



Journalism and Mobile Devices

Introduction

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ooted as it is in a complex process of convergence, the media ecosystem is constantly evolving. The four forms of this convergence are proposed by Jenkins (2006): content, technology, organizational models and professional activity. Thus this notion of convergence appears to characterize a media system committed to produce multi-platform content, encourage collaborations between media and take into account audience practices.

In the context of current challenges, media are paying particular attention to mobile devices. This issue thus aims to spark a debate on this topic by addressing questions of journalistic content produced with these tools; the constraints associated with the use of these tools in professional practice; and the impact and use of these platforms, mainly with regard to smartphones and other tablets.

Beyond the forms of distribution and circulation of news on these mobile devices (use and consumption), researchers try to understand how and what happens (content and format) at the heart of these devices. They also bring their attention to bear on the creation of these apps, the rise of these business models and conditions of production. And finally, in light of these various factors, they try to identify possible trends in digital journalism. Currently, in Portugal, Spain and the United States, research focuses primarily on the use and consumption of mobile de-

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vices (eg, the RJI Mobile Media Research Project, 2014). In France, the focus is on social journalistic practice and the conditions of production within media organizations. In Brazilian journalism curricula, digital journalism studies are undertaken in teams and focus on product analysis (through studies of content or case studies), as well as interviews (primarily in depth) to understand the technological capabilities of the devices studied.

This introduction offers us a moment to pause and reflect on this question of journalism aimed at mobile devices by framing the practice within the field of digital journalism, and relying on the use of terms and concepts used in this field, as well as its assumptions and consensual proposals. We will attempt to analyze basic theoretical propositions in the context of the digital journalism for the sole purpose of promoting academic debate. Thus, cautiously and with discretion, we shall present the conclusions we consider the most conducive to better understand journalism, a complex social practice complicated further with the rise of digital media.

USEFUL CONCLUSIONS

Among the articles published in this journal, we consider three conclusions in particular worth emphasizing: 1) loss of control at the level of distribution results in conditions of the emergence and consolidation of new actors like aggregators of information and social media – article by Juan Miguel Aguado and Andreu Castellet; 2) “flat design”: the influence of minimalism on colours and shapes used by different platforms around the world, and a novel tendency taking hold in the field of journalistic mobile apps, as demonstrated in the case of the Canadian platform *La Presse +* – study by Marcos Palácios, Suzana Barbosa, Fernando Firmino and Rodrigo Cunha; and 3) the “radicalization” of Brazilian products for multimedia and interactive tablets, just as hypertextuality and instantaneity diminish in importance – research by Adriana Barsotti and Leonel Aguiar.

From observation of the principle aspects of the mobile-content ecosystem, and based on a study by Primo (2011), Aguado and Castellet conclude that the loss of control of distribution provides conditions favourable to the emergence and consolidation of new actors in the market, such as aggregators and social networks. Aggregators, which operate using algorithms, draw news from other journalistic products, compile it and make it available on a single page (Torres, 2013). Depending on the program created, we check that aggregators meet two of the three journalistic skills widely cited and studied: selection

and hierarchization – the third being elaboration (Lage, 1993: 21). The machine therefore also performs an editing function. If, for example, the algorithm selects information based on “most viewed” or “most popular” criteria (as is often the case), either from the original site or from content aggregators (as does Flipboard), it means, ultimately, that the public dictates the rules. Nair Silva concludes that *“with respect to content, we observe that despite the fact that the mediator still exists, the user plays a fundamental role within this context of convergence, because, indeed, he or she has the ability to not only surf the network, but also share the content.”*

The integration of the public in the practice of journalism is not new, however. Indeed, we know that the consumer has an influence on programmed content. Studies have not revisited the time-honoured hypothesis known as “agenda-setting,” whose premise takes aim at the impact on recipients according to “agenda” (what we think), and the priority given the issues in the “agenda” (McCombs, Shaw, 1972). Planning therefore became a more complex phenomenon relative to the appearance of consumers. This issue was clearly addressed by Burns (2005) with the concept of the “gatewatcher” replacing the “gatekeeper.” Observers of the “exit doors” of journalistic products are involved today in planning, and feed back their own impact in blogs, forums and other social networks. At the same time, the concept of gatekeeper and its various derivatives, as suggested by White in 1950 (1999), has long been supplanted, as, in fact, it is known that publishing criteria are neither as arbitrary nor as subjective as the author argued. Selection is, de facto, an activity that exists in all production processes (theory of “news-making”), as much at the programming level as that of publishing, and the distribution on different platforms. The influence of the user can therefore be detected as early as topic-selection, the initial phase of the publishing process. Moreover, write Barsotti and Aguiar, the criteria used for deciding what is news in programming and production remain unchanged (as stated by Thaís Jorge in 2007). The reason is simple: values are related to the culture of a society (Seixas, Francisco, 2014). Media content manifests thus in a specific cultural context, but also constitutes a source apart from this culture, allowing it to be a catalyst or an impediment in the case of cultural change (Shoemaker, Reese, 1996: 57). As indicated by Barsotti and Aguiar, Brazilian journalistic products created for tablets follow the criterion of “availability” – level of event access, coverage possibilities – as is the case for any other journalistic product.

Social networks are another actor in the “*information industry mobile ecosystem*,” as reaffirmed by Aguado and Castellet in this issue. Here, the

concepts of the social actor and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1983; 1999) can help us understand to what extent we can consider a social network or the user an actor. Some users are recognized as members of a group, sometimes with economic, cultural and/or social capital. As explained by Recuero, who compares the authors of reference on this subject, social capital can be seen from the “*symbolic mediation of the interaction and integration of the actor in social structures*” (Recuero 2009: 49). The author argues that it is important to study the connections between the actors, and the content of those connections, through their interactions and conversations. Are the connections influenced by the ubiquity of mobile devices? In other words, from the time mobile devices began offering instantaneous notification, did the user have differentiated relations with other actors of social networks (here we highlight Facebook, the most popular social network according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report and Pesquisa Brasileira de Mídia)? The role and influence of a social actor on the behaviour of other actors concerning the access to news is well known. We also know that we opt increasingly for reading information from social networks to the extent that we trust our friends’ selections (Canavilhas, 2010). This behaviour is studied by way of concepts such as interaction, social ties and social capital. Recuero (2009) collaborates with a number of authors in order to understand these categories: Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson; Cooley; Primo; Wasserman and Faust; Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman; Breiger; Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellmann; Putnam; Bourdieu; Coleman; and DeFilippis. For example, Recuero cites most notably Breiger to reflect on what he calls the “*associative tie*,” the sense of belonging to an institution, as within the context of journalistic organizations. In his article devoted to journalistic texts published on the Twitter accounts of *The Guardian* and *El País* newspapers, Moragas (2012) observed that no dialogue existed with the social network’s user. In contrast to what we might think, interaction is minimal, and sometimes understandable. In Brazil, the situation is even worse insofar as the large corporations that own the “quality” papers still use the feed. If it does not always interest newspapers to interact with the public through social networks, what type of input do consumers have into the conditions of production of journalistic organizations? To reflect on this question, we understand that it is necessary to apply already well established concepts, but also to ask ourselves about consensual proposals in the field of digital journalism.

The increase in sales of mobile devices, which logically implies an increase in the demand for digital products, justifies the discourses related to a kind of “revolution” at the heart of journalism, whether in

terms of content, conditions of production, or the specific characteristics of the digital journalism. Statistics leave no doubt that both the sales of mobile devices and the consumption of information through them has increased every day, whether in Brazil, Europe or the United States (Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2013). One person in three in countries like Denmark, the United Kingdom and the United States use mobile devices to access news (Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2013). In this context, the rise of the fourth screen – after film, TV and computer – represents a business opportunity for journalistic organizations (Aguado, 2009). The growing access to broadband networks (3G, 4G), and increased sales of mobile screens have opened an alternative distribution channel for news. The articles published in this journal consider this phenomenon a mobile device inspired “revolution” in waiting that has not yet taken place because of communication corporations’ lack of know-how with respect to the potential of these devices (Braga); because of a lack of interest on the part of these organizations, who balk at the idea of investing in innovative products (Palacios, Barbosa and Cunha Firmino); and by the fact that journalists are by nature reluctant to make changes in the practice and culture of their profession (Silva). On the other hand, a device, as a platform associated with technology (Seixas, 2009), is not always the main factor of influence. In Brazil, the conception of products for the iPad grants more weight to the cultural customs associated with the device than to the question of the medium (Seixas, Guedes, Tourinho, 2014). In addition, the design certainly needs to take into account the attributes of the mobile device, within the framework of journalistic work.

In this context, we believe that one of the main conclusions of the article by Palacios, Barbosa and Cunha Firmino affirms that *La Presse +*, among journalistic apps, is the only one which can be considered truly innovative for tablets (the authors base their work on the Gartner Hype Cycle), because of the resources it offers and because it follows the “flat design” trend. With regards to the descriptive work of available resources and its interface, the authors observe that the layout is original with its coloured frames, simple lines and a horizontal navigation to the right, unlike the majority of apps which use a vertical navigation like *Globo a Mais*. This would be a superior level of innovation towards consolidation thanks to its content offering and the use of multi-mediality (theme examined by Barsotti and Aguiar). This conclusion is founded on the potential of the app in the context of mobile devices, such as its tactility. It goes without saying that the screens of the tablet or smartphone retain their peculiarities. In the case of the tablet, for example, we come close

to the size of a classic book. Thus, for reasons of comfort, this mobile device is most often used for reading articles (Reuters 2013 Digital News Report and the Barsotti and Aguiar article), a phenomenon Canavilhas (2013) brands the “*Platform Model*.” However, if we ask questions such as: What is our choice of colours? Why use this type of font for a title? Why does the internal text in the *La Presse +* app have no subtitle, and in general, is arranged in a single column? Why opt for horizontal navigation? What does this mean from the point of view of the device and in terms of journalistic product? Should there not be a reason directly related to journalism?

The fact that the content present in apps such as *La Presse +* are posted late in the day are based on people’s daily habits and on journalistic organizations’ production routines. Barsotti and Aguiar bring our attention to the question of the concept of periodicity (here understood as an immaterial idea, Groth, 2013) of Brazilian products born on the tablet, hence from the digital universe, and for which, inversely, time is asynchronous: “*Although Estadão Noite and O Globo a Mais are digital products, both are subject to periods of being offline in order for adjustments to be made to offer a complete pack to readers*” (Barsotti and Aguiar). These evening editions should adhere to the “*Supplement Model*” (Canavilhas, 2013) which aims to elaborate on topics covered in the morning editions of traditional print newspapers. Or, in the case of these Brazilian publications, we observe that this does not prove to be the case and that the link with the morning edition is very weak (Canavilhas, Satuf, 2013). An offline period is necessary for any product with a release time, even if it is more or less flexible. It is therefore possible to understand that interference with journalistic expertise exists, just like all consumer habits of our society involving the use of new media.

Barsotti and Aguiar provide interesting conclusions with regard to tablets and Brazilian products derived from this platform. In principle, the tablet is an instigator of “*changes in production routines, business models and journalistic language,*” although the most convincing explanation is limited to productive routines. Indeed, it is not clearly demonstrated how this platform could influence language or business models. At the same time, these products have “*radicalized*” both multimediality and interactivity while simultaneously “*attenuating*” hypertextuality and instantaneity. Multimediality would be based on a range of content, mostly in *O Globo a Mais*, activated by the interactive user’s touch. Instantaneity appears only in the last-minute news products sections. Consequently, hypertextuality will stop existing as these products are purchased and closed as they are downloaded. Would it not be possible to

connect hypertext with the multimediality, however? In the *O Globo a Mais* newspaper app, the small tabs accessible with a single touch, whether in the news section or reports, do they not represent only one aspect of multimediality? Since these tabs lead to layer-by-layer content, should they not present verbal and nonverbal information that would allow a multilinear reading (Landown, 1996: 15-16)? In this case, the user does not click, but simply touches. Thus, if touching or swiping a finger activates other content, should we not talk about hypertextuality?

CHARACTERISTICS OF MEDIA AND/OR JOURNALISM?

In addition, are hypertextuality, along with multimediality, interactivity and instantaneity, to name a few, attributes of digital journalism or digital media? To talk about journalism, should there not be a common denominator that would indicate journalistic expertise, independent of the media for which the product is intended? We will therefore attempt to exercise a comparison of the properties of journalism suggested by Groth (2011, but written in the 20’s and 30’s of the last century), such as periodicity, timeliness, “*publicity*” (the act of making public) and universality (the rendering in media of life knowledge; a concept associated with the public interest).

We have discussed the property of periodicity. The influence of consumer habits in choosing the time of publication, at the expense of device attributes, has been clearly demonstrated. Periodicity is therefore a concept; an editorial policy. Another form of interference is found at the level of events (Groth, 2011: 165), in the type of coverage these require in terms of format, and in the passage of time – sometimes even instantaneous – required. Instantaneity had already made its appearance with radio and television. It is also a technological feature. Websites in the digital world which specialize in news, for example, can utilize instantaneity more frequently than analog media. What we call instantaneity in digital journalism, Groth called simultaneity, the “*highest level of current events*” (2011: 227). The latter is a temporal characteristic, the period between the occurrence of the event and the publication (2011: 225). Perhaps continuous updating (Palacios, 2003) can be considered a feature of digital journalism, as only in this case can we follow changes continuously, at any time. It is important to note that in this first article in which Palacios conceived the idea of continuous updating, the author calls this feature of webjournalism along with the other five “*potentials that are used on a large or small scale, and in different form, in journalistic sites on the web* (Palacios, 2003: 17).” Mobile devices are platforms

within which continuous updating can be used on a large scale. The portability and the physical proximity of the devices and their owners transform these devices into a type “pocket radio” of the twentieth century, with the advantage of being permanently connected to the internet and allow the owner to be constantly connected to the world. In the same way that text messages and other forms of message exchanges (such as the apps WhatsApp and Telegram) are based on a “always on” model for the young generations, the use of these devices in the distribution of low complexity content, such as last-minute news, could be a way to explore continuous updating and attract the younger demographic to news consumption. In this sense, the experiment directed by Zanei Barcelos and students of journalism from the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná (PUC-PR) in Curitiba which produced “Second Screen” news, illustrates the possibility of a rereading and a reconstruction in real time the content of a newscast made possible through social-technical networks and mobile devices – which could constitute a viable strategy for attracting new readers. Does there exist a product considered by society to be journalistic that is not about current events? And, at the same time, platforms conceived for tablets work with the news, but not in the form of continuous updating, since the majority of products are closed and do not accept the option.

Journalism is a socio-discursive practice that depends on the interaction of at least three factors: sources, practices and the public (Ruellan, Adghirni, 2009). There are clear changes at work in the practice, but we must be careful when it comes to defining what is structural, insofar as it is a complex process made even more complicated with ICT. Many changes have taken place with this convergence, certainly, particularly with multi-platform products, production processes, content and professional skills (Jenkins, 2006, Deuze, 2004). Are these changes decisive in the field of journalistic expertise, however? Pereira and Adghirni argue it is still too early to confirm these changes and suggest some methods to follow: “1) *proliferation of products, content and professional profiles: new forms of journalism [...] have placed themselves alongside the practices and media historically consolidated under the journalistic label; 2) the redefinition of the status of journalists and corporate communications: because of the credibility of these actors, the crisis of the business model of corporate communications and by the redefining of relations with the public; and 3) integration of news-writing and practices with new technologies. In other words, investment in the process of convergence between different dimensions of journalistic activity, including production routines and multimedia products, is aimed at an increasingly*

demanding and interactive public” (Pereira, Adghirni 2011). As emphasized by Palacios, Barbosa, Firmino and Cunha in their article citing McLuhan, new technological means effect those used previously, from practice to consumption, such that a medium tends to adapt upon the introduction of a new element in its ecosystem.

The concerns of professionals regarding these new technologies, such as cultural adversity or salary insecurity due to the introduction of these practices, has been extensively studied worldwide. In addition, we also know that digital journalism products have brought into question the identity of the journalist, without necessarily implying fundamental changes to it. The shared identity; modular (always in motion), desired (discourse of objectivity, impartiality, the public interest) and paradoxical (Ruellan, 1993; Pelissier, 2002), exists and is increasing in the world of digital media. The field of journalism has its unique specificities. It remains unstable and heterogeneous, and these aspects have recently been exacerbated. The autonomy of the journalist remains relative (Bourdieu, 1997). The values of the so-called journalistic culture remain intact. The study of organizational barriers is old (Breed, 1999), dating from the 50’s, when sociologists in the United States conducted participatory research in the newsrooms of the press, radio and television, giving birth as a result to the theory of newsmaking (Golding; Elliott, Gans, Park, Tuchman). The production process has undergone modifications, but also suffers from the pressure of external forces, as in the past. Barsotti and Aguiar show here that in the Brazilian newsrooms of *Estadão Noite* and *O Globo a Mais* the digital operation strategies rooted in the information website did not introduce new production processes for mobile versions of automatically fed journalistic sites.

CONSENSUAL PROPOSALS

Would it not be productive to ask about the new technologies capable of changing social practice, language or journalistic discourse? In this sense, one proposal appears to be consensual in the field of digital journalism: new technological innovations mean newness both in the narrative and the language of journalism. This assertion is reinforced in the articles published in this journal in which the words “new” and “innovation” are keywords. We frequently analyze whether a product innovates; and if it does, how, both in terms of the format and in terms of language associated with the device in question. We find that technological innovation has an impact on “*production routines, forms of narration, business models, format/design of product and*

content,” as explain Palacios, Barbosa, Firmino and Cunha. Innovation in journalism is therefore considered a phenomenon with repercussions on different aspects of know-how, but also on the products and their use. Thus, for each new device, a new language takes shape. And in a field of study marked by technological intensity, where the links are extremely close between all of the technological platforms of this media ecosystem, newness is of course a coveted element. Aguiar and Barsotti thus conclude that Brazilian journalistic products for tablets favour “*the intensification of sensations by means of a pedagogy of gestures*.” For their part, Aguado and Castellet believe that news aggregators such as Flipboard characterize the “new” language. For our part, we believe that the selection and ordering of information, developed by an algorithm would be a novelty in one of the phases of the production process, but the “new” and so recently recognized language does not convince us. Thus, it is necessary to ask whether the new elements of narration, as brought about by touch for example, indicate another form of journalism or a change in the structural order? What would these changes be? The modifications to the operation, formats, and graphic design are readily observable, but do they represent changes from the journalistic point of view? And what do consumers think of these changes?

In the world of digital journalism, the idea that the search for trends would be intrinsic has become common, especially for those which promise to be lasting. We try to really understand the path to which we are committed. In the field, it is said that the future of journalism lies in mobile platforms. The reasons, in addition to the consumption of devices and related information, are focused on assumptions mentioned in the articles: 1) present and continuous use of smartphones; 2) establishment of convergence (content, technologies, business models and professional activity, Jenkins, 2006); 3) appearance of new social actors such as aggregators and social networks (Aguado, Castellet, 2014 revisit Primo, 2011); 4) characteristics of these mobile devices like ubiquity; and 5) the increase and/or loss of speed of certain properties of digital journalism (as highlighted by Aguiar and Barsotti). The so-called app economy is growing exponentially. According to Vision Mobile, the market grossed \$53 billion in 2012, and is expected to earn \$146 billion in 2016. It is certain these numbers are enticing and motivating in a quest for new trends.

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