News at Work

Imitation in an Age of Information Abundance

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Introduction: When More Becomes Less

On a rainy morning in July 2005, in an auditorium in downtown Buenos Aires, Guillermo Culell was speaking at a workshop about the policy and management of information technologies. Since its launch in March 1996, Culell had been in charge of Clarín.com, Argentina's most popular online news site and the Internet presence of *Clarín,* the country's highest-circulation daily.[1] Ten minutes into his presentation, Culell showed a slide with a figure with a semicircular shape in the middle that flattened toward the edges. He polled people in the audience about what they thought it was. One attendee shouted, "A hat!" Another said, "A bell curve." A third declared that it was the well-known image of the boa that ate the elephant, from *The Little Prince*. Culell nodded and showed a slide with the illustration from that book. He paused, and a smile momentarily lit up his face. Within a presentation about the online news operation of an established newspaper, perhaps he smiled because of the connotation of the small devouring the big. But no doubt it was also because he knew that the audience would react with bewilderment when he told them that the illustration from *The Little Prince* also represented fairly accurately the temporal pattern of online news consumption at Clarín.com during the workweek. He illustrated his claim by showing the slide reproduced in figure I.1. He then asked, "What do most people do from nine in the morning until six in the afternoon, Monday to Friday? They are at work. Our public is people who get the news at the time and place of work."[2]

I.1 Illustration of the news-at-work pattern used by Guillermo Culell in his July 2005 presentation. ("L a V" stands for *lunes a viernes,* or Monday to Friday. The numbers 0 and 23 represent the hours of the day, starting at midnight.) © Guillermo Culell.

In the world of print and broadcast media, the news is largely conceived as a good that is consumed primarily before and after work and outside the workplace. Culell's claim signified the emergence of a novel temporal and spatial pattern of news consumption for the general public.[3]

I empathized with the workshop attendees because I had experienced both intrigue and excitement when Culell had told me of this "news-at-work" phenomenon more than a year earlier. We had met in the summer of 1996, shortly after I had begun to conduct research on online news, and had kept in touch over the years. In April 2004, while I was in Buenos Aires, he wanted my opinion about a new development on which he had been working. During that conversation he shared with me the news-at-work phenomenon that he and his colleagues at Clarín .com had discovered. He added that it had inspired a transformation of the editorial offerings, organizational structure, and graphic design of the site. An analysis of patterns of site usage led Culell and his colleagues to conclude that people who accessed online news at work would best be served by many, constantly updated, breaking, and developing stories (to keep them coming back to the site numerous times during the day), mixed with a handful of attention-grabbing features (to entertain them during more extended breaks from work tasks). Based on this conclusion, they planned to increase the frequency and volume of news publication during the day and the number of more elaborated feature stories. They planned also to restructure the newsroom into two units—one devoted to the production of breaking and developing news and the other to features. In addition, they would divide the homepage into two parts—one for news and the other for features.

Culell showed me the prototype for the new site, and we discussed the implications of the changes that were about to take place. As the conversation unfolded, I realized the potential significance of these changes in

news production and in the consumption behavior that had motivated them. Newspapers have often been read at the breakfast table or in transit to and from work. Television news has commonly been watched in the evening. During the second half of the twentieth century, media organizations aligned their editorial strategies, work processes, and production and distribution technologies to cater to this dominant temporal and spatial patterning of news consumption. Thus, the emergence of the news-at-work phenomenon could trigger transformations in core work, editorial, and technological dynamics of the journalistic enterprise. But did that happen? If it did, what kinds of transformations took place?

The research journey began in April 2005, when, aided by a team of research assistants, I launched an ethnographic study of editorial work at Clarín.com. By then, its main rival, Lanacion.com, and a new but aggressive competitor, Infobae.com, had also moved into a regime of constant publication of breaking and developing news during the day. Shortly after starting the research, it was clear that the above-mentioned editorial, organizational, and design changes implemented almost a year earlier at Clarín.com had evolved into a stark division at the site between the production of news and other kinds of content. As will be shown in chapter 2, the two divergent modes of journalism coexisted within one news organization, but with little in common other than a shared brand and office space.

Another issue rapidly caught the attention of the research team. The changes at Clarín.com, implemented to satisfy perceived alterations in the nature of demand, had had an unintended and unanticipated consequence in the production sphere. They triggered a qualitative leap in journalists' knowledge of stories deemed newsworthy by their colleagues. Although monitoring and imitation have long been staples of editorial work, it became apparent that staffers devoted to the production of breaking and developing news took advantage of this leap to incessantly monitor coverage at competitors' sites. Moreover, learning about a story published by another organization dramatically increased the likelihood of its publication by Clarín.com. That is, journalists reacted to the discovery of the news-at-work experience by increasing the number of stories made available to consumers, but the intensification of monitoring and imitation also caused the diversity of the stories' content to decrease. As will be analyzed in chapter 3, this intensification applied to the construction of news but not the production of features. Moreover, interviews conducted in 2006 and 2007 with journalists who worked in other online and print newsrooms revealed that these monitoring and imitation

practices varied little by medium and organization. The rise in imitation appeared to be widespread across the journalistic field.

Did these production practices have any systematic effects on the resulting editorial products? To answer this question, I conducted a content analysis of news stories that examined patterns in the selection, presentation, and narrative construction of the top stories published by Clarín.com, Lanacion.com, and Infobae.com during the autumn of 2005. The analysis also looked at similar issues about the front-page stories published by *Clarín* and *La Nación*, Argentina's second-largest newspaper and the print counterpart of Lanacion.com, at four points in time between 1995 and 2005. (Since the launch of the online sites and throughout this ten-year period, the respective online and print newsrooms had operated in a relatively autonomous fashion at both *Clarín* and *La Nación*.) The analysis, presented in chapter 4, shows an increase in the similarity of the print newspapers' stories that coincided with the timing of the growth in the volume and frequency of online news publishing. It also shows a high level of homogenization in the stories published by both print and online outlets in the contemporary setting. Last but not least, these patterns apply to news stories but not to other types of content, such as features or opinion pieces.

Many of my informants were well aware of these transformations in news production and products. But they often exhibited a sense of unease talking about them, to the point of preferring to say almost nothing at all. On one of my research trips to Buenos Aires, Ricardo Kirschbaum, managing editor of *Clarín,* asked to discuss my research progress. As I prepared my presentation for him on the morning of July 27, 2006, I compared the front pages of *Clarín* and *La Nación* on that day (figure I.2). The papers had a striking similarity in story selection, placement, and headline construction: the dotted arrow marks the top national story of the day in both papers; the dashed one, the top foreign story; the dotted and dashed one, the top metro story; and the long-dashed one, the top health story. A few days later, I showed Kirschbaum a series of charts with quantitative findings and then illustrated them with a slide with these two front pages. He said little, but his facial expression and body language conveyed a sense of discomfort yet lack of surprise, a reaction that I encountered often during the fieldwork process. Another common reaction from journalists about this pattern of similarity is captured in the phrase "*todos tienen lo mismo*" (everybody has the same). The phrase was often followed by brief comments about a dislike for this state of affairs—people do not become journalists to imitate competitors' work—

I.2 Front pages of *Clarín* and *La Nación*, July 27, 2006. © *Clarín* and *La Nación*.

and belief that one could do little to change it because it had become a part of "how things are now."

These transformations began as a reaction to changes in consumption. But what were the actual routines of consuming news at work, and what did the homogenization of news mean to consumers? To answer these questions, two studies were conducted in 2006 and 2007. The first study consisted of a content analysis of the most-clicked stories on Clarín.com, Lanacion.com, and Infobae.com, as an expression of actual consumer behavior. The second was an ethnography of news consumption to understand the interpretation, affect, and experience associated with appropriating online news. (The main findings from both studies are the subjects of chapters 5 and 6.) The results from the content analysis show a much lower level of homogenization in the stories that consumers read more frequently than in the stories that journalists consider most newsworthy. These results also indicate the existence of divergent thematic distribution in the selection patterns of journalists and consumers: the choices of the former are concentrated on national, business, economic, and international topics (or "public affairs" news), and those of the latter on sports, entertainment, and crime subjects (or "non–public affairs" news). Thus, changes in imitation were triggered by the discovery of the news-at-work phenomenon, but the magnitude and thematic composition of the changes emerged from unintended consequences of transformations in work and organization. Otherwise, imitation would

have been less common and the resulting stories less similar and focused on different subject matters. The ethnography of consumption underscores this by showing that a mix of dislike, resignation, and powerlessness also marked people's experience of reduced diversity in the news. In the words of Lorena, a twenty-nine-year-old teacher of Spanish as a second language, "The market is like this. And newspapers are part of the market, so they're all going to go in the same direction. Do I like it? Of course not. Do I know of any solution? To be honest, no" (personal communication, March 2, 2007).

The rise of homogenization in the news has led to a state of affairs that neither journalists nor consumers like but feel powerless to alter. This spiral of sameness and powerlessness has important cultural and political implications. The analysis presented in chapter 7 argues that it might be tied to a rise in the prevalence of generic news content and the importance of the wire services providing it. It may also be related to a decrease in the watchdog role traditionally played by news organizations and the concomitant alterations in the balance of power in society. The analysis also highlights the inability of consumer-driven alternatives to reach large segments of the population with a wider and more diverse set of stories. Because this book sheds light on broader trends in the media industry, appendix B also includes findings of a study of news homogenization among the leading online media of the United States during the 2008 presidential election. The preliminary analysis shows that the diversity in what is reported is quite low, even during a period of major historical significance when resource constraints are relaxed and public interest in the news is higher than usual. In an age of information plenty, what most consumers get is more of the same.

The dynamics of increased imitation come full circle, from the process of production, to the resulting news products, to the experience of their consumption, to the cultural and political implications. It is this circle—in the context of a new time and place of online news consumption—that this book aims to understand. More precisely, what follows is a tale of two distinct phenomena and the paradox that binds them. The two phenomena are the emergence of the workplace as a key temporal and spatial locus of online news consumption and the intensification of imitation in news production on the Web and in print. The paradox is the remarkable increase in the amount of news available and a perplexing decrease in the diversity of its content. This paradox has become a defining element of the contemporary media landscape. The 2006 edition of the authoritative *State of the News Media* report sums it up as "the new paradox of journalism is more outlets covering fewer stories" (Journal-

ism.org, 2006). Thus, making sense of the paradox is critical to understanding a current dynamics of a central social institution. In addition, accounting for how and why this paradox came to be affords a privileged opportunity to undertake much-needed theoretical and methodological innovations in the study of imitation. Realizing the potential of these innovations enables this account to offer novel ways of studying and explaining the common processes whereby the power of imitation turns more (knowledge of a given social world) into less (diversity of options pursued by the actors). These innovations are succinctly introduced next and described in detail in chapter 1.

Theoretical and Methodological Underpinnings

The conceptual goal of this book is to offer an examination of the dynamics and consequences of imitation in work, organizational, and economic processes. In addition, it focuses on the media industry and pays special attention to the role of technology in these processes. To this end, it relies on an interdisciplinary framework that draws from scholarship on imitation in each of these areas and from technology research. From the communication and media studies field, the book builds on accounts of the practice dynamics involved in imitation during everyday editorial work, often under the guise of "pack journalism," and the attention to the situational forces that affect these dynamics. It also draws on the growing concern expressed by academics in this field about the homogenization of news content. From relevant research in sociology and economics, it builds on analyses of the outcomes of imitative action in interorganizational mimicry and herd behavior, respectively. It supplements the efforts to understand the structural factors that shape these outcomes. From technology scholarship, the book adopts the view that social processes are often intertwined with material formations. Thus, any explanations of variance in social life must, in principle, take into account the possible role played by technological infrastructures, actions, and knowledge.

In addition to bringing together domains of inquiry that are often kept separate, this framework contributes to solving three important limitations that cut across this scholarship. The first limitation arises from the complementary foci of the imitation analyses typically offered by the scholarship in communication, sociology, and economics. These analyses usually split production practices (the preferred focus of work in communication and media studies) from product outcomes (the dominant

focus of inquiries in sociology and economics). They look at either practices or outcomes but not both. For instance, on the one hand, communication scholars examine how journalists from different organizations who share the same beat often focus on similar topics and disregard alternative angles, but these scholars do not systematically analyze the effects on the resulting stories. On the other hand, economic sociologists study how membership in interlocking boards of directors is frequently tied to shared organizational structures, but they only infer the existence of imitation from these outcomes. Splitting production practices from product outcomes complicates theory development efforts by making it difficult to establish clear connections between a particular practice pattern and specific changes in the resulting products. For instance, an increase in the similarity of news stories or organizational structures can be caused by changes in practices other than imitation. The customary separation between production and products, in turn, diminishes the ability to shed light on the specific practice mechanisms that generate these outcomes and to adjudicate between competing explanations.

The second limitation of relevant existing scholarship is that the role of technology has been overlooked. Not paying attention to technology is potentially a serious flaw because of the many ways in which artifacts are central across the domains of media and economic action. It is also problematic in light of recent research that provides examples of technology and imitation that resonate with phenomena examined in this book. For instance, in their analysis of the development of electoral campaigning on the Web in the United States, Foot and Schneider include dialogues with Web masters about their common monitoring and imitation patterns that differ little from what I heard in the newsrooms of Argentine media. One Web master commented, "We want to be able to match what other campaigns are doing, so we consistently monitor their Web sites" (2006, p. 179), and another visited opponents' sites "all the time" to "see what kind of content they have, whether there are some ideas they have, or features they have that we should be having. I think we all have just about the same" (p. 180). Without access to certain Web technologies, these actors could not have monitored their competitors and imitated some of their actions and products in the way they did. Thus, an account of their practices that rests solely on social forces and mechanisms would be critically incomplete. This does not mean that technology always matters, but that it can. Therefore, a determination of the actual role of technology should be an essential part of the research process.

The third shortcoming is a disregard for the consumption stage of the imitation life cycle. That is, the dominant focus on production practices

and product outcomes seems to have been at the expense of attending to how end users incorporate these products into their everyday lives. Two problems arise from this neglect of consumption. First, it assumes that consumer behavior has no bearing on the practices of producers, and therefore imitation can always be satisfactorily explained by resorting only to production dynamics. This might be adequate in many cases but should be an outcome of the inquiry rather than one of its premises. Second, studies that adopt a normative view of the socially deleterious effects of a homogenized news supply fail to anchor it in an understanding of how people appropriate and make sense of such news. This, in turn, diminishes the ability of the analysis to yield a realistic assessment of the prospects for social reform.

Building on the valuable insights of existing scholarship, yet aiming to overcome some of these limitations, this book develops the following framework. First, it bridges the production-product divide. Thus, it looks at how journalists from one organization monitor and imitate the work of their colleagues in other organizations, and it systematically analyzes the effects of these practices on the resulting stories. Second, it conceives imitation as emerging at the intersection of situational and contextual factors. In other words, it pays attention to the workplace dynamics and the patterns of the larger organizational field that shape the intensity and direction of imitative activity. Third, it directly examines the role played by technological infrastructures, actions, and knowledge. That is, it inquires into whether changes in the availability and use of technical resources have any links to transformations in imitation. Fourth, it accounts for the consumption of imitated products. Thus, it analyzes how consumers appropriate an increasingly homogenized news supply within their everyday routines and the cultural and political consequences that various modes of appropriation have.

To demonstrate the heuristic power of the four elements of this framework, this book relies on a research design that combines ethnographic and content-analytic studies of the production practices of journalists, the resulting news stories, and how consumers appropriate these stories. Unlike most existing scholarship on imitation, this design overcomes the production-product divide that has dominated the literature. It also extends the empirical gaze by including data on the consumption of the products of imitative activity.

More generally, this framework presents an alternative to the common stance of most social studies of media, technology, and economic processes, which focus on either production or consumption. That is, media studies either examine the making of news and entertainment

content or look at their effects on or reception by consumers. Similarly, technology accounts either inquire into the construction of artifacts or analyze their appropriation and consequences. V. Zelizer argues that a parallel trend characterizes the divide between scholarship in economic sociology, on the one hand, and sociological studies of consumption, on the other: "Economic sociologists examine production and distribution with no more than occasional gestures toward consumption, while specialists in culture, gender, family, inequality, and other fields lavish attention on consumption almost without regard to the questions—or answers—posed by economic sociologists" (2005a, p. 332). A handful of recent studies examine both production and consumption matters in these various fields.[4] They show the power of illuminating processes that are far more interconnected in society than in scholarly accounts. Thus, and to continue with the case of economic sociology, it is not surprising that Fligstein and Dauter label studies that bridge production and consumption a "frontier" in scholarship on markets (2007, p. 119). Therefore, in addition to its methodological contributions to the study of imitation, this book adds to an emerging movement that offers integrated accounts of production and consumption.

Temporal and Spatial Context

Like the news-at-work phenomenon, the account offered in this book is marked by a particular time and place. Thus, it is worthwhile to reflect briefly on some key aspects of the temporal and spatial contexts that frame the book. The time is the recent period from 2005 to 2007, with the analysis of news products going back to 1995 for added longitudinal perspective, and the place is Argentina. (A more detailed examination of these contextual matters is offered in chapter 1.)

The inquiry that resulted in this book was conducted during a recent period of rapid, momentous, and ongoing (at the time of this writing) transformations in the world of news. The contemporary, fast-paced, and evolving character of these phenomena presented challenges, because it is usually easier to study phenomena that happened in a more distant past and whose contours have long been settled. The upside of confronting these challenges is that the findings can potentially inform public discussion about the future evolution of the phenomena. The downside is the risk that the evidence will become dated in the short term. However, the main contributions of this book are not about the print and online operations of the two leading news organizations of Argentina

or the practices and experiences of the consumers of their products at a particular point in time. Rather, the critical contributions of the book are (*a*) its illumination of the underlying dynamics of imitation that depend on basic sociomaterial processes that are shared across many social worlds; (*b*) its demonstration of the value of an innovative research design that can capture multiple dimensions of these dynamics; and (*c*) its formulation of a theoretical framework to explain how and why these dynamics unfold as they do. Thus, these analytical contributions are somewhat decoupled from the timing of the data collection efforts.

One recent transformation in the media industry that is of relevance for this book is the rise and growth of a number of alternative platforms for news production and distribution on the Web, such as blogs and citizen media sites. Considerable optimism about a more diverse news landscape often accompanies academic and popular discourse about these platforms. Therefore, one may wonder how much an account of a decrease in news diversity among leading, mainstream media companies matters in a period marked by an explosion in consumer choices for accessing information? The answer is that it matters even more than when a handful of print and broadcast media dominated the journalism field. Research summarized in chapter 6 shows that the content of news blogs is highly dependent on stories produced by the media. Blogs commonly comment on stories generated by traditional and online media but very seldom break new stories. Furthermore, in Argentina and other parts of the world, the development of these alternative platforms has accompanied an increase in the relative market power of the leading news organizations on the Web. Nearly all of these organizations are tied to mainstream journalism companies. This is not surprising since, as Hindman argues, "In a host of areas, from political news to blogging to issue advocacy . . . online speech follows winner-take-all patterns" (2009, p. 4). Thus, a decrease in the diversity of news content among the larger players is likely to reverberate strongly across the media landscape.

That rapid speed also characterizes recent transformations in the media is shown by the fact that potentially relevant changes in structure and leadership at the main organizations included in the ethnography of news production have already taken place since most of the research for this book was conducted. A critical structural transformation was the merger, following a global trend in the industry, of the print and online newsrooms at *Clarín* and *La Nación,* respectively. This process began at both organizations in the spring of 2008. A major leadership change occurred with the departure of Clarín.com's longtime, founding editorial director to head all the Internet operations of Grupo El Comercio, Peru's

leading media conglomerate, and his replacement by a newcomer. Do these changes alter the analytical argument presented in this book? A study undertaken in the summer of 2008 with a doctoral student included interviews with editors at Clarín.com and Lanacion.com and at four other sites in Argentina. These interviews featured discussions about issues directly related to the ones examined in this book. This additional evidence, reported in appendix B, suggests that the recent organizational transformations in these two newspapers have not altered the underlying dynamics of imitation that are the focus of this book.

Why is Argentina a suitable choice to explore the issues at the heart of this book? As noted above, the genesis of the project was largely opportunistic and triggered what was then conceived as a stand-alone study of editorial work at Clarín.com. The decision to turn this study into the first empirical building block of a much larger project was made after realizing that the Argentine setting is an asset for the goals of this book in terms of what it shares with other settings and also its unique features.

The Argentine news industry and its counterparts around the world have much in common. The country has a modern media system, and new technologies such as cable, mobile telephony, and the Internet have diffused rapidly in recent years. The leading players, such as the organizations studied in the ethnography of news production, are well networked. The top editors and executives regularly exchange information with peers through participation in forums organized by the World Association of Newspapers and the Inter American Press Association, and journalists routinely receive training overseas. In collaboration with local universities, *Clarín* and *La Nación* offer graduate programs in journalism that incorporate modules on recent developments in the field and are often attended by their respective reporters. These programs are supported by exchange agreements with Columbia University in the United States and Bologna University in Italy (*Clarín*) and with *Diario El País* and the Autonomous University of Madrid in Spain (*La Nación*). In addition, the online news consumers interviewed for this book are similar to their counterparts in other countries in terms of age, educational attainment, and occupational profile. Several even work in local branches of leading multinational corporations, where they are in daily contact with colleagues in offices located in other nations and regions of the world.

Four distinct elements of the Argentine context also make this location advantageous for the analytical objectives of this book. First, the Argentine newspaper industry is mostly national, highly concentrated, and privately held. This makes certain factors that affect imitation easier to identify than in countries such as the United States, where the industry

has a more complex geographic configuration, is less concentrated, and is more open to the influence of capital markets. Second, the print and online newsrooms in each of the two newspaper companies examined for this book operated in an autonomous fashion throughout the period of the study. This allowed a better analysis of intermedia influences than if they had been organizationally integrated. Third, a special labor relations agreement contributed to much higher levels of personnel stability in the print newsrooms studied than in those of many other countries. This, in turn, moderates the role of fluctuations in resource allocation, a central aspect in political-economy explanations of imitation, and makes the effect of alternative or concurrent factors more visible than would be possible in other contexts. Fourth, the recent history of institutional instability in Argentina has made the average news consumer a savvier interpreter of journalistic texts, in particular those that deal with public affairs subjects, than in countries where people take for granted that political and social institutions in their everyday lives function adequately. When the institutional context is uncertain, citizens constantly look for news that can help them anticipate events and navigate difficult times. This, in turn, provides particularly fertile ground for inquiring about people's perceptions, interpretations, emotions, and experiences as consumers of news content. Mindful of the existence of these and other, perhaps less central, idiosyncratic traits of the Argentine location, I address different aspects of what might be locally unique and what might be shared across national settings in the chapters in which they are directly relevant. Chapter 7 assesses these various aspects of the findings from a comparative perspective.

The Argentine location is an asset for yet another reason. The vast majority of scholarship on online news, in particular, and the social, political, and cultural implications of digital media, in general, relies primarily on data from the United States and, to a lesser extent, other industrialized nations. But the emergence and evolution of digital media are not only global but also globalizing phenomena that deepen information flows across often very distant and quite different locales. Therefore, it is essential to expand the geographic gaze of the research enterprise to reach a more global understanding of digital media and their consequences. Locating the inquiry in Argentina furthers this goal as well.

The evidence available in scholarly articles and technical reports that is summarized in chapter 1 suggests that online news consumption at the time and place of work, the expansion of imitation practices in news production, and the homogenization of the resulting news stories are not unique to the contemporary Argentine media scene. This is further

underscored by additional findings about news homogenization during the U.S. 2008 election cycle that are included in appendix B. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that the location chosen for this book is a useful mirror to reflect news phenomena and imitation dynamics that are taking place in other locations. It is certainly not a perfect mirror and perhaps is better understood as a fun house mirror or a broken mirror. But like the absurd stories of Miguel de Unamuno or the cubist paintings of Pablo Picasso, the exaggeration and reconfiguration of critical elements of the object of inquiry might teach aspects of social life that are more difficult to understand from the location choices that dominate studies of digital-media phenomena and imitation processes in a number of disciplines.

In sum, this book offers an account of three separate but interrelated elements that are central to contemporary journalism and its publics: the emergence of the time and place of work as key parameters for the consumption of online news, the substantive rise of imitation in news production, and the unforeseen paradox of a greater volume of news but a less diverse content. It presents a theoretical analysis that encompasses the multiple stages in the life cycle of imitation—from production and products to consumption and cultural and political consequences—and how they affect each other. The book also fosters theory development by taking into account the role of technology and the causal force of situational and broader contextual factors. It makes these theoretical contributions by combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a research design conceived to overcome the divides between studies of production, product, and consumption that dominate relevant scholarship on imitation, in particular, and general tendencies in studies of media, work, and technology. Finally, this book makes these descriptive, theoretical, and methodological contributions through a history of the present undertaken in a well-suited, yet unusual, setting. This setting helps to deepen a global outlook in the understanding of developments at the intersection of digital technology, organizational action, and cultural formations.

The next chapter discusses in depth the theoretical, methodological, and contextual aspects of this book that are summarized in this introductory chapter. Readers who wish to move directly into the empirical analysis might want skip to chapter 2. For others, what follows is a more extensive account of how I studied imitation in the South.