DOSSIER

BETWEEN PARTNERSHIPS, INFRASTRUCTURES AND PRODUCTS:

Facebook Journalism Project and the platformization of journalism[1]

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ABSTRACT – Our objective in this paper is to present and discuss the complexification of the process of platformization of journalism by *Facebook*, triggered by the implementation of the Facebook Journalism Project (FJP), in January 2017. Since then, the platform has been associating itself with new and varied actors, expanding its fronts and positioning itself as a coordinator of activities related to journalistic institutions. At the same time, it continued to offer itself as an infrastructure for the development of journalistic products and businesses. Based on the Platform Studies and methodologically inspired by the Cartography of Controversies, we present the FJP and public demonstrations by journalists, researchers and other actors involved in its implementation. The diversification of partnerships, the inclusion of pedagogical actions, the renegotiation of prescriptive and normative dimensions that guide journalistic institutions, and the consolidation of the platform as an infrastructure are the main issues discussed at the conclusions.
Key words: Platform. Algorithms. Controversies. Journalism. *Facebook.*

ENTRE PARCERIAS, INFRAESTRUTURAS E PRODUTOS:
Facebook Journalism Project e a plataformização do jornalismo

RESUMO – Nosso objetivo neste artigo é apresentar e discutir a complexificação do processo de plataformização do jornalismo pelo *Facebook*, a partir da implementação do Facebook Journalism Project (FJP), em janeiro de 2017. Desde então, a plataforma vem se associando a novos e variados atores, ampliando suas frentes de atuação e se posicionando como uma coordenadora de atividades relacionadas às instituições jornalísticas. Ao mesmo tempo, continuou a se oferecer como infraestrutura para o desenvolvimento dos produtos e negócios jornalísticos. Ancorados nos Estudos de Plataforma e inspirados metodologicamente na Cartografia das Controvérsias, apresentamos o FJP e manifestações públicas de jornalistas, pesquisadores e outros atores interessados em sua implementação. A diversificação das parcerias, a inclusão de ações pedagógicas, a renegociação das dimensões prescritivas e normativas que orientam as instituições jornalísticas, e a consolidação da plataforma como infraestrutura são algumas das questões discutidas ao final do artigo.
Palavras-chave: Plataforma. Algoritmos. Controvérsias. Jornalismo. *Facebook*.

ENTRE ALIANZAS, INFRAESTRUCTURAS Y PRODUCTOS:
Facebook Journalism Project y la plataformización del periodismo

RESUMEN – Nuestro objetivo en este trabajo es presentar y discutir la complejización del proceso de plataformización de periodismo por parte de *Facebook*, a partir de la implementación del Facebook Journalism Project (FJP), en enero de 2017. Desde entonces, la plataforma se ha ido asociando con nuevos y variados actores, ampliando sus frentes y posicionándose como coordinadora de actividades relacionadas con las instituciones periodísticas. Al mismo tiempo, continuó ofreciéndose como infraestructura para el desarrollo de productos y negocios periodísticos. Basados en los Estudios de Plataforma e inspirados metodológicamente en la Cartografía de Controversias, presentamos el FJP y demostraciones públicas de periodistas, investigadores y otros actores interesados en su implementación. La diversificación de las alianzas, la inclusión de acciones pedagógicas, la renegociación de las dimensiones prescriptivas y normativas que orientan las instituciones periodísticas, y la consolidación de la plataforma como infraestructura son algunos de los temas discutidos al final del artículo.
Palabras clave: Plataforma. Algoritmos. Controversias. Periodismo. *Facebook*.

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present and discuss how the process of platformization of journalism, that has already been addressed, became more complex through the implementation of the Facebook Journalism Project (FJP). With the launch of FJP, in January 2017, *Facebook* gradually broadened its fronts of action, became associated with new and diverse actors connected to journalistic activities and launched a number of initiatives in favor of journalistic institutions, especially what it called "local journalism". Since then, we have seen *Facebook* expand its area of action in the field of news production, providing spaces for exchanging experiences and dialoguing with

professionals of the journalistic industry, thereby positioning itself as a platform coordinator of activities related to journalism.

In the PhD dissertation that originated this paper (Jurno, 2020), we proposed that the process of platformization of journalism by *Facebook* can be divided into two periods of time. In the first one, from 2014 to 2016, we observed the platform offer itself as an infrastructure for news publishers, particularly around Instant Articles (IA). A more imposing relationship with journalistic institutions characterizes this phase, especially in terms of economic power, as there was no apparent opening for negotiations and the exchange of experiences. In the second period, from 2017 to 2019, the platform expanded its field of work and began to offer its services as a coordinator of activities related to the journalistic craft. This period marked the beginning of *Facebook's* funding of training and education initiatives for and about journalism, promoting discussions that aimed to improve services, and expanding the offer of infrastructures for the development of products and business. As we discussed in the PhD (Jurno, 2020), the possibility of dividing the process of platformization of journalism into two periods is largely due to the algorithmic controversies (d'Andréa et al., 2019) in which the platform took part throughout 2016, when questions regarding its business model and the agency of its algorithms emerged, and weakened the role of a "reliable sociotechnical agent" claimed by *Facebook*.

In this research, we were inspired by Cartography of Controversies (CC), a method that is "the exercise of crafting devices to observe and describe social debate especially (...) around technoscientific issues" (Venturini, 2010, p.258). By highlighting the debates held in and by journalistic publications, we relied on a "discursive approach" of controversy analysis (Marres, 2015), seeking a closer look into the specificities of these social destabilization movements that rise from digital environments. We adopted the cartographic method (Barros & Kastrup, 2012) that emphasizes the importance of giving up rigid procedures, by establishing a *corpus* to be analyzed a priori, to practice the cartography in a perspective that meets Latour's (2005) recommendation to "follow the ants". We also understand "controversy" as moments when the uncertainty is shared and the associations have not yet been stabilized.

Our theoretical framework is composed of Science and Technology Studies (STS) concepts and, more specifically, Platform Studies, which combine a set of concepts, reflections and

methodological practices that seek to understand the technical, political and economic articulations and dimensions that constitute social media and other online platforms. According to Van Dijck (2013), "platforms are computational and architectural concepts, but can also be understood figuratively, in a sociocultural and political sense, as political stages and performative infrastructures" (p.29). Although they are made up of several layers that mediate actions and restrict the experience of accessing them, the actions of platforms are very often unknown and underestimated (Bogost & Monfort, 2009). The simple fact of choosing a platform results in published content being shaped in accordance with what is possible/permitted by its affordances (Bucher & Helmond, 2017). Therefore, platforms are not "intermediaries" (Latour, 2005) that convey content, but they are "run on account of coded protocols that appear to 'mediate' people's social activities, while in fact steering social traffic" (Van Dijck, 2013, p.145). In this process, they acquire enormous scales, coexist with and even supplant older infrastructures.

The process of penetration of the platforms' logics in the most diverse social sectors is known as "platformization", a notion that refers to "the way in which entire societal sectors are transforming as a result of the mutual shaping of online connectors and complementors" (Van Dijck et al., 2018, p.19). The transformation of economic sectors and aspects of social life from platforms' logics are reinforced by the growing process of "infrastructuralization" of the practices of giants like Google and *Facebook* (Plantin et al., 2018), that increasingly centralize informational flows and rearticulate relationships between diverse publics. To Nechushtai (2018), this is a process of "infrastructural capture", characterized by a relationship of dependence and, therefore, of significant asymmetry. Van Dijck et al. (2018) explain that, in the platformization process, "the creation of *public* value toward the common good is often confused with the creation of *economic* value serving a nondescript amalgam of private and public interests" (p.23, emphasis in the original).

Complementary to this debate on platforms, we understand journalism as a "singular collective" (Jácome, 2020) whose strength lies in the articulation of rhetoric, actors, commercial interests and materiality. Here, we use the term "institutionalized journalism" in reference to the type of craft that is assumed by *Facebook* as "journalism" when prioritizing editorial and commercial partnerships with a certain group

of institutions. This is a conception similar to the concept of "hegemonic journalism" used by Nerone (2015) to characterize "an assemblage of ideas and norms constructed and deployed historically" (p.314), especially between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States. To this author, in the American model ideal, journalism seeks to assume a central role in the process of keeping people informed, to provide information with credibility so that the public can form its opinions, to monitor the environment and the government (Nerone, 2015). This type of journalism means to fulfil its alleged role based on the idea of objectivity.

This article is divided into four sections. In the first one, we provide a more in-depth discussion of the platformization of journalism, presenting a brief history of how *Facebook* has steered this process. We show some specific features of the first period of the platformization process, marked by the implementation of Instant Articles (2015), and summarize the destabilizations in the mediation of *Facebook* throughout 2016. In the following section, we present the Facebook Journalism Project that was launched in January 2017 summarizing its three pillars of operation (product development, training for journalists and news literacy) with a focus on the diversity of institutional actors assembled. In the section on Debating the Facebook Journalism Project, we identify the issues raised through the public manifestations of journalists, researchers and other actors involved in this matter.

In the final section, we return to the main arguments surrounding the specific features of the platform and the platformization process to discuss how its relationship with institutionalized journalism has been transformed and became more complex due to the expansion and to the growing complexity of associations made by the platform. We identify how *Facebook* diversified its modes of insertion in the logic of journalism, starting to include not only actions with pedagogical intentions, such as training, but also a renegotiation of the prescriptive and normative dimensions that guide hegemonic journalistic institutions. At the same time, the platform continued to offer itself as an infrastructure for the development of journalistic products and businesses.

2 The platformization of journalism by *Facebook*: a brief history

One of the social sectors that has been greatly affected by the process of platformization is that of cultural production (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) and, consequently, journalism. The practices that emerge with platforms' actions shape market structures and lead production and cultural goods themselves to become "contingent" (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). This contingency is understood both in the dimension of production, which becomes infrastructurally dependent on a select group of online platforms, and products, that become malleable and open to constant revision and recirculation, are modular in design and informed by datified user feedback (in other words, a feedback mediated and measured by the infrastructures of these same platforms).

Thus, it should be highlighted that the computational architectures of platforms, including those adapted to journalism, are anchored in the production and processing of (meta)data, through algorithms and protocols, and in the presentation, through user friendly interfaces with a certain set of information that reflects strategic choices of the company (Van Dijck, 2013; Gillespie, 2014). By making the content (in)visible, organizing and listing the contents that circulate in these environments (Bucher, 2012), algorithmic mediations contribute heavily to the reorganization of news production, circulation and marketing. These transformations challenge journalistic institutions because, despite offering new opportunities to reach audiences, at the same time they relativize a certain privileged position that has historically been occupied by media organizations (Nielsen & Ganter, 2018).

Van Dijck et al. (2018) include journalism among the various social sectors that have been radically influenced and transformed by platforms' actions, especially the Big Five (Google, Apple, *Facebook*, Amazon and Microsoft)[2]. Nevertheless, they emphasize that the "platformization of journalism" is a result of the interaction between billions of users, advertising networks, news, fact-checking organizations, advertisers and platforms. In other words, it is anchored in a large network of actors and associations that cannot be thought of separately, focusing solely on users or on a certain platform for example.

One of the results of this process is "the great unbundling". According to Van Dijck et al. (2018), "the newspaper as a product is a bundle of news stories and advertisements. Although bundling

was born out of economic necessity, driven by the high costs of producing and distributing news" (p.51), this bundle organized by journalists was what people sought, subscribed to or bought. With the unbundling of news, "each individual story 'becomes a separate product standing naked in the marketplace' which 'lives or dies on its own merits'" (p.52). The journalistic product of a newspaper, provided in the form of an organized bundle to the audience, is transformed into many isolated pieces of content offered in a personalized way to spread users. Although this decentralized circulation has been common for some time, it has been intensified in recent years, especially after platforms began to attract news outlets through native hosting programs. According to Van Dijck et al. (2018), "in these programs, news organizations 'hand over' their content to the core infrastructural platforms where it can be consumed, bought, and connected with advertisements" (p.59). The pressure to find new sources of revenue in a new media scenario and the changes in the allocation of advertising investments has led journalism companies to develop commodification tactics for platform-oriented news.

The process of platformization of journalism may be associated with what Nerone (2015) calls "journalism's crisis of hegemony". To this author, today there are "journalisms" that dispute audiences that were once restricted to a few outlets. However, this multiplication does not produce a new hegemony. The author believes that the current situation suggests that the news and the real world are matters of personal choice: "no doubt this is the direction that social media have so far taken, allowing each individual to construct a news feed that is unique to oneself and largely a reinforcing influence" (p.325). According to Nerone (2015), we are living in a historical time of abundant information, which prospers and circulates more freely from journalistic mediation and favors processes such as the unbundling of news. In this respect, "the crisis of hegemony in journalism is not a crisis in information – although it may entail this in some circumstances. It is a crisis in *coordination*" (p.325, our emphasis).

Therefore, we argue that this crisis in coordination of hegemonic journalism is directly associated with the platformization process. In the case of *Facebook*, we found that this process began in 2014 with the launch of Trending Topics and Paper, the first tools designed specifically for the news industry. Since then, the platform has shaped its architectures, economic models and discourse to

become an "infrastructural platform" (Van Dijck et al., 2018) for journalism. However, it was the launch of Instant Articles (IA), in May of 2015, that definitively transformed the platform's relationship with news publishers (Jurno & d'Andréa, 2020). This tool was created for the publication and circulation of content in a platform "native" format, focusing on users who accessed the platform using mobile devices, offered as a product "to give publishers control over their stories, brand experience and monetization opportunities" (Reckhow, 2015). When adopting the format, publishers delegated this control to *Facebook*, which pre-set the design, affordances and available advertising options. The circulation and reach of content were also delegated to the platform, since IA circulated in news feeds and followed the operating logics of its algorithms.

In a previous work, we argued that Instant Articles should be viewed as "a pioneering and *Facebook's* core initiative for it to become an infrastructural platform for the publication of journalistic content" (Jurno & d'Andréa, 2020, p.181), and thus the protagonist of the first period of the platformization process. The search for an audience and greater reach were determining factors when news publishers agreed to submit to *Facebook's* rules, with all their consequences. Among these rules, we could mention delegating the circulation and organization of journalistic products to the operating logics of algorithms and other socio-material bases of the platform. Although this was not an imposition (publishers were free to accept or reject the proposed terms and paths to take advantage of the wide circulation they would enjoy on the platform and the possibilities of monetizing their content), many professionals claimed that they felt intimidated into using Instant Articles as a form of survival. According to Vivian Schiller, former executive at *NBC* and *The New York Times*, "publishers have little choice but to cooperate with *Facebook*. That's where the audience is. (...) It's too massive to ignore" (as cited in Goel & Somaiya, 2015). However, according to Joe Speiser, founder of LittleThings website, "the hope is that Instant Articles gives publishers way more traffic to make up for the lower monetization potential" (as cited in Marshall, 2015).

The year 2016 was marked by successive destabilizing processes for *Facebook* as a sociotechnical artifact that, rhetorically, placed itself as a neutral facilitator for interpersonal and commercial exchanges. For example, the platform faced issues related to the selection of news in its Trending Topics tool, with accusations

of suppression of news stories with a politically conservative bias (d'Andréa et al., 2019). Following the publication of a story reporting human interference in an automated selection process (Nunez, 2016), Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of *Facebook*, had to testify and provide formal clarifications regarding the workings of Trending Topics to American politicians. Months later, *Facebook* repeatedly deleted the iconic image "The Terror of War", a Pulitzer prize winning photograph, claiming that it contained "child nudity" (Jurno & d'Andréa, 2017). Posts by users from many places around the world and by many news outlets were removed, and even one from the Norwegian Prime Minister, who stated that "to erase posts containing such images is to limit freedom of expression, democracy, the right to criticize and question, and view past events as they actually were, not as they have been deemed to be by one giant corporation" (Solberg, 2016).

After facing various algorithmic controversies[3] (d'Andréa et al., 2019) throughout 2016, we saw *Facebook* call upon journalism as a strategic partner in an attempt to regain control of circulating content. The change in its relationship with and attitude towards journalism institutions effectively stemmed from controversies surrounding the American presidential election. On November 10th, two days after the announcement of Donald Trump's victory, Mark Zuckerberg said that he saw a "profound lack of empathy" in people who believed that the only reason for someone to vote for Trump was the circulation of false news (as cited in Burke, 2016). The *Facebook* CEO also claimed that believing that these news stories influenced the outcome of the election was "a pretty crazy idea". Nine days later, he published on his personal profile information on the development of actions to combat the circulation of misinformation on the platform (Zuckerberg, 2016). According to him, the problem *Facebook* was facing was "technically and philosophically" complex, and the company was taking care "not to discourage sharing of opinions or to mistakenly restrict accurate content. We do not want to be arbiters of truth ourselves, but instead rely on our community and trusted third parties", referring to the journalist partners as this source of trust. In the same post, Zuckerberg highlighted journalistic mediation and claimed that *Facebook* would "continue to work with journalists and others in the news industry to get their input, in particular, to better understand their fact checking systems and learn from them".

3 Facebook Journalism Project: pillars and strategies

The launch of the FJP, on 11 January 2017 (Simo, 2017), sealed a closer relationship between the platform and journalistic institutions. Fidji Simo signed a post presenting the project, at the time the Director of Product Management, stating that it was a great project intended "to establish stronger ties between *Facebook* and the news industry" and that it would be the central pillar to "promote and support journalism". The proposal was to work "together with publishers around the world through trainings, programs, and partnerships" (Simo, 2017) to "help strengthen communities by connecting people with meaningful journalism" (Facebook Journalism Project, 2019).

From the beginning, the initiative has been organized on three fronts: 1) Collaborative development of news products; 2) Training & Tools for Journalists; 3) Training & Tools for Everyone (Simo, 2017). Ever since, every initiative associated with the news industry has been concentrated around the project that renewed *Facebook's* efforts to develop solutions for institutionalized journalism based on the platform's functioning logics. In the words of *CNN* journalist Brian Stelter, the FJP emerged at a crucial time for the platform, which was engaged in battles in several of the sectors in which it operated, "from privacy scandals to failed product launches to misinformation problems" (Stelter, 2019). "Although separate from the company's much-debated efforts to curb misinformation and spam on the platform, the project is related because it's been trying to support the sharing of accurate information", he argued, believing that the project was part of the same major effort to address the misinformation crisis.

The attempt to seek in journalism the expertise that *Facebook* lacked can be exemplified by the hiring of a number of professionals from journalistic institutions who assumed the main executive positions in the project. From the launching, the head of news partnerships has been Campbell Brown, a well-known American journalist, former reporter and television presenter. Another initiative was to form partnerships with third-party fact-checking organizations, when the journalistic mediation was called to define and flag misinformation on the platform (Simo, 2017). Also launched in January 2017, this work front was intended to be a continuation of the measures announced in December 2016, when *Facebook* began "Addressing Hoaxes and Fake News" (Mosseri, 2016). According to

Simo (2017), *Facebook* understood that the problem of misinformation was "much bigger than any one platform".

In Table 1, we have organized the actions highlighted on the FJP website as "key programs and initiatives" of the project. Reading the topics, we can already observe the complexification of the platformization process that has come to involve news literacy projects, hackathons with programmers and the creation of certifications, as detailed below.

Table 1 – FJP actions highlighted by *Facebook*.

Date	Actions highlighted by *Facebook*
11 Jan, 2017	The Facebook Journalism Project is launched
10 Apr, 2017	*Facebook* certificate for journalists
27 Apr, 2017	Providing training and support for local news writing
03 Aug, 2017	Facebook Journalism Project hackathons
11 Oct, 2017	Launch of CrowdTangle for local news
27 Feb, 2018	Digital news subscription accelerator
28 Jun, 2018	Combating misinformation in Brazil
15 Sep, 2018	Expanding news literacy in the classroom
19 Nov, 2018	Community News Project is launched in the United Kingdom
28 Nov, 2018	Training journalists in the Middle East and Africa
01 Dec, 2018	Subscription test is expanded
15 Jan, 2019	Doing more to support local news
06 Feb, 2019	AFP adds Arabic support to the global fact-checking program

Source: author's ellaboration.

Also in January, in the presentation text, when describing the first pillar of the project, "Collaborative development of news products", Simo (2017) affirmed that it was not a new initiative but rather the formation of a closer collaboration between the interested parties, confirming our hypothesis of the complexification of an ongoing process. Facebook Live, Facebook 360 and Instant Articles are cited as examples of products to be improved based on the partners' needs. The executive also highlighted the role of local news as "the starting place for great journalism — it brings communities together around issues that are closest to home".

The creation of new business models and the search for forms of monetization of publisher partners' content was also to be a focus

of work in the first pillar of the FJP. Simo (2017) mentioned the creation of "free trials" so that users could experience the content of publishers before subscribing and the very possibility of subscriptions, both within Instant Articles. There was also the option of including commercial breaks for monetization of content published on video. The possibility of making subscriptions through IA was one of the main requests of professionals throughout that first period of platformization, but the beginning of the tests was only announced a year later, in June 2018 (Hardiman & Salari, 2018). Months later, in December, when the option was already up and running, the executive Salari (2018) declared that the platform actively directed these posts via algorithmic selection. This was done to ensure that users received "more of the content they pay for" and to offer publishers "a direct way to reach their subscribers". In other words, the platform stated that it algorithmically prioritized partners' content for inclusion in users' news feed.

As another part of the first pillar, Simo (2017) announced that several hackathons would be held with professionals from the institutions to discuss and build ideas that would better meet the needs of their journalists. More and larger meetings would also be held between the platform's team and partners to talk about solutions to improve their relationship. In August 2017, the *Facebook* engineering team had already worked with over 350 people from the product, strategy and engineering teams of the journalistic institutions in New York, London, Hamburg and Paris "to hack and build product solutions" (Mangalick, 2017). Piyush Mangalick, a *Facebook* engineer, emphasized that the hackathons were only one of the ways in which the platform collaborated with the organizations and highlighted some of the ideas that emerged during the meetings and which include intense algorithmic agency: helping people to see more perspectives in news feeds; reduce bias through analyzing the "sentiment of stories"; and improve readers' engagement through data generated by *Facebook* to support reporting and monetization.

Another development announced by Simo (2017), also upon the launch of the FJP, was the free provision to all partners of CrowdTangle (CT), a tool for measuring performance. Since its launch, in 2011, CT had made reports "by experimenting with *Facebook's* public API and trying to come up with creative products we could build on top of their social data" (Matt, 2019). Before being acquired by the platform in 2016, it was widespread in the news industry. According to the company executive, CT had become "one of the

leading tools for helping publishers take advantage of social media to tell their stories", through the selection and organization of content published by users on online platforms.

In the second pillar, "Training & Tools for Journalists", the platform offered online courses for institutions' professionals to learn how to take better advantage of *Facebook* products and tools (Simo, 2017). The courses were carried in partnership with the Poynter Institute, a respected institution in the journalism field, that also participated in the creation of the Facebook for Journalists Certificate, institutionalizing the learning of journalists on and through the platform in an initiative with strong normative and pedagogical dimensions. The aim of the courses was to "make it easier" (Jenkins & Kerr, 2017) to use *Facebook* in professionals' production routines, ranging from gathering facts to writing reports. To Kelly McBride, an executive at the institute, it was an honor for Poynter to participate in this "definitive guide for journalists" since it was not possible to "do journalism these days without *Facebook*" (as cited in Jenkins & Kerr, 2017). After almost two years of FJP, over a hundred thousand people had taken the online course (Cole & Kruman, 2019).

Simo (2017) also highlighted *Facebook's* wish to provide "training at scale" for local newsrooms, which would be offered with the collaboration of important journalism organizations such as the Knight Foundation and the International Center for Journalists. Another part of this pillar was the Facebook Accelerator Program, a funding program for local journalism "designed by publishers for publishers". In February 2018, the platform launched a project to help local news publishers build digital subscriptions that, according to Campbell Brown, "are critical to the long-term sustainability of their business" (2018). The program began in the USA, was expanded to the United Kingdom (November 2018) and Brazil (April 2019), and had the objective of "making their business models more sustainable" and "helping them find and retain their audience" (*Facebook*, 2019). In November 2018, the platform launched the Social Media Solutions Program in partnership with the International Center for Journalists to provide "training" for journalists from Middle East and North Africa countries on how to use *Facebook* to achieve their professional goals, and learn to separate "facts" from "fiction" on platforms (Akkad, 2018), reinforcing its support for a type of journalism that is organized around the objectivity ideal (Nerone, 2015).

Finally, FJP has a third pillar, "Training & Tools for Everyone", which offers information to help people "make smart choices" regarding the news they read (Simo, 2017). This information was provided to the public through courses in partnership with educators, journalists and researchers in the field, as the guide launched in partnership with the News Literacy Project. Although *Facebook* normally insists on technological solutions, we observed how the platform also turned to educational solutions, assembling other sectors in the platformization process. There were also scholarships granted to undergraduate journalism students, and training given to professionals through a partnership with the Society of Professional Journalists via Facebook News Partnerships (Brown, 2018). The partnership with fact-checking agencies to combat misinformation on the platform was also part of this pillar.

4 Debating the Facebook Journalism Project

The implementation of a wide project such as the FJP triggered, as expected, an extensive reaction from a broad range of actors involved in the process. In this section, we present a summary of an analytical movement that sought to identify the issues thematized through the public manifestation of journalists, researchers and other actors involved in the process. As we pointed out in the introduction, we sought to adopt a "discursive approach" to digital controversy analysis (Marres, 2015) to observe examples of destabilization and reassembling associated with the platformization of journalism by *Facebook*.

About a month after FJP was launched, researcher Emily Bell (2017) claimed that while journalism was struggling to know how to operate without external influences, *Facebook* was "grappling with" how to occupy, albeit reluctantly, the gap left by the press in crisis. She claimed that, without *Facebook* and *Twitter* "to amplify the diminished messages", "most published news would feel very much like shouting into the wind". To Bell (2017), *Facebook* had become "the exoskeleton of the news industry", with great knowledge and economic power, but still in the novitiate regarding how it exercises its influence.

The only time that *Facebook* spoke about "numbers" related to the FJP in a more broadly way was six months after its launch,

when it published a report stating that the company had spoken to "2,600 publishers around the globe to create a dialogue around how they use our products and how we could make improvements to better support publishers' needs" (Brown & Simo, 2017). According to the executives Brown and Simo, these meetings served to explain how platform's tools worked, such as the news feed and Instant Articles, and entice journalists to publish their articles using them, which resulted in innovations and changes to these and other tools. During those months, *Facebook* had also acted as a sponsor, supporter and/or participant at a number of events in the journalistic arena.

According to the journalist Lucia Moses (2018), of Digiday UK, the major challenge of a project like the Facebook Journalism Project was how to deal with a highly heterogeneous group of news publishers, with various business models and different interests regarding the platform. According to this journalist, the executive in charge of the project (Campbell Brown) prepared for this by organizing meetings with two dozen publishers every six months to give them a first glimpse of the products before they were launched. At these meetings, Brown received the professionals' feedback and "let them hobnob with product executives who previously were just names to publishers" (Moses, 2018). Moses highlighted the intimate environment at the meetings, with some held in the executive's own apartment. Moses claimed that the participants viewed the simple fact of *Facebook* talking to them as "impressive", given that the company demonstrated unwillingness to make itself available for exchanges in the early years. This perception that the relationship with the platform had become closer is shared by Kendra Tucker, an executive at Axios, a digital American news website. In conversation with Moses a year after the launch of the FJP, Tucker stated: "Do we have more control and say over what kinds of product they create? I'm not sure. But at least we get to get our voice into some part of the discussion" (as cited in Moses, 2018).

However, Lucia Moses claimed that many critics said that there was "a lot of talk" and little action: "for all the nice lunches, the power still lies with *Facebook*". According to her, "critics say the initiative hasn't delivered in meaningful ways and is a public relations exercise aimed at placating publisher critics more than anything". She mentions the position of Jim Brady, CEO of Spirited Media, a local digital publishing company. To Brady, who attended

the meetings with publishers, *Facebook* had been more responsive than the previous year, but he had not seen great changes in the products that really benefited local journalism. Even so, he added: "Then again, it's not their job to fix the local journalism problem; it's ours" (as cited in Moses, 2018). This was also the perception of Warren St. John, CEO of *Patch*, a site that collaboratively gathers news and information from local communities. St. John believed that publishers needed to understand that platforms were not going to solve their problems for them or change their business model to save local journalism (Moses, 2018). Furthermore, even if they continued to receive most of the expenditure on digital advertising, which was fundamentally a threat to publishers, platforms sent huge amounts of traffic to these publishers. Meanwhile, Nicholas Carlson, global editor-in-chief of Business Insider, a business news website, was more positive. Carlson told Moses that "they're providing great services, connecting us with audiences and creating amazing forms of media. (...) I don't think [*Facebook* executives] get enough credit for the ways they [enable publishers] to communicate with audiences and monetize" (as cited in Moses, 2018).

      Facebook's efforts were recognized by some professionals, but many remained suspicious of the attempts to form a closer relationship. The editor-in-chief of *BuzzFeed*, Ben Smith, said he believed that Campbell Brown was a real force at *Facebook* who was in favor of news publishers and that the platform's executives "see pretty clearly that their ecosystem needs to have quality, publicly available journalism" (as cited in Stevens, 2017). However, Jonah Peretti, CEO of the same company, was not so conciliatory: "The business model of news is changing, and if Google and *Facebook* take all the revenue but don't want to pay for the fact checking, the reporting, the more-intensive investigations, who does that work?", he asked (as cited in Stevens, 2017). Rachel Kraus (2018), a journalist for the *Mashable* website, said she remained skeptical even eighteen months after the project was launched. She claimed that the platform, with "its identity as a tech company, its devaluing of editorial judgment, and the role it played in eroding trust in the news in the first place, makes it wildly unqualified to be in the business of disseminating — let alone making — the news".

5 Final considerations

In this paper, we sought to discuss how the implementation of the Facebook Journalism Project, started in 2017, complexified the process of platformization of institutionalized journalism. This process had already been guided by *Facebook* since at least 2014, when the first tools developed for news publishing were created, but changed considerably after the launch of the Facebook Journalism Project. To provide specific details of this complexification, we sought to systematize the platform's actions and the debates in news publications from January 2017 to June 2019.

In early 2017, when *Facebook* was facing intense pressure to ddress misinformation crises, institutionalized journalism was experiencing "the great unbundling" process (Van Dijck et al., 2018) and the "coordination crisis" (Nerone, 2015). By launching a wide-ranging project with the intention of being "a hub for our efforts to promote and support journalism" (Simo, 2017), the platform placed itself as an entity that intended to coordinate the efforts of news publishers and related actors, such as universities and research institutes, which reveals an improvement, during this second period, of the asymmetric logics of power exercised since the first initiatives launched by *Facebook* (Jurno, 2020).

This alignment has been crafted through technological developments and funding initiatives, but also through the legitimization of the journalistic work. *Facebook* came to recognize more clearly the "assemblage of ideas and norms" (Nerone, 2015) that govern the choices and processes of journalists in the mediation of content. An exaltation of this journalistic mediation emerges in the comments of *Facebook* executives, who showed willingness to learn from the professionals in the journalistic industry. This positioning is quite different from what was observed during the first period (2014–2015), when the platform presented itself as a benefactor that facilitated publishers' access to a new media ecosystem, without openness to dialogue (Jurno & D'Andréa, 2020). However, despite showing more openness to exchanging expectations, *Facebook* continues to demand that news publishers delegate important steps of the news process to the platform, including circulation, monetization, visibility and product design.

With the (relative) demystification and denaturalization of its agencies, primarily due to the algorithmic controversies that occurred in 2016, we saw *Facebook* seek a closer and more robust approach with institutionalized journalism, which came to be viewed as a strategic partner in the reaction to the ongoing crisis of trust. Journalists were invited to meetings and hackathons with the platform's teams, at which they could voice their opinions and take part in the creation, implementation and improvement of tools, promoting an entrepreneurial logic. A logic that, according to Irani (2015), produces technologies but, above all, subjects aligned with the culture of Silicon Valley and transnational culture.

The platform did more than request the journalistic expertise. It invested in the development of a relationship with the institutions of the sector, striving to achieve its goal "to establish stronger ties between *Facebook* and the news industry", as stated by Simo (2017). To the journalist Lucia Moses (2018), the FJP "was a high-profile effort to smooth relations with prominent news publishers" in face of the devastation caused by the spread of misinformation on *Facebook*. The promotion of journalism was perceived on the various occasions that *Facebook* held meetings with publishers, but was also manifested through investments in training that focused on the specific features of the platform. The platform began to invest in training journalists, in technological literacy to use the platform's tools, in the development and funding of what it called "local journalism" and in news literacy for users.

Throughout this second period of the platformization of journalism, *Facebook* also broadened its partnerships and funding, diversifying means of insertion in the news logics, such as associating itself with respected institutions and initiatives like the First Draft Partner Network and Poynter Institute. This facet of the platformization process encompasses not only training to deal better with the affordances of the tools, which expresses a pedagogical dimension in *Facebook's* actions, but also shows the induction of new perceptions on core issues for hegemonic journalistic practice. In this sense, there are also strongly normative and prescriptive dimensions in how the platformization of journalism appropriates and tightens the values and practices of "hegemonic journalism" (Nerone, 2015). This is the case of the training in partnership with the

International Center for Journalists that aims to distinguish "fact" from "fiction" (Akkad, 2018).

To Van Dijck et al. (2018), the FJP "signals *Facebook's* active involvement in governing the news sector as part of the larger ecosystem" of the platform, and "this means that the production of news becomes progressively tailored to obey the mechanisms and organizing principles driving the platform ecosystem" (p.50). Therefore, a less imposing stance by *Facebook* concerning its products and an attempt to reconcile its desires with the aspirations of journalistic institutions is crafted in articulation with its strategy of acting as a central infrastructure for the production and monetization of the sector. The Facebook Journalism Project is also, or mainly, an effort to consolidate the platform as an "obligatory point of passage" for journalism. This can be seen in the speech of the Poynter Institute executive, Kelly McBride, who claimed that it is impossible "to do journalism these days without *Facebook*" (as cited in Jenkins & Kerr, 2017). The gradual dependence on the infrastructural dimension performed by the platform and the insertion of its logic in the journalistic craft makes *Facebook* be increasingly viewed as the "the exoskeleton of the news industry", as stated by Emily Bell (2017), in other words, as a core infrastructure for news production.

The complexification of the process of platformization of journalism by *Facebook* allows us, in the conclusion of this paper, to revisit some of the reflections signaled by Van Dijck et al. (2018). To these authors, "public values" and "economic values" become confused, especially when infrastructural platforms arbitrate on the workings of different social sectors. In the case of journalism, this tension remits to a historical conflict between editorial and commercial interests of publications, but that has now gained new proportions, mainly due to the strong financial asymmetry in relation to *Facebook*. In this sense, we believe that "journalism's crisis of hegemony", in the words of Nerone (2015), is today in a new chapter, marked by its increasing entanglement with computational architectures based on specific logics of articulating public and private interests.

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| NOTES

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2   In addition to the *Facebook* initiatives discussed in this paper, the centrality of the Google News Initiative in this platformization process of journalism should also be highlighted.

3   The term "algorithmic controversies" refers "to a diversity of actions, reaction, repercussions, etc., triggered by algorithms not only because of their 'executability' in the interfaces of digital platforms, but also beyond them, mainly through sociotechnical networks triggered by their performances" (d'Andréa et al., 2019, p.142).

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