GENERATION Z JOURNALISTS: WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THEM IN TIMES OF MEDIA DEGRADATION?

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ABSTRACT *This article presents the results of a research-creation project undertaken in Brazil during a period of thirty months to assess how journalists of the so-called Generation Z handle emerging technologies and create specific narratives on converging media platforms. The study included 125 university students on a multi-platform journalistic creation project subject to the methods of Paulo Freire's theory. The results show that Gen Zers establish writing parameters that avoid complex browsing and are based on a virtual newsroom and multitasking. New journalistic models to be led by the students who participated in the study will probably rely on an organizational setting characterized by horizontal decision-making processes and more flexible, democratic production. Immersed in the context of imminent democratic backsliding in Brazil, research participants defined their news agenda as a form of contesting hegemonic discourses.*

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INTRODUCTION

The current erosion of the media's historical and structural power (Waisbord, 2018; Starr, 2019; Reese, 2019) brings to the fore the need to question the training of future journalists. What can be expected from professionals of the so-called 'Generation Z', a population cohort characterized as 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), people who have experienced the context of media convergence and narrative hybridization since birth?

Despite the influential opinion on how the use of technology characterizes this group – also called the 'Net Generation' by Don Tapscott (1998) – there is much controversy as to what these youths' different skills in the use of Internet and digital resources actually are (Bennett *et al.*, 2008; Gallardo-Echenique *et al.*, 2015; Bullen and Morgan, 2011). How transformative can such skills (if real) be for the future practice of journalism?

Much research has been done on the transformation caused by digital media in journalism, including investigations on the impact of fake news and press credibility (Fletcher and Park, 2017; Citrin and Stocker, 2018; Lazer *et al.*, 2018). Alternative pedagogical practices are proposed so that future professionals can proficiently wield new technologies. However, little light has been shed on how these young professionals use emerging technologies in their first journalistic endeavors while still in training.

This article analyzes the experience from a research-creation project which included the participation of 125 Brazilian students majoring in Journalism to produce the *Campus Multiplatform* project, as described in the following. The premises of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1974, 1985, 1993) support the qualitative research process, which unveiled these young undergraduates' abilities and perceptions about journalistic work on multiple platforms. Research was based on an inductive investigation which did not consider the students to be tech-savvy simply because they are immersed in a context of accelerated technological development. On the contrary, this text intends to describe some practices that were empirically observed during a journalistic training process and only partially confirmed assumptions of the digital native discourse.

In this study, context matters greatly. Under constant attacks over the past few years, especially in the current climate of political unrest and transition of power to the far-right in the country (Hunter and Power, 2019; Daly, 2019; Jinkings *et al.*, 2016; Albuquerque and Meneses, 2017; Souza, 2016; Scartezini, 2016), the Brazilian press has sought forms and spaces of resistance. Among these spaces, digital alternative news media have become an important means to contest misinformation, particularly when the government's political communication strategy disqualifies the traditional press. This complex sociocultural context often leads Journalism majors to question their future in the market and their role in society, which includes technical and political challenges.

The current scenario in Brazil marks a specific chapter of the conservative, polarized wave that is invading western democracies through social media strategies (Fitzgerald, 2018; Albrecht *et al.*, 2019). In this context, Generation Z – people born as of 1997,

according to Michael Dimock (2019) – is also targeted by the alt-right discourse. In the West, movements on this pole of the political spectrum are proud to declare themselves as the "growing voice of Generation Z" (Salazar, 2018: 2).

At the same time, press conglomerates all over the world have suffered to adapt to media convergence. In Brazil and other countries, many digital channels have become a platform for citizen journalism (Bruns and Highfield, 2012) and a career alternative for journalists affected by the economic erosion of traditional media outlets. These channels also started to develop a counter-hegemonic narrative (Couldry and Curran, 2003), turning their criticism toward conservative state policies and the advancement of far-right ideology. Therefore, being able to navigate through digital media is not only a matter of the technical capacity to communicate with an online audience, but also a necessary condition for defending essential values of journalism, such as plurality and a watchdog stance towards political power.

For students who are currently majoring in Journalism, it is assumed that their habits in digital media channels are already naturalized. Notwithstanding, Sue Bennett *et al.* (2008), among other authors, question this assumption, arguing that there is not enough evidence to suggest that intrinsic digital fluency is the result of only a supposed high consumption of technology. As such, it is not possible to presume how students will use online media for news production, mainly within a context of unbalanced values that traditionally support journalism in Brazil and elsewhere. In addition, the social and economic inequality that pervades Brazilian society is also reflected in the context of public higher education institutions, which means that different levels of media literacy and access to technological resources influence how journalists-to-be tend to maneuver digital media.

Therefore, questions remain unexplored. What is in fact normalized among these Generation Z journalists, and how do they execute journalistic work in a digital environment, even in a training process?

Based on a qualitative investigation and through an innovative form of inquiry – namely, the research-creation methodology – this article aims to elucidate a specific research question:

RQ1: What are the editorial, technical, and organizational precepts that guide Generation Z journalists-to-be in building transmedia multi-platform news media?

In the following section, the paper will debate the transformations that journalism has faced and its interfaces on social media, focusing specifically on the effects of these transformations in Brazil and for young journalists of Generation Z. The subsequent section describes the research methodology, and the final section discusses the main findings, along with the limitations, of the study.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE

Research on the impact of social media for newsmaking has grown rapidly over the last few years. Among the research subjects, the most common are changes in the relationship between journalists and the public, pointing to trends indicating greater interaction (Holton *et al.*, 2016); the de-ritualization of news consumption (Livingstone, 2004); the transformation of traditional media as a result of the rise of new media which are natively digital (Bivens, 2008); the use of artificial intelligence and algorithms in news distribution (Bucher, 2012; Latzer *et al.*, 2014); updated professional practices and newsroom settings (Robinson, 2011); emerging values for news selection (Trilling *et al.*, 2017); and considerations about professional ethics (Deuze and Yeshua, 2001).

These shifts have prompted many studies about the professional identity of journalists and the meaning of the profession in the face of the cultural mediatization induced by new ways of accessing, producing, and circulating information (Mellado and Van Dalen, 2014). The current transformations in the field are recognized as structural and they demand a review of society's relationship with information, trust, and civic participation (Peters and Broersma, 2012).

Social media and digital platforms were previously characterized as 'alternative news media' (Bruns and Highfield, 2012) or as an escape route for journalists facing the press crisis. Over time, the view that online and offline platforms are not contrary but complementary forces has prevailed. Despite the clear differences in normative and pragmatic requirements between social and traditional media, the journalism scenario envisaged the rise of digital news outlets (Bell *et al.*, 2017). This adaptation has led to more interaction between news producers and their audiences on open online platforms (Bruns, 2008; Deuze, 2007), with journalists or non-professional independent newsmakers creating their own transmedia narratives (Jenkins *et al.*, 2014).

The deontology of journalism has been reclaimed as we face the need for a clear distinction between professionalism and the use of social media as a display for laypeople's opinions (Domingo and Heinonen, 2008). It is not enough to exhibit ethical criteria and the values of journalism to mark this distinction. Technological abilities for using social media have become indispensable for professional journalists. Hyperlinks, videos, photos, tagging sources and people involved in the news story, or the use of hashtags are important for boosting visibility (Hermida, 2010). These digital tools have become necessary for disseminating content in social networks but are also already crucial to the transparency of the newsmaking process (Karlsson, 2011). Journalists working with digital media have now been laden with the need to shape their content so as to gain attention and trust in an enormous universe of daily data.

Technical leaps have also imposed ethical dilemmas (Deuze and Yeshua, 2001) related to the process of gathering information, the use of content, and the right to source confidentiality; hypertextuality and the use of links with access to different platforms over which the journalist has no control; multi-platform practices and multimedia narratives

that affect the integrity of a story; and the detrimental effects to accuracy that come with immediacy. The deontological codes that rule journalism are seldom updated to include principles which are appropriate for a digital environment (Días-Campo and Segado-Boj, 2015), thus underlining the need for self-regulation among professionals (González-Esteban *et al.*, 2011).

Given the lack of a normative reference for the profession, teaching digital journalism at universities grows in importance, since it is left with the task of imbuing professionals with self-critical capacities and stimulating creative skills to improve journalistic narratives.

Brazilian students around the ages of 18 to 22 are part of a generation born at a time where digital technologies had already been developed. What, then, characterizes the relationship between younger generations and news media?

Generational Differences

As defined by the *Pew Research Center* (Dimock, 2019), Generation Z encompasses those who completed 22 years of age in 2019. Therefore, students currently enrolled in Brazilian higher education are an integral part of this demographic cohort, which is characterized by a potential technological immersion through mobile devices from an early age. Barbara Combes (2009) questions the automatic acceptance of the attributes that hypothetically characterize Gen Z, as proposed by native digital theorists and which became dominant both in grey and academic literature (Smith, 2012). For instance, the belief that youths from this generation possess intuitive knowledge useful for finding information on the web only because they have been exposed to technology since birth is clearly denied by Combes (2009). On the contrary, she finds that students do not know how to use more sophisticated search engines and rely on doubtful sources of information. Based on such findings, Mark Bullen and Tannis Morgan (2011) propose to change the label from 'digital natives' to 'digital learners'.

This controversy does not deny that technology has a huge influence on daily life and students' behavior. The *ICT Kids Online Brazil Research* (BISC, 2017) showed that 85% of Brazilian infants and teenagers (9-17 years old) are connected to the Internet, and 93% of them are online through their smartphones. Most of them use the Internet mainly for social media (73%). Fifty-one percent of the interviewees between the ages of 9 and 17 use their phones to consume news, and twelve percent use the Internet to discuss politics or the country's problems. Nevertheless, access to these resources does not imply a proficient or a conscious use of them.

In other parts of the world, such as Western Europe, people between the ages of 19 and 29 are twice as likely to be informed via social media instead of through TV news. Among the youngest generation, 73% claim to consume online news at least once a day. However, access to information is not correlated with a stronger connection between these young respondents and the support to democracy (Foa and Mounk, 2016).

Data on consumer habits and access to online information among younger generations are pivotal for journalistic practices. In the field of journalism, however, there is still a feeling of division between 'old' and 'new' practices (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre, 2013; Colson and Heinderyckx, 2008). The divide between 'traditional journalists' and 'interaction experts' is also related to how these different professionals identify the possibilities for recovering trust in journalism. While the former believe this process comes with strengthening journalistic authority – via stronger accountability – the latter see more promise in the horizontal relationship between producers and consumers of news (Zahay *et al.*, 2019).

All this data must be considered within a context of a political offensive against the democratic role of the press. After all, new professionals are on their way into the labor market and face distrust towards journalistic practices and may also rely on technology to produce content. This is an explosive combination in our day and shall mark the Gen Zers' course of action in the field. This is why it is important to understand how (and if) Journalism majors use technology and combine it with the normative principles of the profession, such as plurality and accuracy.

METHODOLOGY

This article presents an analysis resulting from a thirty-month long research-creation project developed between 2016 and 2019. The project was named *Campus Multiplatform* and involved Journalism majors (N=125) from the University of Brasilia.

According to Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk (2012), research-creation is an emerging form of qualitative research that challenges conventional formats of scientific production, since it does not abide by pre-defined models which segregate the roles of researcher and the people under analysis and by data collection tools deemed to be neutral and objective. In contrast, the research-creation methodology experiments with a new aesthetic, relying on different formats of artistic production (text, audio, image, dance, *etc.*), lively human interactions, and multimedia texts. This very experimentation produces new knowledge that qualifies for scientific testing in the humanities and social sciences.

Research-creation is suitable for experiences with new media and new languages that involve creative processes. Developed in Canada in 2003 "to encourage hybrid forms of activity promising to capture for research the creative energies of artists" (Manning and Massumi, 2014: 84), research-creation has expanded its application to different fields of knowledge. The methodology was defined by the *Canada Council for the Arts* as "a part of an investigation that involves trying things out, as opposed to gathering data, as it is often conceived in traditional academia" (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012: 9). It also differs from the research-action methodology in that the final objective is not to encourage political or participatory engagement but to observe a creative process after opening up a platform for experimentation.

Chapman and Sawchuck (2012: 15-21) identify four sub-categories of research-creation stemming from the modulation of the two words composing the term: 'research-for-creation', 'research-from-creation', 'creative presentations of research', and 'creation-as-research'. This project with students from the University of Brasilia proved to be a case of 'creation-as-research', although, in practice, the experience was an amalgamation of the four categories. Text creation, images, and other hybrid content types that were developed as a pedagogical practice were previously informed by collective research on the literature for multimedia journalism and platform convergence. In turn, this content generated data about the relationship between a new generation of journalists and their digital journalistic narrative. Consequently, these analyses may also encourage further experimentations among young professionals in an "interweaving of theory and practice" (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012: 20). If that is the case, the research becomes a creation in itself.

The process of creation and critical reflection with these Journalism students was also combined with discussions in 'culture circles', as proposed by Paulo Freire's methodology (1974, 1985, 1993). The work consisted of in-person and online debates – via instant messaging apps in mobile devices – to discuss and investigate the students' thematic universe (Freire, 1974. 1993). Students debated the agenda to be reported on and at the university, constantly contemplating newsmaking and collective practices to be distributed through multiple news platforms.

In Brasilia, students had weekly discussions mediated by a professor. These meetings were organized to set the agenda and discuss language and potential criticism for the material produced for the *Campus* project. At these gatherings, students discussed their views about topics regarding university matters and new media types to explore while keeping the normative principles of journalism in mind. In these experiences, students laid out their own reading of their generation as consumers and producers of news. From these debates, it was possible to identify 'generative themes', that is, matters that touch on these young professionals' background in their journalistic experience with emerging technologies.

These exercises involved five student groups, of which 60% were women and 40% were men, mostly (78.3%) within the age range between 18 and 24 years old. Following the profile of the university's population, 39.6% were white students, 36.7% were brown, and 10.2% were black.

The students' production was compiled around the Campus *Multiplatform* project as an experiment with multimedia journalistic narratives, as detailed below. Their discussions in the culture circles were recorded in a research diary. The main topics that emerged in each group were categorized in a panel that also included the observed practices throughout the phase of content production by the students. The practices were grouped into four processes: choosing the agenda to be reported, searching for information, defining the emphasis for the writings, and following along with the audience's responses. Since the

focus of the research-creation project was on digital media, the tech resources used by the students for each process were also registered.

In the news production stage, every student in the study responded to a semi-structured interview. The initial responses were then compared to three reports: a technical one made by the Editorial Board with an assessment of the project and recommendations for subsequent groups, a self report produced by each group, and questionnaires filled out individually with data on each student's experience.

Analysis of the reports and the five panels (one for each group) fell under four final categories that were inductively obtained from the observations recorded throughout the thirty months of the project. The categories were (1) the organizing model (how the students coordinated their tasks in order to produce collectively), (2) content priorities (what parameters defined the agenda to be reported), (3) technical orientation (concerns about the tech resources to be used and why these choices were made), and (4) deontological claims. The main findings are described below.

THE *CAMPUS MULTIPLATFORM* PROJECT

Campus Multiplatform is a laboratory for digital narratives employed by the *Journalism School* of the *University of Brasilia*. Students produced content for seven platforms: a website and an app developed by the project, a *Facebook* page, an *Instagram* profile, a *Twitter* profile, a *WhatsApp* group, and a *YouTube* channel.

Campus news was formatted into different narratives so as to reach out to different groups, which were segmented according to their chosen platform. Without making use of algorithms or Artificial Intelligence tools, the project took advantage of the innate characteristics of each platform and other codes that are permanently and invisibly working in the web in order to bolster views. On all platforms, the reader can speak up and take control of the news in order to create his or her own transmedia narratives (Jenkins, 2008, 2011; Jenkins *et al.*, 2014; Scolari, 2011, 2017; Castells, 1999, 2012).

The editorial principles guiding the *Campus* project were based on citizen journalism (Traquina, 2003, 2005), aimed toward a virtual environment of democratic deliberation that, instead of vying for neutrality, was partial to citizens' interests and not to formal political or economic institutions.

In organizational terms, *Campus* horizontalized hierarchies of a classic newsroom by promoting permanent internal deliberations to make collegiate and plural decisions. Also, the project was always open to interventions from its audience.

Another focus of *Campus Multiplatform* was the production of content *on* smartphones (pictures, videos, audio bits, editing, posting/distribution, *etc.*) and *for* smartphones. This focus included permanent communication among all project participants via instant

messaging apps. These arrangements led to the functioning of a virtual newsroom, which can be defined as:

(...) A place in cyberspace where journalists work sufficiently and synergistically without the need for a shared physical space. Thus, paradoxically, it can be said that journalistic production is dispersed, by not gathering professionals in the same physical space, but centralized and/or coordinated at the same time, since it operates in a "place" in cyberspace that also becomes the end destination of the produced content, thus where the content is processed and from where it is distributed for consumption (Barcellos *et al.*, 2014: 85).

Media experimentation by the young journalists in each semester was divided into three phases: 1) debates in culture circles, 2) creative production, and 3) critical analysis of the content.

The study was developed in five semester-long cycles, with a prior survey of different media platforms, which was followed by content creation adapted to the possibilities of each channel. In the very first phase, culture circles were carried out with students having a discussion about digital communication. Relevant topics related to journalistic multi-platform and transmedia production were also debated, such as the use of smartphones for content production, news distribution and consumption, journalists' actual role in society, and the format of newsrooms.

After the debate phase, the students began producing news intermittently for approximately forty days. These pieces were produced and published in one or more platforms, with specific narratives, and according to a publishing schedule based on the audience's characteristics and the story to be told. It was always up to the students to identify the appropriate topics, spaces, and social-technical networks for posting the content.

Each platform used by *Campus* reported information about and to the community of the *University of Brasilia*, a public higher education institution established in 1962. One of the largest in Brazil, the University has four campuses around the nation's capital and comprehends around 55,000 people among students, faculty, and staff. Amid the very diverse topics reported, the students were bound to this community's interests, including news about higher education policies, public incentives for research, cultural events, safety and transportation conditions at the campuses, building infrastructure and improvements, failures in the facilities' regular functioning, scholarships, political disputes in the student union, and so on.

At the end of the first semester of 2019, the *Campus Instagram* profile had 617 publications and 2,425 followers. On *Twitter*, there were 545,700 impressions and 2,100 retweets, and 6,300 contents had been "favorited". One hundred eleven pieces were published on *Facebook*, amassing 4,620 likes. Forty-seven pieces had circulated on the website, and 59 were released on *WhatsApp*, where 6,043 messages were also sent (5,134 delivered and 3,017 read). The *Campus* app and the *YouTube* account are still in experimental use and thus without a statistical record.

Entrepreneurial Vision

Students were oriented by the dispute for an audience – and approval of their stories with likes and shares – via the systematic use of hashtags linked to thematic keywords. It was a constant concern for the participants. Therefore, they took advantage of the fact that platforms have mechanisms to aggregate users by their interests and habits in order to offer customized news to their readership (Pariser, 2012; Barcellos *et al*., 2017).

However, this strategy did not ensure that the public would identify that *Campus* was, in fact, *one* media producer acting on many platforms. The receiver could be reached only by isolated news in different locations. Students then assessed that a larger perception of unity and better 'branding' would bolster public recognition of *Campus* as multi-platform media. The need to gain recognition as a more sophisticated journalistic product was interpreted partially as a natural drive for visibility but also as a consequence of the prior critical debates.

As alternatives for minimizing the perceived fragmentation of *Campus* by the audience, students suggested some tactics related to typically commercial, entrepreneurial, or marketing concerns, such as the use of logos and color patterns on all platforms, and chose a 'mascot' for the project (a seal[1]). Beyond that, hyperlinks were created as bridges between platforms, although the full story was presented in each space with its own characteristics. To make the project's unity explicit, the team made regular advertising and educational campaigns (theatrical performances, printed materials, press office actions, videos, digital multimedia pieces for social networks, *etc*.).

These initiatives emphasized the project's single identity, which allowed it to be considered an actual multi-platform journalistic product. The students also proposed a daily live show named *Campus Café* – broadcasted every morning on *Facebook* – and to develop an app that aggregated the content scattered throughout many platforms. In the app, editors alternated between the tasks of posting headlines from different platforms and promoting previews of pieces that were still in development.

Work organization

To organize their production, students created a virtual newsroom model and workflow by defining functions for all the participants. They sought a horizontal organizational model with few hierarchical divisions and no isolated chief positions. Each semester, an Editorial Board was responsible for establishing collegial decisions, instead of a monocratic approach with a sole editor.

The choice for more participative forms of decision-making was made for different reasons, with the intention to minimize the impact of individual mistakes, to spark creativity, to enable synergic processes of collective intelligence, and, most importantly, to establish an environment for permanent debate.

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[1] Traditionally in Brazil, young and inexperienced journalists who have just arrived in a newsroom are fondly called 'seals' by older journalists.

The virtual newsroom was mostly coordinated via smartphones, allowing continuous content production and contact among teams, with no physical or work hour constraints. Through messaging groups, decisions and news coverage also took place collectively. Other tools such as spreadsheets for task management and the sharing of image, video, audio, and text files were accessed through the web.

The agenda to be reported by the students came from reporters' observations and creativity and from the information collected in University-related groups on social networks, the University's official communications, regional mainstream media, and many others.

DISCUSSION

As many other members of their age range, project participants showed familiarity with technologies available in digital networks and used them proficiently to produce news for *Campus Multiplatform*'s different channels. However, the analysis demonstrated that the students' use of technological resources in favor of a well-oriented journalistic production was dependent on prior knowledge of good and bad practices in digital media. The students' digital aptitudes facilitated the creative, entrepreneurial freedom needed to take advantage of the net platforms in order to inform the university community. Nonetheless, these skills were not automatically adjusted to the normative principles of journalism, such as the plurality of voices, fact-checking, and some legal requirements. On the contrary, technical skills needed to be shaped beforehand by discussions based on theoretical frameworks and practical experiences with the use of the Internet (topics that were debated by the groups in the culture circles). Without them, the transmedia narratives probably would not have been applied efficiently.

Therefore, we may claim that traditional journalistic processes and techniques are prerogatives for producing news on different digital platforms, which puts the groups in the category of 'digital learners' and not simply 'digital natives'.

With the exception of the group responsible for the first semester cycle (2016), the reporters decided that they should not be restricted to one particular channel but to produce for different platforms, which we assessed as a willingness to navigate among multiple and complementary narratives. Groups demonstrated their ability to multitask and to adapt content to different channels.

Among the practices for adapting resources and narratives, the groups were quite partial to the use of smartphones for their journalistic production, often resorting to apps and tools freely available on social network websites. Participants only opted for more traditional equipment if and when they anticipated higher technical standards than those enabled by mobile phones. Therefore, the virtual and mobile newsroom model, in addition to working with the innate resources of smartphones, proved to be viable in this practice.

Campus's seven platforms published news for a segmented public. For each one, students decided to provide all the information needed to understand the piece in a single page. This decision had to do with the public's increasingly reduced time for reading. It demonstrated that participants were led by a certain economy of browsing; therefore, they attempted to save the audience's time and attention by avoiding the use of multiple links and different navigational schemes so as to get the whole story in a plain piece. The option to concentrate whole narratives on the same platform and web page indicated that these students tried to prevent the fragmentation of a story in different spaces. Furthermore, the decision to save 'clicks' was directly related to Brazil's social context, as transitioning through different web pages tends to be slow due to the poor quality of Internet connection. A better connection is expensive mainly in mobile devices, which leads receptors to avoid spending data packages.

In sum, the decisions made by these young journalists pointed to three clear criteria for news production: a) simple information flow which favors wholeness to the reported facts, thus converging one story to a single platform; b) narrative singularity, producing specific content to one channel instead of constructing a narrative invariably applicable to all platforms at once; c) mobile production with resources that are common to both the public and journalists.

Editorially, students chose topics of public relevance with a humanitarian approach, clearly opting for citizen journalism (Traquina, 2003; 2005) as their professional deontological standpoint. This choice was also based on their experience in a university environment. The participants planned and executed the presentation of news pieces with these characteristics to engage in a dialogue with their audience. This was not properly a rational choice but an inherent ingredient to their professional practice. Accordingly, we identified a fourth criterion orienting their newsmaking: proximity to their public as an intrinsic aspect of the profession, indicating their view that a story is not "done" at the end of journalistic production but is permanently open to the receiver's response.

Observing the daily production routine, it was possible to identify a tension among the reporters that did not subside after posting a story. Instead, it was sustained with the task of responding to each message they received from their readership. In some cases, the production cycle renewed at that moment. By interacting with the audience, certain pieces were reformatted and new topics and agendas emerged, which reinitiated the production and content distribution process.

Reporters interacted with the audience in different ways, such as via an e-mail address and a *Whatsapp* number (rarely used by the audience). However, the spaces for comments in *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter* posts really became a point of contact between the newsroom and the readers.

The students considered the number of likes, post shares, and comments in the platform as measures of the audience's interests, motivating either the extended coverage of a certain topic or its interruption, as well as the best time and platform to post a story.

In almost every posted story, the readers showed their interest by tagging a 'friend' in the comments, which means suggesting the story to someone else. The students responded to every comment. Oftentimes, the readers asked for more information about the story and tagged other 'friends'.

With this practice, proximity to readers was consolidated as an ethical demand. As a result, a journalist's responsiveness to their public has become essential.

As for organizational management, the project was characterized by discussions and dialectic processes through every step of the way. The students decided that functions should follow a horizontal and circular setting that could facilitate every member's inclusion in deliberations over the approach toward the topics to be covered. Furthermore, it also allowed for shared responsibilities in decision-making, especially when it came to editorial and ethical standards.

Deliberations could be categorized as face-to-face and virtual (synchronous and asynchronous), which are either encompassing or specific. Students exhibited an inclination toward discussions, arguments, and collective decision-making over the fulfillment of group tasks. The openness of Generation Z journalists-to-be toward deliberated decisions indicates their acceptance of horizontal organizational models in companies and communication groups.

Preference for mobile resources was not a mark of a hypothetically tech-savvy generation but mainly a need imposed by the students' context in place. Given the sprawling urban centers around Brasilia and the inefficient public transportation system in this metropolitan region, the use of online resources was a strategy against the difficult commute to the university. In any case, this practice at *Campus* attests that this management model is viable, since it allowed a shared news production and maintained online collaboration, while ethical principles were constantly checked with the readiness of digital resources. Although this option proved to be viable for alternative production, it also evidenced some insecurity among students when they had to make editorial decisions.

In technical terms, the virtual production process enabled immediate responses to journalistic demands via real time coverage, news reports, and other types of pieces, while it also facilitated a balanced distribution of tasks.

Difficulties observed in this study relate more to the students' inexperience with management and human resources and with deontological and editorial impasses. It underscores that the youth's access to technology alone is not nearly enough to induce a diverse, responsible, and creative journalistic production, in addition to the fact that the skills for maneuvering technology are not an intrinsic attribute common to all Journalism majors or members of a certain generation.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

On average, the Generation Z students of the *University of Brasilia* who were part of the *Campus* project showed spontaneity in their use of the most common communication technologies available to produce stories on different digital platforms. If they are taught how to elaborate traditional journalistic narratives (print media, radio, and television) and if they know the corollaries of the profession, they readily become dexterous in the use of apps, mobile tools, and devices to create different forms of content which are non-fragmented, responsive to their audience and subject to critical analysis from their peers and audience. Moreover, they were capable of using information systems to act as their platform for quick, virtualized news distribution. These characteristics match the current digital age of journalism, where impermanence supersedes the traditional production and narrative methods of mass media.

The way in which these students made decisions may indicate a trend toward a change in established and rigid organizational models in media companies. These Gen Zers easily incorporated flexibility and virtual deliberation. This flexible format enabled the groups to engage in diverse multi-platform production that reaches an audience scattered across many channels. However, the confirmation of a general trend in this direction can only serve as a hypothesis here, as this was only a case study within the context of a university.

Without rigid narrative formats and with the fragmentation of media in cyberspace, there are two essential traits characterizing the young journalists' relationship with emerging media technology in this case. On the one hand, they proved their capability for innovation and creativity in the use of technological resources. On the other hand, they demonstrate hesitation as to how to use these resources according to the corollaries of journalism, which was deepened in a virtual newsroom.

In current (and possibly, future) outlets, group work and deliberative communication are constant in journalistic practice. Nevertheless, the Internet and social networks have created a more competitive environment and have exponentially multiplied audience criticism. The Journalism majors who participated in this study adjusted well in a collective decision-making process, although sometimes they demonstrated certain scruples or pride upon submitting their production to a colleague's review.

As for choosing an agenda, these students selected positions in favor of the local community, opting for topics related to defending the gratuity of public universities and against prejudices of any kinds. For instance, they chose to report allegations of acts against human rights on campus, while they also covered topics about mental health of students, professors and other workers in education.

The research-creation methodology proved to be effective in verifying the proclivities of these members of a generation of journalists-to-be and their relationship with emerging technologies and organizational models for news production. This research only observes participants in direct contact with the creative processes proposed for the study (which

integrated the project). Repeating this experience with different groups over the course of five semesters allowed us to detect trends in the newsmaking process among a specific cohort of Journalism students over time. However, the study did not vary in context and geographical space. As such, in order to draw broader comparisons, it would be necessary to look into concomitant experiences in different contexts.

This project's fulfillment within the university context presents clear limitations to providing more general conclusions about the students' attitudes toward digital media use. The *Campus* project is a training platform; thus, the students were not under paid labor relations or legal responsibility. Moreover, their attitudes toward producing content for traditional media were not analyzed, which inhibits a comparison between digital (mainly in social media networks) and analog journalism.

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NOVINARSKA GENERACIJA Z: ŠTO OČEKIVATI OD NJE U VREMENIMA DEGRADACIJE MEDIJA?

Zanei Barcellos :: Patricia Gil

SAŽETAK *Ovaj članak predstavlja rezultate istraživačko-stvaralačkog projekta provedenog u Brazilu u razdoblju od trideset mjeseci čiji je zadatak bio istražiti kako se novinari takozvane generacije Z nose s novim tehnologijama i stvaraju specifične narative na konvergirajućim medijskim platformama. Istraživanje je uključilo 125 studenata u projekt stvaranja sadržaja na različitim platformama, pri čemu su se koristile teorija i metode koje je osmislio Paul Freire. Rezultati pokazuju da generacija Z uspostavlja parametre pisanja kojima izbjegava složeno pretraživanje i koji se temelje na virtualnoj redakciji i multitaskingu. Novi novinarski modeli otkriveni kod studenata koji su sudjelovali u istraživanju vjerojatno će se osloniti na organizacijsko okruženje čije su karakteristike horizontalno odlučivanje i fleksibilnija, demokratičnija produkcija. U kontekstu trenutnog demokratskog nazadovanja u Brazilu, sudionici istraživanja definirali su svoju informativnu agendu kao oblik borbe protiv hegemonijskog diskursa.*

KLJUČNE RIJEČI
GENERACIJA Z, KONVERGENCIJA, ISTRAŽIVAČKO-STVARALAČKI PROJEKT, TRANSMEDIJSKI NARATIVI, VIRTUALNE REDAKCIJE, MULTIPLATFORME

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