



Selected Papers of #AoIR2025:
The 26th Annual Conference of the
Association of Internet Researchers
Niterói, Brazil / 15 – 18 Oct 2025

DATAFICATION OF MEDIA WORKERS

Luis Gonçalves

ECA-USP, Communication and Work Research Center (CPCT)

Roseli Figaro

ECA-USP, Communication and Work Research Center (CPCT)

The transformations in the world of work driven by digital machinery have brought old and new questions to be addressed by the field of Social Sciences. For example, what is the place of labor and the theory of value in this new set of productive forces that make up the form of the capital system? This question is difficult to answer and requires in-depth knowledge of the production processes that digital technologies operate and their ability to appropriate all the gestures of living human labor.

Authors from different perspectives have called the process of capturing, appropriating and processing user information for different capitalist purposes datafication (Cukier and Mayer-Schoenberger, 2013; Van Dijck, 2017). In our ongoing research, datafication of the work activity of media workers in their productive arrangements (Fapesp, 2023-2028), we are now declining to understand the term in a generic way, and are focusing our attention on understanding the datafication of work activities. Specifically, we put a magnifying glass on the digital machinery to understand the place of value production of media workers (journalists, publicists, public relations people, designers, audiovisual workers, etc.), as well as the specific place they occupy in the production chain of platform companies such as Meta, Alphabet and Microsoft, to see if and how the work process of these professionals is datified in its different specificities.

Sensitive materialities

In order to verify these specificities, we developed the theoretical-conceptual hypothesis of sensitive materialities (Figaro, 2024). These include all the know-how, all the gestures, movements, expressions, actions and operations that are possible, required or unprecedented and that are always necessary when the social being wants to “take advantage of the properties of substances

Suggested Citation (APA): Gonçalves, L. & Figaro, R. (2025, October). *Datafication Of Media Workers*. Paper presented at AoIR2025: The 26th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Niterói, Brazil: AoIR. Retrieved from <http://spir.aoir.org>.

in order to impose ideal forms on them” (Vieira Pinto 2005, p. 255) - or, in the terms of political economy, the power to create value. This is why, under capitalism, these sensitive materialities tend to be dominated in the form of labor power and now, through datafication, also captured in the act of living human labor. Codified and modeled, they can still be separated from workers in the form of software and its resources, affordances, prescriptions and patents, generating productivity that will not benefit them. The subsumption of labor thus takes on a scale never imagined before.

In order to understand how the sensitive materialities of media workers can be appropriated in the form of data, we have structured three layers of observation of this process that refer to datafication: (1) in the communicational product and its media results; (2) in the specific activities of production and circulation of communicational products, i.e. the procedures for carrying out the work activity; and (3) in the sensory, cognitive, ambience, device and location interactions present in the act of interaction, i.e. all the gestures of the living human being in activity. This separation is didactic, because human work throughout human history has always been made up of these elements. The difference with digital machinery is that these components can be captured, separated and datified for specific appropriations and uses, giving capital even greater control over living human labor through human-computer interactions (Gonçalves, 2023).

Together, these three levels of datafication of sensitive material express a new socio-productive phenomenon. At the same time as these workers produce value in the form of communication products for their professional arrangement, they may also be producing, according to our research hypothesis, value in the form of data about themselves, their work and their product, which serve the most diverse commercial activities by becoming intangible assets of the platforms that control these tools. The work of communicators is at an important point in this digital production chain.

In this hypothesis, these workers act as a workforce for their arrangements and, at the same time, for the platforms - in the latter case, unpaid and without the option to be different: they don't even have the freedom to decide who they sell their labor to. This form of exploitation by heteromation - i.e. that which hides the complementarity between automated tools and human labor (Ekbria; Nardi, 2017; Ekbria, 2021) - is made invisible by the fact that the activities are fragmented and the digital tools appear to do all the 'work' themselves.

As a radicalization of Taylorist calculation, determination of the form and time of bodily movement, sensitive materialities then become all the gestures and expressions of productive activity mediated by digital devices that can be recorded specifically in the form of data with capitalist use value - whether, for example, as productive or unproductive work (Marx, 2011).

Preliminary considerations

These are some essential elements of the research questions and hypotheses of the “datafication of communication activity and work of communicators' arrangements: the clashes with the determinations of platform companies” project, carried out since 2023 by the Communication and Work Research Center (CPCT) at ECA-USP. We argue that the datafication of communication

work is mediated by digital tools in whose logic operate determinations that are beyond the control of workers and subsume the value of work in an unprecedented way.

In its current stage, the project seeks to identify the socio-technical, psychosocial and political-economic reality of the global chain of data production and consumption to which the datafication of the labor of media workers is integrated, as well as seeking to recognize and create theoretical categories capable of representing the concrete movement of these realities.

With this, we hope to contribute to the understanding of so-called platform capitalism (Srnicek 2017) and help media professionals in particular to resist and oppose these determinations through political struggles and regulatory frameworks, thus building the possibility of overcoming them.

References

Cukier, K.; Mayer-Schoenberger, V. (2013). The rise of big data: How it's changing the way we think about the world. *The Best Writing on Mathematics 2014*, p. 20-32.

Ekbia, H. (2021) Heteromação do trabalho e novas lógicas de extração de valor. In: Grohmann, R. org. (2021) *Os laboratórios do trabalho digital. Entrevistas*. Boitempo.

Ekbia, H.; Nardi, B. (2017) *Heteromation, and other stories of computing and capitalism*. MIT Press.

Figaro, R. (org.) (2018). *As relações de comunicação e as condições de produção do trabalho de jornalistas arranjos econômicos alternativos*. [Communication relations and the conditions of production of journalists' work in alternative economic arrangements] ECA USP.

_____. (2024). Datificação das materialidades sensíveis: captura das atividades cotidianas de trabalhadores da comunicação. [datafication of sensitive materialities: capturing the daily activities of media workers] *Revista Chasqui. N.º 157, diciembre 2024 - marzo (Sección Diálogo de saberes, pp. 273-287)*

Gonçalves, L. (2023). *Máquinas automáticas: Trabalho, mente estendida e subjetividade sob o fetiche da mercadoria*. [Automagic machines: Work, the extended mind and subjectivity under the commodity fetish. Doctoral thesis]. Tese de doutorado, PPGPS PUC-SP.

Marx, K. (2011) *O Capital. Livro 1*. [The Capital. Book 1] Boitempo.

Srnicek, N. *Platform capitalism* (2017). John Wiley & Sons.

Van Dijck, J. (2017). *Confiamos nos dados? As implicações da datificação para o monitoramento social*. [Do we trust the data? The implications of datafication for social monitoring]. *MATRIZES V.11 - N° 1 jan./abr. p. 39-59*.

Vieira Pinto, Á. (2005). O conceito de tecnologia.[The concept of technology]
Contraponto.