

Community, credibility, and care: Activist public relations in the Portuguese psychedelic field

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Abstract

This article theorises how activist public relations operates within a Portugal-based node of the contemporary psychedelic movement. Drawing on agonistic and critical public relations, legitimacy is approached as a situated and contested accomplishment through which credibility and epistemic authority are negotiated in practice. Using a qualitative single-case design, the study analyses a comprehensive website corpus ($N = 313$) and four role-central interviews. Findings demonstrate a hybrid choreography that coordinates pre-event digital cues, co-present encounters, and curated post-event afterlives. This choreography is sustained through temporal anchoring (cadence, cycles, annual anchors) and narrative care informed by ethics of care, including privacy safeguards, harm-reduction framing, and a deliberately non-promotional tone. Place-framing and selective partnerships further root claims in Portuguese publics and enable adjacent legitimacy while maintaining clear boundaries against treatment provision. The article contributes by specifying how place-based community infrastructure is sustained through hybrid and temporal repertoires, and by showing how care-oriented curation can widen credible voice while bounding exposure so that testimony functions as public reason rather than spectacle. Practically, the findings suggest designing communication as a sequenced arc from outreach and reminders to convening and documentation, followed by resource-oriented recaps, supported by predictable rhythms and explicit privacy and harm-reduction protocols.

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Introduction

Legitimacy, in activist public relations, is not a property secured by consensus but a contested, situated process of agonistic publics that challenge power, widen who can credibly speak, and redistribute epistemic authority (Holtzhausen, 2002, 2013; Ciszek and Logan, 2018; Davidson, 2016; Zagzebski, 2012). Building on this lens, the article examines how a grassroots initiative in Portugal organises publics across online and in-person settings and curates testimony through care protocols to render claims legible in a contentious field.

The meanings of psychedelic experiences are historically and culturally framed and are currently being renegotiated at the intersection of scientific research, psychological wellbeing, legal experimentation, and popular culture (George et al., 2022; Hartogsohn, 2020). What was once coded as countercultural is now increasingly discussed in relation to therapeutic innovation, consciousness studies, and epistemic pluralism, reflecting broader attempts to contest dominant biomedical paradigms and hierarchical knowledge orders in health and drug policy (Carhart-Harris and Goodwin, 2017; Jay, 2024; Letheby, 2021; Pollan, 2018; Teixeira, 2024; Yaden et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop, the case analysed here - Safe Journey – Psicadélicos em Português, a public-facing node of the translocal #ThankYouPlantMedicine movement - provides a setting to examine hybrid participation as online/offline coordination (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012) and narrative care as the curation of testimony in health-adjacent controversies (Place, 2021).

Guided by the literature, the study asks: (RQ1) how place-making, testimonial practice, and care-centred communication combine to produce relational credibility in a health-adjacent public sphere; and (RQ2) how hybrid (online/offline) practices provide temporal anchoring that sustains participation over time. Using a qualitative single-case design, the analysis integrates a website corpus with role-central interviews. Findings identify a hybrid choreography in which newsletters and web artefacts pace attention, co-present formats convert that attention into strong-tie encounters, and post-event “afterlives” sustain engagement over time, adding procedural clarity to activist public relations accounts of place-based community infrastructure.

Theoretical and contextual foundations

Public relations scholarship situates social-movement communication within agonistic democratic life, where legitimacy is negotiated through productive dissensus and community-centred practice rather than consensus seeking (Ciszek and Logan, 2018; Davidson, 2013, 2016). The present analysis follows that trajectory by foregrounding hybrid participation - the coordination of online and in-person practices that sustain publics over time (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012) - and by reading testimony through

participatory storytelling and care ethics as a mechanism of relational credibility in health-adjacent controversies (Place, 2021). This integrated lens brings together community, co-creation, legitimacy, and social justice as interrelated dimensions rather than separate silos (Adi, 2019; Ciszek, 2015, 2018; Ciszek et al., 2025; Demetriou, 2011, 2022; Smith and Ferguson, 2010; Sommerfeldt, 2012, 2013; Weaver, 2019).

Positioning activist public relations and the study context

Activist public relations is conceptualised here as community-centred strategic communication undertaken as part of grassroots collective action - that is, locally initiated, volunteer-driven mobilisation by affected publics and allies rather than top-down institutional campaigns (Levenshus, 2010; Smith and Ferguson, 2010). Aligned with critical PR scholarship, this perspective treats communication as a situated practice of symbolic and material contestation that interrogates power, advances epistemic justice, and shifts emphasis from reputation management to contentious public action (Coombs and Holladay, 2012a, 2012b; Holtzhausen, 2002, 2013; Demetriou, 2011, 2022; L'Etang et al., 2016; Weaver, 2019; Adi, 2019). In this view, PR is constitutive of activism: it organises attention and participation, redistributes epistemic authority, and enables counter-public meaning-making under conditions of conflict and inequality (Ciszek, 2015, 2018; Ciszek and Logan, 2018; Davidson, 2016; Sommerfeldt, 2012, 2013). However, activism is not inherently emancipatory. It can contest dominant epistemic centres while also reproducing hierarchies, exclusions, or paternalistic solidarities within and across collectives. Acknowledging this ambivalence helps avoid romanticising activism and positions activist public relations as a complex repertoire that can be mobilised toward different ends (L'Etang, 2016; Moloney and McKie, 2016; Weaver, 2019).

Epistemic authority denotes the socially recognized capacity to issue knowledge claims that publics treat as credible and action-guiding in a given domain. Such authority rests on trust, established practices, and civic epistemologies, and is therefore contestable and subject to redistribution in public controversies (Zagzebski, 2012).

Agonistic perspectives emphasise that such work proceeds through dissensus and contestation rather than harmony (Ciszek and Logan, 2018; Davidson, 2013, 2016). Recent work differentiates advocacy and activism across communicative, collective, and combative behaviours, ranging from education and coalition-building to confrontation (McKeever et al., 2023). This spectrum clarifies how community-centred action can advance issues without overt antagonism, while still engaging contests over expertise and epistemic authority (Zoller, 2005). Complementary research further shows that activist organisations act as issue managers, staging problems, mobilising coalitions, and pacing tactics over time to influence agendas (Woods, 2022; cf. Capizzo and Madden, 2022).

This positioning matters for the present study, which is situated within a translocal movement linking de-stigmatisation to justice, reciprocity with Indigenous knowledge, and broader concerns with collective well-being. The #ThankYouPlantMedicine (TYPM) movement emerged in 2019 from community networks around the *World Ayahuasca Conference* organised by ICEERS, coordinating annual “waves” of public testimony and education (ICEERS, 2020). Parallel initiatives - including Indigenous-

informed ethical frameworks and programs in psychedelic justice and reciprocity - further position these publics as social-justice publics concerned with inclusion, repair, and ecological responsibility (Campo and Escudero, 2022; Celidwen et al., 2022; Oglesby and Beaussant, 2025; Chacruna Institute, 2021).

In Portugal, a long-standing public-health approach to drugs has reduced acute harms and normalised harm-reduction services, yet stigma around drug use - particularly psychedelics associated with recreation and spiritual practices - remains ambivalent. European evidence points to low but visible use, mixed public attitudes toward harm reduction, and persistent social distance from drug users in lay perceptions (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2024; Taylor et al., 2022; Shahid and Neufeld, 2024).

Debate becomes more complex where traditional or Indigenous plant practices intersect with European drug control frameworks, creating tensions between cultural recognition and prohibitionist regimes (United Nations, 2007, art. 31; Convention on Biological Diversity, n.d., art. 8(j); UNESCO, 2003). While the International Narcotics Control Board clarifies that plants containing DMT are not internationally scheduled, national regulations remain jurisdiction-specific, contributing to ongoing ambiguity in public discourse (INCB - International Narcotics Control Board, 2010).

Within this setting, the present case study examines Safe Journey – Psychedelics in Portuguese (*Safe Journey – Psicadélicos em Português*¹), the Portuguese node of the translocal #ThankYouPlantMedicine movement. The initiative translates repertoires of testimony, reciprocity, and education into the national context through Portuguese-language resources, hybrid online/offline engagement, and participation in public debate. Positioned outside clinical provision, it targets both public and professional audiences and adopts an explicit evidence-led, harm-reduction-oriented editorial stance.

This positioning aligns with an agonistic view of public communication in which legitimacy is negotiated through reasoned disagreement. In a contested public sphere shaped by institutional authority and media gatekeeping, strategies that synchronise scientific research, online testimony, and in-person convenings are legible as activist public relations responses to a complex informational environment (Capizzo and Madden, 2022; Müller, 2024).

Hybrid participation, situated legitimacy, and narrative care

Hybrid participation (online/offline). Contemporary mobilisation blends collective action (common identities and stories, coordinated roles) with connective action (personalised, digitally mediated participation) (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Platforms decentralise authorship and amplify testimony, yet algorithmic filtering and information disorder can fragment attention and erode trust (Ribeiro and Zelizer, 2025; Sandvig et al., 2016; Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). Following Giddens (1990), digital infrastructures often disembed practices from local contexts via abstract systems, requiring re-embedding through trust-building routines, situated cues and accountable relations - a move several PR scholars explore when analysing community dialogue and structuration (Johnston and Lane, 2019; Valentini et al., 2012). In this study, hybridity refers to online/offline

coordination - how digital “waves” and in-person gatherings mutually re-embed participation in place and time (Rosenbaum and Bouvier, 2020).

Situated legitimacy (place-making). Community-centred approaches to PR foreground relationality, co-presence and place-making, shifting emphasis from institutional messaging to public co-creation (Hallahan, 2004; Johnston and Lane, 2019; Valentini et al., 2012). Classic and PR-specific traditions note that vibrant publics depend on overlapping routines, informal ties and shared meaning, and that PR can reduce alienation by cultivating relational in person bonds (Kruckeberg and Starck, 1988). Recent activist-PR research shows how place-framing and co-presence anchor identities and render claims legible within situated histories (Capizzo and Madden, 2022; Capizzo et al., 2023).

Narrative care and relational credibility (testimony). Testimonial strategies foreground vulnerability and lived experience to counter stigma in health-adjacent controversies (Watts et al., 2024). Here, imagination does practical work: testimonies invite audiences to simulate possible selves and futures, re-interpret suffering and healing, and consider alternative relations of care, expanding credibility beyond narrow expert-centric regimes (Letheby, 2021; Myers, 2025; Place, 2021). In activist PR, these effects depend on curation: peer narratives are presented alongside practice-oriented resources under an ethic of relational responsibility (Christens, 2010; Place, 2021), aligning with community-building traditions that use ritual, memory and embodied presence to resist erasure over time (Capizzo et al., 2023; Sommerfeldt, 2012, 2013). In this study, narrative care is informed by ethics of care perspectives, which foreground relational responsibility, attentiveness to vulnerability, and the ethical conditions under which voice and testimony are made public. Rather than prescribing moral outcomes, ethics of care is mobilised here as an analytic lens to examine how communicative practices bound exposure, manage risk, and sustain credibility in health-adjacent activism (Hou and Johnston, 2024; Kennedy, 2016).

Taken together, these strands of scholarship point to activist public relations as a situated and contested practice rather than a neutral set of tools. Hybrid participation highlights how digital and co-present forms of engagement are coordinated to sustain publics over time, while place-based legitimacy foregrounds the importance of local anchoring, co-presence, and relational infrastructures in making claims intelligible and credible. Narrative care, informed by ethics of care, further complicates this picture by drawing attention to how testimony is curated, bounded, and rendered accountable in health-adjacent controversies. Rather than treating these elements as discrete variables, this study approaches them as interrelated mechanisms through which credibility, participation, and epistemic authority are negotiated in practice. On this basis, the following analytic lens synthesises insights from activist public relations and social-movement scholarship into six sensitising constructs that guide the analysis of the case.

Analytic lens: Six sensitising constructs for this case

Rather than importing a ready-made typology, the analysis of this case study draws on converging strands in activist public relations and social-movement studies to assemble a

case-sensitive lens. The aim is to keep the argument anchored in contested public sphere, hybrid participation, and situated legitimacy while making explicit the constructs that guide reading of the materials. In this sense, the categories below operate as sensitising constructs - concepts with clear provenance that direct attention without predetermining findings.

1 - Place-framing - captures how claims are rooted in situated histories and co-presence, building belonging and intelligibility in specific publics (Capizzo and Madden, 2022; Hallahan, 2004; Kruckeberg and Starck, 1988).

Indicators: references to local histories and Portuguese cultural frames; Portuguese-language choices and vernacular terms; localisation of in person events/venues; partnerships or coverage in local media.

2 - Participatory storytelling - denotes the co-production of humanising narratives under risk and contestation, integrating advocacy releases and testimonial forms together with strategic partnerships that amplify claims, widen publics and support arguments in discursive conflicts (Cabosky, 2014; Capizzo and Madden, 2022; Johnston and Lane, 2019; Smith and Ferguson, 2010; Valentini et al., 2012; Watts et al., 2024).

Indicators: co-signed statements or open letters; co-hosted events/webinars; cross-posted content and shared hashtags; hyperlinks to partner resources; expert endorsements; media pieces naming coalition partners.

3 - Care-centred communication - draws on care ethics to frame attentiveness, responsibility and protection in health-adjacent controversies (Demetrious, 2022; Hou and Johnston, 2024; Kennedy, 2016; Place, 2021).

Indicators: harm-reduction guidance and safety disclaimers; preparation/integration resources; referral pathways; moderation norms that prioritise non-stigmatizing language.

4 - Temporal anchoring - The pacing of participation through recurring touchpoints - event series, newsletter cadence, and annual “waves” - that sustain publics beyond episodic peaks. Building on connective/collective coordination, anchoring is treated here as a temporal repertoire: intentional choices of timing, and cyclicity that stitch online stimuli to in-person gatherings (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Siročić, 2024).

Indicators: alignment with movement-wide dates; event calendars and serial gatherings; newsletter cadence and mailing list growth; recurring campaign “waves”; routinised social posts or content series.

5 - Relational reflexivity - designates the ongoing interrogation of roles, boundaries, and knowledge claims in coalition work: how actors locate themselves vis-à-vis expertise, community, and lived experience, and how they surface and test assumptions to keep deliberation plural and informed (Johnston and Lane, 2019; Valentini et al., 2012). In this case, reflexivity includes inviting disagreement, checking how personal experiences may bias general claims, and cultivating formats that help publics navigate personal and collective existential questions without prescribing pathways.

Indicators: role/boundary statements (e.g., “not clinical provision”); positionality notes; conflict-of-interest declarations; protocols for moderation and community guidelines; reflexive notes in event/article framing; attention to epistemic plurality and responsibility).

6 - Ethical solidarity - designates coalition-building oriented to social justice and protection of vulnerable groups or cultural systems, consistent with agonistic accounts of PR and health activism (Ciszek et al., 2025; Ciszek and Logan, 2018; Davidson, 2016; Zoller, 2005).

Indicators: statements of reciprocity/justice; acknowledgements of Indigenous knowledge; partnerships with community groups/NGOs; calls for donations or mutual-aid actions tied to equity goals.

These constructs are interdependent in practice (e.g., place-framing often accompanies temporal anchoring) yet sufficiently distinct to structure the analysis that follows. The Methodology opens by operationalising this lens through two theory-driven research questions.

Methodology

Research design and case selection

Safe Journey – Psychedelics in Portuguese was purposively selected as the Portuguese node of #ThankYouPlantMedicine, operating at the intersection of health-adjacent controversy, community building, and public communication. Its public mandate (information literacy, stigma reduction, non-clinical) and hybrid repertoire make it suitable for the theory-driven research questions (RQs).

This study employs a qualitative single-case design suitable for “how/why” questions about contemporary phenomena nested in real-life context and inseparable from that context. A case study approach is appropriate where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred, and multiple sources of evidence are combined for analytic overview rather than statistical inference (Yin, 2017).

As articulated in the literature review, the analysis is guided by two research questions:

RQ1: How do place-making, testimonial practice, and care-centred communication combine to produce relational credibility in a contentious, health-adjacent public sphere?

RQ2: How do hybrid (online/offline) practices provide temporal anchoring that sustains community participation over time?

Data sources and corpus delimitation

The corpus comprises all open-access content published on the *Safe Journey – Psychedelics in Portuguese* website from 1 January 2024 to 30 June 2024, including informational pages, features/news items, event listings, resources, testimonials, media mentions, and curated external links, as mapped in the site structure (site map referenced June 2024). The timeframe was selected to capture a coherent and bounded cycle of public-facing communication, enabling systematic comparison across recurring formats within a stable organisational repertoire rather than treating the website as an open-ended archive. The corpus was compiled through a systematic manual

inventory conducted after the close of the sampling window, while the website may have undergone subsequent updates, the analysis is bounded to content dated within the defined timeframe. Inclusion criteria comprised public accessibility (i.e., no login/paywall), relevance to the project's communication aims, and unique URLs. Duplicate items, dead links, and non-project materials were excluded. The unit of analysis was the webpage or post, and the unit of meaning consisted of paragraph-level segments, captions, and navigational labels, adopted to preserve analytically meaningful units in multimodal pages. The final corpus totalled 313 items (14 opinion pieces, 111 articles, 15 interviews, 66 videos, 16 external podcasts, 15 "personalities," 18 training resources, 40 professional-practice items, and 18 testimonials). Several items were presented as organisational copy without individual bylines; these were coded as institutional voice. Analysis was conducted in Portuguese, and relevant excerpts were translated into English by the author for reporting purposes. The website's information architecture and item breakdown are summarised in [Table 1](#).

Semi-structured interviews - Four in-depth interviews were conducted with core volunteers in role-relevant functions (strategy, content design, community facilitation, testimonial curation). Sampling followed a purposive, role-central logic that privileges information power over numeric representativeness. Interviews were held online (Zoom) between September and December 2024, lasted 75–90 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed (Zoom automated transcript subsequently manually revised). Excerpts were translated into English by the author (with adjustments to preserve semantic nuance). Participants were anonymised for analysis and reporting. In case-based activist-communication research, small-N samples are methodologically appropriate when participants hold role-central responsibilities and provide process insight, this approach follows the logic exemplified by [Levenshush \(2010\)](#). An overview of interviewees and role-central functions is provided in [Table 2](#) that reports only role-relevant information and preserves anonymity in line with the ethics protocol.

The website corpus captures the initiative's public-facing artefacts and communicative architecture, while the interviews provide process rationales, boundary-work, and ethical

Table 1. Structure of the safe journey website (June 30, 2024).

General section	Subsections
Explore	Opinion, Articles, SJ Interviews, Videos, Other Podcasts, Personalities, SF Podcast (coming soon)
Events	Psychedelic Salons SF, Living Room Session SF, Gatherings SF, ThankYouPlantMedicine
Resources	Substances (Psilocybin, Ayahuasca, LSD, MDMA, Mescaline, Ketamine), Professionals, Investigation by Portuguese, Organizations, Websites, Podcasts
Professionals	Directory, Training, Professional Practice, Music for Psychedelics (coming soon)
Community	SJ Members, Donations, SF Events, Testimonials, Online Community (coming soon)
About	Mission, Team, The Call, Contact

Table 2. Interviewee overview.

Interviewee	Professional background	Role in SJ	Notes
#1	Strategic comms expert in multinational public/corporate context	Coordinates PR and external relations	15+ years in PR agencies and public sector
#2	Academic and former filmmaker	Co-founder, content design	Master's in Cognitive Science
#3	Artist and event facilitator	Community events, moderation	Focus on relational engagement
#4	Organizational psychologist and PhD candidate	Testimonial curation and outreach	Researches psychedelics professionally

considerations that are not fully legible from public materials alone. Together, these two sources support within-case triangulation and were interpreted through the same analytic lens, albeit with attention to their different evidentiary functions.

Ethics and data protection

This study complies with the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA, 2023) and with EU data-protection law (GDPR) as applicable to social-science research. All participants were adult professionals discussing organisational/public communication practices; no clinical interventions were involved, no vulnerable groups were targeted, and no sensitive personal data or clinical histories were collected, beyond the storytelling elements that are public. Participants received written information about the study and provided informed consent (participation, audio recording, anonymised quotation, academic use). Data were anonymised/pseudonymised at transcription and stored on encrypted drives with access restricted to the researcher. Only de-identified excerpts are used in reporting.

The project followed the research-ethics framework of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa (UCP) and guidance from CETCH-UCP, alongside European Commission ethics guidance for SSH research. In line with these frameworks, a self-assessment classified the study as minimal risk (non-clinical, non-interventional interviews with consenting adults on professional practices); accordingly, no formal ethics committee submission was required for this design. Data processing complied with recommendations of the Portuguese Data Protection Authority (CNPD) for scientific research under the GDPR.

Coding framework, procedures, and trustworthiness

The analysis was guided by six sensitising constructs introduced in Section 2.3: (1) place-framing; (2) participatory storytelling; (3) care-centred communication; (4) temporal anchoring; (5) relational reflexivity; and (6) ethical solidarity, which together informed a shared analytic framework across both data sources.

For the website corpus, the unit of analysis was the webpage or post, and the unit of meaning consisted of paragraph-level segments, captions, headings, navigational labels, and editorial notes. For interviews, the unit of meaning was the thematic segment within each transcript. In both cases, coding followed a deductive thematic content analysis approach (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017), guided by the six sensitising constructs, with overlaps permitted when analytically warranted.

The analytic process unfolded in four stages. First, the website corpus was inventoried and mapped to establish the full sampling frame, and interview transcripts were prepared and reviewed for analytic familiarity. Second, both datasets were segmented into meaningful units appropriate to each source type. Third, segments were coded to the six sensitising constructs using a working codebook with operational indicators, inclusion and exclusion rules, and boundary examples to minimise conceptual drift. For website materials, external links were coded only when accompanied by Safe Journey's editorial framing, and embedded media were coded through on-page descriptors rather than off-site content. Duplicated items were excluded. Fourth, patterns were summarised within and across constructs, with website artefacts and interview accounts compared during synthesis to identify convergences, divergences, and sequencing across the case.

The codebook was refined iteratively during analysis to clarify category boundaries and reduce category inflation, including limited abductive adjustment at the level of operationalisation. This included refining inclusion and exclusion rules and clarifying how indicators were interpreted within each construct. The overall analytic process followed staged qualitative procedures consistent with established guidance (Bingham, 2023). All coding was conducted by the author in Microsoft Excel, supporting segment-level organisation, codebook versioning, and systematic retrieval of excerpts for analysis and writing.

Adequacy was assessed as thematic sufficiency rather than numerical saturation, considering the information power of interviewees, the breadth of the website corpus, and the stability of interpretations after the second analytic cycle (Guest et al., 2013; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Credibility and dependability were supported through prolonged engagement with the full website archive, analytic note-taking accompanying codebook refinement, negative and edge-case checking, and triangulation across public artefacts and insider accounts. Transferability rests on the thick description of context, case boundaries, and analytic constructs provided throughout the article.

AI tools were used only after first-cycle manual coding to assist retrieval, clustering, and English-language revision of already-coded excerpts. They were not used to assign codes, generate data, or determine interpretations. All excerpts were verified against source materials, and all analytic judgments remained the author's (Morgan, 2023; Naeem et al., 2025).

Findings

Rooting claims in Portuguese publics (place-framing)

The findings are organised around the six sensitising constructs introduced in Section 2.3 and integrate evidence from both website materials and interviews. Across the dataset,

these sources converge on co-presence as the primary way to render claims legible within local cultural frames. After pandemic-era online dissemination, the team pivoted to in-person convenings (“psychedelic salons”; “living-room sessions”), with digital outputs sustaining continuity between gatherings (Interviewees #1, #3). As Interviewee #3 put it: ‘Social media is just a tool to get people together in person, but real connections happen when they share a meaningful experience in the same space.’ (...) ‘You need to tune the orchestra of attention. People’s time is valuable, so events must be meaningful for them to want to return and bring others.’ This emphasis on co-presence reinforces how participants frame physical encounters not merely as interactional moments, but as central to building trust and sustaining participation within local publics.

These moves are mirrored by localisation cues (Portuguese-language copy, Lisbon venues, references to national media, translation into Portuguese of international scientific content and reports) and by a partnership footprint with Portuguese actors, which situates the initiative within scientific and civic networks while maintaining a non-clinical concern. Public testimonies also help localise experience: for example, the testimony by Inês (46-year-old, university professor) situates personal change within Portuguese everyday life and community ties, reinforcing that belonging and intelligibility are anchored in national publics.

The website’s interview archive further reinforces local anchoring by foregrounding Portuguese institutional and clinical voices. This includes João Castel-Branco Goulão, associated with SICAD (Serviço de Intervenção nos Comportamentos Aditivos e nas Dependências), Portugal’s national service for addictive behaviours and dependencies. It also includes Pedro Castro Rodrigues, a psychiatrist who helped establish an early ketamine-with-psychotherapy unit within the SNS (National Health Service). Together, these appearances tie the case to national policy and clinical practice without collapsing community education into clinical provision. These institutional anchors also help differentiate the initiative from “alternative/New Age²” connotations historically attached to psychedelics, positioning claims within mainstream Portuguese scientific and civic publics.

Illustrative public anchors - Illustrative public anchors include recurring salons and living-room sessions archived on *Safe Journey - Psychedelics in Portuguese* with Portuguese venues and images. They also include features and segments in mainstream outlets, such as a SIC Notícias long-form report and CNN Portugal items curated by the initiative, which locate the debate within national media publics.

From stories to coalitions (participatory storytelling)

Storytelling is curated and scaffolded, not incidental. Testimonial pieces on the site are paired with explainer articles, safety guidance and cross-links to partner initiatives, widening interpretive communities and strengthening argumentative robustness (Interviewee #4). This editorial scaffolding reframes psychedelics as scientifically credible and socially relevant, explicitly distancing the platform’s narrative from stereotypes while preserving cultural plurality.

Public testimonies explicitly address destigmatisation and audience expansion - e.g., Rui (44-year-old, psychologist) positions himself as a reflective “psychonaut” whose

testimony seeks to demystify entrenched prejudices in Portuguese publics and to articulate how non-ordinary states of consciousness can support personal growth and mental health. He writes that these experiences helped him become “more open, more flexible,” and improve all kind of relations, while insisting they are not a path for everyone - a nuance consistent with the site’s non-promotional stance and safety emphasis, reinforcing the communicative function of personal testimony within an educational frame.

Coalitional signals delineate roles and broaden reach. Partnerships with SPACE Portugal foreground clinical/professional domains, while the case initiative concentrates on user-facing education, clarifying boundaries and borrowing adjacency from expert systems without becoming clinical provision (Interviewees #1, #4). Interviewee 1 reinforced that “Since 2020, there has been a significant increase in media coverage in Portugal regarding the therapeutic use of psychedelics, reflecting the growing interest in assisted therapies with substances like MDMA and psilocybin”. (...) “Our partners like The Portuguese Society for the Clinical Application of Entheogens (SPACE) have been a leading voice in promoting these practices and organizing debates on the legalization and regulation of these therapies in the country”.

Public-facing appearances with recognised mediatic figures (like the comedian Fernando Alvim) and professionally recognized authorities further bridge audiences and normalise debate beyond niche communities, as archived by SJ’s news/videos pages.

Leadership also underwrites the project’s credibility and reach. Safe Journey was founded by Pedro Teixeira (PhD) - a professor and researcher publicly associated with psychedelic science and health behaviour - whose visible educational work (e.g., a book, *Psicadélicos em Português*, [Psychedelics in Portuguese] [Teixeira \(2024\)](#) and regular media appearances position the platform at the intersection of scientific literacy and lived experience. Teixeira’s public narrative explicitly links personal experiences and motivations (making the topic accessible, addressing misinformation) with scholarly framing, reinforcing the site’s informational, non-promotional stance and helping translate specialist debates for broader publics. In practice, this leadership personalises the coalition’s voice without eclipsing community testimony, as seen in the SJ archive (interviews, op-eds, talks) and mission page.

Public communication choices (e.g., evidence-led interviews, mainstream media placements) are consistently used to counter cues of “New Age” branding or pseudo-scientific explanations for subjective experiences and to normalize debate across broader publics.

One notable outcome is Safe Journey’s contribution to normalising mainstream media discussion of psychedelics in Portugal. Since 2020, national press, television, and radio have devoted increasing attention to science, policy, and practice debates - evidenced across multiple outlets ([Bento et al., 2023](#); [Correia, 2024](#); [Frazão and Domingues, 2024](#); [Céu e Silva, 2024](#); [Prova Oral, 2024](#);). While causal attribution is beyond this study’s scope, Safe Journey’s media-facing work and Portuguese-language resources align temporally with this trend and have provided journalists with accessible sources, spokespeople, and story leads (Interview #1).

Care as credibility work (care-centred communication)

Across the public corpus, the register is consistently non-promotional and risk-aware, with harm-reduction guidance, safety disclaimers, and integration resources presented in an informational, “journalistic” tone rather than persuasive appeals. These editorial choices are used to curate sensitive content, align peer testimony with practice-oriented resources, and protect credibility in a health-adjacent controversy, as reflected in the site’s structure (e.g., About [Mission], Resources, Directory, Professional Practice).

Care is also operationalised through privacy and boundary protocols in the testimony’s workflow: contributors are offered anonymity or pseudonymisation where desired and reminded of safety and non-recommendation norms - signals of ethical curation appropriate to a contested domain.

Interview accounts link this ethic of care to personal commitments that motivate participation and shape communicative restraint. As #2 put it, “my personal experience with psychedelic therapy changed my life - what I studied, how I contribute. It took me from cinema into cognitive science and into this activist work,” a trajectory described alongside an emphasis on local community-building rather than broad, impersonal outreach.

In #1’s words, engagement was catalysed by witnessing a close friend’s positive transformation and by the scarcity of reliable national information hence the choice to prioritise evidence, safety and public education over promotion. #2 similarly stresses cultivating local, durable ties over diffuse, short-lived visibility.

Operationally, this care-centred stance appears as: (i) safety/privacy guidance and non-stigmatising language in editorial protocols; (ii) directory curation and practitioner-facing resources to channel users toward reputable help; and (iii) unsigned articles foregrounding information over personalities. Together, these devices enact relational credibility - presenting peer narratives alongside practice resources without collapsing lay experience into expert discourse - while maintaining boundaries consistent with a non-clinical, public-facing mission.

Public testimonies on the site reinforce this ethic by situating lived experience within everyday Portuguese life (e.g., profession and age markers) and by modelling careful self-presentation in a stigmatized context - further supporting the link between narrative care, credibility work, and destigmatization in national publics.

Choreographing time (temporal anchoring in a hybrid ecology)

Participation is paced through predictable cadences that keep publics engaged between peaks: a twice-monthly email rhythm, serial event formats (salons; living-room sessions), and synchrony with movement-wide moments (e.g., ThankYouPlantMedicine Day, 20 February). Interviewees link a recurrent sequence (newsletter exposure; attendance; volunteering) showing how timing converts attention into capacity (Interviewees #2, #3). Periodicity is not fully regular, cycles compress or stretch with volunteer availability, and maintaining continuity with limited resources is described as a core constraint: “One of the biggest challenges is managing in-person community events with minimal resources while ensuring continuity of subscriber engagement” (Interviewee #4). This highlights

how temporal coordination is not only a strategic design choice, but also a practical constraint shaped by resource limitations.

Beyond simple regularity, the initiative assembles a temporal repertoire that combines (i) lead-in windows (announcement + reminders), (ii) event punctuation (co-present encounters), and (iii) afterlives (recaps, recordings for members, follow-up resources). Email functions as the bridge medium: members receive first notice and post-event materials, which extends the lifespan of a single gathering and knits it to the next cycle. Public outputs on the website (e.g., short write-ups, curated links) amplify this afterlife without slipping into promotion, reinforcing the informational register noted elsewhere. This choreography aligns asynchronous digital attention with synchronous co-presence and then back to asynchronous reflection, sustaining commitment across infrastructures.

Temporal design also works at different scales. At the *micro-scale*, weekly posting routines and countdowns build momentum toward a given event; at the *meso-scale*, monthly/bimonthly convenings establish recognizable beats that make participation planable; at the *macro-scale*, annual anchors (e.g., TYPM Day) provide a high-visibility horizon against which local cycles are nested. Together, these temporal layers help the project retain publics (not just reach them), smooth the natural troughs between peaks, and translate diffuse interest into recurring practice.

This organic circulation is reinforced by routine cross-posting of website items and event notices on Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and YouTube, which helps maintain engagement between convenings.

Boundary-work and inclusion (relational reflexivity & ethical solidarity)

Interviewees describe ongoing boundary-work, including maintaining informational tone, avoiding dramatization, and clarifying role boundaries (Interviewee #4). They also reflect on inclusion and access, acknowledging participation constraints while seeking to balance formats and audiences. Public testimony guidelines, such as anonymity options and privacy cautions, materialise this reflexivity in practice.

Ethical solidarity appears where the project names and supports vulnerable publics, recognises Indigenous knowledge, and links to justice-oriented or professional initiatives (e.g., alignment with TYPM; collaborations/adjacencies with SPACE Portugal; involvement - in the Ordem dos Psicólogos [Order of Portuguese Psychologists] report process following SJ's approach). These moves indicate strategic positioning to influence norms and agendas while protecting credibility through careful curation.

Beyond procedures, this boundary-work reflects a broader normative horizon articulated across the site and interviews, where society is understood as interconnected with the natural world and grounded in relational ways of knowing. Public testimonies frequently describe connection, unity, and interdependence, framed not as prescriptions but as experiential grounds for care, reciprocity, and fair exchange that avoids using community knowledge or rituals without consent, attribution, or shared benefits (Interviewees #2, #4; public testimonies archive).

This horizon helps explain editorial restraint (inform, not promote), the recognition of Indigenous knowledge, and the emphasis on protective practices (privacy options, harm-

reduction guidance): credibility is pursued as ethical solidarity in practice, not merely as reputation management.

References to Indigenous knowledge appear intermittently in the organisation's communication, primarily as contextual and ethical markers that situate plant-based practices within broader cultural lineages. While the organisation foregrounds a scientific and evidence-informed approach, these references signal epistemic humility by acknowledging the coexistence of multiple knowledge traditions. Rather than functioning as sources of authority, they operate as boundary-setting devices that delimit epistemic claims, reinforce ethical orientation, and mitigate risks of appropriation or instrumentalisation. In this sense, legitimacy is built through acknowledgement and restraint, aligning with the organisation's broader care-oriented communication strategy.

Across sources, the website mix of institutional interlocutors, journalistic tone, and curated testimonies functions to decouple the cause from stereotypes associated with historic countercultures while retaining cultural and identitarian alternative breadth.

What the integration shows (cross-source synthesis)

Taken together, the materials show how hybrid participation and care-centred curation combine to produce relational credibility in a contentious, health-adjacent field. Hybridity, understood as online/offline coordination, operates as choreography rather than duplication: newsletters and web artefacts prepare and pace attention; co-present formats convert that attention into strong-tie encounters that deepen trust and are then extended through post-event "afterlives" (recordings for members, recaps, resource links). In this cycle, publics are retained rather than merely reached, participation becomes temporally anchored and socially sticky.

Within this choreography, place-framing and narrative care provide the credibility substrate for epistemic authority. Localisation cues, Portuguese venues and national-media adjacency render claims legible in domestic publics, while curated testimonies - identified by age/profession and paired with safety guidance and directories - translate vulnerability into scaffolded public reasons. Leadership gives the coalition a recognisable, informational voice, and partnerships (e.g., SPACE Portugal) supply adjacent authority without collapsing lay experience into expert monologue. The net effect is a redistribution of epistemic authority: who can credibly speak broadens, yet speech remains bounded by harm-reduction, privacy, non-promotion norms and legal constraints.

Cross-cutting tensions clarify what the case is and is not. First, the same mechanisms that grow visibility also risk drift toward promotion; this is countered by unsigned copy, safety disclaimers and anonymisation options, maintaining a non-clinical, public-education remit. Second, capacity constraints (volunteer cadence, uneven cycles) temper scale, but the temporal repertoire mitigates troughs by nesting micro-, meso- and macro-rhythms. Third, activism here advances issues largely through public pressure and discursive challenge - expanding coalitions, contesting dominant frames, and normalising debate - rather than through confrontational tactics, aligning the case with the communicative/collective end of the advocacy-activism spectrum.

In sum, the integration indicates that place, testimony and care jointly produce legitimacy as a situated, relational achievement (RQ1), while temporal anchoring explains how participation is sustained across infrastructures and over time (RQ2). The pattern is not simply “more content equals more reach” but content timed for conversion into co-presence, and co-presence curated for continuity. This is the mechanism by which a translocal movement is rendered locally intelligible and durable in Portuguese publics.

Discussion

What the case explains

This study shows how hybrid participation and narrative care combine to produce relational credibility in a contentious, health-adjacent field (RQ1), while temporal anchoring explains how participation is sustained across infrastructures and over time (RQ2), consistent with agonistic accounts of legitimacy as negotiated in dissensus (Ciszek and Logan, 2018; Davidson, 2016; Holtzhausen, 2013). In practice, newsletters and web artefacts prepare and pace attention, co-present formats convert that attention into strong-tie encounters, and post-event afterlives extend those encounters through curated resources, a choreography that converts connective into collective action across infrastructures (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Siročić, 2024). Credibility is not a property of statements alone but a relational effect of place-framing (Portuguese venues, language, media adjacency), testimonial curation (age/profession identifiers, safety scaffolding), and care-centred protocols (privacy, non-promotion) (Watts et al., 2024).

Implications for theory

Community, place-making, and hybrid legitimacy. First, this study extends scholarship on activist public relations and community-building by specifying how place-making operates through hybrid communicative infrastructures rather than through spatial anchoring alone. While prior research has theorised activist PR as place-making and community infrastructure grounded in locality and co-presence (Capizzo and Madden, 2022; Hallahan, 2004), the findings demonstrate how legitimacy is sustained through an intentional choreography that coordinates digital “waves,” co-present encounters, and curated post-event “afterlives.” This is particularly evident in how digital communication is oriented toward physical co-presence. Rather than substituting place, online channels function as conduits that direct attention toward specific locations, venues, and embodied encounters, reinforcing the role of physical setting in rendering claims legitimate within situated publics. Rather than duplicating content across platforms, these communicative moves convert participation across infrastructures, rendering place a dynamic and ongoing accomplishment. In this sense, place functions as a living communicative resource through which community is continuously enacted, negotiated, and stabilised over time, complicating static understandings of locality in activist public relations (Capizzo et al., 2023).

This dynamic also operates across scales. As a node within a translocal movement, the case illustrates how globally circulating activist repertoires are selectively translated into

nationally situated communicative forms. Shared movement logics - such as synchronised campaign waves or ethics of reciprocity - are rearticulated through Portuguese-language resources, adjacency to domestic media ecosystems, and the involvement of nationally recognised institutional actors. In this sense, place-making is not only spatially grounded but also relationally negotiated across global and local registers, contributing to the durability and intelligibility of activist publics within specific cultural and institutional contexts.

Ethics of care and epistemic authority in activist public relations. Second, the findings contribute to critical public relations theory by articulating ethics of care as a mechanism through which epistemic authority is redistributed in activist communication. Testimonial practices do not operate through exposure alone, but through careful curation that pairs lived experience with harm-reduction guidance, privacy safeguards, and practice-oriented resources. This care-oriented configuration enables vulnerability to function as public reason rather than spectacle, broadening who can credibly speak while simultaneously bounding speech through protective norms (Christens, 2010; Hou and Johnston, 2024; Kennedy, 2016; Place, 2021). By foregrounding care as a communicative condition rather than a purely moral orientation, the case extends existing ethics of care scholarship in public relations and demonstrates how legitimacy in health-adjacent activism is stabilised through attentiveness to vulnerability, restraint, and relational accountability (Demetriou, 2022).

Non-combative repertoires and activist public relations. Rather than positioning the case as an exception to confrontational activism, the findings help specify how non-combative and constructive activist repertoires operate communicatively in health-adjacent fields. Prior research has conceptualised forms of constructive or solution-oriented activism as relying on credibility, negotiation, and relationship-building rather than overt antagonism (Brooks et al., 2018; Ciszek, 2018). This study extends that work by showing how such repertoires are sustained through activist public relations infrastructures, including paced attention, care-oriented testimonial curation, and clear boundary-work between education, advocacy, and clinical authority.

In this sense, the contribution is not that the initiative avoids confrontation, but that it demonstrates how non-combative activism is made durable through communicative design. The case clarifies how participation infrastructures and editorial care enable sustained issue advancement over time by combining care-oriented boundary-work with strategic pressure and agenda-shaping, refining accounts of constructive activism within public relations scholarship.

Implications for practice

The practical implications of this study speak to activist organisations operating in health-adjacent and sensitive issue contexts, where visibility, participation, and care must be carefully balanced over time. Rather than functioning as discrete recommendations, the following points outline interrelated communicative conditions that support sustained engagement, ethical restraint, and credibility across different stages of participation.

First, the findings highlight the importance of designing communication not only for reach, but for conversion across stages of engagement. In the case analysed, communication unfolds as a sequenced arc linking initial outreach (e.g., newsletters and announcements), moments of co-presence (in-person gatherings), and post-event ‘afterlives’ (recaps, recordings, and resource sharing). This sequencing reflects established practices in public relations, where communication is structured across pre-event, live, and post-event phases, but extends them by emphasising how these stages can be deliberately connected to sustain participation over time rather than treated as isolated outputs. This also suggests that digital communication should not be treated as an end in itself, but as a mechanism for directing attention toward situated, often physical, forms of engagement.

Second, the case highlights the role of temporal organisation in supporting collective coordination. Predictable rhythms - such as regular newsletters, recurring gatherings, or annual campaign anchors - enable participants to integrate engagement into everyday routines, a well-established concern in relationship management and content planning within public relations. In this case, however, temporal structuring is not only used to maintain visibility but to actively convert attention into ongoing participation, smoothing periods of low engagement and supporting continuity beyond peak moments of mobilisation.

Third, testimonial communication emerges as effective only when curated under explicit care-oriented protocols. This point is especially relevant in public communication settings where storytelling is often used to humanise issues, build identification, and widen engagement. In the case analysed, practices such as offering anonymity or pseudonymisation, pairing personal accounts with harm-reduction and integration resources, and maintaining an informational rather than promotional tone help prevent vulnerability from becoming spectacle. Crucially, testimonies are not presented as self-sufficient evidence: they are consistently contextualised with scientific sources, acknowledgements of variability, and clear signals that personal accounts do not constitute clinical guidance.

Fourth, the study illustrates how organisations can secure legitimacy through adjacent institutions without drifting into clinical authority. This has broader relevance for public relations practice, where organisations frequently rely on expert endorsement, media visibility, or institutional association to strengthen credibility in contested environments. In the present case, strategic proximity to professional bodies and mainstream media extends legitimacy, while clear boundary-setting maintains the organisation’s positioning within education, community-building, and public deliberation rather than service provision.

Fifth, the findings point to the value of explicitly naming an editorial and ethical stance. In public relations terms, this resembles the role of framing and message consistency in helping publics interpret not only what is said, but how and why it is said. Making commitments to evidence-led communication, harm reduction, and resistance to prohibitionist simplification explicit helps audiences make sense of editorial choices, including the use of risk notices, source prioritisation, and the absence of prescriptive advice.

Finally, the case demonstrates that meaningful evaluation does not require elaborate analytics infrastructures. This is particularly relevant for volunteer-led or resource-constrained organisations, for whom conventional performance metrics may be either inaccessible or poorly aligned with community-oriented goals. In such settings, indicators such as communication cadence, transitions from outreach to attendance or volunteering, and patterns of coalition-building through co-hosting or cross-posting can provide sufficiently grounded feedback to support pacing and strategic adjustment over time.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study adopts a single-case design situated within a specific national and communicative context. Rather than limiting its contribution, this boundedness enables a detailed and context-sensitive analysis of how activist public relations operates in practice. The findings are therefore analytically transferable, offering conceptual insights that may inform the study of similar initiatives across different settings.

Future research could extend this work in several directions. Comparative studies across national nodes of translocal movements may further examine how hybrid communicative choreography varies across regulatory and cultural contexts. Longitudinal designs could track how participation, temporal rhythms, and coalition-building evolve over time. Additional research might also combine qualitative analysis with engagement or network-based indicators to explore conversion across stages of participation and further examine how editorial stances and testimonial curation shape epistemic authority in media and policy debates.

Conclusion

This case study demonstrates how a public-facing, non-clinical initiative can build legitimacy in a contentious, health-adjacent field by choreographing participation across communicative infrastructures and curating testimony under conditions of care. In the *Safe Journey - Psychedelics in Portuguese* case, newsletters and web artefacts pace attention, co-present formats convert that attention into relational encounters, and post-event afterlives extend engagement through resources and recaps. Taken together, these practices frame legitimacy not as a fixed attribute, but as a situated and relational accomplishment shaped through timing, co-presence, and ethical boundary-work.

By offering a close-grained account of hybrid participation, temporal anchoring, and narrative care in activist public relations, the study contributes empirical clarity to ongoing debates about place-making, community infrastructure, and credibility in contemporary activism. It also highlights how care-oriented communicative practices can sustain durable publics in sensitive issue contexts without relying on clinical authority or confrontational repertoires.

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Ethical consideration

Informed consent for academic publication was obtained from all participants and from the organization involved in the study. The research adhered to national ethical standards for non-clinical qualitative inquiry.

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Notes

1. <https://www.safejourney.pt/>.
2. Alternative New Age culture can be defined as a loosely organized movement that integrates spirituality, self-help, and holistic practices, often blending Eastern philosophies with Western ideals of personal growth and environmental consciousness (Hanegraaff, 2018; Heelas, 2008).

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