

# UNSPOKEN CENSORSHIP:

## the perception of Brazilian journalists on the editorial control “in the newsrooms”<sup>1</sup>



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**ABSTRACT** – As a result of a national survey that sought to identify the journalists’ perception on aspects related to journalistic freedom, we have found that the vast majority identified a high degree of control over journalistic practice that starts from the internal corporate environment, which is not visible to the public eye. The survey was carried out between September 2015 and March 2017. We base our work on the scientific studies of journalism that constitute the so-called organizational theory. In order to update the theory, we have examined the reality of the “newsrooms” in order to understand the current editorial control mechanisms, which are implicitly driven.

**Key words:** Editorial control. Organizational theory. Journalism. Censorship.

### **CENSURA TÁCITA: a percepção de jornalistas brasileiros sobre o controle editorial “nas redações”**

**RESUMO** – Resultante de uma pesquisa nacional que procurou identificar a percepção dos jornalistas sobre aspectos relacionados à liberdade jornalística, verificamos que a grande maioria identifica um alto controle sobre o trabalho jornalístico, controle que parte do ambiente interno e que não é identificado pela figura abstrata do público. O survey foi aplicado entre setembro de 2015 a março de 2017. Fundamentamos nosso trabalho nos estudos científicos do jornalismo que constituem a chamada teoria organizacional. Com vistas à atualização da teoria, verificamos a realidade do chamado “jornalismo de redação”, para se compreender os mecanismos de controle atual, os quais são acionados tacitamente.

**Palavras-chave:** Controle editorial. Teoria organizacional. Jornalismo. Censura.

## **CENSURA TÁCITA: la percepción de los periodistas brasileños sobre control editorial “en las salas de prensa”**

**RESUMEN** – De una encuesta nacional que intentó identificar la percepción de los periodistas sobre aspectos relacionados a la libertad periodística, verificamos que la mayoría identifica un alto control sobre el trabajo periodístico que parte del ambiente interno y que no é identificado por la figura abstracta del público. La encuesta fue aplicada entre septiembre de 2015 a marzo de 2017. Fundamentamos nuestro trabajo en los estudios científicos del periodismo que constituyen la llamada teoría organizacional. Con vistas a la actualización de la teoría, verificamos la realidad del llamado “periodismo de redacción”, para comprender los mecanismos de control actual, los cuales son accionados tacitamente.

Palabras clave: Control editorial. Teoría organizacional. Periodismo. Censura.

### **1 Introduction**

In 1904, Joseph Pulitzer, owner of the *New York World* at the time and main enthusiast and supporter of the first school of journalism in the United States, wrote about the power of public opinion and its relationship with journalism. According to him: “Sometimes nothing is clearer than the press’ supreme mission of opposing against the public opinion” (2009, p.65). Although he was admittedly a supporter of journalism as a way of conveying popular aspirations, Pulitzer had already noticed that a line was required between contrasting editorial and public opinion.

The concept of journalism as discussed lately by scholars propose paradigmatic revision to the field in considering new conditions or other external factors. One of the novelties pointed out as an imperative of post-industrial journalism is a deepening in the trend for public participation at different steps of the news production process. The audience would, now more than ever, be discerning at each stage of fact selection. Watching over journalism meticulously, ever

since it also gained access to other forms of information outlets and it has even turned into “producers” of content as well.

In this way, gatekeepers lose power in the process of selecting the content that will be published. Giving way for the audience to rate the relevance of content – which is disseminated by algorithms and metrics online and is supported by sheer user input volume. The endless potential for content search on the internet reveals the semantics of content which goes beyond a carefully audited journalistic product. The public would also be able to determine the relevance of the news, by their order and arrangement on websites, as pointed out by Bruns (2011).

The enthusiasm of scholars and researchers influenced by cultural studies is reinforced by the alleged active role that the audience starts to play in its “participation / collaboration” on journalistic practice. The criteria of news’ values would then be more subject to the public’s role as the audience<sup>2</sup>, which, from one point of view, represents a redefinition of the productive routine – to the extent of signifying a “popularization” of journalism. This makes it more connected to public interests and thus more democratic, more truthful and ethical, as is suggested by a significant part of the studies on the initiatives of “independent journalism”. This popular pressure would make journalism itself more popular, in the sense of representing people’s aspirations, as proposed by Jesús Martín-Barbero (1997).

If this is true, newsrooms would be less susceptible to the interests of political and economic groups, including the media owners. In this new order, journalism would be subordinate to the interests of the people. In other words, control over journalistic practice would be less determined by the internal rules that constitute what is understood as the editorial line, associated with ideological aspects, so that journalists would be more receptive to fluctuation in the public opinion.

This possible new reality of journalism contradicts what Robert Darnton proposed in the article “Journalism: all the news that fits we print”. According to him, journalists write for their “reference group”, which are the journalists themselves. In other words, journalists write to journalists, “because reporters are the most voracious readers, and need to earn their status daily by exposing themselves to their professional colleagues” (Darnton, 2010, p.78).

Darnton’s perception of journalistic practice is echoed by other works from at least two major theoretical framework of journal-

ism, which define it from aspects related to the logic of managing the professionals staff working in a newsroom, making the audience a secondary element in what regards to editorial control. The analyses from the first major theoretical framework considers the relations established between internal groups, but seen as relations determined by management mechanisms assimilated by those working in a given organization, so that these characteristics become part of what is understood as the organizational culture. A second theoretical framework starts from the productive logic that verifies which routine aspects configure a proper way of working, defining what is inside the professional field of journalism.

Proposing a reflection on the subject, we present the results of a research that sought to map aspects of degree of control over the journalistic practice carried out “in the newsrooms” from Brazil, based on a survey that collected information for a representative sampling of the journalists’ self-perception. The study sought to identify aspects related to journalistic freedom. We have found that journalists identified a high degree of control over journalistic work in the newsroom environment, in opposition to research that indicated a growth in the audience participation on journalism.

## 2 Researching procedures

The research “Journalistic Freedom” (Messagi et al., 2017), published by members from the Department of Communication of the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), with the support of the Brazilian Federation of Journalists (Fenaj) and its affiliated trade unions, outlines a current scenario of the Brazilian journalists’ perception about their professional autonomy, examined aspects of editorial control in the newsrooms.

The study is inspired by the *Perfil do Jornalista Brasileiro* (Mick & Lima, 2013), according to which the population of Brazilian journalists was of 145 thousand professionals in 2012. Data collecting was carried out by an online survey taken from a hyperlink spread by email and published on journalists’ trade unions’ websites, web portals for journalists and by emails sent from journalism course coordinators to graduates, with the support of professors. Social networks were also used to reach journalists from all around the country, through the creation of a fanpage ([www.facebook.com/](http://www.facebook.com/)

liberdadejornalística/) managed and led by scientific initiation scholarship holders<sup>3</sup>, from the Universidade Federal do Paraná. Phone calls were also made to journalists from several Brazilian States so that they could help disseminate the survey in their regions or answer the survey, especially in states where the response rates were below the minimum needed to reach the goal established.

As a dissemination strategy, in addition to the fanpage, which has accumulated more than a thousand likes in the period, promotional artwork was created to be sent as email-marketing and posts on social networks. The pieces had three basic aims: giving national visibility to the project, specific dissemination in states where more responses were required and encourage respondents to the disclosure of more data. More than thirty pieces were created, as well as videos and frequent posts to disseminate the survey. *Facebook's* Messenger tool was also used to spread the hyperlink.

**Image 1** – Standard artwork to disseminate the survey (Answer and share the survey! Is there journalistic freedom in Brazil?)



Source: Fanpage 'Journalistic Freedom'<sup>4</sup>.

The survey contained 42 questions and sought to map more explicit and direct forms of editorial control on journalism over the past five years, under the assumption that the lifespan of careers in journalism companies are increasingly shortening. The survey's form assumes that the control often takes on a subtle, organizational fea-

ture, propagated by punishment and reward mechanisms inside the companies. The survey's target, therefore, was made up of journalists who worked directly for media outlets.

**Table 1** – Answers by State

State	Answers	Percentage	Representativeness	Difference
Acre	5	0.3	3	2
Alagoas	23	1.2	23	0
Amapá	11	0.6	12	-1
Amazonas	22	1.1	17	5
Bahia	69	3.5	102	-33
Ceará	67	3.4	51	16
Distrito Federal	128	6.6	147	-19
Espírito Santo	27	1.4	66	-39
Goiás	51	2.6	48	3
Maranhão	15	0.8	17	-2
Mato Grosso	29	1.5	16	13
Mato Grosso do Sul	48	2.5	29	19
Minas Gerais	120	6.1	218	-98
Pará	35	1.8	28	7
Paraíba	41	2.1	38	3
Paraná	227	11.6	113	114
Pernambuco	83	4.2	38	45
Piauí	22	1.1	25	-3
Rio de Janeiro	187	9.6	366	-179
Rio Grande do Norte	27	1.4	20	7
Rio Grande do Sul	145	7.4	137	8
Rondônia	14	0.7	7	7
Roraima	4	0.2	5	-1
Santa Catarina	146	7.5	193	-47
São Paulo	351	18	987	-636
Sergipe	25	1.3	16	9
Tocantins	31	1.6	18	13
Total	1,953	100	2,740	

Source: Messagi et al. (2017).

The survey reached all Brazilian states. The estimated proportional representation of journalists in each state can be seen in Table 1. The states above in which the minimum number of answers were obtained were randomly used for those who have not reached the minimum limit for the proportional representativeness coefficient. That was the case of Amapá, Bahia, Distrito Federal, Espírito Santo, Maranhão, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, Roraima, Santa Catarina and São Paulo. Nevertheless, it is necessary to keep in mind that in the states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro, it was not possible to reach the minimum goal considering the proportional distribution of valid answers. Thus, the minimum representativeness per state proposed by Mick and Lima (2013) was reduced, reflecting on the degree of national reliability, with negative impacts in these states, where the number of answers was below 50% of the representativeness.

The survey had more than 2,500 answers by journalists from distinct newsrooms in the country of which 1,953 responses were considered valid (answered in more than 90%). The survey form remained open from September 2015 to March 2017 and therefore it was a self-applied survey. One speculation raised by the research group about the difficulties in reaching the minimum representative goal is that journalists who did not identify themselves with the conditions assumed by the questions probably did not continue to answer them. Unlike the *Perfil do Jornalista Brasileiro* which included all journalists in their wide-ranging different conditions; the main target of the Freedom survey were journalists who work specifically in journalism companies – otherwise who are primarily known as “newsroom journalists”. This restriction, notable from the structure of the survey’s questions, was very possibly an obstacle for obtaining a higher number of answers. However, if we only consider the population of journalists who work under the restrictive conditions selected for the sampling, the reliability of the survey increases as nearly half of the respondents did not work in “newsroom journalism”, as the *Perfil dos Jornalistas Brasileiros* indicates.

We have considered only those who responded not to hold head positions and journalists not working in press advisory or other positions identified as “outside the media”, which was the case of professors. Thus, 641 valid answers were excluded. Also removed from the count were the journalists who identified themselves in managerial positions or who owned media companies, a total of 361 people.

These groups were disregarded because journalists in the position of managers or owners are unlikely able to identify control or would indicate favorable responses to that condition, since they usually are the ones who hold that power. If we had considered the responses of this

group, we would have a considerable distortion of the results, close to a 30% degree, which would weaken the analyses. Those who work in advisory or outside the media were also disregarded, as they could not identify the aspects of control and freedom, not being inside the targeted environment or not producing content directly for journalistic vehicles.

Thus, 1,058 valid answers were considered, which corresponds to a sample of 0.72% in relation to the estimated universe. Still, even if we consider the universe of 145,000 journalists established by the mentioned *Perfil do Jornalista Brasileiro*, and thus converting the estimated universe into a specific population, we will have, based on Santos (n.d.), a sampling error of 3% and a confidence level of 95% on the data obtained. The data presented consider simple random sampling, in which all elements are equally likely to be selected. When we exclude respondents apart from the selected group, we have an even higher level of reliability. The following formula has been used:

$$n = \frac{N \cdot Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p) + e^2 \cdot (N - 1)}$$

Where:

n – sample

N – population

Z – standardized variable associated with the confidence level

p – true probability of the event

e – sampling error

In this paper, we have selected the answers to questions concerning how editorial control is exerted in the journalistic practice. We present five charts from which the analysis was developed, associating results to the theoretical framework proposed for this research. In this way and within the limits of the procedures adopted for data collection, no particularities or specific aspects of employment contracts were considered. A more accurate result, in our view, would require other researching methods.

### 3 Amid fears and certainties

When Warren Breed<sup>5</sup> published the paper “Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis” in the scientific magazine



Social Forces, in 1955, starting a new theoretical approach to journalism, working conditions in US newsrooms were characterized by Taylorist-Fordist production modes.

In the book "Principles of Scientific Management", Taylor establishes five fundamental principles for the scientific organization of work (Braverman, 1987). Taylorism was initially taken as a method for managing labor in the industrial sector, but was soon extended to the tertiary sector as well, reaching the journalistic companies, whose operations combined work processes from both sectors, i.e. industrial (printing) and services (news and articles writing). As it is in administration, in journalism the rationalization of work is invariably associated with control, and there the problem lies in the clash of interests. Not only from the sociological point of view, in which one notes the increase of processes of work exploitation, as observed by Braverman (1987), but mainly for journalism the impact on the journalistic autonomy, an ideological aspect that is concerned with the ethical foundations of the profession. For journalists the issue is even more complex as Taylorism reduces the autonomy of degree of the production in lower sectors, ignoring any intellectual work.

Once autonomy is relativized by the control processes of organizational production, other issues become part of the decisions about which subjects, sources, images or words will be chosen, not restricted to the public interest alone. That is, the theorists who have focused on this theme found that the journalistic product results from factors external to the very facts that originate the news. Hence, there arises a noticeable ethical core, calling into question the credibility of the work done by these professionals.

For this reason, in journalism, the perception about managerial policies is scrutinized from a more critical lens, considering that they not only affect the productive routines, but the news itself and, consequently, the perception of third parties about the state of reality.

The principle of the theory proposed by Breed is in the controlling relation that those who occupy higher positions (executives: media owners and editors) in a journalistic organization exert on those who hold subordinate positions (staffers: reporters). It begins as follows (Breed, 1955, p.327): "Top leaders in formal organizations are makers of policy, but they must also secure and maintain conformity to that policy at lower levels". That means that, as important as defining the internal rules in a certain organization, it is critical to ensure that employees follow those rules.

Inspired by the Gatekeeping Theory proposed by David Manning White, which sought to understand the stages of the news selection pro-

cess inside newsrooms, Warren Breed started from the internal relations, with a critical and sociological look at the control of news production.

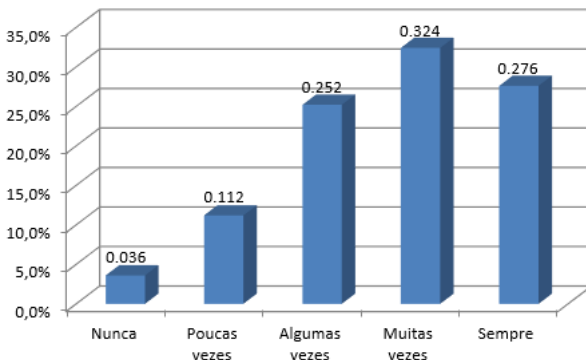
According to Breed (1955), control policies in the newsrooms generate the conformity of journalists, making them more susceptible to accept certain impositions. These, in turn, may be linked to particular interests related to political or economic factors imposed on journalism.

To ensure that the rules are followed or to teach staffers a company policy, the organization needs to use resources that restrain the journalist beyond the conduct manuals. The most extreme resources used in this sense are rebuke or penalties which, when directed against a journalist, not only have the power to restrain them, but also serve as example to others, causing an effect with collective consequences.

The mechanisms in such cases vary, on the one side: promotions, awards and selection for the most relevant journalistic stories, for those who adjust to the editorial line of the media outlet, i.e. for those who comply and conform; and on the opposite side: career stagnation, selection to the least relevant (“street hole”) cases and subject to layoffs, ultimately, for those who flout.

This condition led us to seek and identify how journalists perceive the relation between their supposed autonomy and the editorial line of the media outlet for which they work. This question undoubtedly expresses a clear distinction between the two interests, but, furthermore, they are signs of dissatisfaction, journalists’ fear about their contractual status, and rewards guaranteed for the most conformed, as can be noted from the following charts.

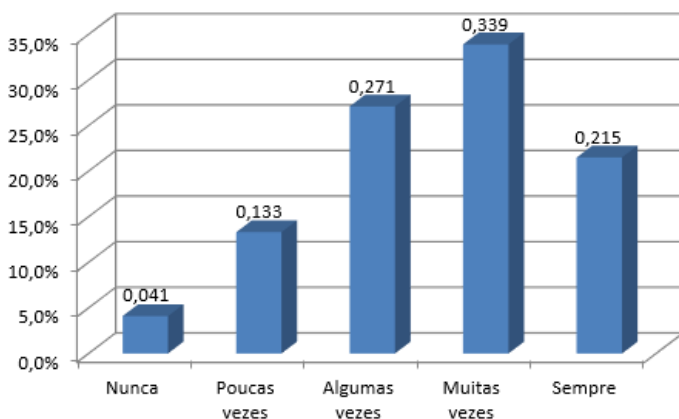
**Chart 1** – Do you believe that journalists who are ideologically aligned with the companies are promoted more often?



(Never / A few times / Sometimes / Many times / Always )

Source: Messagi et al. (2017).

**Chart 2** – Do you believe that journalists who are not ideologically aligned with their companies are fired more often?



( Never / A few times / Sometimes / Many times / Always )  
 Source: Messagi et al. (2017).

In both cases, the number of journalists who identify ideological control over journalistic practice is considerably high, which is often perceived when the journalist is not ideologically aligned. The indices of journalists that identify a type of control that occurs through punishment, in this case the layoff of journalists, exceed 95%. A similar index can be seen in the inverse question presented by Chart 1, in which 96% of journalists believe that promotions are given to those who are ideologically aligned with the company.

Therefore, the charts present factors that are not associated with business aspects, even though these may be present in the news production logics. But the ideological-political guidelines are the ones that remain present in the workplace.

Thus, if there is an atmosphere of journalists' anxiety about their future as professionals, while at the same time there exists the certainty of benefits for those who corroborate the companies' positions, it is quite possible that discontent is overshadowed both by the fear of losing job and by the certainty on which ways can lead them to a better outcome. Under these circumstances, the journalists produce content aligned with company ideology by passive coercion that does not need to be altered by the owners. This creates friction between the editor and journalists which generates weariness and discontent. Obedience to the editorial line is established as a condi-

tion for working, regardless of the interactional relations in the work environment, which seem to lose strength in these times.

As Darnton (2010) demonstrates, one of the reward mechanisms in the daily life of newspapers is the designation for interesting journalistic stories. In such cases, it is more likely that the journalists who usually is designated for the best stories will be able to gain greater prominence in the newspaper, and this will also make them stronger candidates for higher positions. Obviously, these games, which include more complex rewarding elements than simply financial issues, are quite subtle and are used as control mechanisms in the newsroom. Darnton (2010) understands this process as part of the strategy to reinforce behaviors that are positively or negatively interpreted by persons in higher positions. This way, the process of adaptation by the journalists to the values of the newsroom occurs through mechanisms implicit in the daily work.

But there are also the explicit mechanisms that appear, for example, through public praise, which becomes more relevant the higher the position occupied in the newsroom hierarchy by the person who uttered the compliment. Cash prizes or promotions also reinforce the kind of behavior expected at the workplace.

“Resistance” or “against board ideology” arises through chats in hallways, bathrooms or coffee rooms by mocking and joking against bosses. There are also subgroups of journalists in the newsroom who are organized by age, lifestyle, working time or cultural background. In this way, Darnton adds important factors to the theory developed by Breed, observing the formation of another reference group, which arises parallel to the main group, since this subgroup also becomes a reference for the journalists. The difference is that such subgroups, due to the relations of trust built, are less subject to the company’s interests. It is usually to those subgroups that the journalists turn when they want an opinion on the internal problems faced in the newsroom day-to-day, such as conflicts with editors.

The secondary group can also help journalists to turn their attention to certain subjects or to the definition of the journalistic agenda, by sharing information sources, for example. For the journalists, the results of their work are valued in proportion to the recognition of their group, since, after all, the group colleagues may also be contact bridges to new job opportunities in the future.

These practices have been gradually stifled by control mechanisms that are not necessarily spelled out by layoff threats. And

this is for a very simple reason: in countries such as Brazil, where the most precarious conditions in the job market tend to make the weaker employment contracts prevail, most journalists cannot claim to have a solid job.

Although some consider it an advantage in favor of journalistic freedom, as journalists who work as freelancers<sup>6</sup> may observe (Oliveira, 2010), the job without a stable contract of employment, in most cases falls into the category of precarious work, in which professionals assume the risks for production without the guarantees they will be published and paid for the work performed.

In the search for “a place in the sun”, as hired workers with the due registration in their Brazilian work cards (which are more like small notebooks), freelancers seek to adjust to the editorial demands of each media outlet, sometimes even by paying for production costs and by accepting to give content for payments below the journalists’ minimum wages, established regionally by trade unions’ agreements.

This movement observed in conventional journalistic companies involves many of the processes of productive restructuring, a concept observed more deeply by the Sociology of Work. The “wage condition”, perceived as a characteristic of a society where work is perceived as central to social relations, is in decline nowadays in Europe, and much more so in Brazil, where conditions are more precarious. Words such as flexibility, individualization, outsourcing, subcontracting, deregulation and work automation are becoming more common. According to Castel (1998), these transformations led to the fall of the social-democratic model, where the Welfare State was the main actor, reconfiguring labor relations around the world.

Under conditions in which there is this “uncertainty of the future” hanging above, marked by the absence of work contract and social protection, it does not matter how skilled the worker is, feelings of insecurity and submission emerge. In the case of journalism, the foundation of autonomy is weakened, as well as other professional values, constrained by the need to survive in the profession, while facing a “reserve army of labour”, to use a Marxist expression – meaning the surplus of workers that causes reductions in the value of labor power, due to the disproportionate supply in relation to the demand for employment (Antunes, 1995).

#### 4 A not so “invisible” censorship

When Darnton (2010) described the environment of US newsrooms in the 1960s and 1970s, he pointed out the hierarchy of power relations based on the physical organization itself, which signaled the degree of prestige the journalist held before others.

The editor-in-chief commands from an office, and the assistant editors direct groups of ‘editorships’ [...] at one end of the room, standing out by its distinct arrangement of furniture and enclosed behind a low height office partition. They are distributed in four sectors. First, some rows of famous journalists led by the most notable ones [...]. Next are three rows of reporters and copy editors, who sit next to the most notable journalists at the front of the room, so that they can be near the commanding posts by the time of completion. Then a string of middle-aged veterans who have made a name and are reliable for any story. Finally, a band of early-career young reporters, at the back of the room, the youngest occupying the most removed places. (Darnton, 2010, pp.78–79).

Current conditions change the makeup of the “newsroom journalism” environment, in which the reference was the physical space occupied by professionals who established relations with each other and from which the news was structured. The changes include a reorganization of journalistic work that includes conditions that overlap with group strategies and extending editorial control mechanisms but making them less noticeable.

For Bourdieu, editorial control mechanisms are no longer those in which power relations are made explicit by the imposition of ideas through straight orders or layoff threats. For the most part this power does not need to be explicit, as it is structurally established when some have much more sanctioning power than others, so that the conditions of relations between journalists and media owners, represented in the newsrooms by the ones on decision-making positions, are already implied. This allows us to understand that

[...] everyone who has the **privilege** of investing in the game [...] accepts the unspoken contract that is implied in participating of the game, in recognizing it this way as worthy to be played, and that it unites them together with all the other participants by a kind of original collusion. (emphasis added) (Bourdieu, 2004, p.173)

Therefore, by claiming for themselves the right to represent the public interest, the journalists build a power relation over the domain of information and techniques that determine a way of do-

ing, as delimited by the knowledge field, but according to Bourdieu (2004) that is a symbolic power, since it is exerted in structuring conditions that determine a private reason.

Following the reasoning we propose here, working conditions are now becoming less secure, from the point of view of contracts, for an increasing number of professionals. Thus, we have an increasingly sharper division between groups of journalists working for newspaper companies, separated by stable or unstable working conditions. This sociological approach seeks to understand the situation resulting from applying neoliberal ideas that promote productive restructuring, privatization, downsizing of the State, fiscal and monetary policies that favor financial capital, take away workers' rights, fight against "left wing unionism" and disseminate individualism. The result of these changes has been a deepening of fragmentation, heterogenization and complexification of the working class, as well as the weakening of class organizations (Antunes, 2000).

But when we talk about journalism, we need to add more particular conditions of the professional field that include other complexities, such as the so-called business model crisis, stemming from the market reorganization under the impact of digital technologies, and the drop in revenue from advertisers who have been migrating to direct communication channels with the audience that are generally more efficient from the point of view of Advertising. The digital environment becomes more relevant turning many traditional newsrooms into connected environments that enter a competition based on high productivity and low cost. Click-baiting news gains more relevance, together with the news production by drops, trivialities and lists in the 'buzz-feed' model, and content that uses information produced by other vehicles and news agencies, or resulting from the commercial department negotiations.

Added to this is the diversification in content offered over the Internet, especially on sites that offer free content, as well as social networks, youtubers, streaming services, among other initiatives that are now competing in smaller or even similar degrees of exposure, with the major brands of journalism that vie for the audience attention, whether in the mass market or in the niche market.

By laying off of journalists with high salaries, cost cuts, production restructuring and graphic and editorial reforms, journalism companies try to compensate the drop in revenue that started from the popularization of the internet. This has intensified in recent years, resulting in

dire financial situations for some companies to the point of pressuring many to review its practices, sell their businesses or simply “shut down”.

The drop in revenue suffered by traditional printed newspapers in different countries, such as *Le Monde* (France), *The Guardian* (England), *El País* (Spain), *The New York Times* (USA) show the exhaustion of the traditional business model. Also in Brazil, the reflexes of the crisis are noticeable in the process of downsizing the newsrooms, from the reduction of job positions in the area and the closing down of printed periodicals. Among the traditional periodicals that were recently closed, we can mention *Gazeta Mercantil* (2009), *Jornal do Brasil* (2010), *O Estado do Paraná* (2011), *Jornal da Tarde* (2012), *Diário do Povo* (2012), *Diário do Comércio* (2014), *O Sul* (2014) and *Brasil Econômico* (2015). (Carvalho, 2018, p.132).

According to a survey conducted by Volt Data Lab (2018), 2,126 journalists were dismissed from the Brazilian newsrooms from January 2012 to January 2018 at 79 traditional media outlets in the country.

In order to fill the gap left by the reduction of job positions in the newsrooms, news outlets wishing to maintain the supply of news products bet on three generally associated solutions. The first was to increase the productivity of journalists who remain employed, motivated by an increasingly multitasking routine, flexible working hours and the use of technological resources to speed up and automate the work. The second was purchasing the news produced by specialized agencies or using content produced by press advisories from several organizations. The third was subcontracting professionals, with different degrees of association to the company. Some established closer ties with more frequent deals, the so-called “*frilas fixas*” [regular freelancers] and “*pejotas*”<sup>7</sup> [individuals paid as legal entities], while others closed deals more sporadically<sup>8</sup>.

These strategies, in line with the pursuit of reducing the cost of journalistic work, opened new areas for debates on journalistic quality and ethics. It is not our intention to do so. Our interest in this topic is that the last two business strategies listed above represent a significant change in working conditions, as they indicate that most production is being done outside the newsroom environment.

There is an empty meaning in the concept of “newsroom journalist” lately considering that much of the content displayed by the journalistic media was not produced in a newsroom or by the companies’ own journalists. Together with the journalists who form the productive core of the major newspaper companies, we observe the coexistence with an increasingly representative margin of a collaborative network of content “providers”, formed by freelancers, legal entities, amateurs, agencies and press offices.



These groups tend to maintain weaker bonds with each other. In turn, journalists in newsrooms tend to conform to work conditions and therefore more susceptible to editorial demands in the face of outside pressure that does not necessarily come from the news-consuming audience, but from other marginal journalists, who are willing to produce content with greater alignment and disposition, and under more precarious conditions than those with regular jobs.

Therefore, when we speak of “newsroom journalists” we are referring to those who identify as their main source of work and remuneration the production directed to journalistic media, in the absence of a more adequate term to classify them as a group. It includes those who maintain an employment bond with the companies, as well as freelancers and “*pejotas*” [legal entities] with frequent output.

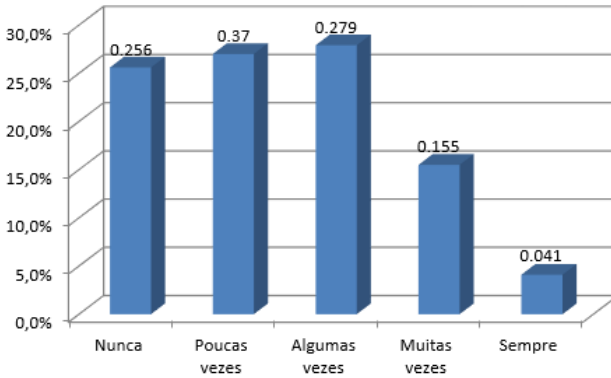
These current conditions of the journalistic work make journalists more willing to “obey” organizational mandates without it being explicit. It is mainly the fear of losing their labor “privileges” or their source of income, haunted by the empty workstations around that reminds them of their present situation, making them susceptible to the editorial mandates.

In an earlier study on the media, more specifically “On Television”, Bourdieu (1997) already pointed critically to the existence of an “invisible censorship” in the newsrooms, which constituted itself as symbolic violence: “exerted with the tacit complicity of those who suffer it and, also often, of those who exert it, insofar as the former and the later are unaware of exerting or suffering it” (Bourdieu, 1997, p.22).

The routine of journalistic production as it is known, that is, by the way it is structured or developed over the years through certain mechanisms of control over the work, reinforces subtle aspects of the exercise of power that often are not noticeable, or that lend a symbolic feature to social and also professional values of freedom and journalistic autonomy, to guarantee an activity capable of serving exclusively the public interests.

Without the need for explicit intervention on journalistic practice, the journalists operate as “self-censors”, previously setting the limits for their practice, considering what may harm or benefit them in the journalistic organization to which they are bonded. When asked about this, 74% of journalists said they had already established to themselves a prior censorship.

**Chart 3** – Have you ever stopped writing, considering or publishing a subject because you understood that the content was contrary to the political orientation or harmed the interests of the company, in the last 5 years?



( Never / A few times / Sometimes / Many times / Always )

Source: Messagi et al. (2017).

In this case, we can consider both the economic aspects, such as the publication of news that affects the reputation of an advertiser, as well as the political-party aspects of groups with which the company has relations. The external factors here are considered to be indirect, since the materialization of control is exerted by the highest positions in the newsroom.

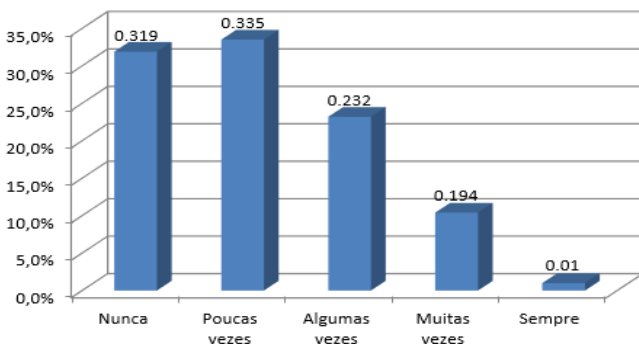
As one can notice in Chart 3, the number of journalists who perceive the existence of an editorial line that contradicted their principles at some point in their career in the last five years is significant. The data shows a self-awareness of the problem of invisible censorship mechanisms, exerted without the need of explicit orders or threats.

According to Bourdieu, these aspects are effects of the symbolic violence exerted on journalists, since it imposes on them limitations to the professional ethos, but with an aspect that makes the verification of control even more difficult: the logic imposed by the production routine makes the exercise of power to be a little or nearly nothing strange to work, naturalizing violence and safeguarding its contradictions to the symbolic field of journalism's internal struggles.

Still, the percentage of journalists who have already identified external interference over their journalistic production is much higher than those who never did so, indicating the high degree of

self-perception journalists have on their condition, as one can verify in the following chart.

**Chart 4** – Have you had any material censored or edited for reasons external to the journalistic field, in the last 5 years?



( Never / A few times / Sometimes / Many times / Always )

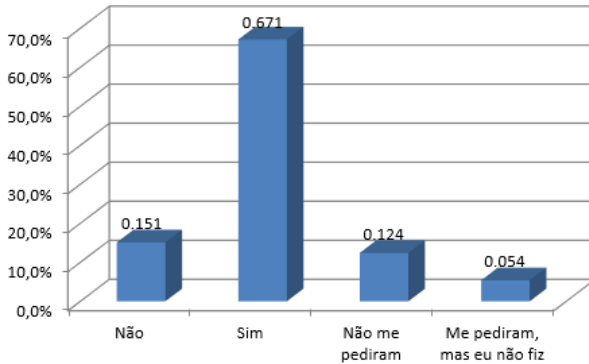
Source: Messagi et al. (2017).

As it can be seen in Chart 4, 68% of the journalists confirm they have suffered some degree of censorship. In this question it was assumed that journalists have identified these external reasons as the political and economic aspects whose interests concern particular groups, including the owners of the company for which they produce news and the sectors that support the company, especially the advertisers.

Censorship would then be exercised not in advance by the journalists themselves, based on their experiences with the media for which they work, but later on, by editorial intervention on the product, resulting in two possible scenarios: absolute censorship or content shelving, or editing of the source material to meet business, political or editorial agendas. In this case, censorship was exercised internally, in the company, but under conditions that are potentially related to external aspects.

Another possible way of interpreting the data is that this control would be exercised by another group. The reasons outside the journalistic field could also involve the participation of the audience. This statement loses strength, however, when we look at the following chart.

**Chart 5** – Have you followed a recommended stories, at the request of the company’s management or of any department outside the newsroom, to serve interests not strictly journalistic, in the last 5 years?



( No / Yes / I wasn't asked to / I was asked to, but I did not )  
Source: Messagi et al. (2017).

Chart 5 also reinforces the theory that journalistic practice is determined by factors external to journalism, since journalists identify external pressures over production that are not related to the audience. However, since the “recommended stories” is allocated internally, it is significant that 67.1% of journalists indicate this type of situation. In this case, interference may be performed by the business department as well as by the company owner. The data indicates an internal control was present in the journalistic work, because even though they are the result of external pressure, they are filtered by the internal division of the journalism company.

One aspect to be considered in this data is that it may have been influenced by the high rate of journalists who indicate that they have already produced content to serve interests not strictly journalistic, such as the growth of branded content, which tends to merge journalism, marketing and advertising into narratives that seek to associate public and private interests. Contextual marketing, native advertising or branded content are among the modalities that appear as novelties demanded by the end of the boundaries between church and state, represented by the approximation between commercial and journalism departments.

## 5 Final considerations

The contributions of Breed, Darnton and Bourdieu regarding the way in which control is exerted over journalism practices rep-

resent important advancements in the understanding of productive logics in journalism.

With the structural changes that are currently imposed on journalistic work, stressed by the difficulty of working from home, freelancing, negotiating work as legal entities, source media, newsrooms downsizing, collaborationism, outsourcing, among other aspects (Anderson et al., 2012; Deuze & Witschge, 2016; Sant'anna, 2009). The question, when addressed to aspects of editorial control, tends to softly reveal the need for a theoretical review of the previous studies in the face of a new context. It is worth considering that this would not apply exclusively to organizational theory<sup>9</sup>.

One of the aspects that weigh against "classic" theories would be that the factors related to organizational culture that affect journalistic work are directly linked to the physical environment, in which the dynamics establish practices transferred by the oldest to the youngest.

Under the current conditions, research should consider the fragmentation of work marked by the virtual, online and mobile environment that advances teleworking. Thus, the question of Deuze and Witschge (2016, p.16) seems very pertinent to us:

These new forms of journalistic organization challenge not only production but also require new routines to be developed. In addition to the fact that focusing on routines belies a daily practice that may not be as stable or solid as it used to be, contemporary changes brought about by disruption and innovation force us to reevaluate the conceptualization of "routine" as an organizational function. This is then a final challenge for journalism researchers: without throwing the baby away with the hot water, how to conceptualize journalistic work by doing justice to both routinized and fluxional working practices, as well as the convergence between such practices?

These interests and their influences on journalistic work are more complex than they seem, as a journalism company deals not only with the economic interests of the company, but also with political, cultural and social factors that puts some degree of pressure on the media owners and consequently the journalists.

Nevertheless, the control is exerted from within the newsroom, but without the need for the constraints that were previously present in the day-to-day of those who took journalism seriously. Today's journalists are more susceptible to control not because they are unaware of their current condition as the data shows, but rather in the historical aspect of the constitution of journalism as a business, foremost. Which results in the weakening of employment contracts, increasing instability

of workplace relationships, and consequently reinforces the susceptibility of journalists to editorial interests. There are few resolutions to this situation, which demonstrate aspects of organizational theory.

This conclusion, which may seem obvious, may only sound natural to those who have no concern about the future of Brazilian journalism, because what is at stake, as the data point out, is credibility, just when one could think that Brazilian journalism has reached some level of maturity. As the data indicate, we are far from it.

## NOTES

- 1 A preliminary version of this article was presented at the IV Encontro Sul-Brasileiro de Professores de Jornalismo, in October 2017. This article includes comments and suggestions done by the participants in the research group “Theory of Journalism”.
- 2 An important distinction in this regard is the idea of audience participation and / or collaboration in journalism.
- 3 The undergraduate students Monique Portela, Gabriela Tres Marniezo and Gabriela Wegner formed this group.
- 4 Retrieved from [www.facebook.com/pg/liberdadejornalistica/photos/](http://www.facebook.com/pg/liberdadejornalistica/photos/).
- 5 American graduate in Journalism and Sociology. Professor of Sociology at Tulane University in New Orleans, he had as academic advisors the functionalist theorists Robert K. Merton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld.
- 6 Here it is worth rescuing the etymological meaning of the word (freelancer), related to a liberal aspect, in which it is possible to “freely” offer the labor power to the market. In adverse conditions for the freelancer, generally established by the market itself as it does not offer stable conditions to everyone, there is a tendency to reduce these values and compromise the working and living conditions of those who submit to these conditions. Which reminds us that the concept of freedom, expressed by the English word “free”, is not synonymous with liberalism.
- 7 These are the journalists who start a small business and then are hired as legal entities to perform the same work of journalists hired as individuals, but without labor benefits.
- 8 These work modalities are a trend in the Brazilian market. The labor

reform implemented by the government of President Michel Temer from 2016 to 2018 facilitates such process, with the possibilities of outsourcing the core activity and intermittent temporary contracts.

- 9 See Charron, J., & Bonville, J. (2016). *Natureza e transformação do jornalismo*. Florianópolis: Insular; Brasília: FAC Livros.

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