

# Google, Facebook and other digital platforms are influencing the work of journalists

February 9 2022



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Journalism is a rapidly changing profession. Digital journalism is transforming the way in which information and communication technologies are used by media workers. With this change journalist

practices, norms and values are also being reshaped. That concludes Tomás Dodds in his Ph.D. research, wherefore he did 7 months of participant observation in two Chilean newsrooms. On Wednesday 9 February 2022 he will defend his thesis: "Newsroom Dissonance: How new digital technologies are changing professional roles in contemporary newsrooms?"

## **Your thesis is called 'Newsroom Dissonance,' what does that mean?**

A dissonance is a lack of agreement or harmony between people or things. During my ethnographic work at a television station Canal 13 and the newspaper La Tercera, I saw the consequences of digital technologies. What a journalist is, is a result of a negotiation between the journalist, the editor and the people who control the [newsroom](#). But with these new technologies, journalists need to follow the logic of the platforms that they are using. They need to obey the rules of third-party companies like Facebook, Twitter and Google to write news. And these 'rules' are algorithmic constructions that aren't fully transparent. These external companies tell the newsrooms who their audience is. And because the advertisement revenues depend on how well you do in these matrices, newsrooms are more likely to publish more of these stories that do well. Some journalists have to keep on writing about topics although it goes against their own professional identity and what they believe they should write about. This ensures a professional dissonance within the newsroom. Journalists are feeling a gap between their values and their daily practices.

## **Is this change in journalism a problem?**

I wish my thesis was happier, but I think it's scary. We don't know how these algorithms work because they are not transparent. And you have to

believe those third parties in what they say. It also happens in other fields, like academia. Google Scholar tells you how successful your articles are. But that is also a matrix. If the only thing a university cares for is the number of citations, you are forced to pursue these numbers. It's scary because journalism has the power to put on the agenda. That power is now shifted from the [journalists](#) and newsrooms to the platforms, that can have big effects on a democratic society.

## **Is there a way back?**

It is not about going back. I think newsrooms need a model where they depend on subscribers. We need to find an equilibrium between algorithmic decisions that the platforms demand and the autonomy of the newsrooms. For [digital journalism](#), there is less time to do [background checks](#) or research because they need to break the stories very quickly. One of the dissonances is how they can correlate their identity as a journalist where they feel they need sources for their article but the system is forcing them to write a source-less article. We need to find the answer to the question of how we can find a balance between the platforms and the journalistic work rather than letting the platforms dictate what a journalist should be.

## **People seem to like 'free' news, do you think there lies a responsibility at the audience side as well?**

Yes. Last years have shown how little we know about the platforms and what they do with our data. There was this whole dream of the democratization of information, but what we have seen in the past decade is that we don't know how the platforms work. It got a lot of people by surprise. But I do think the audience has a responsibility in taking care of news organizations. They fulfill a key role in democratic societies. With the use of the platforms this role is changing, merely

based on a matrix and that is a terrible thing. I'm not arguing that we need to avoid the technology, but we do need to take care of journalism as a society and not be dependent on opaque algorithms.

## **You did your research in Chile, are the results applicable worldwide?**

This question comes up more often and it doesn't feel like a fair one. Nobody asks this when you research in the US. People say: "ohh very interesting but it's in Chile. That's an awful bias and inequality in academia. But yes, Chile is a great example to study how technologies are affecting professional identities. Since the end of the dictatorship in the '80s, there has been a huge investment in the private sector pro-technology. Chile is pushing itself to modernize as much as it can. It makes it an interesting case because you can compare the very recent transition from analog to digital.

Provided by Leiden University

Citation: Google, Facebook and other digital platforms are influencing the work of journalists (2022, February 9) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2022-02-google-facebook-digital-platforms-journalists.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.