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TELEJOURNALISM AND CONVERGENCE:

Towards a newscasting group brand?

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ABSTRACT
This article reflects the strategies of communication business groups from the perspective of brand unification, as evidence of a pattern of news casting group brand formation. To that end, two hypotheses are raised: 1) the processes of convergence and the strategy of integrating newsrooms could forge a path to the configuration of groups that would provoke significant changes in the production and distribution of contents, 2) the convergence process, through integrated newsrooms, could generate a reduction in the autonomy of newscasts. The research used literature review, observation and monitoring of vehicles in the Rede Nordeste de Comunicação and the Sistema Jornal do Comércio de Comunicação, complemented by six interviews with professionals. As a relevant result, the possible emergence of group brand TV journalism and its potential restrictions to editorial autonomy create a need for further studies to identify obstacles inherent to the integration processes.
Keywords: TV journalism. Convergence. Integrated newsrooms. Technology. News casting group brand.

TELEJORNALISMO E CONVERGÊNCIA:
Rumo a um telejornal de marca de grupo?

RESUMO
Este artigo faz uma reflexão das estratégias de configurações de grupos empresariais de comunicação na perspectiva de unificação de marca, como indício de um modelo de telejornalismo de marca de grupo. Assim, são levantadas duas hipóteses: 1) os processos de convergência e a estratégia de integração das redações estariam abrindo caminho para a configuração de grupos, provocando uma alteração na produção e distribuição de conteúdos; 2) o processo de convergência, através das redações integradas, poderia gerar uma redução na autonomia dos telejornais. A pesquisa utilizou: revisão de literatura; observação e monitoramento dos veículos da Rede Nordeste de Comunicação e do Sistema Jornal do Commercio de Comunicação; realização de seis entrevistas semi-estruturadas com profissionais. Como resultado relevante, a possibilidade do surgimento de um telejornalismo de marca de grupo e suas possíveis restrições de autonomia editorial criam uma perspectiva de novos estudos no que se refere ao desencaixe dos processos de integração.
Palavras-chave: Telejornalismo. Convergência. Redações Integradas. Tecnologia. Marca de Grupo.

TELEPERIODISMO Y CONVERGENCIA:
¿hacia un telediario de marca de grupo?

RESUMEN - Este artículo propone una reflexión sobre las estrategias de configuración de grupos empresariales de comunicación ante la perspectiva de la unificación de marca, como evidencia de un patrón de teleperiodismo de marca de grupo. Así, se presentan dos hipótesis: 1) los procesos de convergencia y la estrategia de integración de las redacciones parecen estar preparando el camino para la creación de grupos, provocando un cambio en la producción y distribución de contenidos; 2) el proceso de convergencia, mediante la integración de las redacciones, puede conducir a una reducción de la autonomía de los telediarios. La investigación parte de una revisión de la literatura y ha utilizado la observación y monitorización de los informativos de la Rede Nordeste de Comunicação y del Sistema Jornal do Commercio de Comunicação, además de seis entrevistas semiestructuradas con profesionales de esos medios. Como resultado relevante se destaca la posibilidad del surgimiento de un teleperiodismo de marca de grupo y sus posibles limitaciones de autonomía editorial, las cuales permiten pensar en nuevos estudios sobre los desacoplamientos de los procesos de integración.
Palabras clave: Teleperiodismo. Convergencia. Redacciones integradas. Tecnología. Marca de grupo.

Introduction

In recent years, studies and publications addressing the application of technology to journalistic practices have been identifying and endeavoring to understand the transformations being brought about by technological infrastructure in the production of news, especially in regard to the redesigning of newsrooms (integrated newsrooms), new corporate configurations of communication enterprises in the light of brand unification processes, journalism based on digital databases and the ongoing journalistic convergence process. The paper's initial hypothesis is that the processes of convergence and the strategies of newsroom integration are paving the way for the configuration of groups that, by granting their communication vehicles a common brand, would also be also inducing e reconfiguration of the reproduction sphere (lower costs) and of the content distribution patterns (expansion of the audience). The second hypothesis is that the convergence process, through the strategies of integrated newsrooms, could generate a reduction in the autonomy of each of the individual vehicles. In this work we will focus on TV news, which could eventually become a news casting group's brand.

First, however, we will work with the concept of convergence developed by Salavarría *et al.* (2010). They present a useful definition for obtaining a better understanding of the journalistic convergence process:

> Journalistic convergence is a multidimensional process that is being facilitated by the widespread implementation of digital telecommunication technologies, affecting the technological, corporative, professional and editorial areas of medias, providing an integration of tools, spaces, working methods and languages previously separated, so that journalists prepare contents that are distributed across multiple platforms through the appropriate languages of each one (SALAVERRÍA *et al,* 2010, p.59).

The technological apparatus (computers, internet, digital tools) and the configuration of journalism companies structured on the model of digital journalism databases are factors that enhance: the integration of media vehicles that belong to the same business group; production aspects (costs reduction); distribution of content (expansion of the audience), and the unification of the brand for vehicles and contents. Thus, a new unified newsroom model has emerged producing information for consumption on different platforms, which can be conceptualized as "integrated newsrooms" (SALAVERRÍA, 2010) or information centers

(LÓLEZ-GARCÍA *et al.,* 2009). Ramón Salaverría (2010) argues that the traditional communication business groups (printed media, radio and TV) seek ways to extend their leadership in the information business. Amid conditioning circumstances (bleak economic environment) and structural circumstances (reduction of the public), in this convergence scenario the integrated newsrooms (or information centers) and brand unification are seen as a solution in order to maintain the hegemony of the media groups, preserving and expanding the audience from the perspective of reducing operational costs and, in that way, maximizing profits.

One of the core products of such groups is the TV newscast, understood by some authors as a central element in the distribution of information. The national, regional and local TV newscasts are, for Brazilians, "a place of reference very similar to family, friends, school, religion and consumption" (VIZEU, CORREIA, 2008, p. 12). Flavio Porcello (2006) argues that "the TV newscasts are currently the main source of information in Brazilian society: cheaper, more convenient and easily accessible (...). The TV newscast today occupies a central place in the lives of Brazilians" (PORCELLO, 2006, p.13). According to Nilson Lage (2004), the fixed scheduled newscasts, like the *evening news* (bulletins at the beginning of night), are the highest rated among the newscasts. It is precisely why the objects of this article are the two early evening newscasts produced in the Agreste region of Pernambuco State: ABTV (2nd edition), by TV Asa Branca[1] (VHF channel 8) and TV Jornal Notícias, by TV Jornal Caruaru[2] (VHF Channel 4).

The presence of technology, the integration of newsrooms and the databases contribute to innovations in operational processes in media companies that alter the practices and professional assignments in journalism, as well as TV journalism's own production processes, since technology has always been associated to journalistic work, and that reflects on the production, circulation and consumption of information in a socio-technological relation. In the late 90's, the process became evident with the first initiatives of convergence in the media and the entry of television channels and newspapers on the Internet. During this period, they began to distribute their content in the web as an extension. In this process, "the journalists responsible for the site were responsible for adapting the content produced for traditional media. This adaptation occurred in small newsrooms, as it still does in some media" (LOPEZ, 2009, p.59).

García Avilés and Carvajal (2008) emphasize that the convergence in newsrooms is constituted as a step towards integration of the various

vehicles and products of communication groups, which can even lead to the unification of brands. That forges the path for the configuration of groups, different from communication vehicles, as regards an integrated production process, distinct from the logic of a production and distribution process based on traditional support (print media, radio and television). "This new systemic conception of media companies began to be translated into an idea: the brand is more important than the support" (SALAVERRÍA, 2010, p. 29).

The orientation of news production suitable for distribution in various vehicles creates the figure of a multiplatform or multi-tasking journalist, capable of handling all the new demands. The emergence of a special kind of journalist[3] is nothing but the tip of the iceberg of a series of changes that the media production system has been experiencing in recent decades (LÓPEZ-GARCÍA *et al.,* 2009).

This job profile does not necessarily mean there is any improvement in the quality of journalistic production (LOPEZ, 2009). To Kischinhevsky (2009) the journalists have been led to produce for distribution in different vehicles and platforms, without any corresponding remuneration. Thus, because of these new business settings, journalists can readily jeopardize their main function of mediator, and the final quality of their work, since the reporter will now prioritize the multiplatform production and not the quality of the work and verification of the facts (KISCHINHEVSKY, 2009). The obligation of adapting the same content to the languages of the various platforms is creating what Dean Starkman (2010) has called the "hamster wheel" effect. Basically, the idea is that the increased workload on the journalist in order to meet the demands of the subsequent distribution platforms reduces the cost of production but generates a loss of depth in the material produced.

The news supply chain

Rodrigo Alsina states that "companies that are embedded in a system of market economy tend to unify their production practices" (ALSINA, 2009, p.198) especiallyin the light of contextual circumstances, such as unfavorable economic situations and technological and social changes, or structural conditions, such as the gradual reduction of the traditional media audience. To Alsina (2009) the response of journalism business has been similar in the face of challenges of competitiveness in a context of economic changes and reduction of the public, showing that "the production logic of any company makes it reduce production

costs" (ALSINA, 2009, p.210). As a result, there is a suspicion that the convergence applied to the media is, in essence, a cost reduction strategy rather than a content distribution strategy. The hidden risk in this strategy is that the alleged improvement in the quality and diversity of content is just a business ploy (of traditional media) to justify an increase in journalists' productivity and reduce costs (SALAVERRÍA, 2010). Convergence as a priority economic strategy would also tend to overshadow the debate about the impact of integration of newsrooms on the autonomy of vehicles and their journalistic products, as in the case of a possible transformation of the newscast group's brand. Mark Deuze (2004), warns that among professionals of integrated newsrooms, there is a consensus that obfuscates the issues of autonomy, putting collaborative and cooperative work between different vehicles as the best way to produce multimedia content (DEUZE, 2004). In general, such collaborations and cooperation are performed only by cross-media or cross-promotion (MICO *et al.,* 2009). Thus, questions about the autonomy of integrated vehicles are often overllooked in the light of the supposed benefits of cooperation, thereby promoting the standardization of speech and loss of pluralism in newsrooms (MICO *et al.,* 2009). The point is that the struggle for autonomy in newsrooms lies not in collaborative processes, but in a specific change, which traditionally has been limited to clashes with non-journalistic sectors of the enterprises, such as executive directories and marketing, and now faces interests and specificities of integrated vehicles, leading to disputes between the journalistic sectors themselves, which may further limit their autonomy. Supply chains of traditional media are definitely moving towards a new organizational model (SALAVERRÍA, 2010). In this process, the journalistic structures are created and reorganized in an economic approach through a single identity. Mauro Wolf (1985) proposes that within the journalistic activity, regardless of the vehicle, practices are adopted both in the selection and transmission of information. It is precisely such practices that are facing a redesign and a forced unification which can influence the meaning of terms such as newsworthiness and news. For Wolf (1985) newsworthiness

> Consists in the set of requirements that are demanded of events from the standpoint of the work structure in the media and from the standpoint of the professionalism of journalists to acquire the public existence of news. (WOLF, 1985, p.190).

The newsworthiness is directly related to the structural design of the supply chain of news; what Silva Junior (2008) characterizes as:

production, processing editing and circulation. The redesign of the news supply chain can alter the production, distribution and consumption of news, as well as its meaning: "News is a social representation of everyday reality, institutionally generated and manifested in the construction of a possible world" (ALSINA, 2009, p.14). The author stresses that the concept varies according to the characteristics that the production process establishes: obviously, the process depends on the structure that enables it. So the news "is the result of professional culture, work organization, production processes, particular codes (rules of writing), language and rules of the field of languages, the enunciation of journalism and journalistic practices" (VIZEU, CORREIA, 2008, p.13). Technological tools make the process more complex, from the supply chain of the newscast (capture/design/writing/editing), through distribution (multiplatform) and interactive audience (reception/consumption). That means that the degree of newsrooms autonomy, in a perspective of integration, has direct influence on the news process.

Convergence and media companies

As previously mentioned, the production model based on integrated newsrooms has proved to be an economic strategy, enabled by technological infrastructure, with the intention of meeting the news demands of both traditional media (decreasing audiences) and the digital media (rising audiences). Thus, in the light of the visible flow of audiences from traditional to digital media, companies have put forward the integrated newsroom as a strategy that allows them to readily meet the demands of an increasingly multi-platform audience, with lower production cost (SALAVERRÍA, 2010).

The perception has been formed of a multiplatform information management under a unified brand, which directs the production and distribution of content for various media belonging to the same journalistic communication group. Thus, the brand of TV newscasting could come to be the same among all the vehicles that make up the group, creating a group's brand of TV journalism, with distribution of content in various media, based on a unified and interrelated production center. If such a process, as reported in the literature, is being driven primarily by economic considerations, based only on technological settings, to the detriment of socio-cultural criteria, the great danger is that it does not give due attention to structural, professional and socio-cultural differences of the medias. Internet is considered as an enabler for

journalistic media groups adopting new processes for coordination and integration of media/vehicles (SALAVERRÍA, 2010). Such coordination, obviously, has influenced a reorganization or redesign of newsrooms and their editorial activities and that may well be reducing the autonomy of the various products and vehicles of a particular communication group.

In the view of López-García *et al.* (2009), such configuration of the journalistic companies goes through a model of online journalism in databases, under the aegis of a strategy called the information center. For the authors, the databases are the fundamental agent of the new organizational structure in the processes of investigation, production, presentation and distribution of information. Databases play a central role precisely because within them them lies the bulk of the publishing and content management systems that enable the editorial integration of television newscast with the different products and vehicles that belong to their respective groups. Thus, media companies can optimize resource management, integrate production and adapt contents in order to distribute them on various platforms (LÓPEZ-GARCÍA *et al.,* 2009).

The new media-based processes are related not only to the web, but also to the databases (memory, digital and changeable) in various vehicles (printed media, radio and TV). The functions of databases have made room for convergent journalism because they format new standards for the construction of informative pieces, allow management of information flow in different platforms and integrating professionals and users. Barbosa (2007) argues that

> the functionality of databases for digital journalism are perceived both in the aspect of the internal management of products and that of changes in the structuring of information, the configuration and presentation of news (...) as well as the retrieval of information (BARBOSA, 2007, p.130).

Considering the processes of convergence journalism, it can also be seen that the databases are central components for the structuring and strengthening of increasingly integrated newsrooms that operate according to the logic of convergent model journalism. However, the perspective that enables the technological integration processes does not take account of newscast group's brand limitations in regard to the autonomy[4] of the TV newscast in this new business model.

Hypothesis

Given the theoretical underpinnings that guided the study, two

central hypotheses (CH) were formulated:

CH1 *The processes of convergence and the strategies of newsrooms integration are paving the way for the configuration of groups that, by granting their communication vehicles a common brand, would be also be causing a reconfiguration in all that concerns the production (costs reduction) and distribution of content (expansion of the audience).*

CH2 *The convergence process, through the strategies of integrated newsrooms, could generate a reduction in the autonomy of each of the vehicles. In this work we will focus on TV news, which could eventually become the newscast group's brand.*

Methodology

To execute this article and duly check the validity of the hypotheses, basically, three methodological tools were used: 1) literature review, 2) observation and monitoring ABTV ([2nd] edition) in the case of two communication vehicles of the group Rede Nordeste de Comunicação (Rádio Globo FM [89,9] and the Portal +AB) and TV news carried by two communication vehicles belongingto the group Jornal do Commercio Sistema de Communicação (SJCC) in the Agreste region of Pernambuco State (Rádio Jornal Caruaru AM [780] and the Portal NE10 [jcinterior.com.br]); 3) conducting six interviews (three per business group) with journalists, editors and managers related to trends and perspectives in news production and the adoption of new media.

Results and Discussion

Based on the theoretical approach, it is possible to see that the current process of technological convergence has a significant presence in the news media groups, but the technological possibilities and economic needs proved to be overshadowing fundamentals of the problem, as well as the editorial autonomy of the products and vehicles. One of the unintended consequences of this process of loss of autonomy would be the homogenization of discourse and its consequent loss of pluralism in newsrooms (MICO *et al.*, 2009).

Thus, the primacy of the brand over its support opens the discussion on the brand of TV journalism groups, based on the new media catalysts as a point of communication for groups adopting new processes of coordination between vehicles and products. The journalistic communication groups have begun to set themselves up as multiplatform and multimedia conglomerates, not just economic economic ones, thus reinforcing the tendency of a common identity across multiple platforms as part of a new strategy: a merger or integration of newsrooms and the emergence of a newscast group's brand with more limited possibilities of autonomy.

Analyzing actual cases proposed by the article, we see that the Rede Nordeste de Comunicação has not created a common brand for its vehicles and products. However, the Sistema Jornal do Commercio de Comunicação (SJCC) already had a very similar mark for the three media (TV, radio and web), but a change forged in 2010 made the portal (which changed its name to JC Online NE10) discordant from the other vehicles. This fact differs from what prevails in the literature review, in which the communication group brand tends to become the main reference and not the vehicle or support. Furthermore it has led the SJCC to preside over a dispute over the distribution of content amog its own differentiated media brands. However, in the course of monitoring the activities of the business groups, it was possible to notice early signs of a convergence and integration of newsrooms of various vehicles, especially regarding the debate of guidelines and assembly stock coverage unified process such that it might culminate in the existence of the newscast group's brand, as well as other effects related to unified management of production and distribution of content.

In this latter aspect we examined the responses to the first point in the intervuiews to see if there is an established guideline or standard for these affiliates of the Globo network and the SBT netweork orientating them towards a new organizational model that would indicate integration. Two of the responses seem to show that this is a distant reality for both broadcasters, in Caruaru; however, what did transpire was the dedicated search for audience. The answers also reinforce Alsina's (2009) view that the response of journalistic companies to the challenges of competitiveness have been very similar since they are continually monitoring their own performances:

> Our teams are advised to keep an eye on everything the other newscasts produce or for any innovation. Thus, by observing, our professionals also innovate in the search for

viewer audience (Interview A, TV Asa Branca, an interview for this research).

There is no strong position taken by network in regard to its affiliates; all are free to create their own editorial line. I am guided by the executive director of the SJCC, (...), there is no journalistic subordination to Recife, but we do follow the same editorial line. (Interview B, TV Jornal Caruaru; anan interview for this research).

The following fragments of interviews seek to check whether there is now a search for professionals with profiles appropiate for integrated neswsrooms (multi-tasking multi-media journalists) as described by López-García *et al.* (2009). The responses show that both companies, TV Asa Branca and TV Jornal Caruaru, identify strategies for transiting their professionals in the different vehicles in the group thereby obtaining a multipurpose media professional. They also highlight concern with reducing costs, and underscore the previousçy cited fragments in regard to the quest for audience and the drive for further integration of newwsrooms in the Agreste region of pernambuco. One important point that came up in the interviews but was overlooked in the reference literature was the trainees and new staffr rences do not seem to notice, is that the interns and new hires are the object of training designed to qualify future multitasking professionals for their respective newsrooms:

Some of the professionals involved in drafting TV news are announcers, some are editors, others have been video reporters and even image editores take part in editing the texts. (Interview C, TV Asa Branca, an interview for this research).

For some years this has been the profile of the SJCC professional. Trainees have even been given a special title, they are now Multi-media trainees and iot is obligatory for them to work in all media vehuicles so that they end up with a holisticc view (...) Regardless of their job title, all must meet the demand of the vehicles whenever necessary; they must be prepared for that. (Interviewee B, TV Jornal Caruaru, an interview for this research).

> *The texts have become increasingly succinct. Stafff are no longer hired for a specific area. The professional must performs several functions and produce texts for radio, TV and the web.* (Interview E, TV Jornal Caruaru, an interview for this research).

The last fragments of interviews expose the answers given on integration management (SALAVERRÍA, 2010) and the editorial autonomy of the TVs in regard to the other media groups. On this point it can be seen that the convergence issues reinforce the view of Deuze (2004) regarding autonomy and integration, namely, that professionals in converged newsrooms or in newsrooms in the process of integration tend to emphasize that the best way to produce multimedia content is through a culture of teamwork: *"We work in constant partnership"* (Interview A, TV Asa Branca, an interview for this research). *This perspective of collaboration in the production of TV Asa Branca tends to enlarge: "There is a modest production considering the size of the company. The potential is far greater than what is actually being practiced."* (Interview D, TV Asa Branca, an interview for this research). At the TV Jornal, the term integration is used as a synonym for exchanges of experiences and collaboration among the vehicles, and not to mean strategic management of information, to reduce costs and increase audiences:

> *There is integration in the sense of exchanging experiences and considering how to addresst some themes, but each manager is responsible for his own vehicle. (...) Every day we exchange agendas through staff meetings with the presence of a representative of each vehicle.* (Interview B TV Jornal Caruaru, an interview for this research).

The point of this last analyzed fragment, which shows signs that at times there may be disagreement or dispute between autonomous vehicles, is the assertion that the decisions and evaluations about agendas are taken together and may well confront interests and specificities of vehicles, as pointed out in the literature review, giving rise to a dispute among the now-integrated journalistic sectors and consequently imposing further limitations on their autonomy.

Regarding the observation and monitoring, the production model imnplementing integrated newsrooms is the result of a strategy

that enables news media groups to meet the demands for news from both traditional and digital media.The observations and monitoring carried out in this study identified the use of cross-media and cross-promotion strategies, considered to be the simplest form of cooperation between newsrooms (MICO *et al.*, 2009). This cross promotion occurs when a vehicle advertises another vehicle of the same group. It was most evident in TV Jornal Notícias, especially regarding the Portal NE10 (jcinterior.com.br). Another relevant point is that the announcer of the ABTV ([2nd] edition) is the same as for Rádio Globo FM (89.9), which suggests journalistic versatility, giving evidence of a process of integration in the group and reinforcing some of the points present in the fragments of interviews previously mentioned.

Conclusions

Based on data collected in the interviews and the monitoring of the two stations it is possible to conclude that the hypotheses suggested in this article have not been fully confirmed.

The hypothesis that the process of integrating newsdesks is paving the way in journalism for configuring groups that superimpose on the individual communication vehicles in regard to contents production and distribution was confirmed in the case of those attached to the Sistema Jornal do Commercio de Comunicação (SJCC), since such vehicles are already working with a view to sharing some contents and already have staff and/or trainees with multimedia profiles. With regard to media vehicles in the Rede Nordeste, however, although there are already some signs of unification, they are not sufficient to allow us to classify them as integration.

The other hypothesis, that convergence through the integrated newsdesks could generate a reduced range of media vehicles and in particular news programs, resulting in the creation of a single newscasting group brand, proved to be a very distant possibility for the Agreste region of Pernambuco. By investigating the possible emergence of a TV newscasting group brand and the consequent restrictions on editorial autonomy, this research has created the prospect of further studies to a identify the elements of such integration processes and their interactions. Given that the driving force leading business groups to use technology to integrate their media vehicles and products, it may be that other aspects that presuppose the existence of distinctions among the media vehicles of a given journalistic themselves are being forcefully

overridden.

Based on this research it is clear that the ways in which media groups are using new ICT in their newsrooms indicates that the processes of convergence, deployed by business groups is driven mainly by economic considerations. Therefore, there is a need for other perspectives on the issues raised here, such as the socio-cultural angle.

|NOTES

1. The broadcasting organization TV Asa Branca belongs to **Rede Nordeste de Comunicação** LTDA, along with Rádio Globo FM (89.9) and Portal + ab (maisab.globo.com).

2. **TV Jornal Caruaru** (formerly TVI) started its activities in 2004 as a subsidiary of SBT. In May 2006 it went to the **Sistema Jornal do Commercio de Comunicação** (SJCC). The SJCC in the Agreste of Pernambuco is consists of: **TV Jornal Caruaru, Rádio Jornal Caruaru AM (780) and NE10** (jcinterior.com.br).

3. There is some description of this type of journalism: online, digital, multimedia, or polyvalent.

4. The integration strategies of newsrooms allows for an increase, decrease or dispute for autonomy in doing the newscasting. Disputes over autonomy traditionally were restricted to non-journalistic sectors of the company, to which have noew been added, in this case, the integrated journalistic vehicle sectors. Thus, integration can foster the sum of forces or expand the disputes between vehicles.

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