Newsroom dissonance: how new digital technologies are changing professional roles in contemporary newsrooms

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Part III

Professional dissonance in multiplatform newsrooms

V. Chapter 5: Newsroom dissonance

Journalism is still becoming acclimated to the transformations that new technologies have brought to newsrooms (Meese & Hurcombe, 2020; O'Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008). Journalists are struggling with the changing temporalities of news production, the novel infrastructures of technology and materialities, and the new platforms that they are now being pressured to utilise. Because of these distortions, news makers are encountering transformations in their professional roles and identities. Media workers, as I witnessed daily, are mulling over the question of what it means to be a journalist in contemporary multiplatform newsrooms.

The acceleration of the rhythms behind news making due to new levels of dependency on digital infrastructures asks journalists to act and produce knowledge based on a different set of values from those they consider to be proper to the profession. This growing gap between journalistic values and practices creates a state of mismatch in which media workers must prioritise different topics, values, and norms, which is a phenomenon called *professional dissonance*.

In this chapter, I argue that reporters arrive at this feeling not only because of the introduction of new digital technologies but also because of managerial decisions that disregard journalists' perceptions of their own roles. The new infrastructures themselves demand that reporters modify their practices to function correctly. However, I argue in this chapter that the decisions enacted by those who run the newsrooms, such as editors and managers, about how to approach these technologies are the main disruption to reporters' professional identities. To reduce the dissonance that reporters are experiencing, media workers could oppose the new rhythms of digital infrastructures or the obscure algorithms of third-party platforms, but that would necessarily translate into dysfunction within the already established patterns of production, negatively affecting audience metrics and advertising revenues alike. As Tuchman argues (see Chapter 1), news organisations depend on a process of active bureaucracy and flexible negotiations between reporters and editors. Tuchman (1978) further states that these negotiations are part of a cumulative practice based on journalists' previous experiences. Moreover, although journalists may criticise algorithms (Christin, 2017), algorithms rarely negotiate. Contesting the algorithms behind digital platforms produces a disruption in the contemporary active bureaucracy with which media organisations work. Consequently, the flexible negotiations between journalists and editors become less open, which results in less

compromise occurring between the two and increased mandates regarding how journalists must feed the algorithm for different platforms. Journalists have less room to protest, and the gap between values and practices becomes ever wider.

The web-based environment of the attention economy, in which the pressure to generate clickbait content is uppermost, offers optimal conditions for the increase of professional dissonance in the newsrooms. Journalists now have less incentive to contextualise, problematise, and scrutinise their stories and sources, and if they do, these must adapt to the settings imposed by the platforms on which their stories appear, which often favour whoever writes the most dazzling, eye-catching version of the same story. As van der Haak et al. argue, the editorial decision to rely almost exclusively on social media platforms for news distribution is translating into 'fewer reporters on fewer beats, fewer angles presented, fewer facts checked, and less inspired storytelling' (2012, p. 2925). Thus, journalists' ability to capture the attention of users has become more important than their journalistic values. The competition to capture an ever-more connected and yet ever-more fragmented audience (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017) has encouraged media organisations to seek new or better strategies to report the news (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018). Similar to many other communication-related industries, news media companies, who are facing a growing financial crisis worldwide, are moving inexorably toward a scenario of hypercompetitiveness ruled by a new attention economy (Nixon, 2017). In this context, the rapid datafication of the audience, thanks to new algorithms and analytics tools, has become key to estimating the popularity of news products (Christin, 2018). Indeed, rather than working to promote inclusion or foster diverse exposure for the audience, popularity-driven metrics have become a strongly detailed, low-cost click-counter for the performance of individual news items (Welbers et al., 2016). However, these metrics measure the performance not only of news articles but also of workers' individual success. Now every journalist can be ranked by the popularity of their work. The creation of a 'culture of data' (Lamot & Paulussen, 2020) in news organisations is changing the way reporters approach their own work, creating the need for new routines and concurrently transforming established practices (Hanusch, 2017). Thus, journalists are increasingly pressured to perform well according to the datafied audience. As their values and ideals are not necessarily measured by the algorithm, journalists remain subordinate to clicks and counts. Thus, feelings of professional dissonance begin to proliferate across multiplatform newsrooms.

In this chapter, I describe what I consider to be the most important consequence of the introduction of new digital technologies for journalists and media workers: digital technologies

are leading media workers to a state of professional dissonance because they are being forced, partially due to institutional decisions and partially due to economic interests, to practice journalism in a way that violates their own journalistic values. That is, in this chapter, I argue that the dissonance that these journalists are experiencing does not necessarily emerge from the technologies and platforms that they must utilise, but from the way that their media organisations have responded to the introduction of these same digital technologies.

In the following sections, I define the concepts of professional dissonance and journalistic values. Drawing from data collected during my fieldwork, I argue that these concepts are key to understand the impact of digital technologies in contemporary newsrooms. I then discuss how each of the areas I have analysed in this thesis – infrastructure, temporality, and platforms – illustrate the professional dissonance in the newsrooms of *La Tercera* and Canal 13.

5.1. Professional dissonance in journalism

Professional dissonance is defined as 'a feeling of discomfort arising from the conflict between professional values and job tasks' (Floyd Taylor, 2007, pp. 89–90). It is a rather recent concept that builds on the psychological theory of cognitive dissonance. The cognitive dissonance theory, first developed by Festinger (1957), describes the phenomenon that occurs when a person concurrently holds two cognitions or ideas that are psychologically inconsistent with each other (Aronson, 1969). The meat paradox is a prime example of this phenomenon. As Rothgerber explains, some people may encounter a conflict between 'their eating behaviour and their affection toward animals' (2020), thus causing tension between their conduct and their beliefs. In professional dissonance, however, one of these cognitions develops on the basis of an individual's personal and professional values, while the second arises from the duties or responsibilities required to satisfactorily perform a job according to the standards established by a particular organisation. In any case, both professional and cognitive dissonances could impact the subject's self-perception and self-determination (Bem, 1967).

Professional dissonance, once applied to journalism, is ideally described as the gap that exists between the answers to two questions: How do I believe that quality journalism should report the news? and How am I permitted to report the news? If the gap between these answers is wide, then media professionals experience high levels of anxiety, dread, and frustration. If the gap is narrow, however, media workers experience more professional satisfaction and contentment in their careers.

Melissa Floyd Taylor further argues that it would not be a mistake to classify professional dissonance as an existential problem, as 'it relates to feelings which directly impact on our perception of ourselves as people, our feelings about the kind of people and professional we are, and our feelings about how we should live our lives and fulfill our jobs' (2007, p. 91). Therefore, potential 'value collisions' (Frankl, 1988) could increase journalists' malaise or cynicism and despair.

Undurraga (2017) first employed the concept of professional dissonance in journalism in 2017. Seven months of newsroom ethnography between 2013 and 2015 and the work of Farías (2015) allowed Undurraga to identify two types of dissonance in Brazilian newsrooms: epistemic and evaluative dissonance. By evaluative dissonance, Undurraga refers to journalists' differing political and economic views, that is, how they understand political systems, economic models, social justice, democratic processes, and so on. This type of dissonance, he argues, could even be positive and fruitful for newsrooms, as it allows the encounter of different perspectives and points of view regarding relevant contemporary topics. By epistemic dissonance, and perhaps more interesting for this thesis, Undurraga refers to 'clashes over how journalism is best practiced, including clashes over how to know the world, and how best to report it, cultivate sources, and describe events' between media workers (2017, p. 512). During my own fieldwork, epistemic dissonance was more evident regarding the gap that existed between paper and digital journalists at *La Tercera*. Undurraga does not consider the role of new digital technologies in the increase of professional dissonance; however, he identifies how managerial decisions contribute to this state. I argue in this thesis that depending on the platform on which they were working, Chilean journalists experienced professional dissonance in different ways. As others have observed (Hendrickx et al., 2021), journalists working within the same newsroom but on different platforms demonstrated dissimilar appreciation for novel technologies, including audience metrics. I argue that this occurred because, for example, audience metrics impacted journalists' work differently depending on the platform on which they were working. Paper journalists saw the impact of these new technologies in a more indirect way than digital journalists, who were punished or rewarded the instant they publish an article online.

5.2. Journalistic values

Journalistic values have been defined as 'structures of meaning that are discursively created, perpetuated, and contested' (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, p. 120). Journalistic values have long

been challenged and disputed. According to Underwood (1993), for example, since media organisations became increasingly profit oriented, the relationship between journalists' values and the interests of the business executives who run the newsrooms have caused clashes regarding which priorities news organisations should follow. However, as Bell and Owen notice, the 'influence of social media platforms and technology companies is having a greater effect on American journalism than even the shift from print to digital' (2017). Journalists and editors rarely clash any more over priorities, or some of these discussions have been rendered irrelevant, as companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google 'have evolved beyond their role as distribution channels, and now control what audiences see and who gets paid for their attention, and even what format and type of journalism flourishes' (Bell & Owen, 2017).

In this context, Carlson and Lewis (2015) utilise the concept of 'blurring boundaries' to address the question of what could and could not be called journalism today. For Carlson, 'struggles over journalism are often struggles over boundaries' (2016, p. 2), because at the core of questions about appropriate journalistic behaviour or even what counts as journalism is the battle over symbolic boundaries that define practices, knowledge, methods, and perhaps most importantly, values.

Values in journalism have historically been a critically important boundary (Johnson & Kelly, 2003). As I argued in the introductory chapter of this thesis, some authors indicate that regardless of the platform on which media workers labour, core ethical and professional values remain the same when workers identify themselves as journalists, as if the title of the job carries with it inherent, agreed-upon standards (Boczkowski, 2005). According to Ryfe (2006), this is important because journalists' decision-making processes are often influenced by these values about 'what a journalist's role is, what her or his obligations are, [and] what values and commitments are appropriate' (p. 205).

The concept of professional dissonance has rarely been utilised in media and journalism studies; nevertheless, we are witnessing a growing number of publications that address the problem of ethical values mismatching job practice routines (Mellado et al., 2016). Several years of fieldwork in four newsrooms across Denmark and the United Kingdom caused Thomsen to conclude that both licence-fee funded broadcasters and commercial broadcasters understand and share as imperative the idea that journalism is 'doing a public service'. Furthermore, media workers at a commercial station seemed to be annoyed by the assumption that they would not provide a public service as much as their licence-fee counterparts.

Thomsen concludes her ethnographic work by arguing that her research reveals how 'journalists [are] experiencing current changes to news work as problematic for upholding

values of journalistic professionalism' (2018, p. 263). Although some essential values were shared among all the news divisions in which she conducted her research, Thomsen argues that new working routines are mismatched with those values.

Notably, journalistic ethics and principles have changed along with the historical developments and social structures of any society (Kepplinger & Köcher, 1990; Siebert et al., 1956). Therefore, when we compare contemporary journalistic values with those from our recent past, we are less in the presence of iconoclastic journalists and rebels and more in front of a profession that has mutated along with the political and social moment in which it lives.

Similarly, Hanitzsch and Vos conceptualise journalistic roles as 'discursive constructions of the institutional values, attitudes, and beliefs with regards to the position of journalism in society and, consequently, to the communicative ideal journalists are embracing in their work' (2017, p. 116). Therefore, they argue, we should examine not only the professional role of journalists but also the institutional roles of media workers. These roles can then be divided into two categories of study: the normative and cognitive roles of journalists. First, normative roles 'indicate what is generally desirable to think or do in a given context', emphasising the idea that journalists have a social responsibility to their audiences. Second, cognitive roles are concerned with 'the institutional values, attitudes, and beliefs individual journalists embrace as a result of their socialization' (2017, p. 125). Cognitive roles are, in simple terms, the formulas, guidelines, parameters, and road maps for concrete action that a media organisation pre-establishes for their journalists.

5.3. Normative and cognitive roles

As Belair-Gagnon et al. state, 'journalistic roles – even when they manifest solely at a discursive level – matter because their construction implicates the resources granted to journalists and the notion of journalism' (2020, p. 349). I observed this phenomenon during my fieldwork. More resources and prestige were granted to the professionals whom executives thought mattered more, as in the case of *La Tercera*. I attempted to understand why paper journalists were held in higher regard than web journalists at *La Tercera* despite the digital reporters' more sizeable readership, and the Internet editor told me that 'the paper remains as the most important product of the company, and that just makes sense' (see Chapter 2). This appreciation of newspaper journalists' cognitive roles within this media organisation meant that they enjoyed better salaries than their digital colleagues and, as my interviews revealed, were regarded as 'better journalists'. They were considered better reporters than their digital

counterparts not because they produced more articles, worked longer hours, or generated significantly more revenue, but because paper was the platform with which the institution identified most strongly at that moment, and therefore, it received the most privileges from the senior editors and media managers.

A year after I finished my fieldwork, the newspaper would publish the 'journalism no longer fits on the paper' cover, signalling that more attention would be bestowed upon digital reporters. However, it is difficult to guess the extent to which appreciation of different journalistic roles has changed since I left.

In 2017, I interviewed a digital journalist who had worked at *La Tercera* before moving to Teletrece. I asked her why she thought the cross-media model had not worked for the newspaper, and she responded, 'It is because of the egos. In *La Tercera* [sharing information between platforms] did not work because of the egos'. One of the most frustrating memories she recalled from her time at *La Tercera* was when newspaper reporters 'kept to themselves' scoops and stories that they wanted to publish in the newspaper the next morning. 'Sorry, but everyone in Chile will know that scoop in two hours', she added. As she recounted, newspaper journalists were living with a 'decade-ago' mentality in which they refused to share their information with digital reporters, even if that meant that *La Tercera* would be surpassed by other media that published online first. I argue that this is a clear example of how an editorial decision mandated that scoops belong to the newspaper because the editors attributed higher value to the paper journalists' cognitive roles. However, this interview demonstrates that my interviewee was struggling because her normative values, that is, informing people quickly about interesting developments, was in dissonance with the cognitive role that the organisation had assigned her.

As my interviewee continued, 'We need to change that way of thinking, and in order to do so, the newspaper reporter, the editor, and the director of the media need to change'. She recounted that at some point a pro-digital director arrived at *La Tercera*. One who, in her words, was willing and open to journalists from different platforms sharing information, utilising new platforms in innovative ways, and 'level[ing] the field' between colleagues inside the newsroom. In other words, this editor was willing to align the cognitive roles between journalists from different platforms. 'But changing that mentality was difficult. It is difficult in every sense. Why, for example, do web journalists keep earning much less money than their newspaper counterparts? Why?'

Unlike my interviewee, I argue that this dissonance between newspaper and digital journalists occurred not only because of egos but also because of its roots in journalistic cognitive values

that were deliberately promoted by the media organisation in which they worked. Ego did not cause newspaper reporters to save their stories for the next day; rather, this was caused by the value that surrounded the printed press, such as impact, prominence, and timeliness, among other factors. Newspaper journalists worked quickly to publish once or twice every 24 hours. They followed what they saw as the core values of professional standards of news. Yet, as my interviewee noted, their work was increasingly being surpassed by people who published similar stories on the web, and by the time their stories were printed on paper, everyone was already familiar with them.

However, digital reporters worked quickly to publish sometimes dozens of stories during a workday. According to their normative values, the newsworthiness of a story was determined by its temporality. The sooner that the story was published, the sooner they informed the audience, who had a right to know in real time whatever was happening around them. Craig suggests that 'journalism champions speed and timeliness because it yields the value of comparative advantage' (2016, p. 466), as whoever releases the news first earns the lead over their competition. Thus, for decades, the speed of reportage was understood as a marker of quality in journalism. As one of Teletrece's reporters told me, this may still have been true: 'On the web, you need to get out fast. And getting out fast and doing it well is difficult'. However, the temporalities associated with the digital environment caused the 'doing it well' part to become more complicated because editors were pushing digital journalists to be the first to appear with the story online, regardless of the quality of the product, and thus, increasing dissonance was being created between normative and cognitive values. Instead, to fulfil these sets of ideals, digital journalists often acted against their own sense of journalistic values, which normally would include the usage of sources, extensive research for the construction of stories, and the timeliness of a story.

One explanation for this contradictory action is the versionality of digital media products, which has reduced the need to perform well from the beginning. The digital journalists I worked with were encouraged by their newsrooms to publish *anything* as quickly as they could so the social media team could feed the link to that article into the social media platforms. It did not matter if the article simply contained a picture and a one-line paragraph because this could be changed later. Only at a second stage, when user attention had been captured, did the real journalistic work enter; then reporters developed a well-written, medium-length journalistic article.

'Technology changes how we do journalism', said the T13 Internet editor during my interview with him, and he later added that 'journalism has to change and adapt to how people are

consuming the news'. This senior editor had 15 years of experience in digital projects, and he believed that one of these changes concerned the immediacy demanded by digital platforms. Consequently, he promoted the versionality of digital news among his workers. Because news articles could be edited even after publication, pressure was reduced for digital journalists to be accurate from the start, and they could complement their stories with sources and extensive research long after publication. However, they could only do that if they had time to linger on a single article.

5.4. Pre-established values for journalists

After conversations with several digital journalists at Teletrece, I drew on the conclusions of Belair-Gagnon et al. (2020) about journalistic roles and the allocation of resources and then conducted more interviews with the sole purpose of addressing this issue before departing the newsroom at *La Tercera*.

In Chapter 2, I discussed an interview with the *La Tercera* digital editor. I asked him whether the importance that editors assigned to either paper or digital journalists actively translated into the resources that the organisation directed to the reporters. 'No', he responded at first, only to modify his response a second later and elaborate about how *La Tercera* saw the newspaper as its most important platform. After my interview with this editor, in which he explicitly stated that he considered digital reporters – the group he was in charge of – to be 'ephemeral journalists', I reinterviewed some of his team members. Without telling them that their direct supervisor considered their jobs to be finite, I wondered how they were negotiating the 'blurring boundaries' in their daily work. I sat with one of *La Tercera*'s digital journalists at the Juan Valdez coffee shop outside of the newspaper headquarters. The terrace was packed with people smoking, but the noise of the loud conversations around us and hissing sounds of traffic protected us against any possible eavesdropping. As I ordered the coffees, she lit a cigarette and checked some of the many pending WhatsApp messages on her phone.

We discussed the boundaries of her job and what she felt was inertia from the managing editors toward the digital reporters. There was an attempt once, she recalled, to enhance the digital section of the newspaper and make her team perform additional research and publish different topics, 'but that only lasted two weeks' until the digital editor started collaborating more with the paper. 'All his friends were there, and he was closer to them', she remembered. According to this interviewee, it was more rewarding to publish in the paper than on the web, even for the man in charge of the website.

Originally, there was another way newspaper journalists collaborated with the digital reporters. The newspaper journalists were supposed to arrive early in the morning and write with the digital team for a while, but soon, they simply stopped coming. When they did cross the newsroom in the morning, they sat grudgingly facing a wall like all the other digital reporters, mainly transcribing their own stories from yesterday's paper and uploading them to the website.

Both digital and paper journalists espoused the same values, but they had different roles and priorities within the same organisation. They were praised differently by the editors; furthermore, the meaning of being a journalist was different; the practices, knowledge, methods, and ideals were dissimilar between one and the other, to the extent that they refused to mix.

My interviewee recounted multiple instances in which she had to expend extra effort to write and publish the news since her supervisor was nowhere to be found. 'You are alert, even when your bosses are not. I care that things go well […]. I couldn't not care, for the love that I have for the newspaper, my career, my profession, if we publish something wrong … You put the pressure on yourself', she said, unashamed.

This quote is useful to understand the how the editors and managers at *La Tercera* had well-defined pre-established values for digital journalists. These reporters' normative values were still being expressed both in practice and during our interviews ('I care that things go well'); however, their cognitive values were simply less important for the organisation than those of their paper counterparts.

5.5. Newsroom dissonance in practice

On 16 October 2020, I received an audio message in one of the WhatsApp groups where I still chat with journalists I met during my time in the field: 'I'm done, you know. I'm done. I've been preparing some material about the 18O, focussing on eye trauma. I did a nice, careful job, and it has been so difficult getting them [the editors] to publish anything. […] So, yeah. That's it. I'm quitting'.[36] Since October 2019, the tone in these journalists' messages had been becoming increasingly frustrated and belligerent toward the newsroom and media organisations in which they belonged; however, now these voices had a quiet sorrow in them, a tone of resignation.

[36] The original audio was in Spanish.

I should clarify; this applied to the voices that were left. The testimony of this T13 reporter was merely one among many. The majority of the journalists and media workers that I featured in these pages no longer work in the newsrooms where I first met them. Some of them do not work in newsrooms at all. In fact, none of the other members in this particular WhatsApp group are still employed in the organisation where I met them. To my amazement, his voice message was not followed by surprise or disbelief, but rather by empathetic responses: 'It sucks when these things happen, when these *fuckers* are not capable of just saying they don't want to publish you', one of his former colleagues reflected unapologetically, while another added, 'I have many friends who are going through the same thing right now […], mega exploited and mega censored'.

This message exemplifies how this journalist's normative role – his self-proclaimed social responsibility toward the Chilean audience in a context of social unrest – collided with the cognitive roles that emerged from the institution for which he worked and the socialisation between digital reporters and editors.

In March 2021, I addressed this case and asked this digital journalist if he believed that the decision not to publish his work on eye trauma during the unrest was related to the platform on which he was working and the level of detail and content that this platform allowed. In yet another voice message, he responded: 'I don't think it has much to do with the platform, because there are other topics, equally well-researched, for which I have had no issues in the past'. He stated that the television station had covered different topics about human rights violations during the protests. However, he added that the newsroom had avoided presenting these cases as 'systemic' and instead simply reported on these occurrences as singular events.

Perhaps equally interesting was what he wrote immediately after that voice message: 'In this case, the topic was very complicated, so even the television editor reviewed it'. I asked him why the television editor would review a web article. 'It is not something that is officially institutionalised, but I think it's because we assume that the editor of the main platform [this also happened at *La Tercera* with the newspaper editors] is more aware of the different sensibilities'. He then argued that sensible topics were covered less frequently on the web, and therefore the Internet editor had, in his opinion, less expertise on addressing these types of issues.

This interviewee indicated that digital journalists seemed to be struggling to cover significant topics, or 'sensitive topics', as my interviewee phrased it, not necessarily because of the affordances of the platforms that they utilised but because of the editorial decisions behind how these platforms ought to be utilised. The idea that this journalist needed to consult with the

editor from another platform – in this case, the television editor – revealed the depth to which expectations had dropped for digital journalists to cover relevant topics, and although this reporter pushed for his story to be published, he was required to rely not on his direct supervisor but on someone else whom the media organisation thought had better journalistic knowledge for covering 'sensitive issues'.

In this chapter, I argue that digital technologies have had a significant, dynamic, and unpredictable impact on the normative and cognitive roles of journalists. Reporters, such as my interviewee, uphold what could be called traditional values in journalism. Van Zoonen (1998) argues that journalists are not a homogeneous group and they embody different organisational constraints; however, they invoke a similar ideal value system when they are forced to reflect upon their own work. Therefore, news and media are 'an ordered aggregate of shared norms and informal rules that guide news collection' (Sparrow, 2006, p. 155). However, the institutional values, attitudes, and beliefs have been transformed, as my interviewee above revealed, leaving journalists feeling uneasy and confused about what they are supposed to do and how they are supposed to do it. These changes are significant, as they subvert the traditional process of news making; they are dynamic, as they are constantly evolving in relation to every new technology introduced to the newsroom; and they are unpredictable, as they come to fruition differently in every newsroom and in every political context.

During my fieldwork, I observed how journalists, especially those working with digital platforms, recognised in their work a paucity of merit. That is not to say that they did not uphold principles and ethics in their approach to journalism, but they believed that their labour was lacking in journalistic value. As the interviews in the previous sections have demonstrated, this created a condition in which journalists began to experience tensions that negatively affected the perception of their jobs and even of themselves.

However, I argue that resistance to dissonance is keeping journalism alive. As Schapals and Porlezza note, 'the introduction of new technologies in journalism has historically been met with a great deal of resistance on behalf of those most affected by them – namely, journalists themselves' (2020, p. 17), but resistance does not equal refusal. By resisting new technologies, journalists, as a community, ensure that their values, beliefs, and standards are safe and constant rather than behaving irregularly or being swayed every time a new technology is introduced. Moreover, previous studies have demonstrated 'how change is a process of constant negotiation between the journalists, the tools they utilise and other members of news organisations in charge of strategic decisions, […] through everyday interactions and practices' (Domingo et al., 2015, p. 55). Indeed, as Domingo et al. continue, emphasising journalistic

practices and the actors who interact with each other during the production of news rather than the institutions opens 'the black boxes of normative definitions of journalism and democracy' (p. 64).

This highlights the need to avoid a technologically deterministic approach to the phenomenon of professional dissonance. The fault for the mismatch between journalistic values and role performances does not reside exclusively with the technologies that arrive in the newsroom; it is also the consequence of organisational decisions that establish the way in which these software and hardware are utilised. Journalistic resistance, as characterised both in the literature and my own research, is a safeguard to prevent undesirable results from the usage of these technologies.

In other words, the tension between the journalists and the technological object is not creating this resistance. In the following sections, I argue that, as a result of organisational decisions, the newsroom dissonance I observed during my fieldwork actually originated in an infrastructure that was set by those managing these newsrooms; it demands different journalistic values and disregards journalists' feelings of dissonance.

5.6. The night of 'La Franja'

By the time I hung up the phone on 16 November 2017, it was already 1 a.m. I was standing alone in one of the building's poorly lit interior open patios, which at that time, was depressingly deserted. At least a breeze of fresh air seemed to be coming from the hills above, cooling the warm summer night as it swayed the top of the palm trees that decorated the courtyard. As I scribbled on my notepad the last quotes from the interview I had just finished, the dim shape of a security guard came around the corner. 'T13', I said, employing the back of my pen to hit the press department logo stamped on the front of the small orange notepad I was carrying. I caught the guard scanning me suspiciously with his eyes. *Why else would I be here at this time?* I remember thinking testily, more out of sheer tiredness than anything else. I finished writing the notes before I lost track of everything that I had just asked my interviewee, closed the pad, and hurried toward the double glass doors at the south end of the patio, which housed the only source of light and noise in an otherwise dead building: the entrance to the Teletrece newsroom.

The smell of a stuffy, unventilated room hit my nostrils hard when I entered. The minutes I had spent outside interviewing sources on the phone made my nose forget the concentrated odours of coffee, food, and people who had been locked in the same room for some extended length of time. Five half-eaten, extra-large pizzas lay unattended in their opened boxes at the corner

of the table where the journalist who covered culture, entertainment, and television would have been sitting if this were daytime. However, this absence was barely noticeable in a newsroom in which digital journalists and television reporters were buzzing around relentlessly, as this night ended the 'franja electoral', a 'speak now or forever hold your peace' kind of situation for politicians, and that meant all-hands-on-deck for T13's TV and digital journalists.

The 'franja electoral' is one of the most important events in every Chilean presidential election. As mandated by law, every night, starting 28 days before the election, both private and public television stations transmit during the same timeslot an authorised electioneering video for all presidential candidates who are participating in the first round of elections, which this year was to be held on 19 November. In addition to television debates, this is the way in which the republic provides every official candidate an equal chance to transmit a message to voters regardless of how much money they raised during the campaign.

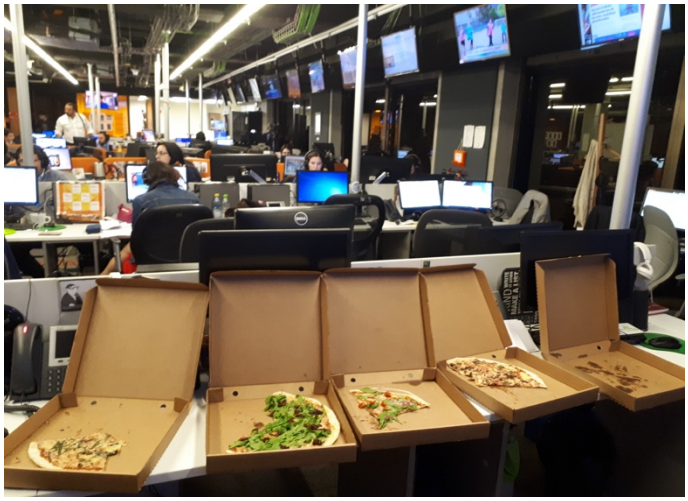

Figure 20. Pizza boxes during the 'franja' night. Photo: Tomás Dodds during fieldwork.

The television reporters rushed to each of the candidates' headquarters to obtain their reactions while broadcasting live from the field, whereas the digital reporters on T13.cl analysed the videos and gathered opinions from academics and experts on political communication. I interviewed the creative directors behind the campaigns to understand the message they wanted to promote with each of the videos they had chosen to present that night.

As luck would have it, I would be in the Teletrece newsroom for the first round of presidential elections on 19 November, and then I would be in the *La Tercera* newsroom for the second round on 17 December, which included only the two candidates with the most preferences from the first round. Not only would I witness an election night twice during my fieldwork but I would also be able to compare how the infrastructures of each news media organisation handled

one of the most important, demanding, and stressful nights in a journalist's career. The night of 'la franja' had been an apt rehearsal for what was about to come, but as I finished writing the last of the articles that I had been asked to publish that day, I wondered how much the infrastructure of the newsroom could impact the way that election nights were covered.

Tuchman (1978) was among the first to examine the relationship between the physical layout of the newsroom as well as how media workers were organised spatially and that impact on the structure of journalistic work. Since then, scholars have examined the multiple layers of the physical and virtual infrastructures that have impacted the news-making process (Shepard, 1998). For example, after conducting research on the new layout structures of Australian newsrooms, Josephi (1998) concludes that it is possible to observe an increment on newer newsrooms' floor designs that places more emphasis on flexibility and transparency; she associates these characteristics with fundamental features of an organisation that is attempting to remove barriers between thematic section reporters and multiplatform workers. Correspondingly, Coester (2017) concludes in her research that in 'some newsrooms leaders are designing their workplaces to better support the behaviours, workflows and attitudes required in an adaptive, modern media company'.

Figure 201. Election night in Teletrece's newsroom. Photo: Tomás Dodds during fieldwork.

This picture portrays Teletrece's digital journalists on the afternoon of the first round of the 2017 elections. The lack of walls and cubicles embodies the importance that this newsroom placed on uninterrupted, rapid communication between workers. In practice, this layout allowed journalists to communicate effectively with each other. 'Is anyone writing about this issue?' someone would ask. A 'no' in unison from the rest of the occupants of the table and a quick nod of the head from the content editor (sitting immediately out of frame in this photo)

was sufficient for a journalist to begin a new article. This setting also allowed journalists to monitor the television screens placed all around the walls, which alerted them of any breaking news or developments in the night's results that they may otherwise have missed.

Figure 22. Quick editorial meeting for the elections. Photo: Tomás Dodds during fieldwork.

The picture in Figure 22 presents an impromptu editorial meeting that occurred that day. The closeness of the journalists working in the same platform allowed them to quickly gather to discuss how a particular event or development would be covered. The content editor in this picture (wearing a white shirt) did not even need to rise from his chair; rather, he rolled it to the middle of the two tables where digital reporters worked.

A comparative analysis of newsrooms in three European countries that were attempting to integrate different platforms and workflows, thus reshaping their infrastructures, enabled García Avilés et al. (2009) to categorise their results into three models of newsroom convergence. The first model is based on full integration in which 'architecture and infrastructure for multichannel production are combined in one newsroom and controlled via a central news system with workflow management' (2009, p. 299). During my fieldwork, I witnessed multichannel production combined in the space of one newsroom; however, in no way was this controlled by a central news system.

Perhaps Teletrece is closer to the second type of model they observed: cross-media. In this newsroom model, journalists work in different sections, but they at least attempt to coordinate their work routines and the content that each platform produces (García Avilés et al., 2009). Ultimately, a final type of integration model is what they call 'the co-ordination of isolated platforms'. In these newsrooms, 'borders and differences between online, print, radio and

television sections in the same media company do not seem surmountable and convergence is not even seen as an appropriate means of quality improvement' (2009, p. 300). This is precisely what I observed at *La Tercera*. More importantly, this was what both paper and digital journalists of the newspaper perceived to be true because of the segregation that the layout of the newsroom produced.

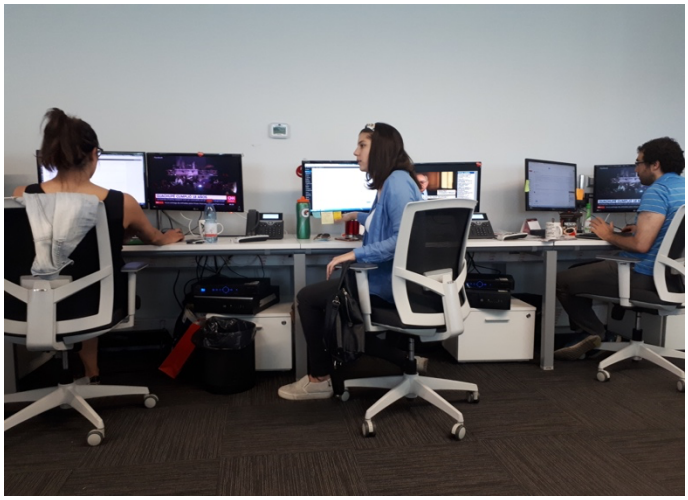

Figure 23. The digital journalists' table at La Tercera *faces a wall. Photo: Tomás Dodds during fieldwork.*

The digital journalists' workstation was particularly inefficient. Not only were they were placed far from the rest of the journalists (who were mixed in rows and islands of white tables) but they were also facing a wall. Even communication with each other was rather difficult sometimes, with the exception of the journalists sitting immediately to their right or left. This placement created a different sense of teamwork from what I had experienced at Teletrece, and election night at *La Tercera* precisely demonstrated the lack of coordination that this arrangement produced.

While the election at Canal 13 was covered smoothly, although hectically, efforts were controlled and coordinated. However, election night at *La Tercera* was quite the opposite. The newspaper and the digital section worked with little or no coordination. According to Gade (2004), 'at many newspapers, changes in newsroom structure have brought with them new job titles that many news veterans would not recognize, including duty officer, maestro, circle editor, news manager of public life, and change facilitator' (2004, p. 8), which have concurrently produced a change in older job titles. The reconfiguration of newsrooms, she argues, has created the necessity for a horizontal level of participation, involving the editor in a more active role in writing and reporting, and almost completely eliminating the figure of the lone wolf that formerly existed in the newspapers. This was certainly the case at Canal 13,

where journalists from many platforms gathered and shared information on planned articles and pieces as a whole. However, at *La Tercera,* communication did not flow from one side of the newsroom to the other. Leaderless (or editorless), digital reporters struggled to find their own sources and frequently simply repeated articles from other websites or agencies, leaving the most well-prepared and well-planned articles for the paper. Without the ability to interview, research, and verify information, journalists at *La Tercera* were under the impression that their jobs were no different from what others could do at home.

The dissimilar infrastructure in the two newsrooms established the frame for the values that the organisations required from their journalists. A layout that excluded digital journalists from the actual conversation and sharing of information with the rest of their colleagues forced them to write brief, sourceless articles that were simply utilised as filler while paper journalists arrived with their 'true stories'. Conversely, at least for that day, digital reporters at Canal 13 were complementing their peers in television and social media while concurrently receiving information from them and including it in their articles.

The digital journalists at *La Tercera* were clearly frustrated. 'I think it would be enough to have a more present editor [to fix this situation], someone who was aware of the articles we write, and make us do special themes', one of the reporters told me. This journalist was rather optimistic, but I doubt that would have been sufficient since the absence of the digital editor was indicative of a significant issue at *La Tercera*: the importance that the organisation provided to the journalists who worked for that platform.

The physicality of the newsroom at *La Tercera* directly impacted the digital reporters' feeling of professional dissonance. Reporters' inner thoughts and values were rarely in accordance with their outer actions. I argue that the organisations' decision about how to arrange the layout of the newsrooms directly affected the way in which digital reporters interacted with colleagues from the same and different platforms. If anything, this spatial arrangement increased the gap in practice between journalists' ideals and actual job tasks and further indicated what was expected from those working on the web. As Berkowitz suggests, 'Scholars refer to the journalists' professionalization process as a distinctly ideological development, as the emerging ideology served to continuously refine and reproduce a consensus about who was a "real" journalist' (2011, p. 18). In this process, *La Tercera*'s digital reporters were not being included in the 'real' journalists' group.

However, although there is little room to appropriate or transform a layout that has been imposed on media workers, in the next section I reveal how journalists negotiated (and resisted)

the pressures that the organisation placed on them – a pressure that increased the feeling of professional dissonance by making journalists act against their own sense of journalistic values.

5.7. The platformisation of news

The platformisation of news has a momentous role in the increase of professional dissonance in contemporary newsrooms. As my conversations with journalists and digital editors have demonstrated in previous chapters, the news sector is actively utilising infrastructural platforms to produce, monetise, and distribute their news. In return, this has created a dependency between media organisations and online services (Meese & Hurcombe, 2020). As Van Dijck et al. argue, 'infrastructural platforms are making extensive efforts to become central nodes in the production, circulation, and commodification of news by developing new data services and news-related features' (2018, p. 50). That is, companies such as Facebook and Alphabet, the parent company of Google, want to position themselves in the middle of the flow between advertisers, news producers, and the audience, thus making their platform indispensable for the distribution and consumption of information. Consequently, authors such as Helmond argue that 'Facebook employs its platform as an infrastructural model to extend itself into external online spaces and […] it employs these extensions to format data for its platform to fit their economic interest' (2015, pp. 7–8). Thus, the platformisation of news has dire consequences on journalistic norms and values. As the digital editor of one of the newsrooms told me, 'If we follow what they tell us to do, they [Facebook] are going to put us on a very visible shelf', signalling that the control of news selection was shifting further from news organisations to these platforms, undermining the privileged position of gatekeeping by professional journalism.

News producers are formatting their content, including the length of texts or the videos and pictures that are attached to it, specifically for these platforms, making the news ready for algorithms (Gillespie et al., 2014) and platforms (Helmond, 2015). Newsrooms are reconfiguring their own data to fit the agenda of the platforms. This adds to the production of news becoming progressively more tailored to the audience. At *La Tercera,* this was more pronounced than at T13 because of the two large blue screens that hung from the wall in the middle of the newsroom that portrayed data supplied by Chartbeat, a technology company that provides analytics about the behaviour of online audiences to publishers around the world. At T13, a person constantly monitored the audience behaviour online.

According to Fenton (2009), a result of the new infrastructural platforms that have made their way into newsrooms is that the contemporary common work ethic among journalists has been basically summarised as 'speed it up and spread it thin'. Juntunen argues that the necessity for speed among journalists is based on three variables: commercial, as the primarily advertising-funded revenue model of newspapers has not yet fully migrated to the digital market; technological, as the platformisation of news has overtaken multiplatform newsrooms across the globe; and journalistic, as the core values of 'doing it for the public […]. Assumed audience expectations and "the public's right to know" are often fused together as grand legitimizing arguments in explaining the need for speed' (2009, p. 170). 'Speed it up and spread it thin' thus is nothing more than the epitome of professional dissonance in contemporary journalism because journalists are being pressured to produce content at a speed that is incompatible with a well-researched, content-heavy article.

News articles have also been further datafied (Porlezza, 2018). Journalists can now tell which of their articles are performing well or which has captivated the most eyeballs in an economic system that is based on attention. This creates further tensions between datafication and journalistic economy, as journalists are left to wonder how much of the agenda-setting is based on editorial decisions and how much is based on audience interactions with similar articles, such as liking and sharing the stories on their own platforms. According to Van Dijck et al., 'the integration of platform data in news operations effectively creates path dependencies as the data infrastructures of the Big Five platforms [or 'FAAMG' – Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, and Google Alphabet] shape the scope of editorial decision-making' (2018, p. 54). Indeed, my research occurred in an ecosystem of highly data-driven news production, distribution, and consumption in which editorial decisions were increasingly informed by audience data. Nelson and Tandoc (2019) find that routines regarding audience analytics are so embedded into journalism's everyday practice that even budget meetings to plan their daily coverage and agenda-setting start by studying these data points.

During my fieldwork I observed a gap between the editors' perception of platformisation and the journalists' perception of this new scenario. According to the Teletrece's social networks editor, 'We needed traffic, we needed visibility, we needed people to read us, and well, what all journalists look for – that our work could be shared, read, and *viralised'*. His job required him to care about the traffic and the number of news articles that, once placed on these infrastructural platforms, could be consumed, bought, and connected with advertisements.

Journalists, however, often resented the number of stories they had to write about *Grey's Anatomy*, *Friends*, and other TV programmes or celebrity culture. Although these stories

offered satisfactory reception by the audience, they fell outside what the journalists felt was actually newsworthy.

As a result of the new digital platforms that have overtaken the publishing process, journalists have real-time insight regarding what kind of information the audience is consuming, and thus, the temptation for those in charge of profiting from advertisements is difficult to resist. This has been empirically proven by Welbers et al., who, after analysing the print and online editions of five Dutch newspapers, conclude that 'using a cross-lagged analysis covering 6 months, we found that storylines of the most-viewed articles were more likely to receive attention in subsequent reporting, which indicates that audience clicks affect news selection' (2016, p. 1037). I saw this in action during my fieldwork: when in doubt, Teletrece's content editor would publish an online story about events in 'that show' to lure readers to the website, as this strategy had proven time and again to be successful on the web.

One of the social media journalists I interviewed during my fieldwork at *La Tercera* offered additional insight into this process: someone who did not write articles picked which of those written by the digital and paper journalists they thought would succeed on the platforms because, as he stated, 'We already know which type of news would "have a click"; for example, an article about two pandas that had a baby panda. … Animals are a hit on Facebook', he explained. Although this may seem like a trivial story, it actually indicates a preference or priming for certain topics over others, highlighting and rewarding the work of those who write less informative political news and cultural content in exchange for 'hits for the web'. This phenomenon became even more problematic when I asked him about the rest of the stories that they shared on the newspaper's social media: 'Well, what we do in the morning is look at the homepage and choose from there […], that is our first criteria. It comes from other teams [digital and paper], and it's noteworthy because they have put it there, even when we don't know why they have put them on the homepage'.

Paradoxically, this made me think that the social media team's dissonance emerged from having to share on social media platforms news articles that other journalists deemed newsworthy or relevant, despite the team's knowledge that these stories would not function under the logic of the platforms. Their awareness is limited regarding this issue; hence, the same member of the team later added, 'Sometimes there are articles that we do not put on the networks but that are receiving a lot of visits anyway, so we would post them on Facebook and Twitter anyway'. The work of the social media team was to determine what type of article

would generate the most tracking on social media platforms rather than to understand the newsworthiness of the topic itself.

Journalists may resent the number of articles they must produce about *Grey's Anatomy* and other TV and reality programmes, although they have also learned to utilise these publications to satisfy their own journalistic ideals and reduce the level of professional dissonance in their daily work. As the social networks editor told me during our interview, 'Using social networks is the way to capture new audiences, is the way to get traffic to the site, it is how we let people [who only consume online news] know what it is happening on our television news, or in our radio station, or what it is happening on T13'.

In some ways, digital journalists were utilising gossip and reality programmes as a hook to bring people to the website, and once the user entered the T13 homepage, then they were exposed to the rest of content that journalists felt was less appropriate for social media but more interesting from a journalistic perspective. As a digital reporter told me during an interview, 'There are decisions that I make because of the clicks, but there are also decisions that I take against the clicks. There are things that are important for the audience to know, even when most people will not [click on them and] read it, but these are things that they *need* to know'. Instead of submitting to the pressures of the platformisation of news, some journalists, particularly at T13, were hacking the way these platforms work, 'testing [and tempting] the audience with topics that are safe bets', a digital reporter told me, to increase the traffic to the website, where a less clickable story waits to be read. As Duffy and Cheng argue, 'traditional newsroom practice has been that editorial and commercial operate under contradicting values which requires partition' (2020, p. 1). According to these authors, when that 'wall' falls, media workers enter a state of cognitive dissonance in which they struggle to understand how things should be and how they are. To reduce this feeling of discomfort, I found journalists at Canal 13 who were attempting to hack the system by utilising external social media platforms to lure readers to the website with clickable stories, where, in their words, 'the worthy' information was waiting for them. It was a mechanism to solve conflicting values by doing things the way they were done, without stopping to cover those topics that should be covered.

5.8. Digital infrastructures

Some media organisations are opting to promote a more individualistic, less skilled type of reporting. According to van der Haak et al., 'most media owners have squeezed news

organizations to do more with less' (2012, p. 2924), and thereby, they have aided the increase of professional dissonance in their newsrooms.

In different ways, both *La Tercera* and Teletrece exemplified the importance of adapting the infrastructure of the newsroom to new digital technologies. Teletrece impacted not only the materialities of their organisation but also the skills and professional roles within the media outlet and therefore the sense of professional dissonance among media workers.

At *La Tercera*, in an attempt to keep traditional journalism alive, managers and executives reinforced hierarchies that subjugated the digital area of the newsroom to the newspaper. This is not uncommon for the breaking-news model, which is oriented toward efficiency, and consequently, 'the newsroom's routine is fast-paced, […] and its hierarchy is steep, mitigating dissention over news decisions that can waste precious minutes' (McPherson, 2012, p. 2306). It did, however, relegate digital journalists at *La Tercera* from being gatekeepers to being mere platform complementors (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Many things in the material and digital infrastructure of this newsroom stressed the perceived irrelevance of digital reporters to the rest of the newspaper. First, they were physically excluded from the islands of white tables that united everyone else working on that newsroom floor. Instead, digital reporters faced an empty wall with little or no space to informally chat with their colleagues. The space for digital reporters revolved around efficiency and productivity as individuals.

Second, the software that these reporters employed to write, edit, and upload their articles allowed a high degree of censorship and manipulation. The same versability of the web that enables journalists to constantly update and upgrade their stories also permits a more discreet, inconspicuous type of censorship. Editors, or anyone with appropriate credentials, can log in to the platform, amending the article undetectably and at will. I experienced this censorship personally when the headline on one of my pieces mysteriously changed in a matter of hours, with no one ever claiming responsibility for the now-tainted version.

As a consequence of new digital technologies, journalists and media workers have started to witness how these rhythms impacted their personal lives. This was expressed by a female journalist who had to decide between motherhood and her career (because 'there just isn't enough time') as well as by reporters who had to renegotiate their privacy and the intimacy with which they approached journalistic sources. The same infrastructural platforms that ruled the content and form of the news also entailed tacit levels of intimacy and urgency with which journalists were required to abide to be permitted to report the news. Again, refusing to surrender their privacy to those who now chased them on their personal phones and WhatsApp

groups, as I describe in Chapter 3, would have meant foregoing the story altogether or risking lacking an important source. In this moment, the dissonance reporters experienced became clearer to me. To comply with their values, such as the duty of having the appropriate sources for their story, journalists needed to form a new kind of relationship between themselves, their sources, and the technologies that mediated these communications.

As Undurraga (2017) argues, epistemic dissonance involves not only the mismatch between values and practices on the topics covered but also the ideal practice of journalism. In the eyes of some of the reporters I interviewed, the usage of technologies that invaded their personal lives and allowed sources to access an intimate, private space in journalists' routines directly increased the feeling of dissonance in their work.

Mellado argues that reporters' roles are far from static. Instead, they are 'situational, dynamic, and fluid' (2020), and their definitions must be understood and studied within their context. This conclusion reinforces Hanitzsch and Vos' (2017) idea that journalistic roles are discursively constituted and negotiated within the newsroom's infrastructure rather than being uniform and changeless. However, the information presented in this chapter has placed these ideas in opposition to each other.

As I have demonstrated here, professional dissonance, as a result of the introduction of new digital technologies in contemporary multiplatform newsrooms, is an important phenomenon not only because it causes mental discomfort as a result of the gap between values and practices but also because it is indicative of journalists' abilities, or the lack thereof, to negotiate and constitute their identities. Although journalism has perpetually been changing, the difference in these new technologies is the reduction in journalists' freedom to contest, settle, or even debate their practices and activities, as they attempt to match their ideals of what the profession should look like with new requirements. There is no room for debate when the majority of the newsroom's revenue depends on an algorithm that must be fed in a specific way with a specific content at a determined rate. There is little space for argument when the competition to capture a hyper-connected audience has multiplied by hundreds in only a few years. Thus, the increase of professional dissonance in Chilean newsrooms represents not only how journalism has changed but also how the professionals who practice it have been prevented from expressing their opinions on those changes.