

JOURNALISTS OR INFLUENCERS? THE APPROPRIATION OF DIGITAL INFLUENCERS PRACTICES AS A TOOL OF JOURNALISTIC VALUE

JORNALISTAS OU INFLUENCIADORES? APROPRIAÇÃO DAS PRÁTICAS DOS INFLUENCIADORES DIGITAIS COMO FERRAMENTA DE VALOR JORNALÍSTICO

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ABSTRACT

This article answers two main questions: What are the similarities and differences between journalists' online practices and that of digital influencers? How have social media and the intimate perspective shortened the distances between journalists and their audience? To understand this scenario, a trio of Brazilian television journalists was investigated to comprehend their digital presence. The authors elaborated an exploratory methodology for qualitative analysis of Instagram publications. Based on elements that characterize the digital influencers and journalistic practices, a score was also created to understand the potentials of their discourse, performances and content strategies online.

Keywords: Digital Influencers. Journalists. Practices.

RESUMO

Este artigo responde a duas questões centrais: Quais são as semelhanças e diferenças entre as práticas dos jornalistas nas redes sociais e dos influenciadores digitais? Como o digital e a intimidade compartilhada diminuiram a distância entre jornalistas e suas audiências? Para compreender esse cenário, apresenta-se uma pesquisa de caráter exploratório e um framework teórico e metodológico para análise da presença digital de três jornalistas no Instagram com base nas especificidades do discurso em rede, performance e estratégias de conteúdo.

Palavras-chave: Influenciadores digitais. Jornalistas. Práticas.



INTRODUCTION

The role of journalists on social media is no longer restricted to being a news promoter or a columnist remarking on the factualness of Twitter's Trending Topics. Journalists are constantly taking on a didactic function and endorsing discourse on geopolitical debates, social issues and even suggesting places, reading material, and restaurants for their followers on social media. Such characteristics reshape the journalists' participation within digital environments in such a way that the interaction seems more active and closer to the public – thus approaching a digital influencer persona.

Brazil is the leading Latin American country in the growth of influencers and strategic uses of digital networks according to consumer behavior surveys. It is estimated that 71% of Brazilian social media users follow some kind of digital influencer (Qualibest, 2018). Based on this context, this article aims to discuss the (re)construction of journalistic skills and the appropriation of influencers' practices in journalists' online communication. The empirical analysis was based on three Brazilian journalists, all of them related to the television industry and with a bold digital presence: Astrid Fontenelle (soft news television journalist), Guga Chacra (television commentator), Evaristo Costa (hard news television journalist).

The new form of journalists' presence on social media is leading the field towards a perspective that Bruns has already identified: "We follow individual journalists [...] rather than trusting only in the imprints of news organisations," (2014, p. 18). In Brazil, supposedly, these new communication actors are defining what is a successful online practice and even influencing journalists to build a digital presence. Therefore, this article argues that the authoritative speech of journalism is facing a change that could be understood based on two questions: 1) What are the similarities and differences between journalists' online practices and that of digital influencers'? 2) How have social media and the intimate perspective shortened the distances between journalists and their audiences?

1 JOURNALISTS: ATTRIBUTES AND AUTHORITY

The first academic and technical record of journalism is from the 1690s. At that time, Peucer identified relevant elements that underpin the journalistic practice supported by the pillars of truth, justice and ethics. The influence of journalism is under threat even when it is built through professional, ethical and deontological values. In order to understand this context, it is important to review some fundamental key values for legitimacy and journalistic authority.



First, before the journalistic practice itself, there are deontological presuppositions that will together grant legitimacy and credibility to journalism. Ethics and morals are factors that guide the profession, relationships with colleagues, sources and the organization of the field. Abramo (1988, p. 109) defends the public commitment of journalists and emphasizes that “There is not a specific ethics of the journalist: his ethics are the same as the citizen.” Other values confer legitimacy to journalistic practice its professional ethos: truthfulness, precision, inquiry into social problems, separation of information and opinion, verification, interpretations of reality (Karam, 2014). All of this is part of a general standard that Abramo (1988) classifies as journalistic ethical value. It may seem broad, but that plays a determining role in the structures of this professional practice.

This paper aims not to discuss the ethical issue in depth. However, the understanding of a duty towards the citizens’ interest is essential to journalism and, therefore, to this article. The journalistic practice relies on the ethics and morals inherent to the journalist and it is part of legitimacy and credibility – as a result of daily professional activity. Legitimacy derives from the fulfillment of some attributes that make journalism socially recognized as a profession. In other words, the recognition of journalistic practice by the public guarantees institutionalization. Therefore, recognition is professional assumption and a consequence of the professional practice based on ethics and morals, but it is not necessarily a characteristic for the existence of journalistic discourse (Goodwin, 1993).

The same thing happens with the idea of journalistic credibility, which is a value that arises with a journalist’s professional lifespan and its performance. Credibility arises from the bond of trust established between journalists and the public through the narrative and logic of the journalist’s performance. When a performance is associated with truth, it establishes a relationship of belief and reliability.

The existence of these essential principles to validate journalistic conduct only exist because the field has adhered to elementary characteristics to differentiate journalistic discourse from any other type of narrative. First of all, it is necessary to talk about the public interest that guides journalistic practice. In short, public interest comes from anything considered impactful on the life of a community and audience. Public interest anticipates the act of doing journalism and can be classified as collective motivation or social interest (Groth, 2011).

In this context, Groth (2011) has put forth the possibility of understanding journalism as a science and its essence as a result of society interest (Groth, 2011). According to the author’s conceptual and systematic model, journalistic activity can only be considered as such by analyzing the characteristics that form it. Thus, it is necessary to “disassemble and reassemble” the elements in order to understand their value and utility. Groth systematized some of them as elementary ones: periodicity, universality, timeliness and publicity.



Table 1 – Elements of journalistic activity

Element	Description
Periodicity	Regularity, recurrent publication
Universality	Diversity of content, thematic openness
Timeliness	Focus on the present and nearness-in-time/recency
Publicity	Public and general accessibility

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Groth (2011)

To build a logical analysis of the journalistic discourse it is necessary to add the characteristics of Groth’s model to others such as plurality, uniqueness, objectivity, proximity, public interest and target audience.

According to Gadini (2011), *plurality* is a contemporary feature in journalism and it is greatly influenced by North American journalistic practice in the 1960s and 1970s. Plurality is the search for the opposition of a discourse, when journalists research different and even opposite perspectives and interview diverse profiles to ensure various voices in a report on the pretext of increasing the reliability and credibility of newspapers. Through plurality, the practice of “listening to both sides” became a key element in distinguishing journalistic discourse.

Tuchman (1979) understands the plurality of sources as a fundamental attribute of the news and relates it directly to another founding element of journalistic discourse: *objectivity*. However, the debate about this element, as well as the notion of impartiality, is considered an ideal to be achieved, but it is impracticable in its totality. According to Tuchman (1979), objectivity is a strategic rite in content production because it systematizes journalistic practice.

Another category defined by the Brazilian professor Genro Filho, in “O Segredo da Pirâmide” (1987), is *singularity*. The concept is based on premises such as the path of the journalistic narrative, the constant search for the new or unusual and the inherent potential of the practice to be a propellant for social debates. Although the author is criticized for the Aristotelian and Marxist thought that generated this category, it is from this theoretical viewpoint that the research in Brazilian journalism structures the discussion of the *lead*. Another reason to highlight this element is that journalism is a form of knowledge solidified in the singular, in the unique, in something neither universal nor particular (Genro Filho, 1987).

Another characteristic is *proximity*, related to the question “where?”. It means the geographic space covered by journalists at the moment of news coverage. Through this characteristic one can evaluate the thematic scheduling given to subjects by journalism. Considering the degree of proximity and interest



that the subject has from a certain community, the subject will have a greater repercussion (Traquina, 2005).

In journalism, speech also guarantees the confidence of the reader/viewer and the communication vehicle, therefore it is aggregated to the journalist's behavior and language expression. In addition, the journalistic technique through elements that guide the professional practice also guarantees *authority* to the professional. Therefore, journalistic authority brings together a community of social actors who primarily share an understanding of what journalism is and its main function, placing journalists as professionals engaged in proving themselves as observers who truthfully report reality. It would be possible to say that journalists claim their cultural authority (Tuchman, 1979). This kind of authority arises through the modus operandi of journalists, where the professionals themselves develop a professional identity/personality based on ethical and technical values.

The result of the journalistic authority, beginning with the professional culture built over the years, is the recognition of the journalist as an authorized observer (Zelizer, 1992): someone in whom the population of a city can trust and that with time adapts to technologies and communication transformations.

There are also other practices that legitimize journalists' work; professional orientation, development of specific news forms, and the personal narratives they circulate to support a privileged social place (Carlson, 2017). Carlson argues that journalistic authority is always the product of complex and variable relationships, as the ones with the audiences, sources, technologies, and critics, they are all responsible for shaping journalistic authority in the contemporary media environment.

2 DIGITAL INFLUENCERS: LEGITIMACY AND INTIMACY

The term digital influencer became part of the academic, mediatic and commercial vocabulary in 2015 in Brazil (Karhawi, 2017) and it refers to internet users producing content on social networks in various formats. Digital influencers are considered ordinary people, originally amateurs, that based on the participatory culture can produce content online and gain audiences. This possibility is a result of a landscape of participatory lurch where the tools of distribution and production are now available online and the production sphere is occupied by everyday people and no longer confined just to the traditional media. Digital influencers can also be understood as a type of internet celebrity (Abidin, 2018), as members of a professionalized, commercialized and monetized circuit (Arriagada, Ibáñez, 2020), and as opinion leaders (Motta, Bittencourt, Viana, 2014).

Becoming a digital influencer requires not just one's desire but also legitimation conceded by the public or followers on social media. Legitimation "is based on the necessity to create or to reinforce the



position of legitimacy of the speaking subject" (Charaudeau, 2002, s/p). Through a journalistic perspective, this process can be based on the speaker position of authority that can be conferred by an "institutional authority". In other words, it means that a journalist is commonly recognized as credible because of the mediatic institution where they work giving them the "right to the speech" (Charaudeau, 2002). However, the internet has broken down some traditional media processes. Digital influencers have not ever had an "institutional authority" that could give them the possibility to speak and to gain audiences interested in what they share online. The legitimation process, then, depends fully on how followers recognize them as credible, rightful and worthy of their attention.

Previously, fashion bloggers used to gain their audiences as a result of a democratic turn of fashion. Blogs were considered a space with a claim on the real: "one space where real fashion, fashion as worn by real people, can be seen" (Rocamora, 2012, p. 102). This gave fashion blog readers the impression of a non-mediated relation as opposed to the traditional and mediated fashion media. As digital influencers are a developed and adapted form of their predecessors, the bloggers, they are still attached to this characteristic of realness and non-mediated relations. And as ordinary people, digital influencers cannot expect to have any kind of previous authority and if they do so it seems that any "offline" capitals are not automatically transferred to digital relations. Thus, legitimation needs to occur as followers acknowledge influence, credit, knowledge or some type of capital that is important in a social group, or a niche, that the digital influencer is trying to embrace.

As part of a very specific legitimation process, digital influencers can be legitimated by traditional media and brands as a result of their followers' recognition of their legitimacy and reputation. And it can be identified in their potency to interfere in the consumption practices of their followers and the topics that they are able to circulate among an online community. It is important to emphasize that digital influencers are a broad definition of individuals that can also call themselves YouTubers, Instagrammers, TikTokers, bloggers or content creators. And despite the stereotypical tendency to group digital influencers into a uniform, homogenous category, they can be part of very different genres such as fashion, travel, food, games, books, humor and so on. This is a key aspect of digital influencers and is also related to multiple possibilities of reputation and legitimacy granting. In other terms, the right to speech is variable in the digital influencer economy.

Another standpoint to understand digital influencers is in accordance with what Abidin has described as *perceived interconnectedness* (2015). The author debates intimacy as a business strategy for influencers and also highlights the importance of an impression of authenticity. The same is identified by Reade (2020, p. 3), who describes how "social media influencers employ practices of authenticity to foster relatability and intimacy with their followers." These strategies are based on the participatory



culture that shares a sense of connectedness among users in different levels of visibility and production online.

A prominent content genre among digital influencers is lifestyle. Abidin (2015) has identified that these influencers resort to disclosing intimacies as they showcase trivial parts of their lives, not only luxurious advertorial photos. It gives the illusion of commonality, horizontality and a less hierarchical relation (Abidin, 2015).

More specifically, Abidin draws on ethnographic evaluations and states that “Horton & Wohl’s (1956) notion of parasocial relations [...] builds a model of communication through which influencers convey intimacies” (2015, s/p). The framework of perceived interconnectedness is presented as a parallel to parasocial relations – Horton & Wohl theorize on how television and radio personalities “produce one-sided interpersonal connections and an illusion of intimacy with their audience through conversational small talk that appears informal, casual, and responsive” (Abidin, 2015, s/p). Although digital influencers enact similar relations online, there are some differences that update the theory and make digital influencers’ relationship with their followers more complex. The table below takes seven elements into consideration and characterizes each of them according to the traditional perspective and the digital one.

Table 2 - Perceived Interconnectedness Framework

Element	Parasocial Relations	Perceived Interconnectedness
Medium	TV/radio technology	Social media platforms
Primary strategy	Theatrics	Intimacies
Origin of strategy	Constructed by producer	Co-constructed by producer and audience
Organization of actors	Hierarchical	Flat
Authority of dissemination	Broadcast	Interactive
Flow of dialogue	Unidirectional	Bi-directional
Conversational structure	One-to-many	One-to-many, one-to-one

Source: Abidin, 2015, s/p

Basically, the framework of *perceived interconnectedness* also clarifies the legitimation process of digital influencers as it should be grounded in a flat organization of actors, interactive dissemination of content, a discursive strategy based on perceived intimacy, and co-creation with their audiences. Reade (2020) describes three practices among digital influencers that could be related to what Abidin has identified: 1) Posting raw images (without filters or editing), 2) Storying the everyday, 3) Moments of



“real talk” about topics considered important to the audience. This process of impression management is a way to ensure authenticity and relatability between digital influencers and their public.

Reade’s findings also corroborate the notion of calibrated amateurism: “a practice and aesthetic in which actors in an attention economy labor specifically over crafting contrived authenticity that portrays the raw aesthetic of an amateur, whether or not they really are amateurs” (Abidin, 2017, p. 7). To do so, digital influencers can include behind-the-scenes content in their social media profiles, as well as “natural” photos and snaps of their daily lives aiming to promote a sense of realness, an impression of spontaneity and “unfilteredness despite the contrary reality with their followers” (Abidin, 2017, p. 8).

This intimate disclosure strategy, however, is not present in journalism practices. Nevertheless, journalism is facing what authors consider a “reputational decline” (Anderson, Bell, Shirky, 2014, p. 34) mainly brought about by new technologies and postmodern disbelief in traditional institutions. Along with capital issues, journalistic reputational capital is also under threat: “Part of the historical authority of news institutions cannot be reduced to such easily quantifiable metrics as audience size, revenue, or even Pulitzer Prizes” (Anderson, Bell, Shirky, 2014, p. 53). Now it is not possible to construct a good reputation online by that or by professional competences like “maintaining integrity, adding value to information for an audience, demonstrating knowledge, linking to sources and explaining methodologies” (Anderson, Bell, Shirky, 2014, p. 34). Journalists are now required to do this “in a public, real-time realm” – a realm perfectly illustrated by digital influencers.

3 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the theoretical discussion, the authors identified some possible categories that could help analyzing and characterizing journalists and influencers practices online, and it resulted in the proposition of a framework of analysis (Table 3). The theoretical framework describes the characteristics of journalists and digital influencers and it is strongly inspired by the proposition of Abidin (2015) and the model of Groth (2011) with the insertion of concepts of the theoreticians discussed above (Genro Filho, 1987; Gadini, 2011). The objective of this framework is to serve as a theoretical-methodological input throughout the analysis of the profiles of the journalists on social media platforms.

In the elements’ column, there are points shared by journalists and digital influencers as media actors. However, each of these elements reserves specifications of their professional practices, listed in columns 2 and 3. More than a checklist tool, the framework may be used to describe the journalists’ profiles and then used as a qualitative perspective in order to more easily recognize major aspects of journalists and digital influencers.



Table 3 – Theoretical Framework¹

Elements	Traditional journalists	Digital influencers
Medium	Traditional media (origin); social and digital media (migration)	Social and digital media (origin); traditional media (migration)
Content	Factuality; distinction between opinion and information, social and ethical duty to expose facts (publicity).	Co-construction of content with audience; no distinction between information and opinion; relational and personal content.
Flows of communication	<i>Top-down</i> , one-to-many, unidirectional, hierarchical.	One-to-many; one-to-one, bi-directional, flat.
Commercial strategies	Neutrality and no association with brands.	Association with brands, <i>publiposts</i> , monetization from platforms.
Periodicity	Daily journalistic information logic based on thematic relevance.	Frequency based on algorithmic and platform logic. Personal motivations.
Universality	Generic discourse, segmented/specialized content.	Generic content, niches, communities.
Singularity	Attention to the unusual, exclusive, new.	Amateurism, identification attributes, aspirational attributes.
Proximity	Local proximity, journalist as a public representative; informational integration, thematic bonds.	Interests proximity; shared realities, communal sense; personal bonds.
Plurality	Reference to sources and multiple perspectives.	Reference to brands, followers and pairs. Unique, self reference.
Relatability	Opinion notes (editorial, column, comment).	Testimony, intimate discourse, private life disclosure.
Public interest	Citizen watchdog, civic value, ethical values.	Social minorities representative, no ethical values claimed, brands <i>versus</i> public interest.
Transmedia expertise	Extension and/or adaption to social media from a traditional media format/narrative.	Multiple platform content, individuality of formats for each platform.
Authority	Institutional authority, textual authority, ethical authority.	Genuineness; confidence; proximity; intimacy; personality, authenticity.

Source: Elaborated by the authors

¹A high-quality image is available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KLiFUdivCUWw3K-XjTL07ams4-EzL3pe/view?usp=sharing>



4 ASTRID, EVARISTO AND GUGA: JOURNALISTS ON INSTAGRAM

As mentioned before, this article discusses the digital presence of three Brazilian journalists on Instagram. Their selection as an empirical object shows the relevance of their journalistic work and demonstrates how they are important personalities in the Brazilian media landscape. Also, this is not the first study conducted in Brazil about the trio of journalists Astrid Fontenelle (soft news television journalist), Evaristo Costa (hard news television journalist), Guga Chacra (television commentator) and their digital presence (Vasconcellos, 2020; Pinheiro, 2018) – what reinforces validity within the field as a recognized empirical object among peers. To recognize the similarities and differences between journalists' online practices and digital influencers and how this convergence is capable of affecting the idea of journalism value, this paper focuses on Instagram profiles since it is an important platform for digital influencers (Leaver, Highfield, Abidin, 2020) and it is slowly being adopted by television journalists (Musse, Musse, 2016).

The first journalist analyzed is Astrid Fontenelle, a Brazilian journalist who is currently a TV host on GNT, a pay channel from Globo. She has hosted a female roundtable called Saia Justa since 2013. Astrid is known for soft journalism and variety programs. During the period of this research, she had 1 million followers on Instagram, and more than 5,576 publications².

Evaristo Costa is a Brazilian journalist who is currently an anchor at CNN on a soft news program³. From 1999 until 2017, Evaristo Costa worked at Globo, one of the major TV broadcasters in Brazil and Latin America. He ended his Globo career at the Jornal Hoje, a daily newscast. In February 2020, Evaristo Costa was considered the most influential personality in Brazil according to research from Ipsos⁴. During the period of this research, Evaristo had 7.5 million followers on Instagram, and more than 800 publications.

Gustavo Cerello Chacra known as Guga Chacra. He is a television commentator specialized in the Middle East and holds a master's degree in international relations from Columbia University. Guga Chacra lived in Beirut, Lebanon, during 2008 and 2009 as an international correspondent for the newspaper O Estado de S. Paulo. Since 2009, he has been living in New York and is currently an international commentator at TV Globo on its pay channel dedicated to the news broadcast Globonews and on its

² Data retrieved on 11/02/2020, by the authors.

³ The research was conducted in 2020 while Evaristo Costa was a journalist at CNN. By the time of publication of this article, 2023, he is no longer at the TV network.

⁴ Available at: <<https://istoe.com.br/evaristo-costa-e-o-mais-influente-do-brasil-e-rodrigo-faro-o-mais-conhecido/>>



radio station Rádio CBN. He is also an international politics columnist at the newspaper O Globo, from the same media conglomerate. During the period of this research, Guga Chacra had the lowest number of followers of our sample – 294,000 – and more than 2,000 posts.

Specifically, this article studied Astrid, Evaristo and Guga's feed posts and stories through a non-participatory observation between January and October 2020 by live archiving screenshots of publications. The research did only focus on journalists through the empirical observation since the authors have already a large history of investigating digital influencers practices. So, the influence logics were observed through theoretical and previous research and journalistic perspective was gained through empirical findings (Karhawi, 2020).

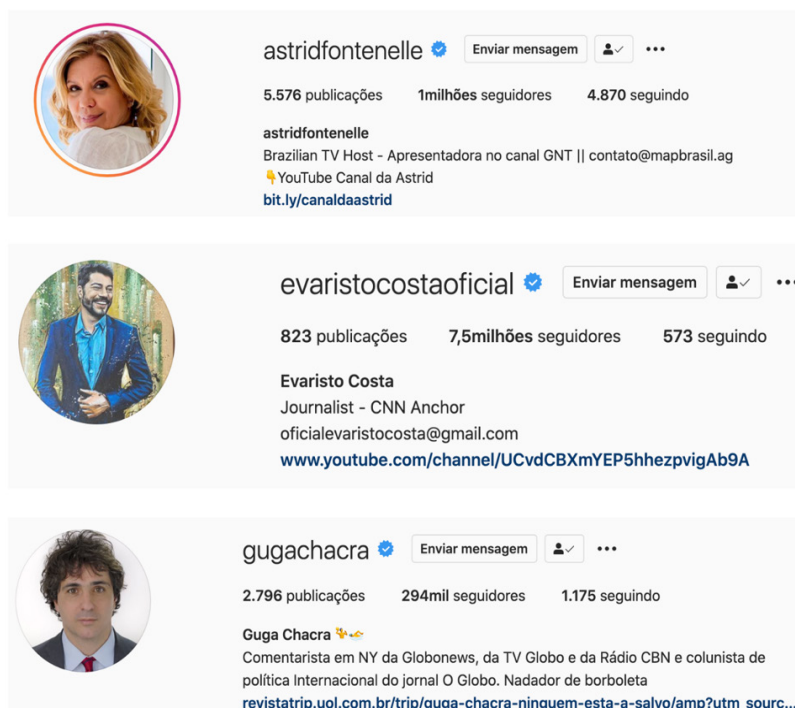
In order to constitute a framework of analysis to get into the field, based on the discussions undertaken so far, the authors were strongly inspired by the propositions of Abidin (2015) and the model of Groth (2011) with the insertion of concepts of the theoreticians discussed above (Genro Filho, 1987; Gadini, 2011) to recognize elements that would reveal attributes of digital influencers or journalists in the field.

4.1 AUTHORITY AND FLOWS OF COMMUNICATION

It is already a consensus that "online social networks constitute such sites of self-presentation and identity negotiation" (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 304) and as a result construct a networked self. The three journalists analyzed dedicate the space of their Instagram bio for institutional labels: TV host, anchor and commentator, respectively (Figure 1). When Astrid, Evaristo and Guga show their journalistic ties in their bios, there is evidence of impression management. The name of the media outlet also works as a sign of their position of authority — an institutional authority (Charaudeau, 2002). The journalists have some credits and capital that they have accumulated from their "offline career," as opposed to an influencer that starts from digital. The way in which they enunciate their *ethos* reveals that the trio is in a process of digitalization or adaption of their content and works to a digital sphere.



Figure 1 – Journalists on Instagram



Source: Instagram

During the observation period of this research, there was a lack of evidence of a bi-directional flow of communication between the journalists and their followers. Astrid Fontenelle does not respond to all of the comments left on her Instagram posts, but she constantly likes all of them even without answering back. But there are still some occasions when Astrid answers a few messages. Guga Chacra also likes almost every message from his followers even when not answering them. Evaristo Costa, however, seems to be the least involved in bi-directional flows of communication since he rarely responds to, comments on, or likes the messages on his posts. This element can be read through different perspectives: career digital influencers are in a moment of professionalization where a team is required to handle social media, interact and respond to messages. Considering that the journalists are not fully dedicated to social media as a career, the amount of comments on their posts does not have the expected interactive flow of dialogue. It is also possible to infer that their digital presence is not attached to a flat interaction but rather to a top-down distribution of content, a replication of traditional media flows.



4.2 CONTENT STRATEGIES: PERSONAL LIFE, PROFESSIONAL LIFE AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Astrid's profile on Instagram attests to a type of editorial prerogative pointing to a content strategy based on her journalistic expertise regarding periodicity and a clear distinction of genres. The first element appears in her use of a content production similar to traditional media logic. During the weekdays, her posts are based on factual themes and her job, and there is a high volume of posts, especially on Instagram Stories. On weekends, there is a lower volume of posts and more soft topics. Thus, there is a hierarchical distribution of information.

A journalistic approach is also acknowledged throughout the different content genres on Instagram feed. There is a balance of posts about private life; professional life and social issues. Private life posts are marked by the appearance of her son and husband; pictures with friends; moments of leisure; and even moments of disclosure concerning her faith⁵.

Professional life posts are the ones where the journalist invites her followers to watch Saia Justa, tells what happened on the show and shares institutional videos⁶. Transmedia expertise is an element present in digital influencer practices but crucial to journalists (Anderson, Bell, Shirky, 2014). This convergence strategy, spreading what was once on TV to social media, also reinforces her professional links and a "right to speech" that is tacitly and constantly reminded to followers.

If Astrid were a digital influencer, it would be possible to describe her as a niche influencer, or a minority influencer – a digital influencer who is part of a social minority and produces content based on personal issues, according to Abidin (2018). But she is a journalist, so the commitment to some specific discussions can be part of her practice as an opinion leader. On Instagram, racism is a constant agenda; from personal posts about her son during #blacklivesmatter; pictures of a Brazilian Black boy, João Pedro, killed at home by a stray bullet in Rio de Janeiro; posts about Thelma Assis, the young Black woman who won Big Brother Brasil 2020⁷ and a wide variety of discussions. But other agendas are also considered like antifascist posts; or an outfit picture with a T-shirt that says habibi (my beloved, in Arabic), a tribute to Lebanese people after the explosion in Beirut⁸.

⁵ Posts published on 07/03/2020, 10/18/2020, 08/06/2020, 05/25/2020, respectively.

⁶ The posts were published on 09/30/2020, 09/24/2020, 07/01/2020, respectively.

⁷ Posts published on 07/07/2020, 05/19/2020, 04/28/2020, respectively.

⁸ Posts published on 07/01/2020, 08/06/2020, respectively.



Figure 2 – Astrid Fontenelle on Instagram



Source: [instagram.com/astridfontenelle](https://www.instagram.com/astridfontenelle)

The publications about racism, social minorities and even politics put Astrid in an interesting context. The journalist combines her own opinion with credible sources like data from social institutes and historical facts. And even when there is a personal approach, there is a clear element of discursive authority granted by journalistic expertise and referencing sources. This is in contrast to digital influencer practices that constantly present an amalgamation of opinion, information and even commercial content (Goanta & Bertaglia, 2023).

4.2.1 Content strategies: humor, proximity and relatability

Evaristo Costa’s Instagram posts are not defined by a journalistic periodicity nor a digital influencer logic of publication determined by the speed imposed by algorithms (Arriagada, Ibáñez, 2020). The journalist does not post daily and his Instagram has been left without publications for long periods (from the 28th of August until the 10th of September 2020, for example). There is also no editorial parameter or a clear thematic distinction among the posts, as opposed to Astrid’s.

The lack of consistency in Evaristo’s posts reveals how Instagram is secondary to his practice. This is an important point, as journalists tend to use social media as an extension of their profession and not



as a medium where journalism itself is made. Contrarily, digital influencers use social media as a medium and as a labor locus (Vallas & Schor, 2020).

At the same time, Evaristo has more followers than Astrid Fontenelle and Guga Chacra. One of the main reasons can be credited to his career at TV Globo and as an anchor of one of the major daily newscasts in Brazil, Jornal Hoje. Another assumption has to do with one of his unique characteristics online, which is the humor employed in his posts that seems to catch his followers' attention.

Figure 3 – Evaristo Costa on Instagram



Source: [instagram.com/evaristocostaoficial](https://www.instagram.com/evaristocostaoficial)

The first image of Figure 3 is a post for Journalists' Day (April 7th 2020) where Evaristo appears wearing unexpected bottoms for a hard news journalist. In a different publication (07/06/2020), a smiling Evaristo is posing in front of an ancient building in London, wearing a suit and the caption reads "My belly is shriveling up to button the suit. Laughing in despair". The humoristic characteristic moves Evaristo Costa away from a stereotype of a journalist and approaches a digital influencer perspective: he is not connected to his audience because of his role as a public representative or as a result of a sense of informational integration, but instead is based on a proximity element and a communal sense (Abidin 2015). Concurrently, humor is capable of a discursive generalization and a possibility of amplifying Evaristo's reach online, as it does not depend on a niche audience or specific interests – an element of universality.

Evaristo does not employ many transmedia strategies. There are some videos preparing the audience for his TV show debut on CNN but this is not constant on his profile. Furthermore, professional posts are also presented in a humorous way. Despite the announcement of the TV show with an



institutional and more formal video, Evaristo publishes playful professional posts. Figure 8 is a behind-the-scenes image, a common type of publication among digital influencers who work with an aesthetic of amateurism (Abidin, 2017). In the photo Evaristo appears on a rainy day in London recording a part of his TV show and the caption reads: "This is what CNN doesn't show!" (February, 2nd 2020). The caption is a joke about the journalist's former outlet media, TV Globo. "This is not shown by Globo!" was commonly said by Brazilians as a complaint for more democratic media coverage but it is now used even as a meme to talk about controversial issues.

Another example is the third image of Figure 2 where Evaristo is back in his suit in a professional pose with a CNN background (March, 09th 2020). The captions, however, are a part of an axé song by the Brazilian singer Ivete Sangalo, known as the Queen of Carnival in Brazil. The line says: "There's going to be a party!". Humor, and especially its Brazilian component, plays an important role on Evaristo's Instagram, working as a connector between him and his followers: a supposed distant TV journalist shares ordinary jokes online, an element of proximity and relatability. These elements could characterize Evaristo Costa as a digital influencer, since authenticity is a crucial (Abidin, 2015; Reade, 2020, Banet-Weiser, 2021) element to their practice.

4.2.2 Content strategies: professional life and public interest

Lastly, Guga Chacra's Instagram profile tends to a more impersonal perspective. Differently from Astrid and Evaristo, a significant part of Guga's publications is not personal pictures of himself. Guga is a frequent publisher; there are new posts every other day and sometimes twice a day, although his Instagram does not have a daily periodicity. His content strategy is possible to be grouped into four clusters: 1. Landscapes; 2. Professional posts; 3. Personal and family posts; 4. Facts and public interest posts.

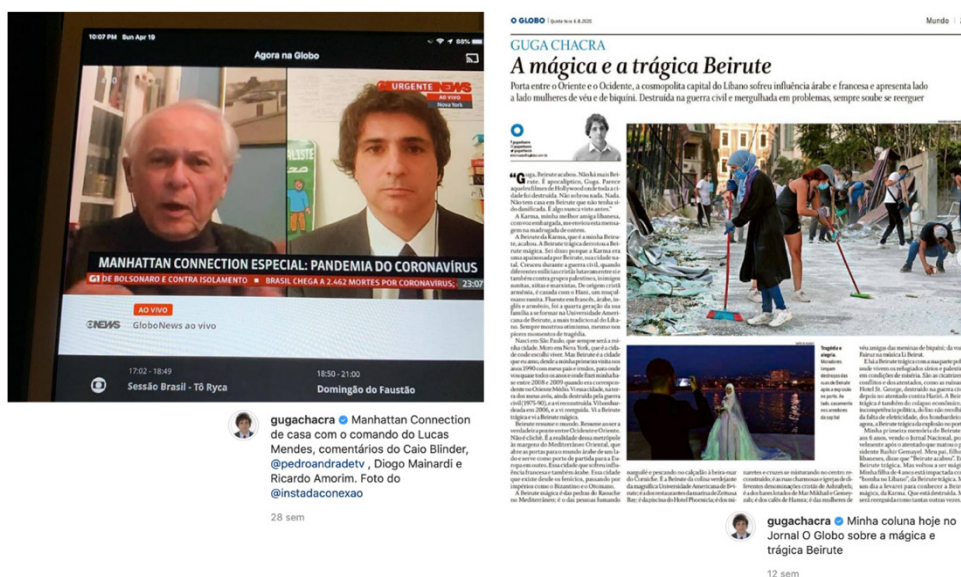
Landscape posts are frequent on Guga Chacra's Instagram feed. As a Brazilian living in New York, he is constantly photographing the city. These posts do not even have a caption: the whole attention is on the view. Guga Chacra is not known for his photography so this practice could be considered a type of amateurism and an entrance into participatory culture (Shirky, 2011). At the same time, it works as another possibility of self-presentation that is not restricted to an Instagram bio. The international lifestyle can be recognized also as a professional identity negotiation among Guga and his followers.

Professional posts replicate a unidirectional distribution flow because of the brevity of their captions that are not always stimulating conversations with followers, like Astrid Fontenelle's, or causing laughs, like Evaristo Costa's. In this category, Instagram posts are used as transmedia strategy: the propagation



of TV moments online and the presentation of articles or interviews published in print media⁹. It would be possible to characterize Instagram as a repository of Guga Chacra's achievements at work and his institutional authority, even when using Instagram for some behind-the-scenes moments.

Figure 4 – Guga Chacra's professional posts



Source: [instagram.com/gugachacra](https://www.instagram.com/gugachacra)

Among professional posts there are screenshots of his own tweets. Guga Chacra has 1.1 million followers on Twitter, a telling number that is higher than the number of followers on Instagram. The chosen tweets addressed the COVID-19 situation and Brazilian political issues emphasizing his role as a commentator, where he is able and free to make more opinionated expressions.

The use of social media assumes some type of disclosure content and intimate relations. This is not exclusive to digital influencers and it would not be different on Guga Chacra's profile. However, his personal posts seem to have a double intention: proximity with followers and legitimacy of his trajectory. Disclosive posts like the ones of his parents grants not only relatability but credit and authority, as the posts are also linked to some of Guga Chacra's professional abilities or skills from his youth. His career is often intertwined with his personal life: when he publishes a picture from 1997 of a road trip in Lebanon and other countries from the Middle East with his family or when he posts a "throwback" of him in Jordan

⁹ Posts published on 10/21/2020, 03/30/2020, 07/22/2020, respectively.



in 2004¹⁰. But simultaneously there is a reinforcement of his work as a commentator specialized in the Middle East or his role as an international correspondent who is expected to have visited the world.

Figure 5 – Guga Chacra’s personal posts



Source: [instagram.com/gugachacra](https://www.instagram.com/gugachacra)

Other personal posts present jokes about his own look; videos and photos of swimming habits; leisure and daily moments with family and pictures of his puppy¹¹.

The final observed category groups together more factual and public interest posts. Astrid Fontenelle and Guga Chacra share this journalistic ethic of public interest and engage in putting important agendas into circulation. Evaristo Costa only posted about more factual issues during the #blacklivesmatter period. Guga Chacra uses Instagram to post tributes to the author of Mafalda, Quino, in the occasion of his death, to publish supportive videos for the Lebanese people after the port explosion or to share photos of protestors during Black Lives Matter parades¹². Thus there is an open flow of content that allows factualness to appear — almost associated with a professional duty to make it public.

¹⁰ Posts published on 04/17/2020, 04/10/2020, 02/19/2020, 05/06/2020, respectively.

¹¹ Posts published on 10/05/2020, 09/07/2020, 09/04/2020, 09/10/2020, 07/11/2020, respectively.

¹² Posts published on 09/30/2020, 09/05/2020, 06/03/2020, respectively.

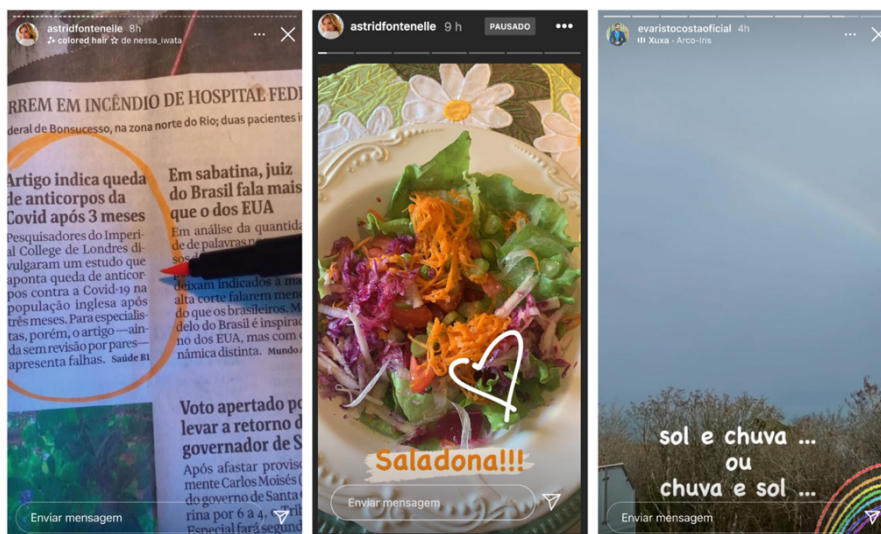


4.3 TRANSMEDIA EXPERTISE

The last important issue about the journalists' use of social media and appropriation of digital influencer practices is related to some specific tools. The first one is Instagram Stories. This tool is known for its ephemerality, a post on Stories remains there only for 24 hours so, contrary to the feed, it is not an archive but a space for conversation. It recalls an "oral paradigm of communication, where the visual is now a disappearing utterance" (Leaver, Highfield, Abidin, 2020, p. 71). From the trio, Astrid Fontenelle is the only one who uses Stories as a consistent content strategy.

Though Astrid publishes every day on her feed – sometimes even twice a day – on Stories she posts up to 70 posts daily consisting of self-videos (15 seconds long) or photos. Benefiting from the ephemeral nature of Stories, Astrid begins her day reading the newspaper with her followers. The nature of these publications is sharing the news, but she also stands out as a type of media critic, questioning the headlines and approaches to some topics (Figure 6). This group of Stories postulates Astrid's commitment to accuracy, information and impartiality – journalistic expertise and ethics.

Figure 6 – Instagram Stories



Source: Instagram

At the same time, Astrid's use of Stories reveals a grasp of Instagram tools, putting her in a category of users who can vary content and formats online. This also brings her closer to digital influencer cultures where being a heavy user of social media and an expert in new tools is a prerogative of the job (Karahwi, 2020).



Stories are also a place for authenticity allowed by the disappearance of content in 24 hours. So, it is not uncommon to see Astrid sharing her meals of the day, home issues, TV shows that she is watching (repeating the logic of a media critic), a new filter being used¹³.

Evaristo Costa and Guga Chacra post more infrequently on Instagram Stories. Evaristo uses the tool for shooting landscapes from London using, once again, humor. The third image of Figure 6 is a Story (from October, 28th 2020) where the journalist chooses the song "Arco-íris" (Rainbow, in English) by Xuxa, a former singer and TV host known as "Queen of the little ones" (Rainha dos baixinhos) because of her career on TV shows for kids. The song gives a funny contrast as it has childish lyrics and musical arrangements. Conversely, Guga Chacra uses Stories mainly for reposts related to his participation in Globonews.

The second tool is Instagram Reels, a feature launched in August 2020 that allows users to post short and funny videos, very similar to TikTok. Only Astrid Fontenelle and Evaristo Costa have experimented with Reels but neither has used it for a long time. However, appropriation of tools is not just using what the platform offers but also recognizing some digital conventions. Evaristo Costa does that when he posts a variety of formats on his feed. There are TikTok videos where he dubs himself presenting his former TV show *Jornal Hoje* (TV Globo) and funny voiceover audio clips about relationships from TikTok¹⁴. Evaristo Costa also publishes memes, photos edited by himself with a comic vein like with a picture of him beside Kim Kardashian when he was nominated the most influential personality in Brazil; or a photo with the British Royal Family at the time Prince Harry announced leaving his royal duties¹⁵.

¹³ Stories published on 10/28/2020, 07/09/2020, 03/02/2020, respectively.

¹⁴ Posts published on 04/29/2020, 05/19/2020, respectively.

¹⁵ Posts published on 02/17/2020, 01/08/2020, respectively



Figure 7 – Evaristo Costa’s memes on Instagram



Source: [instagram.com/evaristocostaoficial](https://www.instagram.com/evaristocostaoficial)

Lastly, with digital influencers there is a business model that assumes partnering with brands (Terra, 2017). An attachment to brands is not allowed for journalists that work at some specific media outlets in Brazil. Guga Chacra is likely under these contractual rules because he has no commercial publications on Instagram nor any association with brands or sponsored posts. Astrid and Evaristo seem to be in more flexible contracts. Evaristo Costa is an ambassador for an investment agency and the brand appears on his feed alongside other brands. Astrid Fontenelle occasionally shows brands, mainly on Instagram stories and some partnerships on her feed¹⁶.

5 JOURNALISTS OR DIGITAL INFLUENCERS?

As individuals who have made a career out of social media, digital influencers can be considered experts in the uses of social networks like Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. Based on that, it is natural to predict that anyone using social media according to some standards of success is a digital influencer or is trying to become one. But considering that these individuals are a specific type of media actors, professionals or celebrities, good use of social media is not confined to them. That is why it is important to assume that journalists can be influential as part of their work, but they are not necessarily digital influencers as a *career*.

¹⁶ Posts published on 06/17/2020, 02/23/2020, 10/05/2020, respectively.



But when the journalist “becomes” a digital influencer, another part of their practice is in the game, like the possibility of being a columnist or even a commentator. Journalists who keep a distance from controversies and opinions can enunciate them outside the institutional space on their social and personal profiles. Astrid Fontenelle and Guga Chacra are good examples of that. Both of them gain visibility and strength in a space dominated by the dynamics of digital influencers because of differentiated knowledge, an academic degree, the mastery of several discursive types, experience with travel and global cultures, and other deontological assumptions of the profession. In consonance with Vasconcellos (2020), it would be possible to affirm that more than digital influencers, journalists are information professionals – and that commitment is irrefutable.

On the other hand, social media can also work as a leisure moment, disassociated from institutional codes or ethical duty. Evaristo Costa uses Instagram as a possibility to create new bonds with the public and disclose a more intimate personality that has nothing to do with his professional one. As a result, he tends to also be considered for brands and other types of partnerships since he uses more personal and detached strategies online.

The authority granted to journalists partly relies on the public perception of ethical conduct and a posture of a representative of citizens. In other words, ethical, social and moral principles have a huge impact on journalists’ process of legitimation. Because of that, proximity to social media is an important source of credibility among the audiences, as the impacts of relatability can change perceptions of professional value. Conversely, the legitimation process for digital influencers varies according to the influencer niche but it has little impact on how ethical (or not) the digital influencer is. This is a crucial difference between the two professions.

Besides that, based on the theoretical framework proposed and the empirical analysis it is possible to derive a practical tool: a scale (or a score) of how close a journalist is to digital influencer practices or vice versa. The scale is one possibility for quantifying which elements move a journalist closer to and which move them away from digital influencer practices. It makes it possible to identify if a journalist’s behavior is nearer the behavior of digital influencers, if it mainly follows journalistic practices, or if it is still in the balance of both.



Figure 18 – “Digital influencer or Journalist” Score¹⁷

Score Attributes	Journalist's Degree (A)	Midpoint/ Balance (B)	Influencer's Degree (C)
1. Medium	✓	()	()
2. Content	()	()	()
3. Flows of communication	()	()	()
4. Commercial strategies	()	✓	()
5. Periodicity	()	()	()
6. Universality	()	()	()
7. Singularity	()	()	()
8. Proximity	()	()	()
9. Plurality	()	()	()
10. Relatability	()	()	✓
11. Public interest	()	()	()
12. Transmedia expertise	()	()	()
13. Authority	()	()	()

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The 13 elements serve for both professional categories with their own specifications. Astrid scored 8 points in the journalist degree and 5 points in the midpoint, balanced degree. This illustrates the qualitative findings: Astrid Fontenelle is constantly employing her ethical values, as well as her textual and transmedia expertise to create new forms of sociability online and even expand her work. Astrid is a watchdog of citizens issues, a close friend and a proud mom for her audience.

Evaristo Costa, in turn, scored 5 points in the digital influencer degree, 4 points in the journalist degree and 4 points in the midpoint, balanced degree. The metric reveals a more balanced score and also a behavior that is closer to digital influencers. Perhaps it is not a coincidence, then, that he is the journalist with the largest number of followers. But the score also confirms the qualitative analysis: Evaristo is the only one who uses Instagram as a tool for entertainment and a possibility to define a new performance of himself online. A more generic discourse and less attachment to social issues seem to guarantee another possibility of bonding with his followers and a different locus of work.

Guga Chacra scored 11 points in the journalist degree and 2 points in the midpoint, balanced degree. Again, it corroborates the finding: Guga does not use Instagram at its full potential and does not exploit features or even captions. Social media is a space to extend his institutional credibility and academic/

¹⁷ A high-quality image is available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WaKGqUtlHxiSF6R8T3BWZBhqf9kMCnu/view?usp=sharing>



specialized authority with equal portions of proximity and intimacy more related to social media in general than the practice of a digital influencer.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper had two guide questions: 1. What are the similarities and differences between journalists' online practices and that of digital influencers'? 2. How have social media and the intimate perspective shortened the distances between journalists and their audience?

The first question has already been answered, but an extra observation is required: everyone is confined to a visibility society. We are all, on different levels, part of this culture and so are journalists. The appropriation of some practices of digital influencers is natural for journalists, doctors, teachers and different liberal arts professionals since digital influencers seem to master social media rules and possibilities. They can all be influential people in their own professional or social field – influence is an attribute not restricted to social media –, but being a digital influencer as a career is different and demands specific abilities and competencies. Considering the other questions, it is possible to define a thesis:

1) Journalists are recognized from broadcast and not native to social media like digital influencers are. As a consequence, some social credit needs to be redefined and even granted again on social media, and sharing intimacy is a way to do that;

2) Journalists use Instagram because traditional media is facing a loss of prestige and a need to be more convergent. So, journalists themselves use their profiles on social media to promote their own TV shows: a strategy to move audiences from digital to television;

3) On different levels, journalists recognize the importance of digital influencers and take some advantage of their narratives and content formats to try to seek the same kind of visibility and success/fame online.

Inspired by digital influencers' performance, journalists guarantee their own authority on social media. It is not enough for journalists to control knowledge through the news, it is also necessary to establish communication networks with the public online. This reconfigures the professional prestige that was intertwined with the types of authority historically held by journalists but now lies within social media. The impacts of that on institutional media and its credibility could be investigated in future works. But what Astrid, Evaristo and Guga highlight is a reconfiguration of journalism and its prestige. Their examples map out how to enter fields where journalists have not yet occupied but are, as usual, extremely necessary.



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