Preface
Towards a Digital Fourth Estate

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A radio producer asked me four years ago about the difference between data and information in the context of presenting Luciano Floridi's scholarly-amazing book, the Fourth Revolution.

Although I have answered the question rightfully, I did not realise that data and information govern our lives to the extent that some of us are oblivious to our ignorance. Before that interview, nearly a year ago, particularly in September 2019, I had participated in an academic conference in the German city of Bonne. I had a golden opportunity to explore a new path of human knowledge. A path on how to approach journalism and media studies in the modern world that is the world of digits, the world of Machine Learning (ML), a world of Artificial Intelligence (AI), a world of visible and invisible agents who communicate, and we may not recognise that they communicate and share data.

Al Maaref University conducted its first international conference, "The First International Conference on Digital Journalism and Innovative Media Industry (ICDJIM-1)," with venue in Beirut City on July 1

& 2, 2022. Several papers were selected within the scope of topics discussed above to be included in this edition. In my capacity, as the coordinator of the noted conference, I would like to thank personally and on behalf of the Faculty of Mass Communication and Fine Arts of Al Maaref University to the Journal's management of Journalism Research (i.e., Žurnalistikos *tyrimai*) established by the Faculty of Communication of Vilnius University for their collaborative and positive gesture to publish the peer-reviewed papers in a special edition. I would like also to thank Professor Hussin Jose Hejase for his constructive comments, suggestions, editing, and re-reviews of the selected papers for publishing.

In opening this special edition, I have postulated a question that hinges around the principal theme of ICDJIM-1, which is the digital fourth estate. The question is: Do the new media and journalism liquify knowledge?

This question imposes hypothetical perspectives on how individuals and researchers approach this inquiry. In addition, it requires presenting denotations of its conceptual terms since their meanings cannot be taken for granted.

To be methodological, I distributed a pilot survey questionnaire to some students whose specialisation is communication and majoring in journalism, digital media, radio and television, public relations, and advertising. 145 respondents from Al Maaref University and the Lebanese University filled out the online questionnaire.

67.6 % of the respondents selected the journalists and reporters present information to the public, 17.2 % selected that the journalists and reporters present truth to the public, and 15.2 % selected that the journalists and reporters present data to the public.

In responding to the question, "what is the most significant thing that the media outlets you follow present to the public," 53.8 % of the respondents selected entertainment, 26.9 % selected information, and 19.3 % selected data.

However, the questionnaire revealed that 86.2 % do not always trust the media outlets they follow.

What I have obtained from the survey is data or information. There is no doubt that what I have collected is considered data, and needs analysis to be informative and hence to be categorised in the field of knowledge since the meaning is buried in data (Frankel & Reid 2008).

As noted earlier, what are the definitions of the terms that exist in the question postulated in this Preface? According to Kiran (2019 p. 16), "Data" comes from a singular Latin word, datum, which originally meant "something given." Its early usage dates back to the 1600s. Over time "data" has become the plural of datum. Data is raw and unorganized facts that need to be processed. Data can be something simple and seemingly random and useless until it is organized.

On the other hand, as the same author (ibid p. 16) argues, "Information" is an older word that dates back to the 1300s and has Old French and Middle English origins. It has always been referred to as "the act of informing," usually concerning education, instruction, or other knowledge communication. When data is processed, organized, structured, or presented in a given context to make it useful, it is called information.

For Floridi (2014), we are living in a world rooted in the infosphere that affects our understanding of ourselves as agents turned into connected informational organisms. We are living in the world of datasphere and our understanding is embedded in the skills that upgrade us from connected datafied organisms into connected informational organisms.

The question may not always be what went right or what went wrong?; it is the question of knowing what is going on. The issue is that the data organisms surround us. Our devices chat, talk, or in other words, they communicate with each other - shake hands. In this context, what are we? Are we agents turned into connected informational organisms, inforgs, as Floridi (2014) described us? Are we unstable inforgs surrounded by high waves of rapid changes and the influx of data, and this aligned with Zygmunt Bauman's description of our mo-

dernity-liquid society? Under the umbrella of liquid modernity, liquid journalism, which Mark Deuze coined this term, is a concept that describes the rapidly changing conditions and atmosphere of journalism and journalists (Deuze 2008).

What did all these changes turn us to? Do they turn some of us into defensive humans aiming to protect our self-culture and self-identity through conservatively approaching communication and the media? Do we approach the status quo in an anarchist position without taking any action hoping that the chaos can be turned into order after time – Mikhail Bakunin (Create order out of chaos)? Alternatively, do we equip ourselves and the media institutions with the means of knowledge including digital literacy to prevent data from turning into an infodemic? I prefer to use the term datademic that aligns with datafied society. The data is everywhere, but the information is elsewhere.

The spiral data, as a result, needs to be processed under the umbrella of knowledge and boosting media literacy skills and up-to-date tools. Thus, we may have big data with no informational or little informational outcome. The danger resides in the new shape of our contemporary world in which it will be turned into datademic-societies versus informational-rich societies. Unfortunately, we are witnessing this form of dichotomy.

Although this paper posits the datasphere with skepticism and adopts the sensitizing nature of the emerged concepts relating to the media and its ecology, it does not adopt a postmodernist stance because of the individuality of validating or not what is considered information. In this vein, it calls for setting up criteria or measurements to validate what can be called information. Although these criteria or measurements reside at the core of empiricism, this means adopting sophisticated empiricism rather than naïve empiricism.

Do the new media and journalism liquify knowledge? It is a question that does not offend the media outlets or question criticism of their work. It is a question that we need to ask ourselves. How do we grasp knowledge from these outlets since we are described as "informational

organisms" who want to know and since we have needs to be gratified (e.g., entertainment needs, educational needs, etc.)?

The essence of our existence is to know and to know we need to communicate and experiment. Even experimentation itself is a form of knowledge.

In this vein, communication and its mediums and outlets are carriers of data and information. Having delineated this point, the early theorists of communication - and semiotics - dealt with it as a scientific process in physics and mathematics rather than a social process or a human need. As a result of this scientific stance, theorists namely; Robert T. Craig consider communication to be a practical discipline rather than a scientific discipline (Craig 2018).

Furthermore, information theory itself has been formed in the field of mathematics (Ash 2012). In addition, relevant courses from computer sciences infiltrated the journalism curriculum. Contrary to information theory, which is flavoured ontologically, data theory, which is flavoured epistemologically, as it is presented by Lindgren (2020), calls for the necessity to compromise between the influx of big data – the quantification of data and the qualitative tools needed to interpret the data, and hence to extract the qualified data that can be turned into information, and hence, acceptable knowledge.

However, the existence of social media has presented a fertile environment to discover further the social dimensions of communication.

The study of media and journalism under the umbrella of arts and social sciences does not mean that we should not consider other innovative and technical skills that boost the media industry and media literacy. In this context, it is significant for the concerned academics and researchers to revise the current validity of communication models and several theories in the field of communication and the media.

We cannot ignore the fact that the media is affecting our lives. Now the media outlets may present to the decision makers an opportunity to extract data and turn it into information. This technical process in which it can be algorithmic, and it can be humanistic as well if it con-

siders the means of social justice in dealing with data. Thus, the digital fourth estate is not an individualistic movement nor a collective action. It should be a social-justice ecology that governs the life of a real democratic society.

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