

Chapter 13

Mobile Journalism and Innovation: A Study on Content Formats of Autochthonous News Apps for Tablets

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ABSTRACT

Using a qualitative methodological approach, this chapter brings to bear a theoretical and conceptual framework with particular consideration to the notions of innovation, journalistic convergence, design and the theory of affordances, as well as mobile communication and mobile journalism. This analysis covers the period 2010-2014 and seeks to examine the specific affordances, the structure, organization and types of narratives produced; the design and use of multimedia features as well as the level of integration with other products in the same news organization. The empirical corpus consists of products selected for their representativeness within a broader sample: O Globo a Mais, Estadão Noite, and Diário do Nordeste Plus (Brazil), La Repubblica Sera (Italy), La Presse+ (Canada) and El Mundo de la Tarde (Spain). The study concludes that - although timid - experimentation continues to prevail regarding formats, content, language and narratives based on the features of mobile devices, the continuous evolution of operating systems and changes in hardware platforms.

INTRODUCTION

Four years after the creation of the first journalistic products for tablets, and the iPad in particular, how have autochthonous – and specially evening news apps – contributed to the evolution and innovation of content formats? This is the central question of this chapter, which is part of the research developed at the Convergent Journalism Laboratory Project¹ hosted at the Faculty of Communication, Federal University of Bahia, Brazil.

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The aim of this chapter is to take a step forward in the systematization (with previously cataloged experiences as background and context) of a specific type of innovative journalistic product, namely autochthonous news app, with special attention to evening news apps, and a focus on identifying their contribution to the complexification and differentiation of the mobile information ecosystem in an environment of convergent multi-platform journalism.

As elements of the new mobile ecosystem, evening newspaper apps for tablets are specially designed products that form part of the multiplatform information landscape. They are newcomers to the contemporary media ecosystem, characterized by fluid, horizontalized production, resulting in a multimedia continuum (Barbosa, 2013) and they constitute a rich field for the identification and observation of innovative features in journalistic production.

The premise to be explored in this text is that ‘autochthonous’ apps – *i.e.*, created by specialized teams, producing exclusive materials for mobile platforms, with distinct treatment of contents (Barbosa, Firmino da Silva, & Nogueira, 2014; Barbosa, Firmino da Silva, Nogueira, & Almeida, 2013) – are products which exist and compete in a new innovation cycle with regards to the editorial line, treatment of information, design, formats, and use of multimedia language. As such, they may be considered as prime spaces for experimentation with new affordances such as tactility (Palacios & Da Cunha, 2012) personalization and geolocation, as well as a breeding ground for new business models, consumer dynamics, circulation, recirculation and response to journalistic content.

Brazil has been one of the leading countries in the production of evening news apps. Their emergence, marked by a convergent and multi-platform logic, has been designed to take advantage of the way content is consumed on tablets during the evening period, *i.e.*, in what is known as ‘lean-back’ mode, when the user is usually at home, more relaxed and with a (pre)disposition to explore longer, more complex/sophisticated textual constructions and/or HD/multimedia content.

The emergence of these journalistic apps for tablets can also be associated with a general boost in the consumption of content on tablets and smartphones, thereby opening new horizons to business models directed towards a mobile ecosystem. Prospects of economic sustainability seem to be rising, based on the innovation and creation of narrative forms more aligned to audiences who have already identified with the platform’s potentialities, particularities and distinctions, *vis-a-vis* other media formats.

The basic parameters of analysis were defined in our research project and will be applied to systematize the data collected through structured observation of a *corpus* comprising Brazilian and international evening news apps, namely: *O Globo a Mais*, *Estadão Noite*, *Diário do Nordeste Plus* (Brazil), *La Repubblica Sera* (Italy), and *El Mundo de la Tarde* (Spain). These apps were selected from a larger universe which have been mapped in our earlier studies and constitute a representative sample for the purposes of the proposed investigation. We have also included *La Presse+* (Canada) in our *corpus*; although not characterized as an evening newspaper, in contrast to the other apps analysed in this chapter, it is an autochthonous tablet product, with distinctive innovative and advanced features that justify its inclusion as a relevant object for our case study.

The methodological approach is qualitative and employs theoretical constructs created by researchers at the Convergent Journalism Laboratory Project, especially the notion of innovation gradients as a derivation of Gartner’s Hype Cycle (Palacios, Barbosa, Firmino da Silva, & Da Cunha, 2014). The theoretical and conceptual framework of journalistic convergence, developed by a large contingent of the authors in several countries, will also be central to situate the phenomenon of evening news apps.

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