

EDITORIAL

# BRAZILIAN JOURNALISM RESEARCH: COURAGEOUS ADVENTURE IN SEARCH OF AN IDENTITY

Copyright © 2007  
Associação Brasileira  
de Pesquisadores em  
Jornalismo / **SBPjor**

LUIZ GONZAGA MOTTA  
*Universidade de Brasília, Brazil*

The theories of the news began to emerge in Brazil only in the last two or three decades as a result of the proliferation of postgraduate programs in communication which have concentrated all the research in this area. Despite the profusion of projects, journalism research is still very incipient as a specific scientific field. The identity of this field is not defined and much is lacking for the theories and paradigms to be consolidated. In the universities and support agencies, journalism is considered an applied social science and its mention refers more to the teaching of the professional practices than to a scientific reflection.

In this emerging academic scenario, launching a scientific magazine devoted to a limited, recent field in the academic world such as journalism seemed an audacity and an even more courageous adventure when the publication is entirely edited in English, a language which is little cultivated in the Brazilian academic world.

For this reason, the decision by a small group of researchers initially gathered around the Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo (Brazilian Association of Journalism Researchers – SBPjor) to create the **Brazilian Journalism Research (BJR)** in the first semester of 2004 was interpreted by many as an idea which was out of place. The pessimistic forecasts declared that there already were sufficient magazines, that journalism did not represent an autonomous field within the communication sciences and that a magazine in English would not have any resonance in the Brazilian academic community.

I refute this pessimism and demonstrate the wisdom of the launching of the magazine for the consolidation of the journalism discipline in Brazil. BJR was consolidated among researchers and became a

reference. It now occupies an outstanding place on the national (and even international) scene in the construction of journalistic knowledge and in the definition of the journalism field as a mature, autonomous academic discipline.

These affirmations are based on the professional and academic reality of journalism in Brazil. The professional activities present indicators different from the pessimistic forecasts, as I have already demonstrated in previous editorials. The professional field is heated up, regardless of what may happen with printed newspapers, whose demise some foresee shortly. In the academic field journalism also reveals a surprising vitality, even exaggerated with relation to reality. In view of the field's vitality, it is not surprising that a magazine entirely devoted to journalism research has emerged in the Brazilian university environment.

### **The search for a characteristic identity**

For the group of researchers that founded the SBPJor in 2003 and created **Brazilian Journalism Research** in 2004, there was an excessive emphasis in communication research on schematic theoretical models, influenced by other more consolidated scientific areas such as semiotics, linguistics and sociology. But their conceptual models were not always adapted to the knowledge of the profession and to the study of the relations of journalism with society.

These spurious models have little capability for explaining the profession's reality and the role of journalism in contemporary life. Consequently, journalism research moved away from the professional field and placed researchers on one side and journalists on the other, distant and mistrustful. This situation worried the researchers. The main objective of the society and of the magazine was to create a characteristic forum and stimulate research on a theory of the news which discussed the impasses of the profession and the identity of journalism in a period of accelerated mutations.

### **Launching and functioning of the magazine**

The first step in 2004 was to develop the graphic project for which a recognized designer was responsible. It was also at this time that the directors of the SBPJor approved the editorial project and invited a series of Brazilian and foreign researchers of recognized academic prestige to participate in the Editorial Board. The board is made up of 35 researchers

who hold doctorates, with 16 Brazilians and 19 foreigners. This board judges and issues opinions on the papers spontaneously submitted utilizing criteria of quality, originality, innovation and contribution by the work presented to research in the area. Therefore the magazine was born with a graphic framework and a characteristic editorial identity.

The first issue was published in the first semester of 2005. From then on the magazine came out regularly and in the first semester of 2007 it also appeared in an electronic version on the Internet, with free access. After three years of existence, the magazine today has a regular semiannual periodicity, a dynamic editorial management befitting an international academic magazine and a directed circulation. The circulation is 700 copies, distributed free of charge to the 300 members of the SBPJo and sent to the main university libraries in Brazil and in the world through an exchange system.

In summary, in only three years the BJR has consolidated its identity, has become a meeting point for the community, has maintained a regular periodicity, has continued with the evaluation by peers of the articles spontaneously sent in for publication and has become available on the Internet. The BJR has already made an original contribution to the advance of the scientific discipline of journalism (as we will discuss below), although it should continually correct its editorial and academic courses in the future. BJR is consolidating all the requirements to become shortly a magazine for international reference achieving all the levels of graphic and editorial quality required by the agencies.

### **The scientific merits of BJR**

To make the editorial proposal operational, the magazine maintains three autonomous sections (besides the editorial): a section entitled *Dossier* in which articles are grouped which present states of the art in some specific areas (studies on the theory of the news, on electronic journalism, political journalism, media watchers, etc.), which reveal the major trends and perspectives of the research; another section of articles with varied contents sent spontaneously (submitted to peer judgment); finally, a section of book reviews in which Brazilian or foreign books of interest to the community of researchers are reviewed.

In the six editions printed from 2005 to 2007, besides the editorials, comments and reviews, 64 articles were printed. These editorials, comments, reviews and articles were written by 92 different authors,

of which 76 were Brazilians and 16 foreigners. The foreigners' collaboration grew in a marked way in the two volumes published in 2007, indicating that the magazine is gradually becoming a Brazilian magazine with an international profile. The total number of articles published in three years is relatively small for making a consistent balance sheet, but permits a rapid thematic visualization of the articles published.

**Table 1: Themes of the articles published from 2005 to 2007 in the BJR\***

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Frequency/ Percentage</b>
Theory of the news (state of the art, trends, paradigms, challenges and courses of research)	15 (23.5%)
News and the cognitive processes, the construction of images, identities and social representations	8 (12.5%)
Freedom of the press, freedom to produce and receive information	8 (12.5%)
Ethics and social responsibility of the press, journalism and society, right to information	7 (11.0%)
Political journalism, pluralism, diversity of sources and of political representation	6 (9.5%)
Journalistic coverage, techniques for verifying the news, relation with the sources	6 (9.5%)
Digital electronic journalism, cyber journalism, online journalism, information technologies	5 (8.0%)
Crime and news, violence, police coverage, press and public security	2 (3.1%)
Mediation of information by communication institutions, new informative institutions	3 (4.7%)
Journalistic photography, photographic coverage	1 (1.5%)
Criticism of the media, media watchers	1 (1.5%)
Reception, attention, response and comprehension of the reader, listener, internet user or television viewer	1 (1.5%)
Discourse, language and narratives of journalism.	1 (1.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>64 (100%)</b>
* The thematic categories are not mutually exclusive. In theory, the articles could be classified in more than one category.	

Confirming the editorial policy adopted, Table 1 reveals that the predominant theme of the articles published in this initial phase of the magazine was the theory of the news, the trends and challenges of journalism research. On one hand, the magazine served as an agglutinating element of the balance sheets which needed (and still need) to be made of the various sub-areas. On the other hand, especially in the edition of the second semester of 2007, this space in the magazine served for a discussion with respect to the directions of the cross-national studies of journalism with the participation of influential leaders of journalism research.

It is not surprising that the second theme has been journalism and the construction of reality. This results from an influence of the constructivist currents in the area's research during the last two decades in Brazil and in the world. The theme of press freedom comes together with it, not only due to its current nature but also because this theme was the subject of a special edition discussed below. The following three themes are more or less interrelated with the ethical exercising of journalism, with social responsibility, with pluralism of sources and of actors represented and with relations with sources. This reveals the seduction of ethical and social themes for the researchers. The following theme, as it could not be otherwise, reveals a growing orientation of journalism research toward the new technologies and digital journalism.

In the "Dossier" section the magazine has published articles, syntheses and analyses on the start of the art of research in various sub-areas of journalism. Already in the first volume, this section contained articles which summarized production charts of different areas of journalism research in Brazil (postgraduate programs, research groups registered with the National Research Council (CNPq) and papers presented in national congresses of the category)

Starting with the third edition, the magazine began to also publish articles which presented similar balance sheets in other countries, encouraging dialogues and cooperation. In the second semester of 2007 (Volume 3, No. 3), the magazine contained some articles presented at the Brazil Conference promoted previously by the SBPJor. These articles showed the increase of a consciousness regarding globalization in the studies and a growth of criticism with respect to the research itself. More important, they pointed out feasible alternatives for an international collaboration among journalism researchers by means of comparative research and cross-national

projects or of the construction of universal abstract models which could be applied in several countries, for example.

A considerable original contribution to journalism studies and to a theory of news in Brazil and in the world has appeared in the articles published in the first three years. I cannot mention all of them and I am running the risk of committing injustice. I will cite some at random. For example, a group of researchers from the University of Brasília (D. Moura, L. Martins, C. Santana and Z. Adghirni) made innovating contributions to the comprehension of journalistic information, increasingly more strategically mediated by communication institutions. C. Franciscato presented five interesting descriptive categories utilized by journalism to identify time as a social phenomenon. R. Cristofolletti and S. H. Damas made an original profile of media watchers in Latin America. And so forth. V. Darde and M. Benetti showed how the Brazilian newspapers of national reference failed to present pluralist sources in AIDS coverage. M. Porto corroborated this political deficiency on revealing that despite the balanced coverage of the presidential elections in Brazil, the press did not include sources and diversified perspectives in the news about an important item in times of elections such as the economy. Something similar occurred in the coverage of science and technology by Latin American newspapers, where less than 10% presented controversial views, according to the article by L. Massarani and B. Buys.

The magazine also published a significant number of articles of the cross-national type. This reveals the receptiveness of Brazilian researchers to articles containing comparisons with other countries, contributing to a more internationalized profile of the magazine. For example, Heloiza Herscovitz compared the self-perception of ethical values among Brazilian, French and American journalists. Bárbara Kristensen and Joan Evans Pin revealed the coverage of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of Brazil by Portuguese newspapers. Kati Caetano demonstrated the role of journalistic photographs in the formation of a stereotype of Islamic women. Jaques Wainberg studied the reception and the comprehension of international news among readers of Porto Alegre. Vanessa Higgins showed how the ideology of journalists and three newspapers of the United States imposed American political standards on the coverage of news about Brazil. And the above-mentioned study by Massarani and Buys compared the coverage of science and technology in 12 Latin American newspapers of reference.

Finally, a few brief words with respect to the special volume on press freedom published in the edition of the first semester of

2007 (Volume 3, No. 2), in partnership with the UNESCO office in Brazil. The special volume contained 16 articles by researchers, four foreigners and the rest Brazilian. Eight of these researchers were invited to write because of their well-known knowledge. The other eight articles were selected from the more than 20 papers sent in spontaneously by the authors. It is my understanding that this volume alone is worth the first three years of the magazine's existence. It is impossible to summarize it. The discussion with respect to press freedom varied from the ideological questioning of the term itself to the discussion about the social responsibility and social control of the media. The main message of this volume's articles, in my opinion, is that press freedom is a condition *sine qua non* for democracies, but it needs to be permanently discussed by society so that it could be continually updated.

### Final comments

More comprehensive balance sheets with respect to **Brazilian Journalism Research** will be made in the future. The first three years were experimental. Many things could be corrected. But in its first three years of existence, BJR fulfilled its role of opening frontiers. It acquired credentials as a magazine with effective management, original contribution and an international editorial standard. It could not alone give complete answers to the questions formulated at the beginning of this editorial regarding who we journalism researchers are. But it has produced significant material on the theories of the news and contributed important reflections with respect to our activity. Simultaneously, it helped to insert Brazilian research into the global academic community.

The area documents of the development agencies in Brazil have recommended in recent years the need for pertinence of research works to the discipline to which they belong. While maintaining the encouragement of transdisciplinary works, the documents have recommended more pertinence and concentration.

In my opinion, journalism research is gradually becoming a discipline with its own identity, with a well-defined field and subject. After three years as editor of BJR, looking retroactively at the progress of the magazine, I am tempted to affirm that despite the many operational and editorial problems, the magazine is victorious: it has taken its place as a meeting point and center of confluence of journalism research. It

is helping journalism studies to win recognition as a strong discipline, identified with the profession, pertinent, localized. It is fulfilling its role.

This issue is the last one that I am editing. For this reason I want to express my gratitude to some people. In the first place, to all the directors of the SBPJor, mainly to President Elias Machado and to the editorial director, Dione Moura, for the freedom which they granted me to make decisions. In the second place, to those who believed in the undertaking and who came along the path with me until now. To Nanche las Casas, Fábio Pereira, Rafael Barbosa, Célia Ladeira, Orlando Brito, André Dusek, Jack Liebof, Heloiza Herscovitz and Sonia Virgínia Moreira, my thanks. Without them, it would have been impossible to reach this point. To all, thank you very much!

**Luiz Gonzaga Motta**

*BJR* Executive Editor