




# Now You See Me: Public Service and Portuguese Radio on Instagram

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## Abstract

Digital platforms have expanded the communicative scope of radio, encouraging stations to integrate visual elements into their strategies and enabling new forms of identity construction, content promotion, and audience engagement. This study investigates whether communication on Instagram differs between public and private radio stations, considering the principles of differentiation expected of public service media. Using a quantitative approach with data extracted via Application Programming Interface (API), 844 posts from 2023 were analyzed: 244 from Antena 3

(public) and 600 from Rádio Comercial (private), with a margin of error of  $\pm 2.10\%$ . The main findings indicate that the institutional nature of radio stations significantly shapes their social media communication, challenging the conclusions of previous research. Antena 3 exhibited stronger alignment with public service objectives, particularly through content focused on artists and events, whereas Rádio Comercial favored promotional and engagement-oriented strategies. The hypotheses suggesting that institutional nature would not affect communication, and that the themes of “Self-promotion” and “Community” would be equally represented in both cases, were rejected.

Overall, this study demonstrates that institutional differentiation persists in platform-based online environments.

## Keywords

Radio • Instagram • Public service • Social media • Portugal

## Introduction

With the rise of new technologies and digital platforms, it has become possible to analyze the visual dimension of radio stations and, from this perspective, to understand how they construct and communicate their identity, promote programs and build relationships with their audiences (Berry, 2013). However, beyond documenting radio's visual expansion, a more pressing question concerns how institutional missions are articulated within platform environments structured by visibility metrics, engagement logics, and algorithmic distribution. Social media do not merely extend radio's presence; they reshape the conditions under which institutional identities are publicly performed.

In this context, the aim of this study was to determine whether the Instagram communication strategy of a public radio station differs significantly from that of a private one. This is a socially relevant issue, as stated in the *Portuguese Radio and Television Public Service Concession Agreement*, and similarly in other countries, public service broadcasters are required to distinguish their content from commercial offerings: "A globally differentiated programming compared to the audiovisual market offering" (p. 9).

A quantitative approach was employed, using data extraction via Application Programming Interface (API). This method enabled the collection and storage of information from January to December 2023 from the selected Instagram pages, resulting

in a dataset of 1,625 posts. With a margin of error of  $\pm 2.10\%$ , the final sample consisted of 844 posts: 244 from Antena 3 (public) and 600 from Rádio Comercial (private).

This study does not assume structural symmetry between the selected radio stations. On the contrary, it deliberately contrasts two distinct institutional regimes operating within the same national media system: a public service broadcaster bound by normative obligations and a commercial market leader driven by competitive imperatives. The asymmetry between the cases is analytically intentional, as it allows us to examine how different institutional logics are translated into communication practices within the same social media platform.

The findings indicate that the institutional nature of radio stations significantly shapes their social media communication, challenging the conclusions of previous research. Antena 3 exhibited stronger alignment with public service objectives, particularly through content focused on artists and events, whereas Rádio Comercial favored promotional and viral strategies. The hypotheses suggesting that institutional nature would not affect communication, and that the themes of "Self-promotion" and "Community" would be equally represented in both cases, were rejected. Nevertheless, themes traditionally associated with public service, such as education and health, were notably absent. The study also reaffirms the increasing visual dimension of radio in the digital age.

## Radio, Public Service, and Social Networks

Instagram is widely regarded as the fastest-growing social media platform in history (Wagner, 2015). In terms of user demographics, Moore and Craciun (2021) report that the most engaged age group is between 18 and 29 years old, representing 53% of accounts at the time of their study. The authors also note that women constitute the majority of users, a trend that is likewise observed in Portugal

(OberCom – Observatório da Comunicação, 2023). According to Datareportal (2023), approximately 32% of Instagram users are between 18 and 24 years old, 29.6% between 25 and 34, and 15.3% between 35 and 44, making these the three dominant age groups on the platform in Portugal.

Instagram is characterized by its strong emphasis on personal expression (Piñeiro-Otero, 2020; Frier, 2020; Manovich, 2017). Among the main motivations for its use are self-expression, documentation, and social interaction (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). In a study by La Sala *et al.* (2014), participants indicated that they use different social media platforms to express distinct aspects of their identities, for instance, Facebook for maintaining friendships, LinkedIn for professional networking, and Instagram for sharing more casual, everyday photos.

The use of Instagram by radio stations as a promotional tool enables them to present themselves as more personal, emotionally relatable, and socially engaged (Ferguson & Greer, 2018). Beyond that, it allows listeners to *see* the radio. For decades, sound was synonymous with radio, while images were associated with television. Radio was confined to what several authors have described as the “theatre of the mind” (Patnode, 2011), a notion that no longer fully applies. With the advent of digital technologies, visual media have rapidly gained popularity, leading to significant changes in how audiences consume content (La Sala *et al.*, 2014; Ferguson & Greer, 2018; Kroth, 2016; Berry, 2013; Bee, 2021; Reis, 2011).

The history of radio has always been characterized by cycles of innovation and disruption (Reis, 2011; Oliveira & Portela, 2011). This ongoing process of transformation is what Prata (2008) terms “radiomorphosis.” The first major rupture occurred with the emergence of television in the 1950s, which prompted widespread speculation about the end of radio. The second was the rise of the internet, which gave birth to a new format: web radio. Today, society is shaped by communication across multiple, and

increasingly visual, channels, among which social media play a central role (Ferguson & Greer, 2018; Prata, 2008; De-Sola-Puevo *et al.*, 2021).

Today, radio can not only be heard but also seen. This evolution stems from the need to adapt to new audience demands, uses, and media consumption habits (Cordeiro, 2012; Kroth, 2016; Bee, 2021; De-Sola-Puevo *et al.*, 2021; Oliveira & Portela, 2011). Social media has become a powerful tool for expanding audiences, showcasing radio operations and on-air talent, and transforming one-way communication into a two-way exchange through interactivity and instant feedback (Karttunen, 2017).

According to Kroth (2016, p. 21), *radiomorphosis* emerged as radio adapted to the digital environment and to new patterns of content consumption “in a more competitive and demanding space.” It became essential for broadcasters to recognize that globalization was eroding their exclusivity and that the absence of websites or online content distribution rendered them uncompetitive. Karttunen (2017) further observes that radio stations now compete not only with one another but also with all other media. In this context, maintaining relevance requires that radio remain as current and integrated as possible within the cross-media landscape.

The defining characteristics of radio — immediacy, simplicity, interactivity, and intimacy — closely align with the nature of social media (Reis, 2011; Collins, 2021). While radio’s simplicity lies in its lack of concern for framing, visuals, or lighting, the simplicity of social media derives from its accessibility, requiring only an internet connection. In terms of interactivity, radio offers opportunities for real-time dialogue with listeners, whereas on social media, interactivity is an intrinsic feature that depends on sharing and conversation.

Radio has also long been described as an intimate medium, as its content is experienced personally and imaginatively by each listener (Collins, 2021; Patnode, 2011). Similarly, social media, platforms built around sharing everyday, often

personal moments, share this quality of intimacy. In this sense, the two media are not fundamentally different, and the expansion of radio into the digital sphere represents a natural and seamless transition (Ferguson & Greer, 2018).

Cordeiro (2012) introduces the concept of “R@dio,” describing a new model of radio broadcasting that, in her view, restores the best features of traditional radio by making it not only more interactive but also more participatory. Piñeiro-Otero and Martín-Pena (2020) similarly argue that the convergence of radio and social media has fostered more interactive, specialized, and personalized content. Collectively, scholars agree that this represents the emergence of a new model of radio broadcasting (Prata, 2008; Kroth, 2016; Berry, 2013; Bee, 2021).

Although digital technologies have transformed the ways in which radio can be both watched and listened to, Kholis *et al.* (2023) observe that traditional media face growing challenges in attracting audiences. With technological advances, radio now competes directly with platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music, which appeal to users through their personalization features and ease of access (Oliveira & Portela, 2011). According to these authors, such competition has contributed to a decline in radio listenership. In Portugal, data from the latest Reuters Institute report (2024) indicate that television remains the most frequently used medium on a weekly basis, at least for news consumption. Among radio broadcasters, RFM ranks sixth and Rádio Comercial eighth in offline reach, and 14th and 15th, respectively, in online reach.

Both television and public radio have made digital transition a strategic priority (Piñeiro-Otero & Martín-Pena, 2020). However, research on European public radio indicates that its presence on Instagram remains relatively limited. The authors note that radio stations are adapting their content to convey more visual narratives and agree that Instagram is primarily used for self-promotion and community representation.

In their study of the semiotics of radio stations’ Instagram posts, Ferguson and Greer (2018, p. 23) identified a dominant theme across many accounts: the portrayal of a happy and energetic community. These images, as the authors observe, communicate unity and joy, often carrying an implicit message: “listen to our radio station, and you too will be happy.” Consequently, radio stations contribute to the creation of a visual culture that promotes an overwhelmingly cheerful and optimistic image of the broadcasting industry.

Piñeiro-Otero and Martín-Pena (2020) observe that, to varying degrees, radio stations have succeeded in appropriating Instagram, adapting their content to convey more visually engaging and informative narratives. The use of Instagram expands the scope of radio by facilitating the dissemination of events, interviews, and other content, effectively helping to bridge the gap between sound and image. The authors further conclude that there are no significant differences between the Instagram communication strategies of commercial and public service radio stations. Similarly, Ferguson and Greer (2018), after analyzing American radio stations on Instagram, found that, contrary to their expectations, the topics of posts did not vary substantially according to the profile of the station.

It is important to examine how public service broadcasters have sought to differentiate themselves in the digital environment because, as Berry (2013) notes in his study of BBC radio, maintaining relevance across generations remains a central concern. The concept of *public service* is commonly linked to the creation of the BBC in 1922, which became the model later adopted by other European countries (Fidalgo, 2005). Public radio and television have long played a vital role in European society, serving as key components of its public sphere (Gripsrud, 2007).

Because public service media reflect the distinct traditions, cultures, and languages of each nation, defining a single, universal model is difficult. Indeed, as of 2001, there was still no central or universally accepted conception of “public service” (Born & Prosser, 2001).

Nonetheless, certain shared principles help delineate its role, such as universality of content and access, the creation of programming that fosters social cohesion, an educational and informative mission, the promotion of political pluralism and cultural diversity, and the preservation and dissemination of national culture and heritage, all while responding to the needs of increasingly multicultural societies (Iosifidis, 2007).

The emergence of the internet has brought challenges that extend beyond the mere transition to digital formats. Lopes *et al.* (2023, p. 23) argue that a new logic of public service is required, one that “inherits the essence of its missions, principles, and values,” yet simultaneously “transcends” them in order to remain relevant and continue contributing to the construction of society.

While previous research has documented the visual transformation of radio and the growing use of Instagram as a promotional tool, less attention has been paid to how institutional missions are translated within platform environments governed by visibility, engagement metrics, and algorithmic distribution. In particular, the question remains whether public service obligations retain their structural distinctiveness in such environments or become recalibrated according to platform logics. Addressing this gap requires moving beyond descriptive accounts of visual adaptation and examining how institutional differentiation operates under the conditions of each social media platform.

## Methods and Data

This study examines whether Instagram communication differs between public and private radio stations within the Portuguese media system. While institutional differentiation might be theoretically anticipated, previous empirical research has pointed to convergence in social media strategies across broadcaster types (Piñeiro-Otero & Martín-Pena, 2020; Ferguson & Greer, 2018). The following hypotheses assess whether such convergence is also observable in Portugal:

**H1.** The prominence of public service values and the communication structures of Portuguese radio stations on Instagram do not differ according to their public or private nature.

The first hypothesis was formulated in light of the findings reported by Piñeiro-Otero and Martín-Pena (2020) and Ferguson and Greer (2018). Both studies explored how radio stations use Instagram as a communication tool. The former focused on generalist radio stations in Europe, while the latter analyzed American radio stations. In both cases, the authors found no substantial differences between public and private broadcasters in their Instagram communication. Piñeiro-Otero and Martín-Pena (2020) concluded that public service radio stations do not significantly differ from others in their social media strategies, while Ferguson and Greer (2018) observed that similar thematic patterns tend to emerge across stations, regardless of their institutional profile.

**H2.** *Self-promotion* and *Community* are themes with a significant presence on the Instagram accounts of Portuguese radio stations, regardless of whether they are public or private.

Ferguson and Greer (2018) initially expected to find variations in Instagram content themes according to the profile of each radio station. However, their results ultimately converged around a small set of recurring themes, the most prominent being *self-promotion* and *community*. Piñeiro-Otero and Martín-Pena (2020) compared their findings with those of Ferguson and Greer (2018) and observed that European radio stations also tend to use Instagram primarily for self-promotional purposes. Through such strategies, stations strengthen their positioning by promoting events and personalities while simultaneously fostering community engagement.

For this study, a public and a private radio station were selected to compare their communication approaches and assess the influence of public service obligations on their online strategies. The selection of Antena 3 and Rádio Comercial was guided by institutional contrast rather than market equiv-

alence. The aim is not to compare similar actors in terms of audience scale, market leadership, or funding model, but to analyze how structurally different regulatory frameworks and missions shape digital strategies when operating on the same social media platform, in this case, Instagram.

Antena 3 is the Portuguese public radio station with the largest presence on Instagram, with content focused on pop culture, national music, and the promotion of emerging artists (Lopes *et al.*, 2023). Its primary audience is between 25 and 44 years old, while younger listeners aged 15 to 24 represent only 4% of the total audience. In the online environment, this age range remains predominant (Lopes *et al.*, 2023).

Rádio Comercial, owned by the Bauer Media Group, is a generalist station aimed at an adult audience. According to its Editorial Statute, its musical programming centers on the genres of Pop, Pop/Rock, Rock, and Dance Pop (Rádio Comercial, n.d., p. 2). Lopes *et al.* (2023) report that the Bauer Media Group reaches more than 155,000 listeners, making Rádio Comercial the most listened-to station in Portugal, a position it continues to hold, according to Marktest (2023).

The selection of Instagram is grounded in theoretical and contextual considerations related to its communicative affordances. As a social media platform structured primarily around visual logic, Instagram privileges image-based storytelling, aesthetic branding, and curated self-representation (Manovich, 2017). Its interface design foregrounds images and short-form videos, encouraging coherent visual identities and performative visibility as central elements of institutional communication. While other platforms such as Facebook also support visual communication, their architecture has historically emphasized networked interaction, hyperlink circulation, and mixed-format informational exchange. Instagram, by contrast, operates through a logic of visual coherence and algorithmically mediated visibility, in which institutions construct their public identity through aesthetic consistency and

emotionally engaging narratives (Moore & Craciun, 2021; Piñeiro-Otero & Martín-Pena, 2020; Waterloo *et al.*, 2017).

Data from the Instagram accounts @antena3rtp and @radiocomercial were collected via Application Programming Interface (API) using CrowdTangle, a Meta-owned tool that enabled the analysis of public social media content, discontinued on August 14, 2024. The dataset covers a 12-month period, from January to December 2023, comprising a total of 1,625 posts (366 from Antena 3 and 1,259 from Rádio Comercial). The extracted data include variables such as post date and time, URL, caption text, and engagement metrics (types and quantities of reactions from followers).

The definition of Public Service Saliency used in this study was derived from the *Public Service Radio and Television Concession Agreement* (RTP, 2015), which outlines its main characteristics. Accordingly, this concept encompasses posts that fall into at least one of the following categories: (a) Portuguese traditions and values; (b) national musical artists and events; (c) the Portuguese-speaking world; (d) international musical artists and events; (e) national and international sports; (f) gender equality; (g) education; (h) health; (i) ethnic and sexual minorities; and (j) religion. It is worth noting that the document does not explicitly refer to national cultural events outside the musical sphere. Nevertheless, in this research, all other national events and artists representing different forms of artistic expression were also included.

From the total number of publications ( $N = 1,625$ ), several sampling tests were conducted until a maximum margin of error of  $\pm 2.10\%$  was achieved for both radio stations. The final sample consisted of 244 posts from Antena 3 and 600 from Rádio Comercial (see Table 1). In total, 844 posts were selected for quantitative content analysis, representing approximately 52% of the total dataset. Each publication was assigned a random number, and the database was then sorted accordingly. The final sample was drawn based on this random order, ensuring that every post had an equal probability of selection.

	<b>Antena 3</b>	<b>Rádio Comercial</b>
Population size (N)	366	1,259
Maximum margin of error (50%)	2.10	2.10
Confidence level (z)	1.96	1.96
Sample size (n)	244	600

**Table 1.** Population, sample, and confidence level. Own elaboration based on Levy and Lemeshow (1991)

At the start of the analysis, the coders received training and access to the codebook in order to perform an intercoder reliability test on 10% of the final sample. During the comparison of codings, some difficulty emerged in distinguishing between “Direct appeal to the community” and “Indirect appeal to the community,” which prompted a more precise clarification and differentiation of these categories. After discussion, agreement levels for each of the three categories under analysis (Public Service, Self-Promotion, and Community) were calculated using the Kappa coefficient. The results were as follows: Public Service —0.80; Self-Promotion —0.84; and Community —0.79.

Although the differences were not significant and coding could have proceeded, a second intercoder test was conducted using the revised codebook to confirm and validate the initial findings. All procedures were repeated, yielding the following results: Public Service —0.81 (an increase of 0.01); Self-Promotion —0.85 (an increase of 0.01); and Community —0.91 (an increase of 0.12). These outcomes confirmed the reliability and consistency of the coding process.

## Findings

To address the first hypothesis (H1), the relationship between the variables “Presence of Public Service” and “Station” was examined. The analysis revealed

<b>Public Service</b>	<b>Antena 3</b>	<b>Rádio Comercial</b>
Yes	71.3	24.8
No	28.7	75.2

**Table 2.** Cross-tabulation between “Presence of Public Service” and “Station”

that public service characteristics appeared in 71.3% of Antena 3’s publications, compared with 24.8% of Rádio Comercial’s publications (Table 2).

The data reveal substantial differences in how the two stations reflect public service characteristics. Antena 3, as a public broadcaster, displays public service features in 71.3% of its Instagram posts, whereas Rádio Comercial, a private broadcaster, presents such characteristics in only 24.8% of its posts during the same period.

To assess whether a relationship of dependence exists between the variables, a chi-square test was conducted. Since all test assumptions were met and the result yielded  $p < 0.05$ , we can conclude that there is a statistically significant association between the type of radio station and the presence of public service content in Instagram posts. These findings contrast with previous research suggesting no major differences in how public and private stations communicate on Instagram. Instead, the results indicate a clear asymmetry between Antena 3 and Rádio Comercial regarding the presence of public service features in their posts.

Nevertheless, H1 also concerns the communication structure of radio stations on Instagram. To address this, the next step examines the intersection of the variables “Public Service – Positive Cases,” “Self-Promotion – Positive Cases,” and “Community – Positive Cases” with the variable “Station.”

Among the positive cases of public service, the most predominant categories for Antena 3 were “International artists and events” (45.4%) and “Portuguese artists and cultural events” (32.8%). For Rádio Comercial, the leading category was

Antena 3		Rádio Comercial	
Portuguese traditions and values	4.6	Portuguese traditions and values	1.3
Musical artists and national events	32.8	Musical artists and national events	47.7
Portuguese-speaking world	5.2	Portuguese-speaking world	1.3
Musical artists and international events	45.4	Musical artists and international events	22.1
Sports	1.7	Sports	18.1
Gender equality	7.5	Gender equality	1.3
Education	0.0	Education	0.7
Health	0.0	Health	2.0
Ethnic and sexual minorities	0.6	Ethnic and sexual minorities	0.0
Religion	2.3	Religion	5.4

**Table 3.** Cross-tabulation between “Public Service – Positive Cases” and “Station”

Antena 3		Rádio Comercial	
Personalities/celebrities in the studio	3.1	Personalities/celebrities in the studio	5.6
Radio personalities	13.5	Radio personalities	0.4
Radio studio (without personalities)	0.0	Radio studio (without personalities)	1.3
External event	10.3	External event	4.6
Program promotion	52.5	Program promotion	5.8
Support	13.9	Support	4.6
Competition	1.3	Competition	3.5
Other	5.4	Other	1.7
Other Special	0.0	Other Special	65.3

**Table 4.** Cross-tabulation between “Self-promotion – Positive Cases” and “Station”

“Portuguese artists and cultural events” (47.7%), followed by “International artists and events” (22.1%) and “Sports” (18.1%). In sum, for both

stations, the main types of posts exhibiting public service characteristics are those related to musical artists and events.

Table 3 presents the data for “Public Service – Positive Cases.” Rádio Comercial shows notably high values for the promotion of Portuguese artists and cultural events (47.7%), in line with the current Radio Law. Although this law is less comprehensive than the *Public Service Concession Agreement*, it shares key objectives, such as promoting culture, national identity, and Portuguese music. Antena 3, subject to both the Radio Law and the Concession Agreement, records a lower proportion (32.8%), though the figure remains relatively high.

To determine whether the station’s profile influences the thematic focus of public service posts on Instagram, a chi-square test was conducted. To satisfy the test’s assumptions —specifically, ensuring a minimum expected count greater than one— the least represented categories (education, health, ethnic minorities, and sexual minorities) were aggregated into “Others.” The results indicate  $p < 0.05$ , demonstrating a significant relationship between the variables. In other words, the public or private nature of the station affects the choice of themes in social media posts.

In the cross-tabulation between “Self-Promotion – Positive Cases” and “Station” (Table 4), the most frequent type of self-promotion on Antena 3 was “Program promotion” (52.5%), followed by “Support” (13.9%) and “Radio personalities” (13.5%). For Rádio Comercial, the category “Other special” was the most prominent, representing 65.3% of the station’s self-promotion cases, while “Radio personalities” ranked second, accounting for 8.5% of posts.

Antena 3 stands out markedly for its focus on program promotion (52.5%), whereas Rádio Comercial dedicates very limited attention to this category (5.8%). Conversely, the “Other Special” category (created specifically for Rádio Comercial) emerges as particularly prominent, representing a frequent posting style that, while not fitting neatly

into any predefined “Self-promotion” subcategory, clearly exhibits promotional characteristics (65.3%). Still within the self-promotion theme, the category “Radio personalities” accounts for 13.5% of Antena 3’s posts and 8.5% of Rádio Comercial’s. It represents the second most frequent self-promotion type for Rádio Comercial and the third for Antena 3.

To determine the extent to which a station’s nature influences its self-promotion strategies on Instagram, a chi-square test was conducted. To meet the test’s assumptions, the category “Radio studio (without personalities)” was grouped into “Others,” ensuring a minimum expected count greater than one. The results indicate  $p < 0.05$ , revealing a significant relationship of dependence between the variables “Self-Promotion – Positive Cases” and “Station.” In other words, the profile of the radio station affects the selection of self-promotion themes.

The intersection between the variables “Community – Positive Cases” and “Station” (Table 5) reveals notable differences in how each radio station engages its audience. More than half of Antena 3’s community-related posts fall under “Direct appeal to the community” (62.2%), followed by “Events” (31.1%). In contrast, Rádio Comercial’s community-oriented publications are predominantly classified as “Indirect appeal to the community” (74.2%). A considerable gap also emerges in the “Events” category: while Antena 3 dedicates 31.1% of its posts to this theme, Rádio Comercial allocates only 4.1%.

It was essential to perform a chi-square test to better understand the statistical relationship between these variables. The categories “Listeners” and “Listeners with radio personalities” had values below 1 for Antena 3; therefore, to meet the test requirements, they were combined into the “Others” category. Since  $p < 0.05$ , a relationship of dependence between the variables “Community – Positive Cases” and “Station” is confirmed, indicating that the station’s nature influences the types of community-oriented posts published.

Antena 3		Rádio Comercial	
Events	31.1	Events	4.1
Listeners	0.0	Listeners	1.4
Listeners with radio personalities	0.0	Listeners with radio personalities	0.7
Direct appeal to the community	62.2	Direct appeal to the community	19.6
Indirect appeal to the community	6.8	Indirect appeal to the community	74.2

**Table 5.** Cross-tabulation between “Community – Positive Cases” and “Station”

Presence of Self-Promotion	Antena 3	Rádio Comercial
Yes	91.4	89.8
No	8.6	10.2

**Table 6.** Cross-tabulation between “Presence of Self-Promotion” and “Station”

After analyzing, comparing, and discussing the results concerning public service salience and the communication structure of Instagram posts by both radio stations, research hypothesis 1 is rejected. Although the hypothesis proposed that public service salience and communication structure do not vary according to whether a station is public or private, the findings demonstrate that institutional nature does, in fact, influence communication choices.

To address the second hypothesis (H2), the intersection between the variables “Self-promotion” and “Community” with “Station” was examined. The results confirm a strong self-promotional presence across both stations, with 91.4% of Antena 3’s posts and 89.8% of Rádio Comercial’s posts classified under this category (Table 6).

A chi-square test was conducted to determine whether the profile of the radio station statistically influences the presence of self-promotional posts on Instagram. After confirming that all test

Community Presence	Antena 3	Rádio Comercial
Yes	30.3	69.8
No	69.7	30.2

**Table 7.** Cross-tabulation between “Community Presence” and “Station”

requirements were met, the results indicated that the variables are independent, that is, the public or private nature of the station does not affect the presence of self-promotional posts, as  $p > 0.05$ . The subsequent cross-tabulation of the variables “Community Presence” and “Station,” however, yields a less predictable result (Table 7).

Although Rádio Comercial features over 50% of posts with community-related characteristics, Antena 3 does not reach the majority threshold, remaining at 30.3%. In this context, it became relevant to assess whether these results could be influenced by the station’s nature. Accordingly, a chi-square test was conducted. After confirming that all assumptions were met, the results showed that  $p < 0.05$ , indicating a dependent relationship between the two variables under analysis. In other words, the institutional nature of the radio station statistically influences the presence of “Community” posts on its Instagram page.

Therefore, research hypothesis 2 is rejected. While “Self-promotion” is a prominent theme on the Instagram accounts of both stations, regardless of their public or private status, the same does not hold true for “Community,” which demonstrates a dependent relationship with the station’s nature and does not reach significant levels in the case of Antena 3.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined how communication on Instagram differs between public and private radio stations, considering the principles of differenti-

ation required of public service broadcasting in Portugal. Adopting a quantitative approach with data extracted via API, 844 posts from 2023 were analyzed —244 from Antena 3 (public) and 600 from Rádio Comercial (private)— with a margin of error of  $\pm 2.10\%$ . The research hypotheses and methodological strategy, based on content analysis, were developed from the specialized literature (Piñeiro-Otero & Martín-Pena, 2020; Ferguson & Greer, 2018).

In this context, the first hypothesis (H1: The prominence of public service and the communication structure of Portuguese radio stations on Instagram do not differ according to their public or private nature) was rejected. Data analysis revealed that, contrary to previous findings, the institutional nature of the radio station influences not only the presence of public service elements in posts but also the thematic choices of the content shared on Instagram.

Beyond confirming statistical differences, the findings suggest that Instagram functions as a selective visibility regime in which institutional missions are strategically performed. Rather than neutralizing distinctions between public and private broadcasters, platform logic appears to recalibrate how these distinctions are expressed. Public service values are present, but unevenly distributed, privileging culturally compatible and visually adaptable themes over structurally normative areas such as education or health.

The differences observed should not be interpreted as a mere consequence of market position or audience size. Rather, they indicate that institutional mandates continue to structure communicative priorities, even when expression occurs within a platform governed by visibility metrics and engagement-oriented affordances.

Antena 3 stands out considerably for its promotion of programs (52.5%), while Rádio Comercial dedicates very limited space to this category (5.8%). Given these contrasting figures, it is important to note that self-promotion remains one of the key

dimensions of digital communication for radio stations, as highlighted in the specialized literature (Ferguson & Greer, 2018). On the other hand, the category “Other Special,” created specifically for Rádio Comercial, emerges as a highly frequent type of publication. Although it does not fit into any of the subcategories defined within “Self-promotion,” it nevertheless exhibits clear promotional characteristics of the station (65.3%).

Continuing with the theme of self-promotion, the category “Radio personalities” recorded values of 13.5% for public radio and 8.5% for private radio. It is the second most used category in Rádio Comercial’s self-promotional content on Instagram and the third in the case of Antena 3. This prominence aligns with findings in the specialized literature, as radio is a personality-centered medium that seeks to establish a connection between its presenters and listeners to foster a sense of closeness (Ferguson & Greer, 2018).

Finally, the second hypothesis (H2: Self-promotion and Community are themes with a significant presence on the Instagram accounts of Portuguese radio stations, regardless of their public or private nature) was also rejected. While “Self-promotion” does have a strong presence on the Instagram pages of both radio stations, “Community” did not reach values high enough to be considered a theme of significant prominence.

We can therefore argue that this research contributes to the ongoing discussion about radio, its digital transition, and its engagement with visual platforms, offering new insights that diverge from the characteristics previously identified in the studies cited (Piñeiro-Otero & Martín-Pena, 2020; Ferguson & Greer, 2018). The analysis made it possible to observe the impact of public service standards on the thematic choices of a public radio station’s Instagram presence when compared with a private station, which is not subject to the same obligations or objectives.

Beyond identifying thematic differences, the findings invite reflection on what the presence of radio stations on Instagram means for their

institutional missions. Operating within a logic of visibility, shareability, and emotional engagement (Manovich, 2017), Instagram requires radio (traditionally defined by sound) to translate its identity into visual and relational forms. Social media thus become arenas in which missions are not merely communicated but publicly performed and strategically framed (Ferguson & Greer, 2018), subtly conditioning how institutional identities are expressed.

For Antena 3, Instagram functions as a selective extension of its public service mandate. The prominence of cultural and diversity-related content signals continuity with its mission, yet the absence of areas such as education and health suggests that this continuity is partial. Rather than reproducing the full spectrum of public service obligations, the station foregrounds dimensions more compatible with the platform’s visual and affective logic, thereby shaping which forms of public value gain visibility.

For Rádio Comercial, Instagram primarily reinforces brand identity and relational proximity. Visibility becomes a mechanism of recognition and loyalty, amplifying its commercial positioning through affective branding. In this sense, the platform does not erase institutional differences between public and private broadcasters. Instead, it reframes them within a communication environment structured by engagement, where public and commercial orientations persist but are recalibrated according to platform dynamics.

Although Rádio Comercial shows a significantly smaller number of posts with public service characteristics, it also displays notable values in the two categories related to artists and events. Nevertheless, as Ferguson and Greer (2018) noted in their own work, which anticipated broader thematic diversity across radio stations’ Instagram content, this study also expected a wider range of public service-related themes in Antena 3’s publications. However, the thematic distribution observed in the analyzed sample proved considerably more selective than anticipated.

Despite divergences among authors, some describing radio as once being a “blind” medium, while others argue that it has always possessed an image, albeit a mental one (Berry, 2013), it is safe to affirm that today, through social media, radio has become a visual medium, or at least one that visually complements what is broadcast on FM. This shift toward digital is not entirely voluntary; rather, it represents a necessity for survival, a way to remain visible in an ever-evolving media landscape characterized by a growing volume of content.

This transformation brings us back to a recurring academic question: by embracing digital platforms and the web, is radio moving away from its traditional concept? (Piñeiro-Otero & Martín-Pena, 2020). While this study cannot definitively answer that question, the findings reinforce that the publications analyzed reflect each station’s profile: the public broadcaster features more public service-oriented content, whereas the private station prioritizes interactive and viral material.

Given the scope of this research, and the limited sample of publications and radio stations analyzed, it can be concluded that, within the 844 posts studied, there is a clear distinction between public and private radio. Nevertheless, future research could expand on this work by including other formats within Instagram itself (such as reels and stories) or by exploring digital communication across multiple social platforms used by radio stations, such as Facebook and TikTok.

One of the main limitations of this research, one that could be mitigated in future studies, was the small sample size. With greater resources and time availability, it would be valuable to expand the sample to include a larger number of Portuguese radio stations and posts, thereby enriching the comparative analysis between public and private broadcasters. Furthermore, it would be particularly relevant to compare the three main public service radio stations (Antena 1, Antena 2, and Antena 3) in terms of their visual communication on Instagram, since, in theory, they complement one another in

fulfilling a complete public service mission. In this sense, while one might demonstrate stronger results in certain public service characteristics, the others would theoretically emphasize different thematic areas.

It would also be insightful to examine the perspective of those who produce these posts. Through interviews with professionals and the application of Gatekeeping Theory, future research could explore how decisions are made and how editorial guidelines are established for a radio station’s digital communication on Instagram. Conversely, it would be equally important to investigate the audience’s perspective, specifically, the impact that these publications have on followers, drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Uses and Gratifications.

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