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FROM 'BAR CHAT' TO PRESIDENTIAL HEARINGS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE FLOW PODCAST BASED ON ETHICAL AND LEGAL NORMS OF JOURNALISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE

André Derviche Carvalho

Vitor Souza Lima Blotta

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Abstract: The arrival of more active voices in the public debate brought a new configuration of its information channels. Driven by the digitalization of the media, this change meant that journalism no longer occupied the same space of power and influence. As a consequence, news production has become more diffuse. Proof of this comes with the object of study of this work, the Flow Podcast, an interview program conducted by non-journalists that reached the level of publicly interacting with the two main candidates for the presidency of the 2022 elections. Thus, the objective is to analyze the characteristics of public interest functions performed outside of journalism in the digital age. From an exploratory analysis of the two programs and the others that included the participation of politicians, it was seen that the approach to topics of public interest persists outside of journalism, but without the same technical and ethical rigor.

Keywords: Public sphere, media power, public interest, media, digitalization

INTRODUCTION

The digitalization of the public sphere provided by the arrival of digital social media platforms has brought changes to the field of social communication. Mediation by the press and journalistic actors began to coexist with other actors equally or even more influential than them (Nielsen, 2012). Contributors to the establishment of information channels (Holton and Belais-Gagnon, 2018), these actors are not always governed by the same technical and ethical standards as journalism, even when performing this job.

This work focuses on one of these actors that has gained relevance over recent years. Flow Podcast is a multimedia digital content channel, broadcast in audiovisual and sound format. With the aim of bringing relaxed conversations with different personalities,

the program has accumulated millions of views and started to play an intermediary role between the political and civil worlds. This happened when Flow brought political characters, linked to public positions during the programs, and addressed issues of public interest.

In this study, the analysis will focus on a symbolic chapter of the magnitude achieved by this actor: the interview with candidates for the 2022 presidential elections, the most heated in the history of Brazil's redemocratization. The two main candidates each participated in their own way on the Flow Podcast, making the channel a source of information for millions of voters who followed the conversation on the eve of the election.

Thus, considering that traditionally the role of interviewing political figures and addressing matters of public interest on the eve of elections with the aim of better informing the reader is carried out by journalists, this work seeks to clarify and analyze the main characteristics of the interviews that Flow carries out with politicians. The intention is not to classify it according to criteria used by journalists, but, as their practices are analogous to these, the research will also compare these different mediators of the public debate.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE WITH DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Communication and its evolution are important factors in human evolution (De Barros, De Souza and Teixeira, p. 5). The evolution of the media changes the way individuals interact and form opinions, as well as changing the relationships between the political and civil spheres (Medeiros, 2013, p. 28). In this sense, the change to be highlighted and examined by the study is that which

comes with digital social media, analyzed from the perspective of how it fits into the field of social communication. These media are similar to the Habermasian concept of public space in the sense that they allow “the meeting of private parties constituting publics as they share equal conditions of exchanging information and debating the rules of their business and politics” (Blotta, 2013, p. 413).

The view on the arrival of the internet and the primacy of digital media varies depending on time and bibliography. There are more positive and more negative views about the potential of this medium. While some attribute advantages to the internet such as its democratizing and participatory aspect (Benkler, 2006) and its contribution to the public debate by facilitating the publicity of information (Celikates, 2015), others question how aggregators, from a rational and critical, these means are (Bucci, 2021). In the latter case, the concern considers the fact that, in a context in which so many communicated so much in such a short time – a configuration brought about by digital social media –, the abandonment of rationality worsens (Bucci, 2021, p. 116), knowing that “technological mediation carried out by the media affects the interaction between people and groups, the capacity for dialogue and opinion formation” (Stroppa, 2021, p. 129).

Regarding the role of the press, the digitalization of the public sphere has brought about a disintermediation of the public debate, which has occurred in several ways. Firstly, we can mention the role of digital platforms in organizing content. In the specific case of YouTube, for example, this site “acts as a publisher when making content available on the platform, because, in addition to an initial menu, the platform brings several layers of direction (curatorship) of the user experience” (Valente, 2019, p. 233, cited in: Stroppa, 2021). Here, Srnicek’s (2018) concept of platform is

adopted, according to which, “platforms are digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact. They therefore position themselves as intermediaries that bring different users together” (p. 46). However, they are not seen as neutral in this intermediation (Ramírez, 2021).

However, even mediating the debate in a certain way, digital platforms do not seem to guarantee the plurality and diversity of information imposed by the Democratic Rule of Law, which requires a regulatory need for this medium: “The selection of content based on its ‘viralization’ , like that carried out by digital intermediary agents, tends to favor a poor diversity of themes compared to the desired pluralism and democratization” (Pasquale, 2017, p. 18).

Furthermore, the perspective that Andrew Keen (2008) has on the topic. The author reports the loss of authority and space by specialized discourse – here associated with truth and factuality – in a context of internet emergence. There are also signs of the discrediting of the press: “Much of it dismissed the opinion of experts and the media, which came to be seen as a source of manipulation and hypocrisy” (Cesarino, 2022, p. 5).

The press, therefore, did not escape these transformations. Habermas (2006) points to the so-called “media power”, which would be based on mass communication technology. One of the ways in which this power is manifested is through the “framing” of certain themes, a process that makes direct reference to the journalist’s job and denotes their potential to intervene in the formation of public opinion. This “media power”, therefore, would be concentrated in the figures of reporters, columnists, editors, directors, producers, etc. Following what Keen says, there are indications that the concentration of this “media power” in the hands of the traditional press has been breaking down:

Today, it is enough to have a smartphone connected to the internet to produce news and disseminate it on digital platforms. In one way or another, the individual seeks to give visibility to topics that are often outside the public agenda, defined by people who hold power and the mainstream press (Cavalcanti and Oliveira, 2019, p. 5).

Ana Leonor Morais Santos (2018) also states that “in addition, this call for interactivity seems to function as a permanent invitation to doxa, in which everyone can give their opinion on everything regardless of their level of knowledge of the subject” (p. 28). The use of interactive media is not only based on informational needs, but also on the uses of self-expression and social interactions (James, Wotring and Forrest, 1995; Trammell, 2005). In addition to searching for information, digital media are also used for entertainment (Lee, 2015).

Bucci (2021) characterizes this scenario as one of intermediation crisis symbolized by the extinction of intermediary functions (which affected traditional press newsrooms) promoted by the immensity of digital connections. The very use of digital platforms by political candidates, especially populist ones, is associated, even on another scale, with the lack of mediation in the digital era, which can also be referred to as “direct contact” between the content producer and the user (Empoli, 2022, p. 20).

NEWS CHANNELS AND AMATEUR JOURNALISM

The African Human Rights Commission and European conventions have recognized the importance of the media and mass media in realizing the right to freedom of expression and rights relating to democratic debate (Blotta, 2013). In this sense, it is also possible to note that the coverage of political conflicts, such as terrorist attacks and natural catastrophes, is increasingly linked

to narratives produced by those who do not practice journalism and make use of these mass media (Aguiar and Barsotti, 2013).

This scenario seems to be favored by the ease and agility that users of digital social media have in publishing the most diverse content, such as photos, videos and texts. According to Cavalcanti and de Oliveira (2019), with the popularization of the internet, individuals gained more access to sources of information; greater capacity to create alternative interactions with communication conglomerates; and feel more motivated to activate their dispositional schemes to create their own space for the production of information. This configuration even motivated the production of literature to categorize a type of informative work carried out by non-professional journalists, such as the concept of amateur reporter (Oliveira, 2015), which would be the common citizen without specialized training in journalism who finds space to encourage public debate by participating more actively in dissemination and even information production. With this phenomenon, the argument is strengthened that the more formal and traditional journalistic practice of newsrooms occupies a space in an increasingly varied communication system (Cavalcanti and de Oliveira, 2019).

Recuero (2009) states that the dynamics of digital media can resemble those of the journalistic method. However, there are limits: “the mechanism through which social actors find motivations for” filtering, producing and circulating information “is quite individualized and focused on the perception of social capital that can generate and be appropriated in the future. Thus, digital media filter and reverberate information, but not always in the same way as journalism” (Recuero, 2009, p. 11), which, in theory, follows ethical regulations and selection techniques, symbolized by news values, for example.

In the case of Flow, we can start from the premise that the content produced there reproduces an informative journalistic format, which is that of the interview (da Silva, 2013). The interview is even associated with values such as public interest, vigilance and objectivity (da Silva, 2013) and the legitimacy of the practice of informative journalism (Pereira, 2017). Therefore, at first, Flow seems to have the potential to contribute to the production of information in its programs, especially considering that personalities linked to public positions pass through there, which comes in a context in which “the internet has become the main arena of political communication in the country” (Cesarino, 2022, p. 4). With the development of digital technologies, new actors external to journalism carry out work that reflects on informative functions and the role of journalism (Eldridge, 2019, p. 858).

When there is the presence of politicians – specifically heads of government – the content present in their statements tends to gain an “important” status (Gomis, 2002, apud: Patrício, Viana, 2018, p. 257) and generate news potential: “It is the comment converted into news, the word considered as fact: statements, speeches, conferences, occasional responses, intentional phrases” (Gomis, 2002, p. 233).

However, it is important to highlight that the interview format has the declaration as its main pillar, which leaves room for a series of subjectivities on the part of both the interviewee and the interviewer. In this case, these subjectivities can be harmful to the public debate when they are untruths, which are a risk in statements (Tambosi, 2005). This configuration presents itself as an “epistemological weakness of journalism: there is not always a way to know whether the sources’ statements are true” (Tambosi, 2005, p. 36), something that professional journalism tries to overcome with rigorous investigation work, which does not always appear on live

interview broadcasts. The reflection that arises is that when this interview is carried out by non-journalists, this pre-disposition to investigate statements can be lost and weaken the public debate with untruths.

PUBLIC INTEREST AND ETHICAL AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

The concept of “public interest” is not universal and can be subject to subjectivities such as: what truly is the representation of the common good? (Patrício and Viana, 2018). However, the literature offers good delimitations of what can be understood as public interest in the field of journalism:

News of public interest can be conceptualized as news that contributes to the intellectual, moral and physical development of citizens, with information that allows the reader to reflect and make decisions in relation to government, health, security, education, work, finally, exercising citizenship (Vidal, 2009, p. 85).

The concept of public interest is widely highlighted in the Code of Ethics for Brazilian Journalists, where access to information of relevant public interest is considered a fundamental right (Fenaj, 2007). On the internet, the limits of what is in the public interest are called into question. This is because, with regard to the type of content circulated, the classification of public space cannot be fully verified, given the circulation of various topics from the private sphere in this digital environment. Thus, Bucci (2021) suggests that there be a deconstruction of the rigidity that considers public space only to be that which concerns the common good:

(...) We must be content with calling “public” the social space generated by communication in which universal openness to the participation of everyone can be observed, with freedom of expression and a broad right to search for information (p. 128).

From the point of view of how platforms deal with this issue, it can be said that the public interest is put to the test again. Digital platforms as a whole, presenting themselves as new gatekeepers and defining informational flows (Valente, 2019. apud: Stroppa, 2021), “do not necessarily seek the public interest when they develop their content moderation and targeting models” (Stroppa, 2021, p. 176). This conclusion by Stroppa (2021) is based on the fact that the service that digital platforms offer to their consumer-users does not seek to primarily achieve values such as diversity of perspectives and the encounter of content that is contrary to standardized preferences, which would be affecting the functioning of the democratic regime (p. 132).

This way, the advent of the internet brought a shock to how the public interest is structured within the public debate. Furthermore, he called into question the ethics that organized part of the field of social communication. Christofolletti (2014) finds that, with the innovations brought about by the internet, the production and distribution of content – which includes journalistic content – has become more participatory and collaborative. Therefore, considering that the news construction process is not always carried out exclusively by journalists, the proposition made is that ethical issues need to be extended in some way to new participants in this field.

Ward and Wasserman’s (2010) proposition is that there be an “open media ethic”, with a code that applies to users in addition to professional journalists in a context in which everyone can do journalism “in different degrees of quality, to different audiences, on different scales, but they can offer products and services that compete with what we called professional journalism” (Christofolletti, 2014, p. 273). As seen from different aspects, journalistic production has become more diffuse with the internet.

International organizations even embrace the idea that journalism can be practiced by non-journalists. For example, a blogger who publishes their own content online can be considered a journalist, according to the UN Human Rights Committee (Stroppa, 2021, p.135).

Brazilian law makes it clear how it treats journalistic content. In this context, it is worth recalling the judgment by the Federal Supreme Court (STF) of the Claim of Non-Compliance with Fundamental Precept (ADPF) No. 130. With the repeal of the Press Law, “judges will apply the Civil and Penal Codes and the Constitution itself to punish excesses committed by journalists and media companies” (da Paixão, 2009), which brings parity, at least in the eyes of the Judiciary, between the actions of a journalist and someone who does not fall into this category. For example, the STF understood the “proportionality between press freedom and civil liability for moral and material damages”, as excessive compensation would, in itself, be a powerful factor inhibiting press freedom (Bernasiuk, 2015, p. 283).

On the other hand, the legislation still protects material that is strictly journalistic in nature from the obligation to compensate (Pinto, 2008). There is support from Brazilian law, therefore, for journalistic activity or journalistic criticism when it is supported by the public interest, this concept also being a protection against the restriction of freedom of information and expression (Barroso, 2004). With this in mind, it is noted that there is jurisprudence that delimits a special space for the informative expression of the press, which could not be used by actors outside this sphere.

METHODOLOGY

Flow Podcast has already conducted hundreds of interviews in more than four years of existence. The interest of the present study lies in those carried out with politicians, whose relationship with public interest is clearer in comparison to those found with figures from the entertainment field, for example. Therefore, the analysis will be carried out on interviews with politicians exclusively, a practice that is also carried out by journalists. For conceptual delimitation purposes, we consider those actors linked to the political field: personalities with positions in one of the three powers, active or having acted in the past; trade unionists (da Silva, 2013, p. 9).

Given the impossibility of extensively and qualitatively analyzing all the dozens of interviews with politicians – some lasting up to five hours – we decided to choose two corresponding programs to carry out a more detailed qualitative analysis.

The choice was made on the program with Lula and Jair Bolsonaro, both candidates for the presidency of the Republic in the 2022 elections, which were the fiercest after the period of redemocratization, and with different political and ideological banners. This choice allowed the two most popular Flow Podcast programs with politicians to be analyzed, but at the same time it presented a limitation: the presenter's preparation for the interview with Lula and Bolsonaro was superior to that found in other interviews with politicians. Furthermore, the dynamics were different: in other interviews, it is common to have two interviewers present. In other words, it is not possible to say that the characteristics of the interviews with Lula and Bolsonaro are the same as those of other programs.

The qualitative analysis of these programs aimed to verify aspects of public interest in the programs. Following the steps proposed

by Bardin (2016), the content analysis in this study will comprise three fundamental stages: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of the results obtained. In the pre-analysis, Flow Podcast episodes in which political figures were interviewed were selected and categorized. Interviews with politicians other than Lula and Bolsonaro were also analyzed, but quantitatively.

During the exploration of the material, the two episodes selected to be analyzed quantitatively were transcribed, allowing a more in-depth analysis of the content discussed. Relevant units of analysis will be identified, such as political topics, problems of public interest, guest perspectives and their discursive approaches.

When processing the results obtained, a qualitative analysis will be carried out, through the interpretation of the collected data. The discursive strategies adopted by the political guests will be observed, such as argumentation, use of evidence and positioning in relation to the topics covered. From this analysis, it will be possible to understand how Flow Podcast contributes to the dissemination and discussion of topics of public interest in the Brazilian political context.

In the case of public interest, we will adopt a relational perspective of this concept (Bobbio, 2000), in which the public interest would be that which is opposed to private, particular, individual and partial interests (Machado and Moreira, 2008).

Regarding reach, in addition to the number of views, the impact that the interviews had on traditional journalistic channels will be measured. The selection of traditional journalistic channels was based on the communication vehicles that Brazilians read the most according to the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2022 (Newman, 2022).

This criterion is used because the newsworthiness contained in interviews can be

measured by the repercussion of a fact (Gomis, 2002, p. 230). Therefore, Flow's newsworthiness potential can be gauged by the repercussion that the events that took place in the program have and by the potential repercussion of the news fact on new facts (Gomis, 1991, apud: Patrício and Viana, 2018).

Analyzing reach is also an essential process, as this is a constitutive element of the responsibility implied in the use that this type of agent, in this case Flow Podcast, makes of communicative freedom (Blotta, 2013). In this case, the responsibility of these actors is being assessed based on the "justified interpretation of the nature of each one (...) and the extent and impacts of their speeches and actions on the public political sphere" (Blotta, p. 434).

In comparison with journalistic practice, we will take ethical and technical standards for conducting interviews as normative parameters. The creators of Flow do not usually use the term interview. In this study, for practical purposes and out of respect for Fávero and Andrade (1998) who define interviews as a "social interaction technique" and separate them from journalistic interviews (p. 2), we will use "interview" even when referring to Flow and "journalistic interview" when addressing this practice when carried out by professional journalists.

ANALYSIS

First of all, it is interesting to conceptualize Flow. In this sense, it is possible to frame it in a podcast format known as "mesacast" (*Tigre. Meio e Mensagem*, 2020), in which a more relaxed dynamic is chosen based on an interlocution in the round table format, prone to debates and conversations. However, it is important to highlight that, despite having "podcast" in the name, a term that refers to content produced exclusively on audio channels, Flow is also transmitted via video channels. Thus, it constitutes a hybrid program

broadcast both on audiovisual channels, through YouTube, and on audio-only channels, through platforms such as Spotify.

Between September 29, 2018, the date on which the first Flow Podcast program was broadcast, and October 28, 2022, the date of the last program before the second round of elections, 674 programs had been broadcast on Flow Podcast.

The presence of politicians throughout the program's existence is proportionally low: in total, 41 programs were made with politicians, around 6% in relation to the total number of programs. The rest of the episodes featured the participation of the most diverse personalities possible, such as influencers, teachers, comedians, musicians, presenters, etc., demonstrating that the standard of Flow is more in relation to the format than in relation to the content covered. Still, it is possible to say that the program addresses the issue of public interest by inviting politicians, since Martins Filho (2005, p. 43) defines: "Public interest is the relationship between society and the common good pursued by it, through of those who, in the community, have authority (governors, public administrators, magistrates, etc.)."

Even though it is a quantitative minority, it is important to highlight that the appearance of politicians took place at extremely relevant moments. In both the 2020 and 2022 municipal elections, Flow Podcast interviewed politicians already as candidates. There, they used the time to present their proposals, for example, which gives Flow, at least in potential terms, relevance in accessing information of public interest at key moments of citizen participation, which are elections. It is worth remembering that all this content was and is available for free on digital video and audio platforms.

Among the 41 programs with politicians, there is a distortion: some guests appeared

more than once. These were the cases of Fernando Haddad, Ciro Gomes, Tarcísio de Freitas, Kim Kataguiri and Arthur do Val. With this in mind, it is possible to observe that there is more space available for certain political-ideological profiles, which in a certain way hurts the plurality of ideas represented in the programs and, consequently, the informative potential of Flow, considering that “the free formation of public opinion presupposes the exchange of ideas and facts without undue restrictions” (Stroppa, 2021, p. 130). Furthermore, there is a male majority in the programs: of the 41 programs, 36 were made with men only. It is worth mentioning that it is not known which Flow invitations were not answered. The analysis here is based on the episodes that were actually aired.

Regarding the number of views, there is a wide range between episodes, but they all have significant numbers. They form a range that goes from 136 thousand, with the interview with the then federal deputy Felipe Rigoni and 16 million, with the program by Jair Bolsonaro, then president of the Republic.

The scope in terms of visualization was brought to the fore, as here it is understood that the scope and nature of the actions are constitutive points of the responsibility implied in the use that this type of agent, in this case the Flow Podcast, makes of communicative freedom (Blotta, 2013). The reach would be comprehensive in terms of visualization and the nature of the actions would be the concrete fact that there were conversations published free of charge with public authorities.

The relevant character denoted by Flow also comes from the fact that several interviews – such as those with Bolsonaro and Lula – were broadcast during the election period, which reinforces the potential that the information conveyed in these two episodes has to contribute in terms of citizenship and democracy, in a context in which information

can be considered a social right from the moment that it is presented as “necessary and essential for life in a mass society, including the full exercise of the set of civil, political and social rights” (Gentili, 2002, p. 43).

Based on the journalistic vehicles that achieved the greatest reach in the online environment according to the Digital News Report, it was possible to verify that Flow has an impact in terms of newsworthiness. Between September 28, 2018 and October 31, 2022, the vehicle that had the most impact on Flow’s programs was UOL, with 1,160 mentions of the channel. It is important to remember that the research considered sites that are under the UOL “umbrella”. Other digital native outlets stand out, such as Metr poles, with 220 mentions of the Flow Podcast. The repercussion of the Flow events was not limited to journalistic outlets born on the internet. Traditional newspapers such as O Estado de S o Paulo, Folha de S. Paulo and O Globo also gave visibility to Flow with, respectively, 145, 134 and 172 mentions. The data was obtained with the help of Google search tools.

Regarding Flow’s legal liability, there was no news of content being removed by legal force. What occurred were voluntary removals, such as the episode with the then mayor Bruno Covas, who died months after the interview, and other politicians, such as Guilherme Boulos, who asked for the removal of their episodes after the Nazi apology of one of the presenters of the show. Flow Podcast.

Other than that, the episode that featured the participation of deputies Kim Kataguiri and T bata Amaral, in which Monark apologized for the Nazis, became the target of an investigation by the PGR (Attorney General’s Office). In February 2022, the Attorney General of the Republic, Augusto Aras, ordered the initiation of proceedings to investigate the possible commission of a

crime of support for Nazism by the YouTuber Bruno Monteiro Aiub, known as Monark, and federal deputy Kim Kataguiri, after the defending the creation of a Nazi party and defending the non-criminalization of Nazism. Aras used the situation to reiterate his position against hate speech. The position of the ANPR (National Association of Public Prosecutors) made it clear that the conduct taken at Flow was exceeding the limits of freedom of expression: “the right to freedom of expression is not absolute and repudiating Nazism is a permanent task, which must be reiterated throughout” (Conjur, 2022). No evidence was found that Flow’s programs are being treated in court as components of journalism, but it is clear that content published on the internet is subject to legal liability.

Discursively, according to statements that those responsible for Flow, such as presenter Igor, gave in journalistic articles (Lavado, 2021, Exame) and programs broadcast online (My News, 2022), the attempt to dissociate Flow from the formality found in interviews is clear. journalistic. This tendency is found in the description of Flow programs: “Flow Podcast is a relaxed, long and free conversation, like a bar chat between friends. At Flow we guarantee a space where guests can develop their ideas without any type of agenda or the normal restrictions of other media, such as a political/philosophical agenda.” This way, there is a search to move away from the journalistic practice formally represented by the journalistic interview and get closer to a conversational character, whose apparently main focus is not the informative content of the interviewed social actor’s speech (Morin, 1973) and entertainment.

It is worth remembering that the declaration of not practicing journalism does not prevent similarities with the work of traditional media from appearing, as shown by Moura (2002) when analyzing the website Slashdot, whose

article selection logic is similar to that of traditional media (Moura, 2002. apud: Aguiar and Barsotti, 2014).

LULA AND BOLSONARO’S INTERVIEWS

Moving on to a more in-depth analysis of two programs, the characteristics of the interviews carried out by Flow become clearer. After the analysis, it was possible to conclude that Flow is in a more flexible social communication space than that of journalism, despite emulating its function, as previously described, without being subject to the same regulations that presuppose journalism has an inherent social responsibility. the profession.

In interviews with other politicians, in general, the duration of the programs is long. In the case of the program with Jair Bolsonaro, the duration of the interview exceeded five hours, something rarely or never found in journalistic standards. During the program, it became clear that there was no previously established time limit. In the case of the interview with Lula, the duration was 1 hour and 37 minutes, within which it was clear that the time limitation was due to a restriction imposed by Lula’s team. Thus, both had different exposure times, an inequality that a political debate situated on a journalistic channel seeks to mitigate with debate rules. This distortion already denotes an extrapolation of the regulations to which traditional media would be subject: in a series of interviews with candidates for the Presidency of the Republic in 2014, the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) prescribed equality in the time limit for candidates (Lery, 2016, p. 67).

In both Lula’s and Bolsonaro’s interviews, it was possible to identify a very active participation by presenter Igor. Various marks of subjectivities could be found such as the expression of opinion (“President, I

don't know if I really agree with what you're saying", says Igor to Bolsonaro about the then president's choices in government; "I already said I don't like as a politician", Igor confesses to Lula), a personal story ("I graduated from ProUni", Igor tells Lula) and references to the program itself ("I took this as my mission: to provide a dialogue. I am very happy", says Igor about the program proposal and about welcoming Bolsonaro). At various times, the presenter takes an ideological and political position in relation to topics of public interest such as the decriminalization of drugs. Such positions are explicit: "They are part of my worldview", says Igor about defending the decriminalization of drugs in the interview with Bolsonaro. Subjectivity also appeared when the interviewee expressed his uncertainty about certain topics: "I don't remember, president, can you help me, Doria started the negotiations before, didn't he?"; he says in a context of vaccines against Covid-19. With this, there is a personalistic conduct of the interview.

This configuration demonstrates a practical separation between what Flow does and what a reporter would do in an interview, where the objective is initially to perform neutrality (Clayman, 1988). This does not happen when the Flow presenter highlights his positions several times in relation to what the interviewee says and what is covered in the program.

Even though permeated by the bias of opinion, the entirety of the programs deals with topics of public interest, even if different and unbalanced periods of time are dedicated to them, leaving them at the mercy of the knowledge and command that the program participants have to talk about certain subjects. Furthermore, it is important to note the presence of breaks in formality with personal stories from both the presenter and the interviewee, moments in which there

is a departure from the public interest to the detriment of matters within the private sphere of each of the participants. However, the presence of topics of public interest is preponderant. In the case of the program with Bolsonaro, a greater diversity of topics was covered. Topics such as the management of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Brazilian electoral system and the secret budget were discussed. With this preponderance of topics of public interest on the "agenda" defined by the presenter, it can be said that Flow came closer to the protagonism claimed by journalists, representatives of the public interest, in interviews (Pereira, 2017) despite not addressing these topics with great depth nor sufficient study, given several assumptions and insecurities that Igor expressed when asking his questions: "What happened?", Igor asked Bolsonaro about the outcome of the CPI (Parliamentary Inquiry Commission) on Covid-19, which gave room for the then president to present his narrative of this event, eventually moving away from the objective truth.

In the case of the program with Lula, the structure was the same with the preponderance of themes of public interest with a few ruptures. It is worth noting that neither of the two interviews had the explicit intention of being dedicated to the 2022 election, which would take place a few days before the two programs took place. However, both took advantage of the space to attack their respective opponents and present parts of their government programs. By not having a pre-established time limit, it is assumed that the space offered by Flow to candidates proved to be more attractive than spaces mediated by the press, considering that there was more scope for self-promotion and attacks on opponents. The audience watching the interviews was exposed to the candidates' intentions, perceptions and proposals, which

makes Flow useful in its informative function. A subsequent study could be carried out to actually measure the impact this type of program has on the formation of public opinion during an electoral period.

However, the potential to form knowledge is already at risk in advance due to the nature of the interview format, as the interview is a genre based essentially on the statement, which is not always aligned with the objective world (Tambosi, 2005, p 35). It is no surprise that, in both episodes, a sign appeared with the message: "Remember to research everything said in this program". Problems with the objectivity of information brought about by dependence on statements are also present in journalism:

Declaratory journalism produces information, but it is difficult to know whether it is true, no matter how "checked" it is and no matter how credible and honest the sources are. It can therefore lead to false beliefs. In this sense, it does not produce knowledge. If the information proves to be true, then it will generate knowledge, constituting over time a precious collection for one of the cognitive sources (Tambosi, 2005, p. 37).

However, journalism would be closer to "producing knowledge" by having its work based on ethical regulations that encourage a commitment to the truth (Fenaj, 2007). Brazilian law itself understands the duty of truthfulness as a journalist's ethical commitment (Brasil, 2010), a proposition that is not found in the way Flow defines itself.

In addition to the interviewer and interviewees, another relevant actor in the composition of the programs was the audience itself. Probably due to a matter of time, only in the Bolsonaro episode was there public participation through questions sent via YouTube chat when the programs were taking place. The questions were displayed for a fee with no previously defined amount.

However, this dynamic allowed for a more inclusive debate directed towards other topics of public interest not covered during the interview. For example, a viewer was able to raise a question with their interests about the direction Bolsonaro intended to take for the Federal Police (PF) competitions. Thus, unlike more traditional journalistic programs that do not always give voice to the public's questions, Flow strengthens the dialogue between interviewer and audience, which is naturally established in the practice of the interview (Fávero and Andrade, p. 3).

Still regarding the topics covered, Flow sometimes gave access to information from the journalistic press. As in this case found in the interview with Bolsonaro: "President, there is a movement, according to journalists, I read this in the media, that tries to give ex-presidents a kind of lifetime positions..."; despite the question being asked imprecisely, showed that the journalistic press is still a reference.

With regard to the verbal characteristics of the program, it was possible to notice a series of signs of informality. This is already a feature found in other Flow Podcast episodes. The main signs of informality, which would sometimes break the technical and even ethical regulations of a journalistic interview, were: when Igor lit a cigarette, swore and called the authority "dude". The very fact of being live is a factor that encourages spontaneity on the part of both interviewer and interviewee to the detriment of conversational planning (Fávero and Andrade, 1999, p. 8). At least in a journalistic context, the informality generated by this context can harm the delivery of news through interviews, even though informality is not a factor that excludes information (Gonzaga, 2010). Thus, we can assert that the hyperinformality adopted by Flow also undermines its informative potential when its programs emulate the practice of interviewing politicians.

There was also the presence of sponsors in both episodes: both a game development company, which does not indicate a conflict of interest at first. Lula was even presented with a t-shirt and a cap from his sponsors, which did not happen with Bolsonaro.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The literature presents different views on the impacts of the digitalization of the public sphere, but it is possible to note a consensus that these impacts fell on the field of social communication. Currently, there is a configuration of public debate that is less mediated by traditional journalistic institutions, such as the press. Information flows have intensified and more actors, in addition to formal journalists, participate and encourage public debate, a fact that comes as a result of the intensification of the use of digital media. In legal terms, the institutional environment begins to organize itself to accommodate the regulations that must be applied to these new actors coming from the digital environment, in addition to the regulations that already regulate journalistic activity. Regarding journalistic ethics, the literature already suggests the implementation of a new vision that contemplates the role that extra-journalistic actors have in the public sphere.

Such trends were evident in the analysis of Flow Podcast, an interview program broadcast exclusively in the digital environment. Despite being a minority, the participation of politicians in this program exists and is relevant, given the scope of viewing of these episodes and the context in which they take place, often during the election period. When interviewing politicians, Flow approaches the journalistic interview and a social function that is to address the public interest. Classifying Flow according to the ethical and technical regulations of journalism would not

make sense, mainly because the program does not discursively propose to be journalistic.

Still, we consider this as an attempt to exempt ourselves from responsibilities intrinsic to journalism. Due to the fact that there are interviews with characters of public interest, it was possible to find evidence of emulation of journalistic work by Flow Podcast. Habermas (2006) does not directly cite digital influencers, but when speaking of “interest groups, religious communities or social movements”, he indicates that these actors obtain public influence from their “‘social’ and ‘cultural’ capital that they have accumulated in terms of visibility, prominence, reputation or moral status” (p. 418). This reinforces the potential of actors like Flow and the need to establish responsibilities for this work, especially when it reproduces the “media power” of the press, which, in turn, is based on mass communication technology (Habermas, p. 419), something that Flow makes use of. Analyzing this accountability proved useful in the process of categorizing Flow in the field of social communication.

(...) one cannot think about communication rights without them also being internally linked to the responsibilities of communicating the right, or to the respective duties of communication and recognition that derive from the principle of publicity, but which accompany every exercise of communicative freedom and freedom of expression. communication (Blotta, 2013, p. 569).

Thus, combining this with the approach to matters of public interest there is a kind of unintentional journalism on the part of this actor external to the journalistic field, but which reproduces his interview practice. This hypothesis gains strength when it is confirmed that the events that took place during Flow had news repercussions in traditional media outlets. It is as if the role that Flow plays in the public debate is beyond the control of

those responsible for it. Such a conclusion would make sense considering the theory of affordances, by James Gibson (2014), analyzed from the perspective of new media by Cesarino (2022). Translatable as “affordance” (Velho, 2001), “affordances are neither in the organism nor in the environment, but in the relationship of co-emergence between them (...) Affordances are not fixed properties of [digital] platforms, but potentialities that emerge between media architecture and user behavior” (Cesarino, 2022, p. 93 and 94).

The affordances of digital platforms and media do not necessarily follow the original intention of their developers (Hayes et. al., 2016; Costa, 2018. apud: Cesarino, 2022). There is, therefore, an unpredictable component of the potential and uses of digital media, which depend on the user’s human behavior. Returning the discussion to Flow, even though the program is discursively distant from journalistic practice and the informative function attributed to it, viewers of the program can see Flow as a source of information. After all, Flow was a source of information for journalistic outlets and the interviewees were often candidates for public office, which makes the information circulated in the episodes relevant to a viewer’s voting decision. The opposite also happened: the agenda of what was covered in Flow programs was based on information published in the press.

Thus, it also becomes noticeable that there is a feedback between Flow and journalistic vehicles. Journalism in a certain way guides Flow, here understood as a communication space initially not mediated by the press. The opposite also happens, but to a lesser extent.

There are facts that, in practice, distance Flow from what journalism would be. The high level of subjectivity on the part of the interviewer, represented by expression of opinion and informality, distances Flow’s

modus operandi from the journalist’s protocol in journalistic interviews. Based on what Emerim (2008) points out as factors for a good interview in a journalistic context, it is possible to have a better understanding of what Flow fails to follow in relation to journalism: time management, preparation of the interviewee and impartial stance and objectivity are not always found in Flow.

In a context where both journalists and non-journalists present themselves as centers of information irradiation within the public sphere, we conclude this study with a proposal for collaboration between these two fields considering the characteristics played by each. Taking the Flow Podcast as a basis, it was interesting to see the opening it offered for viewers to participate in conversations with candidates for the Presidency of the Republic. For logistical reasons, this opening was only seen in the program with Bolsonaro, but it provided a space for exchange between voter and candidate. A more relaxed interaction, full of informalities and subjectivities, presents both positive and negative points: on the one hand, it brought viewers closer to politics (“Congratulations to the Flow team for showing itself as the only podcast capable of hosting two candidates and bringing useful information to the voter. Just because you’re bigger doesn’t mean you’re capable of doing a political interview. Congratulations Flow”, reported a viewer in the YouTube comments); on the other, the lack of rigor in the search for objective truth, which would characterize a journalistic work, opened space for misinformation and made the program not very aggregating from the point of view of creating knowledge.

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