Lean journalism: lean thinking principles and news values applied to Brazilian news startups

Carlos Rocha[1], Nicholle Murmel[2]

[1]Department of Communications, Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba, Brazil
[2]Department of Information Science and Management, Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba, Brazil

Abstract—This article aims to present the concept of lean journalism as a perspective to investigate news startups in Brazil. We have selected two examples: Projeto Draft and AgênciaLupa, and performed a qualitative analysis of their manifestos, through which they introduce themselves to the audience, advertisers, sponsors and future partners. Those open letters to the public reveal how Internet-based news companies are defining the present and future of journalistic business models and products, especially in Brazil, and a good part of this revolution, as the manifestos show, is about rethinking methods to produce and manage information as a corporate asset, as well as revisiting as reinforcing classic news values.

Keywords—lean journalism, news startups, lean information.

I. INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to investigate the presence of lean thinking and lean information principles within the organizational culture and structure of news startups in Brazil, and how those two business approaches can contribute do shape new editorial and management standards for those companies.

According to Carlson and Usher (2015), the crisis journalism is currently going through is attributed to economical, technological and social factors, many of them being a consequence of the consolidation of the Internet and its resources for production and broadcasting of information in a network structure, from everyone to everyone. As part of the aftermath of this phenomenon, we can include the polarization of opinions, the rise of fake news, the echo chambers or bubbles, and the decline of journalism's authority – the latest one, we believe, can be seen as a challenge in terms of organizational learning. Conquering a new market, with a new ecosystem, demands changes both on the type of content news outlets release, as well as in the sort of information that flows through those companies and guides their behavior and culture. That being said, this study reaches to the Information Science field as a different and promising environment to ponder over what Brazilian news startups are doing now and can do in the future in order to thrive.

Through this study, we aim to present the notion of lean journalism as a combination of the main aspects of the lean thinking and lean information management methodologies, which can be found or applied to Brazilian news startups, with the news values that have been shaping newsrooms and news professionals for almost 150 years.

We have selected two examples of Brazilian news startups: *Projeto Draft* and *AgênciaLupa*. And by analyzing their manifestos to their audience, we identified their discourse on what digital journalism can be now, and how these companies wish to present themselves as revolutionary on how they make journalism, but without losing touch with the more traditional principles that define jouralism in the first place.

II. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

The theoretical references used in this article are a combination of Information Science and Communications concepts meant to ground this research so that it's able to understand what it means to be a news startup in Brazil, what sort of journalistic content this kind of medium produces, what organizational environment it operates in and how it legitimizes itself before its audience, sponsors and advertisers.

First, we present three key concepts from researches on contemporary digital journalism: post-industrial journalism, hyper-competition and attention economy. The first concept comes from the article published by Tow Center of Digital Journalism researchers C.W. Anderson, Emily Bell e Clay Shirky back in the 2012*Post-industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present*:

> Post-industrial journalism assumes that the existing institutions are going to lose revenue and market share, and that if they hope to retain or even increase their relevance; they will have to take advantage of new working methods and processes

afforded by digital media.(ANDERSON C.W, BELL, Emily, SHIRKY, Clay, 2012, p.13).

New work methods and procedures were made possible by digital media. That in itself has allowed the emerging of startups in the journalism market. Those companies are designed specifically for the Internet environment and have the web's technological and informational resources as part of their DNA – in other words, they are fundamentally different from the mass media business model that used to rule back in the 20th and early 21st century.

The other two concepts were created by Canadian researchers Jean Charron e Jean de Bonville (2017) and provide strong theoretical bases to understanding the market for post-industrial journalistic companies; the authors explain that the product sold by journalism companies to their advertisers is not the content they create and broadcast – it is, in fact the attention of the audience attracted and kept by that content.

> Publicity funding implies the commercialization of time: the time people spend consuming media is sold to advertisers; in exchange, the audience receives editorial content that doesn't come for free, and that is sold for a price below its production cost. (CHARRON, Jean e BONVILLE, Jean. 2017, p. 346).

That market dynamics is what Charron and Bonville (2017) called attention economy. As for the concept of hyper-competition, it defines the circumstances where the new journalism organizations compete: more quotes and statements, more content, speech, information, news and noise being created and flowing. That forces the media market – and journalism as part of it – to expand as never before, so that the previously fixed positions of traditional mass media are now displaced by other journalistic and technological endeavors, or even by amateurs and enthusiasts of certain subjects. In this current scenario, more agents compete for market and financing that doesn't expand at the same rhythm, hence creating hyper-competition not only for journalists, publishers and broadcasters, but for many economy segments.

> Hyper-competition can be translated as instability in terms of number, identity and position of players in a particular Market, generating, in turn, a high level of uncertainty and risk for administrators and

investors. It becomes harder for companies that evolve in an uncertain and unstable universe to foresee and adapt to their competitors' new strategies in an efficient way. (CHARRON, Jean e BONVILLE, Jean de. 2017, p. 358)

The new rules for the hyper-competitive media environment now revolve around innovation, which the Canadian authors understand as a fast cycle of designing and implementing new solutions, procedures and products, then followed by imitation and standardization, of those elements by the other competitors and, finally, the exhaustion of the current standards, sparking a new cycle of innovation.

Besides the theoretical points presented so far, other two key notions for this study ate lean thinking and lean information. It is by nalyzing and understanding contemporary journalism through those two concepts that we can present the idea of lean journalism.

As described by Greef and Freitas (2012), the notion of lean thinking comes from the principles of the Toyota industrial production system that emerged in Japan right after World War II. According to the authors, back in 1996 the lean thinking methodology became a set of directives for business models applicable not only at the factory floor, but at management levels as well. Basically, lean thinking encompasses five aspects:

- **Value**: Value is defined by the customer, it molds products and services that meet their needs and expectations when and how they need it.
- **Vlaue stream**: a sequence of actions that determine what company activities actually improve the delivery of goods and services and which ones can be ruled out, making the entire process more efficient.
- **Flow**: production must be evolving constantly. There must be a mindset that embraces the cyclic movement of design, demand, production, delivery and improvement of products and services.
- **Pull**: means that all production activity is subject to actual demand from the customers. Benefits include less waste along the production line and better control of resources, stocking and storage.
- **Pursuit of perfection**: constant improvement of production activities and of the products themselves are a top priority in order to meet the

customers' needs and expectations as closely as possible

Greef andFreitas (2012) describe how lean thinking techniques can be adapted and used as management tools that go beyond the industrial production realm to embrace trading and service providers. Following the authors' thought process, the notions of value, value stream, pull, etc. can be used to map out the efficiency of production, categorization, storage, retrieval and use of information in any given organizational context as means to improve the information production process so that it can be created, shaped and made available in the most adequate way for those who need it, when they need it – that is the concept of lean information.

Lean information as a business methodology plays a critical role in this article, since journalism is a social and economic activity whose raw material is information in the form of facts, events, people who are sources, as well as documents and data on all aspects of society. Add to that material the knowledge and skillset of professional journalists and you have the product "news" which, in turn, is a specific type of information that permeates society and directs the decision-making process of citizens regarding all aspects of life in a democratic context. Once we perceive journalism as an informational process, it makes sense to use the concept of lean information as a theoretical tool to understand how it works in a volatile environment such as the current post-industrial scenario.

We believe that the concepts described up to this point are sufficient to map out the organizational landscape of contemporary journalism from the perspective of the Information Management and Communications fields.

III. METHODOLOGY

As we mentioned before, we believe that this study benefits from combining from both the Communications and Information Management fields in terms of data collecting and data analysis. The methodology for this study is inspired on the work of Carlson and Usher (2015), where the authors use the term 'journalism startups' to refer to journalism companies that are founded on the Internet and whose business models step away from that of major newspapers, radio and television stations, to which the authors refer to as 'legacy media'.

Those new businesses exist as networks centered on a main website, but, at the same time, present on several platforms for sharing and socialization – meaning Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, for instance – the content they make and publish fits the layout and language of each of those platforms without, however,

compromising the journalistic root of the texts, audio and video files, or the ethical and quality standards and procedures that traditionally sustain the authority and reliability of journalistic material.

Based on the methodology used by Carlson and Usher (2015), we gathered the manifestos of Projeto Draftand AgênciaLupa. By manifetos the authors refer to online statements and website topics such as 'mission', values' and 'vision', as well as press kits that were available for download. Those elements are meant to introduce the startups to the public – they describe how the journalistic enterprises are funded, what they offer in terms of innovation, content and technology, how they differentiate themselves from legacy media and, at the same time, how, by being different, they maintain the core principles of journalism alive and thriving. After selecting samples of Brazilian news startups, we performed a qualitative analysis in order to reveal which lean thinking and lean information methods and techniques define the place of those companies in contemporary media market, as well as their inner structures and production codes.

The second step of this investigation includes samples of factual journalistic content produced by the selected startups. We have chosen the latest material – two articles per media - as it constitutes the most up-to-date examples of how the startups' manifestoes materialize in actual journalistic routines and finished products.

The methodology we have established for analyzing both the manifestos and the content samples is multidisciplinary, based on the French branch of discourse analysis (DA), particularly on the concept of discursive formation, which derives from Michel Foucault's (2008) discourse theory; it is a relevant concept, as it suggests that there are other elements that give sense to discourse beyond grammar, logic and semantics:

> Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functioning, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation - thus avoiding words that are already overladen with conditions and consequences, and in any case inadequate to the task of designating such a dispersion, such as 'science', 'ideology', 'theory', or ' domain of objectivity'. The conditions to which the

elements of this division (objects, mode of statement, concepts, thematic choices) are subjected we shall call the rules of formation. The rules of formation are conditions of existence (but also of coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance) in a given discursive division. (FOUCAULT, Michel, 2008, p.38)

To prevent the two realms of discursive formation (manifestos and content samples) to become isolated from each other and from the social context they were created in, we also rely on the notion of enunciation institution, according to Dominique Maingueneau (2004). The idea of institution reconnects the actual discourse formations to the concrete circumstances in which they were made.

The introduction of the 'eninciation institution' issue comes to defy the deceiving evidence in the notion that opposes the 'inside' of the text to its 'outside', the conditions that made the text possible. (MAINGUENEAU, Dominique. 2004. p. 53)

Both the discursive institution and the discursive formations it comprises depend on the criteria chosen to enlighten our reading and investigation of contemporary journalism manifestos and content. Even though news startups represent the forefront of innovation in the journalistic field, there are still core qualities and standards those companies abide by so they can still call themselves news outlets. Examples are the news values: a widely debated theoretical set of established elements that determine why and how certain facts and occurrences have more 'newsworthiness' compared to others. A key aspect of news values is that they stem from the day to day demands and situations of newsrooms, as well as the ethics and skills of professional journalists over time, and those two elements are at the root of the decision-making process of journalists then and now, at legacy media companies and startups alike.

For this article, we have selected news values as defined by Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill (2016) as a set of objective traits that can be found on news pieces in general, with few changes depending on the medium and place of origin of the news organization. Those values can, in turn, be applied to the startup manifestos as well as the content samples. According to Harcup and O'Neill, in their

latest study of British press, there are 14 contemporary news values:

- **Exclusivity**: Stories produced or published first by that particular medium. The content results of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls, etc.
- **Bad news**: Stories with negative subjects, such as death, injury, defeat and loss.
- **Conflict**: News that describe controversies, arguments, splits, strikes, fights, insurrections and warfare.
- **Surprise**: Stories featuring surprising, unusual or contrasting aspects
- **Audio-visuals**: Stories that come with appealing photographs, audio or video content, or that can be better illustrated with infographics.
- **Shareability**: Stories that are thought likely to generate sharing and comments via Face-book, Twitter and other forms of social media.
- **Entertainment**: soft news that include sex, showbusiness, sport, lighter human interest, animals. Stories that also provide opportunities humor, clever headlines or lists.
- **Drama:** news about escapes, searches, accidents, sieges, battles rescues, or court cases.
- **Follow-up**: Updates to stories that already are in the news.
- **The power elite**: Stories about powerful people, organizations, institutions or companies.
- **Relevance**: News on groups or nations deemed influential and are culturally or historically familiar to the audience.
- **Magnitude**: Stories perceived as sufficiently significant for involving large numbers of people,.extreme behavior or extreme occurrence.
- **Celebrity**: Stories about famous people.
- **Good news**: Stories with a positive tone: recoveries, break-throughs, wins, cures and celebrations.
- **News organization's agenda**: Stories that help establish or that fit the news organization's own ideological or commercial agenda.

The news values listed above were, then, associated to one or more aspects of the lean thinking and lean information methodologies listed previously. By creating analogies and comparisons between news values and lean thinking/information principles, we were able to establish the notion of lean journalism – the contemporary information streams that flow through and out of the news startups, their business intelligence and its editorial policies that orientate decisions from journalistic and

corporate perspectives at the same time, establishing not only what is newsworthy, but the worth of the media companies themselves as agents that are redefining and, at the same time, defending journalism as we know it.

The next step was to associate each value to a lean methodology aspect in a way that places news values along the information production line that characterizes journalism as an economic and social activity. We have established the following categorization, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: News-values categorized according to the principles of the lean thinking and lean information methods.

Value	Vlaue stream	Flow	Pull	Perfection
Relevance Exclusivity Shearability Audiovisuals Magnitude Good news Bad news Conflict Surprise	Shearability Audiovisuals The power elite Relevance Entertainment Celebrity Good news Bad news	Exclusivity News Corporation agenda Audiovisuals Follow-up, Relevance	Conflict, Surprise Audiovisuals Shearability The power elite Drama Entertainment Relevance Magnitude Celebrity Good news	Exclusivity Shearability Audiovisuals Relevance Entertainement

Source: Rocha and Murmel (2020)

As the table shows, many of the news values repeat themselves across all the stages of the lean methodology, and many of them converge to the stages that depend on the customer of the news product, in other words, the audience. This phenomenon exemplifies the dynamics of attention economy, as journalism has been historically much more susceptible to the public than other economic activities and is even more so now.

Since the value of the news product depends so much on the audience, it makes sense that the news values the audience can perceive play a role in all areas of the lean journalism startup, as well as in the concerns of professional journalists when they investigate and report their stories. As for the internal decision process in these companies, considering they are for-profit enterprises, news values such as shareability, audiovisuals and relevance are present in the value stream and pull production steps, the ones that define the format of the news product and how it will be distributed. Reaching further, generating interaction and going viral can catapult

a news startup to a level of authority and credibility where it can attract more and better advertisers, sponsors and partners.

Still, on the other hand, the number of news values present in the Flow stage of production is remarkably small, considering that this particular stage comprises the actual management of the startup as a for-profit company. We believe news values and company management seem apart from each other because of how the press has established itself as a business activity through time – news values have been conceived as part of the culture and ethics of professional journalists all throughout the legacy media era, and in many occasions they posed as a sort of countermovement against the oppression of the board of directors and the finances department upon the newsroom and its journalists, whose only concern should be public interest and awareness about what happens in a democratic society.

In this sense, news startups are in the process of converting those same news values into assets to be displayed on manifestos where those companies recognize themselves as for-profit, and that they need to pitch themselves to their audience, as well as advertisers and sponsors, so they can attain institutional and financial stability.

This newfound harmony between journalism as a social demand and almost labor of love from journalists to all other citizens, combined with the clear notion that journalism must and can be not only economically feasable, but profitable and innovative, is the base of the concept of lean journalism we aim to define in this article.

In order to identify how lean journalism can happens in Brazilian news startups, we two examples: Projeto Draft and AgênciaLupa first collected and investigated the discursive formations present in the manifestos the two companies offer to the public on their online platforms. This part of the analysis is based on the work of Carlson and Usher (2015) in their investigation of manifestos from American and European journalism startups as metadiscourse: "which is a specific form of interpretive discourse that looks at issues of journalistic performance, normative assumptions, and appropriate practices. From this vantage point, these statements provide both an assessment about the state of journalism and an assertion about journalistic forms for the future". In this study, we searched for the combination of lean thinking aspects and news values that, we believe, are at the core of these lean journalism enterprises.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Projeto Draft is a news startup founded in 2014 by Brazilian journalist and entrepreneur Adriano Silva. Silva has worked in several Brazilian legacy media, such as the Fantastico Sunday-night news and variety show and magazines like Veja and Exame from the Abril publishing group. Unlike Silva's previous workplaces, Draft pulls away from mass audience, and focuses on a very specific niche: covering the new economy[1] scenario in Brazil, as well as providing media consultancy for people and companies that are or aspire to be part of this segment, or interact with it.

Draft's online platform is centered on the website, but spreads across the most relevant social media: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter, as well as a YouTube channel; the company also has a press kit available for download, both in English and Portuguese. The actual manifesto can be found on YouTube as a 3 minutes and 42 seconds long video[2] – more than half of it is dedicated to a thorough explanation of what new economy is and, how it is changing the business environment on a global level and what it takes for people and companies to thrive in this new landscape; only then the video introduces Draft as a news and consultancy company that is in tune with the new economy, as wells as describes the startup's editorial line and its mission "to cover the extension of the new economy. Our mission is to register and chronicle the disruptive innovation and the creative business around the world". Themes of coverage include crowdsourcing, crowdfunding, brand content, open source, startups, design thinking and sustainability.

Beyond online, multimedia presence, Draft's manifesto highlights the offline initiatives the company designed in order to actively participate in the Brazilian new economy scene, instead of chronicling it from a distance. The statement lists workshops, books, and open events, events in company (on demand), new business mentoring and global trips as concrete products and services that go along with the classic news coverage.

Draft's manifesto is particularly revealing, as it shows how its creators want to be perceived as more than multimedia – they want to be seen as a transmedia[3] endeavor that expands beyond the Internet realm into concrete actions, but even the non-journalistic features of this company stem from one of the most, if not the most essential news value: public interest. In Draft's case the interest of a specific share of the general public that is part or is interested in becoming part of the new economy in Brazil.

Through Draft's manifesto alone, we can infer that idea of lean journalism is present in the company's DNA. From the usual Internet-based platform to the small full-time team (four people) and many intermittent partners, all of those traits serve the main purpose of any lean production system: to reduce waste and redundancy. In Draft's case, that is done by making the journalistic enterprise itself as small and efficient as possible, so resources and partnerships can be directed towards the offline initiatives that help sustain and showcase the online platform.

We also analyzed the manifesto of AgênciaLupa, the first medium to specialize in fact-checking in Brazil. The platform was created by Brazilian journalist Christina Tardaguila back in 2015 as a way to introduce the methodology developed by the International Fact-Checking Network[4] (IFCN) into Brazil's journalistic environment. From its early days until 2019, Lupa was funded by Brazilian filmmaker João Moreira Salles, also publisher of the Piauí magazine, as part of the Folha UOL media group.

The emphasis on fact-checking it the first distinguishing product that Lupa offers to the audience and advertisers, and this product is made according to international standards of excellence. In the lean terminology, that can be translated into adding value to the news product: properly verified information is more valuable to citizens everywhere, especially in times of fake news and post-truth. However, the fact-checking methodology not only validates Lupa before its audience, it also poses as part of the startup's values streams – by having its business tightly connected to the IFCN standards, those same standards offer guidelines to define and optimize how production routines will be and what should be considered when making management decisions, so that Lupa is as efficient (lean) as possible in its mission

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[1]The term new economy refers to the change in economy starting back in the late 1990's with the rise of service providers, high-tech companies and information as a corporate asset. Presently, the new economy refers to companies that are highly dependent on information and communication technologies focus their products and services on value from the consumer's perspective and establish cooperative relationships with employees, partners and customers.

[2]Available   at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDsU2YMWDVc

[3]We used the definition of transmedia by Henry Jenkins as found on his website: "a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience". Although the concept was design to discuss the entertainment industry, we applied it to a news platform due to Draft's activities spreading over a range of online platforms and offline events and initatives.

[4]https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/

to verify what government authorities, data reports and other people of interest say to the public.

Like Draft, Lupa can be perceived as a lean news startup: a team of only 10 full-time professionals and all of them play more than one role and work in more than one project. Another important part of the company's manifesto is the description of the editorial council, to whom the text refers as "journalists we admire", although academics, business and IT professionals are listed as members of the council, which renews its members every two years. Having an editorial council gives Lupa strength and weight as an institution and makes the company more reliable in the eyes of the audience, as well as sponsors and potential advertisers. Authority and credibility are values professional journalists hold dear, and that can be attained and maintained by creating and publishing content that appeals to the news values we have listed previously in this paper.

Also like Draft, AgênciaLupa has projects outside the newsroom and the Internet. The company's manifesto has an entire section dedicated to their newest endeavor: LupaEducação, a brand under which Lupa offers courses and workshops to qualify high school and university students, other journalists, corporate agents, public servants and the general audience to use fact-checking techniques and verify information: "the idea of teaching people how to use fact-checking tools and techniques is completely aligned with Lupa's mission – to strengthen democratic debate and validate information sources through knowledge"[5]. According to the manifesto, since its creation in 2017, LupaEducação has expanded and become one of the company's main sources of revenue. The courses and workshops have qualified over 4.000 people to verify information provided by the media, official authorities and other sources.

Lupa's manifesto is even more effective in showing how public interest and other traditional news values can be reconfigured and placed back into the current context of hyper-competition for the attention of the audience and society as a whole. Lupa has positioned itself as a distinguished player in the media market, in particular the hard news branch – information about politics, economy, culture, technology, the government and all other subjects that have direct impact on the conditions in which Brazilian citizens live. Therefore, that is the most critical type of information when it comes to public interest, to which Lupa serves with its fact-checking coverage and by

sharing the fact-checking methodology everyone who might be interested.

Even though Draft and Lupa are fundamentally different in terms of what they offer, who they want to speak to and what they expect to give to society, we believe both companies are good examples of what we aim to define as lean journalism: a new organizational structure for news companies, where there is more dynamism and these organizations can read and learn from the current external environment, where data and information that comes from society, its groups and institutions, is not just facts and occurrences to be investigated and reported, but also clues and trends on how journalism as a business can reshape and improve itself in order to pursue perfection in its mission to serve society.

V. CONCLUSION

Both Projeto Draft's and AgênciaLupa's manifestos can be perceived as two separate discursive formations and, at the same time, parts of the same enunciation institution, since the institution depends on context – in this case, the context of post-industrial, hyper-competitive journalism. The idea of lean journalism we have advocated for throughout this paper is a way to conciliate practical, production and manage aspects – represented by the five principles of the lean methodology – and the contemporary news values that define journalism as a legitimate service to the public, from informing, to entertaining to educating.

By presenting the notion of news content created according to business management standards, we sought to close some of the gap between journalism as a for-profit activity and the idealized version of journalism as above economic and financial reality. The two startups we analyzed gave us, through their manifestos, some evidence that professional journalists in Brazil are already taking over the challenge of managing the news business and creating solid, viable enterprise models.

The debate on the future characteristics of digital journalism is far from concluded, whether in Brazil or around the world, but we believe the notion of lean journalism represents a step towards investigating new journalistic businesses in a more liberating perspective, that places news and news professionals at the center of a renewal and upgrade process, not just a reaction to the Internet, but a proactive effort to reinvent the profession and its market. The current moment is unstable, yes, but the startups are at the forefront of journalism, transforming it and, at the same time preserving its most essential values and traits as a democratic asset to society

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5Taken from: https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/lupa/2017/03/28/lupa-educacao/.Translated to English by the authors.

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