


Platform economy and journalism: another side to the precarious labor environment in Brazil

Economia de plataforma e trabalho jornalístico: outra face da precarização laboral no Brasil

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Abstract

In this article, we discuss the precarious labor environment of Brazilian journalists with relation to platformization and the impacts it has had on the profession. This discussion is based on research data conducted on the work of journalists in Brazil, and primarily on the analysis of the results from the Brazilian Journalist Profile 2021 survey. The online survey consisted of a total of 3,100 professionals working in the field of journalism throughout the country. Data reliability is 95%, with a 2.3% margin of error. The study shows that around 60% of journalists work with online media, and more than half work from home – most of whom paid a high price for this as they were placed under a high level of stress with heavy workloads and overtime. Additionally, 50% of professionals in other communications fields have had to develop social networking roles that are unrelated to their job description. The discussion of this data, in view of precariousness and platformization, leads us to conclude that journalism professionals are subject to working conditions that have an impact on the quality of their physical and mental health.

Keywords: Platformization, Precarity, Journalism, Brazil, Work

Resumo

Neste artigo, discute-se a precarização do trabalho de jornalistas brasileiros, no contexto de plataformação do trabalho e os impactos dessas condições no exercício da profissão. Essa discussão está ancorada em dados de pesquisas sobre o trabalho de jornalistas no Brasil e, principalmente, na análise dos resultados da pesquisa Perfil do Jornalista Brasileiro 2021. A pesquisa na modalidade online validou 3.100 respondentes profissionais da área do jornalismo distribuídos nacionalmente. A confiabilidade dos dados é de 95%, com 2,3% de margem de erro. O estudo mostra que cerca de 60% dos jornalistas trabalham em mídia online, e mais da metade trabalha em casa – a maioria pagou parcial ou totalmente pelos custos disso. Eles estavam sob um alto nível de estresse com carga de trabalho excessiva e horas extras. Além disso, 50% daqueles em outras áreas de comunicação desenvolveram funções de rede social não relacionadas à sua descrição de trabalho. A discussão desses dados, à luz do que se analisa como precarização e plataformação, permite concluir que os profissionais do jornalismo estão submetidos a condições de trabalho que impactam a sua qualidade de saúde física e mental.

Palavras-chave: Plataformação, Precarização, Jornalismo, Brasil, Trabalho

Introduction

Journalism is an area which is constantly changing. In Brazil, the professionalization of the field began in the 1950s with the United States' growing influence on Brazilian journalistic practices (Ribeiro, 2003). At that time, the newspaper industry began to adopt formal employment conditions for journalists and introduce changes that reduced the instability and informality that had previously prevailed. The *Diário Carioca* and *Jornal do Brasil* newspapers (including *Última Hora*) are prime examples of this. For example, the *Última Hora* newspaper adopted the Labor Code, which ensured the professionals had job stability, salary increases, and paid vacations. It also recognized the labor rights of all workers (Ribeiro, 2003).

The labor code adopted at *Última Hora* occurred at a time when there was informality, amateurism and a lack of recognition at the workplace. This was a period of changes that came about after the end of two world wars, technological expansion, the consolidation of radio, telegraph and telephone, text and image printing processes, among other innovations. For Karla Monteiro (2020), author of a biography on Wainer, that was the time when reporting stopped being just a 'gig' and journalists stopped seeking positions in political offices. However, the period of good salaries and professional recognition was short-lived as the political crisis devastated working conditions at *Última Hora*. Regardless, this example was gradually adopted by other journalistic companies, thus establishing a period in which the profession achieved labor relations that were on a similar level with the organization of modern capitalist companies. This led to a change in working conditions and professional recognition in the first half of the 20th century. After the National Federation of Journalists was founded in 1947, professional registration was passed to the Ministry of Labor and, in 1969, Decree Law no. 972/69 was established, which regulated the profession and required journalists to have a higher education diploma in order to work in the profession.

Another change to the organization of work that has impacted employability and salaries was the computerization of newsrooms. The reform at Grupo Folha in 1984, especially at *Folha de São Paulo*, resulted in a large number of layoffs. Abreu (2002, p. 28) states that reforms to the journalistic company were mainly technological, with the dissemination of information technology aiming to achieve "cheaper operational costs". From this point forward, with a few highs and lows in terms of professional and labor organization, journalists have entered the 21st century navigating the new winds of the Internet,¹ facing the challenge of learning how to do online journalism and keep their jobs.

The internet bubble crisis in 2001² spread insecurity and discredit, beginning a period of many changes in the profession. As shown in studies by Moretzsohn (2002), Heloani (2005), Adghirni (2012), Figaro, Nonato and Grohmann (2013), Mick & Lima (2013), Lelo (2019) and Nicoletti (2019), the precarious working conditions (Antunes, 2018) ended up characterizing the profession and led it to be considered as one of the worst to work in Brazil (Lelo, 2019, p. 244). Precarious working conditions are a constant in the profession nowadays (Chadha, Steiner, 2022). Indeed, platform work (Kalsing & Gruszynski, 2021; Barros et al., 2021; Marques, 2022; Longhi, Silveira & Paulino, 2021; Semicek & Aquino, 2022; Jurno & D'Andréa, 2020) is different from traditional press practices as it requires one to adopt new communicative grammar, increases versatility, flexibility, turnover and low wages, intensifies work pace, and extends the number of hours worked in the workweek, often with no contract and no recognition of labor rights.

Given this scenario, the objective of the article is to discuss, based on the Brazilian Journalist Profile Survey 2021, the precarious work environment of these professionals, as pertaining to platformization, and its impacts on the

¹ *Jornal do Brasil* was the first online newspaper in Brazil, launched in 1996.

² See: <https://warren.com.br/magazine/bolha-da-internet/>

exercise of the profession. The research data was collected from a survey conducted between August 16th and October 1st, 2021, the objective of which was to verify demographic issues about the work of Brazilian journalists, as well as indicators of precariousness and illness. The results presented in this article were taken from a sample size of 3,100 valid responses from journalists who work in the media, outside the media, and as higher education teachers. Data reliability is 95% and the margin for error is 2.3%. More than 60% of the journalists who responded to the survey work for online media outlets, while more than 50% of the professionals who work outside the media work with social networks. Many journalism teachers work almost exclusively online and reported an important impact of digital surveillance on their work.

In order to reflect on the relationship between precarious work and platformization, we selected the following indicators of precarious wages (Nicoletti, 2019): working hours, remuneration, employment relationships and position. We also observed the results for the variables workplace, surveillance and monitoring, and online attacks (Lima et al., 2022), because they are directly affected by the digital environment and involve work being done on applications and communication and data management platforms.

We divide the article into three parts: the first part discusses precariousness and the theoretical perspective of platform work, the second part presents an analysis of the research results in light of the concepts of precariousness and the platformization of work and their impacts on working conditions, while the third part presents our conclusions.

The platformization of journalistic work increases precariousness

We use the term platform companies to refer to private, capitalist organizations that provide technology infrastructure to support a wide number of commercial relationships and operate with data. They increase the circulation of capital (Grohmann, 2020), imposing a different time/space relationship to attain more value (Antunes, 2023). These companies operate in the information, advertising and algorithmic remodeling markets and have different purposes. Google (Alphabet) operates based on searches and interactions that are made by users. Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram (Meta) sell metrics and audience/user profiles. Amazon operates in a similar fashion while also performing other commercial activities. The value of these companies is built on interactions with their users; a connection that allows them to collect data of any type, that is, all data (Carelli, Cavalcanti & Fonseca, 2020).³

For Srnicek (2018, p. 49), platforms “are a new type of company”. Its owners hold software, hardware, and a number of natural wealth resources such as minerals, water, territory, buildings, underwater cables, and control fiber optic networks which connect continents via the internet. Costa (2021, p. 142) discusses Microsoft’s “underwater servers” which are installed below the sea to make energy cheaper. Google and Facebook own more than 50% of online advertising⁴ in the United States and other countries, such as Brazil. The “cloud” service sold by Microsoft, Google, Amazon, and other companies controls the information of people, governments, hospitals, research centers, companies and universities. Van Dijck (2019, p.1) states that “platforms are not neutral or value-free constructs. They have specific norms and values inscribed in their architecture.” In other words, this new type

³ “There is no more specificity of sensitive data; in the age of *Big Data*, all data is sensitive, biopolitical. Even the option to choose which type of pizza to order online is now strategic information. Information is power; big data collected online is examined and transformed into mega powers.” (Carelli, Cavalcanti & Fonseca, 2020, p. 103)

⁴ Google has been accused of creating a ‘cartel’ with Facebook in online advertising. Available at: <https://www.uol.com.br/tilt/noticias/redacao/2022/01/19/processo-acusa-facebook-e-google-de-cartel-para-fixar-precos-de-anuncios.htm?cmpid=copiaecola>

of company represents the current way of exploiting wealth and human work. They appropriate techno-scientific knowledge, privatize the internet, and hold the secrets of its algorithms.

As such, this new type of company represents, as Antunes (2023) claims, the current stage of financial, monopolistic capitalism, which establishes corporate rules that segregate groups, people and cultures. Instead of the internet being an open space for a multitude of voices and for strengthening democracy, its monopolization by platforms has turned it into a medium that controls social relations, segregates and juxtaposes groups and cultures, generates intense feelings of collective xenophobia, and interferes in politics and the pathway to democracy (Morozov, 2018). As Van Dijck states, "the platformization of society refers to the inextricable relationship between online platforms and societal structures" (..) and "journalistic organizations are increasingly dependent on online distribution mechanisms owned and operated by Facebook and Google" (2019, p. 1).

We use the word 'platformization' to define work relationships as a metonymy for the restructuring relationship between work and capital in its current state (Tonelo, 2020) and for strengthening flexible accumulation (Harvey, 1995). The term refers to a type of company that reorganizes the forms of production and circulation of goods, imposing its centralizing logic on the market and the work world. Platformization is the restructuring of how services and activities are produced and circulated. It is a rationality that strengthens flexibility, versatility, individualization and professional despecialization.

These are also the characteristics of precariousness that emerged in the 1970s in the world of work. For Druck (2007, p.19-20 *apud* Druck, 2011), the "social precariousness of work [is] understood as a process which installs – economically, socially and politically – an institutionalization of the modern flexibilization and precariousness of work, which renews and reshapes the historical and structural precariousness of work in Brazil, now justified by the need to adapt to new global times [...]"

This is why journalists are considered as a category of social precariousness of work (Nicoletti, 2019). According to Nicoletti, this is defined by 1) precarious, informal connections and different entry-level salaries between regions and professionals of the same level; 2) long working hours, temporary contracts, the hiring of freelancers, and legal entities; 3) a lack of structure for work, a lack of legal protection and safeguarding of the company, a safety risk in rural and urban conflict areas, and physical and mental illness; 4) a decline in professional autonomy and individualization; 5) the weakening of unions and other attempts to regulate professionals; 6) deregulating specific legislation and, more recently, the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT).

In Brazil, job insecurity can be seen at different levels, both in traditional media and in new journalistic initiatives (Silva, 2017). Journalists historically experience different types of pressure in relation to audience, performance, and results; they are underpaid and overworked (Deuze, 2014, 2017; Deuze & Witschge, 2015). The intense and long working days which many are forced to work with can lead to anxiety and illness, to technical and ethical mistakes, and in many cases, to have to adapt to practices and routines which are incompatible with the social role of the media (Lelo, 2019).

Accardo (2007) describes journalism as a profession under a condition of constant precariousness, while Örnebring (2018) considers this precarity as "the new normal" within the profession. Journalists tend to have decreased purchasing power, deteriorating quality of lives, and present physical and psychological illnesses (Gollmitzer, 2020). Miranda (2017) observed Portuguese journalists and concluded that theirs is a precarious profession with low wages, unemployment, and job instability, etc. He also points out the high number of young professionals, which demonstrates a horizontalization of job precariousness. This condition directly interferes in the work and practices of journalists and is a direct consequence of economic and technological change, which he considers as a mutating trend in journalism's labor relations.

"Journalists make sense of precarity using a set of long-established professional norms that are fundamentally individualistic in nature. It is also important that these norms are long-established, i.e. they have historical roots and are transmitted both through education and professional socialization. The historical weight and the individualism of these norms 'prime' journalists to accept precarity as an unavoidable feature of journalistic work (particularly at entry level)." (Örnebring, 2018, p. 18)

The elimination of labor ties, the destructuring of labor law legislation, and labor expenses now being individualized, meaning they are the responsibility of the individual who performs the job, are all aspects of platformization (Carelli, Cavalcanti & Fonseca, 2020; Antunes, 2020; Fairwork Brasil, 2022;⁵ Antunes, 2023; Rebecchi et al., 2023).

In this regard, precariousness manifests in another way because, in addition to having the traditional characteristics of precarious work, it normalizes the breakdown of the visible, palpable relationship between a legal entity (company) and an individual person. It ultimately forces people to work without any legal support in the country. The terms of use for these platform companies become the legislation that operates labor or consumer relations. As a result, a wide variety of professionals are left stranded, from delivery people and app drivers (Uber, Ifood, 99, Rappi, etc.) to those who work in domestic services, teachers, lawyers, designers, architects, doctors, and journalists, as shown in the Fairwork Annual Report (2021) and its overview of research conducted in 38 countries.⁶ Figaro and Silva (2020) state that platforms "exploit the work of a large number of individuals, referred to as collaborators, self-entrepreneurs, clickworkers, and outsourced workers" (2020, p.104).

Platformization in journalism (Longhi, Silveira, Paulino, 2021; Jurno & D'andrea, 2020; Hartmann, Fanfa & Silveira, 2020) reshapes production routines and the way work is performed; it operates within the precariousness of work relationships and places a priority on audience monetization in news agendas. Specialized knowledge is overlooked and the professional becomes a 'content producer', a 'social media manager', a 'social media analyst', among other titles (Figaro et al., 2021; Barros et al., 2021). The workday is extended and intensified because the same professional now multitasks and produces for different media at the same time, such as print, online, and digital networks, and has to take into account the different *affordances* offered by each platform. The professional also monitors digital networks as a guide to the 'news', while the investigation process also requires one to have knowledge of data processing and data mining. The public exposure of professionals has intensified and their support is not always sustained. Reports drawn up by the Brazilian National Federation of Journalists (FENAJ) (Braga, 2023; Lopes, 2022) on the increase in violence against journalists shows that working in the profession has become more risky than ever before.

Another aspect of the platformization of journalism is the virtual newsroom (Silva, 2019; Figaro & Silva, 2020). Virtual newsrooms were developed due to a lack of workplace infrastructure for journalists, but during the Covid-19 pandemic they became a reality for all teams of journalists. Whether working remotely, at the office, or in hybrid form, applications adapted to all types of journalistic activities during the isolation periods in the pandemic. This aspect (which, on the one hand, can be positive) both restricts and accelerates the pace of work due to multiple concomitant activities being performed, exposes the professional even more than before, reduces the number of workers in teams, and makes production costs cheaper for companies by passing them on to professionals (Silva, 2019).

⁵ Fairwork is an action research project that is being implemented in 38 countries, evaluating decent working conditions in platform companies. It is based at the University of Oxford and has evaluated Brazil twice, once in 2020 and, again, in 2021. Both reports are available at: <https://fair.work/en/ratings/brazil/>

⁶ Fairwork Annual Report (2021). Available at: <https://fair.work/wp-content/uploads/sites/17/2022/01/Fairwork-Annual-Report-2021.pdf>

Discussion of results: precarious work as a rule

The Brazilian Journalist Profile 2021 survey studies the profiles of three types of professionals who self-identify as journalists: media journalists, teachers, and journalists from outside the media. From the total of 3,100 respondents, 57.8% are women, 67.8% are white, and black and mixed race represent 9.3% and 20.6%, respectively. Compared to the sample from the first edition of the study (Mick & Lima, 2013),⁷ there is a significant improvement in terms of black or mixed-race people working in the profession; however, the latest data still shows structural social inequality, with black and brown people constituting a demographic minority in the profession.

The study indicates job insecurity and high rates of illness. In fact, 40.6% have already suffered moral harassment, while 32.7% have reported being the target of verbal violence and a further 11.1% reported being victims of sexual harassment in their workplace. What's more, the heavy workloads, reduction of staff and tight deadlines lead to stress and mental illness: 66.2% of participants felt stressed at work and 34.1% were diagnosed as having stress. A further 31.4% had already been prescribed antidepressants due to mental health problems.

Professional devaluation was also observed. 92% of the survey respondents had completed higher education, 28.6% of whom have a specialization, 14.7% a Master's degree, and 6.3% a doctoral degree. This shows the respondents are highly qualified and professional, but this is not reflected in career stability.

A more in-depth analysis of the precariousness of journalists' work clearly shows a link connecting a high rate of informality, the number of hours worked, and an income that struggles to meet basic needs, in addition to low basic benefits, characteristics which confirm the increasing precariousness of working conditions in a world where platforms monopolize advertising revenue and impose their logics on journalistic production. The 2021 survey points to a group of professionals that are not in full health, overworked, and exposed to different types of individual and professional rights violations.

Regarding employment relationships, the research shows that 45.8% of participants are hired according to the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT). Another 10.5% work as public servants, and 3.8% are Legal Entities, owners, or partners of a company with employees. On the other hand, individual companies or micro-entrepreneurs represent 14.7% of the sample. What this means is that journalists do not have the same legal protections as those granted to people under the labor law and are obliged to pay whatever costs are incurred with their activity, in addition to not being granted any social benefits approved by legislation or acquired through labor agreements. Temporary or contract journalists represent 5.5% of the sample (temporary, by the hour, or service provision). Journalists who work with commissions account for 6.4% of the total. 9.6% of respondents work in informal roles (from a legal point of view), implying that they are not protected by any type of law in their professional relationship. In total, 36.2% of journalists have precarious employment contracts.

Although the majority of these journalists have formal ties, the percentage of them that receive benefits, such as health insurance (37.9%), or transportation allowance (18.6%) is low. When asked about personal protective equipment (PPE), work safety items required and provided for by legislation, only 3.7% reported receiving this equipment from their employers. Also worthy of note is that only 4.6% received legal assistance from the company, and just over 10% received in-company training or qualification incentives.

These results show the lack of protection and investment in journalists on the part of the companies they work for. The results regarding journalists' qualifications show the importance of debating the responsibility employers have in guaranteeing the technical and analytical quality of workers both inside and outside the media, and also of

⁷ What is a Brazilian journalist? Overview of the research project Profile of the Brazilian Journalist, 2012 (Mick & Lima, 2013). Available at: <https://perfildojornalista.paginas.ufsc.br/files/2013/04/Perfil-do-jornalista-brasileiro-Sintese.pdf>

journalism teachers. Despite having high levels of education, they lack incentives to stay up-to-date with professional developments in their sector. This means the cost of keeping up with technological and academic development in the area falls almost squarely on the worker. In a highly competitive, flexible and unstable market, this is just added pressure placed on workers.

In terms of salary, the respondents can be divided into two main groups: those who earn the lowest, between R\$1,101 and R\$5,500 (between \$220 and \$1,100), representing 54.6% of respondents, and those who earn the highest salaries (36.9%), between R\$5,501 and R\$22,000 (\$1,100.20 to \$4,390), according to Table 1. Those who earn the lowest salaries are unable to pay their basic expenses, always (36%) or sometimes (23.9%), while the rest state that they earn enough to cover basic life expenses.

Table 1. Gross monthly income of Brazilian journalists

What is your gross monthly income as a journalist or journalism teacher?		
No income	31	1.3%
R\$ 1,100 (\$220) or less	100	4.3%
Between R\$ 1,101 (\$220.20) and R\$ 2,200 (\$ 440)	263	11.4%
Between R\$ 2,201 (\$440.20) and R\$ 3,300 (\$660)	313	13.5%
Between R\$ 3,301 (660.20) and R\$ 4,400 (\$880)	304	13.1%
Between R\$ 4,401 (\$880.20) and R\$ 5,500 (\$1,100)	362	15.6%
Between R\$ 5,501 (\$1,100.20) and R\$ 11,000 (\$2,200)	628	27.1%
Between R\$ 11,001 (\$2,200.20) and R\$ 22,000 (\$4,390)	227	9.8%
More than R\$ 22,001 (\$4,390.20)	50	2.2%
I do not wish to declare	36	1.6%
Total number of respondents	2314	100.0

Source: Brazilian Journalist Profile Final Report 2021 (Lima et al., 2022)

These figures for income, education and employment relationship show a precarious work environment highlighted by wages that are not commensurate with qualifications and living costs, and the resulting need for individuals to search for more work in other unfortunately precarious relationships (freelancing, project work, legal entity, etc.). This data is even more relevant when we look at the fact that the majority of survey respondents is in mid-career stage or senior workers: 27.2% have had a career for longer than 20 years, while 26.1% have had a career between 11 and 20 years; 35.5% of respondents have been journalists for around ten years, while 6.2% started their careers a year ago, at most.

Data on the length of time respondents have worked at their current job also confirms the precarious work environment. More than half of the respondents started working at their main place of work up to three years ago

(Table 2). This data is supported by other studies (Figaro, Nonato, Grohmann, 2013; Jacques, Lima, 2013) that conclude the instability of the profession and the low career perspectives for Brazilian journalists.

Table 2. Length of time at current place of employment

How long have you been at your main job?		
1 year or less	582	25.8%
Between 1 and 3 years	579	25.7%
Between 3 and 6 years	352	15.6%
Between 6 and 10 years	290	12.9%
Between 10 and 20 years	281	12.5%
Between 20 and 30 years	94	4.2%
More than 30 years	64	2.8%
Other (specify)	13	0.6%
Total number of respondents	2,255	100.0%

Source: Brazilian Journalist Profile Final Report 2021 (Lima et al., 2022)

Remote work and extended working hours

Over the last two years, the health emergency generated by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has intensified remote work and the use of platforms for communication, management and publication of content. In Brazil, even though no federal rules were put in place to contain the pandemic, thousands of workers began to work remotely. According to the Brazilian Journalist Profile 2021, 61.3% of survey participants carried out their professional activity from home. A further 10.9% reported working hybrid shifts, partly at home and partly in the office, 24% said they worked in the office, while the remaining respondents claimed they worked in public or private places with internet access. Although the research data was collected more than a year and a half after the beginning of the pandemic, the work routines for most Brazilian journalists remained unchanged.

These journalists claimed that they had to pay for any costs related to working remotely. Of the 2,255 respondents who answered the question "Who paid for the equipment, furniture, software and other items you need to perform your job?", 47% responded "I did" and 0.9% responded "family members". 18.4% of respondents claimed that purchases of home office equipment and furniture were divided between employer and employee, while 33.5% claimed that the company paid for all expenses.

Furthermore, the data is supported by findings from other studies (Figaro, et.al. 2020, 2021) that show the extended working hours as a reflection of working remotely. However, after cross-matching the variables of working hours *versus* workplace, we were unable to verify any significant change in working hours between those who work in the office and those who work remotely. This just shows that work overload with long hours is presented as a professional rule regardless of the modality or style of work.

A number of studies on work during the pandemic indicate greater pressure on workers, including increased working hours. An innovative study from the International Federation of Journalists, entitled 'Global Platform for Quality Journalism', for example, claims the following: "Unfortunately [...] too many states are taking advantage of this crisis to increase their authoritarian power, strengthen their systems of surveillance of the population or to jail journalists while some media companies reduce salaries without negotiation, cut benefits or lay off staff." (Ifj, 2020,

p.4). The 2021 Journalist Profile listed some of the constraints perceived at work such as time pressure, demands and intensification of work, salary reduction, censorship, moral harassment, lack of labor rights, non-compliance with the contract, among others. This situation was also supported by a study on how communicators worked during the Covid-19 pandemic (Figaro et al., 2020, 2021), as well as a global survey carried out by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism (2020), which inspired further study, on the part of the European Journalism Center, on the more recent hardships faced by journalists:

“The survey showed 15% saw a big decrease in resources, and 17% a somewhat decrease in resources, totalling 32% of data journalists. But the biggest gap between positive and negative options is with time pressure: while 30% have been unaffected, 36% have seen their time pressure somewhat (19%) or highly (17%) increase. Similarly, 44% saw an increase in their workload, although 13% have instead seen a decrease.” (European Journalism Center, 2021)

What we observe here is that long working hours and time pressure are relevant issues related to precarious working environments. More data on this issue is evident in the responses given to the Brazilian Journalist Profile 2021 survey (Lima et al., 2022). Between June and August 2021, 37.1% of journalists worked a daily shift of between seven and eight hours, another 16.9% worked between 5 and 6 hours, while almost 30% worked more than nine hours a day, and 12.6% worked more than 11 hours a day. These results show increased working hours as a key component of a journalist’s professional routine, regardless of the sector in which they work.

When asked “do you normally work more than your contracted hours (work overtime)?”, 71.5% of respondents answered yes. Another sign of precariousness is rest time. Of the three groups in the survey, only those who work outside the media reported having eight or more days off per month (i.e., at least four weekends off). Meanwhile, 7% of media workers and 5.4% of teachers claimed they did not even have one day off per month – in other words, they worked non-stop. More than 40% of media workers and teachers have less than five days off per month (at least one per week), while 22.1% of non-media workers are unable to take at least one day off a month. This shows an increased workload for Brazilian journalists based on different indicators related to working hours. It is important to consider that this research was conducted during a period marked by increased working hours due to the pressure of remote work and staff overtime as a result of layoffs and colleagues falling ill. However, pandemic aside, this is the reality reported by a number of Brazilian and international studies⁸ on the work of journalists. As newsrooms shrink and professional practices adapt to meet the new informational flows of digital work and platforms, journalists are required to work more in less time. Silvia Moretzsohn (2002) called the idea of real-time journalism “a speed fetish”, in which the logic of more productivity in a shorter length of time in digital media was not only counterproductive from a production point of view, but also led to problems with quality and ethics.

In contemporary times, the logic of journalistic work mainly follows the criteria and policies put in place by platforms. Van Dijck, Poell and de Waal (2018, p. 55) point out that decision-making based on user activity data undermines the independence of journalism: “Instead of depending on editorial decisions based on journalistic values, the “automated” news process is determined by quantified user demand” (our translation). One example of what these

⁸ Örnebring (2018) analyzes the effects of precarity on professionalism and professional identity among journalists. He describes three different sets of data from in-depth semi-structured interviews (collected in 2008-09, 2010-12 and 2017) conducted with journalists (n = 63, 55 and 11, respectively) in 14 European countries, before the Covid-19 pandemic. His conclusion is that the interviewed journalists believe they are “prepared” for precariousness; that is, they widely accept precarity as a natural part of professional norms such as entrepreneurship and meritocracy. Available at: <https://isoj.org/research/journalists-thinking-about-precarity-making-sense-of-the-new-normal/>

authors are talking about can be seen in the case study of *A Gazeta*, a newspaper from Rede Gazeta, in the state of Espírito Santo, Brazil (Soneghetti & Souza, 2023). One of the numerous measures taken in the name of platformization and precariousness (layoffs, reduced numbers of journalists in the newsroom, SEO writing, accelerated production) is audience monitoring in real time by the newspaper team in the newsroom. In 2019, the company introduced its Performance Desk⁹, which has journalists, data analysts, marketing and SEO professionals working together on the distribution and monitoring of content across all digital media, while also further developing its relationship with the public (Rosado, 2019). In other words, in addition to increasing the precariousness of work relations, platformization reshapes the journalistic production process: controversial themes, keywords (purchased or not), and programmatic advertising all determine the network flow and become the guide for what will be news.

Content production and monitoring

1,335 of the 3,100 journalists in the survey worked in the media, 61,5% of whom worked for online media outlets. Although only 2.7% stated Social Media Manager as their main job, 27.3% carried out this role on a daily basis. For those who worked outside the media, this percentage exceeded 50%. However, only 2.3% reported that their main job was working with social media.

Thus, producing platform content is an important element of precariousness due to its multifunctionality and work overload. The work in these digital environments is treated as a complementary activity performed by different professionals, none of whom are dedicated to the function. Yet, the information produced for these media outlets requires one to know the specific grammar for each platform, the language, and the journalistic and professional values that together create content that the public will be interested in; the work itself is treated as a secondary activity. The disinvestment in human resources to perform the function generates two problems: first, the journalistic information produced for these mediums is treated differently than it is for traditional media, and the ethical values of the platforms diverge from the ethical (deontological) values of journalism, thus generating conflicts of interest that demand constant monitoring by those who produce for the platforms.

The second issue with this data has to do with the value of the work involved in producing content for these environments. The tiny percentage of media and non-media professionals who claim working with social media is their official function is in contrast with the very significant number of people who actually do work in some capacity with platforms. This “discrepancy” demonstrates much more than work overload through the accumulation of functions; it shows the need for constant updating to meet the forever changing algorithms and rules for using platforms. This situation exposes how platforms exploit work, as well as the disinvestment in an activity that ended up adhering to business strategies to obtain presence on networks, attract audiences and convert the various organizations into digital ecosystems.

The prevalence of working remotely, described in the previous section, relies heavily on the online environment and on communication and content management platforms for developing the work of all the professional profiles we studied. What’s more, exposure to the digital environment presents a risk to the safety of professionals and can lead to harassment.

⁹ The performance desk monitors data on programming, or publications to invest in marketing and advertising. However, it is often used to create agendas, identify themes and redirect all types of content production from fictional, journalistic, advertising and political domains. This is also one of the forms of producing disinformation. Business examples: ‘Oi invests in Globo’s Performance Desk’. Available at: <https://telaviva.com.br/06/06/2023/oi-investe-em-mesa-de-performance-da-globo/>

According to the survey, more than one-quarter (29.1%) of participating journalists reported have already suffered cyber attacks or threats. A detailed look at the professional profiles in our study shows that 37.1% of media workers reported being a target of online violence. A slightly smaller percentage (22.4%) of teachers responded that they had already been victims of harassment. It comes as no surprise that the first group is more susceptible to public scrutiny.

Media professionals are exposed to public opinion on a daily basis, and the hostility generated toward this group is fueled by hate speech and disinformation campaigns with the intent to harass and discredit the work of journalists. Additionally, almost one-quarter of journalism teachers reported having suffered online attacks. In their survey conducted with Brazilian journalism teachers, Ebel and Nicoletti (2021) found that the growing violence toward journalists had different repercussions in journalism classrooms across the country, from the self-censorship on the part of teachers who thought twice about publishing content, to sources refusing to speak to students, or even students and teachers being harassed by members of civil society.

In addition to online violence, the Profile of Brazilian Journalists 2021 (Lima et al., 2022) lists surveillance and monitoring by managers as yet another violation of workers' rights. Not only is it an abuse of hierarchy, this action can also intimidate and serve as a form of coercion against free expression of thought. 27.1% of the 2,017 journalists who responded to this question reported having already been monitored by their superiors. The percentage is slightly higher among teachers than the general average (28.6%); however, the three profiles, when analyzed individually, account for around one-quarter of respondents having experienced some form of online monitoring.

This is concerning, especially when analyzing data from people who say they feel overly controlled by their managers or superiors (42.9% of total participants). Moreover, 35% of respondents declared having left a professional activity for fear of suffering some form of backlash or adverse reaction. Among media journalists, this percentage is 37.7%; among teachers, 33.3%; and among non-media workers, 30.8%.

17.8% of journalists stated they had worked under some sort of duress. For teachers, this figure reached 21.1%, higher than that of both media professionals (18.7%) and non-media professionals (15.8%).

The indicators listed above do not only pertain to online interaction for work, or to using platforms and technologies that facilitate privacy violations and monitoring. However, when analyzed together, they raise a red flag about workers' freedom of expression. The research data indicates that the digital environment particularly weakens press professionals; however, it can also be detrimental to journalism teachers. A 2022 report by the National Federation of Journalists (Braga, 2023) on professionals who have been attacked and/or murdered shows that social networks increase exposure, making journalists more vulnerable to attacks, corroborating the data from the Brazilian Journalist Profile (Lima et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The data from the Profile of the Brazilian Journalist 2021 survey (Lima et al., 2022), which we analyzed, confirms the growing precariousness of these professionals' working environments. In addition to precarious pay, these workers are vulnerable to physical attacks and to attacks directed towards their moral and physical integrity, which ultimately can culminate in health problems. The study describes certain elements that make journalists vulnerable to different types of risks, particularly their employability and quality of life. This was true for all verified professional profiles.

When discussing the relationship between precariousness and platformization among journalists, the first thing that draws our attention is the tendency towards more flexible relationships, on-demand and decentralized work, the devaluation of work in the production of information, and the work overload that can lead to illness and stress.

The data from the Journalist Profile 2021 (Lima et al., 2022), in conjunction with other studies on platform journalism, demonstrates that the modes of production have adapted to the standards of platforms, which forces work overload and the constant assessment of workers' productivity through algorithms that equate success or failure to interactivity criteria. These two factors combined place the burden of responsibility on those who produce, not on the strategy nor the business.

The platformization of journalism has led to increasingly precarious working environments for these professionals. In addition to precariousness (and as a result thereof) we have platforms like Google and Facebook which control advertising budgets, thus interfering in the economic life of traditional journalistic companies. Furthermore, since the productive logic of platforms operates with data, it dictates productive routines, such as, for example, how to research, write, and publish, and who the news is produced for. The attention market, in other words, the audience, is also controlled by platform companies, resulting in the monetization of audience data, or programmatic advertising. What this means is that platform companies are becoming the real publishers, an aspect that has been the subject of study by many researchers (Bell et al., 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Jurno & D'Andréa, 2020; Silva et al., 2020; Wang, 2020; Barros et al., 2021; Kalsing, 2021; Longhi, Silveira & Paulino, 2021).

These conditions "characterize gig journalism, leaving journalists vulnerable to employer decisions and economic changes in the media industry, unless there is strong union intervention and clear definition of work activities" (Amado; Márquez-Ramirez; Waisbord, 2021, p.258). In the case of Brazilian journalism, the low rate of unionization and the monopolized structure of the media system are factors that contribute to the vulnerability of the profession. Moreover, "In the context of precarious work, the industrial reserve of workers, expelled from formal work relationships — and writing — seeks means on platforms to carry out a professional activity" (Barros et al., 2021, p.8).

The conclusion of this study highlights that journalism professionals need collective organization to defend their working conditions, which is fundamental for the quality of information and respect for the citizen's right to be well informed.

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