Digital Platforms in Connected Economy: Discourse, Control, Consumption, and Collaboration. Introductory Note

Plataformas Digitais na Economia Conectada: Discurso, Controlo, Consumo e Colaboração. Nota Introdutória

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Volume 39 of *Comunicação e Sociedade* is dedicated to a series of studies from different approaches on the use of digital platforms. These platforms, on the one hand, are interpreted as an important means of consumption and arena for the emergence of collaborative social practices. On the other hand, they are also analysed as new mechanisms for surveillance and the production of performative discourses in an increasingly connected economy.

The backdrop of the crisis caused by the covid-19 pandemic has led to the use of platforms of the so-called "sharing economy" for different places. Tourism-related services and workers have experienced major financial losses, while transport and delivery platforms have risen to unprecedented prominence.

Mandatory social isolation and sanitary security measures for consumption and movement of goods have positioned digital apps that manage such services as the main adjunct for some sectors of economy, such as catering and food delivery (Buheji, 2020). They have also attracted a large number of companies, consumers and especially workers who have seen digital platforms as an opportunity to overcome the economic recession and the lack of opportunities in the conventional labour market in countries like Portugal and Brazil. This unexpected growth also exposed the labour crisis and the ethical dilemmas that the dynamics of this sharing economy were trying to hide (Chen et al., 2021).

The pandemic was yet another proof of how much the internet and its different platforms have become fundamental elements of various dimensions of our lives, both as a tool for work and income, and in a more social dimension as a meeting place, a

consumption space and a communication tool. We can dare to say that never before have we experienced such an intense use of digital media as we do today as a result of the various restrictions we have been subjected to (Ricarte, 2020). This is for those of us having to stay home due to lockdowns, and for those of us having to provide essential services such as medics, caregivers, and transport workers as well. For both groups, digital platforms have become indispensable in unprecedented ways, both at home and the world over.

Through the pandemic we learn how this digital dependency backdrop can still be transformed into a scenario of vigilance and risky behaviour. Almost naturally, we bring to these spaces not only a pressing need to consume and work, but also the good and the bad in us. As such, the internet has increasingly become not a reflection of our offline life, but a continuity of life itself. As Hossain (2020) has pointed out, this intense digital way of life has also produced direct effects on the mental health of many people who relied on the sharing economy digital platforms as their main source of income.

To understand aspects of the uses we make of the multiple digital platforms that constitute the internet, this volume presents important studies that seek to understand the various interfaces of this economy and its impacts. These range from the repercussions in the field of communication, to forms of consumption, social discrimination, labour relations and the dangers of the increasingly intense commodification of our affections through big data (Saturnino, 2020).

The contributions in this volume illustrate how strongly digital media have transformed the economy and the world of work. They demonstrate how these transformations have directly affected our lifestyles and how we can envision regulatory instruments for these sectors to ensure a more balanced and sustainable future in the face of these new realities.

The first four articles in this volume focus on the use of transport and delivery apps in Brazil and Portugal from different perspectives. In the first article, Rafael Grohmann, Cláudia Nonato, Ana Flávia Marques and Camila Acosta Camargo describe, in "Media Strategies of Labor Platforms: Circulation of Meanings in Social Media of Companies in Brazil", how digital transport and delivery platforms use their own ethics through communication to try to control the meanings of the service they offer, thus undermining historical class struggles. Drawing on the pandemic context, the authors take the case of the strike of workers using transport and delivery apps to describe the conflicts between the interests of large companies and the needs of these workers.

Within the same context, but with an approach focused on the organizational strategies adopted by sharing economy companies in light of the pandemic, the article "Sharing Economy and Organizational Communication Practices in Times of Covid-19: Social Brands in Brazil and Portugal", by João Francisco Raposo and Carolina Frazon Terra helps us understand how these companies use the social brand concept to establish what they call a "brand activism". In such a relationship, social responsibility and

good communication practices become key elements for companies seeking to maintain a positive reputation among their consumers. The authors also outline the challenges these brands face in a social scenario where companies are increasingly being asked to take ethical and political positions on current issues.

In the third article the authors Victor Piaia, Eurico Matos, Sabrina Almeida, Dalby Dienstbach and Polyana Barboza write, in the text the "'Breque dos Apps': A Temporal Analysis of Communities and Influencers in Online Public Debate on Twitter", about the collective action of protests of workers using delivery apps in Brazil held against the regime and working conditions during the pandemic period. By analysing the intense debate on Twitter about the precarious working conditions through apps like iFood, Rappi, Uber Eats and Loggi, the article describes how social mobilisation in digital environments takes effect when the interactions between groups involved in a cause are mediated by social groups and digital influencers.

Still on transport platform studies, Naiara Evangelo and Fátima Cristina Regis Martins de Oliveira, analyse, in "The Black Social Ranking Experience at Uber: A Racialized Reflection on Contemporary Surveillance", the impacts of worker rankings and their relation to racial issues. The authors suggest an amplified look at how Uber operates with regard to building a reputation for drivers and passengers, and how this system has become a tool for constant surveillance.

In "Sentiment Analysis: From Psychometric to Psychopolitics", Felipe Melhado and Jean-Martin Rabot examine the topic of the commodification of affections through digital platforms. From studies on the creation of big data and its relationship with contemporary surveillance, they describe how these strategies serve as a psychopolitical instrument for monitoring and producing affect as a form of subjective control.

From an international perspective, authors María Soledad Segura and Ana Bizberge discuss, in "Digital Rights During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Latin America", how the government, the private sector and civil society in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico responded to the governance challenges of new communication technologies during the pandemic and how their responses impacted on human rights regarding freedom of expression, access and privacy.

In the field of consumer studies, the volume includes two articles addressing issues related to consumption practices through digital platforms in Spain and Cuba. The paper "YouTube Preferences and Practices of Preadolescents: Findings From a Study Carried Out in Catalonia", authored by Maddalena Fedele, Sue Aran-Ramspott and Jaume Suau, reveals how the most famous video platform on the internet plays a pivotal role in the media lives of Spanish teenagers and pre-teens, becoming one of the main sources of entertainment consumption for this group of people.

Still on consumption practices, "*Paquetes* as Improvised Media: Transnationalism and Cultural Consumption in Havana-Miami Context", written by Thiago Soares

and Sofia Zanforlin, explores the alternative means of access to information assets in a country where the capitalist forms of consumption are still contradictory. From an ethnographically inspired study, the authors disclose how Cuban consumers devise strategies for consuming US culture not marketed in Cuba through alternative distribution of content packages using online and offline networks.

These alternative procedures on the internet are also the subject of the article "Crowdfunding Platforms in the Political Economy of Alternative Media" by Lina Moscoso Teixeira and Ana Jorge, in which they analyse how alternative media outlets in Portugal, Spain and Brazil articulate to maintain their independent journalism through crowdfunding. The authors describe how the political economy of these media base their online presence strategies on social networks to increase the engagement of the audience not only as readers but also as funders.

The article that follows provides an interesting reflection on open access to scientific production. Tiago Lima Quintanilha and Natalia Trishchenko in their article "Open Access and Scientific Knowledge: Between the Public Interest and the Business Model. A Literature Review", consider the polarities that surface from the connection between open access and scientific knowledge. They highlight, for example, how this initiative can become a powerful catalyst for disseminating knowledge, making it not only more visible but also more accessible if we consider how this knowledge could be transferred from digital platforms. However, the authors do not overlook the negative aspects by referring to an underlying inability to tackle a parallel science economy, that is, one that uses open access and the principles of academic production to introduce capitalist dynamics by imposing fees for the publication of scientific results. According to Tiago Lima Quintanilha and Natalia Trishchenko, this approach to science management goes against the principles of open knowledge and thus favours the rise of opportunity inequalities within the scientific community.

Closing the theme in this volume, "Building Trust in Digital Platforms for Sharing Collaborative Lifestyles in Sustainable Contexts", by Raissa Karen Leitinho Sales, Ana Carla Amaro and Vania Baldi explores a set of guidelines from digital platforms that promote experiences in education projects in rural areas of Portugal. The authors seek to understand how these non-profit associations elaborate discursive strategies in sustainable contexts to promote trust building and reciprocity among their users. They conclude that such guidelines provide an ethics manual for platforms aiming to produce a digital script for best practices in lifestyle sharing among users.

In the "Varia" section, the volume also includes three texts that, while unrelated to the central theme, focus on the current state of journalism in the light of the pandemic. The authors of these three contributions provide from different perspectives the results of a study conducted in May and June 2020, which surveyed 890 journalists, in an attempt to understand the effects of the first state of emergency in journalism in Portugal during the pandemic crisis.

The first "Journalism in the Context of a Sanitary Crisis: Representations of the Job and Journalists' Expectations", by Carlos Camponez and Madalena Oliveira, describes how the work of journalists has been affected over time up to an unexpected scenario provoked by the pandemic. The text focuses on analysing the expectations of journalism professionals compared to the collective imaginary about the profession and the shock of such workers before the labour difficulties in the sector, namely with regard to the precarization of work. Camponez and Oliveira describe how the dissatisfaction with the profession was aggravated by the covid-19 pandemic and outline the reasons that still keep many professionals in the industry clinging to a certain idea of professional fulfilment.

"Journalism in State of Emergency: An Analysis of the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemics on Journalists' Employment Relationships", by José Luís Garcia, José Nuno Matos and Pedro Alcântara da Silva, explains how the socio-professional condition of journalists has undergone changes influenced by the liberalisation and digitalisation of the activity. The authors analyse some implications of the policies on journalistic work before and during the pandemic to determine whether this new reality reflects a reversal of the precarization trend or, on the contrary, its acceleration.

Still on the subject, João Miranda, Joaquim Fidalgo and Paulo Martins propose the "Journalism in Time of Pandemic: New Professional Routines, New Ethical Challenges", where they map the effects of the pandemic on the practices and routines of communication professionals. The authors point out, for example, the existence, within journalistic practices, of some marks of depersonalisation of the activity due to the constraints of journalists' social isolation. These circumstances lead to deontological dilemmas that highlight the relationship between journalistic practice in the pandemic and the rigour related to the processes of investigating the news.

Finally, the volume provides two reviews: that of the book *Advanced Introduction to Platform Economics* by Elsa Costa e Silva and that of the book *The Platform Economy: How Japan Transformed the Consumer Internet* by Jack Linchuan Qiu.

Be they institutionalised news organisations or social media platforms, be they digital economies for light-hearted entertainment, mundane everyday livelihood activities, or collective struggles for dignity and democracy — the issues at stake in this volume of *Comunicação e Sociedade* are important, dynamic, and multifaceted. Yet, in one way or another, they all deal with the fundamental discourses, formal or informal, that undergird today's digital platforms, which must be exposed and scrutinised. They all document and question the mechanisms of control, for good or for bad, that limit agentic practices through not only computer codes but also legal codes and social norms. Digital platform economies are, undoubtedly, tools of late capitalism designed to reshape citizens into little more than atomised consumers, a process now accelerated by the covid-19 pandemic.

However, as shown by articles curated here, the unfolding public health crisis — now triggering a devastating cascade of economic, political, social, and cultural crises worldwide — is also an opportunity for progressive innovations and grassroots collaboration,

both within the ivory tower and beyond. After all, platform economies are a connected economy that can, and should, be reformed through the renewal of our collaboration models and collective spirit. It is along this line of "pessimism of the intellect" and "optimism of the will" that we put together this volume in the hope for more collaboration in academic solidarity economies for better platforms in a better world.

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