



The Construction of News in Canada's Francophone Minority Communities: Source Contributions and Journalistic Initiative at *L'Acadie Nouvelle*

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Abstract. This article examines how news is constructed in Canada's Francophone minority communities through the negotiation between sources' proposals and journalists' initiatives, using the daily *L'Acadie Nouvelle* as a case. Drawing on a mixed-methods, grounded-theory approach, we conducted a two-week newsroom immersion (3–16 November 2025), collecting the full universe of 445 informational inputs (emails, press releases, advisories, calls, messages, in-person tips) and mapping them to 149 published articles, complemented by interviews and non-participant observation. Quantitative coding shows a highly routinized supply: 93% of inputs arrived through routine channels and 98% by email, dominated by press releases (78% of routine inputs) and institutional actors (47%). Yet only 10% of proposals generated at least one story, indicating strong editorial filtering and limited “churnalism.” Informal tips, though rare (7%), converted at triple the rate of routine submissions. Tracing article origins reveals a near balance between source-driven and journalist-driven production: 43% of published items stemmed from source suggestions (30% direct submissions plus 13% content identified via digital monitoring), while 45% originated in journalistic initiative (excluding agency copy). Selection patterns favored community-anchored voices: citizen, municipal, and community-organization inputs achieved the highest conversion rates, while private-company pitches were least likely to pass the filter. Rejections were mainly justified by low public interest, weak local relevance, misfit with the editorial mandate, promotional tone, or time constraints. Overall, findings highlight enduring journalistic autonomy in a resource-constrained minority context, alongside a growing “in-between” space where journalists proactively surface public-relations content circulating online and translate it into locally meaningful news.

Keywords: news construction; journalist-source relationship; Francophone minority context.

1 Introduction

Research suggests that, to understand the construction of news, one must analyze the complex negotiation process between journalists and sources [1, 2, 3]. This interdependent relationship often manifests itself through a power struggle that begins in the earliest stages of the news-making process [4]. Indeed, prior to media coverage, sources provide journalists with various inputs (information, press releases, events) and employ diverse strategies to ensure the most complete possible coverage of their message. Journalists, for their part, exercise their power by sorting, selecting, and shaping these proposals according to professional, organizational, and editorial criteria. In this process, the use of multiple sources is a central principle of journalistic work; it allows for the validation of information, the diversification of the angles from which it is covered, and the limitation of reliance on a single point of view [5]. Cottle [6] describes this power relationship as a ritual in which each party attempts to control the script of the news. It is at the heart of these interactions that a decisive part of what becomes, or does not become, news is played out. Analyzing this process thus involves examining not only the story pitches communicated to journalists but also those they accept or reject, as well as the stories they publish on their own initiative. Studying this issue is all the more relevant in today's media landscape, which has been reshaped by digital transformations affecting the channels, pace, and methods of information circulation. These transformations take on a particular character in Canada's Francophone minority communities (CFMC), where the proximity between journalists and sources, as well as the community role of the media, create unique dynamics.

2 Research Question

Research on the construction of news has developed along various lines of inquiry, each of which has approached the journalist-source relationship in this process in its own way. Researchers associated with a first strand have focused primarily on published content to assess the extent to which the topics covered result from initiatives originating with sources. This work falls notably within the *agenda-building* perspective, which examines the processes through which information sources influence the selection and prioritization of media issues [7]. This research generally distinguishes between institutional (*elite*) sources, closely linked to political and economic institutions, and non-institutional (*non-elite*) sources, which have little institutional legitimacy and include, in particular, citizens, small associations, and local groups mobilized around specific issues [8]. This research has shown that the former largely dominate the media agenda [9, 10, 11, 12, 13] including in the context of local media, where this presence can sometimes be particularly pronounced due to journalists' dependence on certain institutions as a condition for access to information and resources [14].

Building on this research focused on the power and influence of sources in the news-making process, another line of inquiry has turned its attention to journalistic practices themselves, highlighting how journalists handle the information provided by sources. In other words, rather than inferring the influence of these sources from published

content, this research examines the upstream process of sorting, selecting, and transforming informational inputs. Drawing notably on the concept of "*information subsidies*" [15], which we translate as "*public relations materials*", this research highlights that only a small proportion of the press releases sent to newsrooms are actually used. As early as the 1970s, Altheide [16] demonstrated that local television journalists favor press releases from government sources. A few years later, referring to local daily and weekly newspapers that published less than 10% of the content sent by the University of Oklahoma, Fishman's [10] work highlights the limited integration of institutional inputs, while also demonstrating the strong filtering capacity of local media, based on professional and editorial criteria. This trend is, however, qualified by the study by Berkowitz and Adams [17], who analyzed the materials received by a local television station affiliated with a network based in Indianapolis in the late 1980s. They found a more sustained use of public relations material: 22% of the content was selected by the editorial team. These studies converge in identifying several selection criteria used by journalists, among which local relevance appears to be a determining factor; in fact, its absence is the main reason for rejecting press releases [18, 19, 20, 21]. Other criteria include the newsworthiness of the content, its non-promotional nature, and the quality of the writing. It is important to note, however, that this line of research, particularly the systematic analyses of what is accepted and what is rejected by newsrooms, while foundational to the analysis of the journalist-source relationship, has not been the subject of sustained empirical renewal since the 1990s. Consequently, the studies mentioned here reflect practices specific to the media context in which they were conducted, namely that of news production prior to the advent of the Internet and social media. We note, however, that by selecting and prioritizing, journalists actively participate in the construction of the news. Although centered on a specific corpus of letters of complaint addressed to the newspaper *Le Monde*, the study by Boltanski and colleagues [22] constitutes a particularly illuminating contribution to the analysis of journalistic selection processes. It helps us understand the selection criteria used by the editorial staff as well as how certain statements manage to cross the threshold of editorial legitimacy by aligning with collective causes.

In Canada, CFMCs provide a prime field of analysis for examining contemporary dynamics of news construction, particularly within community media. These media operate in contexts characterized by close proximity between journalists and sources, as well as a strong social and identity-based mission [23]. Numerous studies also show that, in these settings, the role of journalists goes beyond the transmission of information to actively contribute to community vitality [24, 25, 26, 27]. In this context, marked both by relational proximity and by the digital reconfiguration of journalistic practices, the study of the concrete mechanisms of news construction appears particularly relevant. It is indeed important to better determine the types of content proposed to journalists by various stakeholders, which ones are retained or rejected during the selection process, based on what criteria, and to what extent journalists are able to initiate their own stories outside of these proposals, in an information environment now largely shaped by digital media. This inquiry directly addresses the question of which voices to prioritize in CFMC community media: should priority be given to those of institutional actors, as scientific literature on *agenda-building* has largely demonstrated,

or to those of community actors, in accordance with the social and identity-based mission of these media? Furthermore, CFMC community media face significant human and financial resource challenges, challenges exacerbated by the production demands specific to the digital environment [23]. Do these constraints foster increased reliance on content derived from public relations and ready-to-publish materials? While research on local media generally highlights low levels of original production and limited, or even non-existent, engagement with local communities [28], few studies have examined the processes preceding journalistic production. In a context marked by digital transformations, particularly in CFMCs, the study of these processes remains essential, however, for understanding what is offered to journalists, what they retain or discard, and what constitutes an autonomous journalistic initiative.

3 Methodology

To better grasp the complexity of the phenomenon under study, we adopted a mixed-methods approach based on the general principles of grounded theory (GT), an inductive approach emphasizing theory emerging from the data rather than the testing of hypotheses [29, 30, 31]. More specifically, this approach allows for the inclusion of any data likely to shed light on this phenomenon. As Bryant and Charmaz [32] emphasize, the research process relies above all on the researchers' ability to maintain an open theoretical perspective throughout the investigation, allowing the empirical data, whatever they may be, to gradually guide the emergence of analytical categories.

3.1 Fieldwork and Research Context

Founded in 1984, the newspaper *L'Acadie Nouvelle* is now the only French-language daily in New Brunswick, Canada. Its creation followed the closure of *L'Évangéline*, a century-old daily that had previously occupied a central place in the Acadian¹ media landscape and whose disappearance sparked surprise and concern within the community [26, 33]. Initially distributed in the northeastern regions of New Brunswick, *L'Acadie Nouvelle* became a provincial daily in 1989. Although it is owned by shareholders and operates as a private enterprise, the newspaper is nonetheless recognized as a

¹ Historically, *Acadie* refers to the Maritime region (present-day New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) colonized by the French beginning in the 17th century, and by extension, to the Francophone community that emerged from it, marked in particular by the deportation of 1755 (the Great Upheaval). Today, the term refers primarily to the Francophone minority in Canada's Maritime provinces, with New Brunswick serving as its main demographic center [34]. New Brunswick is Canada's only officially bilingual province (since 1969, a status enshrined in the Canadian Constitution in 1982), where approximately one-third of the population identifies as Francophone, concentrated mainly in the northern and eastern parts of the province. Despite this bilingual status, Acadian communities face persistent challenges regarding linguistic vitality, access to French-language services, and media representation, in a context where they remain a minority compared to the province's English-speaking majority.

community media outlet by several funding agencies, which allows it to access public funds. We spent two weeks immersed in the offices of this daily newspaper, located in Caraquet, where a team of about twenty journalists works.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection resulted in a comprehensive corpus covering a 14-day period from Monday, November 3, through Sunday, November 16, 2025, inclusive, during which the newspaper published nine print editions and two digital editions consisting of PDF versions of the print editions. Three days featured exclusively online publications, notably due to the November 11 holiday, during which no print edition was produced. Our daily presence in the newsroom, along with the collaboration of all the newspaper's journalists, content managers, editor-in-chief, and general manager, enabled us to collect all 445 inputs received during the study period, emails, press releases, media advisories, Messenger, phone calls, and in-person interactions, as well as the 149 published outputs, namely the articles.

4 Results and Analyses

While the initial objective of the research was to analyze the proposals submitted by sources to *L'Acadie Nouvelle* and their editorial fate, the analysis nevertheless revealed a key finding that led to a partial redefinition of the research approach, made possible by the methodological flexibility of the GT. We thus observe that, despite a significant volume of submissions, only a fraction of the proposals result in published content, while a substantial portion of the news is based on journalists' own initiatives: between November 3 and 16, 2025, 43% of published articles were based on a proposal from a source (including 30% direct submissions and 13% public information identified through digital monitoring), compared to 45% resulting from the initiative of the journalism team².

4.1 A Highly Institutionalized and Routine Information Supply

Writings on the media in the CFMCs highlight a media environment characterized by close ties among actors and by news-making processes that sometimes unfold in very informal settings [23, 35]. We sought to verify whether this observation was reflected in the nature of the proposals made to journalists as well as in the manner in which these proposals were formulated. Sigal [3] proposes a classic typology of news production channels aimed at analyzing the origin of journalistic content and the degree of initiative journalists exercise in its development. This typology distinguishes three main

² The remaining 12% consist of news articles produced by news agencies. We did not include them in our analysis of the journalist-source relationship, as we did not have access to the production processes specific to these agencies, nor to the interactions that guided the selection and processing of the information.

channels: routine channels, which correspond to institutionalized and predictable information flows integrated into professional routines; informal channels, based on less formalized interpersonal exchanges between journalists and sources; and finally, channels of journalistic initiative, where information emerges primarily from the active work of journalists. We categorized the channels through which information was transmitted based on this conceptualization. This section addresses routine and informal channels. A subsequent section will be devoted to journalist-initiated channels.

Analysis of the corpus reveals a strong predominance of **routine channels** in the flow of inputs to the newsroom. These account for 93% of all inputs analyzed (n = 415), compared with only 7% for **informal channels** (n = 30). This distribution confirms the central role played by institutionalized and predictable information flows in news production routines. While nearly all inputs pass through routine channels, their proportion takes on particular significance when considered in light of the journalists' comments, who describe these flows as "*massive*" but "*often of little use*." The breakdown of these routine inputs by type appears in Table 1, where press releases dominate (78%), well ahead of media advisories (18%).

Table 1. Breakdown of the types of submissions received by L'Acadie Nouvelle through routine channels.

Types of Inputs	Number	Proportion (%)
Press releases	322	78
Media Alerts	74	18
Official Statements	14	3
Advocacy	5	1
Totals	415	100

Our analyses reveal that, among the different types of sources, very few citizens spontaneously proposed topic ideas; as shown in Table 2, only 3% of the proposals came from citizen sources (n = 15). This level of participation contrasts with the role played by other types of sources, including institutional sources, which account for the majority of the information flow, 47% of the inputs (n = 207). Journalists describe these *sources* as "*regular providers*" of information whose messages are anticipated and integrated into daily monitoring routines. Private companies follow with 19% of the inputs (n = 86), community organizations account for 11% (n = 47), and government sources account for 10% (n = 44). The data presented in Table 2 thus suggest that the proposals submitted to L'Acadie Nouvelle come primarily from sources recognized for their mastery of professional communication standards, reflecting a high degree of professionalization. This trend has been documented by several researchers, including Iturregui-Mardaras and colleagues [36], who highlight the dynamism, and even the boom, in communication practices within organizations.

Table 2. Type of sources of contributions received by L'Acadie Nouvelle.

Types of sources	Number	Proportion (%)
Institutional	207	47
Private companies	86	19
Community organizations	47	11
Governmental	44	10
Municipal	32	7
Citizens'	15	3
Politicians	14	3
Totals	445	100

One might have expected, however, a significant presence of citizen proposals and informal interactions, given the historical proximity between the media and public actors within the CFMCs. However, an analysis of the discourse by the *L'Acadie Nouvelle* team suggests instead a shift in the venue for citizen expression toward social media networks, a form of disintermediation already observed elsewhere [37, 38], which makes the media just one actor among many rather than the primary gateway for public expression. These findings thus qualify the established observations regarding CFMC media, revealing instead an information landscape structured by institutional sources and routine channels, a pattern consistent with a well-documented trend in which institutional, governmental, and commercial actors exert influence [15, 39, 40].

4.2 Strict Editorial Filtering

Overall, only 10% of the proposals ($n = 45$) led to publication. Although they account for a small share of the total volume (7%), informal channels have a conversion rate three times higher than that of routine channels (30% versus 9%), suggesting that the editorial value of an input depends less on its institutionalization than on its ability to fit into personalized relational dynamics.

Press releases, which dominate the incoming flow, are rarely used: only 7% were selected, one in fifteen (Table 3), which tempers concerns about *churnalism* [41]. Journalists express mistrust of “pre-packaged” content, which they consider too promotional. Media advisories have a higher selection rate (16%), as they are linked to specific events that are more newsworthy than general press releases.

Table 3. Conversion rate of materials received by L'Acadie Nouvelle through routine channels.

Categories	Received	Selected	Processing Rate (%)
Media Advisory	74	12	16
Official Statements	14	2	14
Press Releases	322	22	7
Advocacy	5	0	0
Totals	415	36	10

Citizen proposals have the highest conversion rate (40%, $n = 15$), followed by municipal sources (31%) and community organizations (21%), reflecting an organic link with CFMC community media [35, 42, 43]. This finding contrasts with previous studies emphasizing the preeminence of institutional or private actors: here, private companies have the lowest rate (1.3%), followed by institutional, political, and government sources (5.7%, 7.7%, and 10.3%). This limited ability of private companies and institutional actors to pass the journalistic filter can be explained by a structural mismatch between the nature of their proposals and the relevance criteria applied by the newsroom. Indeed, an analysis of the reasons for the rejection of the 400 discarded submissions reveals that lack of public interest is the dominant factor (28%), followed by weak local ties (27%), failure to comply with the editorial mandate (18%), overly promotional or partisan content (15%), lack of time³ (10%), and an unclear journalistic angle (4%). Our data thus show that, despite the abundance of available information, journalistic production must contend with a mismatch in story ideas, which are often irrelevant or insufficiently rooted in the local context.

4.3 News Construction Largely Driven by Journalists

An analysis of published articles revealed that the majority do not result from suggestions by sources, but rather from journalists' own initiatives. A systematic coding of each article shows that 45% of the published content falls into this category. By "journalists' initiatives," we mean, following Sigal [3], pieces (investigations, original analyses, in-house articles) that do not stem directly from suggestions by sources, but rather from proactive efforts by journalists. Research confirms that newsrooms with greater resources benefit from more opportunities to create original content and are less receptive to content provided by public relations departments [44, 45]. The case of *L'Acadie Nouvelle* shows, however, that even in a small community media outlet operating in a minority context, journalists retain significant capacity for initiative and actively participate in shaping the news.

Analyses based on our interviews with the journalistic and editorial team show that journalistic initiative draws on a variety of situations identified by journalists in their professional environment. For example, participation in community events plays a central role in generating original ideas consistent with the newspaper's community-focused mission [46, 47]⁴. Our data also reveals a shift in where ideas originate toward digital spaces, with citizens first turning to their own digital circles [48]. "Cafés, these days, [are] social media networks," explains an experienced journalist, echoing research showing that journalists in small newsrooms rely on digital tools to bridge physical distance [49]. Finally, the interviews reveal that this journalistic initiative is also

³ This lack of time can be attributed to the constraints of news coverage: a press release may not be selected when available resources do not allow for the necessary attention to be given to it, without the relevance of the proposal being in question.

⁴ However, field assignments are becoming increasingly rare: remote work, which has increased since the pandemic, has transformed the way media outlets operate, with print media being able to work remotely more easily than television.

part of a deliberate editorial strategy aimed at producing distinctive content. The newspaper's hybrid status, a private media outlet with a community focus, creates a unique tension in the construction of news coverage: readers who pay for their newspaper must receive content they cannot find for free elsewhere, which places value on original angles and exclusive information, a factor that helps explain, at least in part, why 45% of publications fall under the journalistic initiative, even though original reporting requires more time and resources. The journalists interviewed also point to a disconnect between what sources offer, often deemed too promotional or insufficiently rooted in the local context, and the newspaper's editorial needs: journalistic initiative thus emerges as a mechanism for readjustment that allows the newspaper to both meet the public's expectations and maintain coverage grounded in the community's collective concerns.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this research was to better understand the construction of news within *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, a Francophone community daily in a minority context, by jointly examining the proposals made by sources and the journalists' own initiative. It shows that beyond the abundance of institutional and routine inputs, news production within such a media outlet relies on rigorous filtering of these proposals and on sustained investment by journalists in editorial initiative, all within an information environment largely reshaped by digital technology.

Quantitative analyses first revealed a news supply heavily driven by institutional, governmental, and private actors, who feed the newsroom through routine channels, primarily press releases sent via email. However, only a small fraction of these submissions passes the editorial filter: approximately one in ten inputs results in at least one published article. This conversion rate reflects the editorial team's ability to resist simply regurgitating public relations materials and to maintain journalistic control over the definition of content that qualifies as news.

The results show that the voices most frequently selected during this rigorous screening process are not those of private companies or large institutions, but those that more directly embody the community: citizens, municipal actors, and community organizations. Although citizen proposals remain numerically marginal, their high selection rate suggests that they are deemed particularly relevant or meaningful to the readership. Similarly, community organizations emerge as privileged sources of information, both because of their ability to produce content and their commitment to raising the profile of Francophone life in minority communities. These findings partially qualify studies that emphasize the near-exclusive dominance of institutional sources in shaping the news, while highlighting the specific role that community media can play in amplifying local voices.

Analysis of the reasons for non-selection also shed light on the gap between the information offered and the public's perceived needs. The majority of submissions are rejected because they are deemed irrelevant to the readership, too distant from the regions served, or because they do not align with the editorial mandate.

The research also highlights the importance of journalistic initiative and the role of digital media in this process. A substantial portion of the published articles stems from a proactive approach by journalists, whether investigating issues identified in the field, following local debates, or identifying online information produced by institutional and community actors, even if it was not explicitly intended for the media. Our data revealed a desire for editorial differentiation within a niche and competitive media market.

In short, our analyses reveal that, even in a context marked by scarce resources and great fragility, journalists remain, all things considered, highly autonomous and central actors in the construction of the news. They do not merely relay content provided by sources: they can break free from it and produce original content. This capacity for initiative is an essential lever for survival for a media outlet such as *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, which is called upon, and, to a certain extent, compelled, to distinguish itself in a competitive environment, all while remaining faithful to its community mission.

With its 18 employees, this newspaper demonstrates organizational capabilities that exceed the average for community media outlets affiliated with a CFMC, most of which have only one or two journalists [23]. A future research avenue would be to conduct comparative studies in other media outlets of this type to assess whether they enjoy this autonomy even when constraints are even more acute. Further research could also focus more directly on the practices of sources. By examining the communication strategies of actors such as community organizations, municipalities, public institutions, or private companies, it would be possible to understand how they conceive of their relationship with community media and tailor their inputs to their perception of journalistic selection criteria.

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