WIRES-Crossed
Community Audit Report
Ballyjamesduff, Ireland

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Developing Community Media to Mitigate
the Impact of Fake News

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Introduction

WIRES-CROSSED is a community led initiative aiming to build a community media framework that equips local communities with all the knowledge, skills and competences to develop, manage and maintain a comprehensive media service to local residents. The project pursues an asset-based community development approach in order to harness the assets within said local communities. The first step in achieving this was the design and implementation of a comprehensive community audit schematic which drew on the most appropriate elements of asset-based community development approaches. The results of which highlight the digital competence, educational assets and deficits present within the local community. Ballyjamesduff is a town in County Cavan, Ireland. It is situated midland and is a boarder county of Northern Ireland. It is a small rural community with approximately 2,500 inhabitants. The town was largely indigenous until 2000 when a rapid economic expansion saw a growth in the rural housing market and awarded Ballyjamesduff the status of a 'commuter-town'. Now, 33.6% of the population are migrants, another 33% have relocated from the country's capital city Dublin and the remainder are indigenous.

Methodology and Data Collection

Following the development and design of the comprehensive schematic, the initial steps to engage the community were taken. This began with the formation of the Local Media Action Group, which comprised of 10 key local stakeholders. A WIRES-CROSSED project representative attended a Ballyjamesduff Community Council meeting and informally presented the project while inviting local involvement. A written copy of a branded press release was distributed to the assembly of community members. This community meeting was selected as the prime opportunity for recruitment as it was made up entirely of engaged community members already exhibiting some level of civic activity and donating some element of recreational time to invest in community initiatives. There was a great response and a group of 10 local community actors was founded. This group was comprised of two members of local

council, a local youth worker, a founder of an integration community group and some volunteers. The group was mixed in terms of age and gender. Once this group was formed, they were presented with the Induction Programme which took place in January 2020 over the course of a single four-hour session in a community hall. The aim of this introduction was to bring local team members through the audit process as well as familiarising them with the questionnaires they would be completing with local residents, businesses and service providers. The questionnaires were designed and reviewed collectively by the project consortium with permitted localization in each partner country. The induction was a success and all participants reported a high level of interest and enthusiasm for the immediate tasks ahead and the longevity of the completed project.

> *"I look forward to the roll out of the programme. I think it will be a great asset within the community to keep people informed on all local development, as it's happening."*
> - Community council member, retail owner

> *"It will be a great way to enable people to identify fake news and therefore target the source and prevent the spread."*
> - Community volunteer

> *"This will be a helpful tool for organisations to recruit new members. Through this medium they can inform the community what their projects are about and how people can engage with them. It will create a whole new awareness for a group of people we currently cannot reach."*
> - Community council member

The Local Media Action group was enlisted to conduct research as a form of participatory action research, this was done in order to conduct research which would lead to a plan being devised by the local community to resolve any issues or needs within their community, in a way that involves all members of the community. The target of 100 questionnaire responses per partner location was identified in the project proposal. To exemplify the ethics of WIRES-CROSSED and the principles of asset-

based community development, the audit was approached and conducted from a positive perspective. The audit team were instructed to look at the things that are working in the community and, through conversation with others, build upon them. The aim was to focus on positives in order to foster unique strengths within the community and work toward genuine success. It was emphasised to the local media action group that a positive energy approach to the community audit would help build on the local strengths and assets identified in a community in order to define the learning needs and discover how best to achieve them. It was decided these questionnaires would be completed by way of interviews with local members of the community completing the surveys, both face-to-face and online. An appreciative inquiry method was encouraged as local media action group members noted it was possible not all individuals interviewed would recognise assets available.

The local media action group were informed that a single set of guidelines would be used throughout the audit process to ensure everyone worked in a professional and proficient manner when working and engaging with a wide range of people from different backgrounds, cultures and life experiences. All prospective interviewees were fully informed about why the information was being collected, and participants were informed that no information would be made available to anyone not directly involved in the study. Interviewers did ask for contact information however it was at the discretion of the interviewee and not mandatory for research participation. Ethical standards required that researchers would not put participants in a situation where they might be at risk of harm as a result of their participation and required that no participant could be coerced into participation. The questionnaires were designed and reviewed collectively by the project consortium with room for localization in each partner county. The questionnaires were comprised of questions to attain both quantitative and qualitative data and had a mix of open-ended and close-ended questions. The community audit was primarily conducted as face-to-face surveys (80%), with some distributed online (20%).
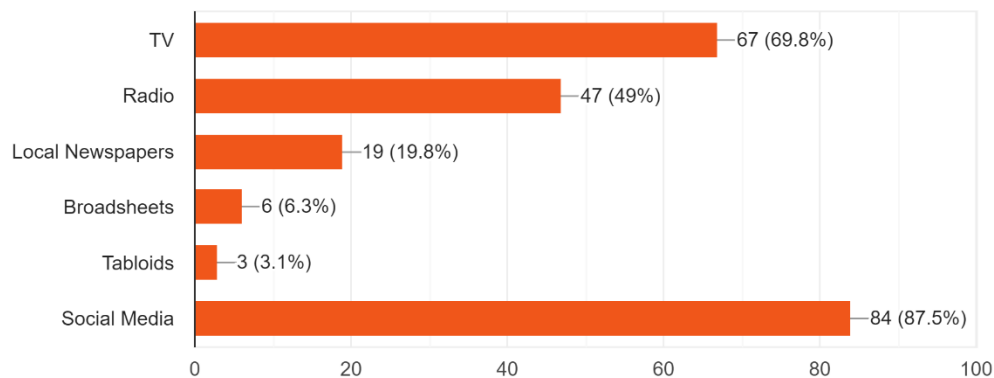
Data Analysis, Results and Stakeholder Voices

Qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods were used, and the findings were discussed and analysed with the support of the Local Media Action Group. All questionnaire responses were entered into Google Forms which enabled numerical data collection for quantitative responses. Analysing qualitative data required a process of correlation and identifying patterns and themes across 100 responses. This was achieved through open review and discussion with 4 local media action group members and the project officer from The Rural Hub. Here recurring themes were identified though critical and analytical thinking.

The interpretation of data obtained indicates a high volume of residents who access news via social media with 87.5% selecting it as a main source of media content.
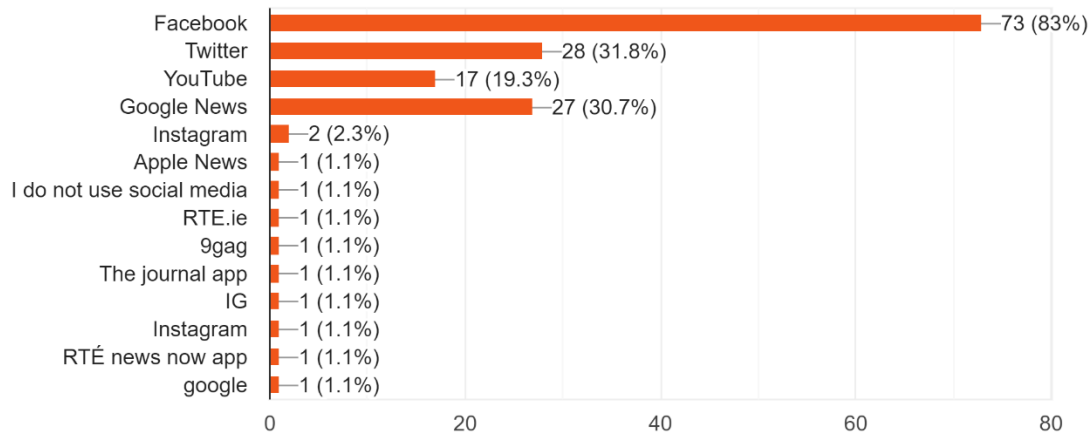
1. Where do you access news and media content? (tick all that apply)
96 responses

| Source	Value
TV	67 (69.8%)
Radio	47 (49%)
Local Newspapers	19 (19.8%)
Broadsheets	6 (6.3%)
Tabloids	3 (3.1%)
Social Media	84 (87.5%)

The most popular social media platform for news intake in the community is Facebook with 83% of participants selecting it as a point of access for news.

2. If you access news through social media, which platform do you use? (tick all that apply)
88 responses

Platform	Value
Facebook	73 (83%)
Twitter	28 (31.8%)
YouTube	17 (19.3%)
Google News	27 (30.7%)
Instagram	2 (2.3%)
Apple News	1 (1.1%)
I do not use social media	1 (1.1%)
RTE.ie	1 (1.1%)
9gag	1 (1.1%)
The journal app	1 (1.1%)
IG	1 (1.1%)
Instagram	1 (1.1%)
RTÉ news now app	1 (1.1%)
google	1 (1.1%)

34.4% of participants believe themselves capable of easily and often identifying who a piece of media is aimed at and what the motivation of a piece is. Almost half, at 45.8% of respondents, indicated that they can 'sometimes' recognise the aim and bias of an individual piece of media content. A mere 3.1% stated they were 'never' able to deduce this information.
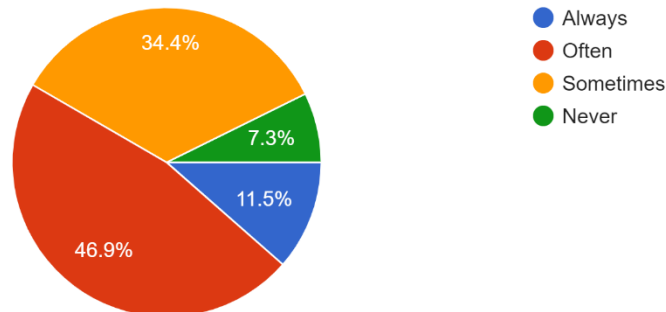
3. When you view media content, can you easily identify who the piece is aimed at and why? i.e. youth, nationalists
96 responses

Aways
Often
Sometimes
Never

45.8%
16.7%
34.4%
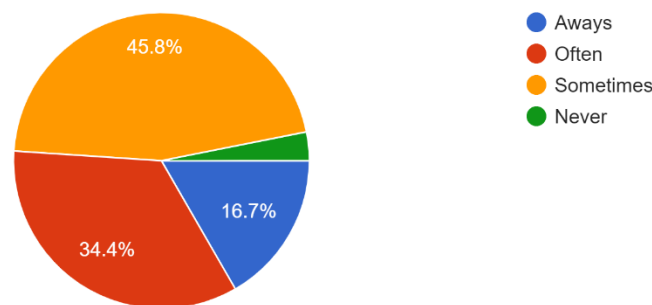
Results for the capacity to identify the perspective of a story were similar with 46.9% stating they could 'often' tell from what perspective a story was being told and 34.4% stating that they could identify the perspective some of the time.

4. Are you able to assess from what perspective a story is being told? i.e. conservative, environmentalist

96 responses

Legend:
- Always (blue)
- Often (red)
- Sometimes (orange)
- Never (green)

Pie chart values: 34.4%, 7.3%, 11.5%, 46.9%

The observation here is the low percentage of participants identifying that they can 'always' identify the target audience and motivation of a piece of media. In both circumstances results were below 20% (16.7% for the aim of a piece and 11.5% for the perspective). Despite there being a low-level of participants reporting they could 'never' deduce this information, with under 10% of respondents, this data suggests either a low level of confidence in the ability to deter the motivation of a media piece or a reluctance to apply such critical thinking.

70% of respondents indicated an awareness of 'click-bate' which, albeit a wide majority, still leaves a gap between this figure and the 87.5% of participants who use social media as a main news channel. Potentially 17.5% of users are unaware of the existence of 'click-bate', least of the all the threats it implicates.

A 2018 Reuters Digital News Report survey, funded by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, examined levels of news literacy among Irish online news consumers as part of a wider survey of general news attributes and preferences. Respondents were asked four questions to measure their knowledge of journalism production and distribution. It found that only about 3% of news consumers were wholly informed about news production and about 33% were fairly news-literate. Data collected in the community audit is based on results of self-assessment, but it would indicate that when compared to national figures there is a possible inclination of Ballyjamesduff residents to overestimate their media literacy abilities.

The same 2018 Reuters Digital News Report survey found that dedicated regional newspaper readers are among the most media literate news consumers at 43%. Results of the community audit found that 1 in 5 members of the community read Local Newspapers in order to access news and media content. Almost half of participants self-identified as having 'advanced' ICT skills at 49% of respondents and a mere 11.7% stated that they had low capacities to use a computer. Just under half of participants indicated a basic ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms. A further 28.1% of respondents claimed they had an advanced ability to do so.

There is a very low level of interest in the community towards receiving training to help develop media literacy with only just over 10% clearly indicating they would be interested in receiving such training. Similarly, 77% of respondents stated that had not completed media-related training. The most revealing question into the mindset of participants was when they were asked if they had considered starting a blog or YouTube Channel to vlog about their daily activities and what had prevented them from doing so. It was difficult to deduct from the data how many participants had seriously considered starting a vlog or how many had stopped themselves from considering starting a blog as they had already decided it would be unsuccessful. Only 5% of respondents indicated they would have positive feelings or confidence and ability to engage with such an activity. The commentary of the reasoning for the 95% of participants that were against this venture was starkly consistent and self-deprecating.

- *"People can be quite judgemental so I wouldn't put myself out there for people to grill how I look and how I am."*

- *"I don't think I'd be very good."*

- *"I don't think I would be able to handle the pressure."*

- *"I don't think people care enough about your life."*

- *"I don't think my daily activities are interesting enough to warrant capture."*

- *"Too much out there at a national/global level to compete with."*

- *"What stops me is the fact of being judged, made fun of etc."*

- *"Small town culture doesn't help."*

- *"I wouldn't have the confidence to do something like that."*

- o *"I would like to document my daily life as a career, but my nerves have stopped me I guess."*
- o *"I have nothing exciting to talk about."*
- o *"Fear of what people think stops me."*
- o *"Sounds scary putting yourself out there, anxiety aghhh."*
- o *"I have nothing interesting to say or a new take."*
- o *"I wouldn't have anything interesting to show."*
- o *"What stops me is what people would think."*
- o *"I don't want the limelight."*
- o *"Yes the opinions of others stops me."*
- o *"Yes, my fear of judgement stops me."*

Conclusion and Recommendations

The interpretation of data obtained in relation to available media infrastructure was vastly positive with the majority having their own IT devices and being able to cite local services where this was easily accessed. The indicators towards readiness and likelihood of participating in a local media team that would produce community media content for the area was also mixed. 43% of respondents said no explicitly. However, among the remaining 57% there was a lack of clear indicators, most doubted their usefulness or capacity.

The conclusion deduced from this comprehensive schematic and Local Media Action Group review is that there lies in the Ballyjamesduff community an ability and potential for high media literacy. The main obstacle is a low level of self-esteem and an unwillingness to engage or put themselves in a position of possible scrutiny. It is evident that there is a need for a project like WIRES-CROSSED and the community stands to develop media literacy as well as interpersonal and individual competences through the delivery of the project. A key recommendation is to consider the disposition of the community mindset and attitude towards any inclination of grandeur. Residents are not modest about their ability; they are genuinely insecure. They may be willing to

get involved but they will appear apprehensive, therefore a welcoming and friendly atmosphere is crucial. Maintaining the philosophy of participatory action will be essential to the livelihood of the project. There must be a focus on the positive and a real effort made to not just engage the community but to support and validate them. A dedicated team of familiar faces partaking in consistent involvement and engagement with the Local Media Action group is vital and so too is a means of acknowledging and validating all efforts made by the community.

Conclusion and Recommendations

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