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**CONSTRUCTIVE AND
POSITIVE JOURNALISM:
ANALYSIS ON GENRE,
SOURCES AND NEWS
VALUES**

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Abstract: Positivity and constructiveness are values that have come to be evoked in journalism in order to oppose the negativity perceived in hegemonic practices. In the present article, we identify some of the characteristics of this approach, based on the content analysis of the newspapers Positive News, Reset and Muda Tudo (self-styled exponents of constructive journalism) and the Good Story of the Week session of the Fox News Rundown podcast (understood as something similar to positive journalism). These characteristics are also compared with those present in theoretical studies about traditional journalism, allowing an analysis of the alternativity preached by these vehicles, which was verified mainly in the themes addressed and in part in the applied genres. Meanwhile, the sources maintain the characteristic of being primarily institutional and the news values can be perceived among those already mentioned in relation to traditional journalism.

Keywords: Constructive journalism, positive journalism, alternative journalism, negativity, content analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Constructive journalism is pointed out by Gyldensted (apud MCINTYRE, 2015, p.7) as an “umbrella term” for initiatives that are identified with different names, one of which is positive. Given the still early stage of studies in this area, the boundary between such initiatives is configured as fluid and poorly determined.

In this article, we intend to analyze 4 initiatives in the area using the content analysis methodology, focusing on the categories of genre, sources and news values. The analysis of these aspects will be made by comparing the vehicles analyzed, being complemented by contributions already present in the bibliography of the area.

In addition to the characteristics of these initiatives, it is also sought to elucidate what they propose in relation to traditional or reference journalism. This proposal will be based on the comparison of what was verified in the analyzes with the studies of traditional journalism theorists, such as Nilson Lage, Mauro Wolf and José Marques de Melo.

The news that make up this analysis were published between February 28 and March 14, 2021 in the Positive News, Reset, Muda Tudo and Fox News vehicles. The last vehicle has the particularity of being a company that makes up traditional journalism, being a part of its approximate production of constructive journalism. Thus, the analysis will be based on a clipping of the company’s programming, focusing on the Fox News Rundown Evening edition Podcast.

The choice of this clipping is due to the fact that the podcast merges international news from traditional journalism with the weekly initiative “Good story of the week”. This initiative is based on presenting good stories around the world, which brings it closer to the character of seeking to arouse positive emotions in viewers that marks constructive journalism initiatives and the like (MCINTYRE, 2015; LUCIAN, MORAES, 2019; GYLDESNSTED, MCINTYRE, 2018).

At this point, it is important to note that the podcast itself is not called positive or constructive journalism. However, the analysis to be developed will allow the perception of elements similar to those highlighted in theoretical works, particularly in relation to positive journalism, which justifies its inclusion in the study and will allow to argue its consideration from this term. The other three vehicles mentioned expressly use the term “constructive journalism” to name themselves, which will allow the analysis of the characteristics of this new type of journalism.

The four vehicles have offices in different countries: the first (Positive News) is located in England; the second (Reset) in Germany; the third (Muda Tudo) in Brazil and the fourth (Fox News) in the United States. Thus, it is expected that the work can contribute to a continuity of understanding of constructive journalism initiatives based on analyzes of their practical development around the world.

THE INITIATIVES: CONSTRUCTIVE AND POSITIVE JOURNALISM

As it was said, three of the initiatives considered here are defined as constructive journalism. This modality is conceptualized by vehicles as follows:

“[...] a new approach to the media, which is guided by rigorous and relevant journalism focused on progress, possibility and solutions” (POSITIVE NEWS, 2021)¹.

“It is a growing field within journalism that challenges traditionally negatively biased paradigms and draws on concepts from positive psychology to recognize the potential of sharing and discussing constructive solutions in society.” (RESET, 2021)².

“For us, journalism needs more than being positive. It needs to present ways, because good news is not enough for readers to feel good. It is important to show how people can participate in the change. This is constructive journalism.” (MUDATUDO, 2021)³.

Constructive journalism is pointed out as a new approach and in opposition to the negativity seen in traditional journalism. This conception may give rise to the notion of this initiative as representing an approach to alternative journalism, which seems to be in line with one of the elements pointed out by Atton (2010) for this form of journalism: the concern with groups considered

underrepresented. In this case, the initiatives start from the perspective that positivity would be a traditionally under-represented element to develop their proposals.

However, the same author also considers four other elements for his conceptualization of alternative journalism: the development outside the conventional media, the production in a collective way and without hierarchy, the involvement of people with little professional qualification and the use of unconventional techniques in the if the professionals are in fact journalists.

In the initiatives analyzed here, it is possible to highlight aspects that do not fit this definition. The first one particularly refers to the case of the Fox News newspaper, which presents a picture with this new character of journalism, even though it is part of a traditional organization. Thus, development exclusively apart from this medium is not seen as essential to these new initiatives.

The second aspect refers to the organization of the newspaper collectively and without hierarchy. This configuration is not seen in the Positive News and Reset newspapers, which, in their sections dedicated to presenting the team and the initiative, point to the existence of different roles among employees, such as managers and editors. Thus, collective production cannot be presented as a requirement for this form of journalism either.

The third aspect, the involvement of people with little professional qualification in the area of journalism, is also not verified in the analyzed initiatives. Positive News, Reset and Muda Tudo have a staff that mixes journalists and professionals from other areas that contribute to the development of the content or its visual presentation. The Fox News podcast is developed in the format of an interview between two journalists.

1. Available on the website: <https://www.positive.news/about/>.

2. Available on the website: <https://en.reset.org/knowledge/what-constructive-journalism-and-why-do-we-need-it-05062018>.

3. Available on the website: <https://mudatudo.com.br/muda-tudo/>.

The fourth and final aspect points to the use of unconventional techniques when journalists are part of the associations. The techniques used will be analyzed here in a restricted way to the structure that can be verified in the texts, since the analysis of other techniques, such as production routines, would require an in-depth observation of the newsrooms, when the focus of the analysis is more on the products developed.

This issue of textual structure will be addressed in more detail in the following section of the article. For the moment, we will stick to pointing out that techniques that mark conventional journalism in linguistic-discursive structures were found in the initiatives in question, being sometimes mixed with approaches such as a more narrative format. Thus, the use of unconventional techniques, although it can be verified at times, cannot be considered an essential element in constructive and positive journalism initiatives either.

This way, it is possible to perceive that these characteristics are not a necessary part of the initiatives and using the term alternative journalism to refer to them can lead to notions that differ from reality.

Thus, in place of the term “alternative journalism”, we find in Lucian and Moraes (2019) the idea of “search for alternative meanings” (p.4), in which “difference remains the criterion for selecting news in terms of thematic exclusivity” (p. 9).

This proposition seems to be more precise for the initiatives considered here, since it encompasses the notion of differences in relation to traditional journalism, without these differences referring to the organization of the initiative or the text structure developed.

This differentiation is more linked to the themes developed and the approaches given to them. The Positive News newspaper is characterized by inspiring articles or with

examples of positive behavior in difficult situations, as well as innovations with sustainable potential. Reset, on the other hand, is characterized by issues more related to the environment, which is justified by the training of its creators in this area. Muda Tudo develops content showing the development of artistic, sustainable or social potential initiatives, while Fox News, in the two weeks analyzed, brought stories related to animals.

Among these approaches and the themes developed, there is a differentiation in the approaches given: while the articles of the first three vehicles have the presentation of solutions to a problem pointed out as their outstanding characteristic, the fourth vehicle brings greater emphasis to the positivity of the event dealt with. It is possible to compare this observation with the one extracted from the Muda Tudo portal and pointed out earlier that, calling itself a constructive journalism vehicle, considers that “journalism has to be more than positive”.

This statement is in line with what the researcher McIntyre (2015) brings, who points out the inclusion of positive emotions as common to positive and constructive journalism, with a greater degree of significance of the subjects and commitment to core values of journalism as factors that differentiate journalism constructive. This way, it is concluded by the evocation of positive emotions in constructive journalism from the presentation of solutions, while the positive holds on these emotions as a way of opposing the journalism of reference. These observations also justify the consideration in this article of the Good Story of the Week section of the Fox News Rundown podcast as a representative of positive journalism, although this name is not explicitly used by the vehicle.

STRUCTURE AND GENDER

The structure of classic news is pointed out by Nilson Lage (1987) as something that “is defined, in modern journalism, as the report of a series of facts based on the most important or interesting fact” (p. 10). To this idea, the author adds that of a lead, which “in the academic synthesis of Harold Laswell, informs who did what, to whom, when, where, how, why and for what” (LAGE, 1987 p.19).

This lead-oriented structure refers to the news, considered in the work of Melo and Assis (2016) as one of the formats in the informative genre of journalism. In addition to this genre, marked by the function of social surveillance, the authors point to the existence of other genres such as the interpretive (educational role), the utilitarian (aid for decision making), the opinionated (ideas) and the diversional (distraction), the which are marked both by different functions and structures (MELO and ASSIS, 2016).

It is worth noting that this classification exposed in the work of these authors was developed based on the Brazilian press, while 3 of the 4 vehicles analyzed in this work belong to the international press. Even so, the consideration of important aspects related to the structure of the vehicles and the functions conceived by them justifies the expansion of its use also for the international vehicles in question.

Among the genres initially proposed by Melo and present in a joint work with Assis, who also studied the diversional genre individually, three of them will be part of our analysis: the informative, opinionated and diversional genres.

Considering, first, only the function of newspapers, the intention to inform is

perceived as one that receives prominence, which can be corroborated in the following statements:

“[...] to report on what is happening right” (POSITIVE NEWS, 2021)⁴;

“[...] to show trends and case studies and provide background information [...]” (RESET, 2021)⁵;

“We spread positive news that happens around every day [...]” (MUDA TUDO, 2021)⁶.

Thus, it is possible to understand the initiatives as part of the informative genre of journalistic communication. However, it is proposed the need to consider the diversion and distraction intention as an element that also composes these initiatives. This is due to the inclusion of emotions and positive psychology techniques in constructive journalism (MCINTYRE, 2015; GYLDENSTED and MCINTYRE, 2018), in addition to the opposition to negativity observed in traditional journalism (MCINTYRE, 2015; GYLDENSTED and MCINTYRE, 2018; LIMA, 2017) as forms of entertainment. Here, fun is not understood in the sense of comic humor or in the present in media genres such as television and cinema, but in the sense of bringing subjects and perspectives considered lighter or more pleasant.

This idea is in line with what is presented in the portals, for example when stating the intention to “tell inspiring stories” (MUDA TUDO, 2021) or “inspire positive changes” (RESET, 2021), which involves evoking positive emotions and pleasant to readers. Thus, in these initiatives, the possibility of a mixed classification between the informative and entertainment genres regarding the intended function is perceived.

4. Available on the website: <https://www.positive.news/about/>.

5. Available on the website: <https://en.reset.org/about>.

6. Available on the website: <https://mudatudo.com.br/muda-tudo/>.

In addition to function, form also plays a decisive role in understanding the genres studied. In the previous section of the article, we mentioned the verification of techniques similar to the conventional ones in the structuring of the analyzed materials. This form of news, as already pointed out, considers the development of the text from a classic lead that brings the most relevant information and is complemented by documentation.

In our analyses, we verified this structure between the Reset, “Muda Tudo” and some articles present in Positive News. However, a second form was found in half of the stories on Positive News and in all of the stories on Fox News. This form is characterized by a more narrative approach to the stories, in which the reports are arranged in a way that is more linked to the temporal sequence than to an order of relevance given to the events. Such characteristics are in line with the concept of using genres that mimic fictional genres, while maintaining a commitment to reality, as Melo (2010b apud ASSIS, 2016) describes entertainment journalism. An example of this provision can be seen in the following extract that begins one of the articles analyzed on the Positive News website:

“Emma Reynolds and her husband were both certain that their four-year marriage was over, but equally certain that this must not be the end of their relationship.” (POSITIVE NEWS, 2021, our translation).⁷

The story about the possibility of developing a positive end to a relationship starts with the placement of two characters. Its more narrative format differs from the classic lead and approaches the form of the diversional genre. Thus, the intersection between informative and diversional genres is also observed in terms of form.

Another variation on the classic form was found in 3 of the 5 news analyzed on the Reset website. Lage (1987) states that the news is marked by being axiomatic, that is, by asserting itself as true, without, however, arguing, supporting hypotheses or bringing conclusions. However, in the aforementioned articles, there was a tendency to bring analyzes and conclusions to the subject discussed, as can be seen in the following extract from the last paragraph of one of the articles:

“[...] if any serious global effort is going to be made in terms of reducing carbon emissions, nations in the global South may need to receive more support from those in the North to [...] support cleaner development of their economies” (RESET, 2021, translation). Wow)⁸.

Such a conclusion brought in the article is not part of the speech of an interviewee or the report used to develop it, but a speech by the author himself. This can be explained by the fact that most of the newspaper’s employees have training related to sustainability, knowledge used to debate the subject on their own. Thus, it is possible to understand it as close to the opinionated genre of journalism, as characterized by Melo and Assis (2016), although the informative function can also be perceived and the text structure approaches the news at different times.

It is important to highlight that the considerations made here do not intend to affirm a categorical framing of each newspaper in a genre. On the contrary, it is expected to attest to the existence of variations in relation to the journalism of reference, both in the form of the articles analyzed and in the function that the initiatives propose to play. Thus, it is concluded that there is a certain hybridism between the informative and entertainment genres, with regard to the

7. Available on the website: <https://www.positive.news/society/untying-the-knot-how-to-have-a-good-divorce/>.

8. Available on the website: <https://en.reset.org/blog/satellite-data-reveals-economic-growth-and-pollution-dont-have-go-hand-hand-03012021>.

function proclaimed by the four initiatives, and between the informative and entertainment genres (Positive News and Fox News) and informative and opinionated (Reset) with regard to the developed structure.

THE SOURCES

We used Atton's (2010) definition to consider elements present in alternative journalism, and we conclude that only the concern with underrepresented groups fits as essential to the initiatives studied here.

In the work of Wolf (1999), the author considers the classification of sources based on different criteria, one of them being the level of institutionalization, and the sources may be institutional or unofficial. He also points out (for the traditional journalism initiatives he studied) the existence of a preference for institutional sources, since they can provide information that does not need to be supplemented by other sources, can be easily inserted into the production routine and tend to have a greater impact. in the public interest (WOLF, 1999).

At this point, it can be interpreted that it is proposed that positive and constructive journalism differ from traditional journalism by primarily using unofficial sources. However, this is not the intended conclusion, since, in our analyses, we did not verify this occurrence.

Of the 65 sources consulted by the 18 articles analyzed, 56 of them were institutional. The classification as a component of this type of source was applied to people who already have a certain prominence in society (such as artists, scientists or entrepreneurs) or who are linked to some movement, company or organization. In articles of this type, the presence of images released by the sources themselves stands out (which occurred in 10 of the 18 articles analyzed, 4 from Positive News, 2 from Reset and 4 from Muda Tudo)

and attests to the characteristic of institutional sources disclosing information that fit more easily into productive routines (as noted by Wolf, 1999) and explains the greater recurrence of their consultation.

The nine people consulted (8 among the articles in Positive News and 1 among the articles in Muda Tudo) who were considered here as unofficial sources are those who were placed as characters in the news, without their occupation or affiliation to any organized movement having been factors that motivated its consultation by the newspaper. In this case, your personal involvement with the issue addressed acts as the main motivator for your presence in the matter, as is clear from the focus given to your statements.

Such a situation can be verified in matters in which the person himself acts as the main source. It is worth highlighting the particularity of the newspaper Muda Tudo in this scenario, because it presents a section for ordinary people to send stories with inspiring and positive elements (although, in the analyzed period, the presence of stories based primarily on unofficial sources was not found).

Another time when this happens is when the person is consulted to bring their personal perspective on an issue that involves the placement of other institutional sources. This can be exemplified by the extract from the Positive News newspaper presented in the previous section, in which the character Emma Reynolds appears, without any institutional affiliation being mentioned about her. In contrast, the speech of two CEOs was also included in the article, showing, not a personal involvement with the subject, but notes about the companies they run.

Thus, it may seem wrong to attribute interest in underrepresented groups to these newspapers, given the frequent presence of institutional sources in the articles. However,

we still support this hypothesis with the caveat that underrepresentation is not understood here based on the criterion of classifying the source as disconnected from institutions, as could be inferred from Wolf's (1999) considerations. In the same way that we pointed out the alternative nature of the initiatives studied here based on the theme they addressed, we consider that the perception of underrepresentation that motivates the choice of sources is also based on the themes they address.

There is, therefore, the consultation of sources that deal with themes considered little addressed in mainstream journalism. Sometimes, it can be assumed that editors choose certain sources because they consider them not very present in traditional media, despite being institutions, which can be exemplified by an initiative for the dark sky cited in the Positive News newspaper.⁹ At other times, sources already have a traditional coverage, but may be chosen to address a subject considered underrepresented. This is the case of Starbucks, a company already known mainly for financial or gastronomic issues, but which was brought up in an article on the website Muda Tudo¹⁰ to address a proposal to employ older workers, which may have been considered positive and little publicized among traditional media outlets.

NEWS VALUE

We argue that constructive and positive journalism has the characteristic of being developed with the main orientation of approaching themes considered scarce in traditional news and with a positive bias. This finding places the editorial policy of

9. Available on the website: <https://www.positive.news/environment/keeping-us-in-the-dark-the-movement-to-protect-our-sparkling-night-skies/>.

10. Available on the website: <https://mudatudo.com.br/rede-de-cafeaterias-abre-unidades- apenas-com-funcionarios-maduros/>.

11. Several authors propose different categories for the evaluation of news values adopted by journalism, aiming at an analysis of newsworthiness criteria. However, due to a question of space, we will limit ourselves to the considerations of Galtung e Ruge (1965) and Wolf (1999).

these newspapers as diametrically opposed to one of the news criteria pointed out by Galtung and Ruge (1965 apud LIMA, 2017): the value of the negative.

The news values¹¹ influence the selection of elements that can constitute news and, according to Wolf (1999), act as a way of guiding and routinizing journalistic activity. They were systematized by sociologists Galtung and Ruge (1965 apud LIMA, 2017) who, in addition to the value of the negative, also point out eleven other criteria: personalization, elite people, elite nations, frequency, amplitude, continuity, unexpected, composition, consonance, significance and clarity.

The first five can be more linked to each news developed. However, as they were not found in significant quantities, they will not be evaluated individually here. The last six, on the other hand, approach ideas verified in the orientation of the more general structure of each vehicle and will be analyzed here this way.

The criterion of the unexpected can be attributed to the general orientation of the vehicles, as it is taking into account the notion detected among newspapers that certain topics of a positive nature do not occupy so much space in mainstream journalism that articles that meet this requirement are selected. Thus, it is assumed, therefore, that these feats would be unexpected.

This notion is linked to the criterion of composition, since unexpected positivity plays the role of balancing programming considered excessively negative. The idea of composition is also found in the work of Wolf (1999) when the balance in approaching

different subjects is pointed out as one of the criteria related to the product that influence the selection of news.

Furthermore, Moraes states that this form of journalism is “based not only on the specificity of the content, but fueled by the audience of a public unhappy with the editorial emphases of traditional general information journalism” (2014, p.5). In this analysis, the criterion of consonance is highlighted, due to the observed attempt to meet the public’s desire for positivity or attributed to the public based on the “image that the journalist has about the recipients” (WOLF, 1999, p. 87).

Concern for the public is also related to the criterion of significance, denoting the search to bring relevant or interesting content. Interest is also highlighted in the work of Wolf (1999), and, together with importance, it composes the criteria he calls nouns. Importance is more linked to the notion of the impact of the news on the nation, on a large number of people or in future situations (WOLF, 1999). This perspective can be seen particularly in articles related to sustainability, as in the newspapers Positive News, Reset and Muda Tudo, which show advances and possibilities presented as important.

The interest is placed by Gans in “human interest stories” or containing exceptional or heroic deeds (apud WOLF, 1999, p.90), which can be perceived in the stories considered inspiring or with positive behaviors verified in the Positive News or in stories featuring animals on Fox News. Both importance and interest can also denote the criterion of clarity, as they contain the expectation that the contents will also be considered important and interesting by the public, without any ambiguity being anticipated.

PARTICULARITIES: CASE: FOX NEWS

Throughout the article, we support the “Good story of the week” frame of the Fox News Rundown podcast as a representative of the positive journalism modality. The differentiation between constructive and positive journalism was based mainly on the techniques used by the vehicle, with the presentation of solutions being more linked to constructive journalism, while the positive focuses on evoking positive emotions. The fact that this picture has the particularity of being an approximate proposal of positive journalism placed side by side with news that represent the journalism of reference raises important comparisons that reinforce this differentiation.

In this sense, the great thematic variation between the stories stands out, with the first part of the podcast portraying stories usually linked to conflicts while the second brought lighter themes and focused on positive emotions (rescued orangutan and construction of a rehabilitation center for platypuses).

Thus, negativity and positivity contrast in the same product. The first stands out among the articles with the greatest informative claim, while the second in those that aim at the most diversionary aspect without the evocation of solutions, the basis of constructive journalism, being present.

This contrast can lead to the perception of associating negativity with the need to inform, already contested by constructive journalism that brings an alternative theme with more positive facts that are sometimes little reported. However, the observation of the aforementioned podcast allows us to recognize that facts such as conflicts and other impactful ones that are more linked to negativity and can have more difficult solutions still occupy little space in these

initiatives and, in reference journalism, they continue to have a traditional approach that highlights negativity.

In this sense, it is proposed the need to continue the debate in academia and in practice on the possibility of adapting the principles present in these initiatives so that the presence of constructiveness is stimulated in a wider range of journalistic themes and initiatives.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this article, we seek to analyze practical initiatives of constructive and positive journalism, marked by the search for an alternative to traditionally developed journalism, which is particularly verified in the themes addressed.

These initiatives also bring some alternatives in terms of the form and function of journalism, configuring a trend of hybridism in the developed genres, while still maintaining the possibility of identifying traditional techniques. With regard to sources, there is again an alternative that is more linked to the topics addressed than to the social position of the source. This is because institutional sources, which occupy more space in mainstream journalism, are also predominant in the analyzed initiatives, but are presented with themes considered little addressed in traditional media.

Among the news values, positivity stands out as an alternative criterion to the negative value present in Galtung and Ruge's proposition (1965 apud LIMA, 2017). In addition, criteria already present in the work of sociologists are highlighted in initiatives in general and in specific matters, such as clarity, significance, consonance, the unexpected and composition. Such criteria are complemented by the interest, importance, balance and image that the journalist has of the public, as pointed out in Wolf (1999).

It is hoped that these analyzes can contribute to the still recent study of these forms of journalism and elucidate some of the characteristics observed in them, in addition to giving rise to the continuity of the debate on the subject.

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