

"I PARTICIPATE BECAUSE...": considerations about the involvement of ordinary people in the telejournalism production of Imperatriz (MA)

"EU PARTICIPO PORQUE...": considerações acerca do envolvimento do cidadão comum na produção telejornalística de Imperatriz (MA)

"PARTICIPO PORQUE...": consideraciones sobre la participación del ciudadano común y corriente en la producción de informativos televisivos en Imperatriz (MA)

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ABSTRACT:

This article is an excerpt from the master's Dissertation entitled "'I participate because...': reflections on the participation of ordinary citizens in the telejournalism of Imperatriz (MA)", which aims to understand the intention of ordinary citizens to collaborate in the construction of news. The research also aims to understand why these people assist television journalists in news production, even without being mentioned or receiving financial incentive. With an interactionist approach (BLUMER, 1980), this work used the Survey collection technique and semi-structured interviews as a method. Among the main results, we found that the vast majority participate because they believe in the 'power' that television news must help individuals, or the community solve problems.

KEYWORDS: Participatory journalism; Telejournalism; Symbolic Interactionism; Imperatriz-MA.

Introduction

The participation of the common citizen, by sending content that they deem newsworthy to journalistic newsrooms, is often analyzed in many studies in the field of communication. However, most research starts from the perspective of analysis, which is the production of news from the audience's participation and how it interferes in this process.

With the aim of filling this space, this research aims to understand the involvement that citizens have with the journalistic narrative of the city of Imperatriz - MA¹, having as

¹ Located in the Metropolitan Region of Southwest Maranhense, with a population of 259,980 inhabitants in 2021 (IBGE index), thus being the second most populous municipality in the state of Maranhão. The city extends along the right bank of the Tocantins River, crossed by the Belém-Brasília Highway, located on the border with the state of Tocantins. Imperatriz is the largest commercial, energy and economic junction in the state, and is also the second largest population, economic, political and cultural center in Maranhão. The city is a crossroads between soy from Balsas, in the south of Maranhão, logging, on the border with Pará, steel in Açailândia and family farming in the rest of the state, with emphasis on rice production and also on future potential

a guiding problem the motivations that the public in Imperatriz has when participating in the news process of the city's television news programs by sending content, they deem newsworthy. To do so, we structured our analysis in two stages: first with the application of a survey questionnaire, with the sole purpose of obtaining our "participatory universe" for the individual semi-structured interviews; and second, the individual semi-structured interviews conducted with citizens who participate or have participated by submitting newsworthy material to television news programs. The analyses were based on interviews conducted with 10 individuals, residents of the city of Imperatriz, during the months of January to April 2022.

One of the justifications for this research, in addition to the need to reflect on the public's involvement in news construction, is precisely the fact of the scarcity of materials focused on understanding the participation of the common citizen since the vast majority of research that addresses citizen participation does not bring the participatory audience itself as an object of analysis but rather journalistic practice.

Changes and adjustments

The current journalism scenario has been marked by a series of changes and reconfigurations. Authors Charron and De Bonville (2016) analyze the changes in journalism over time. According to them, the history of journalism, as well as its modifications, can be divided into four principles, which also function as paradigms, that is, a dominant model or pattern. They're: transmission journalism (17th century), opinion journalism (19th century), information journalism (late 19th and early 20th century), and communication journalism (with its beginning in the 1970s and 1980s). The latter is also characterized by the multiplication of media and information sources, starting with the rise of the internet, which was popularized in the early 21st century, from the 2000s, in a hyper-competitive scenario, as the authors assert, "the rapid penetration of the internet into households is projecting consumers and information producers into a new media universe of superabundance and intense competition" (Charron; de Bonville, 2016, p. 340).

In the communication journalism phase, humor, commentary, and a more informal language are accepted in journalistic discourse. Information and entertainment are intertwined, and journalists are adopting new strategies not only for news production but also to get closer to the audience.

such as the production of energy and cellulose, with the implementation of the Estreito and Serra Quebrada Hydroelectric Plants and the Suzano Papel e Celulose factory in Imperatriz.

With the rise of the internet, as well as the convergence of media, production on television news programs, for example, now needs to deal with a new factor: audience participation. And after the transition from analog to digital television journalism, the "reference point" and production and professional routine are changed after the insertion of this new agent, now participatory (Vizeu; Siqueira, 2014). With a critical look at this performance, Deuze (2009) asserts that the participation of the common citizen is present in a context of a creative vacuum, that is, a vacuum of salaried labor, in which journalistic companies deposit the news work in the management of ordinary unpaid individuals, without basically investing in training, supervision, or protection arrangements.

In this panorama of media convergence, journalists have been under pressure to find varied ways of collecting and formatting information to meet the new demands of an increasingly demanding audience. Recognizing the growing use of applications by Brazilian citizens, communication companies have been using this software in their newsrooms. In most cases, these companies appropriate the apps that are already widely used, such as social media apps (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), as well as instant messaging apps (WhatsApp, Telegram, Vibe), but many broadcasters have already invested in their own apps to mediate their audience participation.

These apps, created to be mediators between citizens and journalists, have in turn changed the productive routine of newspapers. Regarding the adaptations of journalistic newsrooms, social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have also been incorporated into news production. Rost (2012; 2014) presents three points to consider the use of social media by newspapers: the first concerns social media as a means of receiving information and suggestions; second, as a space for content to be published and spread; and third, as mediators of interaction with individuals. Recuero (2012) also sees this connection from three points of view: social media is also a source of information production, can be used as content filters, and is a space for news dissemination. This interactivity between the citizen and the television newsroom has not only modified news production but has also raised new discussions about the role played by the journalist.

Methodological Path

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism, according to Morgan (1980) and Schwandt (1994), is incorporated into the interpretive paradigm, that is, it aims to understand the world as well as the experiences of living from the perspective of those who live in it.

Blumer (1980) presents three main points from an interactionist perspective and their consequences for research. 1) individuals act, individually or collectively, according to the meanings they give to the things that are part of their world, thus, the researcher needs to reach these meanings to understand the way people act, emptying themselves of their own perceptions; 2) the meaning of things is constructed linearly, developing from social interaction and interpretations that someone has with a companion, researchers need to understand that interactionism is unstable and inconstant, its configuration must be discovered empirically and not predetermined; 3) meanings are handled and transformed from the moment people perceive, define, and evaluate the things they encounter.

We understand that this research, although it addresses topics such as television journalism and its practices, is more an analysis of the common citizen and the relationship they have built with journalistic practice than the reverse. The object is the citizen who interacts with journalism, not journalism itself.

Finding the participative audience

To create the corpus for this work, we will use the Survey research technique. This technique is a means to obtain data or information about actions, opinions, and/or characteristics of a specific group of individuals who are considered representative of a larger audience, through a research mechanism that is usually a questionnaire (Freitas et al., 2000). Based on this, we created an online questionnaire using the Google Forms platform, consisting only of closed-ended questions, such as age, gender, education level, the most watched TV news program, whether they have sent a message to the WhatsApp of a TV news program and/or a journalist, whether they have ever visited the station, whether they were mentioned about the sent content, among others. The questionnaire ends with a final question: 'Do you want and have availability to participate in the next stage of the research?'; which leads us to the third and final step of this research: the analysis of our object through semi-structured interviews, which directly dialogue with symbolic interactionism.

Semi-structured interviews

After applying the questionnaire, we proceeded to the semi-structured interviews. According to Manzini (1990), this type of interview is based on a script with relevant questions about a specific topic but can be complemented with other questions that may arise during the interview. The interviews were conducted in March and May of 2022, some in-person, but mostly through the Google Meet video conferencing platform, due to the

Covid-19 pandemic and at the request of the interviewees themselves, who often only had time available during the evening. They lasted between 15 to 25 minutes.

"I participate because...": The reflections of the imperatrizense citizen

To understand the motivations of our 'participatory universe,' we will focus on two questions asked during the interview: 'Why did you send content to the news program?' and 'Do you believe it is important for the news program to open up spaces for public participation?'. The second question was chosen for this topic since, during the interviews, we understood that when individuals spoke about the importance of having open channels for participation in newsrooms, they were also expressing their motivations for participation by wanting to have access to these channels.

We will begin with interviewee 1, who became aware of a police report through the WhatsApp application. "I received the news in a WhatsApp group and thought, 'why not share it with a journalist?' Because we are part of society, we want people to also have knowledge of what you consider important" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). He also states that:

It seems to me that when we help in the construction of the news, a feeling of belonging is born. It's like I'm part of that news program, of course, I'm not being paid for it, but I helped, you know, that has my touch. If it weren't for me, maybe that wouldn't have been broadcast, not in that way and at that time (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

We realize that when the motivation is to make an event notorious to the population, this fact is not always something with a bad repercussion or related to the police area, for example. Interviewee 4, in turn, states that the first time she participated with the city's news programs was by sending content to publicize information from the sports area. "I sent a text, which was a sports report, about electronic games. My husband is part of this world of electronic games and he, along with his team, had just won the North/Northeast championship" (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

She realized that there was almost no dissemination of information about electronic games as a sport and considered it important for the population of Imperatriz to know not only about this sport, but also that there was a team from the city that had already won first place in several championships. For this, she wrote a text telling the team's story and sent it to the most well-known news programs in the city along with some photos. The information had a great impact on the news programs, even reaching the blogs and portals of the city.

Along the same lines, interviewee 9 contacted the TV Mirante news program to send a text, with some photos, that he produced about an action that a group was carrying out for Mother's Day.

I sent the text because I found what the group was doing very interesting, and I wanted it to become public. My message was only viewed, but I didn't receive any response. The text was not broadcast, but later a colleague saw that it was posted on the news portal of the station. The content of the text was different, but they used the same photos I took and didn't give me credit. I even sent a message afterwards, asking for credit, but nothing came of it (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

In addition to complaints, the participation of ordinary citizens also represents the possibility of visibility and has a direct impact on their self-esteem and identity formation. However, the lack of credit, that is, the authorship not mentioned in the contents sent by the common citizen is not something new in the station and demotivates the participation of the citizen who wants to be seen as part of it and noticed.

We also analyzed that some of our interviewees see the TV news as a great problem solver, which will instantly solve some of the population's problems. Interviewee 6, for example, says she has already participated with Difusora Sul's TV news, sending text and photos of the day her motorcycle was stolen, hoping to get a faster response to the case. She also emphasizes: "almost every weekend I send a message about some complaint regarding car audio, loud music here on my street, for example" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). When asked if the police were also sought in these cases, she says she always sends them to the WhatsApp number made available by the police, but admits that at the same time, she also sends them to some TV news.

One reason that has prompted some of our interviewees to participate was the COVID-19 pandemic, which, in Brazil, was officially announced in March 2020, requiring part of the population to stay secluded at home, without gatherings, according to laws. Some of our interviewees reported sending content to TV news denouncing clandestine parties that frequently happened in the neighborhoods they lived in. This is the case of interviewee 2, who sent content to the WhatsApp made available by Difusora Sul containing a complaint about the isolation break. "I made a complaint about people having parties when they couldn't, you know, when everything was prohibited, everything was closed" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). Interviewee 5 was also motivated by the same reason:

I usually go out for a run early in the morning, and I really like that area around the airport. Lately, there have been a lot of parties in that area during the pandemic. People would stay there until dawn. There was loud music, and a lot of alcohol was being consumed (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

Interviewee 2 also shares a similar view. She claims that at first, she didn't consider reporting the issue to the police, but instead made a video and sent it directly to the news channel. However, later, she sent it to a channel (WhatsApp) that the city government opened at the beginning of the pandemic for reporting violations of isolation.

I sent the content without expecting any feedback or effect, because it was happening so much. But I thought, 'what if...?' so I sent it just in case. But deep down, I hoped my report would have some effect... When I sent it, I received those automatic responses from the application, but then I watched the news and didn't see any related stories (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

It's interesting that the interviewee sees the news channel as her priority when wanting to report something, hoping that the problem will be resolved more quickly if it's broadcasted. For Interviewee 3, what motivates him to make news material and send it to news channels is the desire to bring about change.

Usually when I send these videos to news channels, it's because I want to demand change, you know? I've already participated with the broadcaster, talking about the lack of snacks in a children's school, and because of that, the children weren't going to school because many only go to school to have a snack, you know? That made me really angry... After I did that, I realized that the city government went there and left a lot of food for the children, and I realized that this brought about change! So, after that, I started participating more often... if I see something that deserves attention, I send it. Today, the streets in Imperatriz, for example, are almost impassable. Over there in Vila Lobão, Vila Nova²... I'm about to make a video and send it to the news channels (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

For many, television journalism, due to its reach and credibility, is one of the best places where ordinary citizens can be active in the construction of citizenship, seeking to solve some social problem or seeking improvements for their community, for a local group, or even for the whole city, aiming for better education, quality of life, better infrastructure, public health, security, whatever the demand may be. Interviewee 3, for example, sees participation with news channels as a citizen practice and when he has the opportunity to contribute something, he does it, whether in local or even national news,

² Old quarters of the city of Imperatriz.

and even sent videos to Rede Globo's project 'O Brasil que eu quero'³. "We have to demand because it's our right as citizens, as voters... I have this perspective; I share this information to bring about change!" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). Interviewee 5 states that she had the idea of "making an event more media-friendly" so that the situation could be resolved more quickly, as even after reporting it to local authorities, nothing had been done.

For interviewee 10, what motivated her to send content to one of the city's news programs was to gain visibility in a case that was happening: "I participated with JMTV because of an abusive billing that occurred in the institution where I studied. We were trying to find an administrative solution with them, but they were very unyielding" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). She states that if the subject were broadcast on TV, the case would have visibility and would draw the attention of the Programa de Proteção e Defesa do Consumidor (Consumer Protection and Defense Program) - PROCON, causing the organization to treat the case more seriously, "because, like it or not, agencies only take things more seriously when their credibility is being questioned. So, we needed to embarrass PROCON through the news program to get attention on this case" (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

Interviewees 7 and 8 also state that trying to solve or denounce some of the city's problems is what motivates them to participate in the news programs. This leads us to consider that most of the interviewees in our "participatory universe" participate because they want solutions to problems and changes, either for themselves or for the social environment in which they live. However, from the interviews, we have realized that newsrooms do not seem to give due attention to these materials that reach them. This was confirmed, with what was apprehended during the interviews, for three reasons: 1) most of the time there is no feedback on the content that was sent; 2) a large part of the content that the population sends is not broadcast; and 3) in most newsroom of news programs, a channel for communication with the viewer is not available, many have to go to the station or send the content to the journalist's personal WhatsApp, thus participation is facilitated for those who already have contact with someone inside the newsrooms.

³ Project launched in January 2018 (election year), which aimed to encourage Brazilians from all cities in the country to record videos talking about their dreams, desires and desires regarding a better Brazil. The videos were shown on the station's news programs and on the Fantástico program. According to the project, inhabitants of 99.5% of the country's municipalities sent their messages. 9% of the messages were recorded by children; 7% by teenagers; 13%, by seniors; 71%, by adults. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/o-brasil-que-eu-quer/>.

The lack of a mediating channel between the viewer and television stations is also something that demotivates participation. Interviewee 5, for example, states: "once I took a photo, about a situation here on the street behind my house, but I never sent it because I didn't know how to proceed to make it viable, to make it news" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). The biggest criticism of our interviewees is that they cannot easily participate with the TV Mirante news program. The station is one of the most sought after precisely because it has the most-watched news program in the city, therefore, if it has the highest audience, it will give greater visibility to what the individual is looking for.

"For me, the function of television news is...": the importance of television journalism from the perspective of participatory subjects

Interviewee 1 places great importance on television news, as it has the function of informing the population. But not only that, the importance also lies in delivering the news with responsibility and seriousness. He states:

I think that this is the main role of television news, to deliver the news in a way that I can trust. Its function is to pass information to the people with responsibility. And the people need information, they need to be updated with the news, whether it's good or not (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

Building on the same idea, interviewee 6 also affirms the importance that television news has in its function of informing the population, especially about what happens in the community.

Sometimes we spend the day working in the office and don't know what's going on outside, and when we get home, we get informed about what happened in our city, state, and even the country, with the TV news (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

The interviewee also speaks about the function of (what she understands as) community journalism, which, in her words, is what is done with local news, mostly to not only inform but also help the community, such as notifying when there is a water shortage. "The community news program that we have here does this part, of helping us know how to proceed in something specific, like vaccination campaigns, you know?" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). With a similar thought, interviewee 2 perceives television news as a "service provider" to the community.

I believe that television news reaches places where many people cannot reach, and that's why many people, initially, seek to inform themselves

through television news, because it is more accessible and has more contact with the public, with the population of the city. The television news seems to care more about what happens with the population than the police, for example. That's why I participate, because I have the hope that these complaints will be more useful to television news than to other institutions. It's like television news is a service provider to society (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

With a different view, interviewee 3 sees an educational function in television journalism. "I really believe that television news is education, I see it that way. It's showing the news, yes, what happened. But I think it also has the power and can teach a lot to people. I have this vision!" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). With a similar viewpoint, interviewee 4 affirms that television news has the function of provoking the critical thinking of the population. While it informs, it also helps citizens to think and form an opinion.

Television news is extremely important because it is the one that dictates how the news is delivered and there is also the issue of impartiality. I find it very important and relevant... It dictates thoughts, you know?! For example, when a dictatorial government is installed, the first thing that is brought down is the media, the newspapers, which is why there is censorship in North Korea, China. That's why it's important, because journalists report what's happening and help us think and be critical (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

To better understand the "educational" view that some of the interviewees have of television journalism, we will reflect on what Vizeu (2009) says about the pedagogical function of the news program in "organizing the world" on a daily basis, seeking to make it more understandable to the public. This means that it operates the news in a didactic way, thus mediating between the individual and the various fields of knowledge. "Journalism self-references as a place of mediation, de-segregation, truth revelation, and orientation of men and women in contemporaneity" (Vizeu, p. 80, 2009).

Starting from a more pessimistic view regarding the news programs in Imperatriz, interviewee 10 affirms that the function of journalism is to report true news, positioning itself in a neutral manner. However, this is what some of the city's television journalism is lacking, causing her to not consume the news as frequently as before.

Sometimes, what really demotivates me from consuming the content is that the ideological bias is very clear, and I think the function of television journalism is not to make a platform, but to report the news, regardless of who is responsible (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

She observes that in *Imperatriz*, the news program ends up serving the owner of the station or whoever sponsors it, deviating from the function it should have, which is to serve society.

On the other hand, interviewee 9, contradicting the previous interviewee, maintains that the function of television journalism is to assert and reaffirm the truth, especially in today's world where the flow and channels of information are increasingly growing, providing a basis for the emergence of news of dubious origin.

I see the function of television journalism as asserting and reaffirming the truth. For example, many people say that because of social media, television journalism will end, but I don't believe that. Because what I see on WhatsApp and Instagram, I don't see as an absolute truth, and I think television journalism has this function of reaffirming the truth because they are working seriously. So when I see something on the news, I take that topic more seriously because it is more worked on, more dissected, it's not like what I receive on WhatsApp because they are working responsibly. For example, on the national news itself, if Bonner says something wrong, the next day he's retracting, even if it's a minor thing (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

Interviewee 5, in turn, presents two points of view on the function of television news: a positive and a negative one. Although she says that the function of television news is to inform and help society, she also affirms that it has an 'appealing' function. According to the interviewee, what is conveyed in some situations, in some cases, is appealing to the point that "you need to have a certain knowledge not to get involved in situations that are exaggerated to the citizen and that sometimes ends up interfering even in daily life, in opinion." (Interview granted to the author, 2022). With regard to this involvement that the news has in the citizens' conceptions, we remember the Agenda-Setting Theory (Mccombs; Shaw, 1972), which concludes that mass media work in shaping public opinion, but this is something that will be addressed in more detail later.

She also guarantees that the impression she has is that what is presented by television news is law and not open to questioning. "And few people have this critical thinking to analyze the other side, right, besides what is being televised" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). Now, with a more optimistic view, the same interviewee says that she also sees the function of television news in aiding the citizen, from the moment that TV entered almost every household.

We see this a lot in campaigns against violence against women and children, which became much broader after being televised. I realize that the broadcasters began to strive even in relation to issues that are glaring in our society, to the point that you can see that the news segments today have changed to a more social context. There are

segments that talk about cooking, daily life, health, travel, that talk about citizens' struggles. So, it has changed a lot compared to what it was before, right, which depended on a general news to become a local one, and now a local news can become a general one (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

Interviewee 7 states that even though the growing streaming platforms, such as Youtube or Netflix, may threaten television programming and, consequently, journalistic transmission, the news is still considered a priority among several families in the country. And this is really confirmed by recent surveys on television consumption, some of which are presented at the beginning of the topic. According to the interviewee, "there is still the custom of the family coming home from work and having dinner in front of the television watching the news or having lunch watching the noon news and debating among themselves while watching the news" (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

I believe it has a very significant importance because sometimes the population does not have a place to report or criticize something, so I think the role of the press in society is important for that. This is how interviewee 8 sees the function of television journalism, as a stage for denunciations, perhaps even as an ombudsman, where citizens can externalize the ills of their community or make criticisms when they feel that public policies are not aligned with what is guaranteed by the Federal Constitution, for example. He also states that: "And in medium-sized cities, in the interior, like Imperatriz, I think this contact with society is relevant (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

Something interesting that interviewee 9 mentioned, and that we learn in journalism schools, is that the television news seems to 'set the agenda' for citizens' conversations. This hypothesis is presented in the Agenda-Setting Theory (Mccombs; Shaw, 1972), which states that mass media, especially television, do not intend to persuade, but present to society a relationship of what is important and necessary to be discussed. According to the theory, it is the media that provides the understanding of much of the social reality that the public has (Temer; Nery, 2004). For the interviewees, this also influences their motivation to participate with the television news, as they want people to be aware of and debate what they consider significant. Thus, interviewee 9 states: "If I have something in hand that I consider important, I will want to send it to the news so that it can be seen, televised, written, and exposed" (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

We also asked our interviewees if they thought they had any function or responsibility with regards to television journalism as viewers. We wanted to understand if they felt they had this duty to collaborate with the television news, since they consumed

it. We will start with interviewee 1, who claims that his function is not just that of a viewer, but also that of a content creator.

I move from the position of just being a viewer and also play the role of a content creator, I don't know how to explain it properly. It's like I'm not just consuming, but also helping to produce that content, you know!?
(Interview granted to the author, 2022).

Following the same line of thought, interviewee 3 affirms that they also have the role of collaborator: "in addition to being a viewer, I also have the role of collaborator, right, we will indeed be contributing... in a small or big way, I don't know, but it is a contribution" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). Interviewee 9, on the other hand, understands that as a consumer of the news, they have the role of interacting with it. "I believe that I do have a function because, whether we like it or not, I am a consumer of this product that is being broadcasted... The citizen is no longer just a receiver, but also interacts" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). We perceive that these interviewees have assumed the stance of 'co-producers' of the news and act as such: producing content to send to newsrooms or sharing something they received and judged as important to be reported.

When asked, interviewee 2 said that she believes she has a function as a citizen and viewer. For her, the function is to establish a bridge between the news and those who will report it. In fact, this idea could be evidenced during the interviews, as she stated that when she had knowledge of something or had a complaint to make, the news was the first place she thought of communicating it. For interviewee 10, everyone has a function in relation to the news, especially because we can contribute regarding things that happen in the local area that we are inserted in and that do not have enough projection to catch the attention of the media, for example. One interesting thing she mentions is that the audience also has the function of 'alerting' a news program that is not trustworthy from the moment they stop watching it.

I believe that everyone has (a function). First, we can always contribute regarding things that happen in the area we are in. For example, the news cannot know what happens in my neighborhood because it is a very small sphere, but I can contribute by drawing their attention to it. And, in terms of consumption, I think that when we filter what we consume, we contribute to journalism even if it is by not giving it ratings, like 'I'm not watching such news because I do not agree with this work idea' (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

With a different answer from the previous interviewees, interviewee 4 says that the function they have is to verify the news, so as not to run the risk of receiving everything

that is broadcasted as true. For her, this is something important "because there are news outlets that are actually impartial, but there are those that are biased even in the way they speak. So, it is up to the citizen to verify if what is being passed on is correct" (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

We understand that the way the audience perceives their importance as viewers directly affects not only how they see the function of journalism in society but also their position in collaborating or not with the news program by sending content. We also analyze that if, for some, the local news program is at the service of the community, then the individual, inserted in society, is the one who fulfills the role of communicating what happens or not in the space where they live.

The participation of the common citizen and problem resolution

Many of our interviewees believe that television news has the power to help solve problems related to their street, neighborhood, or even the city they belong to in a broader sense. These problems may not be resolved more quickly, but at least they will have visibility when televised. For them, journalistic practices are anchored in the premise of expressing the representation of residents, with the role of alerting, denouncing, and allowing the construction of improvements in citizens' lives.

Interviewee 1 discusses the issue, arguing that he has no idea if it is resolved more quickly, but the repercussion gives the impression that the population's desires will at least be heard by the authorities. For him, the news program also has the function of being the voice of the population and a kind of ombudsman.

Whether we like it or not, we have the impression that, alone, our speech is very weak, but from the moment you play it in the media, your speech is amplified and not only reaches the ear of the mayor, the councilor, but also everyone's ear, the Public Prosecutor's Office, OAB, whoever it may be (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

He, who has participated several times with the city's news programs, states that if he were to send something to the news program in the future, he would send it to show a problem in his neighborhood that needs to be resolved. "I use and would use my participation to show a pain from the environment I am in, to solve some problem in my community" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). Interviewee 2 shares the same thought. She states that she does not believe that because it aired on television, the problem will be solved more quickly, but it will become public and have a greater chance of being resolved. What she believes to be of great value is to make a problem public because then the authorities, out of fear, will try to resolve it quickly. "We have this tool,

the news program, as a way of trying to move bureaucratic issues. When I sent content to the news program, it was precisely for my problem to be solved" (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

Interviewee 6 believes that it does not help solve any problems, especially in the issues of the neighborhood where she lives. For her, the news program is useful, yes, but she still does not see the problems being solved when televised. "My neighborhood, for example, only has a crater, and this is passed directly on the news, but the mayor does not solve it, councilor does not solve it, even with the news hitting the same key: that the city is sinking in holes" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). Interviewee 8 is in the same line of thought, also believing that the problems will not be solved quickly. He sees participation as "a population's outburst, a scream, a search to show that problem they are living. But even so, there is no quickness to solve that" (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

Interviewee 3 has the same idea as the previous ones when he states that problems are not solved more quickly. However, he has another hypothesis about how problems are solved. For him, the city's problems are only resolved more quickly when there is a fatal accident. "Then quickly, in a matter of days, they fix the infrastructure so that there are no complaints about the rulers" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). In fact, an infrastructure problem will be quickly resolved after a fatality. However, these cases also have an impact when televised. It is not uncommon to see on the news cases of accidents that happened due to lack of signage or potholes on the street, for example. Therefore, we can assume that the news media also has a role in solving these types of problems.

With a more optimistic view, Interviewee 7 believes that not only does it help, but the response is automatic. He assumes that political authorities, for example, are afraid of 'tarnishing their image' and when a complaint is made, they automatically issue a statement saying that a team will soon be sent to take care of the problem. "They seem to have a very big fear, I can't explain what they have... But the media is essential for this kind of thing, to make a complaint" (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

For Interviewee 9, the best way to solve a community problem is by bringing it to the news, instead of going to institutions to try to solve the problem.

Because when I send to the news that my neighborhood is without water or that my street suffers from a lack of infrastructure, the news will show it on TV and still seek a response from the city or the company responsible for water supply, for example. So, I believe it is a much more useful and even less tiring way than trying to solve it on your own (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

Interviewees 5 and 10 start from the same principle: the news program is a great helper in solving problems. This is also what motivates them to participate by sending content. This is the case with Interviewee 5, who said that her incentive for sending content to the news program was to make the situation she witnessed known to everyone so that the solution would come more quickly. "Because nowadays, when you bring something to the media, it spreads in a dimension, either positive or negative, with great intensity" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). For them, participation is also a way to encourage other citizens to bring the city's problems to the public. For Interviewee 10, everything that resonates, especially in a negative way, creates an urgency within institutions to resolve it.

Normally, negative attention attracts other negative issues, so if one person raises a problem, other people will stand up saying that they have already gone through or are currently experiencing the same problem and did not know it was possible to resolve it and say they want to join forces. So sometimes a snowball comes towards the institution (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

It is interesting to note that even those who say they do not believe that the news program is an important piece in solving the problems of the environment in which they live, in a way, assume that the problem, at least, reaches the knowledge of the authorities when broadcasted. Once they always choose to put out these 'fires', even small ones, faster so that it does not become completely out of control. Another thing that was noticed is that the majority seeks to participate with the news programs, sending denunciations, for example, thinking of the common good, that is, trying to solve a problem that does not afflict themselves, but the community in general. Interviewee 10 even externalizes this by saying that "Every time, my participation was never personal, I don't care about being recognized, what I sought every time was a solution to community problems" (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

A good part of the interviewees also talked about the importance of the Imperatriz channels opening space for public participation. We understand that the relevance of local journalism having open channels for the public is explained by the need to have visibility for local problems that are not of interest to the mainstream media. Interviewee 6, for example, addresses this issue by talking about these spaces opened by news programs for public contribution: "It is important to have news programs focused on the community because it seems that they are more committed to the residents of the neighborhoods, who are more committed to what happens in our daily lives" (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

We observe that currently, there are more initiatives by major news outlets to produce materials or programs focused on the community than in the past, but the coverage follows standards that do not privilege the local perspective. And citizens when they bring their complaints to the news program, for example, can help journalists by being their eyes for what happens in the community. As Interviewee 3 rightly states:

It is extremely important that news programs open up space for public participation. Because I believe that we as viewers and collaborators too, deserve to have our place to speak. We deserve to be heard. It is important even for the news program to know what is happening in the city or what they expect from us (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

For interviewee 4, if the news program is going to set the agenda for what is being discussed in society, then the news should be related to the everyday lives of citizens. And that's where the importance of having open channels for public participation comes in.

It is very important that the news program allows for public participation. Because if the media is going to set the agenda for what will be discussed in society, then it has to be a reflection of what is happening in society, whether it is inequality, racism, or whatever issue is being debated. It's important to let people speak for themselves. It's important that various people, various groups, that anyone is setting the agenda for what will be discussed (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

For some, public participation can even bring more credibility to what is reported by local news programs. For interviewee 1, for example, when the news program shows images sent in by its audience, "with the noise of the car in the background, the chicken singing, for example, this brings a 'real-life' feeling" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). For interviewee 10, in addition to generating a feeling of having more accessible journalism and that everyone can contribute to the construction of the news, citizen participation also "gives a more democratic idea, that the media doesn't just show what it wants, sometimes the media also shows what you offered to it" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). She also states that this generates a more positive interaction between the consumer and the journalist producing the news, making the citizen want to participate more.

Others already affirm that, while the news program opens space for participation, it is also building loyalty with its audience. This is what interviewee 1 says:

Once they open space for the public to participate, the same person who sent in a suggestion for a story, for example, will always be there in front of the TV watching to see if what they shared is going to be broadcast.

Consequently, the family will be close, will be on the side... I'm sure this is a way to keep the audience (Interview granted to the author, 2022).

Interviewee 5 also believes that individual participation also contributes to the growth of the network. For her, "when it deals with situations where the public can express their opinion and also make decisions, I believe that network will certainly gain more visibility" (Interview granted to the author, 2022). About this, Cajazeira (2013) will say that the collaboration of the common citizen, through the production of videos, photos, among others, manifests itself with a strong impact and, consequently, with an increase in audience, since it opens the possibility for the public to be 'co-producers' of the news.

The same interviewee ends by saying that if the collaboration of citizens is something enlightening and serves as a support point for the population, then the networks need to receive more of this participatory public to better inform citizens.

We will conclude with the question from interviewee 3: 'How am I going to watch something that is far from my reality? Especially being a local news program?'. We understand that the common citizen seeks to collaborate with the construction of the news once he wants to consume what is within his experience. For them, news programs can be both a tool for transformation, through denunciations, drawing attention to local problems, as well as a tool for the construction of meaning, since it serves local interests, based on local demands.

Final Considerations

Regarding the motivations of our interviewees, we found that the vast majority are encouraged to participate for the same reasons: the search to solve some individual or collective problem and the search for changes in society, not thinking only of themselves but of the environment in which they live. We also noted that some want visibility and to be perceived as part of the construction of news in the community they live in, but they represent a small portion compared to those who send content to television news because they see it as a great problem solver by giving voice to the population. However, we realized that a significant part of their motivations is stifled by journalistic newsrooms that seem not to give proper attention to the material that reaches them.

Three reasons expressed by the interviewees explain this: first, it is common not to receive any feedback on the content that was sent; second, in addition to not receiving feedback, a significant portion of the content that the population sends, and considers important for their community, is not broadcasted; and, finally, in most television newsrooms, there is no channel available for communication with the viewer, and many

need to go to the station or send the content to the journalist's personal WhatsApp if they have any contacts within the newsrooms.

With this research, we also intended to understand the social function of television news from the interviewees' perspective, in order to verify if the motivations that drive citizens to participate are linked to their perceptions of television journalism. The vast majority stated that the function of television news is to provide information with quality and responsibility about what happens in society, and that is why it is so important.

Some of our interviewees also attributed an "educational" function to television news. We realized that television news is also seen as responsible for scheduling citizens' conversations, a hypothesis that is even presented in the Agenda-Setting Theory (Mccombs; Shaw, 1972). By talking about the function of television journalism, our "participatory universe" also explained what they think about their responsibility in the news-making process of their community. Many believe that, from the moment they consume the news, they also have the responsibility to interact with television news. It is as if they assumed the role of "co-producers" and thus began to act. We understand that the way they perceive their importance as viewers will directly affect both how they see the function of television journalism and their willingness to collaborate or not with television news by sending content. Many see television news as being in the service of the community. Therefore, the individual, inserted in society, understands that it is their role to communicate what happens or not in the space in which they live.

Finally, the third moment of the analyses concerns public participation as a search for the resolution of both society's problems and individual problems. Regarding this, we understand that most of our "participatory universe" believes in the "power" that television journalism has to help the population solve the problems that arise in the community. However, they believe that these problems, even if not solved quickly, will still have visibility when televised, attracting the attention of both political authorities and citizens.

We also noticed that many believe that the best way to try to solve a population's problem is by bringing their complaints to television news, instead of going directly to institutions or political authorities. Something that caught our attention about this issue is that even when some interviewees said they did not believe that television news has any part in solving society's problems, they still assumed that the problem at least reaches the knowledge of the authorities when televised. That is, by making the problem notorious and attracting society's attention, television news becomes an important piece in solving these misfortunes, even if not solved quickly.

The interviewees also spoke about how significant it is for the local television stations in Imperatriz to provide open spaces for citizen participation. According to them, this importance is because if the television news is going to set the agenda for what is to be discussed in society, then the news should be related to the daily lives of the residents. Others stated that public participation can even give more credibility to the news reported in the city's television news programs, as they believe that when citizens contribute to news production, it gives the idea that the local media does not only broadcast what they want but what is important to the community. The relevance of local television news programs having open channels for public participation is explained by the need to give greater attention to local problems that are often not of interest to the mainstream media.

Although our "participatory universe" is only a segment of the Imperatriz public that sends content that they consider newsworthy to television news, we believe in the relevance of what was learned in this research and that it contributes to the need to reflect on the role of "co-producer" of news that citizens have been playing, especially in the realm of regional/local television journalism.

This work has given rise to several other concerns, such as: is there a difference in public participation (as well as their motivations) with respect to other means of communication? How do professional journalists understand the citizens' view of television journalism as an important element for solving community problems? And do political institutions also understand this role of journalism? This makes us understand that this work can also be extended to observe the behavior of the participatory public beyond television news. However, these concerns will be discussed in future research. The considerations presented here have more of a sense of continuation than of conclusion.

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RESUMO:

Este artigo é um recorte da Dissertação de Mestrado intitulada "Eu participo porque...": reflexões sobre a participação do cidadão comum nos telejornais de Imperatriz (MA)", que possui como objetivo entender qual a pretensão do cidadão comum em colaborar com a construção da notícia. A pesquisa também tem como finalidade compreender o porquê dessas pessoas auxiliarem o jornalista de televisão na produção noticiosa, mesmo não sendo mencionadas ou recebendo incentivo financeiro. Com uma abordagem interacionista (Blumer, 1980), esse trabalho usou como método, a técnica de coleta *Survey* e entrevistas semiestruturadas. Dentre os principais resultados, constatamos que a grande maioria participa pois acredita no 'poder' que os telejornais possuem de ajudar a população na solução de problemas individuais ou da comunidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Jornalismo participativo; Telejornalismo; Interacionismo Simbólico; Imperatriz-MA.

RESUMEN:

Este artículo es un extracto del Trabajo de Fin de Máster titulado "Participo porque...": reflexiones sobre la participación del ciudadano común en los informativos de Imperatriz (MA)", que tiene como objetivo comprender la intención de los ciudadanos comunes de colaborar con la construcción de noticias. La investigación también pretende comprender por qué estas personas ayudan a los periodistas de televisión en la producción de noticias, aunque no sean mencionadas ni reciban incentivos económicos. Con un enfoque interaccionista (Blumer, 1980), este trabajo utilizó como método la técnica de recolección de Encuestas y entrevistas semiestruturadas. Entre los principales resultados encontramos que la gran mayoría participa porque cree en el 'poder' que tienen los noticieros televisivos para ayudar a la población en la solución de problemas individuales o comunitarios.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Periodismo participativo; Periodismo televisivo; Interacionismo simbólico; Imperatriz-MA.