

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION:

BJR special edition on Journalism in BRICS

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In March 1976 the Movement of Non-Aligned countries, at its Symposium on Information in Tunis, invented the concept of New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) as a political programme extending the historical struggle against colonialism and imperialism to the sphere of culture and communication (NORDENSTRENG, 2011). It became a powerful argument in the great global media debates through the 1970s and 1980s, largely around UNESCO, galvanizing media circles both in industry and academia and leading to such landmarks as the MacBride Report and a new era of international communication research (MANSELL & NORDENSTRENG, 2006).

Today, 40 years later, the world looks quite different. After the “collapse of communism” in 1990–91 the bipolar world of East and West is replaced by multipolar world with new powers such as international terrorism. And after Internet and mobile phone the traditional mass media are challenged by new forms of digital communication, not least the social media. The media landscape is becoming a mix of old and new media, calling for media managers and journalists alike to do soul searching and strategic rethinking. Nevertheless, despite the

drastic changes in the world of international relations as well as in the media world, the old fundamental questions remain, as shown in *Towards Equity in Global Communication?* (VINCENT & NORDENSTRENG, 2016).

Brazil, Russia, India and China began to establish themselves as the BRIC group in 2006 and extended it to South Africa, making it a full BRICS in 2010. Today the joint site of Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the BRICS Member States¹ introduces BRICS as “a manifestation of the objective tendencies of development of the international political system. [...]The idea of establishing and running a dialogue mechanism between countries, that serve as major centers of economic growth and political influence, that have global interests and significant integration potential in their regions, was dictated by life itself.” The host of its last Summit in Russia, President Vladimir Putin is quoted: “The BRICS group is still young as an organization, but has already proven its effectiveness. Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa are coordinating their policies on key international issues ever more closely, and are playing an active part in shaping a multipolar world order and developing modern models for the world’s financial and trading systems.” And in the site of the next Summit host India² opens with a quote from Prime Minister Narendra Modi: “BRICS acts as a vital pillar of hope for this world full of political challenges, safety related challenges and economic challenges.”

As summarized in the Introduction of *Mapping BRICS Media* (THUSSU & NORDENSTRENG, 2015, pp. 1-3), the BRICS countries together cover over 40% of the world’s population and 30% of the world’s land mass. They account for over 20 per cent of the global GDP, which has increased threefold in the past 15 years, and they are in possession of 40% the global foreign exchange reserves. Their media are equally expanding, including old print media, which in the industrialized West are on dramatic decline. And the media landscape in the BRICS countries is also growing rapidly in the new media sector as the Internet reaches half or more of the populations in Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa; India’s penetration percent is about 20. But given the population size, China has by far the biggest number of Internet users in the world (twice as much as in the USA) and also the other BRICS countries except South Africa are among the top ten Internet using countries.

In a historical perspective BRICS represents the same kind of challenge to the existing world order as the Non-Aligned Movement did during the Cold War era. As the global order, especially its economic architecture established with the U.S. leadership after World War II in Bretton Woods, has been predominantly Western by its nature, BRICS has by definition an anti-American orientation. However, as pointed out by Oliver Stuenkel from Fundação Getúlio Vargas-São Paulo: “The BRICS do not seek to overthrow global order; rather, they seek to reform some existing structures or create complementary ones.”³ In any case BRICS sets the agenda for research so that it belongs to the current trend of “de-Westernizing media studies”.

It was in this context that the first international research project was launched in 2012 to examine the media systems in the BRICS countries, sponsored by the Academy of Finland and coordinated by the Finnish University of Tampere⁴. The present guest editors are partners in this research project, which has until now produced the above-mentioned book and a special issue of *African Journalism Studies* on journalists in the BRICS countries.⁵

The call for papers to this special issue noted that the BRICS countries have both similarities and differences, and looking at them on a comparative basis can offer more promising prospects for a critical analysis than taking them separately. The call suggested that reflections on the BRICS may also help illuminate different ways of understanding, doing and thinking about journalism in contemporary societies.

The results of the call for papers can be evaluated in this edition. The Special Issue brings seven articles devoted to Journalistic practices in the BRICS countries, the majority using a comparative perspective, and some focusing on a specific country.

We start with an article by Ramaprasad & Pasti, presenting results of the survey carried out with journalists of the BRICS Project, specifically how they evaluate their workplace (whether traditional newsrooms or online outlets), whether they have a degree in journalism, their age and the participation of women in the profession. The analysis attempts to determine the differences between traditional and online outlets, but its importance resides in the fact that it compares responses of journalists from five different countries.

It is followed by an article by Aguiar, which also brings a comparative perspective, studying the new BRICS News agencies. The article emphasizes their relationship with the State, owners, and business models, analyzing their role in the development strategies of their respective countries.

Still in the area of comparative perspectives, we have the articles by Chagas and by Martinez & Joyce. The first one discusses the tabloidization of popular journalism in Brazil, making reference to South African and Indian authors and contexts, discussing not only the similarities and differences between the three countries, but especially how authors from those countries have constructed and reasoned tabloidization and some of its possibilities. The second one focuses on the relationship between Brazil and India, using an approach that is seldom used in our studies about journalism, as it presents a reflection on agenda setting construction based on fictional narratives, so important to both countries. The use of fictional narratives and journalism is not new, but the authors adopt an original premise and contribute to expand the scope of studies about narratives and journalism.

The Special Issue closes with three articles that address the author's own countries. The article by Bomfim looks at Brazil, and analyzes how the image of the BRICS countries is constructed by the VEJA portal. It is followed by a text by Gavra & Strovsky, researchers who are also members of the BRICS Project, and use an empirical approach to point out the values of Russian journalists regarding their profession, making a parallel between current and past Journalism. Finally, the text by Zhao, who looks at China, discussing news production and publication in mobile communication networks, by analyzing three important news diffusion platforms in the country: in Weibo, WeChat and Tou Tiao, pointing to the replacement of professionalization practices by algorithms and technology.

As expected, this is a very diversified special issue, due to the authors' origins and to the wide range of subjects, but we believe it allows a glimpse at the complexity and importance of research about Journalism in BRICS countries.

NOTES

- 1 <http://infobrics.org/what-is-brics/>
- 2 <http://brics2016.gov.in/>
- 3 <http://www.postwesternworld.com/2015/07/09/the-declaration-a-analysis/>
- 4 <http://uta.fi/cmt/tutkimus/BRICS.html>
- 5 <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/recq21/36/3>

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