

Digital citizenship and Youth and Adult Education (EJA): A qualitative analysis of the absence of media education in peripheral contexts

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Abstract: We analyzed the digital consumption of youth and adult education students and their relationship with the circulation of misinformation in peripheral contexts, such as the Itaim Paulista district. We used a qualitative methodology with participant observation and focus groups. We found a general lack of critical skills to navigate cyberspace and high exposure to

Resumo: Analisamos o consumo digital de estudantes da EJA e sua relação com a circulação de desinformação em contextos periféricos, como o distrito do Itaim Paulista. Empregamos metodologia qualitativa com observação participante e grupos focais. Verificamos falta generalizada de habilidades críticas para navegar no ciberespaço e alta

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misinformation: 57.14% of participants reported daily contact with fake news, and 81% had never had formal training in Media and Information Literacy. We conclude that media literacy programs can mitigate the consumption of intentional misinformation, unintentional misunderstandings, and foster civic participation in peripheral communities.

Keywords: media education; youth and adult education; misinformation; peripheral areas; digital citizenship.

exposição à desinformação: 57,14% dos participantes relataram contato diário com notícias falsas e 81% nunca tiveram qualificação formal em Alfabetização Midiática e Informacional. Conclui-se que programas de educação midiática podem mitigar o consumo de desinformação intencional, mal-entendidos involuntários e fomentar a participação cívica em comunidades periféricas.

Palavras-chave: educação midiática; educação de jovens e adultos; desinformação; periferia; cidadania digital.

1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of digital technologies and the proliferation of social media platforms have reconfigured the ways information is produced, circulated, and consumed. However, the democratization of access to information and technological artifacts does not automatically translate into effective digital inclusion or qualified civic participation. Recent research, such as that conducted by Livingstone and Helsper¹, demonstrates that socioeconomic inequalities are reflected in both access to and use of digital media, thereby perpetuating—and in some cases deepening—existing disparities.

In Brazil, this scenario becomes even more complex when considering the realities of peripheral communities, such as the Itaim Paulista district in the eastern zone of São Paulo. In these localities, the challenges of digital inclusion intersect with other issues, such as access to education, employment, and citizenship. At the same time, the phenomenon of misinformation has intensified, representing a global threat to democratic processes. The spread of fake news and the polarization of public discourse, amplified by social media, demand educational efforts to enable individuals to navigate this complex contemporary informational ecosystem responsibly and safely².

In light of this context, the present study aims to investigate the patterns of digital consumption among students in Youth and Adult Education (EJA), analyzing how the structures of misinformation circulation in peripheral communities affect their informational practices and the implications of this phenomenon for contemporary democratic challenges.

This inquiry arises from the need to understand the interconnections among media education, digital inclusion, and civic participation in contexts marked by socioeconomic vulnerabilities. The study specifically focuses on the Itaim Paulista district, located on the periphery of São Paulo, using as its

1 LIVINGSTONE, Sonia; HELSPER, Ellen. **Digital literacy and digital inclusion**: policy, research and practice. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021.

2 WARDLE, Claire; DERAKHSHAN, Hossein. **Information disorder**: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2017. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research/168076277c>. Accessed in: 11 Jan. 2025.

research *locus* a Municipal Center for Training and Qualification (CMCT), a public school in São Paulo offering professional qualification courses to young people and adults from the age of fourteen.

The investigation sought to elucidate how media education practices can contribute to overcoming digital inequalities, not only in terms of access to technologies but, more importantly, regarding disparities in the use and appropriation of critical competencies for digital consumption. The research problem unfolds into secondary questions that guide the investigation: How do young people and adults in the Itaim Paulista community perceive and use different media in their daily lives? What are the main challenges faced by this population regarding digital inclusion and technology-mediated civic participation? How can media education contribute to the development of critical skills for analyzing and producing content in socially vulnerable contexts? To address these questions, a qualitative methodology was employed, including focus groups and participant observation. One of the key findings is the widespread lack of competencies to navigate cyberspace, combined with high exposure to both intentional misinformation and unintentional misunderstandings.

2. MEDIA EDUCATION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Livingstone, Bober, and Helsper³ define media education as the process of developing capacities to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages across a variety of contexts. In the Brazilian context, Soares⁴ introduces the concept of *educommunication*, which expands the notion of media education to include the dimension of social intervention. According to these authors, *educommunication* goes far beyond critical understanding of the media, focusing its efforts on the use of communication tools for social transformation and the strengthening of citizenship.

The relevance of media education becomes even more evident when considering its role in reinforcing democracy, particularly in contexts of social vulnerability. Amid the current surge of misinformation and political polarization, the ability to critically analyze information and participate in public debate is paramount for maintaining a healthy society.

Digital inclusion and citizenship are intrinsically related concepts within the information society. While digital inclusion transcends mere provision of access to technologies, encompassing the empowerment of individuals to use them critically, digital citizenship refers to the active and conscious participation of individuals in social, political, and cultural processes mediated by information and communication technologies (ICTs). Pischetola⁵ advocates for a multidimensional approach to digital inclusion, involving physical resources (access to devices and connectivity), digital resources (relevant content and language), human resources (literacy and education), and social resources (supportive communities and institutions). However, the author notes that, in

3 LIVINGSTONE, Sonia; BOBER, Magdalena; HELSPER, Ellen Johanna. Active participation or just more information? Young people's take-up of opportunities to act and interact on the Internet. **Information, Communication & Society**, Londres, v. 8, n. 3, p. 287-314, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180-500259103>

4 SOARES, Ismar de Oliveira. **Educomunicação**: o conceito, o profissional, a aplicação. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2020.

5 PISCHESTOLA, Magda. **Inclusão digital e educação**: a nova cultura da sala de aula. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2016.

a national context marked by deep socioeconomic inequalities, disparities in access to and use of ICTs tend to reproduce and sometimes amplify existing social inequalities.

As explored by Castells⁶, the relationship between digital inclusion and citizenship in the network society is intrinsically linked to the ability to navigate and actively participate in digital spaces, as digital exclusion may result in new forms of social and political marginalization.

Wardle and Derakhshan⁷ propose a useful taxonomy to understand the phenomenon of misinformation, distinguishing between *misinformation* (false information shared without intent to cause harm), *disinformation* (false information created and shared with the intent to cause harm), and *malinformation* (genuine information used to cause harm). In this study, we adopt this taxonomy as a reference framework to analyze the different types of dubious or false information reported by participants. This distinction allows us to understand the impact of misinformation on this EJA audience, considering its falsity, intentionality, and potential for harm.

Recuero and Gruz⁸ highlight that the structure of digital platforms, combined with algorithms prioritizing engagement, can create “echo chambers” that amplify polarized narratives and unverified information. Drawing on other theorists, the authors examine the relationship between misinformation and democracy through the lens of eroded trust in democratic institutions and traditional media, creating fertile ground for the spread of anti-democratic narratives. Their analysis, although not directly derived from Wardle and Derakhshan’s taxonomy, complements our discussion regarding the macro-level consequences of disinformation, which affect trust in institutions and democratic processes.

EJA serves a diverse audience in terms of age, life experiences, and educational trajectories, requiring teaching and learning processes that value prior knowledge, promote autonomy, and go beyond mere content transmission. According to González Arroyo⁹, EJA should not be viewed merely as a compensatory modality but as a fundamental right and a space for constructing knowledge and identities, recognizing learners’ experiences and knowledge as the starting point for the educational process.

Haddad and Di Pierro¹⁰ corroborate that EJA should fulfill its primary role in social inclusion, providing opportunities for personal and professional development to those who did not have access to formal education at the appropriate age. Deodato¹¹ emphasizes that schools must “also train adults to consume media more consciously,” highlighting the need for targeted approaches for this audience and suggesting that media education can contribute to the development of technical skills, the strengthening of citizenship, and democratic participation.

Our methodological approach, grounded in empirical studies, offers a complementary perspective to critical analyses such as Albuquerque’s¹². While the author examines the power structures and influences shaping the global debate on misinformation, our research reveals the lived experiences and

6 CASTELLS, Manuel. **A sociedade em rede**: do conhecimento à política. In: CASTELLS, Manuel; CARDOSO, Gustavo (org.). *A sociedade em rede: do conhecimento à ação política*. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional; Casa da Moeda, 2006. p. 17-30.

7 WARDLE; DERAKHSHAN, op. cit.

8 RECUERO, Raquel; GRUZD, Anatoliy. Cascatas de fake news políticas: um estudo de caso no Twitter. **Galáxia**, São Paulo, n. 41, p. 31-47, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-25542019239035>

9 GONZÁLEZ ARROYO, Miguel. **Passageiros da noite**: do trabalho para a EJA: itinerários pelo direito a uma vida justa. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2017.

10 HADDAD, Sérgio; DI PIERRO, Maria Clara. Escolarização de jovens e adultos. **Revista Brasileira de Educação**, n. 14, p. 108-130, 2000. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/rbedu/a/YK8DJk85m4BrKJqzHTGm8zD/>. Accessed in: 12 Oct. 2024.

11 DEODATO, Paulo Gerson Olinto. Agência Lupa, Facebook e consumo de notícias: Análise sobre a desinformação na pandemia da Covid-19. 2022. 93 f. Thesis (Professional Master’s Degree in Journalism) – Universidade Federal da Paraíba, Paraíba, 2022. Available at: <https://repositorio.ufpb.br/jspui/handle/123456789/23485>. Accessed in: 12 Oct. 2024.

12 ALBUQUERQUE, Afonso. Redes do imperialismo na agenda do combate à desinformação. **Comunicação & Educação**, São Paulo, v. 29, n. 1, p. 65-79, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9125.v29i1p65-79>

perceptions of individuals directly affected by big tech companies, particularly the major US based technology platforms collectively referred to as GAFAM: Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft.

3. METHODOLOGY

The context of this research centers on a public educational institution located in the Itaim Paulista district, in the eastern zone of São Paulo, referred to by the acronym CMCT (Municipal Training and Education Center). This school plays a fundamental role in providing professional qualification courses for young people and adults, serving a population marked by public marginalization and socioeconomic vulnerability.

The socioeconomic profile of CMCT students, published in the special edition of *Magistério* journal (São Paulo, 2023)¹³, shows that the majority are female (69%), Black (62%), and aged between 18 and 58 years (70%), reflecting the characteristics of the region. According to Atlas Brasil¹⁴, Itaim Paulista presents a Municipal Human Development Index (IDHM) of 0.758, below the São Paulo city average of 0.806. The *Mapa da Desigualdade*¹⁵ by Rede Nossa São Paulo ranks this district among the ten most unequal in the city: out of 96 districts, Itaim Paulista occupies the 89th position. The choice of this school as the research *locus* is justified by its relevance as a professional training space in this territory¹⁶, serving an average of 1,600 people per year¹⁷, and by the opportunity it provides to investigate the intersection between media education, digital inclusion, and citizenship strengthening in a context of social vulnerability.

A qualitative participant research methodology was adopted, with a descriptive objective. Qualitative research aligns with Minayo¹⁸, as it “works with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes, corresponding to a deeper space of relationships, processes, and phenomena that cannot be reduced to the operationalization of variables.” The choice of participant research is grounded in Brandão¹⁹ aiming to be

understood as a multiple and differentiated repertoire of collective knowledge-creation experiences, designed to overcome the subject/object opposition within processes that generate knowledge and in the subsequent actions that aspire to promote transformation through this knowledge.

The descriptive nature of the research, in turn, sought to provide “a description of the characteristics of a given population or phenomenon, or the establishment of relationships between variables.”²⁰ In this study, the objective was to describe media consumption practices, perceptions of media education, and forms of civic participation among students. It is important to note, as Thiollent²¹, observes, that “in participant research, the interaction between researchers and members of the investigated situations is necessarily a dialectical process.” Thus, it is recognized that the research process is not neutral but

13 TELES, Iolanda Cruz. Diversidade, igualdade e inclusão. **Revista Magistério**, São Paulo, ed. esp., n. 4, p. 19-20, 2023. Available at: <https://acervodigital.sme.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/acervo/revista-magisterio-30-anos-cmct-ed-especial/>. Accessed in: 11 Jan. 2025.

14 ATLAS BRASIL **Perfil da Unidade de Desenvolvimento Humano (UDH)**: 1355030812011. Guarulhos: Atlas Brasil, 2010. Available at: <http://www.atlasbrasil.org.br/perfil/udh/1355030812011>. Accessed in: 4 Apr. 2025.

15 REDE NOSSA SÃO PAULO. **Mapa da Desigualdade ganha novo formato e agora traz a classificação dos 96 distritos de São Paulo**. São Paulo. Nossa São Paulo, 2023. Available at: <https://www.nossasao-paulo.org.br/2023/11/28/mapa-da-desigualdade-ganha-novo-formato-e-ago-ra-traz-a-classificacao-dos-96-distritos-de-sao-paulo/>. Accessed in: 5 Apr. 2025.

16 SILVA, Cristiane Nascimento. Para além da técnica: cultura e cidadania. **Revista Magistério**, São Paulo, ed. esp., n. 4, p. 21-25, 2023. Available at: <https://acervodigital.sme.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Magisterio-CMCT-Ed-Esp-4.pdf>. Accessed in: 5 Apr. 2025.

17 TELES, Iolanda Cruz. CMCT em números. **Revista Magistério**, São Paulo, ed. esp., n. 4, p. 19-20, 2023. Available at: <https://acervodigital.sme.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/acervo/revista-magisterio-30-anos-cmct-ed-especial/>. Accessed in: 11 Jan. 2025.

18 MINAYO, Maria Cecília de Souza. **O desafio do conhecimento**: pesquisa qualitativa em saúde. 14. ed. São Paulo: Hucitec, 2014, p. 21.

constitutes a space for collective knowledge construction and potential social transformation.

Data collection was conducted using two main techniques: focus groups and participant observation. Two focus groups were established, each comprising ten to eleven participants, representing approximately 5% of the total student population. Participant selection aimed to reflect the diversity of courses, age groups, and study shifts (morning, afternoon, and evening) offered by the institution. The focus groups were conducted during the first week of July 2024, with an average duration of two hours each. Discussions were guided by a semi-structured script covering topics such as media device usage, information sources, critical evaluation of information, civic participation, and perceptions of media education.

The sessions were audio-recorded²² with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed using Microsoft Word 365's automatic transcription feature, followed by manual review to ensure data accuracy.

Participant observation was conducted by the researcher, who also serves as a teacher at the institution, from April 29 to July 5, 2024. This technique, as highlighted by Minayo²³, "[...] is carried out through the researcher's direct contact with the observed phenomenon to obtain information about the reality of social actors in their own contexts."

During this period, the researcher observed students' interactions with digital media, primarily via their personal smartphones, through classroom research activities and discussions/roundtables offered to all students in the school auditorium. Observations focused on their information-seeking and sharing practices, as well as discussions on citizenship and democratic participation. These observations were recorded in a field diary, following Bogdan and Biklen's guidance²⁴, who define it as a "written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks during data collection, reflecting on the qualitative study's data."

Participants were informed of the research objectives and signed the Free and Informed Consent Form. For minors, a Free and Informed Assent Form was obtained, along with parental authorization. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, according to the CAAE opinion 80140024.6.0000.0081.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, defined by Bardin²⁵ as:

a set of techniques for analyzing communications aiming to obtain, through systematic and objective procedures for describing message content, indicators (quantitative or not) that allow the inference of knowledge regarding the conditions of production/reception (inferred variables) of these messages.

The analysis process followed the three fundamental stages proposed by Bardin. In the initial phase, the collected material was organized and prepared. Transcriptions of the focus groups and field diary notes were read in a floating reading approach, allowing a first approximation to the data and the

19 BRANDÃO, Carlos Rodrigues. A pesquisa participante e a participação da pesquisa: um olhar entre tempos e espaços a partir da América Latina. In: BRANDÃO, Carlos Rodrigues; STRECK, Danilo Romeu (org.). **Pesquisa participante**: o saber da partilha. 1st ed. Aparecida: Ideias & Letras, 2006. p. 31.

20 GIL, Antonio Carlos. **Métodos e técnicas de pesquisa social**. 7th ed. São Paulo: Gen Atlas, 2019.

21 THIOLENT, Michel. **Metodologia da pesquisa-ação**. 18th ed. São Paulo: Cortez, 2011.

22 Foi utilizado o aplicativo para smartphones "Gravador", em sua versão 14.8.1_091fc32-240226.

23 MINAYO, op. cit.

24 BOGDAN, Robert Charles; BIKLEN, Sari Knopp. **Investigação qualitativa em educação**: uma introdução à teoria e aos métodos. Porto: Porto Editora, 1994.

25 BARDIN, Laurence. **Análise de conteúdo**. 1st ed. São Paulo: Edições 70, 2016. p. 42.

identification of recurring themes. At this stage, the units of recording and context, as well as indicators for categorization, were defined.

The material exploration phase involved systematic coding and categorization of the data, using Atlas.ti version 9.1.7.0. Categories were established a priori based on the theoretical framework and research objectives, but also emerged a posteriori from an in-depth reading of the data. The main analytical categories included: use of media devices and platforms; information sources; critical evaluation of information; democracy and civic participation; and demands for media education.

In the final phase, treatment of results, inference, and interpretation, the categorized data underwent qualitative analysis aimed at identifying patterns, contradictions, and insights to address the research questions. Interpretations were grounded in the theoretical framework, establishing dialogue with existing literature on media education, digital inclusion, and citizenship.

Participants are identified with letters A through K, supplemented with G1 or G2, where the letter (A–K) represents each participant and G1 or G2 indicates the focus group to which they belonged. For example, “D G2” refers to a participant in focus group 2, conducted with students from the afternoon and evening shifts of this school unit.

4. DISINFORMATION, DEMOCRACY, AND DIGITAL MARGINALIZATION: ANALYSIS AND DIALOGUES BASED ON EJA DATA

The data presented below were derived from focus groups conducted with twenty-one students from the CMCT unit located in the Itaim Paulista district, representing a diverse sample in terms of age, gender, and professional qualification courses. Analysis of the participants' profiles indicates a predominance of female students, with 15 women (71%) and 6 men (29%). This distribution reflects, to some extent, the overall composition of the student body within the institution, as documented in its Pedagogical Political Project (PPP).

Regarding age, a broad range was observed, spanning from 14 to 60 years, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Age range of focus group participants

Age group	Participants	%
Under 18	5	23.81
18 to 24	8	38.10
25 to 34	2	9.52
35 to 44	2	9.52
45 to 60	4	19.05

61 or older	0	0.00
TOTAL	21	100.0

Source: prepared by the authors (2024).

Regarding gender, the majority of the interviewees were female, totaling fifteen participants, while males numbered six. This female predominance (71%) reflects specific trends of interest and participation in the courses offered by the institution, as observed in the analysis of the 2023 PPP and previous years. Among the seven professional qualification courses offered by this school unit (Administrative Assistant, Logistics Assistant, Custom Sewing, Confectionery, Information Technology, Baking, and Electrical), only the Electrical course had a majority of male participants.

Within the focus group script, one of the questions aimed to identify which devices, media, and information and communication technologies were most frequently used by students to access information and content (Figure 1). The results revealed the smartphone as the predominant device, mentioned by 20 of the 21 participants (95%). Television emerged as the second most cited device, with 14 mentions (67%), indicating the persistence of traditional media in the participants’ daily lives. This finding reflects the “coexistence and hybridization of traditional and digital media in Latin American cultural practices,” as previously noted by Martín-Barbero²⁶.

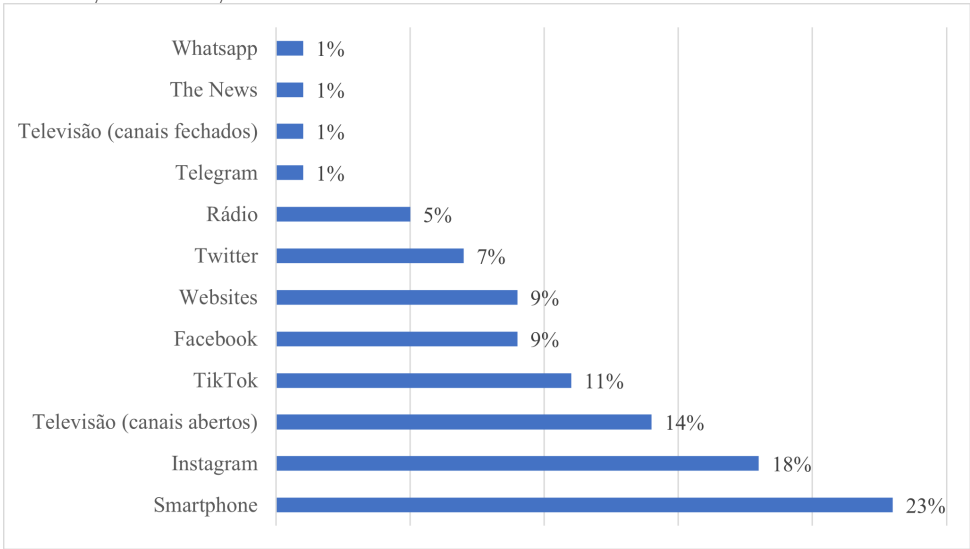


Figure 1: Devices, media, and information and communication technologies²⁷

Source: prepared by the authors (2024).

The predominance of Instagram and the significant presence of TikTok in user engagement for the dissemination of misinformation and content virality²⁸ reflect global trends in media consumption, shaped by the infrastructural dynamics of these platforms, which influence users’ preferences for short-form

26 MARTÍN-BARBERO, Jesús. **A comunicação na educação**. São Paulo: Contexto, 2014.

27 Translation of the image captions: Television (pay TV) 1%; Television (free-to-air TV) 14%.

visual material. Jenkins²⁹ observed this phenomenon in the past decade regarding social media platforms, noting their potential to shape how we consume information and how we construct and share narratives about ourselves and the world around us. Albuquerque's³⁰ analysis of the ambiguous role of social media platforms in the global information ecosystem finds parallels in these data. We observed that while platforms such as Instagram and TikTok serve as primary information sources for many students, there is a widespread lack of critical skills necessary to navigate cyberspace.

This finding represents a structural paradigm that transcends mere lack of technological access, as digital inclusion is not limited to infrastructure but also encompasses the capacity to interpret, question, and produce content in environments mediated by algorithms and shaped by corporate interests³¹. In the context studied, the predominance of smartphones as the main device for accessing information, combined with reliance on platforms like Google, Instagram, and TikTok, highlights a formative gap: a lack of critical engagement with content that prioritizes engagement over veracity³². This dynamic reinforces cycles of misinformation, in which the speed of sharing surpasses reflection on sources and intentions.

The absence of critical skills is not an isolated phenomenon but is rooted in historical inequalities. In peripheral communities such as Itaim Paulista, the scarcity of stable connections and limited access to computers amplifies dependence on mobile devices and social networks, spaces where misinformation spreads virally³³. As observed in the focus groups, even participants who considered themselves “moderately confident” in identifying fake news reported difficulties discerning polarizing narratives or manipulative content, particularly when shared within trusted networks. This paradox between self-perception and practical vulnerability signals the urgent need for pedagogical approaches that integrate media literacy with the students' everyday realities, as advocated by Soares³⁴, who emphasizes educommunication as a transformative practice.

EJA, as a space for educational remediation and citizenship development³⁵, must assume an active role in deconstructing informational asymmetries. This entails transcending the mere transmission of technical competencies—such as the instrumental use of digital tools—to adopt a critical and emancipatory perspective aligned with the principles of educommunication and media literacy. Such an approach equips individuals to “read” not only texts but also the power structures embedded in digital platforms, questioning everything from the political economy of algorithms to the ideological biases present in dominant narratives³⁶.

The predominance of Google as the primary information source among participants (52%) reflects global trends in information consumption but also raises concerns regarding dependence on platforms controlled by large technology corporations. This was evident when participants were asked about their preferred platforms for information searches: eleven out of twenty-one participants (52%) cited Google as their main source. One participant, referred to

28 ARAÚJO, Isadora Gonçalves Eleutério Dias; FERREIRA, Luisa Andrade; GOVEIA, Fábio Gomes. Estudo da relação entre memes e desinformação a partir do TikTok. In: CONGRESSO BRASILEIRO DE CIÊNCIAS DA COMUNICAÇÃO, 46.; 2023, Belo Horizonte. **Anais**. Belo Horizonte: Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, 2023. Available at: https://sistemas.intercom.org.br/pdf/link_aceite/nacional/11/0816202320251264d5ad809e05.pdf. Accessed in: 31 Mar. 2025.

29 JENKINS, Henry. **Cultura da convergência**. 2nd ed. São Paulo: Aleph, 2015.

30 ALBUQUERQUE, *op. cit.*

31 LIVINGSTONE; HELSPER, *op. cit.*

32 RECUERO; GRUZD, *op. cit.*

33 PISCHETOLA, *op. cit.*

34 SOARES, *op. cit.*

35 GONZÁLEZ ARROYO, *op. cit.*

36 BUCKINGHAM, David. **The media education manifesto**. 1st ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019.

here as “C G2,” stated: “I use Google a lot because it’s easier and faster to find things.” This statement exemplifies the emphasis on convenience and speed in accessing information, characteristics typical of the digital era. However, the low mention of traditional journalistic sources or fact-checking platforms is concerning. Only three participants (14%) cited specific news sites, such as G1 and UOL, as reliable information sources. These results align with Wardle and Derakhshan’s observations regarding the “information disorder ecosystem,” where ease of access does not necessarily translate into critical discernment.

It is important to emphasize that the formulation of media education policies and practices is influenced by a range of actors, including foundations, social media platforms, and international organizations³⁷. Although these initiatives aim to combat misinformation, it is essential to recognize that the platforms themselves, such as Google, can contribute to the dissemination of dubious information due to algorithms that prioritize engagement over information quality. This complexity necessitates a thorough analysis of the intersections and contradictions among the interests of these different actors, which, however, falls outside the scope of this study.

When asked about previous experiences with media education, seventeen participants (81%) reported never having participated in specific courses or training on the subject. This alarming finding corroborates Buckingham’s³⁸ observations regarding the marginalization of media education in school curricula, particularly in contexts of social vulnerability. Participant “F G1,” in a statement that illustrates an intuitive perception of the relevance of media education even in the absence of formal experience, expressed: “I’ve never had a class on this, but I think it would be important to better understand how news is made and how not to fall for fake news.”

Despite the lack of formal experiences, most participants demonstrated a basic understanding of the importance of media education. When asked about the risks associated with insufficient knowledge of how media functions, nineteen participants (90%) expressed concerns. Participant “K G2” stated: “I think we are at risk, yes, because there is a lot of false information circulating, and sometimes it is hard to know what is true.”

Responses regarding access to digital technologies revealed disparities among participants. While all reported owning smartphones, access to computers and broadband internet at home was limited, especially among older and lower-income participants. Participant “B G1” exemplified the digital inclusion challenges faced by many residents of peripheral areas, corroborating Pischetola’s³⁹ observations on digital inequalities in the Brazilian context, by commenting: “I use my phone more because I don’t have a computer at home, and sometimes the internet is bad.”

When asked about their abilities to identify fake news and critically evaluate information, participants displayed varying levels of confidence. Thirteen participants (62%) expressed insecurity regarding their information verification skills. Participant “D G2” noted: “Sometimes it’s hard to know if news is true, especially

37 ALBUQUERQUE, *op. cit.*

38 BUCKINGHAM, *op. cit.*

39 PISCHETOLA, *op. cit.*

when it comes from someone we trust,” which resonates⁴⁰ with analyses of the role of social networks in spreading misinformation.

Finally, the focus group discussions concluded with questions regarding interest in participating in a course, project, or training in media education. Nineteen out of twenty-one participants (90%) expressed positive or potential interest in such training. Participant “J G1” responded enthusiastically: “I would definitely participate; I think it would be useful for work and for life in general.” This response reflects a perception of media education beyond a technical skill—as a competency for contemporary citizenship⁴¹.

When asked how frequently they encounter dubious or potentially false information, participants reported an alarming exposure to misinformation (Table 2).

Table 2: Frequency of encountering dubious or potentially false information

Answer	Participants	%
Never	0	0.00
Rarely	3	14.29
Monthly	4	19.05
Weekly	2	9.52
Daily	12	57.14
TOTAL	21	100.0

Source: prepared by the authors (2024).

The predominance of daily exposure to misinformation (57.14% of participants) corroborates Recuero and Gruzd’s⁴² observations regarding the “ubiquity of misinformation on social media and its penetration into users’ daily lives.” When asked about their strategies for verifying the accuracy of information, participants demonstrated a variety of approaches, some more sophisticated than others (Figure 2).

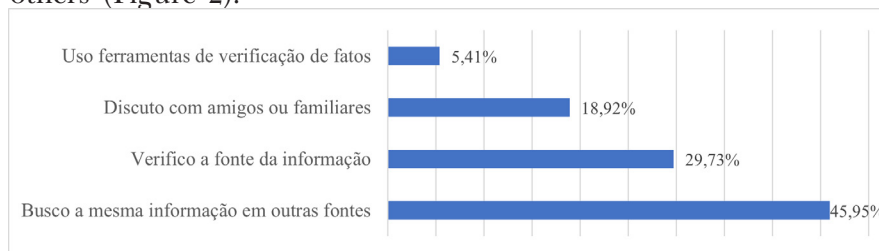


Figure 2: Strategies adopted to verify the accuracy of information⁴³

Source: prepared by the authors (2024).

Participant “E G1” reported that she usually “checks more than one website to see if the information matches,” which, although positive, may be insufficient if not accompanied by technical criteria to assess the credibility of sources. It

40 PISCHETOLA, op. cit.

41 LIVINGSTONE; HELSPER, op. cit.

42 RECUERO; GRUZD, op. cit.

43 Top-down translation: I use fact-checking tools; I discuss with friends about the information; I check the source of the information; I look for the same information in other sources.

is concerning that only 19.04% of participants mentioned using fact-checking websites—powerful tools in combating misinformation—since “the lack of knowledge or underutilization of fact-checking tools can perpetuate the circulation of misinformation, even among well-intentioned individuals.”⁴⁴

When asked about their confidence in their ability to identify fake news, participants exhibited varying levels of assurance (Table 3).

Table 3: Level of confidence in the ability to identify fake news

Level of Confidence	Number of Participants	%
Not confident at all	0	0%
Slightly confident	3	14,28%
Moderately confident	8	38,09%
Very confident	7	33,33%
Extremely confident	3	14,28%
TOTAL	21	100.0

Source: prepared by the authors (2024).

Notably, despite high exposure to misinformation, 85.7% of participants reported being moderately to extremely confident in their ability to identify fake news. This discrepancy between exposure and confidence raises questions about the possible overestimation of verification skills. A statement that illustrates the complexity of the misinformation phenomenon comes from participant “H G2”: “I think I can identify fake news most of the time, but sometimes it’s hard when the news seems very real.”

Several participants mentioned confirmation bias, reporting difficulties in questioning information that corroborates their preexisting beliefs. Social pressure, evidenced by the circulation of information within family or friend groups, was cited as a factor hindering critical questioning. Some participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the volume of information, which complicates thorough verification. Information overload and technological limitations, particularly restricted access to quality internet, were identified as obstacles to cross-checking multiple sources, thereby compromising the ability to critically assess received information.

When asked about their perception of the media’s role in strengthening or weakening democracy, participants expressed diverse views. Participant “K G1” argued that “the media can help strengthen democracy when it informs correctly, but it can also weaken it when it spreads false news.” Participant “G G2” reported: “The news I see on social media sometimes makes me want to participate more, but it also leaves me confused about what is true.” Participant

44 SPINELLI, Egle Müller; SANTOS, Jéssica de Almeida. Jornalismo na era da pós-verdade: fact-checking como ferramenta de combate às fake news. *Revista Observatório*, Tocantins, v. 4, n. 3, p. 759-782, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.20873/uft.2447-4266.2018v4n3p759>

“I G1” observed: “I think if I understood better how politics and the media work, I would feel more confident to participate.”

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to discuss the digital media consumption of EJA students in peripheral contexts and their relationship with misinformation. Conducted in the Itaim Paulista district of São Paulo, the research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing focus groups and participant observation, involving twenty-one EJA students. The central objective was to understand how media education could contribute to students' capacity to navigate the structural logics of digital misinformation in communities marked by socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

Revisiting the specific objectives established at the beginning of the study, it can be affirmed that they were satisfactorily achieved. The first objective, which sought to map the media consumption practices of EJA students, was fully addressed through the detailed analysis of responses obtained in the focus groups. A predominance of smartphone use and social media as primary sources of information was identified, revealing a media consumption pattern that reflects global trends while also highlighting access limitations due to the peripheral context of this group.

The second objective, which sought to assess the students' level of understanding and skills regarding the identification of misinformation, was also achieved. The results reveal a discrepancy between the students' self-perceived abilities and the reality of their exposure to misinformation. While 85.7% considered themselves moderately confident in identifying false news, 57.14% reported daily exposure to such content.

The third objective, aimed at analyzing the strategies employed by students to verify the accuracy of information, was met through the analysis of participants' responses concerning their fact-checking practices. It was observed that, although some students showed initiative in seeking alternative sources, there was a widespread lack of systematic verification methods, highlighting a critical gap in media and information literacy education.

Throughout the research, reflections emerged regarding the intersection of media literacy, EJA, and contexts of social vulnerability. It became evident that media literacy cannot be treated as an isolated or peripheral component of the EJA curriculum but should be considered a fundamental element for the comprehensive development of students. The ability to navigate the digital environment critically, identify and counter misinformation, and participate actively in the online public sphere should be regarded as essential skills for citizenship, particularly in historically marginalized communities.

The study also highlighted the complexity of the phenomenon of misinformation in peripheral contexts. The combination of limited access to technological resources, low formal education, and intense exposure to social media creates

fertile ground for the spread of false news. However, the findings also indicate potential for change. The majority of participants demonstrated an interest in learning more about media literacy, recognizing its importance for both their personal and professional lives.

One notable finding was the identification of a gap in media literacy training, with 81% of participants reporting that they had never received formal education in this area. These data point to a clear opportunity for intervention, suggesting that the implementation of structured media literacy programs within EJA could have a substantial impact on students' ability to confront misinformation and engage more actively in digital civic life.

In conclusion, media literacy within EJA, especially in peripheral contexts, should be understood not only as a tool to combat misinformation but, above all, as a vehicle for empowerment and social transformation.

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