

# Hegemonic media and inequality in Brazil

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## Abstract

In Brazil, the traditional media crisis coincides with the historical moment of weakening political liberalism and the transit of the rational idea of the people in favor of a still obscure mass of population, redefined and fixed by the expanded market. There is a general perception that the forms of representation or framing of the social–political field, dating to the 18th and 19th centuries, cease to be operative in understanding and evaluating socially significant events. In the old place of argumentative rhetoric, the database files come in. The obliteration of the receptive pole in favor of the emission opens the way for the autonomization of the algorithm, that is, for the artificial intelligence to control the entire interlocutory process. On the other hand, the crisis of traditional forms does not imply the disappearance of journalism, which remains virtually a space, to be occupied in the recreation of new forms of mediation politically significant for civil society, even taking into account that the great constitutive principles Of modernity (social contract, democracy, citizenship, state, nation, individual identity) are no longer in tune with the social synthesis operated by the new socioeconomic order. Thus, journalism as a modern phenomenon can be redefined by the market and technology. And professional journalists is just one of several categories of actors mobilized to determine the facts and turn them into media event. In this context, a new, more segmented fact-finding power emerges, as well as a new kind of relationship between the public and the knowledge of reality. The so-called “social” networks are the most palpable example of this new state of affairs, fueling speculation about the modeling of this new type of journalism.

## Keywords

Access to information, broadcasting policy, cultural imperialism, cultural industries policy, democracy, dependency, diffusion of innovation, international and intercultural communication, mass (media) communication, mass media effects, participatory action research, policy and law, regulation/CRTC

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In this new millennium, Brazil has discovered some modern novelties affecting its national media. The first is the accentuated, prevailing profile since the mid-1950s in which media outlets, as well as land, are concentrated in the hands of a few families.<sup>1</sup> In Brazil, 11 families control the most important media conglomerates, which include newspapers, broadcast concessions, radio, and television.<sup>2</sup> The numbers show an increasingly concentrated profile,<sup>3</sup> involving politicians as well as evangelicals.

On the other hand, it is important to note also a certain weakness in the sales of the principal journals, which have registered numbers far lower than those once seen, especially in reference to print editions. The greatest fall was that of *A Folha de São Paulo* (produced in the city of Sao Paulo), a national newspaper, and in second place the journal *O Globo* (of Rio de Janeiro), also a national paper. The numbers refer to the years 2016 and 2017, when print journals experienced an average fall of just under 160,000 units of the daily newspaper, at the same time in which traditional outlets began to receive more than 80,000 new digital subscribers.

This demonstrates, however, that the value paid by online subscribers can not make the print versions profitable. The latter continues to suffer a loss of subscribers, although the loss was not total. Nearly all of the journals have ceased to offer subscriptions exclusively for the print version. With the exception of *A Folha de São Paulo*, all of them offer either only a digital subscription or an option for both the digital and print versions.<sup>4</sup>

This environment is accompanied by numerous layoffs,<sup>5</sup> the juvenilization of the profession, and wage insecurity due to new forms of contracting. Journalists in the principle journals have begun working far more demanding hours, as the traditional and online newsrooms have merged. This consolidation has come to be known as “synergy,” a pompous name that means nothing less than the obligatory fulfillment on the part of the journalist of production in two formats: online and traditional.

The technical rules of production have changed, but the relation of the hegemonic media to the Brazilian public-reader remains unaltered. That which prevails in an all-encompassing and dictatorial fashion is commonly called “hegemonic,” but the common understanding does not coincide with the vernacular and even philosophical or political meaning of the term. If, on the one hand, only the philological surface of the word were considered, that the principle was applied to designate the Greek general who commanded and went to the front of their group, perhaps this initial and, in a way, primitive idea of the term could be satisfactory.

However, to comprehend it from the sense established by Italian theorist/politician Antonio Gramsci, one must understand hegemony as a form of power characterized by an all-encompassing, generalized posture, which functions with the consent or acceptance of the majority. It is, thus, a particular configuration of ideological domination. The passivity of those who accept and are converted to the position of the follower or the subjugated can be recognized from infinite angles, from a subordinate position to slavery by consent. One can also envision it as an imposed condition to which one assents without the chance of an option or free choice. The fact is that it is supported, from any perspective, by the existence of a situation of minor or inexistent arbitral power, simply the compliance or acceptance of a given situation.

Understanding hegemony as this unrestricted adhesion, counter-hegemony would be its opposite. It is not so simple, however, as one of the possible understandings would be the transposition and substitution of forces, that is, it would be mere opposition, that idea of a force which, in its own constitution, brings the proposal of also encompassing and dominating—or rather, the substitution of one force for another. Thus, a moment of hegemonic dispute. An example related to the market-based universe of media: the State cancels the license of one television network and substitutes it for a new network without advocating for differentiated regulatory principles for the broadcasters, nor even announcing alternative production and programming slots. This would merely be a

procedure of substitution, with the popular appearance of a counter-hegemonic posture, but better understood as the hegemonic consolidation of the State or as a “pro-hegemony.”

The understanding that the “counter” is defined by the visceral nature of the opposition—and not by a mere changing of contradictory forces—resides in the comprehension of that which can be ideologically considered as a counter-hegemonic posture. The fundamental role of a counter-hegemonic movement is to inspire thought, and to provide new forms of reflection. In Brazil, community and free radio stations with this profile arose in various regions in the 1960s. In the movement’s beginning and peak in the country, and in the rest of Latin America, these broadcasters were persecuted and closed due to the effects of their messages, while today there is no longer any vestige of the counter-hegemony. Although systematically persecuted by the federal government, what they manage to do is dispute the space on the radio dial with official broadcasters, which retaliate with all of the pressure available to them.

It is important to note that the Worker’s Party (PT) administration, which transformed part of the secular and feudal structure in Brazil, was not preoccupied with altering the hegemonic and family-based system present in Brazil, and even the community broadcasters continued to be persecuted and shut down, without any ample revision of the legislation. Currently, and in the last Dilma Rouseff administration, the intensification and practice of new, digital-based groups has changed the scenario. Access is still restricted and production still significantly critical and abundant, and perhaps due to this counter-production being a years-long process renewed by these groups, the hegemonic narratives produced by the Brazilian media system have been faced with increasing discontent by the population.

This environment of inequality<sup>6</sup> became especially accentuated with the removal of President Dilma Rousseff, having emerged an environment of media production comparable only to that of the military dictatorship period from the end of the 1960s to the middle of the 1980s. Essentially, the most important journals are behaving as spokesmen for the new system, which is characterized by the unfettered power of the Judiciary.

The Sistema Globo de Televisão, Rádio, e Jornal (*O Globo*) was the corporation that most defended the current regime by concentrating all of its media in defense of the government. This certainly implies a scenario equivalent to that of the 1970s, when the same television, radio, and journal network defended the military dictatorship, as it currently behaves as a single voice, as though social networks and new applications have not yet entered the scene in full force. This virtual environment completely changed media, but at the same time accentuated the profusion of fake news and denunciations at an unimaginable pace.

## Constructing alternatives

If, on the one hand, there’s a group of journals directed by elite businessmen and politicians and, more recently, evangelicals, which try to form a block in defense of the current government, promoting a revision of civil rights and an attempt at imposing neo-traditional values, on the other hand new outlets have arisen with force and become a reference for a public eager for news, coverage, and information capable of delivering current events stories and analyses in real time.

All of these new outlets are anchored in social networks and modern mobile applications. One of them is the online journal, “El País” of Spain: it does not possess an overtly argumentative agenda, but in Brazil it began to print questions and articles that Brazilians do not normally find in their newspapers. “El País” bothered the existing networks so much that, in December of 2016, the National Association of Journals (ANJ), filed various suits trying to impede foreign journals from being read and from covering the Brazilian reality. A similar case to that of “The Intercept,” a journal directed by a group of journalists, mostly foreigners, some of whom live in Brazil. The Intercept

has always included an argumentative agenda in relation to current events as well as a fact-based coverage that traditional journals do not have.

This news environment also includes local productions and, among them, what most deserves mention is “Midia Ninja,” popular for having been the only outlet that closely covered all of the protests held in Brazil’s major and smaller cities, starting with the large 2013 movement. “Midia Ninja,” today anchored on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, includes coverage all over the world, including content produced by its own audience. It possesses a stunning flexibility, especially in terms of its penetration and limited resources.

“Midia Ninja”<sup>7</sup> is certainly the progeny of modern technology and has known how to make use of this new reality with live coverage and unexpected angles and focuses. Truly, Midia Ninja, without even excluding the PT, represents the greatest specter that the military government and all its successors face in relation to shared means of communication and alternative vehicles: the capacity to produce on a network and thusly have the ability to reach all of the furthest corners of Brazil.

Brazil is a country with continental dimensions, composed of 26 states and one federal district, a population of 211 million people with their own unique cultures, but only one language: Portuguese. It is a country with an extremely high wealth concentration, where six white men hold the same accumulated wealth as 100 million Brazilians. This panorama is not different from the global scene, with a concentration of wealth biased by gender and race. In such a large country, it is important to also consider the strong influence of the diverse cultures of the immigrants who landed here: the blacks who came as slaves, the countless European nationalities that came over different periods and for various reasons, and the indigenous peoples that were already here.

Concerning wealth concentration, it is important to discuss the indices of education and employability, for example, which place Brazil<sup>8</sup> in the 79th place out of 188 countries. It is worth mentioning that, after 2014, these indices worsened considerably. According to the Human Development Index (HDI), used by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and released in March, Brazil continues to be 1 of the 10 most unequal countries in the world, among a group of 143 countries. In the case of Brazil, the results indicate the effects of the economic and political crises that have affected the country since 2014. According to UNDP, more than 29 million people rose from poverty between 2003 and 2013. However, the poverty level began to rise again between 2014 and 2015, when around 4 million people entered poverty. In the same period, the unemployment rate began to rise, reaching 12 million people. The situation is worse among young people, women, and black people.

To complete this summary of Brazil, it is important to note that the country has suffered with deindustrialization, as products manufactured here are, on average, 34% more expensive than similar products manufactured abroad, principally due to high tax rates. The minimum legal salary is 937 real per month. In function of its potential and the global environment, the country has invested increasingly in agriculture, and is an exporter of iron ore, soy, cane sugar, beef, and chicken. China, followed by the United States and Argentina, is among the countries with the greatest level of trade with Brazil, in terms of both importation and exportation.

Given this scenario, it is necessary to recognize the importance that the State—with its role of defending the national borders—always gave up possession and administration of the means of communication in the 1940s and 1950s, ending in the consolidation of the most important radio and, in the 1960s and 1970s, television broadcasters, turning the mainstream media into a powerful ally. Despite the importance and perhaps because control of the major outlets has always been in the hands of the same owners, the legislation has not been updated to minimize this concentration.

Even data concerning the consumption and ownership of these outlets is a quite recent phenomenon in the country's history. Brazil does not possess official data<sup>9</sup> on its media networks, and for only 5 years has the government begun to produce and provide data on consumption and viewership in the country. In the years in which this research was conducted, television remained the most used method by the highest number of Brazilians for access to information and entertainment. However, Internet access has already emerged as having the highest consumption during certain hours of the day, overtaking television. According to official data released at the end of last year, the medium most accessed by Brazilians is still television. In second place, the Internet, which is the medium which Brazilians spent most time using: 5 hours a day, concentrated between 10:00 and 11:00 in the morning and after 21:00 at night.

## **Cell phones and new powers**

On the other hand, Brazil today contains as many cell phones as it does people, as the former is more commonly used to access the Internet than computers are. Brazilian presence is felt the most on social networks. Brazil has had the second highest number of Facebook<sup>10</sup> users in the world since 2013. This is a global trend, given Facebook has existed for 13 years and has completely reformulated the way we access the Internet, by "swallowing Google," as is often said, as it has consolidated itself as a path for accessing news, information, and entertainment.

Among the tools most used by Brazilians, on the individual and social levels, is WhatsApp, because it allows for quick communication, initially via text and photo, using wifi or consuming a reduced level of data. It also permits voice messages, which is a resource often used in Brazil, a reflection of the low education levels of its population. It also now allows for the ability to produce and share video. Without a shadow of a doubt, Brazilians today throughout the country have access to the production and circulation of information as in no other moment in the country's history. The Internet has enabled this access for all age groups and social classes. One must recognize that it has also led to a greater visibility in relation to Brazilian politics, permitting access to information, sometimes confidential, about investigations into corruption, for example.

On the other hand, Brazil has maintained a permanent flux of production of fiction,<sup>11</sup> such as series and telenovelas, which continue to be exported. The country possesses a reduced number of national print journals, which are generally produced in the area around Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo in the southwestern region of the country, and are outlets owned by powerful businessmen. There still exist a large number of regional print journals, which reserve a considerable percentage of their editions for replicating national and international stories rather than local ones. Print journals have increasingly maintained online platforms, as have magazines. Even community radio broadcasters, which despite the still existent barriers created by Brazilian law, have used the web as an alternative medium.

## **Journalism colleges**

The first university journalism courses<sup>12</sup> began in Brazil in the 1940s, and by the end of the 1960s, the profession was regulated, making a journalism degree mandatory for joining the union. Currently, a journalism diploma is not necessary, but this debate has not been settled, especially given employers continue to prefer journalism school graduates.

Currently in Brazil, there are 350 journalism colleges, and over the next few years a new curriculum will be applied. With the new curriculum, the course will specifically become a journalism

course and will no longer be a Social Communications course where the student chooses the journalism option. The Journalism course will have specific requirements for use of all online platforms, as the job market increasingly demands that the professional not only assume the function of producing news, but also must possess a proficiency in photography, editing, filming, and even promotion and marketing. There are currently about 50 postgraduate communications schools with master's and doctorate programs, which are also concerned, among other things, with reflecting upon journalism's new role and how journalists are the key.

On the other hand, it is important to note that there has been a growing insecurity in the profession,<sup>13</sup> with low salaries and the loss of countless workers' rights. The base salary of a journalist today is around 350 Euros per month for a 7-hour work day, with a total of 14,000 companies hiring, mostly concentrated in the state of Sao Paulo and in the basic cable sector. It is important to say that young women, around 25 years old, are the majority in the profession. Another important piece of data is the fact that the journalism profession is not well protected, with numerous cases of restrictions of liberty, lawsuits, and even deaths, which led to Brazil being ranked number 4 in journalist deaths in 2016.<sup>14</sup>

The consumption of news in Brazil was completely changed by social networks, and especially by their access via cell phone.<sup>15</sup> It is important to remember that Brazilians spend at least 5 hours a day navigating the web, and that their web browsing is mostly done on cell phones, where the consumption of information comes mostly from social networks, leading to a reading characterized by rapidity and a certain superficiality of information. In other words, news content directly constructed, with little or no reflective nuance, basic interviews, generally with official sources.

However, it is important to emphasize that consumption via cell phone and through social networks has defined journalistic production, which cannot be said of the changes brought out from the use of WhatsApp, where the spread of information, true and fake news, has reached immeasurable levels, as there is no way to measure the diffusion of information with likes. The reality of a society dominated by social networks has also affected the production of journalism in the country. Starting with the popular journal "Extra,"<sup>16</sup> owned by the Globo communication group, which created a newsroom to produce content from material—photos, videos, text, and audio—sent in by its readers. "Extra" was a pioneer in using this platform for journalism, and hired two full-time journalists to capture, check, and edit information received from the then 5000 reader-reporters spread throughout the city.

Soon after the success of the journal, various other outlets took advantage of the idea and production via audience caught on like a fever. However, last year Extra's production via WhatsApp experienced a vertiginous drop as readers migrated to television or radio in selecting where they sent their productions, given the greater visibility of these media. Now, it is possible to admit in Brazil that no matter the fact, event, or happening, countless anonymous reporters are registering it as incentivized by vehicles which will later elect and exhibit this amateur production.

It is important to note that this means of production has become more accessible to the reader, who can simply record the audio and send it to the broadcaster, which retains only the main information for the newsroom. As the broadcasters are unable to cover the full territory, reader-produced content ends up being used in the production of material, thus often acting as the principal source of information divulged by the media. This scenario, with the absorption of unqualified labor for the production of news content enhanced by the use of WhatsApp, allows for countless reflections upon the current state of journalistic production in the country, and certainly consolidates the supposition that verification, one of the main stages of journalistic production, has become continuously undermined, and in this we find the increased insecurity of the profession, the entrance of

unqualified labor, and the overutilization of official sources. Any possibility of investigative, interpretive journalism, critical for mainstream media, finds itself, for now, at least, buried in Brazil.

The Facebook platform, with its ability to record video, has also led to journals using this resource not just for news content, but also for live interviews and recordings, leaving the online-print journal with an increasing variety of platforms for its coverage. In general, Brazilian journals have opted for the news producing journalistic format, leaving interpretation to the reader. Journalism concentrates on the production of news, but not on relating it to history, or explaining and questioning its importance to a person's everyday life. This has been one of the causes for the current trust crisis, which affects not only the information that circulates on the web, but also journalism itself, given it is practically a norm to leave truth and ethics behind. The flux of rumors has boiled over in the country and is being fed by the rapid circulation of information.

On the other hand, in the modern world, characterized by permanent access to information, it is important to recognize that the function of journalists is increasingly necessary.<sup>17</sup> Journalism certainly needs to reinvent itself, and given its natural commitment to truth and inquisitiveness, it must adjust itself to what is required of it in the current environment. For this reason, reflecting on the profession in the face of new developments is a fundamental challenge. In this sense, to conclude, it is necessary to emphasize that currently in Brazil, there exist various quantitative and qualitative studies concerned with understanding and analyzing the journalism which we produce, and it is research monitored by established institutions such as the National Federation of Journalists (FENAJ) as well as colleges and journalism courses.

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## Notes

1. According to <http://www.dw.com/pt-br/m%C3%ADdia-no-brasil-ainda-é-controlada-por-poucos-diz-estudo/a-41188603?maca=pt-BR-Facebook-sharing>
2. According to <http://www.fndc.org.br/noticias/midia-brasileira-e-controlada-por- apenas-11-familias-924,625/>
3. Available on <http://www.mom-rsf.org/en/countries/brazil/>
4. According to <http://www.abrapbrasil.com.br/noticias/materia/95/desaba-tiragem-dos-cinco-maiores-jornais-do-pais>
5. More information on <http://www.intervozes.org.br/direitoacomunicacao/>
6. According to [https://www.oxfam.org.br/sites/default/files/arquivos/Relatorio\\_A\\_distancia\\_que\\_nos\\_une.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org.br/sites/default/files/arquivos/Relatorio_A_distancia_que_nos_une.pdf)
7. More information on <http://midianinja.org/> or [https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%ADdia\\_Ninja](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%ADdia_Ninja)
8. More information on <http://brasil.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,brasil-tem-20-6-milhoes-de- lares-sem-rede-de-esgoto-e-dois-milhoes-sem-agua,70002095808>
9. Available on <http://www.secom.gov.br/@/busca?SearchableText=Pesquisa+Brasileira+de+Midia>
10. According on <http://midianinja.org/renatamielli/facebook-2-bilhoes-de-usuarios-e-um-projeto-para-dominar-o-mundo/>
11. For more information access <http://obitelbrasil.blogspot.com.br/>
12. According to [https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Escola\\_de\\_jornalismo](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Escola_de_jornalismo)
13. For more information <http://fenaj.org.br/> and <http://www.uta.fi/cmt/tutkimus/BRICS/plan.html>
14. According to <http://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/internacional/noticia/2016-10/brasil-e-um-dos-paises-mais-perigosos-para-jornalistas-diz-organizacao>

15. According to <http://www.brasil247.com/pt/247/midiatech/327,845>
16. According to [https://extra.globo.com/noticias/rio/whatsapp-do-extra-recebeu-mais-de-um-milhao-de-mensagens-50-mil-fotos-em-um-ano-13071006.html?utm\\_source=Facebook&utm\\_medium=midia%20social&utm\\_content=whatsapp%20um%20ano&utm\\_campaign=Extra](https://extra.globo.com/noticias/rio/whatsapp-do-extra-recebeu-mais-de-um-milhao-de-mensagens-50-mil-fotos-em-um-ano-13071006.html?utm_source=Facebook&utm_medium=midia%20social&utm_content=whatsapp%20um%20ano&utm_campaign=Extra) and <http://www.uta.fi/cmt/tutkimus/BRICS/materials.html> Hyderabad-Raquel Paiva
17. for more information; [https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/nov/16/katharine-viner-we-need-public-interest-journalism-in-turbulent-digital-age?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/nov/16/katharine-viner-we-need-public-interest-journalism-in-turbulent-digital-age?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

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