

Suicide in the media: a cartography of Jéssica Canedo's suicide based on responsible coverage standards

Suicídio na mídia: uma cartografia do suicídio de Jéssica Canedo a partir de normas de cobertura responsável

El suicidio en los medios de comunicación: una cartografía del suicidio de Jéssica Canedo basada en normas de cobertura responsable

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ABSTRACT

The research uses Rosário and Coca's cartographic method to reflect on the coverage of suicide in media and among journalists. To do so, the paper analyses media responsibility and how the press constructed the suicide of Jéssica Canedo, a 22-year-old girl who killed herself after fake conversations between herself and the humorist Whindersson Nunes were published. The content was widely disseminated on social media profiles, among them, Choquei, on Instagram. To conduct the analysis, 51 news pieces from 9 Brazilian newspapers were selected. Subsequently, they were analyzed using a framework based on guidelines from health institutions and media companies for responsible coverage of suicide, as well as through discourse analysis. The findings show poor journalistic coverage of the event and how the far-reaching potential of social media brings new concerns to the field of media responsibility.

Keywords: Suicide; Journalism; Jéssica Canedo; Media Responsibility; Brazil.

RESUMO

A pesquisa recorre ao método cartográfico de Rosário e Coca para refletir sobre o suicídio nos campos midiático e jornalístico. Para isso, analisa a responsabilidade midiática e a construção do suicídio pelo jornalismo no caso Jéssica Canedo, uma jovem de 22 anos que se matou após publicação de uma conversa falsa com o humorista Whindersson Nunes. O conteúdo foi amplamente divulgado por perfis em sites de redes sociais, entre elas o Choquei, no Instagram. Foram selecionadas 51 matérias jornalísticas, de nove jornais, que noticiaram o caso. Elas foram analisadas por meio de um quadro com orientações de instituições de Saúde e de empresas de mídia para a cobertura responsável do suicídio, além da análise de discurso. A pesquisa demonstrou que o jornalismo mantém uma cobertura deficiente sobre o acontecimento e que o amplo acesso às plataformas de redes sociais traz novas preocupações no que tange à responsabilidade midiática.

Palavras-chave: Suicídio; Jornalismo; Jéssica Canedo; Responsabilidade Midiática; Brasil.

RESUMÉN

La investigación utiliza el método cartográfico de Rosário y Coca (2018) reflexionar sobre el suicidio en los medios y el periodismo. Así, analiza la responsabilidad mediática y la construcción del suicidio por parte del periodismo en el suicidio de Jéssica Canedo, una joven de 22 años que se suicidó tras verse involucrada en una conversación falsa con el comediante Whindersson Nunes. El contenido fue ampliamente difundido en los perfiles de las plataformas de redes sociales, incluido Choquei, en Instagram. Se seleccionaron 51 artículos periodísticos, de nueve diarios, que informaron sobre el caso. Fueron analizados mediante una tabla con directrices de instituciones de Salud y medios de comunicación para la cobertura responsable del suicidio, además de análisis del discurso. La investigación demostró que el periodismo mantiene una cobertura deficiente del evento y que el amplio acceso a las plataformas de redes sociales trae preocupaciones sobre la responsabilidad de los medios.

Palabras clave: Suicidio; Periodismo; Jéssica Canedo; Responsabilidad de los Medios; Brasil.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), suicide is responsible for the annual deaths of around 700,000 people worldwide. For Brazilian society, what is particularly relevant, is that more than 77 per cent of global suicides occurred in low- and middle-income countries, making it the fourth leading cause of death among young people aged 15 to 29 in 2019 (Suicide, 2023). When viewed as a media/journalistic event within the field of communication, the social events involved in suicide are complex. This is because suicide is not limited to one act, but often permeates the subject's lives and experiences, encompassing socio-cultural aspects such as regional issues, economics, race, sexuality, gender, age, trauma, loss, and prejudice against mental illness (Braga; Dell'aglio, 2013; Oliveira; Botega, 2006). Moreover, media ethics regard suicide as difficult to deal with.

Given the importance of journalism and the media in the construction of suicide, we propose a cartographic analysis (Rosário; Coca, 2018) of the case of Jéssica Canedo, a 22-year-old Brazilian woman who died by suicide after fake content¹ involving her name was published on social media by profiles with high engagement, including the popular Choquei². Its owner, Raphael Souza, is being investigated by the Minas Gerais Civil Police on suspicion of inducing suicide after publishing fake dialogues between Jéssica and comedian Whindersson Nunes (Ferreira, 2023; Scardoelli, 2023). The cartographic study of the event adds a new layer to discussions about suicide, as media responsibility not only for constructing suicide, but also for inciting it, is considered. By analyzing 51 news items, our objective is to understand how the case was publicized, how the suicide was constructed and how media responsibility is addressed.

In terms of media responsibility, initially, we see that there is limited training for future communicators about reporting suicide. In a documentary analysis (Moreira, 2005) involving the Pedagogical Projects of 26 Journalism Courses offered by public universities in Brazilian capitals, it was found that the words suicide, self-extermination or voluntary death do not appear in the syllabus or in the basic references of the curricular components - showing that Journalism students are not trained to deal with coverage of these events. On the other hand, it is common to find subjects on media critique, journalistic ethics, specialist subjects in Communication, Society and Culture and electives with open syllabuses, which provide the opportunity to reflect on journalistic coverage of suicide.

It is worth noting that these documents are generally formulated based on the National Curriculum Guidelines for undergraduate journalism courses. Although they do not specify the development of skills to deal with events linked to suicide, they do mention that how journalistic messages are received and their impact on society are behavioral competencies that must be acquired during training (Guidelines, 2013). Given the shortcomings in the Pedagogical Course Programs, it can be deduced that the ethical premises and guidelines for dealing with the subject are often restricted to the editorial policies and codes of conduct of the media outlets.

To reflect on the media coverage of the case, this article is organized into four sections that follow the cartographic movements outlined by Deleuze and Guatarri (1995) and Rosário and Coca (2018). The first section focuses on methodological assumptions; the second considers the tracing stage, investigating the meanings of death and suicide in the press; the third, known as touching, which uses journalism handbooks and international standards to identify codes of conduct for covering suicide, in light of the lack of coverage

¹ In March 2024, the Minas Gerais Civil Police, who were responsible for the investigation, concluded that Jéssica herself had produced and shared the fake content (Reis; Ferreira, 2024). Despite this development, the event allows for a critical analysis of media and journalistic conduct in relation to the case, particularly given that during the period in which this analysis was carried out, the police had not yet taken such a stance.

² Choquei was not the first profile to spread fake information. Scardoelli (2023) states that the first website to publicise the prints was Garoto do Blog. Other profiles with significant numbers of users also replicated the content, such as Alfinetadas dos Famosos, which had 23.2 million followers on Instagram in January 2024. At the same time, Choquei had just over 20 million followers.

in Journalism courses; and the fourth, which focuses on landing on empirical data and careful recognition of the material investigated, involving the 51 articles from nine Brazilian newspapers that reported on the Jéssica Canedo case.

THINKING ABOUT TRANSFORMATION: REFLECTIONS ON THE METHODOLOGY

The work uses the cartographic perspective (Deleuze; Guatarri, 1995) with a re-reading focused on communication studies (Rosário; Coca, 2018). Two aspects justify the adoption of cartography: the first is the premise that cartographic research does not evaluate rigid, immovable objects and data, but rather accompanies processes that are in development. According to Barros and Kastrup (2020), the inseparability between the researcher (who oversees and constructs the process) and the object-process of investigation is recognized, considering processuality to be an act of producing subjectivities that, in a way, also affects the researcher. The second aspect relates to the authors' experiences of the process under investigation, both in the classroom, through reflections on the subject, and in their professional practice as reporters. The authors often heard that the editorial policy of the news company was to not cover suicides to prevent new occurrences, in other words, the so-called contagion or imitation effect (Abreu, 2021; Preventing, 2023).

To produce and analyze the data, we used the four movements proposed by Rosário and Coca (2018): tracing, touching, landing and attentive recognition. **Tracing** consists of knowledge about the phenomenon to be investigated, including feelings that may arise. In addition to recognizing the empirical experience of the researchers, the study also includes a theoretical reflection on the subject. **Touching** occurs when there is a need to turn one's attention back to a point; it is "a reflex, a glimpse that happens at the level of sensations, which can have different degrees of intensity, rhythms and senses, and which should not be neglected, because it is in this process that we refine the selection and that the criteria become clearer" (Rosário; Coca, 2018, p. 43, own translation). In these stages, we will conduct documentary research (Moreira, 2005) to verify editorial standards and health organizations' recommendations for media coverage involving suicide. Furthermore, we will perform bibliographical research (Telles; Assumpção, 2022).

Landing is the identification of ruptures, repetitions, deviations, and intensity, which indicate the need to focus on these points to understand their origins and causes. In this research, it consists of verifying key moments in the press coverage of Jessica's suicide. Two landing moments were defined, which will be detailed later. Finally, with reference to the thinking of Kastrup (2007), Rosário and Coca (2018) define **attentive recognition** as the activation of attention, when one turns one's gaze to the connections and lines of the rhizome formed in the research, carrying out theoretical articulations arising from contact with empiricism, which allows the production of data, the construction of the research object itself and makes the cartographic method effective in the way it invents the direction of work. At this stage, the data collected is analyzed with reference to the theoretical framework on media and suicide in the press, and using critical discourse analysis (Machin; Mayr, 2013). The focus is on understanding how both media responsibility and the construction of suicide take place. Thus, we observed five different elements in the discourse construction: (1) word connotation; (2) overlexicalization; (3) suppression; (4) structural oppositions; and (5) choices of lexicon and genre.

TRACING: SUICIDE AND JOURNALISM

Abreu (2021) says that the hegemonic media has a historical failure when it comes to dealing with death. Over the decades, death has been trivialized in the news. In the last major global event involving deaths, the Covid-19 pandemic, which took the lives of more than six million people (Coronavirus, 2024), reports on deaths were reduced to numbers, tables, graphs, and statistics. A humanized and moving tone was often restricted to the deaths of celebrities and public figures. The author states that the meaning of death is cultural: while in Christian religions it is seen as a rite of passage involving sadness, in traditional societies it is also seen as a passage, but to a better life, as in the case of popular festivals celebrating death in Mexico.

Thus, when analyzing journalistic treatment of death from a cultural perspective, we see that the coverage acquires unique characteristics in accordance with society. Abreu (2021) mentions that of all the types of death - violent or natural - suicide is the one most often ignored by the media, except when it involves famous people. However, they emphasize the redundancy of this media practice, since if the WHO reports 700,000 annual cases worldwide, 'the official figures call into question the prevailing idea that the failure of the press to report suicides helps to prevent their spread' (Abreu, 2021, p. 15, own translation). It can therefore be seen that suicide is a critical issue in both the social and public health fields, as well as in the field of communication.

Suicide is defined by the Brazilian Psychiatric Association (2014, p. 9, own translation) as 'a deliberate act carried out by the individual themselves, whose intention is to die consciously and intentionally, even if ambivalently, using a means that they believe to be lethal'. The so-called suicidal behavior, which merits the attention of loved ones and health professionals, also involves suicidal thoughts, planning and the suicide attempt itself.

Another factor that makes it possible to understand the social taboo on suicide, also incorporated by the press, is that suicide is criminalized in at least 23 countries³ (WHO, 2023). In these places, survivors are often punished - the punitive aspect prevailing to the detriment of public health policies. In England, suicide was only decriminalized in 1961 (Guidelines, 2023), which meant that over the years many of its colonies also criminalized the practice. There is also the religious factor; for example, the Jewish, Catholic, and Islamic doctrines condemn the practice (Bertolote, 2017).

Political, religious, and cultural approaches to suicide are also reflected in journalistic coverage. In a study on the discursive constructions of suicide cases in 25 newspapers from Minas Gerais between 1920 and 1940, Fensterseifer and Gomes (2019, p. 338, own translation) identified that 'in the articles analyzed, suicide was mostly described as cowardice, crime, madness, and tragedy. In this sense, it was observed that there was a hegemony of descriptions with a pejorative meaning.' Moreover, the authors found that, in that historical context, the press associated suicide with despair and lifestyles that involved gambling, adultery, divorce and alcoholism. There are two aspects to the construction of the subject's identity: in life, they were generally described as unhappy, weak, foolish, and wretched; in death, it was thought that they would be condemned and punished - in a clear relationship with the moral values of the dominant religion of the time. In this way, the coverage of suicide was focused on the duality of whether it was legitimate or not, with the latter being more common (Fensterseifer; Gomes, 2019).

Advances are seen to be emerging in contemporary Brazilian journalism - especially in relation to greater independence from moral values derived from religion. However, in a bibliographical research involving 11 scientific articles published in national journals between 2018 and 2023⁴, it was identified that there is a recurring failure to cover suicide. Table 1 systematizes some of these works.

³ Saudi Arabia, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Brunei, United Arab Emirates, Gambia, Grenada, Maldives, Jordan, Malawi, Myanmar, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Kenya, Saint Lucia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Tonga, Uganda.

⁴ The bibliographical research, as proposed by Telles and Assumpção (2022), was carried out on Google Scholar, Periódico Capes and the portals of two Brazilian scientific journals focused on journalism, Brazilian Journalism Research and Estudos em Jornalismo e Mídia. By searching for the keywords: 'journalism+suicide'; 'communication+suicide'; 'media+suicide' we found 11 scientific articles about Brazilian newspapers published in the last five years.

Table 1 – Brazilian studies on suicide in the journalism field

Article title	Considerations
Between public debate and silence: analyzing online journalistic coverage of the suicide of black adolescents and young people in Brazil (Monari; Bertolli Filho, 2019).	It addresses the relationship between race and suicide. It points to more positive coverage on the Nexo website but identifies problems with the g1 and Alma Preta portals that stifle and prevent content.
Feminicide followed by suicide: the organization of the media in providing a service to prevent cases of correlated violence (Lopes; Finger, 2023).	It links suicide and femicide in journalistic coverage, highlighting the lack of avenues for reporting and prevention in the news.
‘Journalism in Debate’: journalistic ethics in the Cancellier case discussed by Rádio Ponto UFSC (Viana; Vilela, 2019).	It analyses the journalistic coverage surrounding the suicide of the then rector of UFSC, Luiz Carlos Cancellier, in 2017. The coverage is considered problematic, violating ethical aspects of journalism from the outset.
13 Reasons Why: the debate on suicide in the Brazilian media (Bertolli Filho; Monari, 2018).	It identifies that the media covers suicide more in the months of January and September when there are national prevention campaigns. It also discusses how the series 13 Reasons Why has violated various principles formulated by the WHO on how to approach suicide in the media.
The press and the suicide taboo: a proposal to rediscuss the issue (Mendes; Vianna; Felix, 2022).	Considers that the behavior of the press in response to the so-called imitation effect (stifling reporting of cases) is not the best way to prevent suicide. It makes recommendations for coverage, such as avoiding sensationalism and treating suicide as an uncontrollable problem.
Evidence linking the media and suicide: the contagion effect of journalistic and fictional productions (Ferreira; Reis, 2020).	Using IPEA studies, the authors point out that the media can motivate suicide. It advocates the need to create legal standards for the production and broadcasting of messages involving suicide - both by the press and the media in general, including fictional narratives.
Analysis of suicide reports in the city of Ponta Grossa/PR from 2017 to 2021 (Hessman <i>et al.</i> , 2023).	Analyzing 94 news stories about suicide published between 2017 and 2021 on the Diário dos Campos and A Rede portals, both in the Ponta Grossa-PR region, the authors found that some of the rules recommended by the WHO were not followed, such as disclosure of the suicide method and where it took place. Nor do they relate the cases to aspects of mental health.

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024.

All the papers analyzed share some form of deficiency in journalistic coverage of suicide. In some cases, as in Hessman *et al.* (2023), it is explained that press silencing of such events is a measure to avoid the contagion effect. However, most research recommends that the media address the issue, but in an ethical way and in such a way as to prevent new cases. Monari and Bertolli Filho (2019) argue that death itself is an event that embarrasses human beings and that this affects coverage of suicide. The authors approach suicide from a racial perspective - which reflects the need for a multifaceted and intersectional look at the phenomenon, an aspect also reinforced by Lopes and Finger (2023).

The study by Lopes and Finger (2023) also provides an insight into suicides through the notion of correlated violent behavior - when, for example, an aggressor kills themselves after injuring or taking the life of the victim. When making inferences about Jéssica Canedo’s case, we can equate disinformation directed at a person to media violence. This approach is enshrined in laws in Latin American countries that aim to protect women, such as Uruguay, which classifies and condemns media violence, and Argentina, which addresses symbolic violence (Miranda, 2020). Therefore, there is correlated violence when, after suffering media violence on social media and on Choquei’s profile, Jéssica commits suicide. Furthermore, the existence of gendered factors are noted, since the impact of an ‘alleged’ leak of a private conversation is greater for women than for men in a patriarchal and misogynistic society (Moterani; Carvalho, 2016). The case demonstrates the complex nature of suicide, not least because of the medical history of the young woman, who even reported her mental health struggles on social networking sites (Ferreira, 2023).

TOUCHING IN MEDIA COVERAGE NORMS AND GUIDELINES

During the touching stage, we turned our attention to the editorial premises and recommendations for journalistic/media coverage of this event. As already discussed, talking about suicide in journalism has long been a taboo, evidenced by its exclusion from the news (Abreu, 2021). This policy was not exclusive to Brazil. In Portugal, the Journalism Manual (Grandim, 2000, p. 118) argued that ‘journalists should refuse to report on suicides, except when they have occurred in public places and are already known to the general public’.

However, the Brazilian Psychiatric Association (2014) says that it is the media’s social obligation to deal with suicide, which is a public health issue. Addressing the issue appropriately ‘[...] does not increase the risk of a person killing themselves; on the contrary, it is essential to provide the population with information about the problem, where to seek help, etc.’ (Suicide, 2014, p. 14, own translation). Although research points to the veracity of the contagion effect (Ferreira; Reis, 2020; Preventing, 2023), it also reinforces the importance of journalistic education and the provision of guides, since suicide appearing in the media is inevitable in a mediatized society (Gould; Jamieson; Romer, 2003).

For every suicide, around five or six close people are affected emotionally, socially, and economically (Oliveira; Botega, 2006). The visibility granted by the media can increase this suffering because of a loss of privacy. Furthermore, it may constitute a second form of violence against the person if the coverage is done in a sensationalist way and without the ethical care that the subject requires. However, coverage that preserves the identity of the subject, respects the privacy of those close to them and is geared towards treating suicide as a preventable public health problem can help to demystify the issue. By making the subject more present in everyday conversations it can also promote prevention.

A documentary analysis (Moreira, 2005) of Brazilian journalism textbooks shows that they have tended to lean towards this second perspective (Table 2).

Table 2 – Editorial premises for journalistic coverage of suicides

Guiding document	Guidance for journalistic coverage
Journalism Manual for Radio, TV, and New Media (Barbeiro; Lima, 2013).	Suicide should be reported like any other social reality, not giving it greater weight than the event, and should never be broadcast live. [...] there is no scientific proof that publicizing suicides can encourage attacks on life, but respect for human beings is also part of the limits of journalism (p. 8).
Press Manual - Folha de S.Paulo (2007).	When publishing news of a character’s death, never omit its cause. This, however, should only be published if the newspaper is sure about it. Also, do not omit suicide when it is the cause of someone’s death (p. 85).
Writing Manual: The rules of writing and conduct of the country’s leading newspaper - Folha de S.Paulo (2018).	[...] Do not omit the cause of death of the character who is the subject of the news item. In the case of suicide, however, do not describe the method used (p. 229).
O Estado de S. Paulo (Martins Filho, 1997). Writing and Style Manual (Martins Filho, 1997).	If a well-known person has committed suicide, the news should reveal this to the reader, not least to avoid half-truths. In any report on death, the least you want to know is how or under what circumstances it happened: Illness? Accident? Suicide? However painful the truth may be, avoid disguising it (p. 120).
Editorial Principles of Grupo Globo (2011)	There is no mention of suicide.
Only the truth: Empresa Brasil de Comunicação (EBC) Journalism Manual (2013).	The causes of death, in the case of suicide, will only be reported if the significance and relevance of the event go beyond the private domain. Its dissemination depends on the consent of the Journalism Department. Other approaches are accepted when they report on the issue from a public health perspective, as advocated by the World Health Organization (WHO) - addressing causal factors and preventative policies (p. 48).

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024.

Despite most of the documents mentioning coverage of suicide, there is no in-depth discussion of how the news should be produced. These manuals do not contain more than a paragraph describing the news production policies on the subject - which is worrying. In the case of Grupo Globo, no mention is made of the precautions to be adopted. There is also a divergence in standards: in the Journalism Manual for Radio, TV, and New Media and in the Folha de S.Paulo manuals, there is guidance on the need to cover suicide cases, but no mention of how to do it. The manuals produced by EBC and Estado de São Paulo limit coverage to events that transcend the private domain. When considering evolution of policies, changes over time and consequent social transformations do not appear to influence their revision. If you compare, for example, the edition of the Folha de S.Paulo manual from 2007 and 2018, despite the 11-year gap, the editorial policy is practically the same.

Foreign initiatives provide some positive examples of the formulation of more effective policies to deal with the issue. The Guardian (Editorial, 2023), for example, has more practical guidance on the techniques that should be followed and avoided when producing news. These include - avoiding speculation that seems to suggest a single, simple reason for suicide, as the factors that lead to suicide are often complex; avoiding using images that could act as triggers, such as places where suicides have taken place or scars from cuts; respecting and considering the feelings of relatives; and inserting a paragraph with the contact details of the public support service for people with suicidal behavior (Editorial, 2023). The BBC has a similar policy, advising that such events should be portrayed sensitively, avoiding publicizing methods of suicide and self-harm.⁵ It also draws attention to the place where the event took place: if citing the location could inspire others to repeat the act, it should be avoided - or, as a last resort, brought to the attention of the editors-in-chief (Guidelines, c2023).

Also, in the UK and Ireland, the suicide prevention charity Samaritans, together with journalists and researchers, drew up the Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide (Media, 2020). The document has been used by newspapers in these countries, such as the Telegraph & Argus and The Guardian, as a benchmark for behavior and practices to be adopted when covering suicides. The guide can be discussed in three stages: the first of a scientific nature, gathers what is already known about suicide through scientific research. The second is to encourage personal reflection on the part of journalists, stimulating an altruistic and sensitive attitude when covering these events.

The third instance deals with recommendations for the production of news involving suicide attempts, suicide, and self-mutilation. These include: not mentioning the methods used for suicide; mentioning that suicide can be prevented and where/how to seek help; taking special care in cases of young people, as they are the most vulnerable, avoiding restating age, showing photographs, going into personal history and publicizing messages left by the person who died; not showing public and private places that have a high incidence of suicide; avoiding the use of at least seven expressions that are frequently misused by the press, such as 'committing' and 'victim' of suicide (Media, 2020).

The report also emphasizes that journalists and commentators can play a significant role in both preventing and increasing cases of suicide. It is claimed that there is international evidence which shows media reports and representations of suicide can be influential: poor practices can cause greater loss of life, especially in more vulnerable groups such as young people and those with fragile mental health. On the other hand, a careful and responsible approach can contribute to prevention. These perspectives are also mentioned by the report Preventing suicide: a resource for media professionals (2023), which is based on more than 100 scientific studies. It states that stories about people who have faced difficulties in their lives and managed to overcome them, including suicidal thoughts, are associated with small reductions in suicidal ideas among vulnerable audiences. It is argued that media can play an educational role (Preventing, 2023).

Another positive aspect of the Samaritans initiative was that it highlighted how regional factors should also be considered in media coverage. Another initiative focused on media coverage of suicide is Reporting on Suicide, which involved not only health researchers and professionals, but also journalism schools,

⁵ Self-harm is self-injurious behaviour, but it differs from suicide in that it is committed without the intention of death (Quesada, 2020).

media associations and journalists from Western countries. The project states that carefully reporting on suicide can change perceptions, dispel myths, and inform the public about the intricacies of the issue. Furthermore, it may result in people seeking help when useful resources and messages of hope and recovery are included (Reporting, 2023).

FROM LANDING TO ATTENTIVE RECOGNITION: THE JÉSSICA CANEDO CASE

In order to reflect on journalistic coverage involving suicide, this study carried out two landings (Rosário; Coca, 2018) on this high-profile Brazilian case, in which misinformation and a lack of responsibility on the part of the Choquei Instagram profile can be linked to Jéssica Canedo's suicide.

The landings are the focus for attentive recognition, where we try to turn our attention to reflecting on the journalistic coverage of the case. To do this, news was collected⁶ from nine news portals that also have other high-circulation news outlets in the country, such as printed newspapers. They are: Daqui, Estado de Minas, Extra, Folha de S.Paulo, g1 (national), O Estado de S. Paulo, O Globo, O Tempo, and Zero Hora.

The first landing consists of checking what was reported on and how in the run-up to Jéssica's suicide, particularly given that days before her death she posted videos and messages on Instagram reporting problems with her mental health and saying that she could not take what she was going through any longer. Jessica's mother also confirmed these behaviors. Such content already indicates suicidal behavior (Botega *et al.*, 2005) - requiring journalistic care when dealing with the event. However, no news was found on this landing in the selected portals. This result makes us wonder why there was no coverage, even though the case involved a celebrity, comedian Whindersson Nunes, and it had significant impact on social media. One hypothesis is that if journalists find suicide a delicate subject to deal with, this will be even more difficult when suicidal behavior and the role of social media are considered.

The second landing is dedicated to collecting news from the post-suicide period, which spans one month after Jessica's death, between 22 December 2023 and 21 January 2024. 51 articles were found. For attentive recognition, Table 3 was formulated, which systematizes guidelines and "not recommended" for journalistic and media treatment of suicides, based on the documents and studies identified in the touch and trace stages. We also considered the study by Mendes, Vianna, and Felix (2022), which proposes a set of complementary recommendations to the WHO proposals. This systematization consists of analytical indicators, providing a basis for reflection on the selected news items.

Table 3 – Systematization of guidelines for coverage of events related to suicide and suicidal behavior.

(continue)

Guidelines	Not recommended
Provide information on where and how to seek help for suicidal behavior, including in cases of self-harm.	Name the methods used to commit suicide. Also publish details of the location, especially when it comes to places with a high incidence of suicide.
Educating the public with information about suicide and its prevention based on reliable data. Correcting myths that can lead to imitative behavior. Include interviews with health experts.	Using sensationalist language/content that romanticizes or normalizes suicide or presents it as a viable solution to problems.
Tell stories about how to deal with everyday stresses and suicidal thoughts. Providing testimonies and accounts from people who have been through and overcome such situations. Trying to develop identifying elements between these people and people who could engage in suicidal behavior.	Producing headlines or highlights sections in newspapers about suicide. Making a series of stories involving other suicides - thus encouraging the recollection of these cases.

⁶ The data was collected via each portal's search engine using the following keywords: 'suicide', 'Jessica', 'Jessica Canedo', 'Whindersson' and 'Choquei'.

(completed)

Guidelines	Not recommended
Be careful when interviewing friends and family of people who have committed suicide, especially in recent cases. Avoid talking about how the suicide was committed and recalling the event.	Over-simplifying the motive for suicide or reducing it to a single factor, thus excluding factors arising from intersectionality.
Cover suicide in sections such as Health/Science, Lifestyle and Culture and Behavior, rather than just within General/Cities. Avoid dealing with the subject in the Crime section, especially when the suicide is not linked to other violence.	Use photographs, video footage, audio recordings or links from digital or social media, especially when linked to the suicide (location, statements made before the suicide, etc.). When using photos of anonymous people, the family must be asked for permission.
In the case of online journalism, deactivate the comments function. Avoid live coverage of suicides to minimize any sensationalist language.	Publish letters from those who have committed suicide or even videos and content left on social media.

Source: prepared by the authors, based on Preventing (2023) Mendes; Vianna and Felix (2022), Abreu (2021), Editorial (2023), Media (2020), Reporting (2023); Suicide (2014).

The 51 articles found in the third landing formed a collection that covered topics ranging from the announcement of Jéssica's suicide, the police investigation, the need to regulate media platforms as well as opinion pieces. It can therefore be seen that the contagion effect was not an impediment to the way journalists treated Jéssica's suicide after the event. This observation lends some initial support to studies that point to the need for journalism to get suicide on the agenda (Editorial, 2023; Media, 2020; Suicide, 2014). However, it should be emphasized that one of the reasons why reporting on the case has become so widespread is the involvement of Whindersson Nunes, a public figure. **Celebrity** news value (Harcup; O'Neill's, 2001) can therefore be seen as a catalyst for the coverage, as Whindersson's image was mentioned and published on a recurring basis, as well as his name featuring in the headlines of nine news items.

All the news articles represented gaps in relation to the indicators in Table 3. Only 11 news items contain information on where and how to seek help in the event of suicidal behavior, usually expressed by an endnote with the telephone number of the Centro de Valorização da Vida (CCV), a leading suicide prevention organization in Brazil. All the portals were deficient in this area. The newspapers Daqui, Extra, Folha de S. Paulo and Folha de S. Paulo, g1 and O Globo did not publish guidance in any of their stories.

The educational potential of the news stories was explored in five different instances. The stories provided information on suicide and its prevention through interviews with health professionals and addressing issues that affect young people on social networks, such as cyberbullying and its consequences. Despite the low incidence of educational articles, 14 news items encourage reflection on the consequences of so-called **disinformation networks** or the actions of **unofficial newspapers**. In Folha de S. Paulo, seven stories were published along these lines, most of them by columnists. In these opinion pieces, there is explicit condemnation of the role social networks played in Jessica's suicide. One example is the criticism of Choquei's defense note, which exonerated it from what happened, and the need to hold these media actors more accountable. This can be seen in 'Choquei doesn't do journalism, which doesn't exempt it from being partially to blame for Jéssica's death', by Tony Goes, published on 25 December.

Another indicator analyzed was whether the articles included stories about how to deal with everyday stresses and suicidal thoughts, which could include interviews and testimonies that help other people overcome suicidal behavior. Only five news items from the Folha de S. Paulo (1), g1 (1) and Zero Hora (3) portals identified this prevention strategy, most of them doing so by including interviews with psychologists. None of the news pieces contain testimonies from someone who has made it through a tough time and who could show that it is possible to overcome suicidal thoughts (Preventing, 2023). However, there were reports that did not address suicide prevention per se, but broached strategies to deal with similar situations to those

Jéssica and PC Siqueira⁷ experienced, the so-called **cancel culture** - a phenomenon that manifests itself on digital platforms, consisting of a mass mobilization aimed at repudiating the behavior of a certain figure, resulting in significant losses for them (Cordeiro; Martins, 2022). The article ‘What to do if you’re cancelled on social media? Experts give tips,’ published in Estado de S. Paulo on 9 January, included testimonies from people who have been **cancelled** and interviews with health professionals to discuss the effects and what to do in these situations.

One positive finding is that no news report revealed any details about how or where the suicide took place. However, seven articles contain some kind of violation in relation to interviews with Jéssica or people close to her. Two of them were published by O Tempo, which published statements made by Jéssica’s mother to a RecordTV affiliate in Minas Gerais a few days after her suicide. The reports detail Jéssica’s anguish and behavior when faced with the circulation of content while living with depression. Furthermore, they demonstrate her mother’s suffering at an extremely sensitive time due to the recent loss of her daughter. By publishing this, O Tempo could be considered to be disrespecting the feelings of close relatives (Editorial, 2023).

Regarding the section in which the news was inserted, none of them are published in the Crime section, thus avoiding a direct link between suicide and crime. In some articles, the case was approached from a policing perspective, not because of the suicide itself, but because it involved an investigation by the Civil Police, which sought to ascertain whether websites and social networking profiles were to blame. The story is featured in the following sections: Famous People, Opinion, Politics, Culture, Economy, Celebrities, Entertainment, Blogs, Behavior and Health. However, there were 15 news items where the event was reported in generic and broad sections of the publication, such as National (4), Brazil (7), Cities (3) and General (1), contrary to the coverage guidelines established by Mendes, Vianna and Felix (2022). What stands out here is the unusual fact that a suicide was reported in the Culture, Entertainment and Celebrities sections, showing that Jessica’s death was not the dominant factor in the news story.

In 22 articles the comments were activated, in contravention of the WHO and Samaritans guidelines (Media, 2020; Preventing, 2023). In some news stories, such as the one entitled ‘After the death of a young person, the Minister of Human Rights says that regulating networks is a “civilizational imperative”’, published by g1 on 24 December, 1,068 comments were registered. On the O Tempo and Extra portals, the comments tool was enabled on all news items. In Zero Hora and Estado de Minas, it was not enabled in any of the articles. In general, those commenting condemned the Choquei page. There was also a political polarization of the discussion, especially when the article discussed regulation of media platforms - the issue of suicide took a back seat in the comments. Comments were also found that trivialized mental illness (Figure 1).

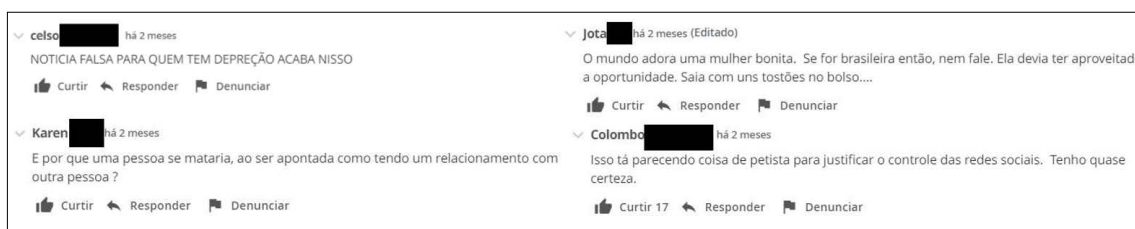


Figure 1 – Comments on a news item about suicide
Source: extracted by the authors from the g1 portal, 2023.

When it came to publishing Jessica’s image, 20 news stories featured her photo, probably reproducing the content of her private social network. Only Zero Hora and Daqui respected the girl’s image in all their

⁷ PC Siqueira, Paulo Cezar Goulart Siqueira, was a Brazilian presenter who owned a highly popular video channel. He was accused of paedophilia, but the case was never proven. Even so, he was the victim of hatred on social media platforms. PC Siqueira committed suicide on 27 December 2023.

articles. The photos accompanying the other news items were similar, featuring Jessica, a young, white woman with straight hair and a cheerful expression. The Samaritans guidelines (Media, 2020) warn that young people are more susceptible to the contagion effect, which is why coverage of suicide involving this audience should be done in such a way as to avoid repeated use of photographs. However, three portals used Jéssica's image repeatedly: Estado de Minas (2), g1 (5) and O Tempo (6). What is more, Extra (1), Folha de S.Paulo (1) and O Globo (2) quoted on their websites what Jessica had said on the eve of her death. Thus, they allowed people who were going through a comparable situation to identify with her once more. The inclusion of this type of testimony goes against the recommendations of health and journalistic organizations, which suggest avoiding the dissemination of messages and the reasons that led someone to commit suicide (Media, 2020; Preventing, 2023).

The analysis also considered Machin and Mayr's (2013) five categories of discourse analysis, with the aim of understanding how media responsibility is portrayed, as well as how suicide is constructed in the news.

All the news stories discuss, albeit implicitly, the media's responsibility for Jessica's suicide, especially when it comes to profiles that publish fake news on social media platforms. The main culprit, according to these stories, is Choquei, although other profiles and websites are often mentioned as having disseminated the content, as are users who attacked Jéssica. Some portals, such as *Daqui*, even called the event the Choquei Case. Fake news is also frequently blamed in journalistic discourse. Rather than being personified, blame is implicitly attributed. Stating that Jessica was a **victim of fake news** is common. There was a debate about the need to regulate media platforms, mainly based on speeches by the Minister of Human Rights and Citizenship, Silvio Almeida, who said that regulating social networks was a '*civilizational imperative*.' This remark culminated in the politicization of Jéssica's suicide. Comments on the news stories associated the minister's speech with a left-wing strategy to censor the media (Figure 1).

In some articles, especially those published by the newspapers O Tempo and Daqui, the word suicide is removed. Instead, expressions such as 'took their life' or even the word 'death' is used, with frequent use of euphemisms. This can be traced back to the historical difficulty journalism has had in dealing with suicide or certain types of death (Abreu, 2021; Fensterseifer; Gomes, 2019). The absence of articles on some portals demonstrates the ill preparedness of the press - since coverage of suicide can be carried out in an ethical and educational manner, as pointed out by health and prevention organizations.

In line with structural oppositions (Machin; Mayr, 2013), there is a demarcation in the discourse, which may be implicit, that separates professional journalism from 'non-journalism', which comes from sites and profiles with a similar offering to Choquei. There is also an opposition between good (Jessica, her mum and Whindersson) and evil (Choquei and social media users). Although hate speech against Jéssica was made by users of social networks, especially Instagram, the man in charge of Choquei ended up being named as the main person responsible for the case - so much so that the Civil Police were investigating him for the alleged offence of inducing suicide (Brasil, 2019). In an analogous way, users are also being held accountable, not in the criminal sphere, but through reports and opinion pieces dealing with cyberbullying (Zero Hora) and cancel culture (Estado de S. Paulo). It is clear that the traditional media considers itself exempt from responsibility in the case and in the other issues discussed, such as the circulation of fake news.

The construction of Jessica's suicide varies according to the articles. However, two scenarios are common: 1) suicide as a consequence of fake news: in this case, there is no mention throughout the discourse of the complex nature of suicide, factors such as depression, age, and society. Thus, the educational potential is lost, as there is an oversimplification of what led to Jéssica's death; 2) suicide as a set of factors: in this group, the articles explicitly state that Jéssica was depressed. Often, this information was linked to reports that her mother had posted a video on social networking sites explaining the young woman's mental health status. In the article 'Lula's ministers defend platform accountability after the death of a young

person caught in the middle of fake news about Whindersson,' in O Globo on 24 December, a speech by the Minister for Women, Cida Gonçalves, brings an element of intersectionality when she says that misogyny on social networks has claimed yet another victim. Both scenarios demonstrate how the communication field is an important domain for suicide prevention (and its possible induction).

The WHO (Preventing, 2023) recommends dropping the word **victim** when referring to suicide deaths. In the 51 news items, the word victim was not used in this way. It was often used to label Jessica a victim of fake news and hate speech from social networks and websites that shared the fake conversations. However, given that the suicide is considered to have taken place after the young woman suffered several attacks, it is arguable whether it is impossible to dissociate Jessica as a suicide **victim** from a criminal act induced by third parties, implicitly and operating in the field of sensations (Brazil, 2019).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The cartographic rhizome formed by this study made connections between research in the field of communication and documents from both health organizations and the professional field of journalism, contrasting their approaches with landings on the coverage of Jéssica Canedo's suicide in the media and by journalists. In general, the research identified that suicide is a problematic event for journalism - not just in the present, but also in the past. Most of the guidelines for promoting more educational, ethical, and potentially preventative coverage were not followed in the articles analyzed.

To conclude, there are three final considerations. The first is that journalistic organizations and training institutions need to accept that suicide is an everyday occurrence and requires trained professionals to cover it.

The second is that suicide is complex and, although many articles simplify Jéssica Canedo's suicide to being the result of fake news alone, it involves mental health and other socio-cultural factors. An intersectional approach can provide new perspectives on the issue. In a misogynistic society like Brazil, the impact of fake conversations of a personal nature was greater for Jessica, an anonymous woman, than for Whindersson, a famous man - even though he had stated in May 2023 that he suffered from depression on a recurring basis.

A third consideration is that social media platforms pose new challenges for media and journalistic approaches to suicide. Not only because of the danger of these spaces being occupied by hate speech, but also because of the possibility of giving visibility to suicidal behavior and suicide itself. If previously the contagion effect was considered a reason for caution and justified the press not covering suicide, now it is difficult to 'turn a blind eye' to something that becomes public without journalistic action. This change underlines the need to rethink and reflect on professional practices.

In March 2024, after a period of analysis, the Civil Police concluded their investigation into the case, saying that it was Jessica herself who had produced and disseminated the prints of the fake conversation (Reis; Ferreira, 2024). The announcement enriches the weaving of cartography as an ongoing investigative process, pointing the way to new enquiries. However, it should be pointed out that the conclusion of the enquiry does not exonerate those that shared the fake content and the users who made hate speech. After the widespread circulation of the prints and days before her suicide, Jessica said that she had never spoken to Whindersson. The comedian reiterated this himself. It also points to a failure on the part of the media to check the veracity of the content, which was in fact fake; and the press's lack of preparation when it comes to covering events involving suicide.

What is more, this case has brought into the public domain the need to hold the big media platforms responsible for the content replicated on their networks. Although much has been said about Choquei's responsibility, little has been said about the participation of Meta, which is responsible for Instagram, or even about the role of traditional media. The failures of media platforms to report on suicide should also be discussed. They could have more effective mechanisms to combat hate speech and the circulation of disinformation, as

well as being able to help prevent suicide. Such debates should also be held without politicizing the issue, in contrast to the comments on the news stories that dealt with the regulation of media platforms.

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