

AIDiAL: an intelligent chatbot to explore new literacies in the age of algorithms and AI

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Manuel Pita

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Principal Investigator

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Membros de equipa:

Manuel Pita¹, João Pedro Carvalho¹, Ana Loureiro², Leonor Costa, Silvia Luiz, Joana Cabral, Fagner Cândido, André Rodrigues, Kaska Porayska-Pomsta

1. CICANT - Centro de Investigação em Comunicação Aplicada, Cultura e Novas Tecnologias
2. CBIOS - Centro de Investigação em Biociências e Tecnologias da Saúde
3. CIDEFES - Centro de Investigação em Desporto, Educação Física, Exercício e Saúde
4. University College London

Abstract:

Understanding the patterns and mechanisms behind news consumption and avoidance in the hyperconnected media ecosystem is crucial for fostering democratic participation and informed societies. Traditional methods of studying these behaviours, such as self-report surveys, and more recent approaches such as digital-trace data collection, often come with limitations and biases. In this research project, we introduce an innovative approach to address these challenges through the AIDiAL system—an intelligent, dialogical news delivery application. AIDiAL is designed to simulate a real-world news consumption environment, enabling the collection of nuanced interaction data while mitigating self-report response biases. This system segments

content into utterance snippets to capture externalised behavioural data, which can be integrating with self-report information to offer a comprehensive understanding of news engagement dynamics. AIDiAL enables fine-grained, conversational, yet naturalistic interactions with news content through which we expect to reveal the complex causal factors behind several phenomena in the information ecosystem including, e.g. news avoidance (across different demographics, with a particular focus on understanding inter-generational dynamics), the roles of algorithmic literacy in determining people's news "diets". The primary goal of this research is to develop robust methodological tools in media studies to derive scientifically valid and replicable inferences that explain content consumption behaviours. AIDiAL seeks to support more informed, critically thinking societies relying on the collection of fine-grained data on human behaviour within the information ecosystem. This project will contribute significantly to the advancement of media research methodologies and our understanding of news engagement across diverse populations.

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