

# JOURNALISM ETHOS:

## Mídia Ninja and a contested field

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Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25200/BJR.v14n2.2018.992>

**ABSTRACT** - The wave of mass protests that swept over Brazil's major cities in June 2013 gave rise to a citizen journalist collective known as *Mídia Ninja* whose coverage of the protests attracted enormous attention and challenged established hegemonic media practices. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study compares *Mídia Ninja's* production processes to those of the mainstream media, aiming to reflect on contemporary journalistic ethos. In so doing, *Mídia Ninja's* attempts at deconstructing hegemonic media discourses and practices are explored through an analysis of five categories that emerged from the data - mobilisation, Ninja's brand identity, deconstruction, mockery and opinion. The investigation of the collective's discursive production processes suggests that its media activist logic contributes to widening the deontological codes of the journalistic profession while rejecting traditional journalistic news values, such as neutrality and impartiality.

**Keywords:** Journalism *ethos*. Media activism. Contested field. Habitus.

### **ETHOS JORNALÍSTICO: Mídia Ninja e um campo em contestação**

**RESUMO** - A onda massiva de protestos que se alastrou nas maiores cidades brasileiras em junho de 2013 propiciou o surgimento de um coletivo de repórteres-cidadãos conhecidos como Mídia Ninja. A atenção copiosa que o coletivo recebeu terminou por desafiar práticas estabelecidas da mídia hegemônica. Adotando uma abordagem metodológica mista, este estudo investiga o processo de produção dos Ninja à luz da mídia hegemônica com o intuito de refletir sobre o *ethos* jornalístico na contemporaneidade. Por meio da análise de cinco categorias provenientes dos dados, mobilização, institucional, escracho, desconstrução e opinião, o esforço dos Ninja em desconstruir os discursos e as práticas da mídia hegemônica é examinado. A investigação dos processos de produção discursiva do coletivo aponta que a perspectiva de produzir narrativas dentro da lógica midiativista contribui, por um lado, para o afrouxamento dos códigos deontológicos do jornalismo e, por outro, para o rechaço de matrizes do campo jornalístico como imparcialidade e neutralidade.

**Palavras-chave:** *Ethos* jornalístico. Midiativismo. Campo em contestação. Habitus.

## **ETHOS PERIODÍSTICO: Mídia Ninja y un campo en contestación**

**RESUMEN** - La masiva ola de protestas que se expandió hacia las mayores ciudades brasileñas en junio de 2013 produjo la aparición de un grupo de reporteros-ciudadanos conocidos como *Mídia Ninja*. La atención copiosa que el colectivo recibió terminó por desafiar las prácticas establecidas del medio hegemónico. Adoptando una metodología mixta, este estudio investiga el proceso de producción de los Ninjas a la luz del medio tradicional con la intención de reflexionar sobre el ethos periodístico en la contemporaneidad. A través de la evaluación de las cinco categorías de los datos, movilización, institucional, escrache, desconstrucción y opinión, el esfuerzo por deconstruir los discursos y las prácticas de los medios hegemónicos es investigado. La investigación de los procesos de producción discursiva del colectivo apunta que la perspectiva de producir narrativas en la lógica medioactivista contribuye, por un lado, para el aflojamiento de los códigos deontológicos del periodismo y, por otro, para el rechazo de matrices del campo periodista como imparcialidad y neutralidad.

**Palabras clave:** *Ethos* periodístico. Media activismo. Campo en contestación. Habitus.

### **Introduction**

The struggle for the recognition of journalism as a legitimate profession has lasted for at least 160 years of its development in Western societies. There has been much debate within a community that strives to be recognised as both a profession and an academic field of discipline rather than a mere trade or service. A process of professionalisation has empowered journalists to speak and, ultimately, has informed their ability to say what news is.

The expansion of the field of journalism because of the changes introduced by the Internet and, more recently, social media, have enabled the participation of new players on the scene, regardless of whether or not they have a professional background or training in journalism. As outsiders, citizen reporters challenge mainstream journalistic standards and put into question the contemporary journalism paradigms. Here we explore the contemporary journalism ethos by looking at the discursive and working practices of a collective of citizen reporters known as *Mídia Ninja*, which is borne out by the cultural collective *Fora do Eixo*<sup>1</sup>.

Inspired by Bourdieu (1986), Traquina (2012) argues that journalism has passed through a process of professionalisation,

granting it distinction and authority. Being part of a field requires the development of an ethos which, in the case of journalism, allows for the ability to tell us what news is and what it is not. This practice or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1999) shapes modes of ‘doing’ journalism and constitutes an “interpretive community” (Traquina, 2013, p. 34), which is engaged in the social construction of reality. For Bourdieu (1986, p. 47), the social world is accumulated history expressed by different types and sub-types of capital, – economic, cultural, and social/ symbolic capital, which are distributed at certain moments in time. Thus, ‘the field’ manifests itself as a production of difference as long as this field presents a particular structure of the distribution of different types and sub-types of capital. We will see that *Mídia Ninja* challenges not only the discursive dimension of the mainstream media, but also its economic capital.

*Mídia Ninja* – which is an acronym for **I**ndependent **N**arratives, **J**ournalism and **A**ction, is a media activist group whose journalistic coverage of the ‘*Jornadas de junho*’ in 2013 received copious attention. ‘*Jornadas de junho*’ was a wave of mass protests in Brazil’s state capitols and major cities, initially against an increase in bus fares. This initial movement gave rise to charges against corruption, government spending for two mega-events (World Cup and the Olympics), as well as the poor quality of public services. Police repression of the protests only galvanised the mobilisation of the masses, gathering force as millions of protesters organised themselves through social media.

By using smartphones with 3G connection to access the live streaming platform *TwitCasting*, *Mídia Ninja* reported from the streets, setting the news agenda on social media and breaking down the mainstream media’s monopoly of information. *Mídia Ninja*’s performance cannot be considered in isolation; it is connected to a larger narrative which is part of the network society (Castells, 2012). On the other hand, *Mídia Ninja* can also be understood as part of other cyberactivist actions initiated by anti-globalisation activists since 1999 and strengthened by the *Occupy* movement in 2011.

In what follows, we investigate *Ninja*’s reporters’ *habitus* and explore the appropriation and/or transformation of established mainstream media practices in order to meditate upon contemporary journalistic ethos within a context where the assumption that everyone is a journalist has gained ground and has challenged the mainstream media market. To do so, we employ a mixed-methods approach

consisting of content analysis of Oximity and Facebook posts as well as ethnographic methods. This study shows that *Mídia Ninja's* activist logic contributes to widening the deontological codes of the journalistic profession while rejecting traditional journalistic news values. However, the collective's political engagement stands as a paradox in its potential to deconstruct mainstream media discourses.

### **Mídia Ninja's media activism**

We understand that the media activism practised by *Mídia Ninja* is connected to a paradigm commonly known as 'alternative media'. From the late 1960s to today, alternative media has been described by a great variety of names given the difficulties in mapping out its goals and strategies, and in evaluating the impact this type of media has on its socio-political context (Fontes, 2010). Thus, terms such as 'citizen media', 'tactical media', or 'media activism', among others, or more specific ones such as 'guerrilla video', express the multi-faceted characteristics of alternative media depending on the context in which it is used.

According to Peruzzo (2009), alternative media has historically adopted a critical-progressive editorial line, which is embedded in counter-hegemonic communication features. Alternative communication expresses the voices of those who are discontent with the status quo. More specifically, alternative journalism distinguishes itself from mainstream media, governmental organisations and other societal sectors that are representative of the dominant classes and offers alternative sources of information. Authors such as Peruzzo (2009), Meikle (2003) and Moraes (2013) have observed how the internet has allowed for greater participation of journalists and citizens in ICT (Information and Communication Technologies), expanding the professional field of journalism.

British scholar Chris Atton (2008), however, notes that there is a dearth of scholarly literature on alternative media and about alternative media working practices, particularly about its *modus operandi* and its audiences. Therefore, an exploration of alternative media practices should shed light on how alternative media produces their contents. Drawing inspiration from Atton's work, it is hoped that this study will make a significant contribution to the gap in the literature concerning the ways in which citizen reporters compete with mainstream media for legitimation.

Howley (2005), in turn, in his reflection on 'participatory community media' suggests that a participatory media organisation is a result of different players and interests inter-reacting to create and sustain a locally oriented media. This corresponds with Australian researcher Romano's (2010) view that "the news media is only one of many social actors and institutions that work together to support deliberation" (p. 11). Drawing on Dewey's (1922) classic notion of *deliberation*, Romano (2010, p. 3) argues that deliberation should be understood as an ongoing dialogue, a debate or conversation, that presuppose decision-making.

Rodriguez (2000), in her work on media in Latin America, coined the term 'citizens' media' to indicate the potential of alternative media practices for change. For her, alternative and citizens' media are deeply connected to socio-political change. More recently, in her opening speech at the 2015 International Association for Media and Communication Research Conference (IAMCR), in Montreal, Rodriguez (2015) used the term 'media at the margins' to refer to media whose practices differentiate them from those of 'centrist' media, which result in unequal distribution of power within and across diverse societies (Rodrigues and Thomas, 2014). For her, theory has not been able to grasp and express the fluidity, multiplicity and complexity of this media type.

In order to contribute to the democratisation of information and create new media approaches, alternative news agencies in Latin America pursue distinctive objectives and work on different levels of autonomy, according to the governmental relations they establish (Moraes, 2013, p. 121). *Aporrea* in Venezuela, *Cimac* in Mexico, *Azkintuwe* in Chile, *Frei Tito Agency for Information in Latin America* (Adital), *Rebelarte* in Uruguay, and *Brasil de Fato* in Brazil, among others, are reflective of Moraes' criticism of mainstream media not being able to express Latin American conjuncture well. For Meikle (2003), activists' dissonant voices in the digital sphere put into question the consensus built by mainstream media. The coverage of the '*jornadas de junho*' can be used as an example of Meikle's point of view. In Bentes' (2015) words:

Mídia Ninja started to set the news agenda of corporate media and broadcast since they filmed and collected images of confrontation between demonstrators and the police: the work of agents provocateurs (police officers infiltrated demonstrations and were seen to throw Molotov cocktails, assimilating as the more violent demonstrators); deletions, fraudulent changes in evidence, the criminalisation and arrest of media activists; violent strategies of repression deploying tear gas and rubber bullets, etc.). (Bentes, 2015, p. 21)

*Ninja's* reporters' way of life and shared views can therefore be seen to foster a co-operative spirit and a political culture which is steeped in the philosophy and praxis of alternative media.

### ***Habitus and journalism production processes***

The ethos of journalism is one of the most fundamental questions within this field today. Recent studies from the Tow Center Institute at Columbia University (Anderson, Bell et al. 2014) indicate that there are no simple answers in the inquiry about this journalistic ethos. The authors question established notions, such as the relationship between 'the producer' on one side and 'the public' (audience) on the other, where one produces the information and the other passively receives it. This is a paradigm which is no longer valid, as the audience has already started to produce and disseminate its communication products. Within this context, *Midia Ninja* offers us the opportunity to explore the group's *habitus* and also the circumstances under which this *habitus* allows for the appropriation and/or transformation of established mainstream media practices.

In Bourdieu's words,

*Habitus* is a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 109)

The transformations in culture rarely are revolutionary; instead, they are dependent on the possibilities present in the positions inscribed in the field (Bourdieu, 1986). The author therefore argues that *habitus* cannot be thought of in isolation; it should be considered in relation to the field. "In such fields, and in the struggles which take place in them, every agent acts according to his position (that is, according to the capital he or she possesses) and his *habitus*, related to his personal history" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 47).

In the following section, we will see how ethnography has been useful for us to reflect on the positions of interviewed *Ninja's* reporters at *Casas Ninja* and the ways in which their position has shaped their *habitus* as much as their discursive production. Figure

2, 'Media activists' ways of thinking', in particular is reflective of our attempts to investigate the ways in which *Ninja's* social capital shapes their own self-perception about their own place within the collective and also the extended social world which shapes and informs their own working practices.

## Methodology

Based on the premise of a communication deficit, which imposes a regime of invisibility on themes and causes and is supported by *Mídia Ninja*, we explore *Ninja's* narrative disputes over meaning with mainstream journalism by looking at *Ninja's* posts both on Facebook and its website. Employing a mixed-methods approach, which combines techniques from ethnography, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, and content analysis, we investigate *Mídia Ninja's* working routines and its discursive production practices.

Case studies allow for the empirical investigation of phenomena and are valid strategies to enquire about the 'how' and 'why' (Duarte, 2005, p. 216). Following a micro-ethnographic approach, we employed 'peripheral participant observation', which does not include activities that could compromise the ability for analysis (Lapassade, 2001). We also conducted fieldwork at '*Casa Fora do Eixo*' in São Paulo and '*Casa das Redes*' in Brasília, two examples of *Mídia Ninja's* network of collective housing. It is worth highlighting the importance of observing the behaviour of *Ninja's* reporters in their everyday working routines, which avoids artificial contexts created by a researcher (Hammersley, 1990). One of the authors spent five consecutive days at the '*Casa*' in São Paulo, from 27 July to 2 August, 2015, and another five days at '*Casa das Redes*', located in Brazil's capital, Brasília, between 5 and 9 October, 2015.

Ethnography as a method has been developed within Anthropology, where the researcher immerses him/herself into a chosen culture in order to observe cultural phenomena from the perspective of his/her subject of study. The Chicago School of Ethnography inaugurated a novel dimension to ethnography, specialising in urban sociology. The openness to question the familiar expanded the field in a myriad of ways, far beyond the discipline of sociology and eventually influencing the field of Communication.

As a result, we witnessed ethnographic studies which have taken newsrooms as ‘the field’ and journalists as ‘the natives’ (Travancas, 2005, p. 102).

We realise the importance of the singularity of the communal life adopted by Ninja’s reporters in their collective housing network. The ethnographic observation enabled us to determine how Ninja’s members’ daily routines, personal relations, and political engagement were all interrelated. In Bourdieu’s terms, ethnography enable us to explore the collective housing’s dwellers position within the collective’s *modus operandi* in order to assess Ninja’s *habitus* and how this *habitus* shapes and is shaped by the everyday activities of Ninja’s communal life and hence their cultural production of information.

To complement the research, one of the authors conducted five in-depth interviews with *Mídia Ninja/ Fora do Eixo*’s members: Rafael Vilela, Filipe Peçanha, Karinny Magalhães, Christian Braga, and Ana Pessoa<sup>2</sup>. The reason for choosing these people was because of their media activities within *Fora do Eixo*. In addition, they are good representatives of the profile of the collective’s members. During the participant observation, it was noticed that there is only one group to carry out the activities of both *Fora do Eixo* and *Mídia Ninja*. In addition, it was clear that their communal life makes the sustainability of both collectives possible, while it was noted that the majority of the interviewed members of the collective are from provincial towns and lack professional training in journalism. It is worth stating that the participants of this study did not ask for anonymity, and the confidentiality issue was raised by one of the researchers during the participant observation process at both collective homes.

From the inductive process perspective, we did not depart from our hypothesis. In this respect, the communal life at the collective housing network, which involved the following of external activities, enabled us to confront our own perceptions with statements collected from interviews. These in turn guided our inferences about the collective’s *modus pensandi* as much as their practices and discourses. In doing so, we avoided the trap of artificial or prefabricated responses. The formal and informal conversation as much as the content analysis, which included different sources of information, contributed to the understanding, interpretation, and codification of our data.

Taking *Mídia Ninja* as an example of digital activism that established a new mode of doing journalism, we combine micro-



ethnography and content analysis, drawing inspiration from newsmaking theory, a method that contributes to the understanding of the foundational paradigms of news and how they are constructed (Traquina, 2012). Participating in the working routines of the collective combined with the intense reading of data allowed for the examination of Ninja's news framing and narrative construction logic which expresses their ways of perceiving the world (Wolf, 2003).

By observing the flow of news production and the daily routines of Ninja's collective homes, we proceed with the analysis of Ninja's *habitus*. The content analysis is based on collected materials, such as texts, symbols, printed or digitalised images as well as Ninja reporters' actions aimed at assessing the data in order to create categories (Hercovitz, 2008).

Based on previous knowledge on the ways in which the collective operates, our study aims at determining to which extent *Mídia Ninja* promotes the dissemination of counter-narratives. Our research data includes Ninja's posts from 2013 and 2016, which we use to investigate what news means for the collective. We assess the tone of their narratives, topics addressed, and standards of news production. The collated data includes posts published on the Oximity website and on Facebook, taking into account texts and images (photography and video materials) and hashtags.

The data collection process indicated how Ninja's members become involved with the causes of the movements they report on and the paradigmatic re-incidence of discourses which expressed strategies aimed at mobilising their audience; narratives embedded in critical and antagonistic content toward the mainstream media; the construction of the collective representation to Ninja's audience, i.e., the production of symbolic capital - and to mock as a form of expressing and spreading their discontent by producing collective agency. The hashtags for instance are used as a tool for both making content go viral and mapping out opinion. We identified recurrent patterns in the collected data, which allowed for the creation of codes and properties through a constant comparative process which approached the critical analysis of data, the interviews' content, and the empirical reality observed during the micro-ethnography done at the collective homes.

The content analysis consisted of the categorisation of 275 documents - Oximity and Facebook posts published between 2013 and 2016. The collection included posts that approached recurrent topics reported on by the collective, such as the peak period of

'*jornadas de junho*' in 2013 (from June to October); the campaign against the reduction of the age of criminal responsibility; social movements; references to the President of the Chamber of Deputies at the time, Eduardo Cunha; acts for and against the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff; mainstream media criticism and the judge Sergio Moro; and finally posts related to the collective's activities with reference to the causes supported by the *Mídia Ninja* group.

The micro-ethnography employed at the collective homes combined with in-depth interviews and content analysis of materials published by *Mídia Ninja* enabled us to explore the main question of this paper. That is, the investigation of the circumstances under which *Mídia Ninja* makes use and/or transforms mainstream media established practices. To create the categories, we observe the tone of the texts and images – the Ninja's style, the hashtags, references and strategies shown in the flow of published posts in particular on Facebook. From this viewpoint, we identified, by employing an inductive process, five categories as follows: mobilisation, Ninja's brand identity, mockery, deconstruction, and opinion.

### Categories

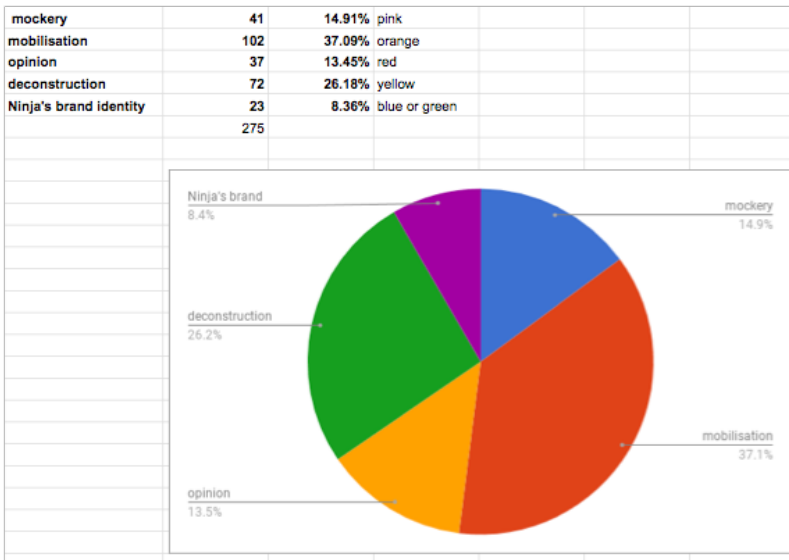
The fieldwork conducted at shared homes allowed for the observation of Ninja's reporters' position and *habitus* within the collective housing. As for Bourdieu, 'every agent acts according to his position' in the field, shaping certain practices and participating in games of power. The experience also enabled us to confront Ninja's daily routines with those of mainstream media, which contributed to data interpretation. The extensive professional experience<sup>3</sup> of one of the authors in Brazilian mainstream newsrooms is an important requisite for the success of the exploration of the field and data.

Regarding Ninja's working routines, it was possible to observe that the selection of topics for news reporting are decided during virtual conversation through chats<sup>4</sup> - known as the '*Chatão*', which gathers together *Fora do Eixo's* regional managers, *Mídia Ninja's* Chat, and *Mídia Casas' Chat* - when the editorial line and the organisation's actions are decided. Through an intense exchange of Telegram messages, the media activists organise their activities, which include demands from other activist groups or movements<sup>5</sup>. Ninja's reporters are expected to produce at least five news articles a

day. But, this milestone is sometimes undermined by the number of activities related to Ninja’s political engagement, as observed during the micro-ethnography period. During the interview, participant Rafael Vilela indicated the use of mainstream journalism techniques in their production routines. By referring to the materials that come from chats and also Facebook inbox messaging, he asserted that “if needed the group makes use of tools from mainstream journalism aimed at checking and improving the information quality<sup>6</sup>.”

Nevertheless, the collective ignores or disqualifies primary sources of information taken as authority by mainstream media. Although there is a leading group<sup>7</sup> which does the strategic planning of *Mídia Ninja*, interviewees did not identify its members. Vilela said that the selection of topics for news reporting is decided spontaneously<sup>8</sup>. The Ninja reporter argues and reassures that the collective does not pursue the ideal of objectivity but constitutes itself as “a subject within the political process,” which produces concerned narratives about the topics and causes the collective embraces. Vilela describes Ninja’s philosophy, which became evident in the fieldwork: political engagement is intertwined with the content production processes, and they complement each other as a media strategy.

**Graph 1** – Mídia Ninja’s categories



Source: Produced by one of the authors

The category defined as ‘Ninja’s brand identity’ enables us to explore the ways in which Ninja’s reporters make recurrent use of their symbolic capital within their own practices. Since its founding, *Mídia Ninja* has attempted to ‘sell’ its own identity. The use of the terms ‘mission’, ‘historic moment’ or ‘epic moment’ adopted by its members in their written posts helps Ninja’s reporters to build an aura of magnitude to the collective. Ninja’s reporters who were arrested during the wave of protests, i.e. Karinny Magalhães and Filipe Peçanha, were portrayed as heroes in Ninja’s posts about the ‘*jornadas de junho*’ that reported on detentions. The representation built on social media was that of dynamism, reputation, and high connectivity, functioning as self-promotion. “The production is mainly self-production (making most of the skills developed over the individual’s daily life), which means, subjectivity” (Sodré, 2002, p. 56). This subjectivity produces fixed human and symbolic capital.

The media activists make use of photos, banners, teasers and gifs embedded in self-propaganda, strengthening Ninja’s brand. The gif “*Somos 500 mil Ninjas?*”<sup>9</sup> (‘We are 500 thousand Ninjas’) exacerbates media activists’ reach. “We are 500 thousand... there’s a network [of people/ us] connected to the streets, the social fights, and to the cultural, political, economic and environmental production of information.” Ninja’s reporters use their own Facebook profiles to like and/or share *Mídia Ninja*’s posts, denoting their self-referencing approach. Ninjas’ values and convictions regarding the importance of *Mídia Ninja* in the digital media scenario feed at certain extent the following categories: mobilisation, deconstruction, and opinion, the ‘mockery’ element on the other hand functions as a strategic tool to develop Ninjas’ products labelled in the three mentioned categories. But there are also hybrid posts, where we can notice features of more than one category described here.

The category ‘mobilisation’, which is present in most of the collective’s narratives, was inferred from Ninjas’ actions, content production, and strategy used to boost their posts on Facebook. The materials included in this label are reflective of the ways in which *Mídia Ninja* operates in their attempts at subverting media’s role in reporting with neutrality, which is one of mainstream media’s pillars. The majority of posts combine images or visual art and written texts aiming to attract new Ninja’s potential collaborators and engage its readers/ followers in its news agendas and/or causes. The series “*É hora de pressionar o STF*” (‘It is time to put pressure on

Supreme Court')<sup>10</sup> was followed by a wave of banners which aimed at strengthening a campaign against the President of Chamber of Deputies in Brazil at that time, Eduardo Cunha (PMDB) - one of the favourite targets of *Mídia Ninja*<sup>11</sup>.

Our participant observation shed light on the priorities and also the extent to which *Mídia Ninja* is committed to social movements, which is reflective of Ninja's social capital. Leading groups and movements' members, such as indigenous peoples, MTST, MST, *Levante Popular*, among others<sup>12</sup>, are often present in *Mídia Ninja*'s collective housing network. The explicit activism is reflective of the collective homes' daily routines and also *Mídia Ninja*'s editorial line, such as the selection of news topics and its news network. Ninja's narratives, which helped us to infer our five categories, are a result of this communal-and-activist-daily praxis.

At '*Casas das Redes*' in Brasilia, we observed how Ninjas' activist activities have a negative impact upon the news coverage of the National Congress of Brazil. Since its founding, *Mídia Ninja* follows a kind of procedure in order to participate in media activism activities, which imply Ninja's reporters' engagement in the organisation of actions and events, public mobilisation, production of materials to disseminate Ninja's causes and activities, and eventually news coverage of its actions. Thus, *Ninja*'s media campaigns function as propaganda of the causes supported by the collective. During the fieldwork at '*Casa Fora do Eixo SP*', Vilela, who conducted the preparatory meeting for the event '*Festival do Amanhecer SP*' against the reduction of the age of criminal responsibility, with 43 representatives of social movements, described his own dynamics:

We have a very organic [spontaneous] relationship with movements, such as MST, Levante, Juntos, Students' movement, LGBT. They come to us [asking for help] and we construct the political process in the narrative field. All at once, we do news reporting and get engaged in the causes that matter most to us. We not only believe in the causes, but we are part of the movement, and fight for it. (Vilela, interview, 27 August, 2015)

During the interview, Felipe Peçanha said: "We are more than a Facebook page. I'm talking about Facebook's potential to make posts go viral". The intense engagement during the acts against Rousseff's impeachment resulted in informative posts about the use of social network sites<sup>13</sup>. In the launch of *Mídia Ninja*'s website, its members stated its main goal by saying:

The Ninja's portal is a hub of production and dissemination of information aimed at valuing and giving visibility to underrepresented topics in the mainstream media. More than mobilise a new generation of activists and journalists, the platform democratises the access to information giving voice to multimedia-citizens, who tell their own version of the facts. Characters, story tellers and readers are mixed up, creating a new reality much more close to truth. (Mídia Ninja, 2014)<sup>14</sup>

From recurrent patterns identified in the interviews and Ninjas' products, we coined the category 'deconstruction' – a term highlighted by Rafael Vilela, Filipe Peçanha and Karinny Magalhães. Ninja's reporters for instance referred extensively on the mainstream media's negative coverage of the left-wing party (workers' party) and the corporate media's support of the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff<sup>15</sup>. This topic corresponds to 26% of Ninja's posts. Below (Figure 1) there is a post which compares the headlines of *O Globo* newspaper of 14 and 19 March 2016, respectively, related to actions for and against impeachment. This was published on *Mídia Ninja's* Facebook timeline on 20 March 2016: "*Brasil vai às ruas contra Dilma e Lula e a favor de Moro*" ("Brazil takes to streets against Dilma and Lula, and for Moro.") The tagline said, "*Protesto pacífico reuniu 3,6 milhões de pessoas em 326 cidades de todos os estados e no Distrito Federal*" ("Peaceful demonstration gathers 3.6 million people in 326 cities from all Brazilian states, including the Federal District"). And "*Aliados de Dilma e Lula fazem manifestação em todos os estados*" ("Allies of Dilma and Lula protest in all states"). The newspaper added: "*PT reúne 275 mil, 7% do público dos protestos de domingo pelo impeachment*" ("PT gathers together 275 thousand, 7% of the demonstrators who showed up on Sunday for impeachment"). However, the images show the same crowd at both events.

**Figure 1** – Deconstruction



Source: Mídia Ninja's Facebook timeline

The category ‘deconstruction’ shows how Ninjas establish a dialogue with corporate media in their attempts at disputing and/or deconstructing mainstream media discursive production. This can be observed in the narratives about the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST), the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST) and the ‘black blocs’. Ninja’s attempts at de-mystifying the black blocs becomes evident in our analysis. For instance, masked youngsters breaking into shops was referred to by the mainstream media named as ‘vandalism’ during the wave of protests in 2013, whereas Ninjas called it as a “symbolic act” in the ‘Black Mac’ post of 07 October 2013. Because of Ninjas’ strategy of deconstructing negative discourses about black blocs, they were accused of connivance, not least because Ninja’s images of the rioters exuded a certain glamour. Interview participant Karinny Magalhães describes Mídia Ninja’s strategy:

We were the first medium to follow the activities of the ‘black blocs’. We were there together with them. We started creating narratives aimed at deconstructing the prejudice that had been built around them. Though they face a lot of criticism, we counteract it and try to show another side. It is clear that when we try to deconstruct a discourse imposed on people’s minds by the powerful, we end up being criminalised. (Magalhães, interview, 9 October, 2015)

Embedded in Ninja’s deconstruction of certain themes lies *Mídia Ninja*’s opinion on the topics addressed in its information flow. That is, there is a juxtaposition between the categories ‘deconstruction’ and ‘opinion’ – where the collective expresses its partiality. By expression opinion in its factual texts/posts, *Mídia Ninja* deconstructs deontological pillars in the field of journalism. These posts are impregnated with an ironic style which borders on aggression and incorporates online social media language resources, such as hashtags, which allow the posts to go viral, i.e., #GlobodoGolpe and #GlobodaMorte<sup>16</sup>.

In the posts on political conjuncture, there is a more analytical tone, though the dispute over meaning with mainstream media remains, as Ninja’s reporters emphasise the partiality of corporate media’s messages. Ninjas also highlight the conflict between classes, positing themselves as representatives of social movements. In addition, the collective sets their own position as a movement itself and deconstructs mainstream discourses as manifestation of truth. The post “*A Mídia Ninja tem lado*” (*Mídia Ninja takes sides*), published on 24 October, 2014, is reflective of the collective’s convictions and

discourses. This post was published two days before the second turn in Brazil's presidential election, when the group declared: "our votes go for Dilma Rousseff on day 26".

We are the desire and practice of a new flow of communication on behalf of popular achievements. We are against the media lords, those who are against the poorest, against the Afro-descendants in favelas and against the most marginalised people of all. In the second turn, we decide to speak up against mainstream media's attempts at terrorising and telling lies in order to manipulate the public opinion. It is our role to counteract those who believe that Brazil is still an extension of powerful landlords' properties. (Mídia Ninja, 2014)<sup>17</sup>

Their partial approach to news opens up space for explicit opinion as well as mockery, which is the name of the category which helps us to build our argument about media activism ethos. This feature strengthens the collective's *habitus*, adding to Ninja's news routines new practices. Whilst the mainstream media use cartoons to disseminate ironic criticism, Ninjas use mockery as a means to weave collective identification and relationships through expressions of indignation (Cammaerts, 2013). A 'wind-up' tone or scorn is also perceivable from *Mídia Ninja's* opinion texts. This category<sup>18</sup>, which draws on a political strategy idealised in Argentina<sup>19</sup>, is brought to light in posts which combine provocative and irreverent visual art and mordant texts. This strategy can be seen in edited videos and real time coverage with a demoralising bias.

The interviews indicate interviewees' belief in Ninja's way of life and activism approach. To change the public opinion and the collective consciousness; to use communication as a means to give voice to the voiceless; to create new narratives from a new point of view; and to expose other viewpoints, are part of Ninja's repertoire, as expressed by interviewees' voices. For them, the communal life strengthens the loyalty of Ninja's members to compromise to Ninja's causes. It is possible to identify patterns in interviewees' speeches that become often repetitive, expressing modes of self-persuasion, where there is the prevalence of a monochord opinion.



**Table 1** – Media activists' ways of thinking

Name	Age	City	Collective	Activity	Motivation
Ana Pessoa	30	Ribeirão Preto (SP)	Sotaque Coletivo	Pelotas -festivals management/ Image edition	As soon as I started devoting myself to the process (cause), I realised the issue of giving voice to the voiceless; the issue of being in search of a novel possible world, taking into account that we play a fundamental role within this process by fighting over communication in particular.
Filipe Peçanha	30	Machado (MG)	Massa Coletiva	São Carlos – photography <i>TwitCasting</i>	Give visibility to issues, collectives, and social movements; realities which are oppressed, distorted, manipulated, and suffocated by mainstream press. Bring to light some utopia, showing that it is possible through practices of your everyday life, making a difference by doing what you love.
Christian Braga	28	Manaus (AM)	Difusão	Manaus – Grito Rock São Paulo – photography/ design/ video	Our reporting is reflective of our beliefs. There's no way to publish a sensationalised piece. That's what is cool. There's a lot of spontaneity within Fora do Eixo and each one of us has his own interests. Ninja expresses well what is meant to be 'we' as a social movement.
Rafael Vilela	30	Piracicaba (SP)	Cardume Cultural	Florianópolis – management/ photography/ text edition/ activism	We exist to set the news agenda and change public opinion (...) We use the best tools available in the market and improve and adapt them to our own dynamics. We don't deny the force/ impact of Marketing [on society]. We use these technologies to potentialise the causes and topics we believe in.

Karinny Magalhães	24	Ferreira Gomes (AM)	Palafita	management/ edition activism	The more we perceive and conspire, the more encouragement we find, even from evil things. If we think about our field, the progressive field, it is under threat. We realise we need to mobilise people and reach targets we've already acquired. Our daily fights are essential to keep us active, and our activism is very combative.
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Source: Produced by one of the authors

Ninja's members are united through their previous activist experience in different cultural collectives which have shaped their identity. They also share a nomadic spirit as much as a commitment to collective causes. This can be related to Travanca's (2011, p. 81) discussion of 'adhesion' in mainstream journalists, an attitude that explains the engagement of journalists with their profession, which results in the "subjection of other aspects of their life". This commitment imposes on journalists a subjectivity which expresses itself beyond and independently of the time spent at work (Travancas, 2011, p. 81).

The subversion in the finality of the use of mobile journalism by *Mídia Ninja's* media activists is an example of the use and transformation of mainstream journalism practices from a peculiar *habitus*. The Canadian international news agency Reuters was the first to introduce digital tools as a platform for the edition and instant publication from anywhere in the world through Reuters Mobile Journalism, launched in 2007 (Silva, 2008). By taking hold of this communicational paradigm, the media activists set different news agendas and approaches online.

Today mainstream media makes use of social media to disseminate information and increase its reach, as does *Mídia Ninja*. Ninjas in addition utilise other resources, such as the pinned bottom to intensify the potential of posts going viral and the efficacy of communication. The pinned bottom is a mode of publication which allows for the definition and identification of the first post within a Facebook page timeline, facilitating the sharing of posts and strengthening the connectivity between the collective's followers. This strategy was useful for making narratives going viral aiming at mobilisation against Dilma Rouseff's impeachment and

demoralisation of mainstream media messages on the same topic. It is evident that, if some procedures of Ninja's reporters are similar to those of mainstream media, there are divergences in its intentions and final products.

## Conclusions

This article has explored the ways in which Ninja's reporters appropriate and transform established mainstream media practices, aiming to investigate journalistic ethos today. Although Bentes (2015) asserts that media activism is more concerned with effects rather than disputes over meaning and truth, our exploration of some of the collective's discursive production processes indicates that *Mídia Ninja* disputes the production of discourses of truth produced by mainstream media. In addition, the collective attempts to legitimise itself as a medium embedded in symbolic power, which challenges mainstream media economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The collective expressed its attempts at engaging themselves in disputes over meaning, when they launched the *Mídia Ninja* project and stated that they pursue to create<sup>20</sup>. By reporting on themes that are under-reported by mainstream media and by deconstructing their discourses, the collective adopts practices and procedures of a social construction of reality, just as mainstream journalism does.

From its narratives, *Mídia Ninja* feeds its own reputation toward its audience as much as it makes possible the sustainability of the project by obtaining funds from international foundations. The sustainability of *Mídia Ninja* is possible through *Fora do Eixo*, which raised federal funds, such as the Ministry of Culture (MinC) and *Banco do Brasil*, which supported the *Fora do Eixo's* headquarter in Brasilia. This was by former government and may have some relevance to stance on impeachment. The collective *Fora do Eixo*, which includes *Mídia Ninja*, started also raising funds from international organisations, such as Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and Hivos International Foundation<sup>20</sup>. The economic sustainability of *Fora do Eixo* and, subsequently, *Mídia Ninja*, is expressive of the conversion of social capital into economic capital, which resulted from the discursive disputes over meaning and legitimation with mainstream media. The narrative production from the media activism's logic under which reporting already means to operate politically by organising and reverberating unheard voices (Bentes,

2015) contributes to the widening of journalism's deontological codes, such as impartiality and neutrality which are not present in *Mídia Ninja's* practices and discourses.

The investigation of Ninja's working routines also illuminated its media activism facet, which functions as a channel for political mobilisation as much as the expression of Ninja reporters' opinion. Social movements, such as MST and MTST, constitute themselves as Ninja's primary sources of information as well as Ninja's own social causes, such as the impeachment process of former President Dilma Rousseff, adding to Ninja's 'news network' (Tuchman cited by Traquina, 2012, p. 191). The news production is highly influenced by this news network, which involves news production and its work flow on one side, and the framing of happenings and news production processes on the other (Ibidem, 2012).

*Mídia Ninja* faces a content production deficit due to their reporters' commitment to activism and political mobilisation which jeopardises its news production activities. Yet the partnership with other media and collectives such as *Carta Capital* and *Jornalistas Livres* has minimised Ninja's news shortage. This study has shown that Ninja's political engagement stands as a paradox, as it narrows the collective's potential to widen the visibility of underdeveloped themes it considers important and threatens its potential to deconstruct mainstream media discourses. In doing so, *Mídia Ninja* gives less priority to its role in news reporting, prioritising the 'counter-communication' approach (Peruzzo, 2009, p. 132). This is reflective of the extent of the influence of alternative journalism within its activities and expectations; an approach which differentiates itself from mainstream media ways of selecting topics and producing information.

\*Translated by Alice Baroni, revised by Gareth Chetwynd and Andrea Mayr. Final revision Tania Rosas-Moreno.

## NOTES

- 1 The *Mídia Ninja* collective has its origins in the Multimídia Centre and PosTV, communication channels created by Fora do Eixo in 2011 and 2012, respectively. Founded in 2005, FdE is a partnership between cultural collectives and

is distinguished by its use of collective residencies, with collective management of financial resources. Recently, the organisation joined the Catarse a crowdfunding platform in order to boost financial resources. In 2013, 18 collective houses and 91 partners collectives integrated into its network, helping to explain for the wide coverage during the protests in Brazil, in 2013.

- 2 Filipe Peçanha, 28, who is from Machado (Minas Gerais), quit his undergraduate course in Audiovisual, Image and Sound Course at University of São Carlos; Ana Pessoa, 28, from Riberão Preto (São Paulo), graduated in Cinema and Animation from the Federal University of Pelotas, in Rio Grande do Sul; Christian Braga, 26 years old, from Manaus (Amazonas), quit Engineering; Rafael Vilela, from Piracicaba (São Paulo) is a designer; Karinny Magalhães, from Ferreira Gomes, Amapá, hopes to enrol in undergraduate studies in Communication.
- 3 Claudia Rodrigues worked as a reporter in the following newspapers: *O Globo*, *O Dia*, *Jornal da Tarde* and *Tribuna da Imprensa* and *Raça* and *Reader's Digest* magazines.
- 4 Chat is the denomination for virtual conversation in platform as Telegram – an app that promotes information traffic and is capable of transmitting heavy audio and video files. Telegram is safer as its system is encrypted.
- 5 One of the authors became member of the Chat Mídia during the field research.
- 6 Interview with Rafael Vilela, 27 August, 2015.
- 7 Skype interview with Jefferson Guedes, 12 February, 2015.
- 8 In the Ninja's glossary, organic means informal, spontaneous, what flows. It's a recurrent expression spoken during the collective's conversations.
- 9 Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/midiaNINJA/posts/633781133446702>.
- 10 Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/MidiaNINJA/photos/pb.164188247072662.-2207520000.1461092611./635151569976325/?type=3&theater>

- 11 Mídia Ninja's media campaign against Eduardo Cunha aimed to push the Federal Supreme Court into the removal of the deputy Eduardo Cunha from the Chamber of Deputies, where he was the leading member at that moment. The Federal Supreme Court minister, Teori Zavascki, accepted the request for the removal impetrated by the Republic General Attorney Office. Zavascki understood Cunha was foreclosing Lava-Jato operation. Lava-Jato (Car Wash) is Brazil's biggest ever investigation into corruption involving private and public companies, members of the business community, institutions, businessman and politicians remains in action today.
- 12 Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/MidiaNINJA/photos/a.164308700393950.1073741828.164188247072662/619270621564420/?type=3&theater>
- 13 Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/MidiaNINJA/photos/a.164308700393950.1073741828.164188247072662/619270621564420/?type=3&theater>
- 14 Post published on Mídia Ninja's website on 14 June, 2014 (the platform Oximity was acquired by Scribd, an online reading subscribe service). Mídia Ninja released new platform on Oximity, it was available at <https://ninja.oximity.com/article/M%C3%ADdia-NINJA-lan%C3%A7a-nova-plata-1>. Accessed on 14 April, 2016.
- 15 In 2016, president Dilma Rousseff (PT) faced an impeachment process due to accusations that she had endorsed accounting methods which would supposedly have disrespected Brazil's Fiscal Responsibility Law (Lei de Responsabilidade Fiscal). Brazil's constitution requires a criminal act to justify impeachment, and critics say Rousseff's political enemies distorted the facts to arrive at a definition of illegality. Demonstrations against and in favour of the president's impeachment took place in Brazil. Ninjas shared conventional left-wing definition of events as institutional coup, supported by mainstream media and important elements within the judiciary. Opponents of the impeachment portrayed leading Lava Jato judge Sergio Moro as a major force behind the ouster of Rousseff, explaining the mocking posts produced by Mídia Ninja directed against Moro and the powerful Globo news corporation.
- 16 The use of hashtags allows the assemblage of reports and

information linked to a keyword or a theme. This categorisation promotes interaction and connection between people with the same kind of interests. Therefore, it works as a strategy for organisation and mobilisation over protests and campaigns through individual posts or shares published on Twitter, Instagram and/or other social networks, The hashtags #ForaTemer (#OutTemer), #DiretasJá (ElectionsNow) or #ForaDilma (#OutDilma) work as a public opinion's thermometer and reinforce the media attention over issues marked by tags.

- 17 Post published on 24 October, 2014. "Mídia Ninja takes sides". It was available at <https://ninja.oximity.com/article/A-M%C3%ADdia-Ninja-tem-lado-1> The website migrated to Scribd platform – a online reading subscribe page. Accessed on 13 April, 2016.
- 18 Example of the mockery category available at <https://www.facebook.com/MidiaNINJA/photos/a.235526863272133.1073741870.164188247072662/533965756761574/?type=3&theater>.
- 19 The mockery strategy was created as a way to map out the torture perpetrated in Buenos Aires during the military dictatorship through demonstrations and creative protests in front of the perpetrators' houses. The mockery strategy aims to provoke embarrassment and humiliation.
- 20 Post published on *Mídia Ninja's* website on 14 June, 2014 (the platform Oximity was acquired by Scribd, an online Reading subscribe service). *Mídia Ninja* released new platform on Oximity, it was available at <https://ninja.oximity.com/article/M%C3%ADdia-NINJA-lan%C3%A7a-nova-plata-1>. Accessed on 14 April, 2016.
- 20 Information on agreements signed with foundations came from Rafael Vilela and Filipe Peçanha during interviews occurring respectively, on 27 August and 15 November, 2015.

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RECEIVED ON: 29/04/2017 | APPROVED ON: 18/11/2017