Webjournalist narratives as an element of innovation: cases of *Al Jazeera, Folha de S. Paulo, The Guardian, The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*

Raquel Ritter Longhi

Ana Marta M. Flores
(Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Departamento de Jornalismo, Programa de Pós-Gradu-ação em Jornalismo. Florianópolis – SC, Brasil)

Abstract

The article presents a reflection about innovation in web journalism, with special focus on the expressive contents and narratives. From this perspective, it appears that features like longform text, the refreshing use of audio and immersive content, such as graphic or imagistic representations in 3D and, more recently, virtual reality (VR), have stood out in this kind of news product at least since 2012. The paper also introduces a state of the art of some existing products and the media labs in some leading news organizations. It discusses the concept of innovation in the light of authors dedicated to the subject, in a literature review, complemented by descriptions of initiatives such as media labs in some online newsrooms, and analysis of narratives that we consider innovative in web journalism.
Keywords: Innovation. Innovative Journalism. Webjournalistic narratives. Expressive contents. Media Labs.

Introduction

Innovation seems to be the keyword in online journalism in 2017, rehearsed from previous years, especially in the field of organizations' strategies to overcome the crisis in the sector. More than action, innovation is a reaction, a result linked to some dissatisfaction, although it should never be understood as a mere solution of problems. Innovation is commonly understood from its apparent technological side, however, to innovate, by definition, is not restricted to this.

In a study about the business and society transformations in the internet age, Manuel Castells (2001) had already pointed out the role of innovation as a protagonist in the recent scenario of the New Information Technologies. For the author, innovation is itself the result of three central factors: first, the creation of new knowledge in science, technology and administration. The second concerns the availability of high-level, self-programming

educators who are able to use new knowledge to increase productivity. The third factor refers to the existence of capable and willing entrepreneurs to take the risks of turning innovative business projects into business performance (CASTELLS, 2001).

One of the most interesting forms of innovation in journalism has been observed in new narrative approaches in cyberjournalistic news content. This phenomenon appears in expressive contents such as the longform text, the refreshing use of audio and in immersive characteristics such as graphic or imagetic representations in third dimension and, more recently, in virtual reality (VR).

The concept transcends the technological aspect, although it permeates, in great part, the cases cited in this study. Innovation has been recognized as an important element to increase the quality and the acceptance of journalism, this fact being evidenced, for example, in international awards that reinforce its potential as a differentiator of a quality journalism. The Online Journalism Awards[1] of 2015, for example, recognize the groundbreaking work in producing quality journalistic narratives both in the major media and on international and independent sites, taking into account the innovative use of emerging technologies in digital journalism.

Indeed, innovation has permeated initiatives in the perspectives of business, of content production and of journalistic distribution, highlighting special projects or the implementation of media labs[2] in leading online news organizations, such as *Al Jazeera*[3], *Folha de S.Paulo*[4], *The Guardian*[5] and *The New York Times*[6]. We can infer that the growing number of media labs inserted within the journalistic vehicles themselves suggests an increase in attention focused on innovation, generating practices and monitoring closer to the newsrooms. Within this scenario, the content has played a key role, with emphasis on the multimedia special "Snow Fall", published by *The New York Times* in 2012. The product has become a milestone in the field of digital journalistic narrative, to the point of becoming a verb for the creation of multimedia narratives, as observed by the then executive editor of *The New York Times*, Jill Abramson, in 2013 (MALIK, 2013). A good survey on how web

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1   "The OJAs recognize major media, international and independent sites and individuals producing innovative work in multimedia storytelling. The OJA Committee and its judges place special emphasis on entries that demonstrate mastery of the special characteristics and emerging technology of digital journalism" (online, 2016). More in: http://journalists.org/awards.

2   Although it does not have a journalistic production available at the moment, it is worth mentioning the example of the NBC Universal (NBCU), one of the largest media companies in the world in developing, producing and commercializing entertainment, news and information for a global audience. The NBCU media labs is defined as dedicated to driving a collaborative culture of innovation. "We are committed to partnering with startups, research groups, academics, content creators and brands. Our labs located in London, New York and Los Angeles are leading the way with fresh ideas and the latest technologies to ignite the future of media and storytelling" (2016, online). The NBCU Media Labs process is divided into four basic steps: inform, inspire, engage, and deliver. The whole flow is permeated by the idea of innovation and technology.

3   Available in: http://www.ajplus.net/english. Accessed on: May 18th, 2016.

4   Available in: http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/tudosobre. Accessed on: January 25th, 2016.

5   Available in: http://guardianlabs.theguardian.com. Accessed on: May 18th, 2016.

6   Available in: http://nytlabs.com. Accessed on: April 24th, 2016.

journalistic narratives have explored innovative content is found in Josh Stearns' article, entitled "The best online storytelling and journalism 2014", published in 2015[7]. In this survey, the author emphasizes the innovative use of immersive audio, images and stories as innovative features of web journalistic narratives, among other aspects.

In this article, we intend to reflect on innovation in web journalism with a special focus on content and narratives. At least since 2012, features like the longform text, a refreshing use of audio, for example, in addition to immersive content, such as visual representations in 3D and, more recently, in virtual reality, have stood out in a scenario in which journalism seeks to explore to the maximum the expressive possibilities of the field. In this reflection, we make a brief state of the art of projects and media labs existing in selected leading news organizations, we discuss the concept of innovation according to the understanding of some authors dedicated to the theme and we explore examples of innovative narratives in web journalism.

Innovative Journalism

The term "innovation" has been passing through the same situation that occurred with the concept of "convergence" a few years ago. Because it is applicable to many situations and areas of knowledge, it is necessary to delimit the context in which it is intended to reflect on it. Originally appearing in the economic, industrial, and capitalist sectors, innovation emerges in these organizations primarily to increase the income (SCHUMPETER, 1985). "In the case of an innovation in the production process, this will give the company a competitive advantage over its competitors, thus increasing the possibility of higher profits" (SANTOS, FAZION, MEROE, p.04, 2011 – Our translation).

The sociologist Manuel Castells (2001) is emphatic in affirming the importance of professionals with a high level of education, able to use new knowledge to increase productivity for innovation, also putting the interdependence between one and the other. "... if work is the source of productivity, the creative power of work and the efficiency of the business organization ultimately depend on the capacity for innovation" (CASTELLS, 2001, p 118 – Our translation). For the author, innovation is due to the highly-specialized work as well as the existence of organizations capable of promoting the creation of knowledge (CASTELLS, 2001).

Even among researchers in the field, it seems that a definite consensus on what "innovative journalism" really is still does not exist. Considering what David Nordfors (2004) brings as "innovative journalism", we understand this as the term corresponding

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7   Available in: https://goo.gl/mjPj79. Accessed on: August 19th, 2015.

to the concept presented at this article, while to Nordfors, "innovation journalism" deals with journalism about technical, legal, business, political aspects and systems innovation (NORDFORS, 2004).

We start from the premise that journalism can be understood as an industry, in the sense that it produces and commercially delivers news information, exclusive content and symbolic goods. Innovation for this activity, however, presents a discourse aimed at the goal of communicating in the best possible way through new and complete experiences, committed to the initial role of the activity. With constant changes in both technological and consumer market fields in journalism, innovation can no longer be seen as an extra element, but as a necessity for the area, which looks for alternatives to survive in a crisis scenario.

Thus, innovation in journalism, in our perspective, goes beyond technological and apparatus innovation and it resides in the entire process of production and journalistic creation. Agreeing with Carlos Franciscato (2010),

> Technological innovation in journalism (...) cannot be considered as an isolated investment in industrial modernization, but also characterized as a contribution that modifies the journalist's routines and work processes, as well as the profile and the quality of the journalistic product (FRANCISCATO, 2010, p.12 – Our translation).

Thereby, we understand that any change in the techniques, technologies, processes, languages, formats and devices destined to maximize the production and consumption of journalistic information can be considered what has coined the term "innovation journalism" (MACHADO, 2010). Another valid aspect is the one brought by Mark Briggs when evaluating journalistic products that competed for the Scripps Howard awards in 2013:

> Once we looked through all the entries [for the awards], the definition of innovation in journalism became clearer, at least to us: Trying new ways to create a better journalism experience for the reader through digital technology. Even better when it's journalism that matters. And it works across all platforms. The challenges of journalism haven't changed. Tackling stories and projects that have the most impact (isn't Watergate still at the top of this list?) makes journalism matter (BRIGGS, 2013, online).

To further specify, a complementary view on innovative journalism seems to be needed. An interesting study carried out by Erkki Kauhanen and Elina Noppari, from the Journalism Research and Development Centre of the University of Tampere, in Finland,

brings a comparison on "Traditional Journalism" and "Innovation Journalism"[8]. We agree with the authors when they say that innovation journalism is not a separate genre, but rather an approximation and a methodological attitude that can be used in all areas of journalism. It is clearly future-oriented, it uses conceptual methods and tools of future studies and it follows the results of researches with that same time focus. In addition, Kauhanen and Noppari claim that innovation journalism perceives its own innovation as a process: circular, cascading, complex, multi-layered and socially conditioned. Furthermore, innovation journalism is very interested in the basis of scientific and technological knowledge and of research and development (R&D); it also sees co-production and co-innovation being as important as its own work, perceiving the public in an innovative role as well. It considers social and cultural innovations as important as technological and commercial innovations (KAUHANEN; NOPPARI, 2007).

Nevertheless, how does innovation in journalism really work in the web journalistic newsrooms? The innovation process tends to be composed of a series of steps that include experimentation, tests, bets and even failures, among several strategies with the aim of presenting new proposals in line with the initial intent. In journalism, innovation has been observed not only in the final products or in the implemented technology, but also through a reorganization of newsrooms with departments dedicated to innovation or with the creation of internal laboratories and external partnerships for the production of innovative products. In the most significant cases, all of this results in revolutionary products and content.

Taking into account these more recent dynamics, in this sense, we discuss how some leading news organizations, among them, *Al Jazeera*, *Folha de S.Paulo*, *The Guardian*, *NBC Universal*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* stand on when promoting initiatives related to innovation. The sample of these six news organizations, considered as leading ones, aims to explore a possible trend in innovative structures, content and narratives in contemporary web journalism.

Innovation in news organizations

Relating it to content, as cited, innovation in journalism can arise either in punctual news products or special series as in editorials, media labs or in partnerships between newspapers and other media and technology companies. In this scenario, we must emphasize the importance of teamwork for innovation, as Manuel Castells observes, stating that "(...) innovation continues to be the product of the intelligent workforce, but in the form of collective intellect" (2001, p.120 – Our translation).

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8   In a different meaning of the one used by Nordfors (2004).

The scenarios of the news organizations selected in this article point out a clear concern with strategic and innovative formats for their consuming public. Through a brief exploratory research, we detected initiatives focused on the production of web journalism content in North America, South America, Europe and the Middle East, as well as some results in terms of innovative content.
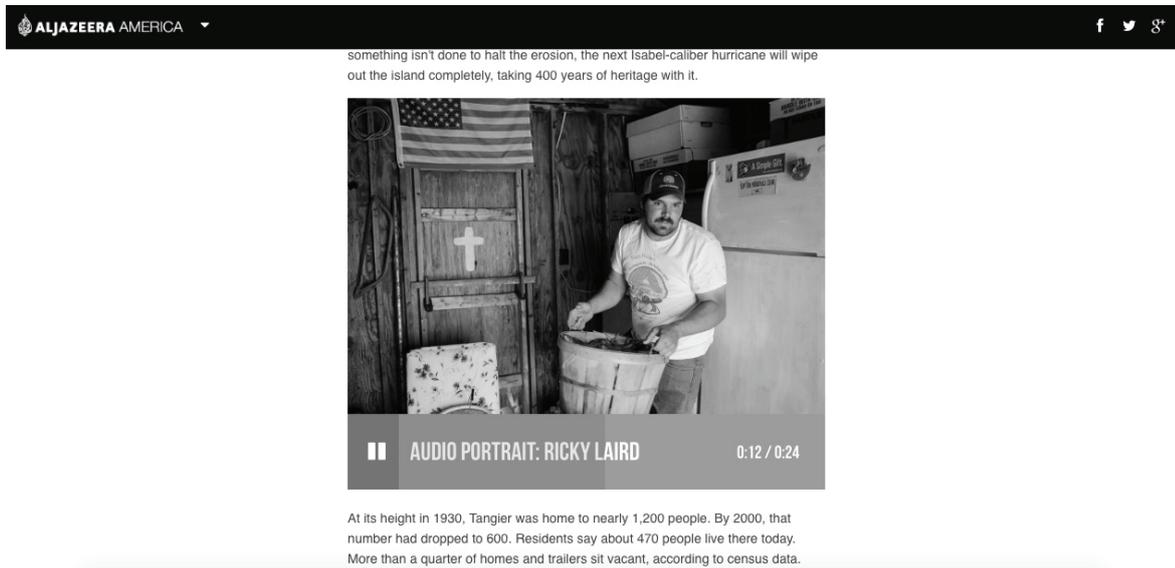
Al Jazeera and global coverage

The *Al Jazeera* (الجزيرة) network, established in 1996, is Qatar's largest news television station and the most important television network in the Arab world. The international activity of the station became even more prominent during the anti-American popular demonstrations in September 2001. The media group currently has a worldwide television and internet coverage, with special editorials for interactivity, photography, video, podcasts and behind the scenes, among others, available in Arabic and in English.

Among the innovative content published by the *Al Jazeera* site, we highlight the great multimedia report "Treasured Island. The people of Tangier fear their life, land and heritage could wash away"[9], which tells the story of a fishing community on the island of Tangier in the United States. In this report, it is possible to detect some elements of narrative innovation: audio excerpts in specific files and the audio portrait are innovative elements in the aesthetic treatment of the theme. Although the expressive resource of the audio is being heavily explored in multimedia narratives, including in cases where it is the main element, like the podcast narrative "Serial"[10], in the *Al Jazeera*'s report this resource appears in the form of small portraits, brief formats in which a character is presented from a photo and accompanied by a small audio record (Figure 1).

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9   Available in: http://projects.aljazeera.com/2014/tangier-island. Accessed on: April 25th, 2016.
10   Available in: https://serialpodcast.org/. Accessed on: December 23th, 2015.

Figure 1 – Audio portrait in the great report "Treasured Island. The people of Tangier fear their life, land and heritage could wash away", of *Al Jazeera*


Source: Reproduction of the site http://projects.aljazeera.com/2014/tangier-island

In addition to reports with innovative elements, one of the highlights of *Al Jazeera* is the AJ+ (Figure 2). The AJ+ is an initiative launched in 2013, contemplating as a perspective the increase and the centrality of the use of smartphones. The proposal is to be more than a news site and to feature a video-focused app with an audience growth strategy integrated to social networking on the internet. The definition presented by the app on its official website states that the AJ+ is a global news community for the connected generation, highlighting the idea to "bring you the stories that are shaping our world"[11]. The proposal is innovative from the point of view that it presents a speech and a packaging aimed at the visual and at the young audience, considering editing tools, mode of presentation, treatment of the assignments and, certainly, the collaborative and connected opening to Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

11   Available in: http://www.ajplus.net/english. Accessed on: April 18th, 2015.

Figure 2 – AJ+ app screens for smartphones
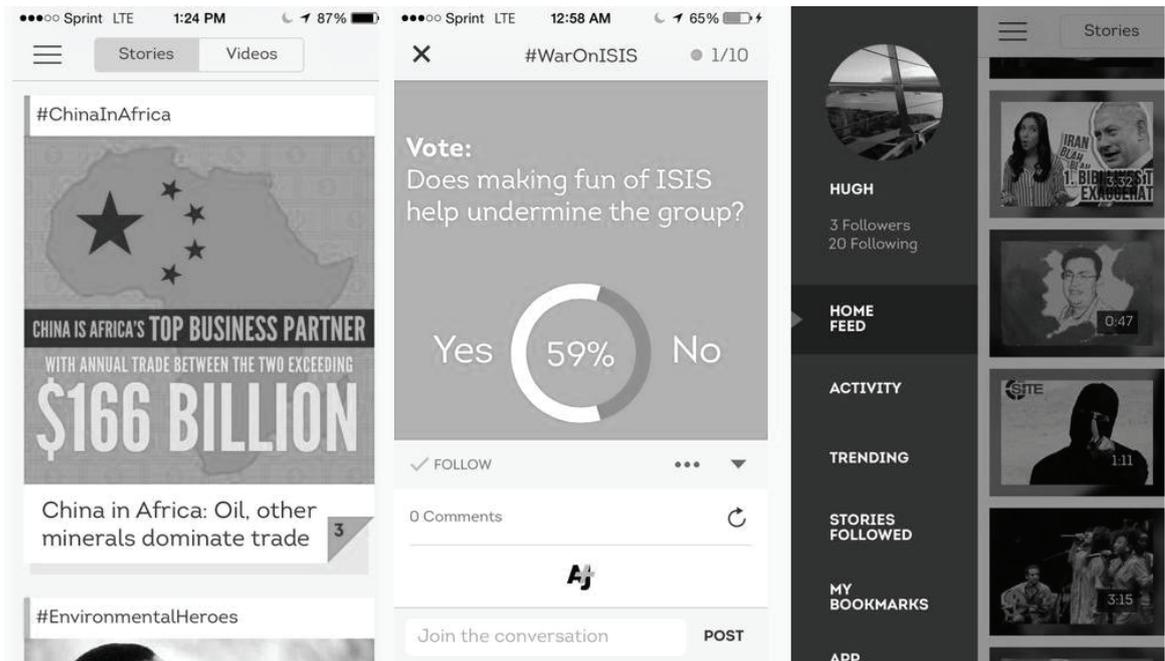
Source: iTunes preview of the AJ+ app for iPhone

Folha de S.Paulo and the specials in series

Folha de S.Paulo is among the newspapers with the largest circulation[12] in Brazil and since 2013 it has been publishing the series *Tudo Sobre* (All About – Our translation), which features special multimedia on its website, apps and other platforms to access the newspaper's content. The first special issue dealt with the construction of the Belo Monte Dam in Pará, the result of ten months of work, with the publication of several digital dossiers preceding the great report. "'A Batalha de Belo Monte' (The Battle of Belo Monte – Our translation) consists of five chapters, 55 photographs, 24 videos, 18 infographics, approximately 15 thousand words and a game about the Brazilian hydroelectric dam" (LONGHI; WINQUES, 2015, p.10 – Our translation). The latest issue published by the vehicle questions the impact of deforestation in Brazil from the perspective of development versus forest destruction. "Folha has searched the Amazon to show in four chapters, with 65 photos, 26 infographics and eight videos, that putting an end to the devastation can be a good business for everyone". (Online, 2016 – Our translation)[13]. The special *Tudo*

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12   *Folha de S. Paulo* is the third newspaper with the largest circulation in the country, according to ANJ data regarding the year 2015. More in: http://www.anj.org.br/maiores-jornais-do-brasil. Accessed on: April 24th, 2015.
13   Data published in: http://arte.folha.uol.com.br/tudo-sobre/desmatamento-zero. Accessed on: April 24th, 2015.

Sobre: "Desmatamento Zero – Floresta Sem Fim"[14] (Zero Deforestation – Forest Without End – Our translation), however, brings a different detail to the other reports published by *Folha de S.Paulo*, as it is a content sponsored by the NGO Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA), an alliance among the Climate Works Foundation, The David & Lucile Packard Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation[15].

One of the most interesting expressive resources brought by the series of reports, however, is in its infographic contents, for which *Folha* has created a new definition: videographics. The term was designed by *Folha* itself, to define the infographics in video that started being produced in 2011, at a time when the decline of the Flash tool imposed new solutions, according to Ducroquet (2013). More recently, *Folha de S.Paulo* has launched the *Folhacóptero* (Folhacopter – Our translation), an expressive resource that combines flight simulation over geographical points with user interaction. This happens, for example, in the aforementioned "A Batalha de Belo Monte" (Figure 3), and it is only necessary to download a plug-in. In the "O Rio em Transformação" (Rio in Transformation – Our translation) special, the infographic treatments vary from 3D simulations of the places of the Olympic games to a hang gliding flight over the city of Rio de Janeiro[16], with ambient sounds.

Figure 3 – Screenshot of the *Folhacóptero*, simulation of a flight in game form

Source: http://arte.folha.uol.com.br/especiais/2013/12/16/folhacoptero

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14 Available in: http://arte.folha.uol.com.br/tudo-sobre/desmatamento-zero. Accessed on: April 24th, 2015.

15 More in: http://www.climateandlandusealliance.org/sobre-nos/?lang=pt-br. Accessed on: April 24th, 2015.

16 Available in: http://arte.folha.uol.com.br/tudo-sobre/rio-em-transformacao/sobrevoo. Accessed on: November 18th, 2014.

The Guardian – focus on mobile content

The British newspaper *The Guardian* – with international North American and Australian editions, recently launched an innovation lab focused exclusively on news on mobile platforms. *The Guardian* Mobile Innovation Lab (Figure 4) is basically an innovation team allotted to the newsroom in the United States with three editors and three reporters, launched in 2015 in Medium[17]. The goal is to explore the way of telling and distributing news on small screens. The project was an initiative of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, a private, nonprofit foundation dedicated to supporting transformative ideas that promote quality journalism, innovation, and media advancement.

Figure 4 – Home page of *The Guardian* Mobile Innovation Lab profile in Medium

Source: reproduction of https://medium.com/the-guardian-mobile-innovation-lab

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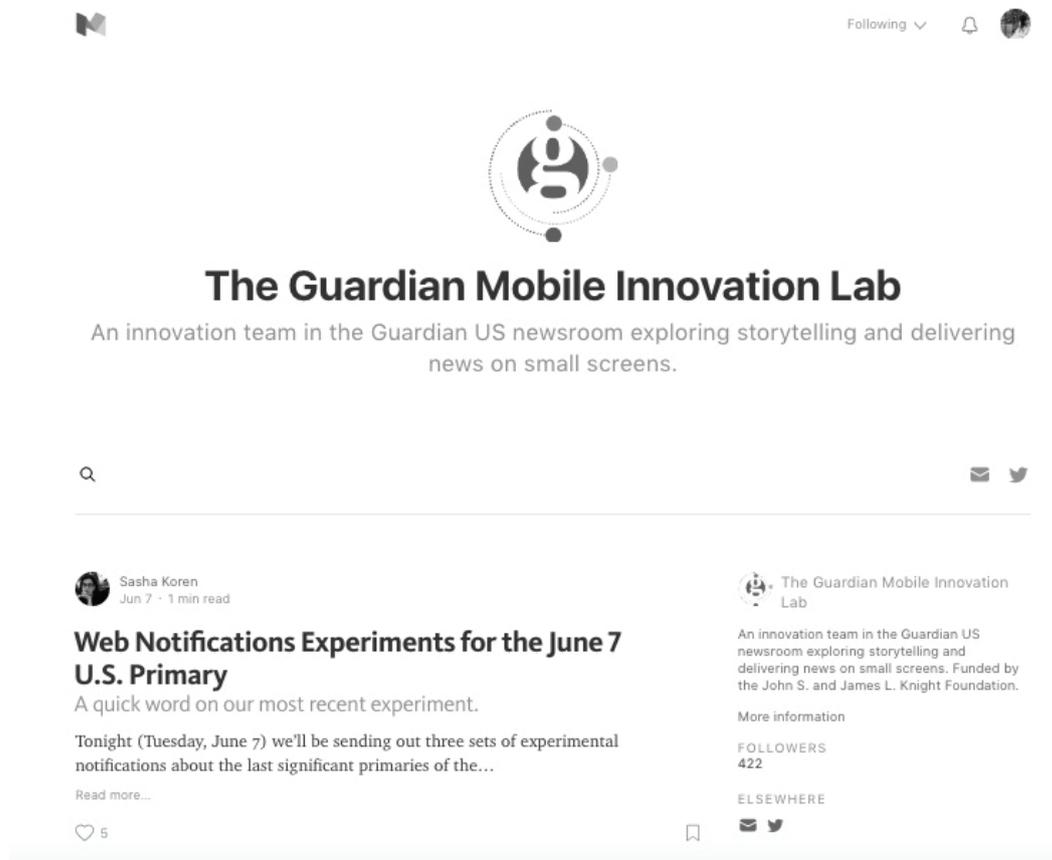
17   Medium is a social publishing platform developed by one of the founders of Twitter, Ev Williams. It was built for the focus on writing and multimedia, it is fully user friendly and responsive. Medium encourages diversity of opinion through its network and it connects ideas through curatorship. Available in: http://www.medium.com/ Access on: March, 17th, 2016.

The lab at *The Guardian* aims to explore five broad areas: live coverage, video, contextualized news, content interaction and notifications. In an interview[18], one of the project's editors, Sasha Koren, explains how the work intends to be developed in the lab:

> The experiences will be designed to reveal how users respond and what is interesting to them that we are not thinking or using as much. I think that if we succeed in our mission, we will do things that do not work, that people do not respond to, which is a strange way of saying that success is failure (KOREN, 2016, online – Our translation).

The Guardian also maintains the *Guardian Labs*[19], a branch of innovation, however, focused only on branded content with engaging and aesthetically refined stories. On the site, it is also possible to follow the behind-the-scenes of the challenges of producing relevant journalistic materials for companies and products like Unilever, UPS, Visa, Rolex, among others.

Following the trend of narratives in virtual reality (VR), *The Guardian* launched its first content with this feature, "6x9: a virtual experience of solitary confinement", published in April 2016[20]. The production, in partnership with the group of artists The Mill: Arts Collective, is a great multimedia report divided into materials containing immersive language, which can be experienced on the computer screen, using the mouse or not, and on screens of mobile devices, with or without the use of glasses for virtual reality like the Google Cardboard. In addition to this set, it includes stories and testimonials with prisoners or with people who have experienced the feeling of being confined for a few hours. There is also meta-content, when *The Guardian* speaks about the significance and the importance of content in virtual reality for contemporary journalism.

The New York Times, laboratory and immersive content

The New York Times (*NYT*), launched the *NYT Labs* or *The New York Times Research & Development* group in 2006 (Figure 5), aiming to bring an early look at new journalistic products, identifying trends and technologies that will emerge in the next three to five years. "We develop applications and prototypes that imagine the impacts these changes will create, and we share those prototypes to facilitate innovation and thoughtful consideration of the future of media"[21] (2016, online).

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18   In full: http://goo.gl/2KmfPy. Accessed on: January 3rd, 2015.
19   Available in: www.guardianlabs.theguardian.com. Accessed on: January 27th, 2016.
20   Available in: http://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2016/apr/27/6x9-a-virtual-experience-of-solitary-confinement. Accessed on: January 27th, 2016.
21   Available in: www.nytlabs.com. Accessed on: February 2nd, 2016.

Figure 5 – Home page of *The New York Times Research & Development*
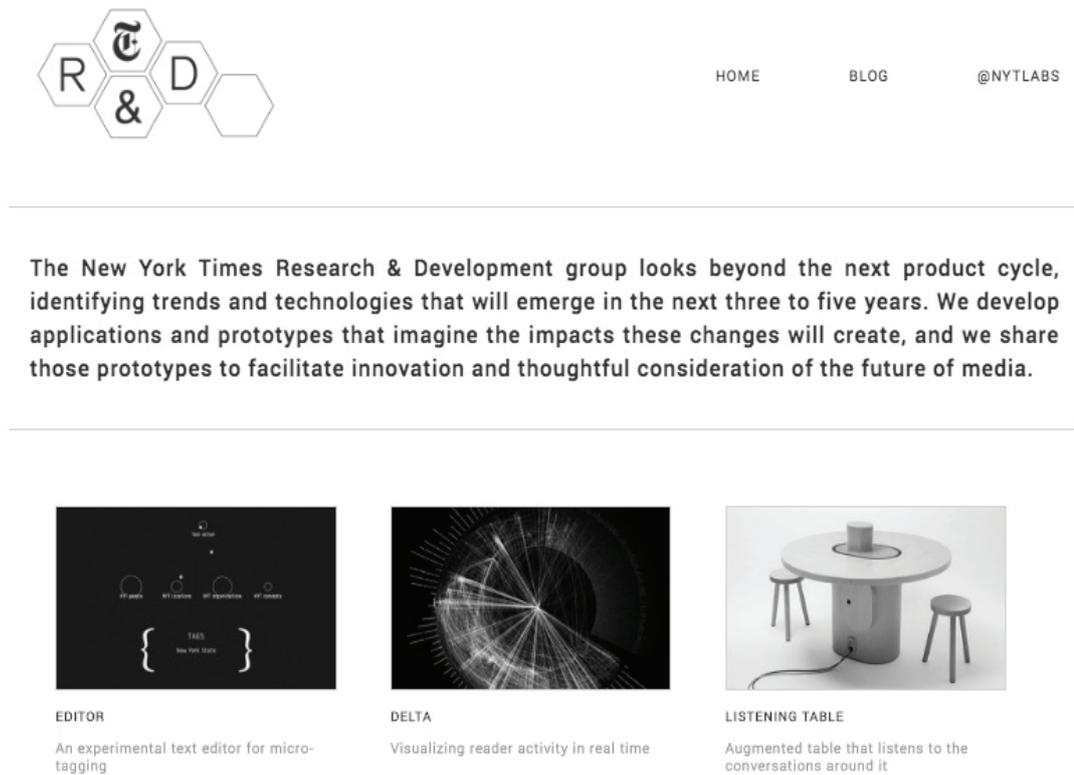
Source: Reproduction of the site http://nytlabs.com/.

In March 2014, the Innovation report, an internal document that "leaked" on the internet, analyzed and made a self-criticism of the performance of the news organization focused largely on its writing. Concerns about capturing new readers through quality journalism guided the document, as well as other issues, however, the word innovation was central, especially when it came to journalistic content. The already mentioned "Snow Fall" was considered, in the report, an example of "sustainable innovation" (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Graph on innovation and disruption, in *the New York Times* Innovation report

1. Incumbents treat innovation as a series of incremental improvements. They focus on improving the quality of their premium products to sustain their current business model.

   For The Times, a sustaining innovation might be "Snowfall."
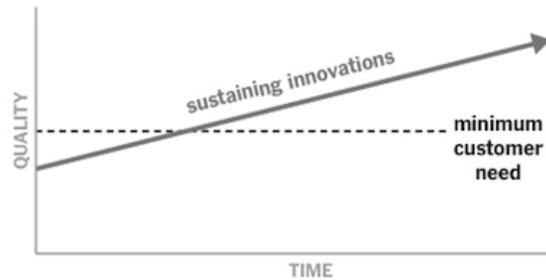
2. Disruptors introduce new products that, at first, do not seem like a threat. Their products are cheaper, with poor quality — to begin with.

    For BuzzFeed, a disruptive innovation might be social media distribution.
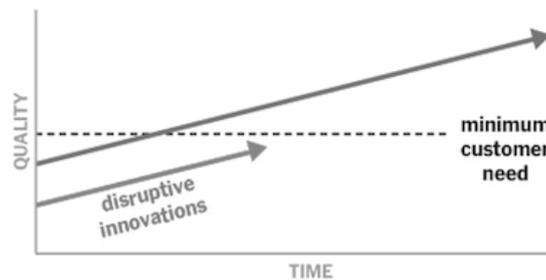
3. Over time, disruptors improve their product, usually by adapting a new technology. The flashpoint comes when their products become "good enough" for most customers.

    They are now poised to grow by taking market share from incumbents.

Source: http://howtomakemyblog.com/nyt-innovation
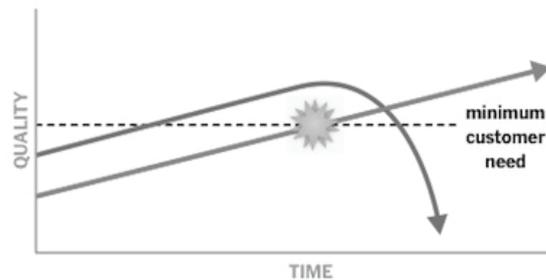
      The *NYT* innovation sector has recently undergone a process of rebranding[22] and is now called the Times Story[X] (still without an official address), as announced in a statement by Kinsey Wilson, the newspaper's editor of innovation and strategy:

> (...) I'm delighted to announce Times Story[X], a rebirth of our R&D lab. Times Story[X] will be part of The New York Times newsroom and product teams. Our goal is to connect the world-class designers and developers at The Times with research and experimentation that looks beyond breaking

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22   Rebranding is the strategic redesign that can mean a new name, a new operating or relationship with the market philosophy; a new logo, a differentiated design or the combination of all these elements to establish a new corporate strategy or to create a differential that translates into a new positioning of the company towards customers, suppliers, employees, media and competitors.

news, product and advertising cycles to anticipate how emerging innovations in technology will transform the way we communicate and express ourselves (WILSON, 2016, online).

This department within the newsroom has spent the last decade exploring possibilities and innovative ways of telling and making news stories, and now it takes even more chances on technology than the *NYT* and its advertisers can use in the near future, such as augmented reality, instant messaging apps, bots that work with Amazon Echo[23], and even connected cars.

The New York Times was one of the first to produce in VR, including the creation of a smartphone app, the NYTVR, and launching various contents into Virtual Reality. In April 2015, the *New York Times Magazine* (*NYTMag*), in partnership with the Vrse, produced a VR content on street art, "Walking New York"[24]. Nonetheless, it was with "Displaced"[25], in November of the same year, that the newspaper provided a more complete experience regarding the virtual reality: near the launch of the content, the newspaper distributed to its subscribers more than one million copies[26] of Google Cardboards glasses, devices for visualization in VR.

With heavy investments in content production, *The New York Times* has also experimented with productions using drones. Indeed, the use of drones in capturing images in journalism marked the years 2014 and 2015, keeping as a strong trend for the future, conjunctly with virtual reality. A range of contents with this type of images has been produced and is still being captured and made available. Also in 2015, *The New York Times* has launched one of the most compelling examples, in this sense: "Greenland is melting away"[27]. Published in October, a month before the world conference on climate change in Paris, this great multimedia report uses drones and satellite images to tell about the work of a group of scientists in Greenland and global warming. The opening presents a stunning image, captured by a drone, of the icy landscape along a river, a direct outcome of the climate changes discussed by the report. Satellite imagery is used in an innovative way to create immersion in the narrative, where the zoom - from space to the small base of scientists in the Greenland ice, is given by scrolling the page. An example of expressive imbrication unparalleled, until then, between reading and image.

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23   Amazon Echo is a virtual assistant that works by voice command, with speakers and wireless connections, from Amazon.com. The device consists of a 23.5 cm cylinder with a microphone array and it answers to the name "Alexa".

24   Available in: http://vrse.com/watch/nyt-mag-vr-walking-new-york. Accessed on: March 3rd, 2016.

25   Available in: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/08/magazine/the-displaced-introduction.html?_r=0. Accessed on: March 3rd, 2016.

26   Available in: http://migre.me/u6VTV. Accessed on: February 2nd, 2016.

27 Available in: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/10/27/world/greenland-is-melting-away.html. Accessed on: February 2nd, 2016.

RAQUEL RITTER LONGHI
ANA MARTA M. FLORES

The Washington Post, popularity of Virtual Reality

One of the most traditional vehicles in the United States, *The Washington Post* (*WP*), founded in 1987, is one of the newspapers that have become more innovative regarding punctual actions and specialized partnerships. Over the past five years, the *WP* has bet on the easiness of access to the public via Facebook, with *The Washington Post Social Reader*, an app for reading news within the social networking platform. Although it is no longer available, the app did not contain content only produced and published by the American newspaper, maintaining partnerships with more than 80 other vehicles such as news agencies, local newspapers, web newspapers, journalistic and specialized websites. (LONGHI, FLORES, 2012).

Recently, in March of 2016, *The Washington Post* bet on the trend in immersive journalism with the production of content in virtual reality[28]. The special "Mars, an interactive Journey"[29] (Figure 7) is accessible through any platform (desktop, tablets, smartphones, with or without the need for VR glasses), as it has been common in the examples that have hitherto emerged in this type of narrative.

Figure 7 – Screenshot of Mars, an interactive Journey, from the *Washington Post*

Source: http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/business/mars-journey.

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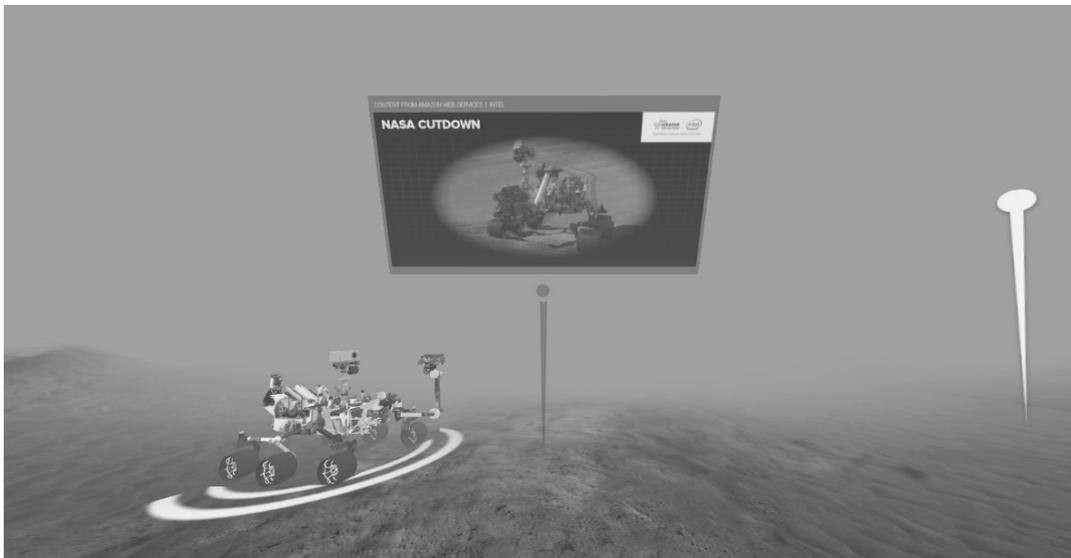
28   The newspaper had already experimented with VR on a 360-degree imaging experiment in the White House oval office, presented at an event of the White House Correspondents' Association. Available: http://migre.me/u6Wqf. Accessed on: April 24th, 2016.

29   Available in: http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/business/mars-journey. Accessed on: June 2016.

According to the director of strategic initiatives of the newspaper, Jeremy Gilbert, explains that one of the objectives of *WP* is to make specialized content more accessible "Only a small percentage of our users are likely to have a VR headset, so we ensured that our 'virtual passport to space' will work everywhere"[30] (2016, online). Still, in Gilbert's opinion, some stories are best told through an immersive format such as VR, especially those that explore a space frontier. The project was created and carried out in partnership with the Moody College of Communication at the University of Texas, in Austin. Researchers and students at the Visualization Laboratory of the Texas Advanced Computing Center provided programming and script support. It is interesting to observe that this special was sponsored by the Amazon Web Services, perhaps a business model trend for innovative journalism, as also noted in *The N.Y. Times*, in *Folha de S.Paulo* and in *The Guardian*.

Final considerations

Innovation is a very present concept in any survey regarding the evolution of narrative strategies in online journalism in recent years. In general, this conception appears associated with the use of expressive forms in a more innovative way, encompassing audio, infographics, text and image. Leading media organizations in online journalism, private or not, have excelled in this field, presenting innovative content. Considering examples in Brazil, the United States, England and the Arab world, we briefly commented on some illustrative cases, pointing out aspects related to innovation in this scenario.

Indeed, the exploration of the expressive potentiality of hypermedia by online journalism has been growing in these little more than 20 years of journalism on the Internet, however, it begins to be an innovative one when it effectively works with the intrinsic characteristics of the field to guarantee its own contents. The case of the great multimedia report is exemplary in this sense, as it evidences a turning point between two moments, especially by the use of more immersive content, either in text or in images, as observed by Longhi (2014).

More recently, immersive narratives have taken the lead in innovative content. Three hundred and sixty-degree photographs and videos and narratives in Virtual Reality have been shown to be extremely engaging features with the audience. The Arabic network *Al Jazeera* has been producing innovative content from an expressive point of view, in which the exploration of the multimedia language is central.

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30   Available in: http://www.washingtonpost.com/pr/wp/2016/03/11/experience-mars-with-the-washington-posts-virtual-reality. Accessed on: February 2016.

On the other hand, the presence of media labs inserted in the journalistic structures is a market trend to expand on many levels (from the leading media to local newsrooms). From now on we can infer that part of these innovative languages with immersive content in virtual reality, interactive infographics or the recovery of audio as a guiding element of news stories already highlighted in this article, are the product of studies and tests carried out via media labs. *The New York Times* example is quite illustrative in this sense. Pioneer on many occasions, the newspaper that has already invested in a real innovation space for 10 years, now takes a new turn by re-creating its lab and forming even more collaborative partnerships with engineers, designers and web developers with the goal of delivering increasingly more innovative products and refined content. The case of the AJ+, by the *Al Jazeera* network, is also emblematic because it bets on a specific audience – young people – and on a platform and technical languages of high adherence with these users. In addition, it is possible to perceive that there is a strong level of investment when we consider content sponsored by large media companies, as illustrated in the case of the *Guardian Labs*. In this sense, it is possible to observe a kind of segmentation of the innovation in a dynamic close to the long tail and to the niche communication. With this, media vehicles seem to be creating their own innovation centers, studying their audiences to understand which formats or languages have the most appeal and investing in a journalism between the segmented and the personalized, rather than necessarily maintaining themselves as a homogenized mass media that seeks balance to reach as many people as possible.

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Raquel Ritter Longhi

Ph.D. in Communication and Semiotics from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC/SP), Master in Communication and Information from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), specialist in History and Aesthetics of Cinema from the Autonomous University of Madrid/Viridiana Foundation. Professor of the Journalism Program of the Federal University of Santa Catarina since 2007, she participates in the Applied Research Network in Journalism and Digital Technologies, of the SBPJor – Brazilian Association of Journalism Research. She has experience in Journalism and Communication, with emphasis in online and graphic journalism and new technologies, with studies in the areas of digital journalistic narratives, languages of digital journalism, image in web journalism, convergence of media and languages, creation in hypertext and aesthetics of cinema and video. At UFSC, she coordinates the Nephi-Jor – Nucleus of Studies and Production on Hypermedia applied to Journalism, she leads the Hypermedia and Language Research Group/CNPq, and she coordinates the extension project Fotolivre.ufsc. Email: raqlonghi@gmail.com

Ana Marta M. Flores

Master in Journalism from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) and Ph.D. student in Journalism at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). She researches fashion journalism in the convergent context and currently investigates the techniques of trend research and Coolhunting applied to consumption in journalism. She participates in the Applied Research Network in Journalism and Digital Technologies (JorTec), of the SBPJor – Brazilian Association of Journalism Research and is a researcher at the Nucleus of Studies and Production on Hypermedia applied to Journalism (Nephi-Jor), inserted in the Hypermedia and Language Research Group/CNPq. Email: flores.ana@posgrad.ufsc.br