

Understanding Local Media's Role in the Post-Pandemic Era:

An Exploratory Analysis through Glocality and Closeness

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This study examines the role of local media in fostering a sense of community belonging among readers in the Ecuadorian context, focusing on how geographical coverage, news sources, and covered themes reinforce community identity. Through content analysis of 17 local media outlets and 6356 news pieces, we investigate how these elements cohesively contribute to the construction of an interconnected community. The findings indicate that predominantly local and regional coverage, along with reliance on primary sources within the community and the prevalence of topics related to politics, sports, and culture, play pivotal roles in creating a shared community fabric. By contextualizing the importance of “glocalization” in journalism, the study demonstrates how local media act as a mirror to community realities and aspirations, promoting a sense of intersubjectivity, adaptability, and civic engagement. This work underscores the critical importance of local media in representing the diversity of reality, facilitating civic participation, and strengthening the social fabric within the local context.

Keywords: Local Media; Community Identity; Ecuador; Glocalization; Content Analysis

1. Introduction

In the current, ever-evolving media landscape, local media face challenges related to the increase in transmediality, the retention of and decrease in their circulation figures, new dynamics in the sale of advertising spaces, and the continuity of their distribution (Martori-Muntsant 2023).

The focus of this study centers on how shared associations, intersubjectivity, and engagement within a local community are formed, and

how this, within the context of local media, can aid readers in feeling like part of a broader community. Through the exchange of perceptions and emotions about what is reported in the media, readers can develop a sense of “us” that is interconnected with their local environment (Trillo-Domínguez and Alberich-Pascual 2020).

It is argued that this formation of identity within communities is dynamic and varies according to three dimensions: geographical or physical proximity, feelings of emotional or relational closeness, and shared interests, each of which requires some level of mediation. While proximity focuses on geographical or physical closeness, feelings of closeness address the emotional or relational connection, and shared interests relate to common problems or concerns among individuals sharing a proximity or affective closeness (Sánchez and London 2020).

The realm of local media in Ecuador, as in various parts of the world, has always been a reflection of the community, an echo of its voices, challenges, and triumphs. As we delve into the comparative analysis of local news websites in the post-pandemic era, the objective of this study is to examine the multifaceted role these local media play in both the global and local contexts, a phenomenon often encapsulated in the term ‘glocalization’ (Pedro 2022).

In the era of globalization and digitalization, the local media in Ecuador, as in many other nations, faces unique challenges and significant opportunities (Matthews and Hodgson 2023). This study focuses on a comprehensive comparative assessment of various local media outlets in provincial capitals of Ecuador. By selecting a variety of digital media, it seeks to better understand the media landscape in these communities, highlighting the diversity and richness of local journalism in the country.

In democratic societies, the local media plays a fundamental role. It serves as a watchdog of local governance, a platform for community dialogue, and a reflection of local culture and values. In Ecuador, this role assumes greater significance due to the diverse nature of its provinces, each with its own cultural and social dynamics (Criollo-Uyaguari et al. 2020). The local media thus becomes a bridge connecting various strata of society, fostering a sense of community and belonging (Lopez-Lopez et al. 2018).

The relevance of this study lies in its ability to explore the role of the local media not only as informers but also as shapers of public opinion and conservators of local culture. These media offer an intimate view of the daily life, concerns, and celebrations of the communities they serve, often filling voids left by national media (Guo and Zhang 2023). In a context where fake news and misinformation have become global concerns, the local media in Ecuador presents a trustworthy alternative, rooted in the reality and specific needs of its audiences (Aïmeur et al. 2023).

1.1 Post-Pandemic Context

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced unprecedented challenges and shifts in the media landscape, highlighting the need for our study for several reasons: digital transformation acceleration, increased dependence on local news for crisis information, changes in community engagement and civic participation (Michailidou and Trenz 2023; Hess and Waller 2021) and exploring “glocalization” in the post-pandemic era.

1. Digital transformation acceleration: the pandemic expedited the digital transformation of local news outlets. traditional reliance on print media significantly declined as audiences sought real-time information online, altering operational dynamics and community engagement methods. This shift merits examination to understand how digital platforms have influenced the accessibility and effectiveness of local news.
2. The increased dependence on local news for crisis information: During the pandemic, there was a heightened reliance on local media for critical, timely information about health guidelines, local government responses, and community resources. This increased dependency underscores the need to explore the intensified role local news might play in a crisis, contributing to place-based journalism by acting as a trusted source of relevant, local information.
3. The changes in community engagement and civic participation: The pandemic’s social distancing measures drastically altered traditional community engagement and civic participation forms. Local news platforms became spaces for virtual community life, hosting discussions, sharing personal stories of resilience, and mobilizing support for local businesses and individuals in need. Investigating these adaptations provides insights into evolving practices in fostering community belonging.
4. Exploring “glocalization” in the post-pandemic era: The concept of “glocalization” is especially pertinent now, as local news not only covers community-specific stories but also contextualizes global events for local audiences. The pandemic, a global crisis with intensely local impacts, offers a unique case to study how local news navigates global narratives while maintaining local relevance and fostering community identity (Baines 2012). Under this concept, Mersey (2009) expresses how online news users’ sense of community changes with the diminishing relevance of geographic constraints. This study underscores the potential of local media to adapt global narratives in a way that retains local relevance and strengthens community bonds, thus supporting our findings on the importance of place-based journalism in the digital age.

While local news has undoubtedly contributed to emphasizing the

geographical and cultural contexts of the news, the unique context of the COVID-19 crisis has potentially amplified and transformed its role. Our study seeks to uncover these dynamics, offering valuable insights into the adaptability of local media and its critical importance in both crisis and recovery phases, thus justifying the necessity and relevance of this research.

2. Theoretical Framework

Community is grounded in a specific locale, centered on a geographical area and the individuals residing there in proximity (Tönnies and Harris 2001). Hillery (1955) pinpointed three fundamental aspects of community: social interactions, connections to a geographical area, and bonds among people. The community is a geographical space, a social network, and a type of relationship (Day 2006). Local news platforms establish connections with their readers, leading to an increase in the sense of belonging to the community, as local media relate to their readers (Hess 2013). Local media explores and reinforces coherence with readers by delving into local community traditions (Wenzel 2019). It is recognized that local media constructs its news considering both individual and communal aspects, which can foster community participation and solidarity within it (Paek et al. 2005). This enhances the sense of community and the perception of a shared community among readers.

A local medium can be a tangible factor shared and discussed by its citizens. We all interpret the world around us, building and reconstructing our immediacies. Intersubjectivity develops through continuous interactions, formed and reinforced through social processes and institutions such as local journalism. Local journalism constructs our shared realities, turning news into an important form of social and territorial cohesion. Our perception of and intersubjectivity with the world are constructed through our interactions with others, reinforced by institutions such as local media. To examine how local media connect with people at the local level and how readers perceive this connection, this is conceptualized through the dimensions of proximity, feelings of closeness, and shared interests (Rivas-de-Roca 2021).

Understanding what constitutes the “local” sense is important, as local journalists are not merely observers of the community but part of it (Batsell 2015). Local and regional media play a dual role in their localities, being actors in the life of the local area and cocreating a sense of the local and regional. Local media are an important form of community engagement.

The role of these media is to offer a space for dialogue, debate, and representation of different local voices and perspectives. It is imperative to focus on identifying which types of sources are used and which are excluded, using diversity and ‘media shadows’ as central concepts (Mathisen 2023). The predominance of personal sources was highlighted, and it was observed that most news was based on a single source. The study revealed a tendency towards

the use of elite sources, such as business leaders and public officials, followed by athletes and coaches instead of common grassroots citizens or company employees. This suggests an authoritarian and elitist orientation in the local media agenda. It also implies an unbalanced representation of diverse perspectives in local media. Mathisen (2023) concludes that although local and regional media tend to favor elite voices, they also offer a diversity of sources by including citizen voices more frequently than national media. The high proportion of stories with a single source does not contribute to diversity but limits the representation of reality and favors elite perspectives. Local media also strengthens democracy through diversified media coverage.

Local media handles citizen information and promotes civic participation. This approach introduces the relationship between media and their audiences, and how this interaction strengthens local democracy. Social information, which is defined as that generated by public and private institutions, state entities, and independent actors of society, focuses on the benefit of people and the exercise of their rights and duties. Citizen information is part of decision-making at the social level and must come from reliable and secure sources. The importance of local media in a mediatized society, where information is a resource for citizen participation which plays a fundamental role and acts as a mediator between the citizenship and the public administration, is that its co-presence facilitates the construction of social reality (Wahl-Jorgensen 2024). Local media fill a gap left by large news agencies, focusing on local events and allowing for active community participation (Ogando Madruga et al. 2017).

The indispensable role of local media in fostering a shared sense of community and enhancing place-based journalism aligns with the findings of Mathews (2022), who explored the profound impact of a newspaper's closure on community members, emphasizing how vital local news outlets are to the social fabric of a community. Local media not only deliver content that resonates with local values, interests, and concerns but also significantly contribute to communal identity, thus echoing Mathews' observation of media's role in community cohesion.

Local media reflect and shape cultural norms, values, and traditions, reinforcing the sense of belonging among residents. A study by Waschková Císarřová (2016) examined how the commercialization of media has influenced the Czech local media over the last 25 years, specifically in terms of localization and delocalization of its content. The analysis showed an inverse relationship between the localization efforts of management and the manifestation of local content in the media. The delocalized nature of the Czech local media has an adverse effect on the democratic and political empowerment of local communities. The impact on democratic empowerment and civic participation in local communities was underscored, highlighting the importance of maintaining a balance between commercial efficiency and civic responsibility in

local journalism (Waschková Císarřová 2016).

Boczkowski and de Santos (2007) express the phenomenon of content homogenization across media platforms, suggesting a convergence trend that could potentially erode the diversity of narratives essential for a vibrant public sphere. Further, the analysis is enriched by engaging with Reinemann et al. (2012), who articulate the increasing prioritization of “soft news”, characterized by its focus on entertainment and human-interest stories, at the expense of hard news that is pivotal for informed citizenship and community engagement. The balance struck by these media outlets between soft and hard news content is scrutinized for its implications on fostering informed community dialogue. Additionally, the importance of geographical and emotional proximity in news coverage, as emphasized by Franklin (2006), serves as a critical lens through which the role of local media in strengthening community bonds is explored. This aspect of the theoretical framework considers how local media leverage the concept of proximity to cultivate a sense of belonging and identity among their audience. By prioritizing news that resonates with the local and regional experiences and concerns of their audience, these media outlets play an instrumental role in promoting community solidarity and engagement.

In synthesizing these key themes, the study aims to provide a rich, layered understanding of the local media’s role in nurturing community belonging in the dynamic interplay between global influences and local imperatives. This theoretical foundation facilitates a critical examination of the strategies employed by local media in Ecuador to maintain their relevance and efficacy as agents that emphasize the geographical and cultural contexts in an increasingly digitized and interconnected world. Through this lens, the investigation seeks to contribute meaningful insights into the adaptability of local media and its enduring significance in shaping community discourse.

Geographical proximity, feelings of closeness, and shared interests influence the relationship between the audience and the local media. Local media become a mirror of the communities they serve, reflecting their specificities and needs. Readers of a local medium generate a relational sense of “us” by interacting with their media. Local journalists strengthen this notion by addressing readers as a collective with common characteristics. Readers and local journalists share intersubjectivity, association, and commitment through their local media, becoming part of a group with shared characteristics. The importance of geographical or physical proximity, emotional or relational closeness, and shared interests around issues or concerns is highlighted. These dimensions are interrelated with notions of community and the local (Kempe et al. 2021).

The local media plays a dual role in their territories: they are actors in the life of the local area and co-create a sense of the local and regional. The local media is part of the formation of a collective identity and sense of community,

providing a space for readers to connect with their locality and with each other. The local media influences the construction of a sense of community and belonging among readers. Proximity, feelings of closeness, and shared interests in creating a local ecosystem are important in creating the dynamics of communication and participation at the local level (López Lita et al. 2002).

2.1 Relevance of the Research

It is anticipated that the findings of this study will significantly contribute to examine the dynamics of local media in Ecuador in a post-pandemic world. They will offer insights into the adaptability of local media, its role in preserving local identity amidst global influences, and its impact on local communities. This study is not only important for scholars and media professionals but also for policymakers and community leaders supporting the role of local media in democratic societies. Local and regional media constitute a research area that is underexplored (Hanusch 2015); therefore, this study provides important insights into local media and their relationship with the audience.

Ecuador serves as a distinct model for examining local media dynamics, enriched by its varied cultural, political, and economic landscape. This study targets a select group of news platforms across various provinces, providing an in-depth look at the Ecuadorian local media ecosystem. In Ecuador's evolving media environment, local outlets are crucial in capturing the community's essence through detailed reporting on local events and issues. The country's media framework is marked by a diverse array of local and digital media outlets, which are central to nurturing community identity and participation. Unlike the more centralized media structures in other countries, Ecuador features a decentralized media landscape with significant differences in content, reach, and interaction across provinces, offering distinct challenges and opportunities for local journalism, particularly in adapting to digital demands and maintaining relevance.

Ecuador's local media landscape is a vibrant network, each outlet playing a key role in disseminating information within its community. Yet, the number of active local media outlets varies, reflecting broader media consolidation trends and shifts towards digital formats. A standout feature of Ecuador's media system, compared to other national contexts, is its focus on localism, ensuring that content is not just relevant but also deeply embedded in the local socio-political and cultural contexts. This local focus is also apparent in media consumption patterns, with a clear preference for local over national or international sources. Despite a shift towards digital news consumption, the willingness to invest in news is low, mirroring broader economic conditions and a preference for free access to information. The study poses specific research questions:

RQ1. How do local media in Ecuador balance global influences with local priorities in their news coverage?

RQ2. What impact do geographical proximity, news sources, and thematic diversity have on the operations of local media in Ecuador?

In summary, this research aims to dissect and comprehend the nuances of local digital media in Ecuador, their response to global influences, and their role in shaping local discourse in the post-pandemic era. The study is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis of the content, reach, and impact of selected local news websites.

3. Materials and Methods

Based on the analyzed concepts that underpin this research, the general objective was to analyze the content of local media in Ecuador, thereby determining the scope of journalistic practice since the end of the pandemic. For this purpose, specific objectives were proposed: 1. to examine the geographical coverage of news published in local media in Ecuador; 2. to identify the sources of the news displayed in local media; and 3. to establish the typologies of news published in local media.

For this research, a content analysis design was applied, defined as an objective, systematic research technique for the quantitative description of information (Berelson 1952), allowing for the validation of inferences and the objective portrayal of representations evidenced in the reviewed text (Macnamara 2005). The methodological framework of content analysis was employed to scrutinize and quantify the representation of content within Ecuadorian local digital media. This methodology facilitated a systematic examination of key elements critical for elucidating the manner in which local news organizations negotiate the interface between local pertinence and global influences, a concept often encapsulated by the term “glocalization”, seeking to evidence coverage, sources, typologies, and diversification of the information presented by these media. This premise draws on Nielsen’s (2015) concept of glocality, which highlights how global trends influence local events’ relevance to audiences—essentially, news originates from global contexts but is enacted through local actions. Consequently, this study aims to explore how Ecuadorian media prioritizes “glocal” information, creating resonances from global influences that are tailored to local contexts, thereby distributing news that resonates due to its geographical closeness.

To achieve the objectives, the study determined the selection of 17 local news website from 13 provincial capitals of Ecuador, highlighting that in the 4 cities with the largest population (Quito, Guayaquil, Cuenca, and Manabí), 2 local news websites per city were reviewed with the aim of obtaining a much broader overview of the sample. The digital spaces of the local media that were reviewed were as follows (Table 1):

Table 1. Ecuadorian provinces and news websites for the sample.

Province	Local Media
Loja	Hora32
Ibarra	Expectativa
Ouito	Últimas noticias GK
Manabí	Manabí noticias Infórmate Manabí
Cuenca	La Voz del Tomebamba El Mercurio
Ambato	El Heraldito
Machala	Machala Móvil
Latacunga	La Gaceta
Esmeraldas	Esmeraldas News
Babahoyo	Al día
Riobamba	El diario de Riobamba
Puyo	Eco Amazónico
Guayaquil	D'Una Noticias El Telégrafo

Following the selection of these 17 local news websites, the review began from the official end of the pandemic, declared on 5 May 2023 (United Nations 2023), until 5 October 2023, thus completing a 5-month review period, with the latter date marking the start of this research. This research predominantly focused on analyzing headlines from the selected local media outlets; headlines serve as the primary point of engagement for readers, encapsulating the essence of news stories and influencing the audience's decision to delve deeper into the text. Given their prominent role in drawing attention, headlines are instrumental in shaping initial perceptions and, by extension, the sense of community belonging.

For this purpose, 3 sets of analysis units were established that underpinned this research, allowing for the formalization of descriptive criteria for the study of the news presented in the local media:

Criterion 1. Geographic coverage of local news websites. Drawing from Morlandstø and Mathisen (2022), news can be organized into the following categories: local, regional, national, and foreign content, enabling the organization of the number of news items for each section.

Criterion 2. Continuing with the same authors, Morlandstø and Mathisen (2022), a characterization of the sources used in local news websites is specified, being sourced from the local medium or an external source. Thus, this criterion allows for the verification of the proportionality of news produced internally with news originating from sources external to the local medium.

Criterion 3. The amount of news organized by theme presented in the local medium was considered, thereby facilitating the search for patterns of predominance in the news displayed on local news websites. Morlandstø and Mathisen (2022) propose the following themes: sports, politics, emergency, commerce and industry, culture, justice, health, and education.

To ensure the objectivity and consistency of our content analysis, we employed Fleiss' kappa, a statistical measure that quantifies intercoder reliability for more than two raters. This test evaluates the agreement among multiple coders who independently analyze a subset of our data, providing a score that reflects the degree of agreement beyond chance alone.

Three trained coders independently categorized a randomly selected 10% of the news articles from our dataset. The coding scheme included predefined categories based on geographic coverage, source origin, and thematic content. After the independent coding session, Table 2 shows Fleiss' kappa to assess the consistency among the coders' classifications. The following table (Table 2) presents the Fleiss' kappa coefficients for each category, indicating the level of agreement among the coders:

Table 2. Fleiss' kappa for the set of criteria.

Category	Fleiss' Kappa	Interpretation Agreement	Percentage of
Geographic Coverage	0.84	Almost Perfect Agreement	90%
Source Origin	0.77	Substantial Agreement	85%
Thematic Content	0.80	Almost Perfect Agreement	87%

In summary, the approach of 3 descriptive criteria that constitute the quantitative analysis units of proportion upon which this research will be based will confirm the scope of journalistic practice since the end of the pandemic. For the processing of data and generation of results, we used the statistical software SPSS v.29 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 29). SPSS is a tool for managing and analyzing data, particularly in social science research.

4. Results

During the study period, 6356 news items from local media were identified. The news items were analyzed according to their geographic coverage, sources of origin, and typologies.

4.1. Geographic Coverage of News in Local Media

Table 3 presents an analysis of local news coverage, with a total count of 6356 news items reviewed. Among the websites with extensive local news coverage,

Hora32 from

Loja reported 500 news items, and Esmeraldas News featured 250 news items. In contrast, regional news coverage comprised 2035 news events. Leading this category, El Mercurio from Cuenca covered 602 news items focused on its province and the southern region, followed by La Gaceta from Latacunga, with 121 news items, and D'Una from Guayaquil, reporting 180 regional news items.

Table 3. Coverage displayed on local news websites.

Local Media	Local News	Regional News	National News	Foreign News
Hora32	500	105	0	0
Expectativa	51	76	90	56
Últimas noticias	20	0	0	84
GK	3	0	44	0
Manabí Noticias	8	36	74	24
Infórmate Manabí	32	9	6	4
La voz del Tomebamba	5	28	80	30
El Mercurio	407	602	488	440
El Heraldo	98	78	50	4
Machala Móvil	62	58	64	50
La Gaceta	19	121	0	0
Esmeraldas News	250	210	10	1
Al día	98	103	99	12
El diario de Riobamba	14	9	1	0
Eco Amazónico	185	201	0	0
D'Una	99	180	21	0
Diario el telégrafo	85	219	419	234
Total	1936	2035	1446	939

For national coverage, the data show 1446 news items. El Telégrafo from Guayaquil was the predominant local outlet in national coverage with 419 news items. It was followed by La Voz de Tomebamba from Cuenca with 80 news items and Manabí Noticias with 74 news items. Additionally, there was a total of 939 foreign news items documented. El Mercurio from Cuenca led with 440 international news items, while El Telégrafo reported 234 news items, making them the top local newspapers in terms of international coverage. It is plausible to infer that the structural elements such as ownership and labor structure of media outlets like El Telégrafo and El Mercurio might influence their preference for non-proximity news. Larger media organizations often have the resources to cover a broader range of topics, including international news, which can attract a wider audience and different advertising revenue streams. In contrast, smaller or locally focused outlets like Esmeraldas News, Hora 32, or Eco Amazónico may concentrate on local news due to their closer ties with the community, limited resources, or strategic focus on local relevance and engagement. These structural differences can significantly dictate media content

strategies. In conclusion, and proportionally as depicted in Figure 1, the majority of the news belongs to the local context with 30%, and regional with 32%. This indicates a significant focus on covering events and happenings of direct relevance to the local audience. At the same time, it maintains a balanced interest in news generated in broader regions of the country. In contrast, the categories directed at the national context (23%) and foreign (15%) have lower percentages.

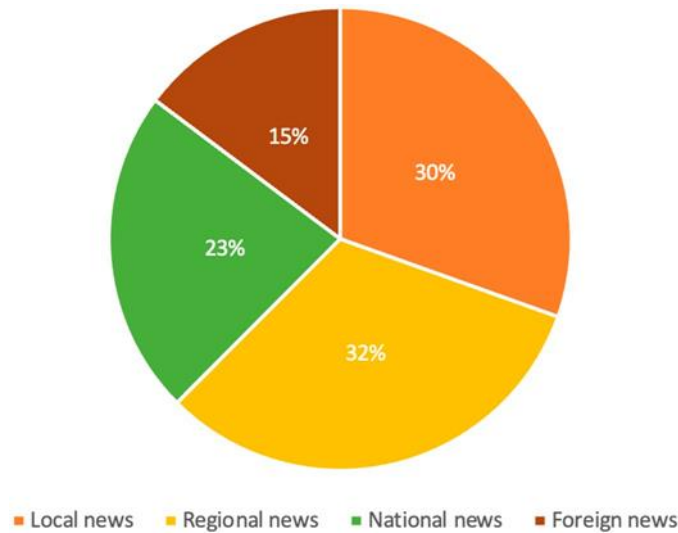


Figure 1. Percentage of news coverage.

4.2. Characterization of Sources Used in Local Media

From the analysis of geographical coverage, it is highlighted that the preference for local sources is consistent with the proportion of local and regional news. According to the data from Figure 2, this trend is confirmed, as 54% of the news was generated by the local media themselves, 35% of the sources are unknown, and 11% come from external sources.

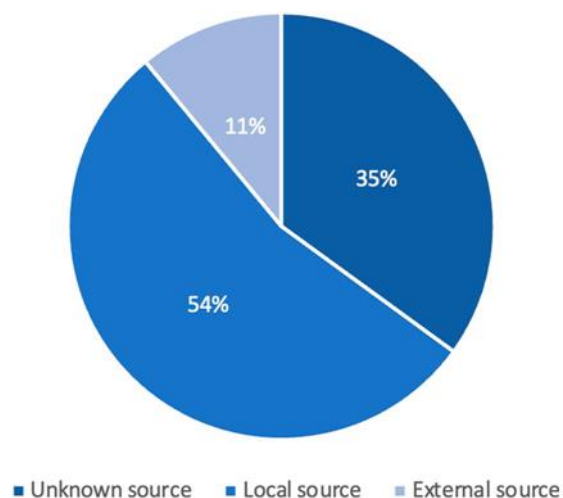


Figure 2. Sources of origin of the published news (percentage).

Regarding the 54% of news originating from local sources, while it generally reflects the editorial team, and in some cases, the names of the columnists, the authorship of the majority of the news published on the websites is directly unknown. On the other hand, the 35% that refers to 2224 news items do not have a clear source; sometimes the medium is mentioned, and at other times, even the source of the news is not cited.

4.3. Types of News Published in the Local Media

Regarding the analysis of themes, Figure 3 shows significant nuances in their selection. It should be clarified that the calculation was made for 5810 news items, representing 91% of the total selected, as 9% represented by 546 news items were oriented towards “other” themes not included in the categorization such as technology, environment, and tourism. The categorization of some content as ‘other’ is indeed significant and warrants further discussion. This category might include emerging topics or niche issues not typically covered, which could indicate new trends or overlooked issues in media reporting. Analyzing these could uncover gaps in mainstream media coverage or highlight innovative reporting areas that respond to evolving audience interests. Within the total sample, the predominance of political themes with 1729 news items, accounting for 30% of the journalistic content from local media, highlights the importance of governmental matters in media coverage.

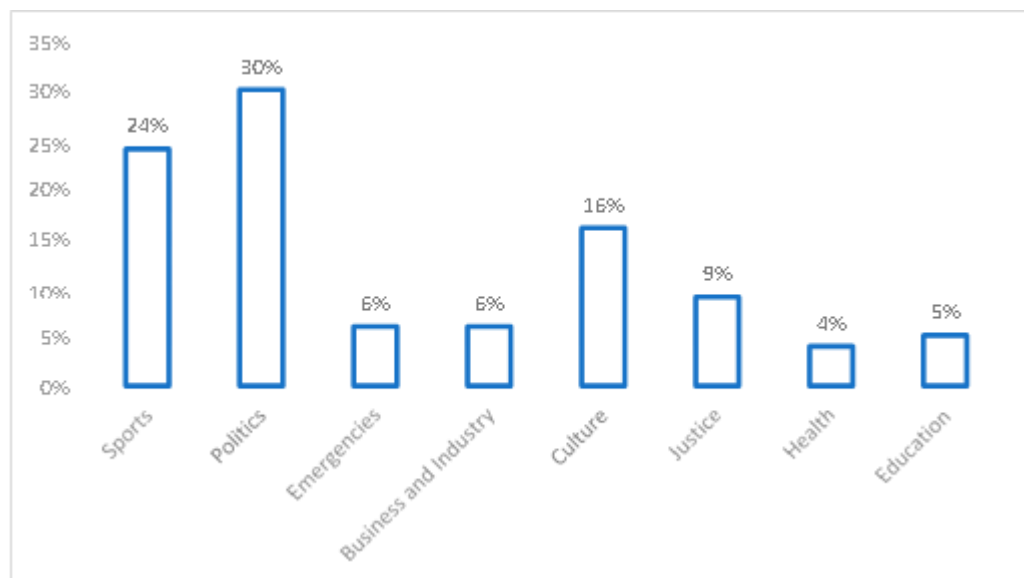


Figure 3. Themes represented in local media.

The category with the second-highest number of records refers to sports-themed news, with 1387 items accounting for 24% of the total content. This category includes not only national sporting activities like national football team matches but also local activities and events from specific communities.

Other categories that have received moderate relevance coverage include

culture, with 16%, and justice, with 9%. Although these themes do not reach the same prominence as sports and politics, they remain a significant object of interest for the local media.

The geopolitical location of media outlets in Ecuador likely affects the typology of content they display. Media in central hubs like Quito and Guayaquil may have access to more diverse sources and a broader audience, pushing them to cover national and international topics. Meanwhile, media in other regions might focus more on local issues that resonate directly with their immediate audience's concerns and interests. This geographic distribution of media influence and resources reflects broader national and even global media dynamics, where centralization in major cities often leads to a diversity in content scope. In addition to the aforementioned categories, there are other topics that have received limited coverage in the local media, including education (5%) with 298 news items, health (4%) with 256 news items, commerce and industry (6%) with 374 news items, and finally, emergencies (6%) with 343 news items.

4.4. Implications of Coverage, Source and Typologies

In examining the relationship between the content's origin and thematic focus within Ecuadorian local media, a detailed analysis of news coverage by geographical emphasis reveals a pronounced prioritization of local and regional topics, which collectively account for a significant majority of the media output. Specifically, local news constitutes 30.45% and regional news 32.01% of coverage, with national and foreign news trailing at 22.75% and 14.77%, respectively. This distribution highlights the media's strategic focus on topics that resonate with the community's immediate environment, thereby playing an essential role in reinforcing community identity and engagement.

Additionally, the origination of news content significantly impacts its creation, with 54% emanating from local sources. This substantial reliance on local sourcing aligns with the media's emphasis on local and regional news, ensuring that the content is both authentic and contextually relevant. Utilizing local sources enhances the news' reliability and relevance, reflecting the community-specific perspectives and nuances, thus bolstering the media's role as a trustworthy informant.

Thematic analysis further indicates that politics, sports, and culture dominate the coverage, with politics accounting for 30% of content, followed by sports at 24%, and culture at 16%. The selection of these topics is likely driven by their direct relevance to and impact on the community, thus enhancing civic engagement by keeping the populace informed about local governance and cultural events. Such focused coverage aligns with the community's interests and supports the media's role in facilitating informed public discourse.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that Ecuadorian local media are committed to delivering content that is not only locally sourced but also centered on themes of direct relevance to their audience. By doing so, the media effectively respond to the community's needs, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement. This approach is especially critical in the post-pandemic context, where the demand for relevant and credible information has surged, underscoring the media's indispensable role in maintaining community coherence and informed engagement. Through this strategy, local media ensure that communities are not only well informed but also actively involved in shaping their social and cultural landscape.

5. Discussion

It is essential to recognize how the integration of Ecuador's media structure and a clear articulation of the research question have deepened the narrative of this study. By situating the investigation within a global scholarly discourse on local journalism's role across different nations, this analysis accentuates the distinctive ways in which Ecuadorian local media encapsulates and portrays local environments, communities, and cultures. Such a comparative perspective not only illustrates the universal challenges confronting local media globally but also casts light on the specific approaches adopted by Ecuadorian media to adeptly address these challenges. This enriches our understanding of the unique contributions and the crucial role played by local journalism in diverse national contexts.

Based on the detailed examination of local media in the post-pandemic Ecuadorian context, our study shows the intricate dynamics of how local digital media outlets contribute to emphasize the geographical and cultural contexts of the news and information. Reflecting upon the initial inquiry into the framing of community representation and place-based journalism, the conclusion drawn from our analysis substantiates a refined understanding of these concepts as mutually reinforcing facets shaped significantly by local media narratives. According to the results obtained, a variety of issues that highlight the findings and the achievement of the specific objectives set forth can be observed. In the first instance, starting from the first specific objective—to examine the geographical coverage of the news published in local media in Ecuador—according to Ordóñez et al. (2020), the pandemic had a positive effect on local media, reaffirming the audience's need to consume content from their immediate surroundings. This premise was reviewed after the end of the health emergency, where it was observed that local media prioritize regional news by a slight percentage over local news. This transition can be viewed from two perspectives: the first refers to the organic expansion of cities through a progressive scaling of growth that leads local media to cover facts and interests of the region (Kaiser 2023), even more so in Ecuador, where this differentiation

between city and region is formalized. Complementarily, the second perspective could suggest a sort of “regionalization” that encompasses the same dynamics of the glocal phenomenon, but applied from the regional to the local level.

In light of the second specific objective—to identify the sources of origin of the news displayed in local media—this research opens a controversy regarding the authorship of the articles specified on their news websites, where although the majority of local media declare the source, whether external or internal, there exists a range of more than 2000 news items where the origin of the information is unknown, merely indicating the entity responsible for uploading the information on the web, a situation that could produce distrust and diminish the quality of the content (Park et al. 2022).

Regarding the third specific objective—to establish the typologies of news published in local media—two issues that fuel academic debate are also pinpointed. The first issue is the thematic diversification presented by Morlandstø and Mathisen (2022), similar to what occurs in this study, where the “others” section has among the highest number of news items; in this particular case, it occupies fifth place after politics, sports, culture, and justice. This may imply that beyond the segmentation of themes, local media contain a mixture of contextual themes that complicate their total categorization. The second issue relates to the distinction between topics geared towards entertainment—sports and culture—and social matters—politics and justice. Specifically, entertainment encompasses almost 50% of the total news of local media; for Nielsen (2015) stated, the extended coverage of entertainment-related themes is a consequential fraction of glocalization.

The insights garnered from this research underscore the indispensable role of local media in the post-pandemic era as agents of place-based journalism. By delivering content that resonates with local values, interests, and concerns, these outlets not only inform and engage their audiences but also contribute significantly to the fabric of communal identity. This work, therefore, amplifies the understanding of local media’s contribution to fostering a shared sense of community, demonstrating its invaluable role in shaping local discourse and promoting place-based journalism in Ecuador.

In essence, our conclusions reconcile the study’s framing with the foundational aspects of place-based journalism as delineated in the abstract. Through the lens of local media’s geographical coverage, source usage, thematic diversity, and the adaptation to “glocal” influences, we delineate a comprehensive portrait of how these entities contribute to a sense of belonging and reinforce the communal bond in the Ecuadorian context, affirming the critical importance of local media in the construction and sustenance of place-based journalism.

The obstacles and discrepancies that arose in this study include the incorporation of social networks and the review of lexicon. For the first

obstacle, the potential incorporation into the research objectives, a review of social networks in local media was envisioned. Although they were included at the beginning of the research, the data obtained were not significant enough to present in the results, given that studies focusing on the use of social networks imply a deeper examination. Yet, the following preliminary results can be highlighted: local media use an average of three social networks; Facebook is the most used social network by Ecuador's local media at 88%, and the least used is TikTok at 23%; this starting point will serve future researchers in complementing the same sampling of local media regarding the degrees of interaction and semiotics of social media posts. The second obstacle was the potential review of the lexicon of the news with the aim of determining the vocabulary used in the content presented in the news; however, dealing with 6356 news items made it difficult to proceed with such proposal. Similarly to the issue related to the lexicon, knowing the massive amount of news as well and understanding the reality of Ecuador's local media, it remains to examine the degree of similarity of the exposed news with other already published news, an issue that is also available for future researchers.

The coverage of news in Ecuador's local media focuses on politics, sports, and culture, raising questions about the diversity and representativeness of local realities. Furthermore, it highlights the need to adapt to technological and linguistic changes in the journalistic field. In this sense, to reflect on the role of local media in shaping collective identity and a sense of community, especially in a post-pandemic context. The importance of representing diverse realities and promoting community participation through local media is fundamental to strengthening democracy and encouraging civic engagement.

Likewise, the influence of geographical proximity and shared interests in the relationship between the audience and the local media, and how this dynamic can impact the perception of local reality and the construction of community identity, must be considered.

In summary, the time has come to rethink the role of local media in today's society, as well as the need to address technological and linguistic challenges to ensure an equitable and meaningful representation of local communities.

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