekly press reading habits" and "weekly press reading frequency". The following Tables display the results:

	"Daily Press Reading Habits"		
"Level of Formal Education"	No	Yes	**Total**
1st year	77	155	232
3rd year	62	202	264
5th year	15	117	132

Total	154	474	628

Table 6 – "Level of Formal Education"* "Daily Press Reading Habits" Cross tabulation

An observation of the values shows that the percentage of students reading the daily press increases along formal education: 66, 8% of 1st year students; 76,5% in 3rd year; and 88,6% in the end. This also a statistically valid relation, since Cramer's V equals 0,187, although we can't consider it a very strong association.

	"Weekly Press Reading Habits"		
"Level of Formal Education"	No	Yes	**Total**
1st year	129	93	232
3rd year	103	157	260
5th year	41	92	133
Total	273	342	615

Table 7 - "Level of Formal Education"* "Weekly Press Reading Habits" Cross tabulation

When it comes to weekly press we have the same results. The habit increases along formal education (41, 9%; 60, 4% and 69, 2%) and there also association between variables in the sample. The difference has to do with the strength of the relation. Here, we have higher values for Cramer's V: 0, 218.

	"Daily Press Reading Frequency"				
"Level of Formal Education"	Every Day	2 or 3 Times a Week	Once a Week	More Rarely	**Total**
1st year	42	76	28	9	155
3rd year	53	122	22	5	202
5th year	33	67	13	3	116
Total	128	265	63	17	473

Table 8 - "Level of Formal Education"* "Daily Press Reading Frequency" Cross tabulation

Although rather weak, there is an association between these variables. Gamma equals 0, 096, which represents a positive association between "level of formal education" and "daily press reading frequency". This means that both variables evolve in the same direction: when "level of formal education" increases, "daily press reading frequency" also increases.

	"Weekly Press Reading Frequency"			
"Level of Formal Education"	Once a Week	Once or Twice a Month	More Rarely	Total
1st year	56	26	10	92
3rd year	88	58	11	157
5th year	48	31	11	90
Total	192	115	32	339

Table 9 - "Level of Formal Education"*"Weekly Press Reading Frequency" Cross tabulation

As for the weekly press, we have the opposite result. Value for Gamma is -0, 082, meaning that variables evolve in opposite directions: When "level of formal education" increases, "weekly press reading frequency" decreases.

Generally, it's fair to say that data tend to confirm our hypothesis, except in the case of the relationship between "level of education" and "weekly press reading frequency". We can in fact claim that students reading habits tend to change (increase) accordingly to their level of formal education, both variables varying in the same direction. A possible explanation to the decrease of weekly press reading frequency could lie in the increase of the daily press reading frequency. We could admit that students in more advanced levels read more in a daily basis, which ends up decreasing the need to turn to the weekly press.

- H2: *"Older" students will tend to choose more "hard news" as current events than "younger" students.*

An observation of data from Tables 11 and 11 supports our hypothesis. In fact, in both cases (current event #1 and current event #2) the choice of "hard news"[14] increases along formal education (although students clearly tend to chose hard news, despite their level, as data

___

[14] To classify an event as "hard news" or "soft news" we toke into account not only the event itself, but also the context in which it's mentioned and the focus students highlight when they enunciate their choice.

show). As for the first case (current event #1), we find that 88, 1% of first year students chose
"hard news" as the most important event of the year; in the 3rd year this happens in 92, 5% of
cases and in the 5th year for 92, 6% (the evolution from the 3rd to the 5th year is almost
inexistent). We have the same tendency for "current event #2" (72, 9%; 82%; 83, 6%), but
values are lower. We believe it might have something we addressed previously: the "order of
choice". While in "current event #1" a great amount of students tends to focus on an
unsurpassable event, in "current event #2" some of them might chose "for second" something
that has more to do with their personal tendencies, or something that happened very recently,
despite of its' "importance". These are, naturally, mere speculations.

"Level of Formal Education"	"International Current Event #1"		
	Hard News	Soft News	Total
1st year	200	27	227
3rd year	245	29	265
5th year	126	10	136
Total	571	57	628

Table 10 - "Level of Formal Education"*"International Current Event #1" Cross tabulation

"Level of Formal Education"	"International Current Event #2"		
	Hard News	Soft News	Total
1st year	148	55	203
3rd year	187	41	228
5th year	97	19	116
Total	432	115	547

Table 11- - "Level of Formal Education"*"International Current Event #2" Cross tabulation

In both cases, there is statistical association. For "current event #1", Cramer's V equals 0, 074
and for "current event #2" equals 0, 115. We believe that the difference of strength could also
be explained by the fact that, because of we have just discussed in the previous paragraph, the
distance between hard news and soft news becomes more clear and evident in the second
choice. In the first case there is a high probability that students will choose a "hard event",
which received great media coverage and impacted on many people's lives, despite of

individual factors' influence or their own judgment about the events' importance. In such a situation it's less likely that education would make much difference and factors like media coverage could explain the results. This situation is altered for "current event #2", where choices may be more "independent" from "external factors" and more based on students' judgment.

- H3: *Opinion about Portuguese journalism will tend became more negative along the level of formal education.*

"Level of Formal Education"	"Opinion about Portuguese Journalism"					
	Very Negative	Negative	Nor Negative Or Positive	Positive	Very Positive	Total
1st year	5	30	59	137	7	238
3rd year	5	34	70	156	1	266
5th year	3	20	27	80	1	131
Total	13	84	156	373	9	635

Table 12 - "Level of Formal Education"*"Opinion about Portuguese Journalism" Cross tabulation

First, as we mentioned before, opinion about Portuguese journalism tends to be favorable. Nevertheless, some alterations can be identified along formal education. This becomes more evident when we consider only 3 response categories: "negative"; "nor positive or negative"; "positive".

"Level of Formal Education"	"Opinion about Portuguese Journalism"		
	Negative	Nor Negative Or Positive	Positive
1st year	14,7%	24,8%	60,5%
3rd year	14,7%	26,3%	59%
5th year	17,6%	20,6%	61,8%

Tabela 13 – "Level of Formal Education"*"Opinion about Portuguese Journalism" cross tabulation

As shown, number of negative opinions is the same in the 1st and 3rd year, but increases in the 5th. As for the category "nor negative or positive", increases from the 1st to the 3rd year, but decreases in the fifth. Positive views decrease in the middle of formal education and then

increase. It seems we have a transfer situation: students that had no opinion in the 1st and 3rd year then start thinking about these issues. Some of them shift to a positive opinion but it seems that most of these students became more critical.

When we cross "level of formal education" and "opinion about Portuguese journalism" (5 categories) we find that these variables are statically associated: Gamma equals – 0, 022. This implies a week association in which variables vary in opposite directions, as predicted by our hypothesis.

We could say that, in general terms, data tend to support our hypothesis, although values report weak association between variables. This is not surprising, if we consider that, as we have previously noticed, "level of formal education" is a part of a wider explanation model for students' media use habits and practices. We have, therefore, reason to believe that students' media use habits and practices changes along their formal journalism education and that that specific variable might have something to do with those changes. More than this, we have the conviction that this happens because of the emphasis that is placed on the need to keep track of current events and on the contact with media production in the classroom. This believes need to be clarified in future research.

3. Redesigning the project and perspectives of development

Departing from the analysis of these data and from our findings, we are now improving the questionnaire to be applied in the second stage of the survey, which is now starting. As stated previously, some questions were corrected and other dimensions of analysis were introduced.

We are also extending the research to journalism students from other universities, integrated in different education programs, and also to students from other areas of knowledge, as well as non students, in order to control our main independent variable: "formal education".

We believe it will be interesting to follow this specific case at Minho University, in order to compare results before and after the implementation of Bologna restructuring process. An analysis and comparison of the program's curriculum would also provide us with some tools to understand if Bologna really implied a change of paradigm (as it is supposed to) or can be resumed to an administrative accommodation.

At this stage we would welcome the possibility of extending the survey to an international level. Any interested researchers may contact us, to arrange this possibility, which would certainly contribute to the quality of the project.

4. Final Comments

Our investigation of students' media use habits must be understood in the broader context of the construction and development of a concept for media education quality, in terms of the premises we have previously stated. We recognize that the development of the field requires the development of media education as a discipline of study and research, and the bridging of some "apparent opposites": theory and practice; students, teachers and journalists. The weight of national structures and education policy specificities in each country must be acknowledge in any debate, but exchange of experience and comparative analysis may prove to be very useful, especially to the definition and restructuring of journalism curricula.

New challenges arise in the field of journalism education, and should be addressed when we reflect upon the nature of the profession and the way it should be taught. The digital

environment is producing effects on newsrooms and on the practice of journalism and we should be asking ourselves whether we are dealing with a change of paradigm in the profession, which should also de reflected in education and, if so, which is the best model to pursue it.

At this point we can't really claim that journalism education does make a crucial difference in students' habits of using the media to keep track of current events. But our results support the thesis that formal education is part of the model that explains the variation of those habits. Along with the empirical results, we sustain the empirical knowledge built from the contact with our students, witnessing their development in terms of skills, knowledge of current events and critical thinking about journalism, the media and the world: their growth as journalism students and, hopefully, future journalists, and their consciousness as citizens.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire Delivered to Students – 2001/2005 (Portuguese version)

Práticas mediáticas dos estudantes de Comunicação Social

....

Este questionário destina-se a conhecer as práticas e representações dos alunos de Comunicação Social relativamente a alguns domínios com especial destaque para o jornalismo. As respostas são anónimas. Desde já se agradece a sua colaboração.

....

1. Costuma acompanhar as notícias da actualidade?
   Sim
   Não *(se respondeu não, passe à questão 7)*

2. Qual o meio de comunicação a que mais recorre para esse efeito? *(Indique apenas um)*
   Imprensa
   Rádio
   TV
   Internet

3. Costuma ler algum jornal diário?
   Sim. Se sim, qual?
   _____
   Não. *(Se respondeu não, passe à questão 5)*

4. Com que frequência o faz?
   Todos os dias
   2 a 3 vezes por semana
   1 vez por semana
   Mais raramente

5. Costuma ler algum semanário ou revista de informação geral?
   Sim. Se sim, qual?
   _____
   Não. *(Se respondeu não, passe à questão 8)*

6. Com que frequência o faz?
   Uma vez por semana
   1-2 vezes por mês
   Mais raramente
   (Passe à questão 8)

7. Se não costuma acompanhar as notícias da actualidade, diga porquê.
   _____
   _____
   _____

8. Indique os **dois** acontecimentos nacionais ocorridos em 2005 que considera dos mais importantes:
   _____
   _____

9. Indique os **dois** acontecimentos internacionais deste ano de 2005 que considera dos mais importantes:
   _____
   _____

10. A sua opinião sobre o jornalismo que se faz actualmente em Portugal é, de uma forma geral: *(assinalar com um X)*

    Muito negativa
    Negativa
    Nem negativa nem positiva
    Positiva
    Muito positiva

11. Da lista de afirmações abaixo, indique as **duas** com as quais mais se identifica:

    O jornalista deve ser culto
    O jornalista deve ser desenrascado
    O jornalista deve ser imparcial
    O jornalista deve ser criativo
    O jornalista deve ser verdadeiro
    O jornalista deve tomar partido
    Outra. Qual
    _____

12. Relativamente à profissão de jornalista, parece-lhe que a Internet constitui:
    (Escolha duas possibilidades)

    Mais um campo para a profissão
    Uma fonte de informação
    Uma ameaça ao jornalismo
    Uma inovação no modo de fazer jornalismo.

Para tratamento estatístico das respostas, agradecemos que preencha ainda os seguintes itens:

13. Sexo:
    Feminino
    Masculino

14. Idade: anos

15. Durante o tempo de aulas vive:

    Com os pais ou familiares
    Num lar/residência universitária
    Num quarto
    Num apartamento com colegas
    Outra situação.
    Qual? _____

OBRIGADA PELA COLABORAÇÃO!