**DOSSIER**

# BETWEEN STYLE AND SOCIAL CONDITION:

immersive journalism and the paradoxes of legitimation in the entrepreneurial culture[1]

MARCOS PAULO DA SILVA
*Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul, Campo Grande – Mato Grosso do Sul – Brazil*
ORCID: 0000-0003-2868-4865

**ABSTRACT** – Based on theoretical and methodological dialogue with literary theory, this article aims to characterize immersive journalism as a hybrid genre by discussing the appropriation and combination of varying forms of expression and how they stretch the limits of traditional journalistic formats. Moreover, it seeks to identify the characteristics of this type of journalism used to re-legitimize the professional field within the paradoxes in which they emerge. The debate centers around the main argument that, in the context of immersive journalism, a hegemonic mediation is established between a narrative style (a journalistic way of narrating) and the social condition (a hegemonic cultural pattern representative of contemporaneity) which is demarcated by the demands of entrepreneurial culture.
**Key words:** Immersive journalism. Entrepreneurial culture. Re-legitimize. Aesthetic-expressive dimension.

## ENTRE O ESTILO E A CONDIÇÃO SOCIAL:
### jornalismo imersivo e os paradoxos de legitimação na cultura empreendedora

**RESUMO** – Baseado em um diálogo teórico-metodológico com a teoria literária, o artigo de natureza ensaística busca caracterizar o jornalismo imersivo como gênero

híbrido discutindo os eixos e níveis de fusão e apropriação entre diferentes padrões expressivos que tensionam a estabilidade das fronteiras dos formatos jornalísticos tradicionais. Além disso, procura identificar as características desta modalidade de jornalismo que são mobilizadas na construção de uma premissa de relegitimação do campo profissional no interior dos paradoxos em que elas emergem. O debate sustenta-se no argumento central de que no âmbito do jornalismo imersivo estabelece-se uma mediação hegemônica entre um estilo narrativo – um modo jornalístico de narrar – e a condição social – um padrão cultural hegemônico caracterizador do tempo presente, neste caso demarcado pelos imperativos da chamada cultura empreendedora.

**Palavras-chave:** Jornalismo imersivo. Cultura empreendedora. Relegitimação. Dimensão estético-expressiva.

## ENTRE EL ESTILO Y LA CONDICIÓN SOCIAL:
### el periodismo de inmersión y las paradojas de la legitimación en la cultura empresarial

**RESUMEN –** A partir de un diálogo teórico-metodológico con la teoría literaria, el artículo de estilo de ensayo busca caracterizar el periodismo inmersivo como un género híbrido, discutiendo los ejes y niveles de fusión y apropiación entre diferentes patrones expresivos que tensionan la estabilidad de las fronteras de los formatos periodísticos tradicionales. Además, busca identificar las características de esta modalidad de periodismo que se movilizan en la construcción de una premisa de relegitimación del campo profesional dentro de las paradojas en las que emergen. El debate se basa en lo argumento central de que en el contexto del periodismo de inmersión se establece una mediación hegemónica entre un estilo narrativo – una forma periodística de narrar – y la condición social – un patrón cultural hegemónico que caracteriza el tiempo presente, en este caso demarcado por los imperativos de la llamada cultura empresarial.

**Palabras clave:** Periodismo inmersivo. Cultura empresarial. Relegitimación. Dimensión estético-expresiva.

## 1 Preface

What exactly does "serious" mean in Literature? This provocative question from Italian literary critic Franco Moretti (2003, p. 8) in his essay collection on the narrative pattern in European novels from the latter half of the 19th century transcends its empirical character. Behind the author's question lies a broader and more in-depth theoretical-methodological shift – an exercise in "distant reading", an expression coined by Moretti (2013) which happens to also be relevant in other objects and fields of knowledge (Silva, 2017). For analytical purposes, Moretti states that the question –

what does "serious" mean? – does not exactly focus on the content of literary works, but on the incorporation and handling of aesthetic codes and narrative elements that refer to background characteristics – cultural values that are reduced to a "serious ethos" – which demarcate the hegemonic lifestyle of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie:

> Because, effectively, with the advent of serious *ethos*, and with the concomitant multiplication of fillings, the novel finds a new, quiet rhythm, a type of narrative "neutrality" that allows it to function without ever having to resort to extreme measures. One writes and reads with a new, prosaic spirit, without expecting unknown things when turning the page. It is enough that the story is "interesting" (...). The millennial link between style and social condition is thus preserved while also circumvented. (Moretti, 2003, p. 8).

The "link" between style and social condition: the mediation that emerges in the symbolic space between a narrative style – an aesthetic-expressive pattern – and a certain social condition – a cultural pattern – is an important explanatory key that can be used in other fields of knowledge, such as journalism, which happens to be the focus of this article. In this sense, what Moretti (2003) refers to in theoretical-methodological terms is that the symbolic forms (in his case, it was for 19th-century European novels, but for the scope of this work, it is the experiences of immersive journalism) communicate with the concept of hegemony in a Gramscian sense (Gramsci, 2004; Hall, 1977). This communication – the supposed "serious *ethos*", in Moretti's analysis (2003) – lies not exactly in the characteristics of those who build them (the writers of the time were not the maximum representatives of these values of seriousness) but in the formal nature itself and the consequent narrative rhythm that the aesthetics of narration materializes. In short, it is in the rhythm and rituals (often hidden) ingrained in private and everyday life that Moretti observes the explanatory keys for the social dissemination of certain symbolic forms and narrative styles. It is no wonder then that he points to a specific excerpt from György Lukács, originally published in Hungarian at the beginning of the 20th century, to reinforce his point of view:

> The form, in a piece, is what organizes, in an encompassed whole, the life that is given to it as subject, what determines its time, rhythm and fluctuation, its density and fluidity, its rigidity and smoothness; what accentuates the sensations perceived as important and distances those of minor importance; what puts things in the foreground or the background and arranges them in order. (Lukács, 1981, pp. 69-71, as cited in Moretti, 2007, p. 24, free translation).

By establishing this theoretical-methodological shift, the Italian literary critic is trying to identify the ideological nature embedded in symbolic forms. Looking at this from the explanatory key of hegemony, it deals with the relationship established between the formal elements of the narration and the ritual of sociability in everyday life.

However, within this proposal of theoretical-methodological displacement, what does it say about contemporary journalistic forms, especially the so-called "immersive journalism" (De La Penã et al., 2010; Aitamurto, 2018; Sanchéz Laws, 2020; Mabrook, 2021; Herrera Damas & Benítez de Gracia, 2022; Greber, Aaldering & Lecheler, 2023; Greber et al., 2023), the object of reflection in this paper which will be defined further on? Or how can the theoretical-methodological contribution of literary criticism contribute to unveiling the complexity of the object? It is understood, in advance, that the contribution of the "sociology of symbolic forms" set forth by Moretti (2007) can feasibly expand on the interpretation of the theme. After all, to paraphrase the Italian critic once again, what does it mean to be "immersive" in journalism and how is such a relationship established in the universe of contemporary everyday life?

In this sense, this article makes use of presuppositions made in literary theory to provide an alternative explanation for the aesthetic-expressive phenomenon of contemporary journalism in one of its most inventive manifestations. Due to its essayistic nature, the line of argument that follows is supported by categories of analysis inscribed largely in the field of abstraction and analogies. Therefore, we are not looking for ready-made answers or to exhaust the subject, although the focus is on unveiling the layers of meaning behind the concreteness of the empirical object of immersive journalism.

## 2 Notions and theoretical dimensions of journalistic forms

This article is built around the argument – not randomly inspired by the theoretical – methodological shift proposed by Moretti (2003, 2007, 2013) – that within the scope of contemporary journalistic forms (particularly immersive journalism), a hegemonic mediation has been established between the narrative style – a way of narrating in itself – and the social condition – a cultural pattern that characterizes the contemporaneity of society.
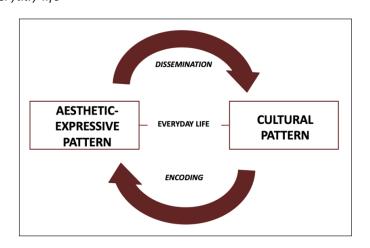
To use the metaphor "embodiment" suggests that the

narrative style of immersive journalism – the concept of which is fundamental in aesthetic-expressive terms – embodies, so to speak, symbolic elements of the social condition within a cultural pattern that closely follows the hegemony of late capitalism (Dardot & Laval, 2016; Cardoso de Mello & Novais, 1998): the so-called "entrepreneurial culture" (Cohen, 2015) – which we shall detail later.

Although inscribed in a scenario where empirical verification is difficult in terms of traditional communication research, the argument in question is not established in a vacuum. It is accompanied by some supporting presuppositions, two of which – mentioned in the preface of this text – are borrowed from Moretti's literary theory (2003, 2007, 2013) in order to try and understand the legitimacy crisis that journalism faces as a social institution. The first presupposition is regarding the fact that no narrative pattern or symbolic form is disseminated socially if it does not find support in broader cultural patterns of everyday life (Moretti, 2003, 2007; Silva, 2017). Therefore, symbolic forms spread and find resonance in extralinguistic elements present in everyday life – as illustrated in the diagram below:

**Figure 1**

*Graphic representation of the dissemination and codification of cultural patterns by aesthetic-expressive patterns mediated by everyday life*



Source: diagram prepared for this article, inspired by the theoretical-methodological theory proposed by Franco Moretti (2003, 2007, 2013) and based on Silva (2013a).

The idea of "form as the essence of the plot" worked on by Moretti (2003, 2007) in his proposal of a sociology of symbolic forms leads to our second presupposition: it is understood that the symbolic codification of cultural variables in everyday life is established not only in terms of the narrative content (scenarios and characters, for example) but particularly in its own form; in the rhythm and the aesthetic-expressive dimension of narrating (Moretti, 2003; Silva, 2017). Literature on different empirical objects, such as the culturalist approaches to melodramas from Jesús Martin-Barbero (2003) and jazz from Eric Hobsbawm (2008), although not making any direct reference to Moretti's theoretical-methodological proposal (2007), does illustrate the relevance of this kind of "step back" approach – the "distant reading" (Moretti, 2013). Journalism, as a type of hybrid narrative of everyday life (Faro, 2011), also dialogues with the symbolic structures present in everyday life, not only in terms of content (the subjects about which it narrates) but particularly in its aesthetic-expressive dimension (its way of narrating).

It is based then on the third presupposition on which this reflection is built. Firstly, this is a presupposition based on the understanding that journalism with an informative matrix – hegemonic symbolic forms devoted to the representation of everyday life throughout the twentieth century (the most significant of these forms being the news) – bases its way of narrating the world around three constitutive dimensions: a pragmatic dimension, an ethical-deontological dimension, and an aesthetic-expressive dimension (Silva, 2022).

The pragmatic dimension refers to the plausibility and likelihood as they pertain to the journalistic narration and the concreteness of the phenomenal world. According to Gomes (2009, p. 32), a "fact", understood as an element of concrete reality, has a temporality that always points to the past, to what is "irreversible". In this respect, it differs from narration (the text, in general) which is a "discursive texture" that is inscribed "in the fabrics of language". Both fact and text, however, are mediated by different rules of correlation and relationship with reality:

> The text as a whole is an *expressive configuration* that produces meanings that refer to real facts, imaginary facts, or do not refer to facts at all. Its effect is meaning. The text, seen as a fact or part of a fact, is not just an expressive configuration; it develops its inevitable potentiality, becoming primarily a *pragmatic configuration*, an entity that, when producing meaning, also produces a practical effect, like all other objects and agents inserted in factual interrelationship. (Gomes, 2009, p. 33, free translation).

In this perspective, journalistic activity deals, on a daily basis, with both instances of effect production: the effects of meaning and the effects of reality. This is important for understanding that the process of shaping news – selecting newsworthy events and building news narratives – can involve elements from both the aesthetic-expressive dimension and the pragmatic structure of reality.

The aesthetic-expressive dimension, in this context, refers to the set of elements related to the style, presentation, and format of journalism. These elements are not inert, nor are they neutral or innocent. On the contrary, they are established around the combination of facts, events, and opinions in a narrative and have a formative role that guides how the news is investigated, interpreted, and consequently formatted by the mediation of journalistic content (Darnton, 1975; Manoff, 1986; Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). To add to this discussion, Sodré (2009) incorporates the idea of rhythm resulting from the mediation between news formatting (the symbolic forms they assume) and the routine of everyday life.
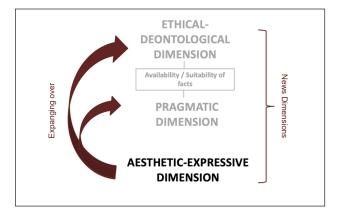
Lastly, the ethical-deontological dimension is established around credible professional values and notions such as authorship and journalistic authority (Vos & Moore, 2020; Vos & Finneman, 2017; Schudson, 1978). Founded on these values, journalism was historically constructed as a social institution (Vos, 2013) and transforms discursive engendering – like arguments such as the search for "truth" and impartiality – into slogans adopted by society as a whole. The ethical-deontological dimension still relates to the professional habitus of the journalistic field, from a Bourdieusian perspective (Bourdieu, 1997; Silva, 2013b). In this perspective, the journalistic field is interpreted as a space in constant tension – "a microcosm with its own laws, defined by its position in the global world and by the attractions and repulsions from other microcosms" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 55, free translation). The ethical-deontological values of journalism are also metaphorized by Bourdieu (1997) as "glasses", understood as a symbolic articulation within the habitus, a type of "social embodiment" of the professional field (Silva, 2013b).

Once the constitutive dimensions of journalistic forms have been clearly defined, the presupposition is built that, in the contemporary scenario of structural changes in communicative practices (which is the core of journalistic production), the aesthetic-expressive dimension of the news overlaps into the other dimensions (ethical-deontological and likelihood), as well as into the classic

parameters of "availability" and "suitability" of the facts (Gans, 2003). The following diagram illustrates this presupposition in question:

**Figure 2**

*Graphical representation of the aesthetic-expressive dimension overlapping into other constitutive dimensions of news*



Source: diagram prepared for this article, based on Silva (2022).

The anticipated combination within this presupposition provides fertile ground for understanding the social dissemination of contemporary journalistic forms, such as those in journalistic narration around the first-person experience, which includes the different forms of 360-degree video (Aitamurto 2019; Herrera Damas & Benítez de Gracia, 2022), virtual reality (De la Peña, 2015; De la Peña et al., 2010; Mabrook, 2021; Sanchéz Laws, 2020; Greber, Aaldering & Lecheler, 2023) and gamification (Bogost et al., 2010; Vos & Perreault, 2020). Despite the appeal of "innovation" and "audience engagement" that comes with the contemporary logic of entrepreneurship (Cohen, 2015), these journalistic forms strain the historical status of professional practice in the journalistic field (Deuze & Witschge, 2018).

## 3 Objectives and development of arguments

Journalistic legitimacy is not static and is constantly being renegotiated (Tong, 2018; Vos & Thomas, 2018; Carlson, 2016).

The simultaneous presence of conflicting vectors in legitimation and delegitimization (Tong, 2018) suggests that the professional field of journalism has responded to its multiple crises – economic, cultural, and institutional – (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Tong, 2018; Vos & Thomas, 2018; Reich & Godler, 2014; Lewis et al., 2008), not only in terms of institutional discourse, or metadiscourse (Carlson, 2016; Vos & Thomas, 2018) but also by proposing new formats and innovative narrative structures, such as the aforementioned ones.

Even though these innovative formats are usually found in business models that focus on expanding into new areas of the journalistic market (a practical reaction journalistic organizations have had to the economic crisis in the field), a kind of "reclamation" in terms of profitability (Cohen, 2015; Moretzsohn, 2015), they are also often linked to the notions of maximizing audience engagement (Vos & Perreault, 2020; Mabrook, 20217) and empathy (Sánchez Laws, 2020; Herrera Damas & Benítez de Gracia, 2022; Greber et. al., 2023) as core values for legitimizing journalism both inside and outside of the professional field.

However, these innovative narrative structures also transcode/embody a range of sociocultural values typical of the contemporary capitalist mode of production in usability and the way that reality is represented (in its aesthetic-expressive dimension). This is a paradox as it contributes to destabilizing the very traditional boundaries of journalism with ideas – often in the form of slogans for late capitalism (Dardot & Laval, 2016) – based on personalization/individualization, individual autonomy, perspective empowerment (the first-person narrative perspective), including the imperatives of productivity and self-efficiency (seen in-game narratives where one must achieve goals and advance through stages).

In terms of hegemonic characteristics in everyday life that guide professional structures and contemporary working conditions, these imperatives constitute the same sociocultural values in the so-called "entrepreneurial culture" and that are incorporated in the concept of "entrepreneur journalism" (Coen, 2015; Vos & Singer, 2016), that is, the position of "undertaking" and "conquering" as an individual responsibility. This is even with the precariousness of rights and the expansion of duties that the concept comes to represent, with accountability for individual achievements and failures instead of organizational and collective ones (Deuze & Witsche, 2018).

Here, the paradox of re-legitimization is twofold. First, as mentioned earlier, immersive journalism, as well as other similar

formats of innovative narrative structures, incorporates some of the same sociocultural values observed in the contemporary erosion of boundaries around the ethical-deontological dimension of journalism (Deuze & Witsche, 2018), such as the dissolution of the historical separation between editorial decisions and commercial decisions, and the shift of innovation and profitability to the individual level. On a broader and complementary level, these narrative structures are also in response to a tension process regarding some of the key values of the "rationalization regime" (Silva, 2019), gradually built over the last two centuries, which establishes the limits of modern social institutions such as science, justice, the democratic rule of law, and the press itself (Vos & Finneman, 2017; Schudson, 1978).

These values include notions such as truthfulness, accuracy, and validation (the cornerstones of what separates non-fiction from fiction and the consolidation of parameters for this identification), as well as authorship (the individual who writes the argument or narrative), which is particularly true for journalism. In expressive terms, news narrative structures constitute an important form of observing the world (Bourdieu, 1997) and of journalistic knowledge of reality (Meditsch, 1997).

Following the previously constructed reasoning, it is understood that proposing new and innovative journalistic formats – especially in the context of immersive journalism (detailed below) – as a strategic response from within the profession to re-legitimize addresses the need for an alternative, and more solid, level of argumentation. On one hand, these formats are valid possibilities for future journalistic practices as they have the creative potential to increase revenue and audience engagement (Herrera Damas & Benítez de Gracia, 2022), yet on the other hand, these formats are "hybrid genres" (Fagerjord, 2010) built on the same expressive values (personalization, productivity, self-efficiency, etc.) that destabilize the very conventional boundaries of the journalism (Deuze & Witsche, 2018).

With regards to this scenario, this article seeks to: 1) characterize immersive journalism as a "hybrid genre" (Fagerjord, 2010), and discuss the levels of amalgamation and appropriation between different expressive standards that distend the borders of journalistic formats; and 2) identify the characteristics of this type of journalism (understood as a specific symbolic form of late capitalism) used to build an argument for the re-legitimization of the profession within the paradoxes in which they emerge.

## 4 Immersive journalism as a hybrid genre

The concept of immersive journalism[1] is defined by De la Peña et al. (2010, p. 291), pioneering scholars in the use and approach of this modality, as the "production of news in a form in which people can gain first-person experiences of the events or situation described in news stories". For these authors, the "fundamental idea" of immersive journalism is "to allow the participant to actually enter a virtually re-created scenario representing the news story. The participant will be typically represented in the form of a digital avatar, an animated 3D digital representation of the participant, and see the world from the first-person perspective of that avatar" (De la Peña et al., 2010, p. 292). Continuing with this concept, the authors explain that "the application of interactive digital media to journalistic practice spans a broad spectrum from illustration and infographics to 3D embodied experience in video games" (De la Penã et al., 2010, p. 292). Immersive journalism, therefore, encompasses different scopes of virtual reality, augmented reality, and 360-degree videos.

In addition to trying to define immersive journalism, De la Peña et al. (2010) also discuss the important relationship between virtual reality and the human body. For these authors, "one of the most remarkable aspects of immersive virtual environments is that people tend to respond realistically to virtual situations and events even though they know that these are not real" (De la Peña et al., 2010, p. 293). This relationship is built around three concepts: 1) "place illusion" – the sensation of being and interacting in a virtual place; 2) "plausibility" – the feeling that the operated situation is really happening; and 3) "body ownership" – the feeling of belonging created virtually and operated by the user. The mobilization of these three concepts through technologies paves the way for building experiences (sense experiences, in particular) in immersive journalism (De la Peña et al., 2010, p. 294).

In turn, Herrera Damas and Benítes de Gracia (2022, p. 332), based on a bibliographic review, define the concept of immersive journalism as a form "characterized by the representation of events on a spherical stage generated from real images and which the viewer accesses from a first-person perspective that he or she controls at will, giving the sensation of being present in the place where the events have taken place". In this type of journalism, representations can be interpreted, experienced, and responded to as being real.

Virtual reality experiences, in this sense, "not only feel more real than other journalistic storytelling formats but also offer the advantage of creating a strong sense of emotional connection to people, events and places" (Herrera Damas & Benítes de Gracia, 2022, p. 332). Moreover, according to these authors, some studies seek to establish a relationship between immersive journalism and the promotion of empathy in users in the face of narrated occurrences, although there still lacks sufficient scientific evidence to prove the validity of this correlation (Herrera Damas & Benítes de Gracia, 2022; Sanchez Laws, 2020). Thus, as Dominguez (2014) argues, the protagonism which previously centered on interactivity is transcended, addressing the scope of other narrative potentialities that pique the interest of new audiences with topics they had previously not gravitated toward.

Lastly, Herrera Damas and Benítes de Gracia (2022, p. 332) list six "advantages" immersive journalism has compared to other journalistic narrative formats: 1) the viewer's immersion in the event; 2) the representation of a spherical scenario using 360-degree videos with three-dimensional appearance and levels of depth; 3) the point of view controlled by the viewer; 4) the use of spatial audio; 5) the viewer is more active in the narrated event, either as an observer, a character, or even the protagonist of the event depicted; and 6) the sense of presence.
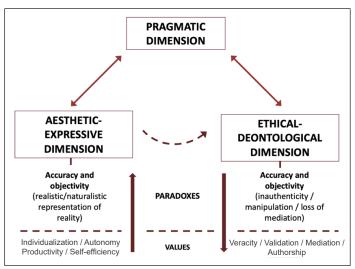
Innovative journalism experiences, however, are not without their inconsistencies and deontological obstacles (Mabrook, 2021; Aitamurto, 2018). In this regard, Aitamurto (2018) points to the emergence of two normative paradoxes from the innovative languages adopted in immersion journalism[2] (such as the use of 360-degree videos and virtual reality experiences). The first paradox refers to the fact that omnidirectional vision in 360-degree video strengthens and weakens the illusion of accuracy in the images. For this author, "by using manipulation, journalists distance themselves from the traditional normative boundaries for constructing the illusions of accuracy and objectivity. 360˚ journalism thus moves away from the 'as is' and toward the 'as if' in visual representations" (Aitamurto, 2018, p. 9). Similarly, the second paradox refers to the fact that, in their search for more accurate and objective reporting, journalists end up compromising norms that are upheld in the field (once again, the notions of precision and objectivity). Ultimately, the two paradoxes reflect the continuing re-negotiation of normative boundaries in advanced visual journalism practices.

In the context of this reflection, this game of inconsistencies is consistent with the objectives that support this article. Thus, characterizing immersive journalism as a "hybrid genre" (Fagerjord, 2010) based on the levels of fusion and appropriation of languages and expressive elements that strain the deontological boundaries of the field – as shall be discussed later – and identifying the characteristics of this modality of journalistic construction mobilized as a discourse of re-legitimization of professional practice within the paradoxes in which they emerge are fundamental for unveiling the complexity behind the broader theme of new digital technologies applied to journalism.

The relationship between the aforementioned three dimensions of the news – the pragmatic dimension, the aesthetic-expressive dimension, and the ethical-deontological dimension (Silva, 2022) – acts like a kind of pendulum that swings back and forth, mediated by the pragmatic dimension (the relationship of verisimilitude with concrete reality), and producing a sense of reality in immersive journalism with the aesthetic-expressive dimension and the ethical-deontological status of the profession – as illustrated in the diagram below:

**Figure 3**

*Graphic representation of the normative paradoxes that characterize immersive journalism*



Source: diagram prepared for this article, based on Aitamurto (2018) and Silva (2022).

The aesthetic-expressive dimension and its strong effect on the other dimensions (shown in figure 2) are even more distinct – as illustrated in figure 3 – in innovative forms of journalism that, in terms of legitimacy, are based on concepts such as "engagement" (Vos & Perreault, 2020; Mabrook, 2021) and "empathy" (Sánchez Laws, 2020; Herrera Damas & Benítez de Gracia, 2022; Greber et al. 2023), as well as in redefining the ideals of "accuracy" and "objectivity" (Vos & Thomas, 2018; Vos & Perreault, 2020), based mostly on the visuality (and the resulting sensoriality) of immersive experiences.

From the perspective of Fagerjord (2010), the hybrid genre is a format that arose from the "mixing" of different media and language genres[3]. According to this author, "media and genres are combinations with many characteristics that traditionally have occurred in stable combinations". On the internet, however, "each of these characteristics, each of the variables in this equation, may be mixed into a new genre in remix culture" (Fagerjord, 2010, p. 192). The Norwegian researcher identifies at least six variables in the hybridization of media and genres for building new "post-convergence"[4] media formats which, ultimately, results in significant changes to the journalistic field.

The first variable of mixing is the "sign system", which refers to a traditional medium, such as printed newspaper, which cannot contain the language of another medium (such as audio or video). Digital languages have radically altered this choice. The second variable is the "mode of acquisition": before media convergence, consumption was determined by the media (for example, the start time of a television news program and the order of news consumption). This was substantially altered by a new mode of acquisition logic where the user can determine the time and sequence in which he or she wishes to consume, therefore instilling an idea of individualization and dealing a strong blow to the concept of "authorship" in its traditional dimension. The third variable of mixing is "canvas", which refers to the specific type of medium used for consumption (for example, a newscast is made to consume on a television set, or news radio is made to consume on a radio, etc.).

Fagerjord (2010, p. 193) calls the fourth variable "distribution", which refers to the time it takes (latency) to create and distribute a message, as well as how long it is available for access to the public (permanence). A printed newspaper, for example, has a relatively long latency (at least 24 hours) between one edition and another but

also has lasting permanence. On the other hand, a radio broadcast has a shorter interval between creation and distribution time (a "live" broadcast is one feature), but with low permanence. This notion of distribution (relationship between latency and permanence) is significantly changed with new digital mediums (like YouTube, and others) and new longer lasting formats (like podcasts).

Two other variables are emphasized by Fagerjord (2010): media genre/format and its relationship to concrete reality and its "purpose" (which the author also refers to as "social function"). Concerning reality, the author points out that "the distinction of fiction/non-fiction is a continuum, not a dichotomy" (Fagerjord, 2010, p. 193) because this relationship, which was more stable in the past, is also a potential object of hybridization in a terrain with less stable borders. The last variable, "purpose", is the rationale behind the creation of a specific media form and its "social function" in the lives of the audience, like informing or entertaining. Fagerjord (2010, p. 194) explains that, within post-convergence, using formal aspects of a media genre begins may be mixed with, and enhance, the purpose of another – this can be seen in contemporary journalistic formats such as news games, virtual reality journalism, and other forms that dialogue to some extent with immersive journalism.

Immersive journalism is therefore understood to be gaining ground in its aesthetic-expressive dimension at a time when the journalistic field is going through a deontological crisis by being a hybrid genre, mixing once stable variables in the profession and symbolic contracts of authority and reliability historically established in modern sociability. Within this logic of hybridity and mixing, immersive journalism incorporates all the variables highlighted by Fagerjord (2010) into languages from fields that do have their origins in journalism. This goes through the "sign system" which is no longer based on traditional journalism (once supported by conventional supports such as the printed newspaper, traditional radio, and analog television), but is now based on game consoles, virtual reality glasses, and immersive environments (such as gamification and the logic of the individual perspective).

It also affects the "mode of acquisition", a central aspect of the autonomous first-person experience, which draws on conventional journalism for its flow and sequence of messages. It also goes through the "canvas" variable as immersive journalism (in dialogue with the "sign system") breaks free from traditional supports. Included here is

the "distribution mode", challenging the ephemerality and transitory nature of news. However, the variables "relationship with concrete reality" and "purpose" fall under the more complex hybridization of values and symbolic codes in immersive journalism. Obviously, the relationship is substantially strained when the boundaries – now a "continuum" and no longer a "dichotomy" to use Fagerjord's reflection (2010, p. 193) – between reality and fiction (the simulation of the real through technology, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and gamification experiences) and between information and entertainment (a stronger sensory experience under rationalization) are broken.

Being configured in this way, however, means this contemporary style of journalism incorporates cultural values in its aesthetic-expressive dimension (it should be noted this occurs primarily to the pragmatic and ethical-deontological dimensions) of the so-called "entrepreneurial culture", contributing to a set of normative paradoxes which the format emerges from – the central argument of this article. Therefore, immersive journalism is once again understood as a hybrid way of narrating everyday life (Faro, 2011) based on the transcoding/embodiment of symbolic elements that support, and are supported by, contemporary life. The theoretical-methodological contribution of the sociology of symbolic forms (Moretti, 2003, 2007, 2013) at the beginning of this article is a mechanism to help explain the complexity of the process.

## 5 Entrepreneurial culture and elements of the process

What does it mean to be an entrepreneur in contemporary capitalist culture, and what are the implications of this concept for developing immersive journalism? This is the fundamental question of this paper. Vos and Singer (2016, p. 152) point to the absence of an explicit lexical definition of entrepreneurship in journalistic discourse and claim this can be used strategically with normative implications within the field. These authors state that supporters of entrepreneurial culture in journalism do not see the topic as controversial, on the contrary, entrepreneurship is referred to as a "necessity" (Vos & Singer, 2018, p. 153) and often as a redemption (Cohen, 2015; Moretzsohn, 2015).

Along these same lines, Cohen (2015, p. 514) warns that "the vision of the journalist as an entrepreneur takes up contemporary

society's entrenched fixation on the entrepreneur as a remedy for broader political, economic, and social problems". This author's definition of "entrepreneurial culture" is based on three tendencies: 1) the decline of the traditional employment relationship (i.e., full-time continuous work for one employer on the premise of receiving employment-based benefits); 2) the rise of "creative industry" policies and discourse (which position culture and media industries as drivers of economic growth, encouraging workers to become "cultural entrepreneurs", charged with sole responsibility for finding work, managing careers and administering social security); and 3) the transformations in digital technologies (which enable work to be performed anywhere, anytime, helping to fuel outsourcing and labor flexibility) (Cohen, 2015, p. 515).

In conceptual terms, this worldview addresses a change in the teaching and professional practice of journalism that historically – at least in terms of self-legitimizing rhetoric – maintained a formal separation between editorial processes and commercial issues in news production – this ideal however is not the reality for most traditional journalism bodies (Vos & Finneman, 2017; Cohen, 2015). Once again, there are background elements here for understanding innovative forms of journalism, such as hybrid genres (Fagerjord, 2010), that blur the once well-defined lines between information and entertainment.

A set of hegemonic values have emerged in this culture that is gaining ground in contemporary times (Dardot & Laval, 2016). From a critical perspective, Cohen (2015) mentions the emergence or remaking under neoliberal concepts such as "self-efficiency" (tied to ideas such as "strategic thinking" and "the capacity to make things happen autonomously") (p. 519); "individualism" (which is remade from neoliberal values such as "do-it-yourself") (p. 520); "autonomy" (which means refusing to be subservient to a single company and maintaining the freedom to self-organize one's labor) (p. 522); and "immediacy" (a result of blurred boundaries between work and non-work time) (p. 523). Deuze and Witschge (2018, p. 175) draw attention to the contemporary shift in the notion of "enterprise", from company to individual, highlighting the connotations of "efficiency", "productivity", "empowerment" and "autonomy". This shift, in turn, is based on the idea that workers are more adaptable, willing to move between activities and take responsibility for their actions and their successes and failures. These authors point to studies that show several "adverse psychosocial effects, rising levels of stress, and

overall poor subjective health among freelance media workers", but that, contradictorily, there has been too little attention given to these effects that come with the notion of the individual entrepreneur as a 'savior' in contemporary crises (Deuze & Witschge, 2018, p. 175). Entrepreneurship is thus seen as an irreversible prescription for the lack of economic alternatives that erode the professional practice of journalism and its deontology (Cohen, 2015)[5].

The notion of innovation in this context acts as a kind of bridge between the "entrepreneurial culture" – a practice or professional quality of the contemporary individual – and innovative formats such as immersive journalism – once again, the ties between style and the social condition, the central argument of this discussion.

However, based on the line of reasoning which this paper is built on – "distant reading" (Moretti, 2013) and the understanding of symbolic forms as drivers of hegemony (Gramsci, 2004; Hall, 1977) – we understand the cultural values of entrepreneurship – individualism, autonomy, immediacy, self-efficiency, and productivity, among others (Cohen, 2015; Deuze & Witschge, 2018) – are not found only in the agents responsible for building narratives (journalists who produce immersive journalism) but, in a theoretical-methodological analogy with reflections from Moretti (2003) – in the formal nature that these symbolic forms embody.

Returning to the introductory question of this article: what can "immersive" mean in journalism based on the analytical possibilities of the sociology of literary forms? To paraphrase Moretti (2003, 2007), the explanatory keys to the social dissemination of certain symbolic forms and narrative styles can be seen in the rhythm and rituals (often hidden) inscribed in private and everyday life. Despite the dialogue – mediated by innovation – between entrepreneurship (as a social condition/cultural pattern) and immersive journalism (as a journalistic style/format), it is argued that the core of this relationship is not properly (or solely) located in the operators of the process (journalists as enunciators), but more in the incorporation of hegemonic values of "entrepreneurial culture" (Cohen, 2015), namely: individualism (from a first-person perspective); autonomy (the user conducting the narrative); productivity (symbolized in the goals to be achieved from language imported from games); and the absence of clear boundaries between informing and entertaining, among others.

Not by chance, the assumption is highlighted that in contemporary times the aesthetic-expressive dimension is denser

than the other dimensions of the news (figure 2). The cultural values of entrepreneurship become fundamental in the way immersive journalism represents reality. In this sense, as illustrated in figure 3, historical values upheld by journalism – precision and objectivity – are now based mainly on the concept of visuality (the naturalistic representation of reality, even if it conflicts with the concepts of fiction and likeness), expanding (and becoming more representative in terms of legitimation discourse) the notions of precision and objectivity in their ethical-deontological and historical meaning. Thus, the essayistic perspective of this article establishes the root of the paradoxes in the discourse on legitimizing immersive journalism in the professional field at a time of institutional crisis.

## 6 In conclusion: the paradoxes of legitimizing immersive journalism

Like two sides of the same coin, the contemporary process of expanding the aesthetic-expressive dimension over the pragmatic and ethical-deontological dimensions of the news (Silva, 2022) has served as the main stage for different social phenomena located at opposite poles: on one side we have the rise of innovative hybrid formats in journalism (journalistic forms of non-news expression such as immersive journalism and news games, as discussed in this article), and on the other, we have the rise of disruptive phenomena such as the mass dissemination of formats that spread disinformation and mimic traditional news aesthetics (which may be referred to as non-journalistic forms of news expression) – such as so-called "fake news" (Silva, 2022; Pontes et al., 2021).

Behind both phenomena are multiple crises in the journalistic field, in particular the erosion of the economic sustainability model of traditional journalism and its institutional authority (Christofoletti, 2019; Vos & Thomas, 2018; Cohen, 2015). This complexity continues to be alarming since the institutional crisis in journalism is like the broader crisis of concepts and legitimacy in other social institutions upheld in modernity, such as science, justice, and democracy itself – all of which are based on historical values such as the ideas of accuracy, validation, reliability in methods, and authorship (Silva, 2022).

However, as problematized by Tong (2018), the opposing sides for the legitimation of a professional field such as journalism (de-

legitimization versus re-legitimation) also point towards similarities in the response processes (rise of the crisis *versus* response to the crisis). In this sense, responses to the crisis of institutional legitimacy and the business model (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Tong, 2018; Vos & Thomas, 2018; Reich & Godler, 2014; Lewis et al., 2008) have been repeated in journalism not only in terms of institutional discourses (or metadiscourses) (Carlson, 2016; Vos & Thomas, 2018) but in the very proposition – and the subsequent attempt to build legitimizing barriers – of innovative formats such as immersive journalism.

Journalism, due to the institutional crisis and the weakening of its economic, cultural, and ethical-deontological aspects (Christofoletti, 2019; Vos & Thomas, 2018; Vos, 2013), is no longer the protagonist in managing the symbolic forms upheld throughout its history (like the news, which is now an object of resignification because of social networks and the disruptive logic of disinformation). Journalism has, on the other hand, been trying to re-legitimize itself through other symbolic forms that do not come from the journalistic field (games, augmented reality, virtual reality, etc.).

The paradox intensifies in the notion that "innovative formats" such as immersion journalism – referred to as "hybrid genres" by Fagerjord (2010) – are anchored in aesthetic-expressive elements that help tension the very historical legitimacy of the professional field (information *versus* entertainment; reality *versus* fiction; rationality *versus* sensory experience). In the structure of informational cyberspace, these innovative ways of narrating the world manifest as causes and consequences of the "affordances" made available by the technological and marketing logic of infotainment (Thussu, 2007). Moreover, in terms of formats, these stylistic elements embody – a theoretical-methodological understanding inspired by Moretti (2003, 2007, 2013) – hegemonic values of the contemporary social condition: individualism, autonomy, immediacy, and efficiency, which are important to the logic of "entrepreneurial culture" (Cohen, 2015; Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Vos & Singer, 2018).

It is no coincidence that the discourse on legitimizing these innovative journalistic formats takes on an argumentative tone that differs from the traditional one, historically speaking. This reflects the underlying assumption of this article, which states that the aesthetic-expressive dimension of journalistic forms is concentrated on its pragmatic and ethical-deontological dimensions (figure 2). Legitimation, in this sense, essentially refers to the logic of visuality, the first-person

perspective, sensitivity and empathy. Precision and truthfulness, values upheld by the professional deontology of journalism throughout the 20th century, are now used for a naturalistic and realistic reconstruction of the world (figure 3), one where users can "experience" reality on their own" as it is" – even if it is in terms of sensitivity and visuality. At the same time, the values of entrepreneurship, based on validating credibility from an individual perspective (first-person witness), are autonomous with goals and effectiveness (that is, it starts to trace the path of the narrative itself, overcome obstacles, advance through stages, etc.). Not by chance, the process of re-legitimizing journalism is anchored in another more mobile, fluid, and dynamic substrate, while also being opaquer and more uncertain.

As a limitation and future challenge, this reflection comes up against the intrinsic difficulty of empirical verification in delimitable categories of analysis as traditionally understood by the social sciences (Babbie, 2009) and particularly by communication research. Not by chance, it is supported by abstraction, aesthetics, and languages in a theoretical-conceptual and methodological dialogue with the sociology of literary forms (Moretti, 2007, 2013). This situation, however, does not exempt this discussion from finding creative solutions and reliable mechanisms – referring once more to the Italian literary critic – to validate the central argument presented and its respective assumptions. This is a task for future reflections.

What we conclude, for now, is that journalism adhering to these innovative formats – especially immersive journalism – echoes private life and everyday life insofar as it supports hegemonic cultural values that guide the sensitive world in the contemporary world. This is far from understanding innovative technologies and entrepreneurship as saviors of the crises of the late capitalist mode of production (Cohen, 2015; Moretzsohn, 2015), one of the main focuses of research in journalism. Once again, this is a theoretical-methodological lesson that the literary theory of Moretti (2003, 2007, 2013) addresses to the journalistic field (Silva, 2017) at the cost of possibly losing the critical dimension of the process[6].

## NOTES

1    This article is the result of a research project funded by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development

2 Studies that evoke literature reviews on the concept of immersive journalism refer to different terminologies related to the use of technologies and audiovisual resources to create immersive effects. Some examples are the concepts of "immersive narratives" (Pérez-Seijo et al., 2018) and "immersive narratives in cyberjournalism" (Longhi, 2018). In terms of the choice of methodology, although there is no consensus on the use of terminologies, this study uses the definition of immersive journalism from a set of widely cited internationally references (De La Penã et al., 2010; Aitamurto, 2018; Sanchéz Laws, 2020; Mabrook, 2021; Herrera Damas & Benítez de Gracia, 2022; Greber, Aaldering & Lecheler, 2023; Greber et al., 2023).

3 Although it is recognized that the adoption of semantic options may lead to conceptual implications in the field of study in question (Tárcia, 2011), the expressions "immersive journalism" and "immersion journalism", for essentially stylistic effects, are treated in this article as synonymous. The concept of "immersion" in this sense is not addressed in this work as a method applied to journalistic research in terms of verification and experimentation of reality. The term has, however, historically been used to refer to oral narrators and narrators in literature in the process of seducing their enunciators with subsequent influence on journalistic practice – among them, on the basis of the so-called "literary journalism" (Lima, 2009).

4 The concept of remix by Fagerjord (2010) dialogues with the concept of "hypermedia" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) and its interconnection of genres and languages in digital culture. The idea of hypermedia, in this sense, is strengthened when analog formats gain transposition in cyberspace. However, this article

uses the notion of "mixing" through the theoretical-conceptual analogy that it makes possible with some of the main imperatives of the so-called "entrepreneurial culture", notably the ideas of personalization and "do-it-yourself".

5   The concept of "post-convergence" – the cultural and technological development that emerged after the dissemination of media convergence (Jenkins, 2008) – is debated by authors such as Ramírez (2020) and by Fagerjord himself (2010). Although the objective of this text is not to exhaust discussion on the subject, it is feasible at this point to highlight that the concept, according to Fagerjord (2010, p. 190, free translation), develops in a context where "the digital representation has become *lingua franca*", creating shared spaces where "forms from different genres in different media may be combined to build new forms, creating new genres". According to Ramírez (2020, p. 12, free translation), post-convergence theorizing is necessary for "to develop a media theory that can explain not only the current state of digital development that has not yet become mass commodities", but also "the next developments in production, representation and consumption, including the possibility of unparalleled rendering of graphics, immaterial interfaces and artificial intelligence". For this author, post-convergence drives the development of "metaphors and methodologies to examine emerging media that go beyond those shaped by previous understandings of media and digital", that is, it reinforces the need to "examine the digital from the point of view of the digital native" (Ramírez, 2020, p. 16, free translation). For more details, see: Ramírez (2020) and Fagerjord (2010).

6   In this scenario it is relevant to mention the contradiction in the rising discourse of entrepreneurship as an individual project based on the "do-it-yourself" slogan and the rise of language innovation projects in journalism – among which, 360-degree videos, reports with three-dimensional images, large multimedia reports and newsgames, in addition to immersive journalism itself – which incur substantial financial investments, often coming from large companies and/or media conglomerates.

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**MARCOS PAULO DA SILVA.** Associate professor at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, Campo Grande, Brazil. Visiting researcher (2022) at the School of Journalism, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, United States, with a post-doctoral fellowship from the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Brazil. CNPq Research Productivity Fellow. PhD in Social Communication from the Methodist University of São Paulo, São Bernardo do Campo, Brazil, with a doctoral internship at Syracuse University, Syracyse, New York, United States. E-mail: marcos.paulo@ufms.br

TRANSLATED BY: LEE SHARP