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ARTICLE

BRAND JOURNALISM IN BRAZIL:
mapping and analyzing practices

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ABSTRACT – This article presents the results of mapping and analysing brand journalism practices in the Brazilian context. For this purpose, brand journalism is understood as a practice that uses journalistic tools, techniques and often principles and formats to gain recognition from clients and strengthen the relationship between brand and society. The methodology employed was qualitative-descriptive, involving: mapping the country's media organisations that produce content by/for brands, applying questionnaires to representatives of each of the mapped media organisations and conducting semi-structured interviews with some of the managers of the newspapers. It was found that 55% of the newspaper companies analysed have a branded content team, revealing itself as a new strategy to meet the demands of brands for visibility and newspaper companies for revenue. The studios or hubs generally operate independently of the newsrooms, but hybrid and complementary practices were also found.
Key words: Brand journalism. Journalism. Journalistic practices. Business models.

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JORNALISMO DE MARCA NO BRASIL:
mapeamento e análise das práticas

RESUMO – Este artigo apresenta os resultados de mapeamento e análise das práticas de jornalismo de marca no contexto brasileiro. Para tanto, jornalismo de marca é entendido como uma prática que utiliza ferramentas, técnicas e, muitas vezes, princípios e formatos do jornalismo para conquistar reconhecimento dos clientes e fortalecer o relacionamento entre marca e sociedade. A metodologia empregada foi qualitativa-descritiva, envolvendo: mapeamento de veículos de comunicação do país que produzem conteúdo de/para marcas, aplicação de questionários com representantes de cada veículo mapeado e realização de entrevistas semi-estruturadas com alguns gestores de jornais. Verificou-se que 55% das empresas jornalísticas brasileiras analisadas conta com uma equipe de branded content, revelando-se como uma nova estratégia para atender a demandas das marcas, por visibilidade, e das empresas jornalísticas, por receitas. Os estúdios ou hubs em geral operam de modo independente das redações, porém, também foram encontradas práticas híbridas e complementares.
Palavras-chave: Jornalismo de marca. Jornalismo. Práticas jornalísticas. Modelos de negócios.

PERIODISMO DE MARCA EN BRASIL:
cartografía y análisis de las prácticas

RESUMEN – Este artículo presenta los resultados del mapeo y análisis de las prácticas del periodismo de marca en el contexto brasileño. Para ello, se entiende por periodismo de marca una práctica que utiliza herramientas, técnicas y, a menudo, principios y formatos periodísticos para obtener el reconocimiento de los clientes y fortalecer la relación entre marca y sociedad. La metodología empleada fue cualitativo-descriptiva e incluyó: mapeo de los medios de comunicación del país que producen contenidos por/para marcas, aplicación de cuestionarios a representantes de cada medio mapeado y realización de entrevistas semi-estructuradas a algunos gestores de periódicos. Se constató que el 55% de las empresas periodísticas analizadas cuentan con un equipo de branded content, lo que se revela como una nueva estrategia para satisfacer las demandas de visibilidad de las marcas y de ingresos de las empresas periodísticas. Por lo general, los estudios o hubs funcionan independientemente de las redacciones, pero también se encontraron prácticas híbridas y complementarias.
Palabras clave: Periodismo de marca. Periodismo. Prácticas periodísticas. Modelos de negocio.

1 Introduction

For over a decade now, news editors in Brazil have been restructuring their newsrooms and creating teams to produce content that is funded by brands or other sources, blending advertising with publishing. This type of advertising (which resembles editorial content) was in use before digitalization, but nowadays continuously more companies and organizations are producing branded content and publishing it in traditional news media (Hardy, 2021). This includes practices and strategies such as paid content, sponsored

content, native advertising, programmatic native advertising, brand journalism, content recommendation, and clickbait. For Hardy (2021), these activities are changing journalism and resulting in critical debates about their effects on the objectives of journalism and how it is performed, in addition to raising questions about the control and influence of marketing professionals in news communication spaces.

In January 2014, The New York Times launched its first native advertising campaign. Two months later, The Wall Street Journal introduced native ads, followed by The Tribune Company and The Washington Post in the United States (Manic, 2015 as cited in Wang & Li, 2017). In Spain, major news publishers began to launch branded content units between 2014 and 2016. Guardian Labs was launched in the UK by The Guardian in 2014 (Hardy, 2021). In 2016, The Independent (also from the United Kingdom) integrated its commercial and editorial sectors, which up until that time operated in studios and labs (content centers). First, it started employing editors and writers for both editorial and commercial tasks; then, it announced to the public that it would cease its print edition (Davies, 2016). In Brazil, according to Bueno (2020), the Folha de S.Paulo newspaper was a pioneer in offering branded content with the launch of its Estúdio Folha in October 2015. At the time, Folha de S.Paulo mentioned The Guardian newspaper as an example of this kind of service.

A few years earlier, in 2010, Forbes, the economics and finance magazine, began operating AdVoice, its branded content production initiative (Hardy, 2021). Known as the pioneer of native advertising, former Forbes executive, Lewis D'Vorkin, offered brands the possibility of purchasing and writing sponsored blogs "disguised as editorials" on his news site (Serazio, 2020, p. 5). This migration of print journalism and advertising to digital spaces has allowed advertising formats to converge even more. Even though D'Vorkin acknowledged that brand journalism and traditional journalism are not the same, he did say that they would be closer than previously thought (D'Vorkin, 2014).

There was a change in revenue flows that occurred slightly over ten years ago as a result of low sales of print editions and a decline in traditional advertising (Carlson & Locke, 2022); however, news companies saw a new type of revenue emerge in the aftermath: native digital content. An increase in digital advertising, the excess and low effectiveness of banners and pop-ups, and the need to increase revenue, in addition to the successful experiences of complete digital

native websites such as Buzzfeed and others, are highlighted by the aforementioned authors as some of the reasons for the rise of studios and hubs in traditional news media, especially over the last decade (Arrese & Pérez-Latre, 2017; Hardy, 2021).

Brands that have their content distributed by news media outlets gain more credibility, influence, and engagement, especially in digital environments. They gain it through "content that is clearly differentiated from advertising, public relations or marketing content" (Arrese & Pérez-Latre, 2017, p. 123).

As such, in a highly competitive scenario in which news companies face the harsh reality of having to reduce traditional advertising investments against the backdrop of emerging new content that competes for reader attention, brand journalism has become an important way to generate financial resources (Arrese & Pérez-Latre, 2017; Carvajal & Barinagarrementeria, 2021). Content creation by brands is accelerating, expanding beyond internal teams and press releases to encompass branded studios collaborating with news outlets to produce journalistic content. Spinelli and Corrêa (2017) add that managers are increasingly seeking new market opportunities to drive both incremental and massive innovations.

Branded content which is produced through journalism is one of the features of native advertising and uses leads, sources, titles, and visual codes that are intrinsic to the profession to appropriate news formats. In his analysis of branded content produced by Brazilian journalism, Matos (2018) points to a news "agenda" that was sponsored by a construction company (its name was withheld and not published) as a part of its marketing strategy behind the building of a condominium in the city of Salvador, Bahia (on the northeastern coast of Brazil). Over a period of about four months, the Correio24horas newspaper published an average of two articles per week about the project up until the launch of the sponsoring company's venture. This relationship, however, was never mentioned in any of the articles we analyzed.

Given the topic's significance and prior considerations, this article presents findings from a recent master's thesis (Rubim, 2023) on brand journalism in major Brazilian news outlets. Brand journalism is understood here as a process that uses tools, techniques, principles, and formats of journalism to gain customer recognition and strengthen the relationship between the brand and society from an institutionalized and market perspective. We used a qualitative-

descriptive methodology which included a survey of media outlets in Brazil that produce some form of brand journalism, based on data from media outlets that were examined by the Communication Verification Institute (IVC) in 2022. We also applied questionnaires and conducted semi-structured interviews with professionals from these media outlets.

According to the survey, more than half (55%) of the 38 mapped news companies that produce branded content in the country have a team dedicated exclusively to branded content. Labs, studios, and hubs for brand journalism are all ways to meet the demands of brands and media companies. These are spaces that operate independently and not only boost companies' revenues but also provide a contemporary approach to the creation and distribution of advertising content. In terms of organizational practices, the survey helped us identify three ways in which news companies are producing and disseminating branded content: 'independent', 'hybrid', and 'complementary'. While these practices are distinct, they all search for financial sustainability and collaboration between editorial and commercial teams.

2 Brand journalism: reflections on the concept

Studies by Arrese and Pérez-Latre (2017), Bueno (2020), Bull, (2013), Araújo (2019), Carvajal and Barinagarrementeria (2021), Figueiredo (2015), Hardy (2017), Lehto and Moisala (2014) and Light (2014) all make mention of "brand journalism", "branded content", "brand storytelling" and "sponsored journalism". Although the terminology and concepts show some variation depending on the researcher's perspective, the practices are quite similar.

Brand journalism refers to the concept created in 2004 by Larry Light, former head of marketing at McDonald's, who proposed actions that became known as brand storytelling, or ways of creating stories for brands (Light, 2014, p. 121). In 2013, Andy Bull published the first manual on how brands can use journalism techniques to communicate directly with their audiences. According to Figueiredo (2015), brand journalism is the result of a merging between journalism and marketing which has experienced significant growth in recent years as companies understand the benefits of promoting their images and brands. The storytelling strategy is highly effective

for communicating with customers. Many companies are using this strategy to create and share authentic news content. Their goal is to gain the public's trust. According to Figueiredo, corporate blogs emerged as the most common form of brand journalism, with some companies even replacing traditional press editions with online news published on their sites.

Jonathan Hardy (2017, 2021) listed three different types of branded content: 1) owned media, a term used for brands that produce their own content for their channels and social networks; 2) 'native' distribution of paid content, such as advertisements integrated into webpages and content recommendations; and 3) material that is hosted by or made by publishers, a practice in which the brand pays for the content without, however, exercising total editorial control (Hardy, 2017).

According to Araújo (2019), as a textual genre and discursive practice, journalism produced by and for brands has a few different names, which include advertorial, native advertising, sponsored content, and branded content. The last-mentioned activity is widely used by large companies to humanize speeches and win over audiences/clients, whether the text is produced by the brand itself or by the newspaper's editorial team.

It is important to highlight that, in this study, we understand branded content as journalistic work (news, reports, articles, etc.) that newspaper teams carry out for brands. In his study on branded news, Serazio (2021, p. 1) acknowledges that although it originated to some degree from common newspaper and magazine advertisements, brand journalism includes journalistic techniques found both in native advertising (i.e., branded content co-created by traditional publishers and incorporated into news formats) and in content marketing practices (i.e., branded content produced by corporations for their news platforms).

These studies show that branded content produced in journalistic format is not a new phenomenon. The focus of this study, however, lies in examining what the news outlets create for advertisers. Although there are similarities, this is a distinct phenomenon that piques our interest.

Changes to the editorial teams and the commercial departments of media outlets have led to the emergence of hybrid genres, as pointed out by Bueno (2020). He explains that news reports, features, articles, and columns preserve the journalistic form, but in

terms of content, they are permeated by statements with commercial or advertising purposes. According to Bueno, this illustrates an intent to strengthen brand image to the detriment of the journalistic principles of accuracy, veracity, and quality of information. Bueno criticizes brand journalism practices that do not openly reveal the company behind the content and that often present the story as a news story produced by the newsroom.

Table 1 below lists some of the definitions for brand journalism used by Brazilian and foreign authors. This list is not limited to concepts or practices; it encompasses a variety of perspectives and information that helped in our mapping and analysis for this research.

Table 1

Concept of Brand Journalism

AUTHOR/YEAR	DEFINITION
Bull (2013)	Brand journalism is a hybrid form of traditional journalism, marketing, and public relations.
Light (2014)	Brand journalism was defined as a multi-dimensional, multi-faceted way of creating a brand story.
Lehto e Moisala (2014)	In this study term "brand journalism" is used as a general concept covering the many facets of storytelling-based marketing content.
Lee (2015)	A broad set of practices and conventions that draw both from public relations and journalism
Figueiredo (2015)	Brand journalism, image journalism, or corporate journalism is the result of the merging between journalism and marketing that has become increasingly popular in recent years as companies recognize the benefits of promoting their own images or brands.
Arrese e Pérez-Latre (2017)	Brand journalism can be considered as a series of content marketing activities produced by brands and corporations that share some characteristics: content with value, newsworthiness, and interest for them and their audiences; distributed by their own media; and using journalistic work processes, tools, principles, and formats.
Serazio (2019)	News-oriented content marketing and native advertising strategies that have flowered in the past decade.
Bueno (2020)	Brand journalism aims to tell stories, and produce stories that value a specific brand, using journalistic techniques and the credibility of the media.
Rubim (2023)	Brand journalism is a practice that uses tools, techniques, and often principles and formats of journalism to gain customer recognition and strengthen the relationship between brand and society from a more institutionalized and market-based perspective.

Taking Bueno's (2018) valuable observation on the necessary

distinction between branded content and content marketing into account, this article adopts Rubim's (2023) definition of brand journalism. Additionally, we acknowledge that news outlets often produce news format content to promote companies and organizations. This practice is known as brand journalism and aligns with the institutional positioning of newspaper managers on the subject.

Serazio (2019, p. 6) points to the similar production routines in classic newsrooms and brand journalism newsrooms. After analyzing the daily activities of brand journalism professionals from media outlets such as The New York Times, The Guardian, and BuzzFeed, Serazio (2019) observed how they make use of "mini-newsrooms", where daily editorial meetings are held and teams discuss topics for interviews, filming, writing, editing, and layout. Serazio compiled his conclusions in a diagram (figure 1) to visualize the convergent relationship between the principles of brand journalism and the traditional fundamentals of journalism.

Figure 1

Relationships between brand journalism and the fundamentals of journalism

Source: Adapted from Serazio (2019)

According to Serazio (2019), brand journalism practices are a convergence of the foundations of traditional journalism (writing and reporting techniques), the economic-political factors of the media industries, and the introduction of new technologies (digitalization, convergence, SEO strategies). We also identified these factors when conducting our mapping for this paper by analyzing products and analyzing the responses to our questionnaires and interviews. This analysis showed how Brazilian media companies tend to create exclusive spaces for producing news content aimed at commercial practices.

3 Brand journalism practices in Brazil: mapping and analysis

The mapping and analysis of brand journalism practices in Brazil is a qualitative-descriptive study (Gil, 2002; Bauer & Gaskell, 2017) and was conducted in four stages (De Souza Minayo et al., 2011). We first used a database of media outlets examined by the Circulation Verification Institute (IVC) in order to select a representative sample of newspapers. We then sent questionnaires to professionals in the commercial and editorial sectors of these newspapers, asking them about their brand journalism practices. The next stage involved analyzing the responses to the questionnaires and adopting a quantitative-qualitative approach to categorizing the information. This phase helped us to identify patterns, trends, and nuances in the newsroom practices. The last stage involved conducting semi-structured interviews with team managers who produce news content for brands. The interviews were held online (videoconference) and took place between March and June 2023. Each interview lasted an average of 25 minutes. We interviewed professionals from six Brazilian news outlets including editors, communications managers, and account executives.

This study prioritized Brazilian media outlets examined by the IVC in 2022, a total of 42 newspapers. Only media outlets with weekly or daily editions were included in our study, bringing our initial sample to 40 media outlets. We first discovered that, although brand journalism is present in all regions of the country, it is more frequently used by news companies in the Southeast region, which is consistent with the fact that around 80% of the Brazilian media is concentrated in the Southeast and South

regions. Figure 2 presents the news companies and their respective presence in Brazilian cities. The more intense circles on the map represent a greater agglomeration of companies by geographic space, while the lighter circles represent a lower concentration of companies in the regions.

Figure 2

Distribution of news companies mapped in the study

Distribuição das 40 empresas de mídia mapeadas
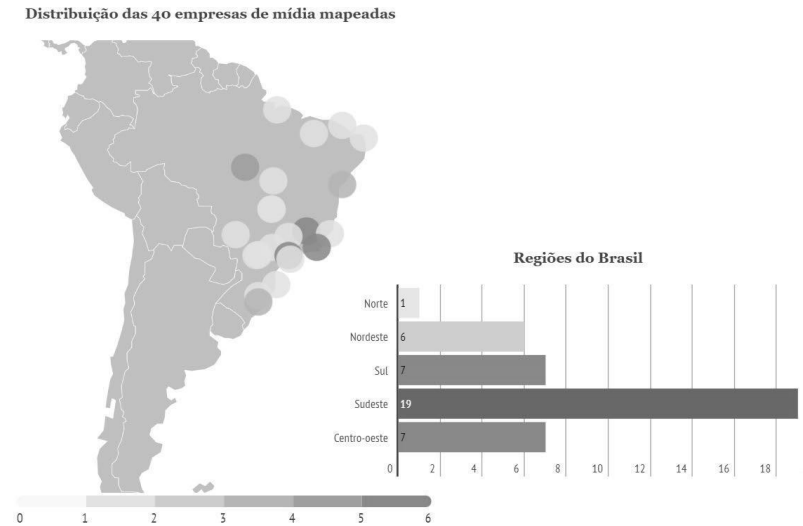
After conducting a preliminary investigation of the websites in our sample to verify whether they feature news content related to brands, we proceeded to distribute online forms to the institutional e-mail addresses of all the media outlets included in the sample. From August to December 2022, a questionnaire was administered to collect data regarding the production of brand journalism, the establishment of dedicated teams for branded content (including the dates of hub/studio creation, if applicable), and information about team members (including their number and areas of specialization). Additionally, we sought to determine if the businesses could sustain themselves through the revenue generated from this activity. All participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous.

By the conclusion of this stage, we found that 38 of the 42 Brazilian news outlets examined by the IVC in 2022 produced some

type of news content for/about brands, which represents 90% of the media outlets in our survey. In the questionnaire, 21 companies stated that they had specific centers for creating branded content, while another 12 media outlets (with no specific teams) said that they had editorial professionals or freelancers (journalists and editors) producing this type of content. A smaller portion (five) of media outlets stated that they received the finished material directly from the contracting companies. We were not able to identify the number of professionals involved in brand journalism in these cases. Although the questionnaire did not address operational routines, subsequent interviews allowed for a better understanding of the processes and the involvement of professionals in producing this kind of material.

We confirmed that news professionals in studios or labs with communications degrees made up 12 of the teams; the other nine comprised advertising or marketing specialists. There were also specialists in image, data, technology, layout, statistics, and others working on the teams. The majority (43%) of companies with their own hub for producing branded content have teams made up of five to ten people (figure 3).

Figure 3

*Size of brand journalism teams in newsrooms*
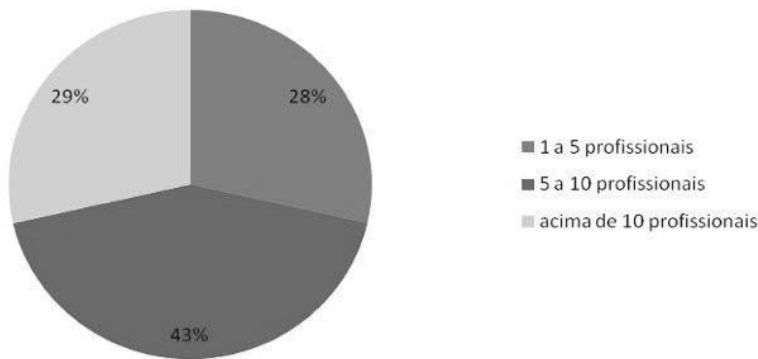
This data shows that, in Brazil, most of the personalized branded content is produced by journalists, with a good portion of the teams being made up of advertising professionals. Although product

analysis was not the focus of our research, the choice between the two groups of professionals may reflect the different strategies adopted by companies about their approach to communicating with the public. The presence of journalists can lend greater credibility and authenticity to the content, while advertising specialists tend to produce attractive messages and boost public engagement with the brand.

In Brazil, most news media companies commonly refer to their centers that produce "customized branded content" as labs or studios. According to Carlson and Locke (2022), it is observed that well-known media companies with loyal audiences tend to have studios instead of generic advertising spaces. This trend follows international business models, and between 2014 and 2015, Brazil experienced a surge in the establishment of brand journalism studios (figure 4). Brazilian labs often use phrases like customized content, high-performance content, and connecting audiences in their slogans to describe the type of stories they create. Additionally, they emphasize the accuracy and quality of the newspapers that host them on their respective pages. Our research identified a total of 12 content creation centers for brands, serving 21 information companies. These centers commonly identify themselves as lab, studio, branded content, sponsored content, or special projects.

Figure 4

The years that brand journalism centers were created in Brazil
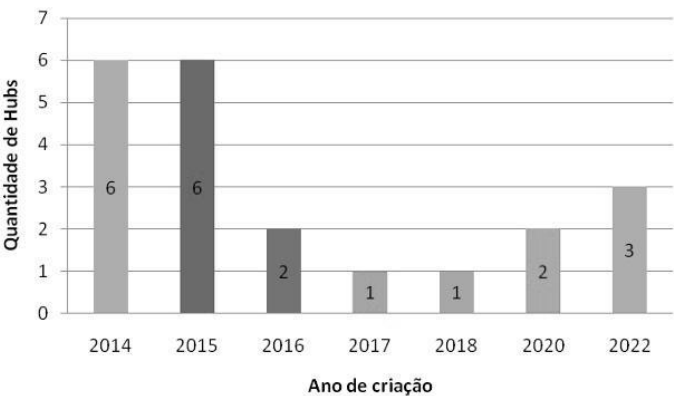
We found that large Brazilian media conglomerates (such as O Globo, Folha de S.Paulo, and Estadão) tend to have exclusive teams for producing branded content which is then broadcast on one, several, or all of the group's news channels, depending on the strategy and package purchased by the brand. For example, Grupo Globo's studio (GLab) produces content for more than 20 Globo titles, such as the newspapers Valor Econômico, O Globo, Extra, Expresso da Informação, as well as Editora Globo magazines and other digital products.

Using Media Kits (created by the commercial sectors), the contracting brand chooses the branded content for the segment or editorial and does so according to its area of activity or market interest. Prices vary between editorials, position on the page, target audience, presence or absence of banners, as well as whether texts and/or photos will be produced by the studio team or not. A premium digital package, for example, costs around R$ 460.000 in 2022 for a newspaper in the Southeast region. This included a headline (with one or more banners on a website), native media, a Facebook post, additional engagement media, and an extra post on Instagram or LinkedIn. The content produced by the branded content team of this same newspaper cost R$ 6.800.

To gain an in-depth understanding of the questionnaire data, we interviewed professionals from six Brazilian news outlets in four regions (North, Northeast, Southeast, and Midwest). These professionals work as news directors, marketing and account managers, or lab coordinators, and also include managers of at least one type of brand journalism practice identified in this study. The purpose of our interviews was to further our understanding of the experiences and practices in the centers, their routines and responsibilities, and the impact brand journalism has on contemporary times and ethical issues.

We found that the respondents felt that the product the teams produced is not necessarily journalism, but rather content that meets a growing demand from brands for new ways of communicating with audiences/customers. Two of the interviewees stated that the implementation of centers and teams filled this role and followed a movement that was already being tested by other media outlets. However, they reinforced the need to distinguish the role and importance of journalism for democracy and society.

> Branded content in this sense is not journalism. We recognize that journalism is in the public interest. A free press is essential for maintaining democracy. The main concern is that it continues to work for the free circulation of ideas and information to the population. During the pandemic, it was the free press in Brazil that informed society, reversing the logic that information is obtained through social media. The press will be free if it can be economically free, and one of the ways to do this is to generate revenue outside of subscriptions and traditional advertising. Branded content has been shown as an alternative for generating revenue (Interviewee A, personal communication, 2023).

Brands leveraging media credibility highlight journalism's enduring business importance. Branded content teams capitalize on the trust earned by journalism, using its reputation to increase effectiveness in a commercial context. This influences both news creation and brand promotion. However, while hubs have the potential to boost media company revenues, they can also compromise the editorial independence of media outlets. The interviewees attributed the greater demand for brands to the tradition of the media outlets to which the studios are linked. The situation is similar for institutions that work only with digital material, as demonstrated through the following statements: "companies know our history", "they trust our newspaper" and "our DNA is to tell stories and our principle is to inform the readers".

We did determine that, although the individuals responsible for branded content do use the word "credibility" and seek legitimacy by associating it with journalism, they also seek to distance themselves from the very concept of journalism as an independent institution. This duality can be seen as a strategy to take advantage of the positive reputation and trust that traditional journalism has with the public while trying to avoid any type of restrictive link with the ethical standards and editorial autonomy of journalism. This approach allows for greater flexibility in producing branded content, but it can also raise questions about the integrity and independence of the information provided.

Speaking to the production routine, we found that studios tend to adopt structures that are similar to newsrooms, having editorial meetings, interview and investigation teams, and professionals who write stories, not to mention photographers and an editor or proofreader –although they may not necessarily share the same physical space. One example of this can be seen with GLab, which split its operations between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in 2023. This

hub had a fixed team that provided a detailed briefing of the material and used specific skills for content production. Professionals were called upon according to the demand, and new professionals were hired temporarily to work on the project. Similarly, Estúdio Correio, from Grupo Correio in Salvador (BA), operated remotely but also had specific functions within the professional structure, including general editor, coordination, and direction.

Another relevant aspect identified in our research was the cooperation between journalists and advertisers. The combination of the credibility granted to journalists (which comes from their experience in investigating) and the experience of advertisers who tell stories where the narratives are not limited to selling a brand was something the interviewees alluded to:

> Most clients seek us out for our experience and also for the credibility that the company and the group convey on its channels. All material, whether texts are sent by the client or not, is screened by the journalists to assess how it will be presented. The journalists verify and correct it. One example comes from the autonomy that the newspaper has; if the client does not agree with the adjustments or possible changes, the material is not published in order to preserve the newspaper's image (Interviewee B, personal communication, 2023).

Another aspect concerns how brands make use of the media's audience to increase identification and engagement. According to the interviewees, the goal here is to establish a more natural and less intrusive connection with the audience, avoiding potential awkwardness when faced with brand journalism. One of the interviewees said that publishing content for sponsoring companies without identifying them is a way to integrate branded content more organically into the media outlet's environment. This provides for a more fluid user experience, increasing the effectiveness of promotional campaigns by reaching a more segmented and receptive audience.

The positive impact on revenue was mentioned as a guideline for the permanence and expansion of producing content by/for brands. When we asked the interviewees about this new source of revenue and how it impacts the sustainability of organizations, they said that brand journalism has had a positive effect on the media industry they work in. They went on to say that sponsored content represents a considerable portion of revenue. "Branded content has proven to be an alternative revenue source for more traditional media outlets." (Interviewee A, personal communication, 2023)

3.1 Independent, hybrid and complementary

Our research also helped us identify three different organizational practices of brand journalism in Brazil. As illustrated in figure 5, 55% of the mapped media outlets adopt an 'independent' model, with specific teams set up to produce branded content. A further 32% of the media outlets adopt a 'hybrid' model, merging editorial and commercial teams and having newsroom journalists produce material, while the remaining 13% adopt a 'complementary' model, focusing on managing content that is mostly provided by contracting companies.

Figure 5 *Organizational practices of Brazilian brand journalism*

Modelos Organizacionais do Jornalismo de Marca

The 'independent' model involves specific teams being set up to produce branded content in hubs/labs and studios. This model is more common among large companies and media conglomerates. Each team comprises journalists, editors, photographers, designers, and sometimes technologists and freelancers, depending on the project's needs.

Among the 21 Brazilian news outlets that adopt independent models, 14 make use of labs or studios from the media conglomerate which they belong to. These 14 news outlets are: Expresso da Informação, Extra, O Globo, and Valor Econômico (GLab); Daqui and O Popular (Branded Content – Infomercial); Diário Gaúcho, Pioneiro and Zero Hora (RBS Brand Studio); Aqui DF; and Correio Braziliense (Branded Content – Special Projects); and the outlets Aqui (Consolidated), Aqui MG and Estado de Minas (Sponsored Content).

Each Lab has a permanent team of approximately ten people, some have an even larger number of professionals. GLab, for example, has fifteen permanent professionals divided between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo and also hires freelancers to carry out specific work.

The other seven media outlets in the Independent group organize their specific internal hubs in the following manner: Tribuna Newspaper (Branded Content), with around five professionals; the media outlets Notícias do Dia (Branded Studio ND), Jornal Correio* (Correio Studio*), O Povo (O POVO Lab) and Jornal da Cidade (Branded Content) have teams of between five and ten members; while Folha de S.Paulo (Folha Studio) and O Estado de S. Paulo (Blue Studio) both have more than ten people on their teams.

Table 2

Brand Journalism Centers of independent media outlets

Outlets	Department's Name
Aqui (Consolidado)	Conteúdo Patrocinado
Aqui DF	Conteúdo de Marca (Projetos Especiais)
Aqui MG	Conteúdo Patrocinado
Correio Braziliense	Conteúdo de Marca (Projetos Especiais)
Correio*	Estúdio Correio*
Daqui	Branded Content (Infomercial)
Diário Gaúcho	RBS Brand Studio
Estado de Minas	Conteúdo Patrocinado
Expresso da Informação	G.Lab
Extra	G.Lab
Folha de S. Paulo	Estúdio Folha
Jornal da Cidade	Conteúdo de Marca
Notícias do Dia (Florianópolis)	Branded Studio ND
O Estado de S. Paulo	Blue Studio
O Globo	G.Lab
O Popular	Branded Content (Infomercial)
O Povo	O POVO Lab
Pioneiro	RBS Brand Studio
Tribuna	Branded Contents
Valor Econômico	G.Lab
Zero Hora	RBS Brand Studio

Twelve branded content production departments from the media outlets that adopt the 'independent' model contain the words estúdio, studio, lab, branded content, or sponsored content in their names. It is also important to highlight that ten of the 21 newspapers that use studios or hubs are some of the largest circulation newspapers in Brazil. This data aligns with market trends; while brand journalism yields a 40% rise in advertising revenue, Weaver (2023) notes that dedicated team implementation introduces additional costs compared to traditional content marketing approaches.

An important factor of the 'independent' model is the emphasis on innovation. Innovation laboratories have proven to be a viable option as a form of profiting on digital platforms, in addition to being suitable for conducting research, experimentation, and implementation of technological and editorial innovations. A desire to be more competitive in the market fuels this strategy. Another characteristic of this practice is greater adherence to the institutionalization of brand service. In addition to teams working independently of the company's newsrooms or editorial departments, these groups also form their own identities. They often have their own logo and name, although they occasionally mention the name of the newspaper that hosts them, Estúdio Correio, Estúdio Folha, or O Povo Lab being a few examples.

One concern highlighted the most by interviewees is being able to distinguish between news content and branded content. However, hubs sometimes use different signage regarding form, nomenclature, and place of application. Occasionally, newspapers use the Lab logo, or a tag for calls to action on the homepage, or change the way the format is presented. We identified different cases ranging from branded content, special content, or just a logo with the lab's name. In some cases, the lab logo was associated with the brand of the contracting company, or even terms such as publieditorial, sponsored content, advertising special, infomercial, or the expression presented by "Company Name".

This lack of standardization not only applies to tags but also to how the material is presented to the public. The branded content in some newspapers replicates the image used in the regular news article and uses typography and features similar to those on the news pages and brand pages (the only distinction being the tag and sponsor brand), or the lab logo. Other newspapers, however, use different typography and font sizes and prominently mention

the sponsoring brand. In short, the production process and brand customization directly reflect the understanding that this hub, while part of the media group, operates independently from the newsroom and pursues its own specific objectives. Management interviewees frequently cited the discourse surrounding editorial and commercial independence.

The 'hybrid' model was adopted by 12 of the 38 news outlets mapped in this study (32%), they are: A Tribuna, Correio do Estado, Diário do Pará, Folha de Londrina, Tribuna do Norte (PR), Correio do Povo, Tribuna do Norte, Cruzeiro do Sul, Jornal de Brasília, Na Hora H, O Tempo and Super Notícia. In short, the 'hybrid' model is an approach that merges the editorial and commercial sectors in the media. This approach is predominantly adopted by local and regional newspapers and is characterized by greater cooperation between the two aforementioned sectors.

Newsroom journalists are frequently involved in producing branded content in this model, with the contracting brands often suggesting the topics that get developed in the newsroom. In the 'hybrid' model, the commercial sector plays an active role in attracting customers and aligning content, while the execution of services falls on the shoulders of editors and journalists. In this model, the relationship between commercial and editorial aspects is key to achieving financial sustainability; however, the lack of defining priorities among interests can lead to controversial or even unethical situations.

Compared to the 'independent' model, there is greater difficulty in identifying branded content in these spaces as there is no mention of labs or studios being used. The absence of standardized tags is apparent, resulting in a substantial reduction in brand product signal transmission on media websites. About one-third of the newspapers using this model did not have any sponsored content tags. The need for signaling branded content and for more standardization and transparency in the editorial and commercial sectors are important aspects for guaranteeing the quality and reliability of 'hybrid' publications.

Finally, five news organizations were identified that utilize a collaborative content model, receiving pre-prepared materials from contracted entities and adapting them for publication. These media outlets are Meia Hora, O Dia, A Tarde, Massa, and Folha da Manhã. Even in cases where the brand itself provides all the material (texts, images, and videos), the interviewees stated that the content is

reviewed and edited by editors and journalists before being published on the newspapers' pages.

The editorial review is prominent, even when the material is entirely provided by the companies, which according to the interviewees reflects the constant search to adapt the content to the institutional and discursive positioning of the media outlet. We did observe a lack of uniformity in identification tags for branded content, as in previous models. Although it has less adherence compared to the other models, the 'complementary' model presence is adopted in several regions of the country, which shows the operational consistency of the model regardless of the size or tradition of the newspaper.

4 Final considerations

This article presents key findings and discussions from a 2023 master's thesis investigating brand journalism in Brazil. We first presented a theoretical review of the concepts associated with brand journalism and then compared these concepts to empirical data collected from our mapping. Research conducted in English and Spanish has explored the unification of commercial and editorial teams (Cornia et al., 2020; Ferrer-Conil et al, 2021; Carlson, 2015) and outlined operating models for branded content teams in Spain (Carvajal & Barinagarrementeria, 2021). We conducted mapping to provide an initial overview of the object in Brazilian reality. Our sample included 38 newspapers from a list examined by the Circulation Verification Institute in 2022. This investigation is particularly relevant because no similar study on newspapers in the country had been done before.

The problematization with the concept of brand journalism lies around the apparent formal similarity between branded content and news articles, despite their fundamental differences. Journalism is guided by ethical guidelines, standards, and procedures based on public relevance, while brand journalism prioritizes the promotion of products and the construction of narratives favorable to sponsoring brands. Commercial motivations and brand interests may interfere with editorial independence and the core commitments of journalism, which can include newsworthiness criteria being shaped to serve marketing and advertising objectives.

An exploratory study carried out before our mapping identified different ways branded content could be presented (using tags that identify the material, alternating between using the studio's logo or just tags in the headline, or even dedicating an exclusive page to branded content), as well as texts that were quite similar to the news content produced by the media outlet. These findings served as the motivation for our mapping, as we hope that future studies will focus on content and discourse analyses.

We would like to draw attention to some conclusions from our work conducted thus far. First and foremost, news media companies in Brazil have capitalized on the credibility of journalism to promote the establishment and operation of studios and labs that produce branded content. In addition to incorporating news practices, these companies leverage the unique position of newspapers in the media ecosystem to enhance the prestige and reliability associated with journalism. This, in turn, boosts their commercial effectiveness, impacting both news production and brand promotion.

While the merging of journalism and advertising is not a new phenomenon, the institutionalization of editorial-advertising integration has raised ethical and professional standards concerns. It has also sparked debates regarding consumer awareness, acceptance of advertising, and the potential consequences for the editorial independence of the media. Through our research, we have identified three distinct brand journalism practices in Brazil: independent, hybrid, and complementary.

The research shows that these practices try to meet the needs of the market and media companies and embrace business opportunities while trying to maintain transparency and clear identification for readers, which reflects the complex interaction between journalistic practices and commercial interests. Despite the recent increase in research, there are gaps still to be explored on the subject, including social responsibility. Future studies could elaborate on the organizational practices identified in this paper and expand on the *corpus* to integrate other organizations into the media ecosystem.

Another aspect to consider relates to the ethical concerns of this practice. The research shows that there were difficulties discerning between editorial and commercial content, which

underscores the need for more straightforward guidelines for labeling content in order to avoid any ambiguity. One of the interviewees stated that publishing content for sponsoring companies without identifying said companies is a way of integrating branded content more organically into the media outlet's environment, thus increasing the effectiveness of promotional campaigns by reaching a more segmented and receptive audience. This statement shows how essential it is to promote awareness and ethical training among professionals. Creating regulations or independent committees to evaluate and certify that brand journalism complies with these guidelines may also be a relevant measure.

Considering this, we propose that brand journalism should adhere to certain principles, namely transparency, integrity, and respect for laws and regulations. Regarding transparency, it is crucial to clearly label sponsored content so that the audience can easily differentiate between editorial and advertising material. Upholding integrity entails creating truthful and reliable content, avoiding false or misleading information, as well as refraining from spreading fake news or solely promoting marketing messages. In terms of laws and regulations, it is essential to adhere to ethical codes, guidelines, and regulations relevant to journalism, advertising, and sponsored content to ensure responsible practices.

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