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Communication as work in platform capitalism: the case of changes in journalism

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Abstract

This paper aims at analysing the changes in the journalists' world of work in the light of growing digital work and platform capitalism. Still under the effects of the 2007 crisis, the restructuring process of the capitalist production system has led to changes in the socio-technical basis that indicate structural changes within society in general. The binomial communication and work is the theoretical-methodological approach to understand these innovations in how capital creates value, on whose communication process the very existence of platforms depends and, consequently, both the global value chain as well as platform work.

Keywords

Introduction

Changes in the socio-technical basis of the means of production challenge the understanding of the shape society is taking.

The theoretical approach of the binomial communication/work can contribute towards the understanding of the role that communication has in reordering work and production. In this sense, this paper argues for the relevance that communication undoubtedly has within work processes as well as for an understanding of communication itself as work.

This relevance is due to the fact that communication is part of work as the human activity that it is, either in terms of the relations that allow for work to be done inasmuch as its norms are produced and reproduced or in the real work relations in which renormalisation depends on effective communication within work environments. Likewise, the capital system needs ever more fluidity in the circulation of information, especially under the auspices of platform companies that trade with citizens' private data, producing forms of organisation, surveillance, and control of society's wealth.

This paper is parsed out into three topics. First, the means of communication as means of production, thus referring to Raymond Williams (2011) as well as to other authors who have been studying the ways in which value is produced by platform companies. Secondly, the changes in journalists' world of work and, thirdly, digital work in journalism – all of which are aspects that have been highlighted by research from the Centre for Research in Communications and Work at the University of São Paulo (Lima, 2015; Figaro, 2018; Silva, 2019).

Means of communication as means of production

In addressing technological innovations, Jenkins (2008) pointed to the convergence of the media, narratives, and cultures. However, he did not unpack the trajectories of this convergence in terms of its implications for economic, organisational, and political concentration.

Metaphors of the network society (Castells, 1999), knowledge or information society are not enough to explain such developments – instead, they are aspects of how much stronger both economic concentration and social control are becoming. It is certain, however, that these changes take place within the organisation of the structural and symbolic basis of society.

Thus, when Raymond Williams (2011, p.69) sees the means of communication "as means of production themselves (…) once communication and its materials are intrinsic to all forms of distinctly human work and social organisation (…)", it can be inferred that the author understands communicative processes as intrinsic to work and to the functioning of the economic system.

The same goes for digital means of communication. Currently, these media are the way through which work activities are organised across several areas of production: from communication, transportation, sales of all sorts of products, in which the logic of information and communication are set. These means are to capital appreciation as the means of transportation were used by Marx (2011) to address the processes of circulation of goods in less time as a relevant aspect of achieving more value.

Just as the steam engine led to fundamental changes in 19th-century societies, completely transforming life in the city, work relations and the forms of capital appreciation, the beginning of the 21st century is faced with the most profound transformation of the means of production brought about by the logic of information through which production relations are being organised. The internet and the digitalisation of all data that can be captured, treated, reorganised, transferred, circulated to create value have gained speed, leading to an unprecedented level of development through any means of production ever. Connection and circulation have boosted value production networks. What the internet represented in the early 1990s with its libertarian and autonomous as well as socialised and collaborative

aspect is disappearing. Instead, control and privatisation are on the rise, fostered by the development of technology and non-open knowledge (private, secret) by companies such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, and so on.

Platforms are digital technology companies that operate in networks, through the logic of algorithms and monetising data collected with the provision of a service, namely connection management, mediation between supplier and user, software and content offer, etc. They commercialise unlimited wealth: people's data. They exploit[1] the work of a mass of individuals – so-called collaborators, self-entrepreneurs, click workers, outsourced labour. Their production logic relies on investments from the financial market, on a permanent upswing of millions in contributions. Were this not the case, how then to explain that Uber has not yet had any actual profits[2] despite being present in all continents, exploiting the labour of drivers and the data of passengers and cities?

The link between platform conglomerates and the financial market is the model that completes platform capitalism. The richest and most powerful investors on the planet are linked to these companies. Take George Soros, for example.[3] He has been investing in Twitter, Amazon, Google, Facebook, etc. At the same time, he invests millions in his Open Society Foundations for expanding access to the digital world everywhere, especially in Latin America and Asia.

This modus operandi between internet conglomerates and the financial market does not however overshadow the entirety of the production chain that is embedded in this process. All of the infrastructure, with its cables, special sands, ore, companies that make and assemble equipment, building material, clean and fossil energy – all of these and their respective workers are part of the production chain that is necessary for the existence of platform conglomerates. The way in which they differ to traditional companies has to do with cutting-edge technology, which is often renewed, and with the fact that they present themselves as mediators, offering support for linking interested parties with their interests.

In *Platform Capitalism* (2018), Nick Srnicek categorises conglomerates into: a) advertising platforms: Google and Facebook; b) Cloud platforms: Amazon, Microsoft, and IBM; c) Product platforms: Spotify, Rolls-Royce, Pandora, Zipcar; d) lean platforms: Uber, Airbnb. Each one of these appropriates data from user, partners, customers, suppliers to operate their own business and designing profit strategies. As has already been highlighted, all these categories depend on an existing material infrastructure of cables and connection products. The logic of communication functions as rationalised processes and institutes the possibility for the operation and the existence of business.

It is the work of millions of people, involved in the production of content, software, equipment, devices, cables, and infrastructure – from miners to the so-called 'network analysts' or click workers, who ensure this renewed existence of capitalism in the contemporary world. Thus, digital work (Fuchs, 2014; Huws, 2017), that is, work mediated by platforms and performed online, as is the case with Uber, Airbnb, Amazon as well as in the means of communication, YouTube, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram, etc. as professional work or user work, is appropriated by these conglomerates, allowing capitalism – in what Nick Couldry (2019) describes as data colonialism or platform capitalism for Nick Srnicek (2018) – to remodel itself and widen exploitation, ultimately demanding that national states as well as institutions likewise rearticulate themselves.

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1 See Gilbert (2020) in the references for one of many articles on the topic.

2 This was covered extensively by the media, one of whose instances can be accessed here: https://g1.globo.com/economia/tecnologia/noticia/2019/11/12/como-o-uber-sobrevive-com-prejuizo-de-us-12-bilhao-e-sem-nunca-ter-dado-lucro.ghtml. Accessed 8 May 2019.

3 After his speech at Davos 2020, George Soros has been called by *Exame* magazine "a speculator turned philanthropist". This conclusion is only possible through a minimally researched article for, after all, he relies on his own ROI by putting so much money on digital expansion. See article here: https://exame.abril.com.br/mundo/george-soros-promete-investir-us-1-bilhao-contra-ditadores/. Accessed 8 May 2019.

Tim Wu, in *The Master Switch* (2012), asked:

> Could the internet foreshadow a kingdom of endless industrial openness, once and for all abolishing the Cycle [of monopoly and stability]? Or is it that the internet, despite its radically decentralised project, would eventually turn into the next logical target of the unsurmountable forces of the information empire, object of the most pompous of centralisations ever done? (WU, 2012, p.19, translated by the author from the Brazilian edition).

The answer for that question seems to have developed quite a bit: the six largest traditional media conglomerates (National, Disney, TimeWarner, ConCast, News Corporation, and Sony) dispute the specificity of their business with Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft. The two world leaders in advertising revenues are Google and Facebook. The respective monopolist logics have acted at times in alliances and, at others, in confrontation. How to face this cycle of fragmentation, globalisation, and economic concentration, as well as of control of circulation and social surveillance?

It seems that the cycle to which Tim Wu refers is stabilising through the logic of hegemonic order. This is why ideologists of the so-called global village, of total freedom and free movement, are, at best, mistaken for there is no autonomy on the part of technology in relation to its conditions of production. Technology is the product of its own time and the uses made thereof are regulated by the cultural and economic logics of this time. The process of creating and circulating a given technique, a given know-how of a certain technology faces the same challenge as any other human creation.

In platform capitalism "(…) data are ever more central for companies and their relations with workers, customers, and other capitalists" (Srnicek, 2018, p.13, translated by the author).[4]

For Tylbor, it is:

> a new business model that has become a new and powerful type of company, which focuses on extracting and using a particular type of prime matter: data. Users' activities are the natural source of this prime matter, which, just as oil, is a resource that can be extracted, refined, and used in different ways (Tylbor, 2019, online, translated by the author).[5]

Digital work on platforms is therefore just as any type of human interaction with network digital media. This interaction provides an unlimited source of material to be transformed into use value and exchange value. Data extraction and data mining are the new frontier of wealth that the hegemonic economic system accumulates and resizes within organisations and institutions in order to enjoy their profits. All companies' integrated systems act as information platforms. These interconnected platform systems offer management processes that allow for a greater degree of control and surveillance of both work and workers.

These integrated processes, activated by algorithmic prescriptions, have altered forms of production, circulation, and reception of all sorts of products, especially cultural ones – besides journalism, it is worth mentioning audiovisual series and fan culture. Streaming platform Netflix, for example, captures data on its users/customer through its algorithms, organising offer in accordance with specific profiles and determining themes from that same collection and extraction of preference data so as to organise the production of films and series (Lima et al. 2015).

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4 Originally: "(…) los datos se han vuelto cada vez más centrales para las empresas y su relación con trabajadores, clientes y otros capitalistas". (Srnicek, 2018, p.13)

5 Originally: "(…) un nuevo modelo de negocios que ha devenido en un nuevo y poderoso tipo de compañía, el cual se enfoca en la extracción y uso de un tipo particular de materia prima: los datos. Las actividades de los usuarios son la fuente natural de esa materia prima, la cual, al igual que el petróleo, es un recurso que se extrae, se refina y se usa de distintas maneras." (Tylbor, 2019, online)

Tom Slee (2017) addresses the precarity of work in platform companies. He uses the neologism of *uberisation* to explain how work has become more precarious and how profits have been taking these companies on a daunting growth. Ursula Huws (2017) discusses the formation of a *cybertariat*, that is, how information processes encompass large aspects of the working class. There are a number of researchers all over the world who are eager to understand the transformations and the implications of such processes in people's lives, in their work, and in social organisation at large. Here, we address the implications for journalists' work, a professional category that signals, due to its very activity, the ways in which it has been restructuring activities in the field of communication.

There is a great deal of pressure towards the maintenance of the interests of traditional forces that have dominated the journalism business, both nationally and internationally. The form in which the journalism business is monetised has entered a perilous phase as traditional advertising, the adverts, and the paid publication are now out of fashion in face of the new trend of stories deriving from the volume of clicks as #TopTrends on social networks – the most read (clicked) on portals. Production routines have been appropriated by logics that impose a *publish-first-research-later* rule of the spectacle in newsrooms.
[6] Conversely, there is a professional human force of knowledge that has been abandoned and removed from the market who do not accept the contempt and the dismay, seeking their own alternatives for the current situation of journalistic work.

Regenerations of journalistic practices

This context brings us to the heart of the matter and the field of communication is an important test field for even greater transformations. As Souza points out:

> (...) many of the symptoms of "the crisis in journalism" derive from the structural crisis of capital, which articulates, through complex cooperation, technological and managerial technologies, thus intensifying the subsumption of real work to the ruling system of social metabolism (Souza, 2018, p. 55, translated by the author).

This means that the dilemmas experienced in the world of work of journalism do not stem from journalism itself exclusively. The logic of the circulation of information and the appreciation thereof as an aspect of capital appreciation reverberate in the professional field of journalism. This repercussion affects far beyond the incorporation of digital technologies for it implies a logic of production and work relations that are guided towards demands of priority access to information, which increases the chances of controlling resources and power on the part of those who already possess them.

Information is the most relevant merchandise for the system of capital; it can be any datum (a commodity) of nature (environment) or of the human body. Information with most added value is that which has already been worked out, that is, mined and put into circulation. Thus, journalistic information is a superior merchandise that attracts advertisers, consumers, and investments.

An example of these implications is seen in the report *A imprensa nas plataformas: como o Vale do Silício reestruturou o jornalismo* – the Brazilian edition of the Columbia Journalism Review (Bell & Owen, 2017). It brings alarming data on the concentration of the journalism business and its full organisational restructuration as well as the restructuration of its logics of production and circulation from the perspective

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6 There are many research projects done on the changes in journalists' work and how information quality has been neglected. Thales Lelo. *Reestruturações produtivas no mundo do trabalho do jornalista.* PhD thesis at Unicamp, 2019. Janara Nicoletti. *Reflexos da precarização do trabalho dos jornalistas sobre a qualidade da informação. Proposta de um modelo de análise*. PhD thesis at UFSC, 2019. Zélia Leal Adghirni. *O jornalista: do mito ao mercado*, 2017, Insular. Adraian Barsotti. *Jornalista em mutação,* 2014, Insular. Sylvia Moretzsohn. *O novo ritmo da redação de O Globo: a prioridade ao jornalismo digital e seus reflexos nas condições de trabalho*, 2014, Parágrafo (FIAM_FAAM). Jacques Mick. *A precarização do trabalho dos jornalistas no Brazil,* 2013, Fenaj.

of media convergence, steered by financial rationality and by algorithmic regulation.

As for work in journalism, besides convergence in terms of media, narratives, and polyvalence/flexibility of professional profiles, we see the destruction of positions, precarity in work relations, and loss of credibility of the journalistic product. Alternatives sought by professional are based on more autonomy and the possibility to produce high-quality journalism that favours democracy and citizen rights. Nonato Lima (2015) calls these professional journalism migrants – that is, journalists who seek new organisational forms to work and support themselves with.

These new arrangements encompass companies, associations, self-employment as well as other unprescribed ways that support newsmaking. More than a legal work relation, these alternative arrangements[7] found by journalists are spaces of survival, of finding creative ways to pursue communication as an activity and, even though many of these are not paid, they have the conditions for offering news content for regions and cities that do not have any sources of information about their own realities.

The new configuration of the production routine and the institution of virtual newsrooms within alternative media dialogue with different interfaces – some of which should be highlighted: the widening of a flexibility accumulation mode; the post-2007 crisis scenario; the concentration of large global monopolies; the migration of advertising resources towards the internet and subsequent purchase of data according to the new logic of advertising; the role of journalism in contemporary society.

With the decentralisation of newsrooms at the centre of it all, which present aspects that are articulated with the combined mode of fragmentation, polyvalence, and flexibility is telling of the form and contradictions between capital and work. These contradictions present themselves as a tension within journalism itself, whose new marks are not yet consolidated and the old ways of working, not yet overcome. Likewise, they point to common aspects of moments of transition, crises, and unstable realities in which there is a confrontation between the innovative and the anachronistic within the production process of journalism that is never finished but, rather, always transforming itself.

These alternative work arrangements of journalists were born in the digital format and are the result of access to pieces of software, programmes, and to the internet itself. Therefore, the convergence in units of productions that is usual in research projects on the newsrooms of large media conglomerates is not applicable here.

Being conceived in the digital environment, as most alternative media outlets and collectives are, is no longer hindered by the obstacle of the medium, as was the case before, as the mobile phone is now one of the main tools for live streaming, text editing, photography, and publishing on webpages and social network. The current difficulty is, instead, distributing, circulating, and widening the reach of meaning being produced.

Furthermore, the discourses of communication monopolies are reinforced through the internet, which finds great reach on social networks. The economic force of communication conglomerates bleeds into these spaces, reinforcing their hegemony and strengthening its historical bloc (Gramsci, 2002).

The other side of the internet can be seen as a crack in the system that allows for the constitutions of an independent work circuit that connects common activities, as in virtual newsrooms, with an exchange of experiences and the constitution of networks that amplify ways to cooperate, potentializing the circulation of information from alternative media.

This new way to organise production routines and their network of collaborating journalists exert pressure on the journalism done by media conglomerates in many ways. In order to differentiate themselves, these conglomerates deny the journalistic character of alternative media, calling it engaged

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7 According to Nonato; Pachi; Figaro (2018, p. 104), translated by the author), "the goal is to highlight the possibility that small businesses, NGOs, civil society organisations, collectives, and other groups of communication and journalism workers might represent an effective alternative of work (employability) and of production of a high-quality service for their links and commitments with the democratisation of the means of communication as well as with society".

or pamphlet journalism (according to *Manual da Folha* and *Diretrizes do Grupo O Globo*, both from 2018).

In that there are very few studies on the production routines and the work condition of journalists in alternative media, we can infer, after exhaustive observation, changes in the way in which news are produced and, consequently, a certain push to update newsmaking theory. This change is brought about by the alteration in the space-time relationship caused by information and communication technologies – digital platforms, mobile phones –, which creates a different chronotope (Bakhtin, 1992) for addressing the news and for the relationship with both sources and the audience.

From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge and the sociology of occupations, the theoretical approach of newsmaking combines the professional culture of journalists, the organisation of work, and the production processes (Gaye Tuchman, 1978), framed as news values, newsworthiness criteria, format, and the construction of the audience (Wofl, 2012). Thus, these changes have implications in news values and newsworthiness criteria.

Tensions between the ethical sense of the occupation, the values that must be negotiated as attributions develop, the conception of the professional world, and the editorial position of any given outlet that reflects on its nature and goal are all intrinsic parts of the production process. By counting on a wide network of journalists, for many of whom conditions are often lacking and whose unalienated work enjoys more freedom and autonomy, these tensions and these "dramas of use itself" (Schwartz, Durrive, 2007, p. 194) become frequent phenomena, marking the very meaning of the kind of journalism being made.

Digital work in journalism: virtual newsrooms

During the research projects developed by Figaro (2018) and Silva (2019), it was possible to verify the ways in which journalists' work was organised under different circumstances to those in traditional newsrooms. Analysing the changes in these spaces is essential for understanding transformations in the world of work of journalists as well as the tensions of journalism itself in how platforms are used.

Without the work conditions offered by traditional communication corporations, the virtual space of platforms such as G-Talk[8], Telegram, and WhatsApp is used by alternative media arrangements as locations to organise work. These media arrangements challenge the production processes of traditional journalism, creating a virtual newsroom that is more horizontal and more open to permanent debate on editorial aspects. Some examples are analytically relevant here: *Agência Pressenza*[9], *Jornalistas Livres*[10], and *Opera Mundi*[11].

Jornalistas Livres only has a virtual newsroom with nonperiodic pitch meetings in person. *Agência Pressenza* has an international virtual newsroom, but its national one is physical and in person.

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8 G-Talk is Google's chat app; Telegram is Russian; and WhatsApp is part of Mark Zuckerberg's monopoly along with Instagram and Facebook. All three instant messaging services are cloud-based and support different types of messages and phone calls.

9 *Agência Pressenza* is an international News agency based in Quito, Ecuador, and it was created in Milan, Italy, back in 2009. With a pacifist and humanist conceptions, "it partakes in a wide network of new media that offer their local projects to a global level at the same time that they foster their information with material provided by the agency" (Silva, 2019, p.36, translated by the author).

10 *Jornalistas Livres* "presents itself as democratic, plural, network, pro-diversity journalism in ruthless defence of human rights" (Silva, 2019, p.35), translated by the author). It was created on the 12th of March 2015 amidst pro-impeachment protests due to the "urgent need to face the growing narrative of hate that was being used against democracy and in permanent disrespect of social and human rights", which is supported by the traditional media.

11 *Opera Mundi* was launched in 2008 and aims to cover international politics widely, with "incursions into culture, behaviour, and ideological debate" (Ceravolo & Terra, 2014, p.7). It takes a left-wing stance, stating that "it never gave up on the principles and foundations of informative journalism" with the influence of alternative and independent press journalism.

Opera Mundi has a mixed newsroom, physical as well as digital. In both types, there is the overlay of the polyvalent, multi-tasking, engaged, and limitless journalist who works late and who takes up their spare time with digital tasks and, consequently, with creating use and exchange value. Just as in monopolised media companies, work relations are marked by the structural precarity of work.

By looking into work and production routines, these transformation processes that alter social relations turn out to stem from the advancement of productive forces and from the very restructuration of the capitalist system. This recomposition is permanent and inherent to the maintenance of value chain of global capital.

It is not only journalism that is experiencing this phenomenon. However, due to the role of communication in qualifying and growing the generation of value as well as to its function to actively serve the dominant system, work relations in journalism operate as a foyer of changes within certain social relations.

Changes that have been consolidated by the advancement of productive forces, the development of information and communication technologies – combined with access to software, programmes, and devices – characterise these new arrangements as spaces to reorganise journalists' work.

This is the function performed by virtual newsrooms in these initiatives. It is in this new social place of journalism production that, along with the streets where its *in loco* research is done, that lies the factory floor of alternative media journalists whose goal is to organise, establish a new productive routine, consolidate methods of journalistic production, establish relationships with sources that can often take the place of the audience of what is produced.

Any online grouping of three or more journalists can be considered a virtual newsroom, characterising an arrangement whose ultimate goal is to produce journalism. Newsrooms can be divided by function or language (reporters, editors, photographers, text, video, cartoons, translation, design, etc.) or by section (national, international, politics, housing, cities, human rights, etc.), special coverage, programmes, or projects (around events, the publication of books, manuals, special features and programmes) or by collaborators' interests (educators, transportation workers, oil workers, etc.) who are, at times, sources and, at others, producers of content.

The virtual newsroom replaces commuting; it is the space for putting together virtual teams, regardless of locality, with specific prerequisites for any given project, thus creating opportunities for journalists to participate.
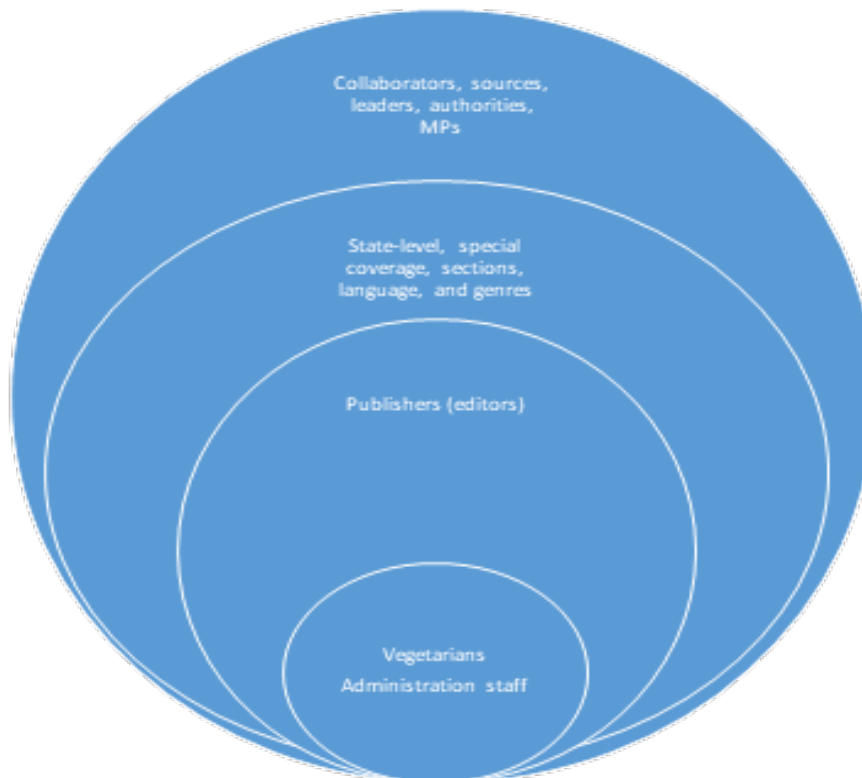
This is the environment where work relations are modulated and standardised and this is also the place where we can observe how journalists speak of and at work (Noroundine, 2002); how they generate use and exchange value; how the new cultural forms of production relations come about, as well as the values that they mobilise for work and those that they take from work to society.

The virtual newsroom is a finite, delimited, and observable space. The probable traces of the recovery of the activity allows us to accompany and analyse the transformations of journalism, of journalists' work conditions, and the changes in terms of the means of production – all of which allows us to see how professionals interact in this particular context with information and communication technologies.

This new newsroom is a space and time in which work-related actions and decision take place. It established the chronotope (Bakhtin, 1992) that conforms the journalistic narrative at the same time that it is the entry for analysing the genre with the respective space and time orientations as well as the specific social conditions, where the chronotope is the centre that organises spatial-temporal events.

Just as in the physical newsroom, the social space of journalistic production is likewise marked by different hierarchies and attributions. In all three outlets analysed in this paper, relations are more horizontal, and professionals enjoy more freedom and autonomy in their work. Nevertheless, these relations are situated in different space-times, as we can see in the image below, showing the workflow at *Jornalistas Livres*.

Graph 1 –Jornalistas Livres' virtual newsroom chart

Collaborators, sources,
leaders, authorities,
MPs

State-level, special
coverage, sections,
language, and genres

Publishers (editors)

Vegetarians
Administration staff

Source: Marques, 2019

This graph illustrates the hierarchy at *Jornalistas Livres*, whose central positions guide and decide journalistic production. Although this organisation is different to the verticality of the physical newsroom, circles denote the presence of direction in the arrangement. The smallest circle is the managerial nucleus that has fewer members, who decide who goes where, practical issues, etc.

The second circle, the Publishers' newsroom, encompasses administration and makes decision on publications, content, topic distribution, etc. Spaces destined to state-level and special coverages as well as language decide on specific themes attributed to these locations; and Collaborators is a wide space where finished texts, photos, topic suggestions, etc. are sent. Each circle represents a sphere in decision-making and each one of them have their own chronotope: a spatial-temporal order that results in a certain type of enunciative insertion with its own production logic.

The virtual newsrooms under analysis here are embedded in apps and software from the US and Russia. They hold and produce their own ideological discourses, seemingly turning production relations into spontaneous, without any hierarchy, free from interests in algorithmic control and in concentration of web traffic. They seem to be components of the public sphere when they are, in fact, private entities. The alternative outlets and collectives that we analysed rely on these apps and software as their social place of work.

The production of journalistic arrangements is appropriated by the algorithmic logic of these platforms: both in terms of the organisation of work as well as the distribution and circulation of the journalistic product. Those journalists who dedicate themselves to this job are not paid by the platforms even though they contribute towards the production of specialised data that later constitute an active to be negotiated in the political, governmental, and advertising market.

Conversely, we see the effort of these journalists in creating new forms of producing and circulating journalism. Their practice synthesises the contradiction that needs to be overcomed currently. We have means of production that invite us to socialise our knowledge and forms of distributing wealth. However, political and social organisation has not overcome the concentration imposed by the logic of capital.

With regard to virtual newsrooms, we can understand it to represent the space of transformations in how journalism is made, but, dialectically, it is the space where the contradictions of work and most precarious relations, in some cases, similar to those from the past century, without a fixed schedule, division of time at and off work, as well as the intensity of work with total engagement and polyvalence. The fewer ways to support themselves, the bigger the reliance on technology to do journalism.

New systems and practices are demanded within the virtual newsroom at *Jornalistas Livres*. The work method for publishing any content is that it must be approved by three people who are online at the time of discussion. This implies a certain level of constant friction of journalism, which is expressed in questions around what the topic is, if it is in sync with the editorial line of the outlet, what actually deserves to be published, with what angle, language, and focus. These are all permanent questions for all members of the collective.

On the one hand, this friction highlights dissensus within the group itself and, on the other, it makes the collective's journalism vigorous and pungent, thus reducing the chances for mistakes as it is collectively surveilled.

The challenges of working in a virtual newsroom go beyond the tensions of the field. Just as anywhere else, the communication device (Mainguneau, 2001) organises discourse as it is steered by the interlocutor, with the goal and form of action in interactivity and dialogism.

The construction of the stages of production in the virtual newsroom is achieved online, from researching, editing to pitching. Often this happens not only between journalists in the same outlet, but also between other alternative media pages and collectives. This is an essential difference between traditional newsrooms and those of the alternative media. Many times, in traditional media, journalists face their colleagues as opponents as all of them seek recognition to keep their jobs. The fight for the next scoop between media companies is even more unethical in the search of the exclusive article.

In the virtual workspace of alternative arrangements, the editor-in-chief does not oversee content, but contributes with the stages of journalistic construction and, at the same time, creates management models.

Agência Pressenza's virtual newsroom aggregates professionals from different countries and states – as is the case in Brazil. However, this is equally a space of conflicts, of tension around the very notion of journalism; a space where multiple dimension of work are expressed, as well as the ways in which journalists understand society and the values enacted both for work and for themselves.

At *Agência Pressenza*, the newsroom coordinator also performs different functions. They organise that week's coverage, distributes topics, coordinates production, and contribute to the formation of professionals of which they are experts, such as webpage optimisation, data analysis and mining.

Therefore, the role of the editor-in-chief or the newsroom coordinator goes through an update, either in terms of understanding their functions or in terms of lack of structure. In the report on how journalism adapts "to the new times" elaborated by Anderson, Bell & Shirk (2013, p. 53), the role of the editor is "(…) to aggregate content, link content that is produced by the organisation or not, performing a meta-analysis of both process and sources, continuing coverage, publicly cultivating and recommending sources". As we have observed in virtual newsrooms, the editor does much more than these attributions.

New functions derive from digital work. The group destined to editors at *Jornalistas Livres* are called Publishers, where "everyone in this chat also fill the role of editors" [Silva, 2019, p. 195]. However, the Publisher is more than an editor because their function is often not to edit content but, rather, publish it, distribute it on a social network or on the website.

This work is far from being mechanical or a matter of copying and pasting as each platform requires characteristics already established by them. On Twitter, for example, the publisher needs to elaborate the article with up to 280 characters, thus choosing the most adequate message for this medium, which is different to a publication on Instagram or Facebook.

Differences in requirements are even marked by the lexicon used by journalists. *Telegramming* (sending messages on Telegram), *Facebooking* (publishing on Facebook), and *Instagramming* (post on Instagram) are synonyms of specific actions of the journalistic work. Likewise, being on call means being responsible for curating content, distributing, and circulating material produced and sent by collaborators from different locations.

On an intense day of coverage, this work requires an appropriate method for content to reach its destination. Being on call means organising the flow, establishing criteria for how relevant content is, forwarding it for publishers to authorise its publication, guaranteeing publication, generating a link, as well as distributing it in different groups to ensure circulation.

At *Jornalistas Livres*, there is also a journalist who, amongst all attributions, has the role of mediating groups and administering all chats, forwarding information from one to another frenetically, which makes them "often feel like those old-school telephone operators, unplugging a cable and plugging a different one or like a chief reporter back when they organised the workplace" (Silva, p. 198).

The flow of online work is valued in virtual newsrooms, but the challenge of controlling who can publish what and where to ensure surveillance and content quality demands new attributions.

One of the journalists interviewed (Silva, 2019) states that, beyond her attributions of shooting and editing videos, writing texts, being on call, and distributing content, she also works as a conflict mediator and a guardian of all passwords that grant access to distribution channels. This conflict mediation, made explicit by the journalist, is clearly more demanding on larger networks and, consequently, more complex when it involves either volunteer work or spaces where work relations are more precarious.

In the virtual newsroom, professional are free to act in ways that are different to how work is organised in a traditional newsroom. The flow – and often the absence of a trajectory for the production process – does take an "army-like character where it is difficult to do anything without stepping over someone" as Anderson, Bell & Shirk point out (2013, p. 62) when they analysed traditional newsrooms. According to Franciscato (2018, p. 6), "the phenomenon of innovation is thus an element with the potential to reflect on the transformations of journalism, organisations, and the occupation itself in the context of ever-stronger impacts of digital technologies".

Amidst these transformations and new ways of systematising and treating information, the criteria that define newsworthiness and news values are going through a transition. These criteria are commonly seen subjectively, externally to journalistic praxis, setting professionals against events in a position whose only goal is to report the facts. In an objective manner, the news or the information product are the result of negotiations that take place at different levels and with different motivations at the centre of the production process, from selection to publication. The goal is to attract readers, calling attention to aspects of social reality that the outlet or the collective have selected.

News values are not static. They perform the function of guiding the everyday production of news and its emphasis, even though the interests and the editorial line are more perennial and represent elements of continuity in the decision-making process around why any given event is considered newsworthy. The organisation of the virtual newsroom itself into themes, the selection of sources, and the language used all indicate the criteria for newsworthiness of the alternative arrangement. Unlike the use of fragmentation as a tactics for manipulation (Perseu Abramo, 2002), the framing of the news-event is used to recompose and highlight what the very fact is, how, where, and who was involved in it, and what the interest behind showing that news-event is.

By addressing journalistic activity as both analysis and report of a journey or period, newsmaking

takes place in the context of its very release. In digital journalism, the logic and the notion of time are different, from the countless immediacy of scoops to the periodicity and different timeframes that follow the platform being used for distribution.

The same article produced by the arrangement is distributed on different days and different times on several channels. The use of technology determines the version and the time for distributing information, extrapolating the journalistic article and granting interdiscursivity to production.

Thus, the advancement and access to the media bridges the gap between production in traditional newsrooms and those of alternative media, effectively pushing the latter away from the label of amateur that the established press has always attributed to alternative media.

Final remarks

The process of restructuring the capital system initiated as a result of the 2007 crisis marks transition and world dispute. Although some platforms had been created before this period, such as Elance, founded in 1999, Odesk, in 2003, and Amazon Mechanical Turk, founded in 2005, it is after the crisis that the so-called lean platforms (Srnicek, 2018) like Uber and Airbnb were born and, by denying rights and social guarantees, configured this new form of work.

Just as WhatsApp and Telegram, all platforms depend on an existing material infrastructure of a network of cables, connected products, and communication processes to ensure its operation. Communication is the dialectical facet of work without which platform work does not exist.

Therefore, journalists' work in treating information, mediating events and a wider audience, is used by platforms for widening its archives with this different type of content that can only be produced with professional participation. What is more, journalistic outlets generate a larger volume of data for these companies, which expropriate the value generated by digital work.

The ways for extracting value from the private system of governance and management, based on large-scale collection of data and 'datified' interactions, are points to be further explored and articulated within current debates on platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2018).

Platform capitalism follows capital's original goals of generating profit, controlling markets, extreme concentration of wealth, and, consequently, social inequality through an economic model that captures the massive production of data.

Conversely, in that these are companies which constitute a private sphere, social network websites also have dimensions of socialisation of knowledge and new production relations that can create a culture of resistance whose role is to contribute with diversity and plurality of information for a society that is searching for civilizational advancements.

Understanding and amplifying debates on digital work and virtual workspaces are necessary for apprehending changes during these times, when the capitalist mode of production and the impacts in social relations as a way to interpret and lead structural changes in reality are themselves changing.

Other qualifications are needed to work in the environment of platforms and further investigation into mechanisms of communication must be pursued, reflecting on the changes in the sociotechnical bases of the division of labour.

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