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To cite this article: Sarah Anne Ganter & Fernando Oliveira Paulino (2020): Between Attack and Resilience: The Ongoing Institutionalization of Independent Digital Journalism in Brazil, Digital Journalism, DOI: [10.1080/21670811.2020.1755331](https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1755331)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1755331>

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 Published online: 18 May 2020.

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Between Attack and Resilience: The Ongoing Institutionalization of Independent Digital Journalism in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

Digital journalism in Brazil is dominated by a few big players and has recently been threatened by the country's challenging political and economic environment. Still, organizational structures promoting independent digital journalism (IDJ) persist. Originally understood as "the blogosphere," independent digital journalism in Brazil (IDJB) quickly evolved into several professionalized initiatives and now consists of dozens of news organizations. This article contributes to the field by (a) adding to scholarly conceptualizations of independent journalism in North America, Europe, and Latin America through the idea of "positive dependence" and (b) refining the understanding of IDJ in times of acute crisis. Based on an analysis of six emblematic cases, we show that IDJB is relational and distinct and that it functions without clearly defined boundaries. We further find that this relationality is necessary for IDJB to survive the attacks it faces. Different support networks shape "models of resilience" that, while not perfect, facilitate the institutionalization of IDJB by allowing for the slow but ongoing creation of new structures within the news ecosystem. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that the continuing institutionalization of IDJB and its particular characteristics contributes to the creation of a more diverse news ecosystem.

KEYWORDS

Independent digital journalism; Brazil; institutionalization; media democratization; relational theory; networked journalism

Introduction

Independent digital journalism (IDJ) has flourished over the last decade in Brazil, and in doing so, has prompted the diversification of a Brazilian media system historically characterized by high levels of political parallelism and ownership concentration (De Albuquerque 2005, 2013; Matos 2012). Recurring political and economic unrest is nothing new to Brazil, and the country currently faces unstable politics relating to a shift to the extreme right since the 2018 election of President Jair Bolsonaro. This situation coincides with deep political polarization, economic challenges, and an increased distrust of democracy (Sponholz and Christofolletti 2019), which this article will show pose important challenges in terms of safety for independent journalism. Since large

media conglomerates dominate public commentaries and reporting on political, economic, and socio-cultural tensions (Matos 2012), attempts to institutionalize journalistic structures that operate outside mainstream media have increased, despite the many threats these independent news organizations face.

Building on new institutionalism and the news literature (Kaplan 2006; Ryfe 2006; Sparrow 2006; Asp 2014), we argue that independent digital journalism in Brazil (IDJB) and its persistence are responses to the various exogenous shocks Brazil is experiencing. The rise of IDJB exemplifies what Ryfe (2006) described as the “interruption of the reproduction of institutional orders” (138). Several scholars have suggested that journalism in other country contexts tends to be homogeneous (Ryfe 2006; Boczkowski and de Santos 2007). In contrast, our findings indicate that the ongoing institutionalization of IDJB counteracts tendencies towards homogenization. In short, in this article, IDJ is viewed as creating change within the news ecosystem by sharing norms, ideas and values with a wider public and creating cultural persistence (see Zucker 1991). Here, institutionalization is an ongoing process, which we understand as the establishment of a set of values, ideas, and rules in society through changes to the news ecosystem. Furthermore, our analysis suggests that IDJB carries important relational aspects that are critical for its persistence. Building on the relational dimensions established in social movement theory (Della Porta and Diani 2006; O’Brien and Evans 2017), we explain how network structures are used to enhance success and longevity. IDJB is, thus, in line with the idea of “networked journalism,” which favors the diversification of news structures and contents (Beckett 2010; Ananny 2018; Robinson 2018). Consequently, we argue that IDJB would not persist without what we describe as “positive dependence.”

We analyze attempts to institutionalize mechanisms for the production, distribution of, and access to journalistic content outside traditional media. Asp (2014) identified a spectrum of economic, political, and cultural factors that can explain media institutionalization, which we refine based on six case studies emblematic to the ongoing institutionalization of IDJ in Brazil. Specifically, we identify safety for journalism (UNESCO 2007; Henrichsen, Betz, and Lisosky 2015; Orgeret and Tayeebwa 2016; UN 2016; Posetti 2017) as an important dimension of the ongoing institutionalization.

We argue that one of the indicators for this process is that independent digital news organizations in Brazil have adapted models of resilience that, though not perfect, help ensure the survival of the organizations and their journalists in the face of professional, physical, and psychological attacks. We explore this field of tension between attack and resilience that challenges the very understanding of independence. Based on the literature on new institutionalism, independent journalism, resource dependence theory, and safety for journalism, our analysis contributes to the understanding of IDJB and its institutionalization through models of resilience as distinct, relational, and ongoing.

Journalism, the Market, and the State in Brazil

It was only in the 1980s, following the end of the dictatorship, when news organizations began to aggressively commercialize news-making in Brazil (Waisbord 2000; De Albuquerque 2005). Due to the country’s history, “commercial” came to mean

“opposing the dictatorship,” and private media was perceived as democratic (Kucinski 1991). As a consequence, media power was consolidated through the influence of powerful private media companies, such as Globo, which often claim to be more representative than political institutions (De Albuquerque 2013). Additionally, the field lacked clear limitations on levels of foreign ownership and government advertising, making news media susceptible to political manipulation (De Albuquerque 2005; Matos 2012; Rovai 2018), and on policy decisions, such as the privatization of regional wirelines, which stimulated private investments. The result was a market prone to political influence and dominated by ten families until the late 1990s, with Globo being the most powerful player in the media industry (Moreira 2015; Noam and Mutter 2016). Consequently, Brazil now has one of the most commercialized and concentrated media systems in the world (Márquez-Ramírez and Guerrero 2014).

The major media players were the first to take advantage of digitalization, reproducing their offline structures in the online news ecosystem. It was not long before 70% of the online news market was controlled by four large groups: Folhapar through UOL, Telefônica through Terra Notícias, Globopar through globo.com, and Telemar through the iG system. These were the most important founding organizations of digital journalism in Brazil (Moreira 2015; Rovai 2018). Even today, the structural advantages held by these companies determine the country’s news ecosystem, and Globo, UOL online, Folha de São Paulo online, and Terra online are still considered Brazil’s top news brands (Newman et al. 2018). As in the U.S. (Hindman 2009) digitalization did not lead to democratization in Brazil. On the contrary, the major players gained even more influence as they were better able to reach larger audiences through their digital websites and because of the rise of smartphones as the most popular devices for news consumption in Brazil (Newman et al. 2018; Rovai 2018). With the emergence of new competitors in online news advertising, such as large digital platforms like Google and Facebook, the revenue generated through advertisements was increasingly redistributed (Oliveira Paulino and Gomes 2012; Statista 2019), and news organizations began to depend more and more on digital platforms to reach their audiences and succeed economically (Nielsen and Ganter 2018). Together, these market shifts led to the consolidation of existing structural issues in the Brazilian online news ecosystem, a development that added to smaller news organizations’ economic and political struggle to survive (Jenkins and Nielsen 2020).

The Rise of Independent Digital Journalism in Brazil Despite Times of Acute Crisis

New forms of Brazilian news organizations have emerged since 2011 and, most notably, since 2013 (Guazina 2013; Figaro, Nonato, and Kinoshita 2017; Rovai 2018). The urge to create independent journalistic structures is deeply rooted in Brazilian journalism’s political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions. Many journalistic entrepreneurs, often journalists trained by the traditional news media, have established media organizations, reshaping the country’s news ecosystem. In the early 2000s, digital journalism in Brazil consisted mainly of the online versions of dominant media organizations. However, these traditional forms of journalistic production were

challenged by the rise of the Brazilian blogosphere (Guazina 2013; Rovai 2018). The blogosphere developed at a time of significant political unrest and political and economic instability, which frustrated professional journalists (Figaro, Nonato, and Kinoshita 2017) and traditional news organizations, which struggled to adapt to the new playing field (Osvald Ramos and Müller Spinelli 2015). During this time, a new form of independent journalism evolved: a professionalized stream drawn from the uncertainties of the wider news ecosystem. The mandates of these new journalistic organizations ranged broadly from commercial to public interest orientations. The attacks the organizations have experienced constitute far-reaching, acute, and multi-layered crises that differ from the financial journalistic crises most referenced in scholarly works exploring Western contexts (e.g. Gasher et al. 2016). Despite these complex crisis situations and their intensification into explicit threats to the safety of digital journalists since the national elections of 2018, independent news organizations in Brazil continue to rise.

Reporters Without Borders has repeatedly warned that Brazil is one of the most violent countries in Latin America for media work, particularly for journalists covering corruption, public policy, and organized crime. The situation has worsened since the 2018 election of President Jair Bolsonaro, which marked “a dark era for democracy and for freedom of the press in Brazil” (Reporters Without Borders 2019). Brazil is also listed on the Index of Impunity 2019, established by the Committee for Protection of Journalists (CPJ), which identifies countries in which crimes against journalists are largely unprosecuted (CPJ 2019). Online journalists are particularly exposed and vulnerable to attacks, and as online tools like social media platforms have begun to play more important roles, threats to journalists have complexified (Henrichsen, Betz, and Lisosky 2015; Orgeret and Tayeebwa 2016; Henrichsen 2019; Ireton and Posetti 2019). Female journalists are particularly affected, as they often experience “double attacks” (Henrichsen, Betz, and Lisosky 2015, 43) for being both journalists and women (Orgeret 2016). Potential consequences include personal intimidation, intimidation of sources, financial costs, and damage to credibility, integrity, and confidence and can result in self-censorship. Henrichsen (2019) emphasized that the need for protection grows particularly important in such circumstances and argued that protection must be three-fold, addressing the self, the story, and the different roles (e.g. watchdog, prosecutor, skeptic) of a journalist. Journalists’ safety has historically been handled by either international and national nongovernmental organizations (UNESCO 2007; UN 2016) or journalists themselves (Lisosky and Henrichsen 2009; Henrichsen, Betz, and Lisosky 2015). In its current form, however, IDJB offers individual journalists an organizational structure that can enhance their protection on an organizational level. This protection manifests in what we describe as “models of resilience,” which foster financial, psychological, and technical support for independent digital journalists.

We argue that the ongoing institutionalization of independent digital journalism in Brazil is part of a broader development of diverse approaches towards a democratic communication system that supports liberation through participative communication. Brazil’s media system has been targeted by various reform initiatives focused on equal access, dialogue, and participation beyond what the international system of media development suggests (Beltrán 2014; Torrico 2016; Cruz Tornay Márquez and Oller

Alonso 2018). The reform is partially politically supported through such programs as “Pontos de Cultura,” established by the Ministry of Culture, and the organization of and participation in Free Media Forums held in Rio de Janeiro, Dakar, and Tunis since 2008 (Rovai 2018). Historically, however, structural reforms to the media system have been unsuccessful. Civil society actors have repeatedly attempted to push for a reform of the media system, but since political motivation to do so is low, there has been little change on the macro level (Ganter 2018).

We argue that the various shifts established within the media ecosystem, such as the creation of the blogosphere (Guazina 2013; Rovai 2018) and the subsequent rise of new types of media organizations, have created the slow but continuous institutionalization of IDJ in the traditional Brazilian media system. Brazil’s political, socio-cultural, and economic crises, which have increasingly led to a crisis of safety for journalists, have not discouraged repeated efforts to institutionalize the country’s IDJ. These democratizing efforts go beyond attempts to reform media through policy change. As Osvald Ramos and Müller Spinelli (2015) pointed out in their assessment of the rise of non-profit and impartial journalism in Brazil, it was during times of economic crisis that journalists began to create multidisciplinary teams that worked together to achieve a more just and equal society through the creation of a “space of possibilities” (Ananny 2018, 116) for reflection. The importance of bringing this mission to the heart of society is a major factor in creating models of resilience that enable the institutionalization of IDJB. As Matos (2012) states, media democratization is capable of supporting the country’s ongoing political democratization, which has been a primary driver of the rise of IDJ organizations.

This intrinsic motivation is culturally rooted in the need for a democratic media environment, which dates back to the dictatorship (1964–1985). The desire to create new media environments arose, for example, in 1998, when the socio-cultural desire for independent journalism received sufficient political support to create Law 9.612 for licensing community radio stations (Rovai 2018). This was a political decision that substantially increased the number of independent radio stations across the country (das Graças Targino, Portela de Carvalho, and Dias Gomes 2008). Moreira (2015) interpreted this spread of licensed community radio stations as an indication of a socio-culturally rooted need to create independent structures outside Brazil’s traditional media system. More recently, the founder of The Intercept Brasil, Glenn Greenwald, noted that the financial support his organization receives shows “a tremendous hunger for independent journalism that is passionate and impactful” (Glenn Greenwald, newsletter, June 17, 2019). In this article, we show how this socio-cultural desire has supported the ongoing institutionalization of IDJB.

“Positive Dependence” as a Conceptual Dimension of Independent Digital Journalism

In the following, we discuss, juxtapose, and connect scholarly conceptualizations of journalistic independence in the North American, European, and Latin American literature. Drawing from this literature, we develop a conceptual approach that considers the complexity of independence and helps us understand and explain IDJB.

Journalistic independence is a broad concept, and its meaning is highly subjective and dependent on context, existing norms, and day-to-day experiences. North American and European scholars generally define “independence” as being free from control, not dependent, and autonomous to ensure authority for journalistic work (Karppinen and Moe 2016; Carlson 2017). Karppinen and Moe (2016) argued that, from a Scandinavian perspective, the relational nature of independence makes it a problematic normative principle. Asp (2014) saw independence as professional norm, but stated that its character can vary, and Carlson (2017) explored this variety in his relational approach to studying journalistic authority in the U.S. as fundamentally social, reliant on context, and constituted through the ongoing “remaking of these relations through interactions among a fluctuating set of diverse actors” (13). Several Latin American scholars (e.g. Assis et al. 2017; Figaro, Nonato, and Kinoshita 2017; Rovai 2018) have explored notions of independent digital journalism as a relational construct. Similar to Holt, Figenschou, and Frischlich (2019), who published a conceptual work on “alternative news media,” these scholars (e.g. Assis et al. 2017; Carvalho and Bronosky 2017; Figaro, Nonato, and Kinoshita 2017; Rovai 2018) have emphasized the relational nature of independent journalism in Latin American contexts by suggesting positions that counter or complement the news ecosystem.

Independent digital journalistic organizations are often described as intrinsically motivated, entrepreneurial (e.g. Carbasse 2015; Osvald Ramos and Müller Spinelli 2015; Carvalho de Magalhães 2018), or innovative (e.g. Flores and Marta 2017). For example, Carvalho and Bronosky (2017) use the term “alternative journalism” to describe a kind of journalism that creates a dialectic relationship with the audience, provides a different perspective on reality, and challenges the inflexibility of conventional journalism. “Alternative journalism” is seen as necessary to shape society’s transformation through dialectics created through changes within audience–industry relationships (Carvalho and Bronosky 2017). Figaro, Nonato, and Kinoshita (2017), in their article on journalistic work conditions, analyzed media they considered to be outside the traditional news ecosystem and explored working conditions for journalists from “other” media organizations, which they summarized as alternative, independent, collective, entrepreneurial, and innovative journalism. Their findings suggest, however, that the terms are used discursively and are created by their ideological foundations. Consequently, the terms can be used to refer to being free from the influence of political parties, religion, and large enterprises or to refer to any “counter-hegemonic” journalistic element (Figaro, Nonato, and Kinoshita 2017). In this context, the word “relational” refers to different notions of independent journalism that are “counter-hegemonic” to existing power structures (Peruzzo Krohling 2009; Carvalho and Bronosky 2017; Figaro, Nonato, and Kinoshita 2017; Rovai 2018). The conceptual work deriving from these Latin American scholars is comparable to Holt, Figenschou, and Frischlich (2019) definition of alternative news media as relational, non-binary, and positioned “on a continuum” (864). In this broader approach, the only way to think about IDJ is in relation to hegemony, implying not dependence on but reaction to the traditional news ecosystem. For example, Assis et al. (2017) defined independent media as activist initiatives working together against economic power. Similarly, Rovai (2018) used the term “*jornalismo livre*” (free journalism) (34), which he defined as existing in opposition but also linked

to large media organizations. Accordingly, he defined “*medialivrisimo*” as a politically motivated strategy: “a tactic and technique, a way to create communication that is independent from traditional structures” (Rovai 2018, 40, our translation), by which he means not organizationally constituted.

On the contrary, in this article, we explore those types of IDJ that are embedded within organizations and, therefore, still adhere to highly professionalized structures. We conceptualize independent digital journalism in a non-monolithic frame, which considers that IDJ is discussed in the literature without any clearly defined boundaries. In the following, we systematize this broad perspective by categorizing the six emblematic cases as counter-hegemonic, niche, community, and entrepreneurial types of independent digital journalism in Brazil. We establish this systematization by analyzing the six cases according to the goals of their particular mandates, their structures, their main actors, the specific types of influence they experience, and the different types of relations they maintain.

We use this broader relational approach to study IDJ by building on the literature on safety for journalism (UNESCO 2007; Orgeret and Tayeebwa 2016; Posseti 2017; Henrichsen 2019) and resource dependence theory as established in social movement theory (see Della Porta and Diani 2006; O'Brien and Evans 2017). Drawing from these different areas of scholarly work and the data analysis, we establish a new notion we refer to as “positive dependence.” We argue that, in countries in which attacks on journalism rise in states of crisis, being relational can provide security for IDJ. We establish our argument by enriching the relational understanding employed for example by Carlson (2017) and Holt, Figenschou, and Frischlich (2019) with work from Latin American scholars (e.g. Assis et al. 2017; Carvalho and Bronosky 2017; Figaro, Nonato, and Kinoshita 2017; Rovai 2018) who have described IDJ in a way that considers opportunities of empowerment through this relationality. This understanding is the basis for what we establish as the “positive dependence” of digital independent journalism in Brazil.

Methodology

We based our analysis on a data corpus that combines document analysis, industry data, and interviews with actors involved with the ongoing institutionalization of IDJB, studying the cases of Agência Pública,¹ Brasil 247, Poder360, Nexo, The Intercept Brasil, and Metrôpoles. These organizations were selected for their established organizational structures and ability to reach solid audience bases while pursuing different organizational mandates and following different editorial philosophies. All of them self-identify as news organizations that present IDJ and that have survived, so far, Brazil's turbulent political and economic environment. They are what Flyvbjerg (2001) described as “emblematic cases” (78): they are illustrative and informative, rather than average. Comparing them enables us to identify patterns of IDJB and strategies of economic and political survival. In addition to using information available from each organization's websites, reports, and ministry documents, in 2019, we conducted Skype interviews with five high-level representatives, including founders and editors-in-chief of the different journalistic initiatives. We used an interview guideline as the basis for our semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in Portuguese and

translated by the authors into English when needed for quotes. The guideline posed questions concerning (a) the organizations' missions and mandates; (b) business models and financial means; (c) forms of access to non-monetary resources; (d) socio-political delimitations and attacks; and (e) strategies of resilience. All interviewees gave their consent for their interviews to be used for this publication. Both authors analyzed the interviews independently. Using thematic analysis, we organized the material according to themes (Herzog, Handke, and Hitters 2019) we identified across the different organizations, then compared and structurally organized the themes into patterns that describe IDJB conceptually. Based on our data, we identified the relevant actors, challenges, and mandates of the selected organizations and inductively generated conclusions regarding Brazil's panorama of digital independent journalism. We triangulated the data by contrasting our analysis and contextualizing documentary information with the data obtained from the interviews (Flick 2011). The draft version of the article was shared with our interviewees to give them the opportunity to comment and provide feedback on our findings to increase the validity of our interpretations (see e.g: Ganter and Ortega 2019).

The Ongoing Institutionalization of Independent Digital Journalism in Brazil

In the following section, we analyze six emblematic cases of organizations that represent different forms of independent digital journalism in Brazil. We show that IDJB is (1) distinct, as it assumes many different forms and mandates; (2) relational and embedded within wider networks, protecting it from attacks; and (3) involved in an ongoing process of institutionalization, as different models of resilience are built out of a socio-cultural desire to diversify Brazil's media landscape and the fundamental need to enhance the safety of digital journalists in the country.

Distinct Mandates of Independent Digital Journalism in Brazil

While IDJ first developed slowly in Brazil, 2013 saw an explosion of related initiatives (Figaro, Nonato, and Kinoshita 2017). We argue that IDJB organizations have different and potentially overlapping motivations (Figure 1). While some IDJ organizations lean towards entrepreneurial motivations, others are driven by political and socio-cultural interests. Consequently, IDJB is distinct and can be represented by more than one type of organization across different dimensions of the spectrum (Figure 1). Among our six emblematic cases, we identified four forms of organizations according to their mandates, structures, main actors, specific types of influence, and different types of relations.

Economic sustainability is an important organizational mandate in the entrepreneurial forms of IDJB. To survive, news organizations can view news primarily as a business, as is the case with Metr opoles (see Figure 1), or understand the economic aspects of IDJ as necessary parts of professional journalism, as in the case of Poder360 and The Intercept Brasil (see Figure 1). Metr opoles follows a concept of "service journalism," meaning that it aims to reach larger audiences by providing quality journalistic coverage that adapts to what audiences want (Interview with Lilian Tahan, director,

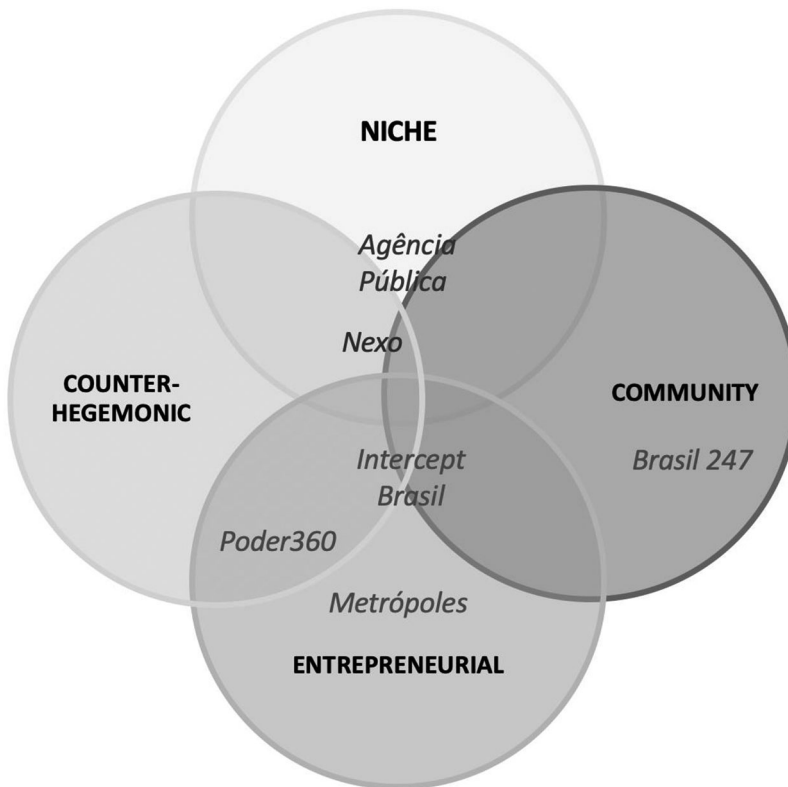


Figure 1. Distinct forms of IDJB and the distribution of emblematic cases.

Metrôpoles, 2019). When Metrôpoles was founded in 2016, “the managerial leadership of the group reasoned that, in a time of technological transitions, new windows of business opportunities can be identified in the market” (Interview with Lilian Tahan, director, Metrôpoles, 2019). Whereas Metrôpoles is part of a large group, however, Poder360 lacks external associates and investors and has a much smaller social media presence.

In our interviews, most other organizations presented their primary motivations as socio-political. These cases viewed the diversification of perspectives, angles, and topics to be a necessary response to the country’s troubled economic and political situation: “A part of the public has been waiting for decades for more diversity in political news reporting. The founders of Nexo see journalism as a powerful tool to strengthen the overall quality of public debates and democracy in Brazil” (Interview with Paula Miraglia, co-founder and general director, Nexo, 2019). Nexo’s editorial principles include balance, clarity, and transparency (Nexo 2019). When they launched Nexo in 2015, during a tumultuous political moment,² the founders felt the need to contribute to the public environment by allowing the public to more easily understand what was happening in Brazil. This goal could be achieved through “explanatory journalism,” an educational and interactive form of journalism (Interview with Paula Miraglia, co-founder and general director, Nexo, 2019). The founders of Nexo identified the need to establish “explanatory journalism” as a niche in which the organization was able to operate as a non-profit entity.

While Nexo's editorial mission is to enhance democratization through information, other organizations position themselves as more clearly counter-hegemonic, seeking to question those in power (Nexo 2019). The Intercept Brasil, for example, describes itself as "a news agency dedicated to using activist and adventurous journalism to hold those in power responsible" (The Intercept Brasil 2019). Founded in 2016 with private money by Glenn Greenwald and inspired by a U.S. pilot project founded in 2014, The Intercept Brasil was created during the post-Snowden era (Interview with Leandro Demori, executive editor, The Intercept Brasil, 2019). Its work has a strong counter-hegemonic element, as highlighted in the following quote:

Glenn [Greenwald] was inspired by the frustrations he experienced when trying to distribute journalistic work on the Snowden case in Brazil. As a consequence, he thought that it was necessary to have a network of enough independent media which would be able to distribute materials easier in the future, even though these materials were in opposition to the ruling political and economic interests. (Interview with Leandro Demori, executive editor, The Intercept Brasil, 2019)

Similar to Nexo, The Intercept Brasil seeks to impact citizens' everyday lives. Further, like Agência Pública, The Intercept Brasil advocates investigative journalism that confronts the established system; the organization is known for rigorous fact-checking and a focus on human rights issues (Agência Pública 2019; The Intercept Brasil 2019).

Several of the organizations we studied focus on community engagement (see [Figure 1](#)): Brasil 247, The Intercept Brasil, and Agência Pública all involve communities in their work, while other organizations, such as Metrôpoles, reach out to their audiences via social media platforms. The motivation behind community engagement is based on the perception that journalism can help achieve much-needed societal change. The collaborative efforts established by some of these organizations are apparent in the roles played by freelancers and volunteers. Brasil 247, for example, explicitly states that it follows a "collaborative philosophy:" the organization employs only 20 staff members, but works with more than 200 volunteers. The organization also actively invites subscribers to weekly meetings to connect the editorial work with the organization's audience (Interview with Leonardo Attuch, founder and editor, Brasil 247, 2019). In a newsletter, Glenn Greenwald emphasized that readers' contributions are fundamental to The Intercept's aim of creating "dense journalism, as done for example during the Brazil election campaign in 2018" (Glenn Greenwald, newsletter, May 17, 2019). This is important to note, since this example shows how communities can be involved and how specific communities may be called upon through crowdfunding initiatives and other forms of private donations.

Recent Attacks on Independent Digital Journalism in Brazil and the Search for Models of Resilience

The current threats to the safety of journalists are central to the work of IDJ organizations in Brazil. We argue that the issue of safety in IDJB triggers ongoing institutionalization, as organizations search for models of resilience to protect their work on various levels (see Henrichsen 2019). Some of the attacks described by our interviewees involved abusive judicial proceedings and the erosion of sources' confidentiality.

Our interviewees' reflections on these attacks highlighted (a) editorial, (b) economic, (c) ideological, (d) psychological, and (e) reputational pressures. Our interviewees also confirmed earlier findings that female journalists are particularly under attack (see Henrichsen, Betz, and Lisosky 2015; Orgeret 2016).

Perceptions of which challenges are the most threatening to IDJB varied among our interviewees. Some believed economic challenges to be the most difficult. For example, in the case of Poder360, "finding a sustainable business model that provides professional journalism" was an important issue because, "without economic independence, there cannot be professional independence" (Interview with Fernando Rodrigues, founder and majority shareholder, Poder360, 2019). Some interviewees described how economic pressure could evolve into editorial pressure. At organizations that emphasize a social media presence, such as The Intercept Brasil, interviewees referred to "a permanent attempt to adapt headlines and texts to the logic of social media (...) And, as a consequence, social media shapes the content" (Interview with Leandro Demori, executive editor, The Intercept Brasil, 2019). While this experience is common to newsrooms around the world, in Brazil, where the need for independent journalism is a socio-cultural factor, these delimitations are seen as particularly harmful, as they create an environment in which it is even more difficult to pursue "reporting which is free from the influence of big corporations" (Interview with Leandro Demori, executive editor, The Intercept Brasil, 2019). In addition to economic pressures and, correspondingly, editorial pressures to work on certain topics and formulate headlines in particular ways, in Brazil, ideological pressures against independent digital news organizations are common and can quickly evolve into physical and psychological violence. Leonardo Attuch explained that:

(...) while many other news organizations shifted towards the right, we shifted to the left (...) the political environment contributed towards journalists working for Brasil 247, mainly at the end of [President] Dilma's term in government, when [President] Temer was replacing her. During this time, leftist media was seriously discussing the idea of impeachment. (Interview with Leonardo Attuch, founder, Brasil 247, 2019)

The Intercept Brasil has received "public and private threats that are particularly aimed at female journalists." In the current environment, with the rise of the new right, psychological pressure has increased, leading to "collective psychological damage during the elections" (Interview with Leandro Demori, executive editor, The Intercept Brasil, 2019). This environment has also consisted of attacks designed to create reputational damage. Agência Pública, for example, was accused of censorship after a journalist launched an inquiry into Kim Kataguirí, a leader of the *Movimento Brasil Livre* (MBL), to verify information the politician had provided (Agência Brasil 2018; Quadros 2019).

Relational Aspects of Independent Digital Journalism in Brazil and Network Types

We have shown that independent digital journalism in Brazil is distinct, meaning a broad spectrum of news organizations identify as independent digital news organizations. These organizations are sustained through economically, politically, technologically, and socio-culturally enhanced networks. The term "relational" can assume different forms and meanings (see Figure 2) based on context, motive, and network

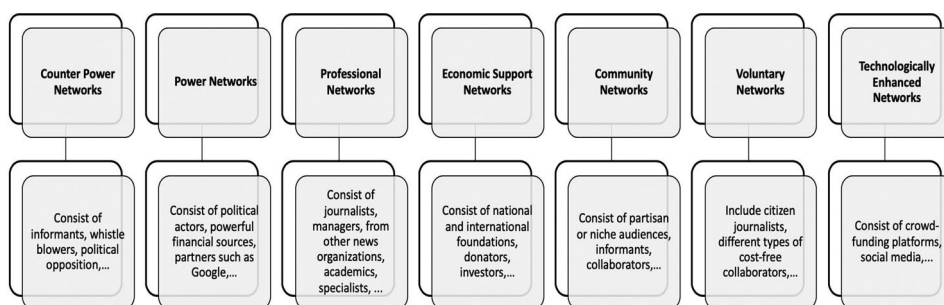


Figure 2. Relational properties and network types of IDJB.

types (Figure 2). Whereas some relationships and interactions are problematic and fluctuating, others are fruitful and help solidify IDJ in the country. Relationality in organizational contexts is often conceptualized using Emerson’s (1962) idea of power-dependence relations that establish power asymmetries or, at least, mutual dependence. However, resource dependence theory, as employed in the study of social movements, has described how resource-dependent formation can lead to network organizations that create dense, informal networks critical for goal achievement (Della Porta and Diani 2006; O’Brien and Evans 2017; Segura 2018). These organizational networks that create IDJB embeddedness by relating to multiple and overlapping resource providers enable the emergence of what we describe as “positive dependence:” a situation in which dependence on various collaborators and partners exists, but the diversity of connections distributes dependences and power among different resource holders. IDJB organizations, in particular, accept some degree of dependence because it supports their goals and enables them to push back against the different types of attacks they experience. They achieve this relational power by building what Della Porta and Diani (2006) described as meaningful and engaged relations with networks of supporters of strategic collaborative activities.

The relational character of IDJB is visible in the spaces created for the purpose of interacting. These can be digital spaces, such as social media sites, or physical spaces, such as the Cultural Centre for Journalism, created by the Agência Pública (2019). Brasil 247 organizes meetings with subscribers and invites them to participate in fundamental debates about the organization’s philosophy (Interview with Leonardo Attuch, founder, Brasil 247, 2019). Other organizations, such as Nexo, work together with academia to improve their content quality. The Intercept Brasil follows a similar model, as it works in conjunction with other regional news organizations, professors, and researchers to obtain access to information (Interview with Leonardo Demori, executive editor, The Intercept Brasil, 2019). Agência Pública also continually works to extend its professional networks through mentoring programs and training for journalists. Economic support networks include such foundations as The Ford Foundation, Luminare, and Fundação Dom Cabral. However, some of the organizations we studied for this article also collaborate with powerful actors, such as Google AdSense and Outbrain. IDJ organizations are often keen to establish close relations with their audiences. In the case of Nexo, digital forms enhance “the profile and arrangement” by supporting the “establishment of a radical policy of transparency” (Interview with

Paula Miraglia, co-founder and general director, Nexo, 2019). Poder360 uses a daily newsletter subscription (Drive) to reach out to readers through exclusive, high-quality content.

In addition to being collaborative, relational IDJ can also be oppositional or non-relational. Poder360, for example, rejects all governmental funding (Interview with Fernando Rodrigues, founder and majority stakeholder, Poder360, 2019), as does The Intercept Brasil:

We would not accept public funding, as this could conflict with our independence; we, therefore, distinguish ourselves from other journalistic organizations as based on this decision. Self-censorship is not a problem in our organization. (Interview with Leonardo Demori, executive editor, The Intercept Brasil, 2019)

IDJ news organizations use their networks to build resilience against the different attacks they face. Elements of these strategies vary, but they involve all economic, organizational, legal, political, psychological, technological, and editorial aspects. For all the organizations studied here, strategies to create economic resilience involve the diversification of income sources. In the case of Metr opoles:

(...) the media group covers 30% of the monthly costs, which creates a huge advantage in comparison with other independent digital news organizations. If the financial side is stable, it is so much easier to produce good quality journalism. (Interview with Lilian Tahan, executive director, Metr opoles, 2019)

The remaining expenses are covered by digital advertisements administered through Google AdSense and Outbrain. Lilian Tahan argued that this cooperation for digital advertising helps "to circumvent that advertisers try to exercise influence on editorial decisions" (Interview, Metr opoles, 2019). However, she also admitted that:

(...) the model is not ideal, as the hunt for clicks to reach economic sustainability is a problem that can affect journalistic quality, and, therefore, it is important to seek income sources other than advertising, for example through collaborations with foundations. (Interview with Lilian Tahan, executive director, Metr opoles, 2019)

At Metr opoles, the aim is "to reach economic sustainability within the next five years" (Interview with Lilian Tahan, executive director, Metr opoles, 2019). Similarly, Brasil 247 has established a strategic relationship with Google that increases its independence from governmental advertisements. According to its founder, Brasil 247 has been economically stable since 2014 and is "able to think financially in the long term and independently from political and economic interests" (Interview with Leonardo Attuch, founder, Brasil 247, 2019). Poder360 sources a large share of its income from newsletters, advertisements, and sponsored content in the digital journal, as well as from opinion polls (Poder360 2019). In contrast, other organizations collect much of their funding through foundations. Nexo, for example, generates some of its resources through subscriptions, but is also supported through specific investments by Luminare, a philanthropic organization owned by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar.³ This donated money is "mainly used for the marketing, particularly of the new platform Nexo Edu, which specializes in preparing educational materials to be used in classrooms: content that Nexo has started to sell to schools" (Interview with Paula Miraglia, co-founder, Nexo, 2019).

Other IDJ organizations in Brazil take a broader approach by involving their communities in the pursuit of economic sustainability. In the case of Agência Pública, crowdfunding and other types of reader support make up 35% of financial resources. Other income sources include donations from private national and international foundations (67%), sponsorships (9%), and specific projects (21%) (Agência Pública 2019). The Intercept Brasil combines donations from foundations and crowdfunding activities. It uses the platform Catarse for some of its crowdfunded projects and has reached, at the time of this writing, more than 9,500 contributors.⁴

In addition to using different economic models, some IDJB organizations try to create legal resilience by incorporating protection through legal counselling as a permanent aspect of their work (Interview with Leonardo Attuch, founder, Brasil 247, 2019; Interview with Leonardo Demori, executive editor, The Intercept Brasil, 2019). Legal counselling is important for creating resilience against online threats, hate speech, and other forms of psychological pressure. It is particularly relevant for organizations using social media platforms, which increase exposure to verbal attacks and threats. As Leonardo Demori stated concerning The Intercept Brasil, “when we left our Twitter account unattended for 48 hours, we had to block 2000 people” (Interview with Leonardo Demori, executive editor, The Intercept Brasil, 2019).

In the context of Brazil’s current political moment, psychological support systems are created both formally and informally. At The Intercept Brasil, after the last elections, staff members felt the need “to talk, unload, offer tips, and provide compassion” (Interview with Leandro Demori, executive editor, The Intercept Brasil, 2019). Paula Miraglia emphasized that “regardless of the physical attacks, it is necessary to promote debate in a critical context that fosters dialogue in the country” (Interview with Paula Miraglia, co-founder, Nexo, 2019). Brasil 247 is promoting permanent dialogue with other news organizations, such as DCM (Diário do Centro do Mundo), Revista Fórum, and GGN (Jornal GGN), with whom they occasionally produce content (Interview with Leonardo Attuch, founder, Brasil 247, 2019).

Organizational ways of creating resilience include “the facilitation of flat hierarchies, particularly around editorial decisions to foster identification with Metrôpoles” (Interview with Lilian Tahan, director, Metrôpoles, 2019). Other attempts to create resilience through editorial decisions have been implemented by The Intercept Brasil and Nexo. The Intercept Brasil “seeks to use simple language to reach readers outside of the intellectual bubble” by “develop[ing] a journalism without jargon, without buzzwords, without clichés, without technical language, avoiding political–business bureaucracy,” which, according to Demori, is often used “to hide information and avoid debate in sensitive issues, such as the current proposal of pension reform” (Interview with Leonardo Demori, executive editor, The Intercept Brasil, 2019).

Nexo aims for “balance, clarity, and transparency” and attempts to be amenable to its readers’ interests. Its decision to offer advertisement-free content is based on the understanding that “advertisements harm the readers’ experience” and provide the “wrong incentives when thinking about content types” because, “when revenue is generated by clicks, quality matters less;” thus, Nexo needs to provide “quality content to convince the public to pay for it” (Interview with Paula Miraglia, co-founder, Nexo, 2019). Another important element in the creation of resilience is the training of staff

members. *Metrópolis*, for example, offers courses for its 200 employees through *Fundação Dom Cabral*, one of its main supporters:

Nexo offers training to employees, which is also open to the general public in an annual course at *Escola N*, an initiative that was founded by Nexo as part of the qualification policies established by human resources. (Interview with Paula Miraglia, co-founder, Nexo, 2019)

Nexo has also produced a series of editorial and technological handbooks “to make sure everyone is on the same page and to create clarity with regards to our project” (Interview with Paula Miraglia, co-founder, Nexo, 2019).

Conclusion

Brazil is one of the most violent countries in Latin America for journalists to work in, particularly online and female journalists. Given these conditions, it is surprising that IDJB has continued to develop in Brazil over the last few years. However, we have argued that IDJ network organization structures are needed to enhance journalists’ safety by establishing strategies of resilience, which also contribute to the cultural persistence of independent journalism in Brazil’s digital sphere. Ensuring journalists’ safety has historically been the responsibility of either international and national non-governmental organizations or journalists themselves (Lisosky and Henrichsen 2009; Henrichsen, Betz, and Lisosky 2015). IDJB, however, offers individual journalists organizational structures designed to enhance their protection. This protection manifests in what we call “models of resilience,” which increase financial, psychological, and technical support for independent digital journalists through different types of networks. Our data indicate that the relational character of IDJB and its ongoing institutionalization are enhanced by what is known as the “networked society” (Castells 2000): a society that favors the establishment of “networked journalism” (Beckett 2010; Ananny 2018; Robinson 2018). Our understanding of “networked journalism” is not limited to digital networks, but inclusive of socio-cultural networks that transport and shape journalistic practices.

Our analysis shows that IDJB is relational in many different ways and thrives in a variety of network types: professional, economic, counter-hegemonic, community, voluntary, and technological. Looking at social movement theory, we can point to Della Porta and Diani (2006), who have argued that building and using network structures can enhance the success and longevity of causes over time. We have explained that, unlike social movements, IDJB organizations are formalized entities that do not follow one common cause, but still use strategies similar to social movements to enable resilience through entanglements in broad and diverse networks. This enables what we conceptualize as a “positive dependence” on supporters that allows IDJB to remain independent from powerful state and media owner interests. In this study, we have emphasized the role “positive dependence” plays in the ongoing construction of resilience models to show that, even when under attack, IDJ is still institutionalizing in Brazil. Our study, thus, identifies safety for journalism (Henrichsen, Betz, and Lisosky 2015; Orgeret and Tayeebwa 2016; Posetti 2017) as an important dimension of the ongoing institutionalization of IDJB. However, further studies should explore the moral, ethical, and professional

dilemmas (e.g. Konieczna and Robinson 2014) “positive dependence” may pose in the future for independent digital journalism in Brazil.

Based on our data, we have shown that IDJB is distinct by identifying different types of independent digital journalism on the broader IDJ spectrum (entrepreneurial, community, niche, and counter-hegemonic). Hence, our findings indicate that IDJB counters tendencies of homogenization in online journalism. The pursuit of independent journalism is about democratizing the media; developing more diverse, more easily accessible media structures and content (Pickard 2006); and supporting a more independent press in a “space of possibilities” (Ananny 2018, 118). The IDJB organizations analyzed here aim at an audience that is otherwise underrepresented in Brazil’s highly concentrated media system. The process of establishing independent journalistic structures in the online news ecosystem, like any act of media democratization, may be described as a messy, “contradictory and uneven process involving different groups and strategies” (Freedman and Obar 2016, 12). In the end, creating a network of independent journalistic organizations in a highly concentrated market may be one of many “tiny acts” (Margetts 2019, 108) that can add up to support a more distinct and diversified media system. Together, specific actors, such as journalists, editors, and journalistic entrepreneurs, create a standard of structures, actions, and functions through which distinct forms of IDJ can be institutionalized.

Finally, we have explained that, in Brazil, there is a socio-cultural desire for independent journalism that dates back to the dictatorship experience and has developed further as the news ecosystem increasingly became commercialized and concentrated. As news organizations test different models of resilience, they establish in the short- and mid-term a sense of economic, political, and cultural sustainability, success, and protection. In this way, IDJ organizations in Brazil are able to create cultural persistence by continuing to share their values, ideas, and norms, particularly in times of acute and multilayered crises.

Notes

1. Agência Pública was one of the first IDJB organizations. We reached out to the organization for an interview; however, the organization currently does not grant any interviews for research purposes. Thus, we used data retrieved through desk research.
2. Between 2015 and 2016, a series of protests shook Brazil in relation to “Operation Car Wash,” which consisted of a number of investigations into cases of corruption inside the government of President Dilma Rousseff. Hundreds of state officials and politicians were arrested, and the conflict finally led to the impeachment of Rousseff.
3. Nexo received USD \$920,000 from the foundation in February 2019.
4. Current numbers can be seen at <https://www.catarse.me/users/958285-the-intercept-Brasil>

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This article is funded by Simon Fraser University Presidential Start-up Fund, and by the Editorial Support Fund for Faculty Members with English as additional language granted by the Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology at Simon Fraser University.

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