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Title: Trends in TV News Scenography and their Influence on Journalists and Journalism

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Abstract:

The last few years we have witnessed deep changes in the way news are presented. One of the most important changes could be found in the scenography applied at TV Newsrooms spaces, transformed today into a large stage of images and icons. Other important change was the introduction of on-screen graphic elements (oracles, cookies, tickers) during news broadcasts, creating new ways of transmitting information on a same space – the television screen – and during an equal period of time – the news programmes duration.

Despite this deep transformation, is not very well known the real consequences of the new newsrooms styles on journalists themselves. The presence of on-screen enhancements and animated graphics may help journalist decoding complex subjects such as science or economy, however, it can also interfere negatively with the way the news are constructed.

On the other hand, we know that journalists complain that these on-screen graphics have a negative impact in their daily work, and also blame the new Newsroom Concepts of risking the quality of their working environment.

The research in course intends to evaluate the direct impact of these changes on the television professionals and the consequences of those aspects on anchors' and journalists' daily routines. By interviewing the different anchors working at Portuguese TV Newsrooms as well as analyzing different news programs, we discuss how scenographic elements and Newsrooms / Studios interfere on the quality of work environment, and on the procedures of doing TV Journalism.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 90's, Portugal witnessed a revolution in the landscape of TV broadcasters. For the first time, broadcast space was opened to private companies, after more than 30 years of public monopoly. The impact of Private Television Broadcasters was felt, not only in the contents, but also in the programme presentation styles, on the corporate images, logos and graphics. SIC was the first Portuguese private broadcaster company. It began its emissions on October 6th 1992. SIC was the most daring Television Company at that time, really setting the difference in television news field. Scenographically, SIC introduced the open space environment through the construction of a wide window between the news studio and the newsroom space, showing to the public the real news laboratory. Those two aspects – image and scenography – were some of the uppermost important ingredients that have helped SIC to be the first European private broadcast company to overtake Public Television in share and audience ratings.

TVI – the second Private Television Broadcasting Company appearing in Portugal – had a slower evolution, with a complex start in terms of corporate identity; for example TVI logotype has changed 3 times, a harsh contrast with SIC that even today maintains the same corporate image created by Hans Donner in 1992. However, in the last ten years they have slowly managed to assure the first place with general audience ratings, including also in the information news.

So, in the last few years we have seen a new round of profound transformation in the TV news scenography. Every newsroom went through a true metamorphosis. From a simple workspace, newsrooms began to receive lighting grids, LCD monitors, television cameras as well as new colours and designs. They got transformed into real television studios, and news programmes began to be recorded there, party walls with journalist and reporters.

Those types of changes can be found worldwide, but they haven't been sufficiently analysed by researchers in the Communication Science field. Therefore, we know little about the consequences of these newsrooms over the journalists (that now become part of the setting) and even over audiences that now have to process information through several layers of contents. Furthermore, journalists now complain that these on-screen graphics have a negative impact in their daily work, and even blame the new Newsroom Concepts for risking their work environment quality. Actually, these newsrooms had become less comfortable workspaces.

Windows had simply vanished, and the ventilation started to be made exclusively by Air Conditioning. Besides that, the presence of huge plasma screens and powerful studio lights increase significantly air temperature. Consequently, there is also an increase of the incidence of flues and allergies in the professionals that have to work there.

Moreover, the “Newsroom Culture” seems to have disappeared. Even with the application of special microphones, while news programmes are aired, journalists tend not to interact as usual and as necessary. This happens because there’s the risk of recording some background noise. Last but not the least, the presence of on-screen enhancements and animated graphics, if in one hand may help journalist decoding complex subjects such as science or economy, on the other hand, interfere negatively with the way the news are constructed.

From the few studies that have focused on those subjects, we would like to point out the importance of key events, such as 9/11, in the development of news programmes, when these enhancements took place in a more significant way (Josephson & Holmes, March 2006). Several authors studied the impact of those enhancements on the viewers and the amount of information that they could retain, assuming that they could only remember part of that information (Reese, August 1983; Drew & Grimes, 1987; Grimes, 1991).

Outside the communication studies, it’s worth taking in consideration some works over mediation processes on interactive contexts (namely museums), where they looked for to the impact of multiple layers of information over publics’ perception (in that case, exhibitions visitors). We may specially quote the works of Bitgood (2002), Davallon (2000), Poli (2002) or Saraiva (2001). Although Museums Universe presents a three-dimensional space, walked through by visitors (non comparable to a television screen), the quoted studies allows us to confirm the relevance of the study of scenography and the superposition of distinct information layers over the public (Polainas, 1998).

We know there were changes during the past 50 years in Portugal. But how do journalists and anchors react to these changes? Did they have to change or adapt the ways of doing journalism? These and other answers will be told next, focusing as well on the evolution of the TV news scenography in Portugal and the main changes and differences between the three general TV channels.

1.1. Portuguese TV News Reality: from 1957 to present

In 1957, Portuguese people could finally watch television. RTP – the Portuguese Public Television Broadcast Company – started its emissions on the 7th March 1957 after several experiences¹.

The news programmes were present since day 1. The first scenario was a table and a chair for the anchor, a microphone, a curtain and a world map behind the news anchor, a design always associated to information (Polainas, 1998). As the political regime was very conservative the format was almost the same for many years. Two main changes deserve to be mentioned before the RTP monopoly ended. They were the exchange of news with Eurovision, in 1969, and the transformation from black and white to colour television, in 1980. On the first, the public broadcast company decided to use a projection to the right upper shoulder of the news anchor, that was possible with the use of the videotape, resembling the graphic window used nowadays. This event also allowed a programme with more current news. When the coloured TV arrived, they have chosen as main colours the blue and white. The idea was to transmit credibility and sobriety to the audience.

The launching in 1992 of private corporate networks changed the colours of Portuguese TV: SIC's use of strong and hot colours mark a clear symbolic differentiation from the sober blue and white RTP. As stated before, TVI was at that time more undifferentiated (and was punished by the audiences for that).

In 2000, TVI made a great turnabout, consequence of huge investments made by its new main shareholder "Media Capital". Under the command of a charismatic Programme Director – José Eduardo Moniz – TVI re-launched its image, betting on Reality Shows as bait for new audiences, and led to a great revolution in television information, inaugurating the most modern television news studio in Portugal², surprising and affecting almost everyone by the dynamics of that space. This image stayed on the news program (*Jornal Nacional*) until now, with slight changes on the anchor's table and the graphic enhancements.

SIC, on the other hand, went through several changes after losing audiences to TVI, initiating a process of some strategical undecidedness about how to regain their audience. Finally, on November 2007, after several unsuccessful attempts, SIC made a bet on virtual scenarios,

¹ One of the most important was the visit of Queen Elisabeth II to Portugal in February.

² It's a two-floor space, the news studio at the centre of the base floor, surrounded and overhung by newsroom and technical control room.

using 3D graphics out of the green panel (*chroma key* technique). In order to assure the complexity of the display, with three sub spaces (table at the middle, virtual stage, and commentator's corner), the news are now presented by two anchors which gives more dynamics but demands more work to the journalists.

Consequence of the re-launching campaign of "Television Public Service" concept, RTP News Services had won a new home, on 2004, occupying a space that became to be considered the widest television news studio in Europe. Besides the modernity of the space and the technology used, RTP Newsroom applied the "Open Space" concept, connecting under the same roof the functions of studio and newsroom. More recently, RTP made some changes on the graphics and the opening credits and, mostly important, changed their colours from blue, white and grey to yellow, orange and red. That change was polemic, since SIC claimed that was a copy of their project's colours, used always by the private broadcasting company and picked out of their logotype.

2. The present of the TV news scenography

The paper presents some preliminary results on two interrelated studies. In the first we report the analysis of the main scenographic details used in three prime time news programmes and how they become a rhetorical instrument in the way news are presented.

In the second study, we analyse the opinion of the most important Portuguese news anchors on their work and the new technological environment.

2.1. Study I

Two researchers recorded the news programs (prime time) of the generic broadcasting companies, on the 12th September 2008, and analysed them, focusing on the main scenographic techniques used and their implications to journalism.

2.1.1. SIC

Jornal da Noite (Evening TV News) always opens showing the whole studio. Then the female anchor, Clara de Sousa³, presents a resume of the main news, standing in front of an image using *chroma key* or 3D technique, standing there for the first story presentation (closer shot).

³ Usually, there are two anchors, but on the night that was recorded, the male anchor was absent.

After the opening story, the *Jornal da Noite* anchor presents the news sitting at the table. The used graphics are either presented as only the programme logo and a footer that resumes the presented story or as an “electronic window” added to that. “*Síntese*”, a summary part of this news programme, is also a particular example of a different use of the graphics: the anchor reads some short news while the screen shows some illustrative images. This allows the anchor to give about four news in one minute.

After the commercial break, the second part of *Jornal da Noite*, opens again with the anchor standing up to present the sport news. To ensure that the viewers stay “tuned”, they frequently use (four times in the programme analysed) images to introduce the news to follow next. Another example was the live shooting of a reporter in a fire that requires some graphics in a technique called *two way* (the anchor and the journalist appear side by side on the screen).

In short, from the total of one hour and five minutes for the news programme, 17 percent of that time was dedicated to the anchor with the use of the standard graphics. The difficulties of coordinating the use of graphics and the presentation of the news were present in several occasions. Two story’s subtitles were covered up by the programme’s logo, one of them with images from 1996. Besides that, the standing presentation may get the attention of the audience but, on some news, the open shot shows a very small anchor “crushed” by a huge screen. When the electronic window is used, no new information is added to each story and the images presented are merely illustrative.

2.1.2. RTP

Telejornal starts at 8 pm with a large view over the anchor and the setting where we can observe the table and the newsroom behind the anchor, as well as some graphic effects on the wall. There are some permanent standard onscreen graphics, like the footer at the bottom⁴ and the logo displaying time at the right down corner. An electronic window on the upper right of the anchor illustrates the news presented at that moment.

This standard layout was presented mostly of the time with only small variations: photos are displayed onscreen, graphic illustrations using *chroma key* technique on the newsroom wall and, twice, the world map in movement behind the anchor. The view over the anchor (about 10 percent of all TV news programme) and the studio was always the same in spite of the

⁴ This footer has now still phrases and does no longer have a crawler style (since May 2008).

potentialities of the news studio.

The main details registered were: several onscreen configurations are used on the different stories presented, at the beginning of each one, there's always a title and resume that shows during some seconds on the left down corner. At the end of the first part, beginning of the second and during the final credits, the whole studio is shown with travelling in or out shots. Some stories are announced in a teasing formula, with images, anchor's voice and sound effects.

Overall *Telejornal's* presentation seems rather classical as the anchor is always seated and the perspective view is almost the same. Graphics effects and onscreen enhancements assure some rhythm. Some sound effects (rhythmic music and fade effect) during the presentation of some stories also contribute to that dynamic. It's classical but efficient as viewer's attention is mainly focused on the information delivered by the anchor.

2.1.3. TVI

The beginning of the 12th September edition, at 7.59 pm is an open shot of the studio closing up until it only shows the anchor. During 58 minutes and 44 seconds of programme, he appears on 17 percent of that time, with some other graphics on the screen.

TVI's *Jornal Nacional* didn't present many graphic techniques. It uses a footer that resumes the present story plus a blue crawler on the bottom of the screen that show some other given news, announcing things to come on the rest of the news programme⁵ or it adds an "electronic window" on most of the time. There is also place for the technique that shows a glance on the news that follow next.

The effectiveness of those techniques offers some variability. For example, the crawler/ticker seems to distract the viewers from the main story particularly because it doesn't add new information to each story and it seems to have no rule to its use on this or that story, and so does the electronic windows.

2.2. Study II

⁵ RTP and SIC also used this technique but left it recently. Maybe it's a coincidence, but it happens after we interviewed scenographical responsible of RTP and SIC and discuss the studies about viewer's perception.

2.2.1. The main actors on the TV News scenography stage

After the characterisation of the present use of news scenography it is important to understand what the journalists have to say about these last few years' changes and their implications on journalism itself. Since the arriving of the private TV networks Portugal has gained some anchor "stars". Nowadays we have about ten main anchors on the three Portuguese generalists TV networks. We asked all these journalists to give us their opinion about the way the scenography influenced their work and how did they adapt to the several changes on each TV network.

Until now we were able to interview only two of them: Maria João Ruela, anchor of *Jornal da Noite* on weekends, and Luís Costa Ribas, senior reporter from SIC since 2005, after being the USA correspondent of SIC, among other media. For complementing our analysis we have used also some of the interviews available on Portuguese media and given by some other anchors on this matter.

Both of the SIC's journalists agreed on a general positive influence of the gadgets used today. The technology allows them to give a more clear explanation of complex issues, such as the raise of the fuel, the American elections, health issues or car crashes.

In what concerns the changes on the reorganisation of the newsroom itself, Ruela emphasises the creation of a central news intake, which changed the journalists' way of working. Now they work more by themes than by edition team. In terms of scenario, there was an intention of leaving the computer monitors of the journalists turned to the *Jornal da Noite* studio to be seen by the viewers during the news⁶ (transparency metaphor)⁷.

The Electronic News Gatherer, for instance, now has less freedom of creativity for recording images, because certain plans simply can't be used with graphic enhancements. The most common example of this situation happens with close-ups, which can become really spoiled with some of those graphic enhancements. When old stories are used, the reporter has to put a black stripe where the graphic enhancements are placed. Otherwise, those enhancements would cover up some important part of the images.

⁶ Apparently, the other journalists working at the TV station do not bother to be seen on the nightly news. On the other hand, they already know, since the beginning of SIC, that they can't act in a crowdie way or with strong moves (Ruela). Now there is an acrylic glass separating the newsroom from the studio, so that the journalists do not approach too much. At some time, the journalists from SIC did not want to seat too near to the studio window.

⁷ According to the information given to us by Victor Duarte, director of SIC's graphic department.

2.2.2. What changed in journalism by the influence of these technologies?

About the job of the anchor, Júlio Magalhães said in an interview that by the end of a news presentation he has a feeling of emptiness because “the only thing the anchor does is selling [the news]”⁸.

Ruela mentions that the new scenarios make the anchor job more demanding, since in the past they only had to read the news and the talk with live reporters was simpler (two way). The green panels where 3D or *chroma key* images are placed by computer demands that the anchor imagine what is there.

Another difference is that the anchor is not anymore quietly seated for all the program duration. The introduction of different camera angles and shots types as well as the movement of the anchor (he/she has to stand up several times during the news), implies that the image has to be better cared.⁹ This also makes the alignment of the stories a motive of concern: the coordinator/director of *Jornal da Noite* has to arrange the presentation so that the anchor doesn't have to stand still after reading some stories¹⁰. This last option is not always wanted by all the journalists because some don't like the standing still presentation. Ruela, mentioning the claustrophobic sensation, does not desire a full 3D studio.

The recent elimination of the ticker was probably made because of the feedback from the viewers, giving place to a resumed phrase of each story. This is particularly important, in the opinion of Luís Costa Ribas, for those viewers who are watching at a noisy location (restaurants, bars, etc.).

José Alberto de Carvalho (quoted by Silveiro, 2006) compares the anchor job to acting because he has to imagine what is on the screen, demanding a “psychological adaptation (...) to interact with people who aren't there”, and may touch some deontological problems. He has to rehearse his moves, meaning that there is a period of adaptation from the regular to the virtual studio.

The general framing of the image also depends on other factors. For example, an anchor that is petite complained about her flat image on the screen in result of the overall picture being designed for a large and taller journalist that is the anchor during the weekdays. The same problem is applied to the table, too big for a single anchor.

⁸ Recovered on 2008, September 1st from <http://www.islagaia.pt/superior/noticias.asp?id=267>.

⁹ Many anchors used to dress up with tie and jacket, but with jeans; now they must dress up differently.

¹⁰ This articulation is easier when there are two anchors.

In the future, the virtual scenography applied to TV information has to pass through a mutual understanding between who makes and who uses those scenarios, according to José Alberto de Carvalho (quoted by Silveiro, 2006).

Conclusion

The impact of scenographic and technological changes on TV news over journalists work can be seen in at least two ways: during TV news emission, obviously, but also at newsroom during news edition. In fact, nowadays newsrooms are workspaces **and** scenarios for TV news programmes. The environmental conditions (artificial environment with lights, air conditioning and mechanical sounds), the spatial organisation and the interaction between colleagues are conditioned by these scenographical functions. In terms of journalistic work itself (redaction and preparation of a story), journalists have to write stories that can be illustrated and often that can be used in other news emissions¹¹ as well as on the short phrases appearing in the footer. During the TV news programme the anchors have to deal with a lot of tasks (stand up, watch several screens, “imagine” the virtual scenario to whom they have to interact with and read the news, etc.). Even if the total time of anchor’s moments is quite short comparing to the total time of TV news show (10 to 17 percent) its determinant to the image and credibility of the journalist and, consequently, of the TV news and broadcast company itself. The huge investments in scenography and technologies prove it.

The scenario is also complemented with graphic enhancements. Although this technique may impress the audience and catches it’s attention, in informative terms it doesn’t add new information.

The crawler, an extra work for the journalist, only works in noisy ambiances. Watched in normal conditions, it seems to distract the attention from the main story.

On the side of successful techniques we have the sound and music used in RTP’s *Telejornal* that may grab the audience attention, and so does the item “*Síntese*” of SIC.

In summary, journalism had to adapt to the several changes of the TV news scenography, leading to a more demanding job of the anchors and journalists, but also having several new techniques to explain complex matters. It’s important to think, not only on the way things look, but also in their effectiveness on informing the audience/public.

¹¹ This point was reported by SIC’s scenographers as a remark made by journalists after the last scenographic and newsroom reorganization. Interestingly, no journalist has referred that aspect. However, that seems to us a quite important impact, of the scenographic over journalistic work, since there is an “optimization” of journalistic writing that decreases variety and singularity.

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