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Esquisse d'une cartographie des plateformes de sociofinancement par abonnement

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Résumé:

Alors que l'industrie musicale se transforme sous l'effet de la numérisation et de la plateformes, le sociofinancement par abonnement (SPA) s'impose comme une alternative de plus en plus utilisée par les artistes pour financer leur travail et maintenir une relation directe avec leur communauté. Néanmoins, le modèle proposé par les plateformes de SPA est encore peu étudié. À partir d'un corpus constitué des plateformes suivantes : Patreon, Ko-Fi, Buy Me A Coffee, Ampled, Subscribestar et Tipeee, cette étude met en lumière les différences en termes de coûts d'utilisation, de diversité des modes de financement et des possibilités d'interaction avec les contributeur·rices. La cartographie des plateformes de SPA suggère que Patreon, SubscribeStar et Tipeee forment un cluster caractérisé par des coûts d'utilisation élevés, un nombre limité d'options de monétisation et une diversité de fonctionnalités facilitant l'engagement avec la communauté. Buy Me A Coffee et Ko-Fi proposent un éventail plus large de modes de financement tout en maintenant des coûts d'utilisation plus faibles. Enfin, le modèle coopératif de Ampled (2019-2023) lui permettait de se différencier nettement des autres en offrant plus d'agentivité aux utilisateur·rices, mais en ne proposant qu'une seule option de monétisation et peu de fonctionnalités facilitant l'engagement avec la communauté. Cette première cartographie partielle du marché du SPA participe aux réflexions sur les plateformes intermédiaires et à leur rôle dans la reconfiguration du travail artistique.

Mots-clés:

Économie des plateformes ; sociofinancement ; industrie musicale ; Patreon ; économie du créateur

Introduction

Depuis le début des années 2000, la numérisation des industries culturelles (Hesmondhalgh 2019 ; Casilli et Posada 2020) a profondément transformé la chaîne de production de biens culturels, du processus créatif à la diffusion des œuvres. Parmi les premières industries culturelles touchée par cette numérisation, l'industrie musicale. En effet, les innovations technologiques qui se sont succédées depuis l'avènement d'Internet ont bouleversé les façons de faire, de diffuser et d'écouter la musique. On pense par exemple au format mp3, au pair-à-pair (Alexander 2002) ou aux réseaux sociaux comme MySpace (Beuscart 2008). À travers ces avancées techniques et technologiques, la dématérialisation de la musique a remis en question le modèle économique de l'industrie musicale, qui s'appuyait principalement sur la monétisation de la musique jouée en direct, c'est-à-dire les concerts, et la vente de musique enregistrée sur un support, du rouleau de cire au CD.

L'industrie musicale a dû composer avec l'apparition de plateformes comme YouTube (Burgess et Green 2018), des bibliothèques musicales en ligne comme iTunes Music (Volda, Grinter et Ducheneaut 2006) et des plateformes de streaming comme Spotify (Eriksson, Fleischer et Johansson 2019). En parallèle, l'avènement des réseaux sociaux comme Facebook, Instagram et place grandissante de l'économie du créateur (Cunningham et al. 2021) au sein de ces mêmes plateformes ont fait émerger des formes de revenus (parfois existantes pré-Internet) dans le contexte numérique. Il peut s'agir d'écoutes en ligne (streaming), de revenus publicitaires, de partenariats avec des marques ou de synchronisation.

L'utilisation des réseaux sociaux en musique et l'émergence d'outils de communication accessibles facilement et parfois gratuitement a participé à l'établissement d'un paradigme *artist direct* (Murphy & Hume 2023) correspondant à une chaîne de création de valeur au nombre d'intermédiaires réduits entre les artistes et les publics où les artistes ont plus d'autonomie. C'est au sein de ce paradigme que des alternatives aux formes traditionnelles de financement de la musique sont progressivement apparues. Parmi celles-ci, le sociofinancement¹, permettant au public, lors d'une campagne limitée dans le temps, de financer directement la production d'un bien culturel grâce à une contribution monétaire,

¹ Le *crowdfunding* ou financement par la foule, parfois appelé sociofinancement ou financement participatif. Il existe 4 types de sociofinancement : par équité, prêt, contrepartie et don. Nous nous intéressons uniquement au financement par contrepartie, c'est-à-dire qu'en échange de leur contribution, les participant-es reçoivent une récompense non financière, matérielle ou symbolique.

souvent en échange d'une contrepartie matérielle ou symbolique comme une copie de l'album ou le nom dans les crédits.

Le sociofinancement, bien que relativement récent dans sa forme numérique, repose sur un principe ancien de financement collaboratif que l'on pourrait retracer jusqu'à la Grèce ancienne (Palusinski 2018) et en musique, au 18^e siècle (Weber 2004). Avec la montée en puissance de la culture participative sur Internet, nous sommes passés du pair-à-pair (P2P) comme technologie au P2P comme économie (Allard 2016). Les nouvelles technologies et les effets de réseau² qui les accompagnent reconfigurent les pratiques de sociofinancement qui se développent à une autre échelle. Un certain nombre de plateformes de sociofinancement au sein des industries culturelles sont ainsi apparues au courant des années 2000 : Kickstarter (États-Unis), Indiegogo (États-Unis), Ulule (France), KissKissBankBank (France) ou La Ruche au Québec pour celles qui accueillent tout type de projet artistiques et culturels, et MyMajorCompany (France) pour les projets dédiés à la musique. La plupart de ces plateformes fonctionnent sur le modèle du « tout ou rien » ce qui signifie que si la somme visée n'est pas atteinte à la fin de la campagne, les contributeur·rices sont remboursé·es et l'artiste ne touche rien.

Depuis 2013 et la création de Patreon, deux grandes formes de sociofinancement coexistent en ligne : le sociofinancement par projet et le sociofinancement par abonnement, qui se distingue par son caractère continu. Ici, les contributeur·rices soutiennent des activités artistiques sur le long terme, sans qu'elles correspondent à un projet spécifique. Plusieurs éléments nous amènent à penser que la tendance du par abonnement pourrait se pérenniser, notamment son adoption par des plateformes majeures comme Instagram, mais aussi car le nombre de créateur·rices payé·es sur Patreon, qui mène le marché, a augmenté de 19% entre octobre 2023 et octobre 2024³ et de 13% en musique.

Le sociofinancement suscite un intérêt croissant dans les études en marketing et en communication. En marketing, les études cherchent à identifier les facteurs de succès d'une campagne, à l'image de Jöntgen et al. (2024) qui examinent comment les caractéristiques des campagnes de sociofinancement influencent la volonté de payer des contributeur·rices. Nancy Baym (2015, 2018) et Lee Hair (2021) soulignent quant à elles le rôle central du travail relationnel dans la réussite des artistes qui optent pour le SPA et doivent entretenir une relation affective continue avec leur

² L'effet de réseau est un phénomène où la valeur d'un produit ou d'un service augmente à mesure que le nombre d'utilisateurs qui l'utilisent croît, rendant la plateforme plus attractive pour de nouveaux utilisateur·ices (van Dijck, Poell et Waal 2018).

³ Accessible au <https://graphtreon.com/patreon-stats>, consulté le 9 octobre 2024. Patreon est la seule plateforme à donner accès à des statistiques.

communauté. Ce travail relationnel repose en grande partie sur les potentialités d'interaction offertes par les plateformes, qui deviennent alors un cadre technonormatif pour les activités de création. Cela nous amène à aborder les travaux critiques de Mircea Vultur (2023) sur Uber. Ceux-ci mettent en lumière les rapports de pouvoir instaurés par ces plateformes de travail, qui, loin de supprimer l'intermédiation, réorganisent le rapport des travailleur·euses (dans notre cas des créateur·rices) à des infrastructures techniques et économiques qu'elles ne contrôlent pas.

Dans un contexte où l'offre en matière de SPA est hétérogène et en évolution rapide, il est important de mieux comprendre ce que ces plateformes intermédiaires proposent à leurs utilisateur·rices afin de poser les bases nécessaires à une recherche plus poussée sur la façon dont ces plateformes encadrent et reconfigurent les activités de création, notamment musicales. Dans un premier temps, nous présenterons les plateformes choisies, leurs modes de financement, leurs modèles d'affaires et leurs outils relationnels pour ensuite proposer une cartographie analytique croisant ces différents éléments de comparaison. En plus de permettre la visualisation de la structuration d'une partie du marché du SPA, la cartographie répond aussi à un enjeu pratico-pratique, en offrant aux acteurs du milieu une grille de lecture des plateformes disponibles.

Méthode

Pour cette étude, nous avons sélectionné six plateformes : Patreon, leader du marché, SubscribeStar, Ko-Fi et Buy Me A Coffee en tant que principaux compétiteurs de Patreon ; Ampled qui propose un modèle de coopérative, et Tipeee, populaire en Europe. Ces plateformes sont analysées à travers une approche comparative pour produire une cartographie permettant de les situer les unes par rapport aux autres.

Entre avril et octobre 2024 nous avons effectué une collecte de données itérative incluant : 1) l'extraction manuelle d'informations disponibles sur les sites web des plateformes (modèles économiques, frais engagés, modalités d'abonnement, outils de communication) ; 2) une analyse des discours véhiculés sur leurs pages d'accueil et documents promotionnels (mots-clés, rhétoriques valorisées, promesses faites aux artistes) ; 3) des sources externes complémentaires (communiqués de presse, articles de presse spécialisée, interviews de fondateur·rices). Nous avons analysé les données selon trois axes : les modes de financement disponibles, les modèles économiques et les fonctionnalités d'interaction communautaire.

Présentation des plateformes

Il est important de contextualiser que les plateformes étudiées correspondent à des marchés multifaces (van Dijck, Poell et Waal 2018), qui se caractérisent par leur rôle d'intermédiaire entre plusieurs groupes d'utilisateurs distincts. Par exemple, une plateforme comme Uber connecte des chauffeur·euses avec des passager·ères, chaque groupe profitant de la présence et de l'engagement de l'autre. Des plateformes sociales comme Facebook ou Instagram relient des utilisateur·rices aux annonceurs, les plateformes de SPA mettent en relation des créateur·rices de contenu, des artistes, avec des contributeur·rices/consommateur·rices, créant ainsi un écosystème dans lequel l'engagement d'un groupe renforce l'attractivité de l'autre. Ce système d'interdépendance crée des dynamiques économiques particulières où la valeur ajoutée pour un groupe est conditionnée par la taille et l'activité des autres groupes connectés via la plateforme.

Ce type de marché bénéficie largement des effets de réseau (van Dijck, Poell et Waal 2018). À mesure que le nombre d'utilisateurs sur la plateforme augmente, la valeur du service s'accroît pour l'ensemble des parties prenantes. Plus une plateforme attire d'utilisateur·rices, plus elle devient attractive pour les autres groupes, créant ainsi un cercle vertueux qui renforce sa position sur le marché. Cela explique pourquoi certaines plateformes dominent leur secteur, atteignant une situation proche du monopole, comme c'est le cas avec des entreprises telles qu'Airbnb, Uber ou Patreon. Ces plateformes multifaces peuvent générer des revenus grâce à divers mécanismes, comme des frais d'abonnement, des commissions sur les transactions, ou encore la vente de données publicitaires. L'intermédiation qu'elles assurent entre des groupes d'utilisateurs variés fait d'elles des acteurs économiques importants voire incontournables dans l'économie numérique actuelle.

Patreon

Lancée en 2013 par le musicien Jack Conte et le développeur Sam Yam, la plateforme Patreon vise à répondre à un problème que Jack Conte lui-même rencontrait en tant qu'artiste : la difficulté à générer un revenu stable à partir de ses tournées et de sa musique sur les plateformes traditionnelles (comme YouTube). Aujourd'hui, on compte plus de 17 000 profils dans la catégorie musique sur le site. Financée à coups de levées de fonds toujours réussies depuis 10 ans, nous notons aussi la popularité grandissante de la plateforme, dont le nombre d'utilisateur·ices ne cesse d'augmenter. De plus, le site continue d'évoluer, notamment en offrant de plus

en plus de services (partenariat avec Spotify, magasin vitrine, espace de chat, etc.), ce qui nous indique qu'il souhaite être un acteur intermédiaire important et structurant pour le futur du financement des artistes en musique, notamment indépendant·es, et qu'il est possible qu'il le devienne puisqu'il l'est déjà par exemple pour le milieu du balado (Rei-Anderson 2022). Patreon base sa communication auprès des créateur·ices sur l'idée de la reprise de contrôle, de l'indépendance créative et de la passion comme moteur de développement. Il est intéressant de noter que le mot travail n'apparaît pas.

SubscribeStar

Créée en 2017 et basée au Wyoming aux États-Unis, SubscribeStar, semble avoir été fondée par le russe Mikhail Zadvornyy pour permettre en grande partie le financement de créateur·rices banni·es de Patreon soit car ils et elles sont affilié·es à l'Alt-right ou qu'ils×elles créent du contenu pour adulte (*Not Safe For Work* - NSFW). En 2018, PayPal a fait fermer le compte de la plateforme. Depuis, celle-ci propose aux abonné·es d'utiliser l'application de micro-paiements américaine Dropp⁴, construite sur la chaîne de bloc⁵ Hedera et permettant ainsi des transactions financières décentralisées. D'un point de vue communicationnel, SubscribeStar se positionne comme une alternative aux plateformes traditionnelles de sociofinancement, en valorisant la liberté d'expression, l'indépendance des créateur·ices et une approche moins régulée, ce qui explique la propension de comptes Alt-Right.

Ko-Fi

Ko-Fi a été fondée par Nigel Pickles et Simon Ellington à Cambridge, au Royaume-Uni, en 2017⁶. L'objectif premier était de permettre aux créateur·ices de se faire payer « une tasse de café virtuelle⁷ » donc de petits montants ponctuels, des microdons, aussi appelé modèle du pourboire (Renault et Ingarao 2018). L'intention de départ était plus de pouvoir « tipper » un·e créateur·ice, que de faciliter le développement d'une source de revenu stable, comme c'est le cas sur Patreon. À partir de 2018, prenant exemple sur la fonctionnalité Reddit Gold, les fondateurs de

⁴ Accessible au <https://dropp.cc>

⁵ Une blockchain est une technologie de stockage et de transmission d'informations fonctionnant comme un registre numérique décentralisé, sécurisé et transparent. Les données, appelées blocs, sont regroupées et enchaînées de manière chronologique, rendant toute modification pratiquement impossible sans le consensus du réseau.

⁶ Accessible au https://medium.com/@kofi_blog/the-story-so-far-af61709d39cd

⁷ Accessible au <https://simonellington.com/ko-fi-story>

Ko-Fi ont mis en place Ko-Fi Gold, un abonnement à la plateforme offrant des services premium, ce qui leur a permis de financer la start-up. La pandémie de covid-19 a augmenté la popularité de plateforme. C'est à cette période que Ko-Fi Shop et Membership tiers apparaissent, dans une volonté de concentrer le maximum d'activités sur une seule et même plateforme (tipping, vente, abonnement). Comme l'explique Simon Ellington, la plateforme continue de se développer : « Nous avons construit un mini CRM pour aider les créateurs à gérer leurs supporters, nous avons construit une plateforme de publication, nous avons reconstruit notre fonction Commissions et demandes, nous avons intégré Discord, Twitch et YouTube pour aider les joueurs et les communautés à prospérer sur Ko-fi.⁸ ». En septembre 2024, les créateur·rices ont amassé plus de 11 millions de dollars américains sur la plateforme⁹.

Buy Me A Coffee

Basée à San Francisco, aux États-Unis, la plateforme a été fondée en 2018 par Jijo Sunny, Joseph Sunny, Aleesha John, and Mathew Sunny. Dès son lancement, elle s'est positionnée comme une alternative aux autres plateformes de sociofinancement, en mettant l'accent sur la simplicité d'utilisation et l'accessibilité pour les créateur·rices de toutes sortes. Tout comme avec Ko-Fi, le principe de base est celui de la petite donation ponctuelle, le prix d'un café. Buy Me A Coffee permet aux contributeur·rices de s'abonner à des créateur·rices qui peuvent vendre des produits numériques (musique, livres numériques) et monétiser des commandes personnalisées directement sur la plateforme. Peu de chiffres sont disponibles, seul un communiqué de presse publié en avril 2021¹⁰ nous informe qu'en contexte de pandémie de covid-19, la plateforme a atteint les 300 000 créateur·rices et a versé 2,4 millions de dollars à ses usager·ères.

Ampled

Ampled se différencie des plateformes présentées jusqu'ici en par son modèle de coopérative, une initiative que l'on pourrait qualifier de résistance au modèle

⁸ Notre traduction « We built a mini CRM to help creators manage their supporters, we built a publishing platform, we rebuilt our Commissions and requests feature, we integrated with Discord, Twitch and YouTube to help gamers and communities thrive on Ko-fi. Over the past few years we've added countless features to keep our creators moving forward. » Accessible au <https://simonellington.com/ko-fi-story>, consulté le 8 septembre 2025.

⁹ Accessible au <https://ko-fi.com/>

¹⁰ Accessible au <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/buy-me-a-coffee-hits-300-000-creators-as-pandemic-saw-an-uprise-of-creators-301277173.html>, consulté le 8 septembre 2025.

unilatéral proposé par ailleurs. Créée en 2019 la plateforme a dû cesser ses activités en 2023 par manque de financement. En octobre 2023, 796 artistes utilisaient la plateforme. Tous·tes étaient propriétaires de la plateforme et la gouvernaient, par exemple en élisant des représentant·es et en votant sur des propositions pour faire évoluer le site. À cette époque, le montant total mensuel reversé aux artistes s'élevait à 9 052\$US, bien loin des millions versés chaque mois par les autres principales plateformes de SPA. Le conseil de direction de Ampled était composé d'artistes, de travailleur·euses et de membres de la communauté (comprendre ici les contributeur·rices). Un pourcentage des fonds reçus par chaque artiste – et choisi par l'artiste – était reversé à la plateforme pour assurer son fonctionnement, ce qui permettait au projet de se détacher en partie des logiques économiques dominantes. Ampled avait reçu du soutien financier de la part du Fonds « Grant For The Web » administré par la fondation Interledger et la compagnie Coil. Ampled avait pour objectif de répondre à plusieurs enjeux socioéconomiques, parmi lesquels le manque d'indépendance financière et le manque de transparence des plateformes proposant le même type de services, la pression exercées par ces mêmes plateformes sur les artistes en leur imposant le pourcentage de leurs revenus qui est retenu. Les arguments communicationnels mobilisés par Ampled mettaient l'accent sur son modèle organisationnel et la dimension collective de la propriété.

Tipeee

Plateforme française créée en 2013 à Paris par Michael Goldman¹¹, Tipeee a la particularité d'être une filiale de MyMajorCompany et de se trouver à mi-chemin entre le sociofinancement et le SPA. La plateforme propose deux formes de financement : le « financement de projet » qui correspond à une campagne de sociofinancement limitée dans le temps et la « collecte récurrente » (avec ou sans objectifs) qui correspond à l'abonnement. Il y a deux formes de tip : le « tip récurrent » mensuel ou par contenu, en lien avec la collecte récurrente et le « tip unique » qui comme son nom l'indique, reste ponctuel. Dans une vidéo anniversaire publiée sur YouTube à l'occasion des 10 ans de la plateforme¹², on apprend que ce sont 20 000 créateur·rices de contenu qui ont collecté 40 millions d'euros. La plateforme fait l'objet de critiques et de polémiques médiatiques car elle refuse d'exclure de son site

¹¹ Fils du chanteur et parolier Jean-Jacques Goldman, Michael Goldman œuvre aussi dans le milieu de la musique depuis longtemps. Il a travaillé pour des majors et il a cofondé la plateforme de sociofinancement MyMajorCompany. Il est aussi parolier et producteur.

¹² <https://youtu.be/HFabGIux6MU?si=rhjOoEvLpJYoT2Z5>

des créateur·rices d'extrême-droite ou complotistes et qu'elle a hébergé le financement du film documentaire conspirationniste *Hold-Up* (2020).

Résultats

Formes de financement offertes

Le Tableau 1 met en évidence les différentes offres de financement et de services proposées par six plateformes de sociofinancement par abonnement. Toutes les plateformes étudiées, à savoir Patreon, Subscribestar, Ko-fi, Buy Me A Coffee, Ampled, et Tipeee, proposent le modèle de l'abonnement, qui permet aux contributeurs de soutenir à différents niveaux, appelés des tiers – les créateur·rices de manière continue. Cependant, seules certaines d'entre elles offrent des fonctionnalités supplémentaires. Le tipping (microdon, modèle du pourboire) est disponible sur Ko-fi, Buy Me A Coffee, et Tipeee, mais pas sur Patreon, SubscribeStar, ni Ampled. De plus, la vente de produits est une fonctionnalité proposée par Patreon, Buy Me A Coffee, et Ko-fi, mais absente sur les autres plateformes. La commission, que l'on retrouve chez Ko-Fi et Buy Me a Coffee correspond à une commande d'œuvre ou de contenu. Seule Ampled avait pris le parti de ne proposer que l'abonnement. Toutes les autres plateformes ont fini par intégrer d'autres modes de financement au cours de leur développement.

	Patreon	Subscribestar	Ko-fi	Buy Me A Coffee	Ampled	Tipeee
Abonnement	Oui	Oui	Oui	Oui	Oui	Oui
Tipping	Non	Oui	Oui	Oui	Non	Oui
Vente de produits	Oui	Non	Oui	Oui	Non	Non
Commission (commande d'œuvres)	Non	Non	Oui	Oui	Non	Non

Tableau 1. Modes de financement proposés par les plateformes

Modèles d'affaires

Les plateformes de marché multiface peuvent générer des revenus de différentes manières, comme à travers des frais d'abonnement, des commissions sur les transactions, ou la vente de données publicitaires. Les modèles d'affaires diffèrent selon les plateformes : la majorité prélèvent un pourcentage des revenus des créateur·rices (entre 5% et 13%), en plus des frais de transaction appliqués par les services de paiement tiers comme PayPal ou Stripe. Ampled, en tant que coopérative d'artistes, adopte un modèle unique où le pourcentage des frais de plateforme prélevés sur les revenus est au choix de l'artiste. Les fonds accumulés servent ensuite la gestion et le développement de la plateforme.

Le Tableau 2 présente une comparaison des frais d'adhésion, des pourcentages des revenus mensuels et des frais de transaction appliqués par six plateformes de sociofinancement par abonnement : Patreon, Subscribestar, Ko-fi, Buy Me A Coffee, Ampled, et Tipeee. Les frais d'adhésion à la plateforme sont principalement calculés sous forme de pourcentage sur les revenus pour la plupart des plateformes, à l'exception de Ko-fi, qui propose un modèle d'abonnement fixe « Ko-Fi Gold » à 6\$ par mois pour accéder à certaines fonctionnalités. En ce qui concerne le pourcentage des revenus mensuels, Patreon applique des taux variables de 8% (Pro) ou 12% (Premium) sur les revenus d'abonnements et 5% sur ceux les ventes, tandis que les autres plateformes varient de 5% à 13%. Les frais de transaction, appliqués par des tiers comme PayPal ou Stripe, varient également. Patreon affiche des frais allant de 2,9% à 6% selon la transaction, SubscribeStar et Buy Me A Coffee ont des frais similaires autour de 3%, tandis que Tipeee applique seulement 1% sur le montant total. Les montants du tableau sont en \$USD afin de faciliter la comparaison entre toutes les plateformes.

	Patreon	Subscribestar	Ko-fi	Buy Me A Coffee	Ampled	Tipeee
Frais de plateforme	%	%	12\$/mois ou %	%	%	%
Pourcentage des revenus mensuels	8% (pro) ou 12% (premium) + 5% (ventes)	7% à 10% selon le montant	5% sur les dons, abonnements et les ventes (sans abonnement)	5%	7%, 10% ou 13%	8%

Frais de transaction ¹³ (selon le mode de paiement de l'abonné-e)	2,9% à 6% + 0,10\$ à 0.30\$ par transaction	2.9% + 0.3\$ par transaction	3% + 0.30\$ par transaction	2,9% + 0.30\$ par transaction	Absence de données	1% du montant total
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Tableau 2. Modèles d'affaires des plateformes

Autrement dit, lorsqu'un artiste gagne 100\$ sur les différentes plateformes de sociofinancement par abonnement, les montants qu'il conserve après déduction des commissions et des frais de transaction varient considérablement selon la plateforme choisie et selon le nombre de contributeur·rices correspondant ici à des transactions. Prenons l'exemple d'un·e créateur·rice qui aurait 10 abonné·es à 10\$. Sur Patreon, avant les frais de sortie¹⁴, l'artiste peut espérer conserver entre 81,50\$ et 85,50\$, en fonction de la commission appliquée (8% ou 12%). SubscribeStar offre des conditions un peu plus favorables avec environ 87,10\$ conservés, tandis que sur Ko-Fi, un artiste utilisant l'option gratuite conserverait jusqu'à 94\$, ou environ 82\$ avec l'abonnement Ko-Fi Gold. Sur Buy Me A Coffee, les artistes gardent en moyenne 89,10\$, et sur Ampled, le montant varie entre 87\$ et 81\$, selon la commission choisie (7%, 10% ou 13%). Enfin, sur Tipeee, l'artiste conserve environ 91\$. Ces différences illustrent l'importance de choisir la plateforme en fonction des coûts et des frais engagés. Elles supposent aussi différents niveaux d'accès à des options offertes par les plateformes : plus l'artiste paye, plus il aura accès à des outils de gestion ou des options de personnalisation de sa page.

Fonctionnalités facilitant le travail relationnel

Le Tableau 3 compare les fonctionnalités de communication et d'intégration des six plateformes de SPA. Toutes les plateformes offrent la possibilité d'envoyer des messages privés, facilitant une interaction directe entre les créateur·rices et leurs contributeur·rices. En revanche, la messagerie de groupe, qui permet de communiquer simultanément avec plusieurs abonné·es, n'est pas présente sur Ko-fi ou Tipeee, mais elle est disponible sur toutes les autres plateformes. Concernant l'intégration de Discord, un outil populaire pour créer des communautés d'intérêt, toutes les plateformes à l'exception de Ampled et Tipeee offrent cette fonctionnalité,

¹³ Dépendant de la localisation géographique des artistes et des communautés, des frais de conversion de devise peuvent s'ajouter. Ils sont de 2,5% sur Patreon.

¹⁴ Certaines plateformes chargent le transfert d'argent entre la plateforme elle-même et l'institution bancaire ou le portefeuille numérique de l'artiste.

ce qui souligne la nécessité, pour certain-es créateur·rices, de renforcer les interactions communautaires en dehors des plateformes SPA elles-mêmes. Enfin, pour l'intégration avec des plateformes de diffusion comme Twitch ou YouTube ; Patreon, Ko-fi, Buy Me A Coffee et Tipeee permettent cette connexion, tandis que SubscribeStar et Ampled ne le proposent pas. Ces résultats montrent que certaines plateformes, comme Patreon et Buy Me A Coffee, offrent un éventail plus complet d'outils de communication et d'intégration, ce qui peut faciliter les tâches qui concernent le travail relationnel (Baym 2017 ; Hair 2021) et la gestion de la communauté d'abonné-es.

	Patreon	Subscribestar	Ko-fi	Buy Me A Coffee	Ampled	Tipeee
Messages privés	Oui	Oui	Oui	Oui	Oui	Oui
Message de groupe	Oui	Oui	Non	Oui	Oui	Oui
Intégration Discord	Oui	Oui	Oui	Oui	Non	Oui
Intégration plateformes (Twitch, YouTube, etc.)	Oui	Non	Oui	Oui	Non	Oui

Tableau 3. Fonctionnalités facilitant la communication avec la communauté

Ce tableau nous indique aussi que les plateformes de SPA sont utilisées en combinaison avec d'autres plateformes comme des réseaux sociaux et de diffusion comme Discord, Twitch ou YouTube. Autant les créateur·rices que les contributeur·rices adoptent une approche transplateforme (Millette 2013), en combinant plusieurs outils numériques. D'une part, les moteurs de recherche internes des plateformes sont très limités, sans filtres spécifiques comme les genres musicaux, et avec une indexation de mauvaise qualité. Autrement dit, ils ne sont pas conçus pour favoriser la découverte d'artistes. Cela oblige les artistes à utiliser d'autres plateformes, telles que Facebook ou Instagram, pour accroître leur visibilité, capter l'attention et espérer convertir leurs *followers* en contributeur·rices. D'autre part, selon l'usage que les artistes font des plateformes de SPA, elles peuvent également servir de lieu de partage de contenu textuel ou audiovisuel, fonctionnant

ainsi comme un mur Facebook. Cependant, le partage des contreparties, selon leur nature, s'étend souvent au-delà des plateformes de SPA. Par exemple, un lien d'écoute peut être envoyé par infolettre ou courriel, tandis qu'un concert privé ou une rencontre individuelle se déroulera via des outils de visioconférence. Ces usages démontrent que l'efficacité des plateformes de SPA dépend aussi de leur intégration avec d'autres services numériques pour maximiser la portée et faciliter l'interaction entre créateur·rices et contributeur·rices.

Discussion

La Figure 1 présente une analyse croisée des principales plateformes de SPA, en mettant en relation deux caractéristiques étudiées dans la section précédente : la diversité des modes de financement proposés et celle des fonctionnalités offertes par chaque plateforme pour favoriser la communication entre les créateur·rices et leurs contributeur·rices. La taille des bulles, quant à elle, reflète le coût d'utilisation des plateformes, mesuré par les commissions prélevées sur les revenus des créateur·rices et les frais de transaction. L'axe horizontal (X) représente la diversité des modes de financement disponibles, comme l'abonnement, le *tipping* (dons ponctuels), la vente de produits ou les commandes d'œuvres. Plus la valeur sur cet axe est élevée, plus la plateforme propose des solutions variées pour monétiser les activités des créateurs. L'axe vertical (Y) illustre la diversité des outils d'engagement communautaire, tels que les messages privés, les groupes de discussion, ou encore l'intégration avec des services externes comme Discord, permettant aux créateurs de maintenir un lien fort avec leur communauté.

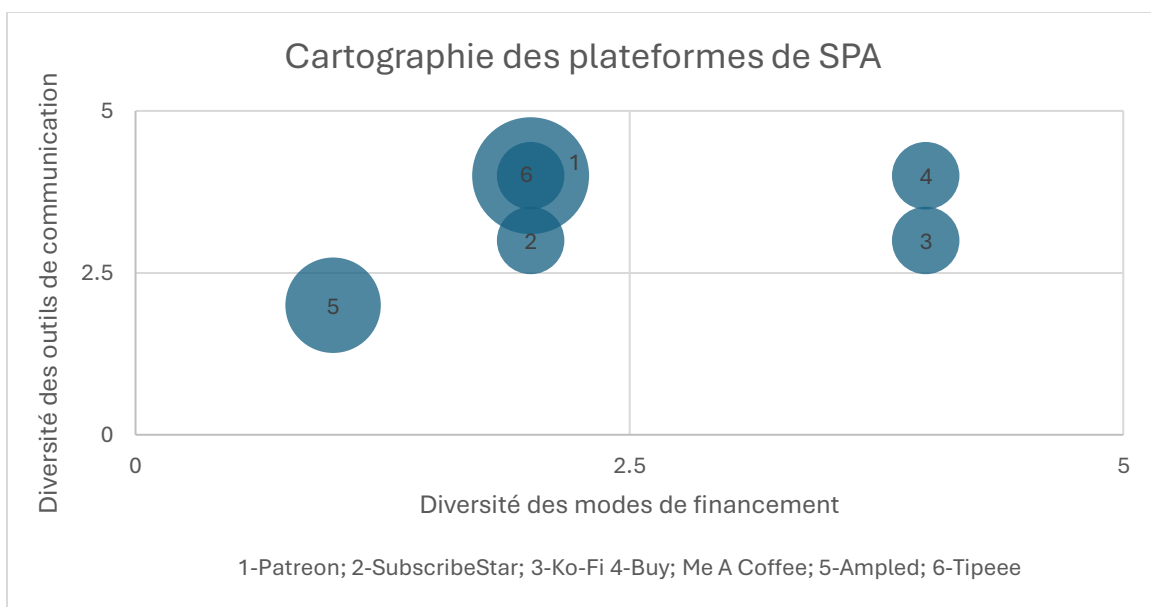


Figure 1. Analyse croisée des plateformes de SPA

Patreon, Tipeee et Buy Me A Coffee se distinguent par une grande diversité de fonctionnalités d'engagement communautaire (4 sur l'axe Y), offrant des outils divers (intégration Discord, messagerie privée et de groupe) pour les créateur·rices souhaitant interagir régulièrement avec leurs contributeur·rices. Toutefois, bien que la plateforme propose plusieurs modes de financement (abonnements, vente de produits), sa diversité en termes de monétisation est plus limitée que celle de Ko-Fi ou Buy Me A Coffee. En revanche, son coût d'utilisation élevé est clairement représenté par la taille importante de la bulle, en raison des commissions prélevées sur les revenus des créateurs. SubscribeStar et Ampled se positionnent dans la catégorie des plateformes avec des coûts d'utilisation bas à modérés. Cependant, elles présentent une diversité limitée, tant sur le plan des modes de financement que des outils de communication, ce qui peut limiter les options de monétisation et l'interaction avec les contributeurs pour certains créateurs.

Ko-Fi et Buy Me A Coffee se démarquent par leur flexibilité. Elles offrent une grande diversité de modes de financement (4 sur l'axe X), incluant le tipping, l'abonnement, et la vente de produits, tout en maintenant des coûts d'utilisation faibles. Ces plateformes proposent également des outils d'engagement communautaire variés, bien que Buy Me A Coffee se distingue légèrement avec une offre plus étoffée (4 sur l'axe Y). Tipeee, enfin, bien que limitée en termes de modes de financement (2 sur l'axe X), se rattrape par une bonne diversité d'outils de communication (4 sur l'axe Y) et un coût d'utilisation relativement faible.

Il est important de noter que le modèle d'affaires adopté par plusieurs plateformes de SPA repose sur une hiérarchisation des services, où l'accès aux fonctionnalités les plus avancées — qu'il s'agisse de l'analyse de données, d'outils de communication ou d'options de personnalisation — est réservé aux créateur·rices qui décident de verser un pourcentage plus élevé de leurs revenus ou de souscrire à une formule payante. Cette logique freemium, bien qu'efficace du point de vue commercial, tend à reproduire voire accentuer les inégalités déjà présentes dans le milieu artistique. En effet, les artistes disposant d'une base d'abonné·es modeste ou d'une assise financière limitée sont contraint·es de se contenter de services réduits, ce qui peut limiter leur capacité à fidéliser leur communauté ou à accroître leurs revenus. À l'inverse, les créateur·rices déjà bien établi·es, en mesure d'investir davantage dans ces outils « premium » ou « pro », bénéficient d'un avantage concurrentiel qui renforce la professionnalisation de leurs activités et la rentabilité de leur investissement. Ainsi, au lieu d'offrir une réelle alternative égalitaire aux modèles traditionnels de financement, les plateformes SPA tendent à

institutionnaliser des mécanismes de différenciation économique qui creusent l'écart entre les artistes, selon leur capacité financière.

L'étude comparative des plateformes de SPA permet également de nuancer l'idée de désintermédiation (Bullich & Guignard 2014) souvent associée aux technologies numériques, c'est-à-dire de réduction du nombre d'intermédiaires entre les artistes et les publics. Si ces plateformes sont fréquemment présentées comme des outils permettant aux artistes de se libérer des structures traditionnelles de l'industrie musicale et des acteurs contrôlant l'accès à des espaces ou des ressources comme les labels, les diffuseurs, les éditeurs de playlists (aussi appelés *gatekeepers*), elles introduisent en réalité de nouvelles formes d'intermédiation (Rouzé 2019) s'inscrivant dans des logiques de marché multiface concurrentiel. En se positionnant comme infrastructure technique, financière et relationnelle, elles imposent leurs propres règles et hiérarchisent les services selon les niveaux d'abonnement, ce qui mène à une reconfiguration du travail artistique et relationnel des musicien·nes.

Conclusion

Cet article avait pour objectif de fournir une analyse comparative des principales plateformes de sociofinancement par abonnement (SPA), en examinant leur fonctionnement, les modèles de monétisation qu'elles offrent aux créateur·rices, et les outils d'engagement communautaire qu'elles proposent. À travers cette étude, nous avons pu identifier des différences significatives entre les plateformes comme Patreon, Ko-Fi, Buy Me A Coffee, Ampled, Subscribestar et Tipeee, tant en termes de coûts d'utilisation que de diversité des modes de financement et des outils de communication. La cartographie des plateformes de SPA suggère que Patreon, SubscribeStar et Tipeee forment un cluster caractérisé par des coûts d'utilisation élevés, un nombre limité d'options de monétisation et une diversité de fonctionnalités facilitant l'engagement communautaire. Buy Me A Coffee et Ko-Fi proposent un éventail plus large de modes de financement tout en maintenant des coûts d'utilisation plus faibles. Enfin, le modèle coopératif de Ampled permet à cette plateforme de se différencier nettement des autres en offrant plus d'agentivité aux utilisateur·rices, mais en offrant une seule option de monétisation, l'abonnement et en offrant peu de fonctionnalités facilitant l'engagement avec la communauté.

Toutefois, certaines limites méthodologiques ont émergé lors de cette analyse. D'une part, l'accès limité à des données précises concernant certaines variables, telles que le nombre exact d'utilisateur·rices actif·ves par plateforme et leur répartition dans des catégories, a restreint notre capacité à analyser finement l'ampleur de la popularité et de la plateforme et son public cible. Ces informations sont souvent peu

disponibles ou protégées, rendant plus difficile la compréhension du rôle réel des plateformes au sein de mondes artistiques. Par ailleurs, les données sur les revenus moyens des créateur·rices par plateforme, ainsi que les taux de rétention des utilisateur·rices, seraient des indicateurs précieux mais restent en grande partie confidentiels.

Une étude plus fine de cultures de plateformes de SPA, qui inclurait une approche ethnographique et une analyse des pratiques des créateur·rices et contributeur·rices mise en regard avec le discours des plateformes, pourrait enrichir la compréhension du SPA et de son rôle dans les transformations du travail créatif et artistique à l'ère numérique.

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Nurturing Ab/Normal Bodies and Speculative Futures: How AI Mistakes Somebody's Hair for a Bomb

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Abstract:

Airports have long served as laboratories for new technological and social control strategies, where surveillance is accepted in exchange for security. With a history of discrimination against minorities, the airport full-body scanner is a controversial apparatus of social control in which bodies are undressed and scrutinized.

Individuals whose bodies and behaviours deviate from established standards of normality re-emerge in these settings as suspected terrorists. A crowdsourced competition sponsored by the US DHS offered US\$1.5 million to solve this problem using Artificial Intelligence (AI). While stakeholders considered it a success, the competition did not produce the expected results, exacerbating the problem due to an issue the developers dubbed “the Bob Marley lookalike guy problem,” which caused the AI to identify bombs on body parts deemed “abnormal” to the Western-centric training data. This challenge illustrates how the assumptions of normality assigned to AI training sets reproduce stereotypes and perpetuate discrimination against minorities. The paper discusses how the competition was organized, the social biases inherent in the solutions, and the developers’ oversight in considering the cultural aspects ingrained in the training data. I argue that AI generates spurious correlations that become historical inevitabilities, reinforcing existing social, economic, and political norms.

Keywords:

Critical AI, Surveillance, Algorithmic Bias, Kaggle

Airports have long been laboratories for new technological and social control strategies where surveillance is accepted in exchange for security (Salter, 2008). Surveillance technologies assist public authorities in enforcing the law by allowing the tracking of individual movements and extrapolating results toward monitoring and predicting individual behaviour. With a history of discrimination against minorities, the airport full-body scanner, introduced after the 9/11 attacks, is both an icon of this kind of technology and a controversial apparatus of social control (Amir & Kotef, 2018), in which bodies are undressed and scrutinized in what Fuster et al. (2015) called “Nurturing Ob-Scene Politics.” People whose bodies and behaviours deviate from measured standards of normality and who fall into categories of social abnormality re-emerge in such settings as suspected terrorists (Costanza-Chock, 2018). In 2017, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) crowdsourced this problem by sponsoring a \$1.5 million Artificial Intelligence (AI) competition on Kaggle.

A growing body of research shows that AI used for surveillance systematically encodes gender and racial biases through training data that mirrors societal inequities (Feldstein, 2019; Kalluri, 2023; Zuboff, 2020). For instance, while facial recognition algorithms have high accuracy, they do not work the same way across age, gender, and ethnicity (Baranwal, 2020; Xu et al., 2022), particularly in darker-skinned females, with error rates 34% higher than for lighter-skinned males (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018). These biases stem from structural disparities, which 72% of facial recognition datasets overrepresent white individuals, and data from low-income countries constitute less than 5% of common training corpora (Steed & Caliskan, 2021).

This article discusses how the DHS and AI developers transformed a controversy around full-body scanners in airports into a technical challenge that obfuscates the political and focuses on rules of optimalities and normativeness. The challenge illustrates how the assumptions of normality and ground truths assigned to AI training sets reproduce stereotypes and perpetuate discrimination against minorities. Using Digital Methods and Critical AI, I show how the competition was organized, the social biases inherent in the solutions proposed, and the developers’ oversight in considering the cultural aspects ingrained in the training data.

Full-body Scanners

Full-body scanners are anthropometric instruments for measuring the proportions of the human body, such as height, weight, and the circumference of the hips, waist, and chest (Rumbo-Rodríguez et al., 2021). These measurements can

indirectly predict body composition, such as body fat indices, and produce correlations of historical social and economic conditions, such as nutrition levels and population wealth (Komlos, 1992). Traditionally, anthropometric measurements were manually collected using a tape or calliper. Automation only emerged in the mid-1980s (Jones et al., 1989), when a device comprising a set of TV cameras, projectors, and a 360° rotating table was used to streamline the process of women’s body measurements in order to improve the manufacturing of comfortable bras. While Anthropometry has a controversial history—serving as the base theory for Eugenics (Cuff, 2004)—today, it plays an essential role in the health sciences, industrial design, fitness, and national security, where statistical data about the body is used to improve health conditions, optimize products, and customize experiences.

The security industry was quick to adopt full-body scanners after the 9/11 attacks in the US. With the potential to identify extraneous objects adjacent to the human body in a few seconds, the technology was rushed into airports worldwide. However, these scanners started to show an alarmingly high number of false positives. It is estimated that the rate of false alarms in the US is 11%, 23% in Italy, and 54% in Germany (Grabell & Salewski, 2011), often detecting potentially threatening individuals carrying a weapon that later is attributed to body lotion, sweat, or buttons and folds in clothing (Russell, 2013). They also wrongly flagged black women due to “abnormalities,” later attributed to their braided hairstyle (Medina & Frank, 2019). Although the DHS does not use false alarms as a key performance requirement in its evaluations, the agency admits current fluctuations in false alarm rates due to body mass index and clothing variation, which could increase annual staffing costs (GAO, 2014).

Passenger Screening Algorithm Challenge

After several public outcries related to the “malfunctioning of the technology,” the DHS crowdsourced the problem on Kaggle, a Google subsidiary popular in the AI community, where teams compete to develop machine learning algorithms. The 2017 Passenger Screening Algorithm Challenge offered \$1.5 million to optimize the AI on airport scanners and reduce the rate of false alarms. The challenge was planned to have two phases. In the first phase, participants had five months to explore a small section of the dataset with scans of 100 passengers. Phase two extended the dataset to 1,388 passengers and gave participants four days to build predictive models capable of identifying threatening individuals.

Methodology

A competition on Kaggle typically features an overview page with a brief introduction to the problem, a section detailing the provided dataset, a discussion forum, and a leaderboard. Participants use the forum to exchange ideas, ask questions, and share their progress. Drawing on Digital Methods (Rogers, 2009) techniques, I developed a crawler to collect, visualize, and analyze public information on the competition's pages. The data collection was made in November 2021. The dataset provided by the DHS was no longer available due to privacy issues. By the end of the competition, participants had exchanged 1,282 messages across 147 threads on the public forum. I examined the corpus using Software Studies methods (Kitchin, 2017) and a Foucauldian approach to Discourse Analysis (Rose, 2001). These methods and approaches enable access to the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind algorithms and help to unpack how developers on Kaggle construct and mediate specific sociotechnical realities.

Human Slices

The dataset made available by the DHS consisted of data from 1,000 male and female volunteers with different levels of body mass indices wearing a variety of clothing types, some of them carrying possible threatening objects adjoined to their bodies. The data was collected using the High-Definition Advanced Imaging Technology, a new generation of full-body millimetre wave scanners. The dataset does not contain actual scanned imagery but over three terabytes of matrices from which participants could generate three-dimensional models of each individual. To protect the volunteers' privacy, Kaggle instructed participants not to share the data and to delete it from their computers after the competition.

Competitors quickly realized that the data provided by the DHS was insufficient to make good predictions. To solve the problem, the developers "fabricated" new passengers or used external resources to augment the dataset. Some exploit the symmetry of the human body to produce mirrored clones of the original passengers. Others used pre-trained models, such as the "Human Shape" produced by the Max Planck Institute for Informatics (Pishchulin et al., 2017). This model is based on the Civilian American and European Surface Anthropometry Resource Project (CAESAR), the largest commercially available statistical body representation scan database, which includes 73 anthropometric landmarks extracted from the 3D scans of 5,000 individuals exclusively from the United States and Europe (Robinette et al., 2002). These resources help define the human body in the context of the competition,

as the algorithm must first recognize a “normal” body in the training set before identifying anomalies.

In six months, the competition attracted more than 11,000 participants among the top data scientists in the world. While the competition was considered a success by the DHS (2017), it was not without its pitfalls and did not produce reliable results. More specifically, the hairstyle of one of the passengers sparked a controversy that the community dubbed “the Bob Marley lookalike guy problem.” Oleg Trott’s (2017) remarks illustrate his and other participants’ reactions to the problem:

The guy with massive dreadlocks, like no one had in the training dataset. They looked a lot like some of the bombs in the training scans instead, except for the fact that they adjoined his head. My model was understandably suspicious. (n.p.)

The hairstyle was not the only problem: a “guy [wearing] suspenders fucked with my model” (emergent complexity, 2017, n.p), “some subjects had excessive...um...girth so that would require an adjustment across slices” (DavidGbodiOdaibo, 2017, n.p), “did anyone use gender recognition to facilitate groin and upperchest?” (numericLee, 2017, n.p.).

The community was displeased by “intrusive elements” and “weird bodies” that caused their models to fail. Requa (2017), for instance, was in the “money zone” (top 8). When their model came across individuals with unfamiliar hairstyles, it sounded the alarm. The increase in false positives caused Requa to fall in the ranking, losing his chance to win the prize. idle_speculation (2017) and other competitors acknowledge that their model could produce false positives due to “edge cases” found in the wild. In other words, their models would cause the full-body scanner to flag a non-conforming body as a threat.

The lack of acknowledging the technical, historical, social, and political factors affects the developers’ problem-solving approach. Moejoe (2017), who placed tenth in the competition, illustrates this lack of care when dealing with code and data, particularly when they have the potential to impact human lives: “the CNN [convolutional neural network] learns which locations correspond to which labels without human input ... It may seem like black magic, but it works well” (n.p.). Developers view the training data as definitive truth for their models without consideration of their original purposes and the bodies they favour. The competitors’ overconfidence in their predictive models can be summarized by Sako’s (2017) comment: “I had strong convictions in my intuitions (that I unfortunately did not bother to validate)” (n.p.).

The Fantasy of Epistemic Purity

The methods used by the data science community resemble the century-and-a-half-old work of British statistician Francis Galton and Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso in identifying criminals based on Anthropometry. From the 1870s to the 1910s, Galton developed a series of scientific photographic experiments layering individual portraits of a given number of people onto a single photographic plate in what he called “composite portraiture” (Sekula, 1989). He saw this technique as a form of “pictorial statistics” for his anthropometric studies, from which he could deduce measurements, proportions, and averages. Galton valued photography because of its supposedly objective perspective and mechanical precision. Misled by its own idiosyncrasies, his claim of objective truth produced by a mechanical machine was compromised by its own manipulation of “raw data,” in which the incremental exposure of the photographic plate produces not an individual subject, but a fabricated ideal type grounded on the dataset.

Influenced by Galton’s ideas, Lombroso (2006) published his infamous *Criminal Man* in 1887, where he outlined his arguments about the inferiority of criminals to honest people, of women to men, and of blacks to whites, thereby reinforcing the prevailing social politics of gender and racial hierarchy. Lombroso used pictures to find commonalities—what is always there—among those who were defined as deviants by 19th-century society: “thieves are notable for their expressive faces and manual dexterity, small wandering eyes that are often oblique in form, thick and close eyebrows, distorted or squashed noses, thin beards and hair, and sloping foreheads” (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2009, p. 220).

AI developers seem to revive Lombroso’s *Criminal Man* by using data points to identify the uncommon or what was “not supposed to be there”—the deviants of the 21st century. Following the classic anthropometric approach, body data has been mobilized to identify and predict behavioural patterns: individuals with non-normative bodies become suspects of future crimes. The knowledge produced by predictive models is so powerful that it tricks us into believing that if a person looks like a criminal, they must be a criminal, or if a person does not have the “right” shape, skin colour, clothes, or hairstyle, they must be a terrorist. As such, the “Bob Marley lookalike guy problem” is not a mistake but a feature ingrained in the production of predictive models, which includes the training set, data manipulation, code configuration, and technology deployment. In pursuing pure objectivity, AI developers conflate data with facts and information with knowledge such that they are either seen to naturally follow one another or support a sense of legitimacy (Hong, 2020).

Conclusion

This research demonstrates how shortcomings in objective, statistical, and scientific language are used as unequivocal justifications to produce an assemblage of code-machine that project a distorted and decontextualized identity over specific individuals. Though the speculative nature of machine learning predictions resembles an exercise in numerology, AI is not a mystical statistical device that predicts the future. The spurious correlation output by predictive models produces justifiable certainties that become historical inevitabilities, reinforcing current social, economic, and political norms.

The Passenger Screening Algorithm Challenge demonstrates how machine learning is an instrument of subjectivation firmly based on the calculated measurement of empirically observed body characteristics that prescribe the difference between the “normal” and the “abnormal.” The supposedly mechanical objectivity of this automated process lends further credence to the idea that their operation is necessarily neutral and impartial, giving credibility to both the method and the technology. Combined with Anthropometry, predictive models have been used to study large-scale patterns in society, define standards in industrial production, and often serve as a justification for racism, slavery, white supremacy, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, ageism, colonialism, and imperialism. The predictions produced by developers on Kaggle provide no mathematical certainty but a range of possible correlations to legitimize highly anticipatory forms of exploitation, incarceration, surveillance, and subjectivation.

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A Call for Collaboration and Community-Centred Journalism: Analyzing the State of Local News and Information in Two Montreal Boroughs

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Abstract:

Between 2008 and October 2024, 525 local newspapers closed across 347 Canadian communities (Local News Research Project, 2024), impacting large cities including Montreal, where *Métro Média* stopped publishing in August 2023. Although the situation calls for re-engaging with audiences, the nature of journalism should also be scrutinized. Traditionally, journalists, as gatekeepers, have tended to hold authority over news selection and coverage (White, 1950). Conversely, a corpus of academic research suggests audience members need to be more engaged in the production of news to feel empowered and equipped to bring change to their communities through journalism (Ellis et al., 2022). The crisis of trust in journalism is at least partly attributable to the fact that most news organizations have, until recently, *not* seen engagement as part of their jobs. This community-centred approach could foster trust in the media and encourage the production of more relevant local content (Wenzel, 2020). Yet, fulfilling these participatory promises remains challenging (Vos & Thomas, 2023). Following this direction, our team of graduate journalism students at a Canadian university conducted a mixed-methods exploratory study analyzing the state of local news and information in three Montreal boroughs, aimed at designing community-centred journalism initiatives. We collected 63 survey responses, and performed 13 interviews, provisionally analyzed using an approach inspired by thematic analysis. Two main themes were identified: opportunities and challenges. We also explored sub-themes of outreach, community building, participation, and power sharing. Initiatives building to improve existing community infrastructure could propel collaborations with existing media organizations, be integrated into Facebook groups, and include in-person information sessions. Working alongside community organizations to develop built-in initiatives may be a relevant option, as discussed in previous scholarship (Wenzel, 2020). Although the scope of this research

is limited and preliminary, requiring additional research, it opens further research avenues for the future of local news in Montreal, via a community-centred approach.

Keywords:

Local news; engaged journalism; community-centred journalism; collaboration; journalism studies

“*Métro Média*’s closure is heartbreaking. There is no longer local coverage, even less so in French, and all the Facebook groups are in English” (survey respondent, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Montreal, 2023).¹

In many regards, August 2023 may be considered a dark month for journalism in Montreal. *Métro Média*, a cornerstone of local journalism, stopped publishing and declared bankruptcy, leaving behind 22 years of hyperlocal coverage and over thirty unemployed journalists (Girard-Bossé, 2023). Conducting research on mapping Montreal’s local news ecosystem, Magda Konieczna and Jessica Botelho-Urbanski (2024) found that: “*Métro Média* offered some of the best local news coverage. It produced 20 digital verticals dedicated to each city borough” (para. 24). This closure serves as a reminder that even densely populated urban centres are not immune to the growing phenomenon of news deserts. The disappearance of *Métro Média* coincided with Meta’s ban on online Canadian news, which took effect on August 1, 2023. Research would later underline how the ban disproportionately impacted local news outlets compared to national outlets due to their reliance on Facebook for visibility and audience engagement (Parker et al., 2024).

In this grim atmosphere, we, a team of graduate students at a Canadian university, gathered in September 2023 to consider the future of local journalism in Montreal. Although the context did not inspire optimism, we did not want to fall into fatalism but rather seize the negativity as an opportunity to think differently about the crisis the journalism industry is facing. Beyond the failing business model of journalism, we thought that asking how news can be made more relevant to communities may lead to more productive conversations and concrete outcomes on a local scale. We started imagining solutions for a more collaborative news and information ecosystem in Montreal.

As a group of 15 students,² we conducted a mixed-methods exploratory study, collecting 63 survey responses and 13 semi-structured interviews which we analyzed using thematic analysis, to investigate the state of local news and information among three Montreal boroughs: Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (CDN-NDG), Le Plateau-Mont-Royal, and LaSalle. An approach inspired by thematic analysis was employed to find overarching preliminary themes to establish further research directions and design a potential project implementation. Our objective was twofold. We wanted to (1) identify the areas and populations where current media coverage falls short of meeting its promises, and (2) examine how residents interacted with local information. This way, we could put forward potential community-centred news and information initiatives informed by the real-life conditions and experiences of

¹ All translations are by the authors.

² The four authors of this paper are grateful to their colleagues who made this research possible through data collection, early-stage analysis, and ongoing conversations.

communities, test their feasibility, and understand the opportunities and challenges they may pose.

The findings point to fresh ways of designing community-centred news and information initiatives grounded in existing networks and infrastructures. Although the data provided insights into a variety of topics, in this paper, we particularly focus on the two most salient themes of this research: (1) opportunities, and (2) challenges, as well as their related sub-themes: in-person outreach, community building, participation, and power sharing. Research findings call for a redefinition of the role of journalists as facilitators for community-led initiatives on news and information, as suggested in previous scholarship (Ellis et al., 2022), therefore questioning the traditional gatekeeper model (White, 1950). They also underline the importance of accounting for diversity and marginalization at large in designing media initiatives in Montreal, particularly for newcomers and those with language accessibility needs.

Literature Review

This endeavour was infused with scholarship on collaborative journalism and examples from initiatives that came to life in recent years in Canada and the United States, more prominently the concepts of community-centred journalism (Wenzel, 2020) and citizen-centred journalism (Konieczna et al., 2018).

Community-centred journalism aims to plug news and information initiatives into existing community infrastructure and ecosystem, and to account for local networks of community stakeholders to effectively answer community needs, rather than fit into journalists' pre-existing belief system, practices, and norms (Wenzel, 2020). By being more inclusive of community members and intentional about its outcomes, community-centred journalism hopes to renew trust, foster civic engagement, and ultimately reflect a fuller array of community perspectives in the information it produces. This approach emphasizes the nurturing of deeper relationships between journalists and community members. As Andrea Wenzel (2020) underlines, community-centred journalism is not a model that can be replicated and scaled from one community to another, but rather a portable intervention process.

Similarly, drawing on citizen-centred journalism, defined as “a journalism that puts citizens in the position of being co-creators of the worlds they inhabit” (Konieczna et al., 2018, p. 5), we argue that community participation should be built organically as a foundation, not as an additional layer to an existing news media organization. Therefore, understanding the distinct realities of a place and accounting

for the lived experiences of its residents seems crucial for journalists in Montreal who wish to pursue more engaged forms of journalism.

For us, thinking collaboratively involves, at least, fitting into the existing networks of community engagement and finding partners within communities, such as local organizations. Wenzel (2020), studying various cases of both community-centred and engaged journalism initiatives in the United States, shared the pros and cons of partnering with these organizations, including amplifying community organizations' efforts by expanding them outward to community networks (p. 63), building on their expertise and "trusted reputation" (p. 63), and including vulnerable community members. However, managing community partners and journalists' expectations could be challenging due to journalists' fear of being unable to maintain professional norms of neutrality, independence, and objectivity against community organizations' own agendas.

Similar to Lloyd and Friedland's perspective on critical community information needs (2016), our research adopts a broad viewpoint on information-sharing practices. This approach re-centres the analysis of the needs of communities, including both everyday and quality of life and needs pertaining to civic and democratic life (Lloyd & Friedland, 2016), moving away from traditional journalistic standards of newsworthiness. Information that may not be seen as newsworthy by journalists may still be immensely valuable for community members to better live their daily lives.

Although these academic works shaped our research directions, practical initiatives that emerged in North America to put community members at the centre of media production also influenced our approach. Moving away from the sole discussions of the failures of the media business model, these initiatives put forward are forms of journalism that aim to produce more relevant information for the communities they work with. One approach that particularly influenced this research is Documenters, an organization based in the United States that trains and pays residents to document public meetings, making their notes available online for all to access. Since 2018, it has expanded to include 25 active sites across the country (Documenters, 2024). This network developed within a rich body of engaged journalism in the United States. In Canada, media organizations are also seizing engaged journalism, with *The Green Line* in Toronto mobilizing younger Torontonians to find solutions through the Attention Action Journey (Chen & Blanchett, 2024) and *La Converse* building dialogue with marginalized communities in Montreal. Academic interest in engaged journalism in Canada is rising, with the first seminar dedicated to this type of journalism organized at Concordia University in June 2024.

This study, therefore, contributes to the ongoing reflection on community-centred and engaged journalism in the Canadian context, by looking at three specific boroughs within Montreal. Although a Documenters-style news and information hub

in Montreal may be an option, we explored other possible project designs. Acknowledging the approach of citizen-centred journalism, in which citizen involvement is the first layer upon which to build news and information initiatives, we decided to focus our analysis on residents, their concerns and desires for the future of news and information in their respective communities.

Methods

We conducted a mixed-methods exploratory study, surveying 63 respondents and conducting 13 semi-structured interviews in English or French, as required. We employed an approach influenced by thematic analysis to analyze the data between September and November 2023. Initially, 15 graduate students conducted a preliminary analysis, after which the four authors of this paper re-analyzed and refined the interpretation of the data, concluding in June 2024, when findings were presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Communication Association. Each author has lived in the examined boroughs, bringing personal experience, professional insights, and linguistic expertise contributing to the data interpretation.

The survey included 20 questions, divided into two main sections: (1) community engagement and news and information consumption habits, and (2) borough-specific information ecosystems, community problem-solving, and media representation. At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to express their interest in receiving training to cover events in their community. The survey was disseminated through borough-specific Facebook groups, the r/Montreal subreddit, and one WhatsApp group. We sent the survey to various local organizations that shared it with their members, including the NDG Community Council and the Service d'Interprète d'Aide et de Référence aux Immigrants (SIARI) in CDN-NDG. Finally, the survey was accessible in public spaces in CDN-NDG, including Monkland Village, Université de Montréal, and various parks, through posters with QR codes. Due to survey dissemination tactics — i.e., through borough-specific online groups and community organizations, the participants were not representative of the boroughs' demographics. The results skewed toward the demographics of the targeted groups and organizations.

The 13 semi-structured interviews proved crucial for obtaining perspectives from residents who otherwise may not have been comfortable filling out a written survey, providing more qualitative insights into the research subject. We targeted borough residents with first-hand experience of news and information, community organization members with knowledge of local issues, and local journalists with a professional perspective on the topic.

	Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce	LaSalle	Le Plateau-Mont-Royal
Survey answers	36	20	7
Interviews	8	5	0

Table 1 - Number of survey answers and interviews per borough

This article focuses primarily on the boroughs of CDN-NDG and LaSalle, which appear to have more pressing community information needs. Their socio-demographic characteristics suggest they may require priority intervention. In contrast, data collection in Le Plateau-Mont-Royal yielded comparatively limited responses. Given the study's exploratory nature, our findings are intended to lay a foundation for future research on community-centred journalism in Montreal. Although results may not be interpreted beyond this study's scope, they offer valuable preliminary insights for further investigation.

Findings

The study findings highlighted several key issues regarding media consumption and community engagement. Across the examined boroughs, survey answers pointed to a blurred distinction between information and news, with many respondents saying they relied on social media to find news, despite Meta's recent ban on news content, which suggests the news they examined was either not officially identified as such by Meta, or that they had not yet realized news was banned on these platforms. While individuals expressed a desire to engage in community problem-solving, they often felt unable to do so. Residents had divided opinions on their neighbourhood media representation, with some feeling dissatisfied and others neutral. In LaSalle, Facebook groups were used as a substitute for lacking community infrastructure, and although there was a strong interest in local happenings, traditional news sources were not heavily relied upon. In CDN-NDG, community information sources were scattered, indicating a need for more centralization. In CDN-NDG and LaSalle, results pointed out inequalities in access to news and information.

The following sections focus on two main research themes and related sub-themes our team decided to emphasize due to their particular salience in CDN-NDG and LaSalle. We dive into (1) the opportunities brought about by community-centred journalism initiatives rooted in local realities and existing networks, focusing on two sub-themes (1.1) in-person outreach techniques in CDN-NDG, and (1.2) community-building in LaSalle. We then (2) outline the potential challenges to collaboration, both in terms of (2.1) participation and (2.2) power sharing between residents and journalists.

Theme 1: The Opportunities for Collaboration

The first overarching theme we identified in the analyzed data – the opportunities for collaboration – includes two sub-themes: (1) in person-outreach, and (2) community-building. We noticed a strong emphasis on community engagement through in-person communication in CDN-NDG. In LaSalle, a desire to reconnect a fragmented community through community-building initiatives, whether digital or in-person, was particularly salient.

Sub-theme 1.1: In-person Outreach: Engaging with Communities Where They Are

In CDN-NDG, a tight-knit borough with a wide network of community organizations, in-person communication appears to be a prime method for both these organizations and residents to share news and information. Among the 38 survey respondents, 23 claimed to inform themselves by talking to their neighbours, and 12 by going to physical locations such as coffee shops and libraries. In-person outreach was also a recurring theme in interviews.

Within our outreach in CDN-NDG, we mainly focused on established community organizations, basing our steps on Nurul Athirah Naserrudin and colleagues' approach to generating trust in participatory research, which emphasizes connecting to gatekeepers within a community in order to generate trust (2022). The gatekeepers, or people who play a significant role in a community, often understand an area and its people. In the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) part of the borough, one of the gatekeeper organizations is the NDG Community Council (NDGCC). In an interview, a community leader at the NDGCC discussed conducting door-to-door outreach in neighbourhoods that were typically underserved because of economic challenges, dwindling community structures, and the lack of access to digital communication tools, such as the Internet. The NDGCC has designated five priority sectors particularly affected by these conditions, which they pay greater attention to in their outreach (Conseil Communautaire NDG Community Council, 2022).

Community leaders at the NDGCC also go to community food centres and housing organizations to share information. The community leader at the NDGCC highlighted that their strategy is to “go where people are” instead of waiting for them to come to their community centre. They described an example of their in-person outreach methods:

In the Winter, three or four of us, we'll go to bus stops for the primary schools. We'll get hot chocolate, and when the parents are waiting for the kids or dropping the kids off, it gives us an opportunity to talk to them. In the Winter, it's a little bit harder to meet people and [it] is probably the most vulnerable time. (Interview, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Montreal, 2023)

The NDGCC outreach strategy creates greater accessibility to information. Instead of approaching a subject without community engagement, journalists could meet residents where they are. For example, a journalist could arrange a meeting at a local park with community members to hear their perspectives, engage in discussion, and spend time establishing connections to understand their lived experiences with the issues they face. This differs from a journalist covering the community from an external perspective, or engaging in parachute journalism, dropping into a community without taking accountability or establishing a long-term relationship with it (Lefkowich et al., 2019).

Location is not always physical. When we interviewed an executive of the NDGCC, she discussed wanting to collaborate with journalists to create a unified and centralized source of information for the community accessible to everyone. One avenue we discussed was the pre-existing council newsletter, as many already receive it and it is a singular source of information. A collaborative approach could look like having journalists work alongside the council to provide relevant community news for their newsletter.

At SIARI, which is based in the Côte-des-Neiges (CDN) part of the borough, in-person communication was also a critical part of their outreach, proving more beneficial than Internet-based platforms. A staff member shared how a group of mothers would meet at a park, sharing the news they had, highlighting the importance of meeting at an accessible location.

At their events, the SIARI staff members hand out a one-page information sheet outlining different community organizations in the area. Concurrently, they note attendees' names and contact information, so they can stay in touch. Journalists could consider implementing this strategy when working within communities that lack trust in the news – providing them with a centralized list of resources they can look to for truthful information.

The way a community organizer described SIARI's in-person outreach suggests that journalists could benefit from communicating directly with community members to understand their needs instead of assuming them. Here, the perspective of critical community information needs (Lloyd & Friedland, 2016) is particularly relevant. The SIARI staff member explained that newcomers' informational needs are often practical such as finding affordable housing, accessing social aid programs, and filing taxes. By providing this type of information that traditional media may disregard, community-centred journalism could facilitate newcomers' socialization and ease their integration into their new city and community, thereby responding to both quality of life and civic needs.

Sub-theme 1.2: Community Building: Reconnecting Fragmented Communities

In LaSalle, community building appeared as a recurrent theme in interviews and survey answers, either complaining about the lack of connection in the borough or celebrating initiatives that aim to strengthen these community bonds. Whether through Facebook groups, the local outlet *Nouvelles d'ici*, or community projects, LaSalle residents are trying to reconnect a fragmented community. These community-building efforts may inspire further community-centred journalism in this borough.

Outreach in LaSalle proved challenging due to the structure of the borough. LaSalle is large, divided into six sections separated by railways, a large industrial zone, and major roads which trigger those divides. Based on these realities, LaSalle has fewer community networks than the other examined boroughs. The borough only has one public library, l'Octogone, which reopened to the public in the Fall of 2024 after a three-year closure. To build community ties in the borough, it is apparent from the survey answers and observations that people turned to Facebook groups to keep themselves informed. Through Facebook groups, 20 LaSalle residents answered our survey: the primary concern being how the borough is described in media articles, or simply a lack of interest in the area by the media which only covers crime and paints it in a bad light. Five residents were interviewed, one of whom is the editor of a local digital news outlet. Overall, residents are frustrated by the lack of structure in the borough and the lack of local media coverage.

Residents surveyed also highlighted a lack of community connections, but some referred to Facebook groups as an alternative. Many residents are active on Facebook, using it as a means of sharing information across three main pages: Spotted LaSalle (34,000 members), I Grew Up in LaSalle (12,000 members), and Arrondissement LaSalle (15,000 members).³ Whenever a question is asked on these

³ Updated figures as of April 2025.

pages, other members respond to it quickly. Spotted LaSalle is the biggest Facebook group, connecting 34,000 members. It represents a large forum for residents to freely share their questions, concerns and recommendations. Whereas the other groups analyzed tended to have more specific topics of interest, Spotted LaSalle is more general in scope, enabling members to talk openly about any issues. Facebook groups were mentioned by survey respondents, who admitted using such groups for news content more than traditional news outlets due to a lack of coverage of the borough's activities in traditional news outlets. The existing networks in Facebook groups, especially in Spotted LaSalle, could serve as a potential foundation for a community-centred news and information initiative: top contributors may be interested in receiving training to develop into more active community informers.

Developing a community-centred approach to journalism could involve engaging with Facebook groups, making them a centralized source of information. A group of trained residents working alongside local journalists could be present in these groups to answer questions and provide verified news and information allowing relevant and hyperlocal information sharing beyond conventional newspapers. These community members could cover municipal meetings, address questions, and serve as trusted individuals within the group, building relationships with new and old members alike.

However, relying on Facebook groups to share information may prove problematic. In August 2023, Meta (which owns Facebook and Instagram amongst other social media platforms) initiated a ban on news sharing in Canada. As a result, news media accounts are inaccessible within the country, and news media links cannot be shared on these platforms. Equipping citizens to act as journalists within Facebook groups is therefore complex because of the platform's stance on news sharing and journalism, and it is undeterminable whether these groups would be flagged as news organizations. Another issue is the way Facebook group members may perceive community-driven journalism because of the toxicity that is sometimes present within these groups. Facebook group moderators would need to remain vigilant to ensure that conversations happening within the group remain respectful. The final concern stems from the purely digital nature of this option, seeing that a significant portion of CDN-NDG survey responses revealed interest in accessing news and information in print format. Sustaining such a Facebook-only initiative in the long term may prove challenging, especially if there are no in-person meetings to maintain interest and engagement.

A local journalist and active community member we interviewed also shared how her work at the Francophone digital outlet *Nouvelles d'Ici* can propel more community connections. Alongside sharing news, she has been training senior citizens to cover council meetings in the borough. A way to approach community-centred journalism Documenters in LaSalle could be by working with *Nouvelles d'Ici*

to expand their workshops to more audiences. *Nouvelles d'Ici* follows the pattern of engaged journalism, seeking to involve community members in the newsmaking process to keep them involved with their communities and bring news that is relevant to them. *Nouvelles d'Ici* partners with the journalism program at the local college André-Laurendeau to provide students with hands-on journalism experience and grow the media's presence in the borough. The issue *Nouvelles d'Ici* faces is limited resources and time. When we conducted this research, *Nouvelles d'Ici* only had one full-time journalist. As such, it is challenging for the outlet to cover a broad range of topics. Shortcomings aside, *Nouvelles d'Ici* represents a strong candidate to work with residents to build a community-centred news and information initiative.

Despite a shared sense of missing community links in the borough, examples such as the interactive Halloween map demonstrate some residents are trying to reverse the situation. The topic of Halloween triggers a lot of conversations online regarding decorating houses, parties for kids, and general questions about trick-or-treating. However, the creation of the Halloween maps for LaSalle and Verdun, an adjacent borough, helped families learn which houses they could visit with their kids for them to receive candy. Maps created by residents help foster a sense of community in LaSalle, facilitating the planning of festivities for parents and keeping track of stores and addresses of interest. We interviewed one of the creators of these maps outside of Montreal who highlighted how the pandemic motivated her to launch such an initiative. Another creator, a municipal councillor in Verdun, also created a map for her neighbourhood because of her concern regarding the socio-economic situation of the area. She noticed people developing a high interest in her map, especially as Halloween grew nearer, which proved to her how important such initiatives are for community building.

Such projects suggest residents are eager to create a sense of community in LaSalle, although the pandemic and its isolating effects must remain a consideration for weakening the community. Such projects, like *Nouvelles d'Ici* and the Halloween maps, illustrate a desire for people for connection, remaining informed, and community building outside of the digital world, which could be a source of inspiration for community-centred journalism projects.

Theme 2: Foreseeable Challenges to Collaboration

As previously outlined, the growing local news crisis in Montreal calls for re-engaging with audiences through innovative and more collaborative solutions. Although Theme 1 explored the opportunities community-centred journalism may bring, the interviews and survey answers also pointed to several challenges associated with this mutation. On the community side, identified challenges include difficulties in sustaining residents' involvement, ensuring diverse participation, and accessibility. For journalists, working with communities may call into question the

conventional distinction between information providers and receivers, which is a central divide to journalistic identity and practices.

Sub-theme 2.1: The Participation Problem: Involvement, Diversity, and Accessibility

The survey answers and interviews provided insights into how community involvement, diversity, and accessibility may be interrelated problems to collectively consider when establishing a community-centred news and information project.

Survey answers provided an overall impression of discouragement among respondents. This was particularly salient in answers about community problem-solving. In CDN-NDG, half of the respondents felt unable to solve problems happening in their community, not only because of a lack of tools and skills, but also due to a belief that problems are too large in scale and structural to be solved by individuals alone. Among the other half of the respondents who felt able to solve problems in their communities, the tools they employed were mostly official and institutionalized, such as calling 311 (the city of Montreal's hotline for information requests about municipal services) and sending requests to their borough councillors. Others stated they rely on activism, advocacy, community volunteering, and attending borough council meetings. No respondent cited the media as a tool for community problem-solving, suggesting that, at first glance, it may not be perceived as effective or relevant. The above-mentioned insights from residents raise an even deeper problem: are community members confident in the capacity of news and information to foster change in their boroughs? While journalists may already be convinced that news is a powerful tool to bring change, residents may have an alternative perspective. Beyond the tangible results of community-centred news and information initiatives, belief in its power to bring change to communities may be crucial to sustain residents' involvement.

A second issue with community involvement in local news and information initiatives is the risk of sidelining disengaged residents. The survey included a question using a scale from 1 to 7 to measure how active in their community the respondents felt. Another survey question asked respondents whether they would be interested in receiving training to help cover events in their community. Across the three boroughs, 17 people answered this question positively, including 10 in CDN-NDG. When cross-referencing these two questions, it is apparent that, in CDN-NDG, residents who see themselves as already active in their community are disproportionately represented among those who would like to receive training to cover community events. Although this answer is statistically insignificant, and the survey included a small, non-representative sample, this is a finding worth

investigating in future research regarding how to foster engagement among disengaged community members.

The issue of diversity was also raised in survey answers and interviews, which is particularly relevant to community-centred news and information initiatives. In the three boroughs we analyzed, these concerns may apply to residents' race, age, gender, and wealth status. In an interview with the NDGCC, we were told outreach and community engagement are more difficult in Westhaven, which is a more disadvantaged part of the borough, leading us to believe that these residents may be more difficult to involve in a community-centred news and information project. Research suggests that community-centred news and information initiatives can sometimes fail to include marginalized voices and accurately reflect the diversity of the places they operate in (Wenzel, 2020). Analyzing the *Germantown Info Hub* in Philadelphia, Wenzel noticed that white residents and property owners' concerns were at times overrepresented in community discussions in East Germantown, a part of Germantown with a predominantly Black population.

In Montreal, financial compensation could mitigate the fact that some residents may not be able to participate in community-centred news and information projects. However, the idea of having residents paid to create news is not accepted by all journalists. One interviewed journalist expressed reluctance to have residents paid for participating in newsmaking. Although this is open to discussion, the reasons need to be investigated further, but it includes making sure community members stay mission-focused, and are not only participating for financial gain.

As outlined in Wenzel (2020), community-centred journalism aims to be more inclusive of diverse community members. Improved accessibility is one way to foster inclusion. The most salient aspect of accessibility we noticed in the survey answers and interviews in CDN-NDG and LaSalle was language. Applied to these analyzed boroughs, language accessibility needs to account for the needs of Francophone, Anglophone, and allophone community members. Montreal has a long history of linguistic divide between Francophones and Anglophones. However, an interviewed journalist in CDN-NDG told us that: "It's one of the few [boroughs] where Francophones and Anglophones work well together, so well that a lot of the issues surrounding that debate just don't apply here." However, in CDN-NDG, which is the most linguistically and ethnically diverse of the three boroughs analyzed, a community leader interviewed at the NDGCC stressed the need to consider language accessibility beyond simply French and English, and the need to translate the information into other languages as well. In 2021, 135 languages were spoken in this borough (Ville de Montréal, 2024), with Arabic, Tagalog, and Spanish being the most spoken maternal languages after French and English (Ville de Montréal, Service du Développement économique, 2018). The NDG part of the borough is more Anglophone than the rest of Montreal, with 36% of residents identifying as

anglophone (Centraide of Greater Montreal, 2021b). The CDN area has a high concentration of allophones, with 46% of residents having neither French nor English as their first language (Centraide of Greater Montreal, 2021a). In light of this linguistic diversity, designing welcoming news and information initiatives that produce content accessible in various languages may be challenging, but would be more reflective of the communities in which they operate.

Sub-theme 2.2: Power Sharing or Gatekeeping? Journalists' Insights into Collaboration

In addition to ensuring community involvement, diversity and accessibility on the residents' side, identifying journalists open to the idea of a collaboration between journalists and community members may be another obstacle. Creating an effective and balanced community-centred news and information initiative would require developing relationships with established media organizations, bringing expertise and dissemination platforms, and finding partners willing to foster a spirit of collaboration.

Our team conducted interviews with three local journalists to gauge their interest in having residents participate in the production of local news and information. Power sharing appeared to be a significant theme within these interviews. While one journalist' professional identity seemed to conflict with the idea of citizen participation, the two others welcomed collaboration and claimed to be interested in participating in residents' training and disseminating their stories. We perceived potential resistance to the idea of citizen participation in one interview with a local journalist in CDN-NDG. This perspective is grounded in the traditional gatekeeper model (White, 1950) in which journalists provide the public with information they assume people need. For the interviewed journalist, residents' participation is limited to submitting story ideas and leads that are then written by the journalist. This conception of journalism is based on the premise that journalists must distance themselves from citizens to remain neutral, and can detach themselves from their biases. This quote from an interviewed journalist in CDN-NDG exemplifies this model:

I am not typical, because I think I see a few layers beyond what the average citizen or resident sees. I see beyond the stereotypes. I see beyond the general conception of what public administrators do or how government works. (Interview, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Montreal, 2023)

Progressing past this gatekeeper model can be challenging because journalists need to reinvent new, more horizontal relationships with community members. Sharing power with them while still receiving benefits from this collaboration can

seem contradictory to some. More research is needed to investigate how journalists perceive community-centred news and information initiatives in order to identify obstacles preventing the implementation of more collaborative journalism models.

Journalists who were open to sharing power with community members voiced five main reasons why they would support such initiatives. This included personal benefits, such as (1) the possibility of publishing more content while having limited resources and staff members and (2) having more free time to focus on other stories. Personal benefits and community interests were sometimes mixed, such as (3) when meeting a need for local news also increased the amount of content published by an outlet. Community-oriented-only benefits cited were (4) ensuring more transparent proceedings at public meetings (the “watchdog” role of journalism) and (5) showing residents they can get involved in the newsmaking process, learn about their community and local governance, and feel more empowered. Journalists who stated interest also voiced practical concerns. Lack of time and resources made it impossible for one of the journalists to carry out daily reporting while mentoring residents who expressed interest in contributing to local coverage. This raises the question of if and how community-powered news and information initiatives can obtain sustainable funding to allow participation on both journalists’ and community members’ ends.

Conclusion

Propelled by the closure of *Métro Média*, our team employed a community-centred approach to journalism to examine three Montreal boroughs’ news and information ecosystems. Challenges and opportunities were identified as two main themes within the data processed through a thematic analysis of 13 interviews and 63 survey answers. These findings suggest strengthening outreach efforts, supporting in-person and localized communication, and embedding journalists within existing community networks may offer valuable opportunities for designing community-centred news and information initiatives in the Montreal boroughs we examined. Partnering with community organizations, operating within Facebook groups, and working alongside local journalists offer an array of opportunities for community-centred journalism to contribute to community-building. However, achieving genuine, equitable collaboration requires addressing issues of participation and power sharing, such as accounting for diversified and accessible participation that enables sustained community involvement, and partnering with journalists willing to experiment with a resolute community-driven approach. Our exploratory study findings are not expandable to other contexts due to the limited number of interviews and the survey not capturing a representative sample of the population. Yet, the themes we identified and the potential project designs may guide future investigations of community-driven journalism in Montreal. Further research could

extend the analysis to other Montreal boroughs and include stakeholders other than residents, community organizations, and local journalists, broadening the possible designs for community-driven news and information initiatives. These stakeholders could be established media organizations, learning institutions, libraries, or city and borough administration. Finally, organizing focus groups may leverage more insights into the incentives and modalities of resident participation, especially when focusing on specific population segments, such as younger and older adults and newcomers.

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