ARTICLES

ROUTINES IN WEB JOURNALISM:

multitasking and time pressure on web journalists[1]

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ABSTRACT – The Internet has brought changes to journalism and the routines of news producers. Over time, professionals in online journalism have had to take on more tasks within the same news making process; one which is replete with speed. This article analyzes how multitasking enhances time pressure in the production routines of web journalism. The research used for the analysis was a collection of in-depth interviews conducted with web journalists from two websites in Brasília. The results from these interviews show that online producers tend to compare themselves with other media professionals. They also believe that they multitask more than other journalists do. Multitasking is seen as one of the aggravating factors leading to time pressure in production routines. It also raises other questions about web journalism.
Key words: Web journalism. Multitasking. Time. Professionals. Routines.

ROTINAS NO WEBJORNALISMO:
multitarefas e pressão do tempo sobre os jornalistas de internet

RESUMO – A internet implica transformações no jornalismo e nas rotinas dos produtores da notícia. Ao longo do tempo, o exercício do jornalismo em rede agregou outras tarefas a serem executadas pelos profissionais em um mesmo processo de produção da notícia, permeado pela rapidez. O artigo objetiva analisar como as multitarefas potencializam a pressão do tempo nas rotinas produtivas do webjornalismo. Para a análise, foram aplicadas como técnica de pesquisa entrevistas em profundidade com webjornalistas de dois sites de notícias de Brasília. Os resultados apontam que os webjornalistas tendem a se comparar com profissionais de outras mídias e se consideram jornalistas mais multitarefas do que os demais. As multitarefas são interpretadas como um dos agravantes da pressão do tempo nas rotinas produtivas, além de levantarem outros questionamentos sobre o webjornalismo.
Palavras-chave: Webjornalismo. Multitarefas. Tempo. Profissionais. Rotinas.

RUTINAS EN CIBERPERIODISMO:
multitareas y presión del tiempo sobre los periodistas de internet

RESUMEN – La internet implica transformaciones en el periodismo y en las rutinas de los productores de noticias. Con el tiempo, el ejercicio del periodismo en red añadió otras tareas para los profesionales en un mismo proceso de producción de noticias, impregnado por la

velocidad. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo evaluar como las multitareas potencian la presión del tiempo en las rutinas productivas en ciberperiodismo. Para el análisis, se aplicaron como una técnica de investigación entrevistas en profundidad con periodistas de internet de dos sitios web de noticias de Brasilia. Los resultados muestran que los ciberperiodistas tienden a compararse con profesionales de otros medios y consideran que son más multitareas que otros periodistas. Las multitareas son interpretadas como un agravante de la presión del tiempo en las rutinas productivas y llevan a otras cuestiones sobre el ciberperiodismo.
Palabras clave: Ciberperiodismo. Multitareas. Tiempo. Profesionales. Rutinas.

Introduction

Time and journalism have always gone hand-in-hand. While time is related to new advances induced by the etymology of news itself, journalism has helped to build a "culture of the present" (FRANCISCATO, 2005, p. 63). Travancas (1993, p. 34-35) reminds us that time is paramount to journalists since "they relate the dimension of time to their production, researching and news editing". Likewise, Schlesinger (1993, p. 177-178) states that "controlling time pressures is a way for journalists to express their professionalism". For Traquina (2005, p. 118), the relation between journalists and time is a structural one: "Working against the clock, dedicated to what is new, and obsessed about being up-to-date, journalists are in a constant struggle (apparently a losing one) to react to the latest events".

The theory of newsmaking comes to mind when analyzing the relationship between time, journalism and news production. As Wolf (2003, p. 193-194) states, "it is mainly connected on two fronts: the professional culture of journalists and the organization of the work and the production processes". Neveu (2006, p. 76) says that journalism is characterized by its need for a structure to organize itself around "a strained relationship with time". Alsina (2009) explains that the routines of information play an important role in journalistic work for last minute events. Tuchman (cited by WOLF,

2003, p. 196) asserts that "without any kind of reliable routine in place to deal with unexpected events, journalistic organizations, as rational businesses, would go bankrupt". Journalists have to make quick decisions on everything before it is published. If they do not, they fail to meet the deadlines. As Wolf points out, there is an "overabundance of events" which needs to be sorted through and selected. Criteria for newsworthy events have been laid out in order to help gatekeepers and to speed up the selection process.

Deuze (2006) borrowed from Bauman when he coined the term "liquid journalism"; a term describing how journalism practices in a liquid modernity where objects, relationships and human existence itself are volatile and fluid, making the exercise of the profession difficult. Deuze (2006, p. 4) accuses journalism of not changing its mode of production, and thereby reproducing a hegemonic society: "Media as social institutions do not escape the sense of accelerated, unsettling change permeating liquid modern life – it is exactly this notion of volatile, uncertain (global and local) flux that professional journalism fails to come to terms with".

In web journalism there is a concept for producing and distributing news in "real time", instantaneity, something which Bradshaw (2014) discusses. Kucinski (2004) explains that "real time" was not born from the internet and web journalism, it had already been transmitted live across telegraph, radio and television. Franciscato (2005, p. 240) reminds us that even though journalism in "real time" aims to "specifically overcome the technical gaps between the speed of movement of things in the world and the speed of journalistic production", there is still a mediation that exists between the professional and the vehicle which cannot be overcome.

But the instantaneity of "real time" is strictly associated to web journalism[2]. For Borges (2009, p. 21), "real time" is strongly expressed in the production routines of web journalism because it assumes a "mandatory maximum reduction of time between the event and the publication". "Real time" in web journalism can also be seen as a practice in which reporters cover events at the time they are happening and immediately send materials to the newsroom.

Time pressure is a constant part of web journalism and its production process. There is a need to stay ahead of the competition in terms of time, originality and quantity of material produced, and to inform online readers across multiple platforms. The expression "speed fetish" (as Moretzsohn calls it - 2002, p.12) references this.

For Signates (2012, p. 440), the advent of the internet triggered an enhancement of presentification in journalism which led to the disappearance of the deadline because "the speed of communication processes made possible by large networks has wildly affected the length of news stories, rapidly becoming old". Comparing the production time for news on the web to other media outlets such as newspapers, the one-day interval between newspaper editions is the most noticeable. Television and radio programs also have intervals for commercials and transmit other attractions. It is hard to come across any intervals in current news broadcasts on the web. Actually, the schedules for publishing material act as a kind of clock which shows how long the web vehicle has gone without producing anything new. The pressure to update within a very short interval of time seems to be one more tension attributed to web journalists, whether looking for new stories or speeding up existing verification processes.

On one side, we have the public who thirsts for news. On the other, we have the vehicles that are interested in beating out the competition. In the middle are the professionals – web journalists – who develop a work which requires multitasking and responsibility of production in a short span of time. This article aims to bring the many functions and roles to attention (which are getting faster every day) that web journalists carry out in news production processes and understand if and how new attributions increase the time pressure in production routines. We also hope to prompt thoughts about the work web journalists are required to do in convergent newsrooms.

Production within convergence

In order to understand the context of multitasking in journalism newsrooms we must first remember that since 2008 discussions on technological convergence in Brazilian newsrooms have been taking place regarding the merger between print media newsrooms and online newsrooms (ADGHIRNI, 2012, p. 74): "the convergence of content in the form of text, audio and video onto platforms disables the traditional mode of producing and places a continual workload on journalists". When talking about journalistic convergence in print news Maia and Agnez (2015, p. 219-220) highlight that "one of the major impacts was the speed dictated by 'real time' and the increasing submission to the need for efficiency".

The convergence phenomenon has brought on technological, market, cultural and social changes (JENKINS, 2009). For Salaverría (2003), there are four dimensions of convergence – business, technology, communication and professional – which demonstrate the use of the internet in production routines, technological advances in newsrooms, changes to informative discourse and new attributions for journalists. Salaverría (2014, p. 28) explains that as journalism organizations evolve they begin to "save money by employing professionals who are capable of taking on tasks which had traditionally been carried out by several people". He also draws attention to the multimediality in multiplatform and polyvalence. Multiplatform refers to the news corporations which integrate media forms in their journalistic coverage, a form of technological convergence. Polyvalence in multimedia represents the polyvalence in journalists and their ability to take on several activities. This polyvalence, according to Salaverría, is represented in a scene where journalists work for several media at the same time (polyvalence of media), produce news on a range of topics (thematic polyvalence) and multitask (functional polyvalence).

It's true that traditional print journalists face a number of challenges due to the shift towards convergence in newsrooms. But there is also the question of the impact convergence has on web journalists who begin their careers producing specific content for this media and how they handle multitasking at work.

Gordon (2003, p. 72) explains that as far as storytelling runs in modes of convergence, little has changed for traditional journalists: "It may, then, be a good thing for today's media companies that complete technological convergence is not yet upon us. And for journalists who are averse to change, who like journalism the way they have traditionally done it, the relative lack of change is comforting". Maybe the convergence that some newsrooms have committed to is not yet complete since there are web journalists who produce both for the web and the printed press but the opposite (print journalists producing for newspapers and the web) is not necessarily happening. One of the motives for this configuration could be the fact that many print journalists have yet to master certain tools such as news publishing systems and photo and video editing software, as well as social networks. Could the number of tasks required of web journalists, who are used to doing it and who work around the immediacy to report, mean added time stress?

Working directly with technology means web journalists

combine audio, video and photo production with several other tasks (selecting facts, organizing reports, rewriting, taking photographs, designing layouts for news stories to be published, publishing the final content on the site and social networks, etc). Could this multitasking make professionals more autonomous and complete at the same time as overworking them? Adghirni (2002, p. 145) reminds us that the routines in web journalism are "hellish". She goes on to say: "The main difference between journalists in traditional media and digital media lies in the speed of the production routines".

Capabilities = + Attributes

Palacios (2004) classified online journalism as having six characteristics: multimediality/convergence, interactivity, hypertextuality, customization of content/personalization, memory and instantaneity/ constant updating. Pavlik (2014, p. 160) added ubiquity to the list, meaning "found everywhere". For Canavilhas (2014), each one of these characteristics differentiates web journalism from other media. Together, they interact with the multitasking that web content producers carry out. When narrating an event in web journalism you can tell the story using image, text and sound in a process where several media converge to offer new reading experiences. We shall now analyze the characteristics of web journalism as they pertain to the tasks of web journalists.

1) Multimediality/convergence – Palacios (2003) asserts that convergence is derived from the process of digitalizing information and its distribution across multiple platforms and supports, and that multimediality refers to the aggregation of image and sound to narrative texts. For Salaverría, Avilès and Masip (2007), within the mode of convergence, the journalists develop content for multiple platforms, using a specific language for each one. We have noticed, however, that journalists, outside of being multiplatform, are also multimodal, meaning they perform their trade across many media and modes of communication.

2) Interactivity – Interactivity allows web journalists and readers to streamline interaction in the communication process. Rost (2014) recalls that there are two dimensions of interactivity: one in which readers receive and react to content (selective) and the other in which they produce new content (communicative). Most often, the publication of this content across social networks and the moderation of comments on the material are both performed by professionals themselves (BRADSHAW, 2014).

3) Hypertextuality – According to Palacios (2003), hypertextuality allows content to be connected through *links*. To be certain of the hypertextuality in a particular content, web journalists can link other tasks at the time of publication such as indexing tags, adding links within the material and inserting external links such as "learn more" and "read more".

4) Customization of content/personalization – Some sites allow for topics to be selected according to user rankings as well as formats for presenting news. Web journalists keep track of the number of views a particular news item receives and are able to increase or disable content according to the public's interest. Lorenz (2014) recalls that social networks can bring content to specific audiences, allowing users to choose what they would like to access.

5) Memory – The addendums (*links*, *tags*) that professionals include in materials help connect them to one another and are easily found on internet search engines. Also, since the internet has no space limits, there is a large amount of information that can be stored on it. So whatever gets produced remains available on news sites and in data banks, compiling a collective memory (PALACIOS, 2003) which hypertextuality has made possible.

6) Instantaneity/continual updates – The technology in web journalism allows for the producers of content to constantly update their material (PALACIOS, 2003) as new information about any particular fact is acquired or released by other journalists.

7) Ubiquity – Current computing is ubiquitous; it permeates throughout the world and our lives. In computing, they say that an electronic device is ubiquitous if its structure allows for resources to be implemented regardless of spatial and temporal conditions for using it, as is the case with mobile devices. The access to news on these devices can amount to one more task for web journalists to perform.

We see that the characteristics of online journalism create tension within and provide challenges to the profession. Table 1 is a compilation of tasks carried out by web journalists in newsrooms. Since we run no fear of exhausting the topic – every day there are new attributions being added to web journalism – we recorded only a few of the functions which web journalists carry out and related them to the time frame in which they should be completed. In column 1 we list the steps in the production routine (Report, Research, Fact Checking, Newswriting and Publishing). Column 2 lists the pre-requisites a journalist must have; the necessary knowledge and the focus of the process. Column 3 lists the

time needed for a journalist to carry out each task (previous planning/ immediate publication/further processing).

Table 1 – Focus of pressure on web journalists

Routine	Focus/ functions	Requirements / tasks	Time
AGENDA	Suggest and find stories Research data Interpret and contextualize facts Report	Creativity Innovation Updating Ability to select and interpret facts	Immediate
RESEARCH	Select Interview Produce text, image, video and audio	Selecting sources Selecting characters Data selection Selecting documents Research Persistence Updating	Previous Immediate
FACT CHECKING	Compare Analyze Check	Patience Research Ability to Contextualize	Immediate
WRITING	Write journalistic texts Decide on news format Insert text/image/ sound Include *links/ tags* Edit	Creativity Clarity Knowledge of newsroom norms Indexing knowledge	Previous Immediate Further
EDITING	Correct Adapt Draft Insert text/image/ sound Include *links* Edit and format the report	Ability to contextualize Knowledge of newsroom norms and management policies Updating	Immediate Further
PUBLISHING	Adapt the text to Newsroom Norms Publish on the site and on social networks	Creativity Knowledge of newsroom norms Updating Knowledge of editing Common sense and political common sense Having an eye for scoops Knowledge of sites and social networks	Previous Immediate Further

Source: Authors.

Just publishing on social networks already requires an arsenal of procedures not only for making content available, which is easy enough in the beginning, but also for the constant use of the metrics and the technologies in order that the material reaches the public through Search Engine Optimizers (SEO) for enhancing searches. Apart from constant updating, web journalists who upload content on social networks might take it upon themselves to perform all the tasks involved in editing (images, graphics, checking information), publishing and monitoring comments at the same time. Of course, the need to be creative, to be able to interpret, contextualize and update are all requirements in journalism, even more so in web journalism. In addition, we assessed time pressure for each phase of production as it relates to the race for a scoop, the custom of prioritizing the release of new, interesting and relevant material; a trait all types of journalism have inherited from the French term *jour* (from *journalisme*), meaning *day* or to be *with the day* (JORGE, 2013).

It seems that digitalization is a regular part of newsrooms nowadays. The fact that media vehicles release products specifically for the web, resulting in a concentration of tasks and production modes for the professionals working for these companies shows the interdisciplinarity of journalism and the flexibility journalists have for adapting to new technology. On the other hand, in some countries, this situation is worsened by the demand for speed – a characteristic of capitalism – and sets the stage for organizations to exploit the assets of journalistic work.

This paper's analysis of the process of news production takes the steps from Table 1 into account, they are: 1) Agenda: when the journalist has to organize the development of information; 2) Research, where the web journalist researches and conducts interviews; 3) Fact-checking, checking information with data banks; 4) Writing, where the professional puts together the research and writes; 5) Editing, where both the research and the writing are revised according to orthographic rules and the vehicle's publishing style; 6) Publishing, when the journalists organizes all the elements of a report in a virtual publishing system and releases the final content on the vehicle's website, and on social networks, if necessary.

This paper aims to show that in terms of systematization of journalistic work on the web many professionals take on several tasks and modes of production in a world where speed is needed to

publish content which in turn ends up generating time pressure on the routines within web journalism.

Methodology

In order to assess how multitasking has increased the time pressure in web journalists' routines, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted to get interpretations on the processes involved (DUARTE, 2012). For Gil (1999), interviews provide advantages like open questions and observing the respondents' physical expressions. For Broustau et al (2012, p. 16), interviews "provide interactions and complex dynamics around a variety of topics". The accounts related in this study show the opinions and descriptions web journalists have about the production process. The interviews are semi-structured and divided into sub-questions (DUARTE, 2012).

The choice of *corpus* came from the researchers' "personal judgment" (DUARTE, 2012, p. 69). The *corpus* is comprised of three female web journalists from two different news sites in Brasilia. These three journalists work in newsrooms where the majority of the employees are women, which closely resemble the current reality of journalism in Brazil where 63.7% of journalists are women (MICK; LIMA, 2013). Even still, the heterogeneity of journalists was maintained for the interviews. The first respondent is a reporter from the printed press, the second is a web reporter and the third one is an assistant director on the web.

The newsrooms were consulted beforehand and had given their authorization to conduct the study. In one of the vehicles the interviews were conducted inside the newsroom, and in the other they were conducted inside the building. The conversations lasted an average of one hour and the respondents gave their consent to have them audio recorded. The respondents did not wish to be identified. The interviewer's previous knowledge of the work environment and of the interviewees facilitated the interview process by providing "truthful accounts from subjective experiences" (SILVERMAN, 2009, p. 119), as was the idea. What is of particular interest to this study is the life experience of the respondents which can add a component of authenticity to the study. Brazilian newsrooms are all very similar to one another in terms of the technology used, the increased workload, the number of functions taken on by a reduced number

of professionals, time pressure and competition between companies (JORGE et al, 2016).

The narratives were truthful and varied. They were organized and separated into the following categories of analysis: amount of content produced, attributes of professionals, comparison to other professionals, and the relation between time and work as they pertain to multitasking, production routines and speed. The discovery of similar issues in the data helped reach conclusions about the relation between production practices on the web and the pressure that time exudes on the professionals under study.

The interviews

This paper presents the results from semi-structured conversations. We can confirm that these interviews are significant accounts of the current reality in journalism newsrooms – as they are important representations of the more than 20-year career of web journalists in Brazil.

Interviewee 1 (2015), who came for a daily newspaper, went through an adaptation process learning the web routines. This female journalist explains that she carries out a number of activities, asserting that she "has become a 'multitasking professional'". She says: "You have to do a lot of things at the same time […]. The routine nowadays is much worse". She talks about the difficulty in putting together all the elements of news on the web – titles, *tags*, *read more*, photos, videos, etc., which she calls "manual labour". This is different from printed news. She says, "Print reporters do not write titles, subtitles or captions. They don't know how to do this. They really don't. I had to learn all of that here" (at the site). She also mentioned that these attributes detract from her research and news writing time, and moves her away from the goal of "whatever it takes to beat out the competition and get the news first".

Interviewee 2 (2015) – another woman, young journalist – said she doesn't usually research information outside of the newsroom and most of it is acquired through resources like *WhatsApp* and e-mail. "The research has become a little more independent than just being at the location. We rely on our speed in web journalism, this is essential to our work, so it is often unnecessary for us to go out on the streets." The third woman web journalist, Interviewee 3

(2015), lives with the following dilemma: she thinks going out on the streets to report as a "waste of time", even though she believes it to be important:

> I believe that a reporter's place is on the street. But I get quite distressed doing this because I'm afraid of losing time [...]. So, I avoid going out on the street. There is a lot you can get done over the telephone. I even show the interns how much information we are able to research solely by using the telephone. [...] A reporter's place is on the street. Staying in the newsrooms is limiting, it makes you dumb [...] On the other hand, if we did go out on the streets, there would be fewer texts published (Interviewee 3).

Interviewee 2 talks about the production routines and says she edits up to 50 materials per day:

> There is a whirlwind of things happening, but you manage to deal with it. [...] There are days when you have so much to do and you get overwhelmed. But that type of chaos has already become part of the routine. I'm able to deal with and I believe that this is what the market nowadays wants from us: quicker and quicker, capable of researching more sources in as less time as possible and have good content that makes an impression. It's a challenge (Interviewee 2).

Interviewee 2 (2015) also mentioned the fact that she handles all media at the same time on the web. She also believes that, as a web journalist, she multitasks more than other professionals at other media: "We have to put in text, text that catches the eye [...], everything is about getting a larger audience. Printed press has many people involved in one process. For us, there are many things for one person to do".

Interviewee 1 also sees herself as a professional who multitasks more than professionals from other media: "I do many things at the same time. I have many functions and have to do them all as quickly as possible." For her, the work of a web journalist differentiates from the work of journalists in other sectors when it comes to producing:

> On the TV, the producer's job speeds up the reporter's life. On the web the work is really different. [...] Sometimes the issue of time makes it difficult because the amount of material you have means you research less than you would if you were working at a newspaper where you only have one topic (Interviewee 1).

Interviewee 3 compares the work she develops on the web with that of TV journalists: "On the internet, whoever has the job, whether it's a reporter or an intern, owns the whole process":

(On the web), when you get a topic, you have to do everything. You don't do part of it and have another person do the rest. This doesn't exist. On television the producer is the one who does the research. The reporter is a complement, sometimes not even that. The editor will adapt the text. So, it appears to me that TV (where I have some experience) is very, very segmented. In our case, we control the process from beginning to end. You might even get help from a colleague if the topic requires division, but, in general, the whole process is the responsibility of the one who has the news (Interviewee 3).

Interviewee 3 also sees herself as being more multitasked than professionals in other media: "We do everything. We do the photos and video. We chase down everyone, we think about the graphics. I think this ends up making us more diverse professionals". She believes that the need for multitasking professionals on the web enhances the time pressure on news production processes: "You have to do everything in a hurry. [...] This is already so much a part of our job that we think it's odd that the others in other media do not work like this".

It is noteworthy that web journalists consider themselves more multitasked than journalists from the same vehicle or other media. As much as they value the high level of content produced on the web, they consider it and the tasks associated with it as factors that add stress to the job. One of the interviewees emphasizes having to write news with particular components as being tiring. While talking about the routines they used time-related words like "quickness" and "speed" as well as referencing ideas like instantaneity and "real time" when emphasizing the importance of "releasing news first". The interviewees reveal advantages and disadvantages of being web journalists within a microcosm where they are representative of women, journalists and citizens, while media convergence is seen as positive, the fact that they do not do many reports on the street is seen as a consequence of "having no time" or a "waste of time", as one interviewee had mentioned. This is a contradiction to the number of tasks they have to perform to feed the electronic spaces on the web.

Final considerations

The whole field of professional journalists who use new tools, work in a digital environment and the increasingly heavy demand for updating needs to be better researched. We hope this

paper stimulates further discussion on the relation between time and multitasking in the routines of web journalists, and hope to highlight the particularities of working on the web and propose improvements to these professionals' working conditions.

When discussing the relation between tasks, multimodality of web journalists and time pressure in production routines, it was apparent that web professionals constantly compare themselves to journalists from other media. They see themselves as the real "masters of the news" for having to put together all the components involved behind building a news story, from the idea to publishing. In other words, it is not uncommon to have only one professional responsible for the whole news production process.

This idea coupled with the concept of prioritizing and added to the complexity of functions and roles in a web newsroom and to continual deadlines proves that if the journalists of old times gave their lives to their profession, as Travancas said (1993), then the ones of today give their souls and all their available time to theirs. This article examines these issues while taking the theory of newsmaking into account and considering the professional culture of journalists and the organization of the job and production processes, as per Wolf (2003). We consider time to be a latent factor in journalism and the concept of "real time" in web journalism production routines to be an aspect that strengthens the premise of producing and publishing news as fast as possible within a market driven by the pressure of competition, as per Moretzsohn (2002). Concerning those professionals who produce content on and for the web specifically, their routines were noted as having certain characteristics – like the multiplicity of tasks – which are capable of aggravating time pressure in news production as well as changing editorial standards, altering the organizational structure and transforming the product.

NOTES

1   An initial version of this paper was presented at the XVIII Congress of Communication Sciences in the Mid-West, May 2016.

2	For the purposes of this paper we used the terms internet journalism, web journalism and journalism on the web as synonyms for activities on the online world.

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