

# Platformized intellectual: theoretical contributions, scope and digital limits of praxis

## Intelectuales en plataformas: aportes teóricos, alcances y límites para la praxis

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### Abstract

Observing the transformations articulated in society, culture and communication, with an emphasis on the expanded use of digital platforms in the subjects' daily lives, this paper seeks to present central theoretical premises to categorize the notion of *platformized intellectual* in contrast with the presence of digital influencers in social media. Starting mainly from the theoretical framework developed by Antonio Gramsci to define the intellectual and his political praxis, we discuss the characteristics of this subject and his field of action in a platformized society. Based on a theoretical debate and an exploratory documentary research, we discuss the potential, limitations and strategies of intellectual activity in a platformized society seeing how their creations work as a form political education.

**Keywords:** digital platform, intellectual work, political education, programmed content, access to information

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## Resumen

Observando las transformaciones articuladas en la sociedad, la cultura y la comunicación, con énfasis en el uso ampliado de las plataformas digitales en la vida cotidiana de los sujetos, este artículo busca presentar premisas teóricas centrales para categorizar la noción de *intelectual en plataforma*, en contraste con la presencia de influencers digitales en las redes sociales. A partir del marco teórico desarrollado por Antonio Gramsci para definir al intelectual y su praxis política, discutimos las características de este sujeto y su campo de acción en una sociedad plataformada. A partir de un debate teórico y una investigación documental exploratoria, discutimos el potencial, los límites y las estrategias de la actividad intelectual en una sociedad plataformada viendo cómo sus creaciones funcionan como forma de educación política.

**Palabras clave:** plataforma digital, trabajo intelectual, educación política, contenido programado, acceso a la información

## Introduction

Communication as a space for collective and social construction and as an instance of social and political praxis organization (Lenin, 1978; Nabarrete Bastos, 2022), is a fundamental epistemological and political issue to understand the different experiences and practices of transformation and struggle. The development of Web 2.0 tools added significant and problematizing elements to the field of communication, both in different professional practices and in the political activism made possible by the internet and later by social media platforms (Poell et al., 2020).

Among the elements that emerge with these historical transformations of communication, we highlight in our analysis the role of digital influence and the expansion of sociability networks constituted in connection with digital platforms. This process makes it possible for not only authorities already consecrated in their professional fields to exert influence, but also subjects previously unknown by a large part of society. Thus, what we reflect on is more than the role of the influencer, but

the *creator's* place in this equation. This is especially relevant in the political and social transformations of contemporary society, in situations in which this *creator* is not only a creative figure in the networks, but an intellectual capable of forming and disseminating intellectuality and socio-historical knowledge from specific social groups, as Gramsci (2004) proposed as the leading role of the intellectual. With the expansion of connectivity through the web, the reach and dissemination of discourses previously restricted to a spatiality fixed in the territory also expanded, enabling a broader sharing of ideas and political values, whether progressive or not. This is not to say that every intellectual should exercise their scientific, political or academic activity on digital platforms or specifically on social media platforms. However, in a society immersed in the process of platformization (Poell, et al., 2020), people will inevitably have their daily lives influenced by the mediating logics dictated by these platforms, with their economic, political, technological and social implications.

We realize that the development of a platformized society enables a space of political articulation between subjects through collective and symbolic experiences within a wide network that involves their peers and their digital networks of digital sociability (Martin-Barbero, 2004) in everyday life. Considering the prominent role of the *creator* in the plexus of platform sociability, we seek to understand how the intellectual, the *creator* and the possibilities and barriers constituted in the processes of platformization are theoretically intertwined (Poell et al., 2020; Nabarrete Bastos, 2022). In developing these relations of communication and human formation, we aim to understand the potential impact of digital content creators in the dispute for the production and dissemination of content that problematizes and shapes the role of the platformized intellectual, based on the theoretical legacy of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937).

From this perspective, we see that these subjects act mediated by platform algorithms (Gillespie, 2018) in the thematic scheduling of daily agendas, and thus update the social function of the *gatekeeper*, considering the possibilities and limits imposed by algorithmic mediation to engagement (Nabarrete Bastos, 2020, 2022). Although the thematic scheduling and discursive circulation imposed by the logic of platform capitalism (Srnicsek, 2017; 2022) are widely more powerful than those subjects, it seems to us that a reorganization in favor of a *ranking* of content that is socially relevant from collectively organized strategies and tactics is still possible. Although we understand that it is essential not to lose sight of the horizon of possible

construction of public and collective platforms, we recognize the limits of the mediatized and platformized common<sup>1</sup> (Nabarrete Bastos, 2022).

The structural path of this paper aims to build a line of reasoning that elucidates such possibilities and limits. With that in mind, we will 1) understand the platformized intellectuality and its performance on the web; and 2) succinctly analyze the characteristics of the governance structure of platform capitalism, to then understand how such creators can find gaps and possibilities for the exercise of political formation and organization with the support of digital platforms. Methodologically, we carried out a non-systematic bibliographic research and exploratory documentary research based on an initial sampling developed for broader research. While our central focus is the theoretical debate, we have included preliminary results of our empirical research in order to provide greater concreteness in relation to what we are categorizing as *platformized intellectual*.

By combining reflections on intellectuality, political formation (that is, the formation of new organic intellectuals that Gramsci proposed) and the construction of social links around communication, we realize that it is not only the interests of platforms that constitute social experiences and relations, but rather the sum of these elements with other spatialized experiences of the subject: the online and offline world, the everyday interactions inside and outside these platforms, along with their articulation, drive dynamics of a platformized society. Gramsci (2004) perceives the performance of leaders precisely as subjects capable of carrying out a collective organization in favor of the political direction of their peers, being able to effectively carry out praxis for the ethical and moral formation appropriate to the classes from which they

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<sup>1</sup> Electronic technology systems reinterpret the organization of the human commons, with the apex of Western rationality governed by information as an efficient operator of financial capital (Sodré, 2014). In fact, strictly speaking, it is a contradiction in terms, as it is a common kidnapped for marketing purposes, a common privatist, the common of interactions regulated by digital platforms, according to their materialities, affordances and symbolic resources. It is the common of technointeractions, which are governed by the structural law of value, capital (Sodré, 2002). This engenders a new societal technology, which engages in «another type of ethical-political hegemony» (p. 22). In this vicarious existence, in this existential dimension, characteristic of the virtual bios, or the media bios, according to the author, the individual himself is described as «an image managed by a technological code» and the technical device becomes a kind of «permanent dwelling of consciousness» (Sodré, 2014, p. 108-115). In short, the mediatized and platformed common is hegemonically structured and shaped by capital (Nabarrete Bastos, 2022, p. 18-19).

emerged or to which they ideologically adhered. Dahlgren (2012) questions what would be the ideal place for the development of the intellectual's skills and abilities in the modern world, precisely because their spaces seem increasingly restricted either to academia, *think tanks* or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). If in the first space the incessant demand for the achievement of production metrics consumes much of their time, leaving little or no space for political praxis, acting in *think tanks* implies operating in private apparatus of hegemony subject to various questions, according to their logics of action and sources of financing. On the other hand, from the author's perspective, the performance in NGOs tends to be so praxis-oriented to the point that it limits the space for intellectual construction (Dahlgren, 2012).

Thus, it is necessary to reflect on the sharing of intellectuality and everyday sociability in the light of platformized experiences, observing how information networks and their increasingly advanced technologies modify the social world. These spaces are fundamental for the construction of political organization in an increasingly connected society, since it is through the circulation of capital and its symbols that capitalism is sustained and its articulation expands between social spheres. Writing on this topic, Grohmann (2020) observes how communication can act more than as a mere space for the circulation of capital (effective and symbolic), but as a space for aggregation and promotion of social struggle where not only material goods circulate as ideals, but also knowledge, information and criticality.

In the organization of social movements, attention is understood by Tufekci (2017) as the greatest advantage given by social networks to the struggles of popular movements. The reason behind this is because the achievement of a certain prominence by social and political rights organizations is significant and fundamental for the consolidation of the dynamics of the popular struggle.

We no longer live in a mass-media world with a few centralized choke points with just a few editors in charge, operated by commercial entities and governments. There is a new, radically different mode of information and attention flow: the chaotic world of the digitally networked public sphere (or spheres) where ordinary citizens or activists can generate ideas, document, and spread news of events, and respond to mass media. This new sphere, too, has choke points and centralization, but different ones than the past. (Tufekci, 2017, p. 29)

The author emphasizes that «attention is the oxygen of [social] movements. Without it, they cannot be consummated» (Tufekci, 2017, p. 30). The Turkish sociologist's words make clear the relevance of digital activism movements. With the development of digital sociability networks, the monopoly of attention is not solely possessed by traditional media. Although performance in platformized spaces and the logic of visibility are subject to the operation of big tech companies and their marketing strategies, other communicative possibilities emerge.

Sodré (2002) concept of mediatization supports our argument from a critical perspective, as the author points out that the social relationships with media and technological interfaces are mediated by *neotechnology*. Thus, relationships begin to be established under the progressive prism of generalized communication, «in which the technological network is practically confused with the communicational process and in which the result of the process, within the scope of the mainstream media, is the image-commodity» (Sodré, 2002, p. 19). This is not a space of exclusivity nor one where other means and senses of communication are excluded, but one for the coexistence of technological development. The effects of instantaneous communication provided by *neotechnology* are such that they reorganize social instances, causing the relationships that coexist in this space of massive interaction to be reconfigured in a fourth *bios*, the media. Therefore, it is a relationship of dependence on the technology that comprises it, akin to a simulacrum in which mediatization inserts the subject in the world in a new way, alongside *technocultural* relationships where the space of life is a constituent part of the media. This form of the mediatized being, however,

does not cover the entire social field, but, as we have already emphasized, that of the hybridizing articulation of multiple institutions (relatively stable forms of social relations committed to global human purposes) with the various media organizations, that is, with activities governed by strict technological and market purposes, in addition to being culturally attuned to a specific semiotic form or code. (Sodré, 2002, p. 23)

We agree with Grohmann (2016) that it is necessary to build a reflection on the relevance of institutional mediatization platforms and spaces, but in order to problematize the whole of the relationships that develop on the side, which are the experiences of sociocultural mediations in their synchronic and diachronic nexuses (Martín-Barbero, 2004). Thus, the processes of mediatization and platformization shape

social experiences through their material dimensions and communicative articulations, but also pave the road through which one can infiltrate local and cultural experiences, everyday sociability and other possibilities of formation and critical engagement (Nabarrete Bastos, 2020, 2022).

In a broader study under development, which originated this paper, we analyzed the performance of the content creators Jones Manoel, Laura Sabino and Samela Sateré Mawé, content creator for social media platforms for a few months. Working in social media platforms through the years, they have achieved thousands of monthly views on their videos, even working on such complex and controversial topics for the capitalist system. Our option for these intellectuals was made in order to try to recognise the diversity among Brazilian leftist content creators: a black northeast man, a white woman from the southeast and an indigenous woman from the Amazon. As much as their videos represent a broad political articulation and a detailed construction of the theories that surround their intellectual and political formations, they do not represent the core of their leading actions, which go beyond platformized environments. Their videos spread basic notions for understanding Marxism, indigenous philosophy and culture, ecosocialism, and class division, while sharing experiences of their political praxis. They are precisely spaces of disseminations, a mirror of their directing action. Precisely for this reason we understand their position as intellectual *creators* and not just digital influencers. Of course, they also see their content creations as part of a bigger communication system where money gets involved as their content is watched by their followers. Regardless, their creations are not just a product, but a political exercise of collective formation and a call to political struggle.

When we say their content isn't just a product we do it in comparison with how the influencer system seems to work as a space for commercial relationships mediated by advertising. Laura Sabino is a young woman from Minas Gerais, a history student at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais). Daughter of a university professor, Laura grew up accompanying her father to lectures he taught in the settlements of the Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra). This means that knowledge about the demands of the field has always been part of her personal and intellectual training. For four years Laura has kept her YouTube channel and social networks very active with the objective of «taking young people from the bosom of neoliberalism», a concern she has seen grow with the increasing trivialization of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship.

Samela Sateré Mawé is an indigenous woman from the Amazon, part of the Sateré Mawé people. Samela is the granddaughter of Tereza and daughter of Regina, two important leaders Sateré Mawé. Her grandmother Tereza was the founder of the Sateré-Mawé Women's Association (Amism) in 1992. Since then, the association has been a fundamental part of the economic autonomy and development of the female heads of families of the Sateré Mawé people. After years of political struggle in the territory and in the association, Samela began to intentionally create content for social networks following the Covid-19 pandemic, emerging as a creator based on the need to host the Acampamento Terra Livre online. In turn, she became what she calls a *digital warrior* (Conti, 2022).

Jones Manoel, is a black man, historian and has a master's degree in Social Work from Pernambuco. He used to be<sup>2</sup> a militant affiliated to the PCB since 2011, dedicated to critical reflections on social construction and national politics, especially in the state of Pernambuco where he ran for State Government in the 2022 elections. In addition, he collaborates as a columnist in some political communication vehicles in Brazil.

The examples mentioned above tell about the performance of academic and organic intellectuals, subjects who are formed politically from their praxis and often from their social group of origin. What we perceive when analysing their trajectories is that their intellectual development began from their own objective and subjective experiences. Jones, for example, in his presentation text in *Carta Capital* (2020), says that he began his militant activity at a very young age when he listened to Racionais MCs, Fação Central, Tupac Shakur, among other politicized artists. When he lived in the Borborema Favela, at the age of 14, he worked selling newspapers at traffic lights in Pernambuco. Samela on the other hand sees her history and political struggle closely connected to the tireless struggle of indigenous people for the right to exist.

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<sup>2</sup> Many processes of political reorganization have taken place since the beginning of this research, such as the expulsion of Jones and other affiliates from the PCB. In a more recent turn of events, during the editorial process of this publication, and from the XVII (Extraordinary) Congress of the Brazilian Communist Party - Revolutionary Reconstruction, held in June 2024, the revolutionary Leninist fraction expelled from the PCB began to adopt the name of Brazilian Revolutionary Communist Party (PCBR). «The PCBR is currently the historical continuity of the PCB and understands that the XVII (Extraordinary) Congress concluded this week continues the legacy of 102 years of revolutionary organization of communists in our country, taking a new step towards deepening the Revolutionary Reconstruction of the Brazilian Communist Party». The group, still in the process of organization and development, is structuring its national recruitment policy, but intends to contest seats in Brazilian national politics.



Likewise, Laura understands as non-negotiable the duty to build a society and a youth grounded in real knowledge about the world. Fundamentally, these intellectual *creators* find in intellectuality answers to the concerns already recurring in their daily lives and seem to

Unify the various types of existing cultural organizations: traditional academic –which is expressed mainly in the systematization of past knowledge or in the search for the fixation of an average of national thought as a guide for intellectual activity– with activities linked to collective life, the world of production and work. (Gramsci, 2004, p. 37)

In this way, it is implied that Jones work of collective construction in the networks reflects his role as a platformized intellectual, particularly around his dissenting from traditional political structures in which parties are designed. An example of this been the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), from which Jones was expelled from the Central Committee. This article does not assess in detail the reasons for his expulsion, but it should be known that there is a conflict between the democratic centralism typical of left-wing parties with the personalist logic and fragmentary visibility of social media platforms. As mentioned in the public letter released by the PCB on the occasion of the expulsion of some of its members: «This action comes from a small militancy with little insertion of real struggle in society and with intense engagement in social networks, often taking this space as the privileged *space* of struggles» (PCB, 2023).

As we explore the amplitude of the intellectual discourse across a vast range of political views, we justify our choice for these individuals in an attempt to amplify leftist content creation opposition with the neoliberal construction of the platforms itself. Related to what Ianni (1999) says about the media system, internet space is certainly a relevant part of society's routines, and can, at the same time, reinforce democracy and oppression, therefore it cannot be a space outside the lines of dispute of democracy, precisely because it is an important part of society and its disputes.

What we hope to demonstrate with the presentation of these cases is precisely what differentiates a digital influencer from an intellectual creator: while the first group can only circumscribe its actions to digital environments, the second is integrated in several spaces of formation, organization and political sociability, with the digital platform being a complement to its offline activities in an attempt to mediatize and platform their ideas, reaching other audiences. Therefore, for Dahlgren (2012) it is

necessary to understand how these *public intellectuals* (PI) are articulated in the spaces of digital construction and consumption, precisely because

For better or worse, one can easily pass through the boundaries separating politics, consumption, entertainment, personal relations, and so on with just a click. PIs can easily jump into this fray, yet their status and impact will be challenged by the torrential cacophony of the web. How they navigate it is thus very significant. (Dahlgren, 2012, p. 102)

Thus, much more than being on the web, what matters is how these intellectual creators build the intellectuality and politicization of their networks. Jeremic (2019) names these subjects as *virtual organic intellectuals*, who have symbolic and practical updates on social networks than the newspaper.

Just as the newspaper was a critical activist tool in Gramsci's time, the digital public sphere is where the virtual organic intellectual can engage in a philosophy of praxis that seeks to break the hegemony and 'common sense' of today which is '... the opposite pole of critical thinking ...' (Crehan, 2018, p. 278) and thus promote common sense through action-based activism and critical digital pedagogy that is rooted in social justice. The combination of these three elements provides a digital terrain as a springboard for today's organic intellectual –the virtual organic intellectual–. (Jeremic, 2019, p. 111)

Jodi Dean (2005) assesses that media expansion was followed by changes in political participation, which began to be mediated professionally and financially by advertising and the logic of the media. In this way, entertainment culture, based on financialization and consumption, defines the terms of democratic governance, just as communicative exchanges have become the basic elements of capitalist production (Nabarrete Bastos, 2022). Although we agree with the author's arguments, our purpose here is to discuss the place of action of the platformized intellectual, or *virtual organic intellectuals* (Jeremic, 2019), considering both the theoretical or formal dimensions of this process and the praxis of intellectuals selected for analysis, their contradictions, limits and scope in the production and circulation of critical content on social media platforms.

## **Broadcast yourself: platform sharing and control**

There is a wide range of political content across social media platforms, discussing issues both from point of view of neoliberalism and a more left leaning stance. As we said above, this paper aims to investigate how content creation is made from the point of view of platformized intellectuality. For doing so we are collecting data from our three selected intellectuals. For now, we will show part of the data we collected in February of 2024 posted on X, Instagram and YouTube.

Not all of them used social media in the same way. Jones, for example, uses it much more than Laura and Samela: in X, Jones activity exceed 700 tweets in 29 days, while Laura posted 31 times and Samela just 6 times. In YouTube and Instagram this disparity continues to show up: on Jones profile there were 41 videos on YouTube and 56 posts exclusively made for Instagram –there were other 42 reels from cuts of YouTube videos–; one YouTube video and three posts on Instagram for Laura; and just a few shorts on YouTube and nineteen posts on Instagram for Samela’s case.

During this time, Jones was massively invited to join livestreams of weekly political debates on alternative journalism platforms, and he later cut segments of these live recordings and uploaded them to his own profiles. At the same time, he recorded many of his videos from analyses on the Brazilian political situation in that month and about his readings as a Phd student. His tweets were mostly reposted from communication groups or other intellectuals, mostly about Brazilian politics and the Gaza genocide. It’s clear that their content doesn’t work in the same way, which is the reason why we continue to see their actions on social media as praxis intellectuals and not as influencers that must be online to make money.

During this time Laura was involved in the MST work field and with the foundation of a social pre-entrance exam in her community; and Samela was living her third pregnancy trimester at the same time she works for the Brazilian Indigenous People Articulation (*Articulação dos Povos Indígenas Brasileiros*) as social media and activist mobilization for the 20th edition of the Free Land Camp (*Acampamento Terra Livre*) that brings together all the 305 indigenous ethnicities that live in Brazil. This is the biggest political event for them. In the following months Laura and Samela were much more active on social media, coinciding with the time we decided to choose them for our analysis. For now, we present this initial view of their content creation in order to illustrate that there are much more actions which take place in their offline

life. As Gramsci (2004) argues, intellectuals must dive into their work field and make communication a part of it, but not necessarily the biggest part.

With an analysis already somewhat dated, Dahlgren (2012) points out with broad enthusiasm, albeit with some caution, that digital media opened up a number of windows for the dissemination of the ideals of public intellectuals. Evidently, there is a wide possibility in this area for the construction and dissemination of their beliefs without being dependent on the literary industry or traditional media spaces, which already have their body of invited experts.

Therefore, it is necessary to add to this equation the broad survey carried out by Poell et al. (2020) on platform studies and their evolution towards platformization studies. The authors note that this topic has been elaborated following a long and relatively new process, having previously permeated the debates about the platform as hardware, later leading to research that emphasized economic criticism and the development of platform cultural studies. There are several possibilities and needs in this field of study. The authors believe in the need to understand «how changes in infrastructure, market relations and governance structures are interconnected and how they are shaped in relation to cultural practices that are constantly changing» (Poell et al., 2020, p. 8). Based on studies of political economy, software and business, the authors understand platformization as «the penetration of infrastructures, economic processes and governmental structures of platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life» (p. 5). On the other hand, from a cultural studies perspective, the authors conceive platformization as the process of «reorganizing cultural practices and imaginations around platforms» (p. 5). We consider the two approaches relevant to the understanding of the platformized intellectual.

As *platform society* is a mechanism that penetrates the core of social relations, affecting how they develop not only in a civic dimension but also a political one, «platforms are an integral part of society, where conflicts of interest are constantly discussed at various levels» (Van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 3). Thus, they define platforms as connective spaces between users, which more than facilitating such connections, concern a connective ecosystem that shapes organizational forms of life. Given the above, the «platforms cannot be studied in isolation, apart from political and social structures, they are all (inter)dependent on a global infrastructure that has been constantly being built since the early 2000s» (Van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 8).

With a complex structure, hidden and entirely bent on capitalist logic, platforms are proven to be spaces of enormous potential for the construction of global communication. However, it is possible to point out limits related to its structure in the expansion of certain voices and discourses in these networks, precisely because its spaces are organized through datafication, commodification and selection, which are perceived by Van Dijck et al. (2018) as characteristics that shape the structure of platforms through their social, political and economic interests. Although we have been living with technological access and platformized sociability networks for decades, the spread of multiple voices remains largely unexplored, since socioeconomic aspects directly influence access and ensure the maintenance of hegemonic power dynamics.

Considering that the platforms are broad business structures (with political and economic interests that develop both in the interest of their conglomerates and in the relationships, they establish with the surrounding economy), citizen and political communication, when produced on the platforms, faces several obstacles that are both routine and unexpected. This scenario urges us to identify and discuss the ability of platformized intellectuals to connect and engage public opinion, a fundamental dimension of disputes for hegemony (Nabarrete Bastos, 2023, 2022), realizing their ability to reflect and erupt in their audiences' pressing values of a democratic and fair society.

### **The platformized intellectual and the construction of the political subject**

Observing the Italian context at the beginning of the twentieth century, Gramsci (1982) understood the multiple possibilities of intellectual activity, especially from the political potential of ideological and political formation and organization, mainly among the subaltern subjects. The role of intellectuals starts to draw Gramsci's attention through political issues and the place occupied by intellectuals in modern society, according to the historical development of the State and its expansion (Nabarrete Bastos, 2023). The hegemonic apparatus enables the conceptual link with the Integral State (Liguori & Voza, 2014), which is the basis of Gramsci's materialist understanding of hegemony. According to Gramsci (2011), there is a balance between political society (the State and its coercive apparatus) and civil society, which consist of private apparatuses of hegemony. Through these private organizations and their intellectuals, in spaces such as the church, unions, schools, etc., a social group or coalition of classes builds its hegemony over national society.

The expansion of the State occurs in a historical process of incorporation of the management functions and hegemony apparatuses that perform these functions, a process characteristic of central capitalist countries, or the West, in the Gramscian metaphor (Bianchi, 2008, p. 74-75). The incorporation of management functions by the State brought the issue of intellectuals to Gramscian thought with centrality. This discussion is articulated with the relations between leaders and those led, dominant and dominated, in the consubstantiation of the domination of a class or fraction of it over society (Bianchi, 2008). As Bianchi (2008) points out, the articulation of Gramscian conceptual pairs –direction and domination, and civil society and political society– is multidimensional, operating in unity-differentiation, and «the place occupied by intellectuals is key to understanding this unity-differentiation, as they are the agents of both functions» (p. 79).

In summary, seeking to bring together the Sardinian philosopher and the Hungarian philosopher Agnes Heller, what Gramsci demonstrates is the possibility of suspending the daily life (Heller, 2016) of subjects from intellectual activity, social interrelationships and the collective construction of thinking and acting, in a relationship of «deep osmosis of intellectuals with the popular strata, recognized as active subjects imbued with ‘creative spirit’, because it promotes the universalization of intellectuality» (Semeraro, 2009, p. 6). In a similar sense, Heller (2016) perceives the possibility of suspension of daily life as a possibility in the life of any individual, presenting a relationship with Gramsci’s (2004) idea that intellectuality is present in all individuals. This is because there is a possibility of suspending alienation through scientific and political praxis. Gramsci categorizes this process as *catharsis*, the «passage from the purely economic (or selfish-passional) moment to the ethical-political moment, that is, the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure» (Gramsci, 1966, p. 53). For Heller (2016),

daily life is not necessarily alienated as a consequence of its structure, but only in certain social circumstances. At all times, there were representative personalities who lived in a non-alienated daily life; and, since the scientific structuring of society enables the end of alienation, this possibility is open to any human being. (p. 66)

The non-recognition of this space of collective construction of intellectuality or the (purposeful) obstruction of the possibility of intellectual development of the subalternized classes hides the perspective that all work, however practical and manual it may seem, is imbued with intellectuality. This is why Gramsci (2004) points out the existence of a

category of intellectuals in each social group and not only in a generalist whole. The reflection developed by him situates the function of the intellectual as existing in each social group, specialist or not, in that group in which he is inserted. Semeraro (2009) presents the following categorization of intellectuals proposed by Gramsci: «Urban, industrial, rural, bureaucratic, academic, technical, professional, small, intermediate, large, collective, democratic, etc.» (p. 3) This proposal requires updating in light of its time, so that anachronisms do not occur in relation to their roles and their corresponding nomenclatures. Although in Gramscian categorization we do not have specificities regarding the forms or supports of communication of intellectual activity, in the context of mediatization and platformization we consider it relevant to discuss the implications of these processes for the communication of intellectuality and the emergence of a platformized intellectual.

We believe that the process of reconstructing the figure of the intellectual meets the emergence of digital activism. The reconfiguration of social dynamics and spaces of collective struggle in digital modernity has rekindled the notion that the struggle for transformation occurs uninterruptedly. In parallel with the rise of right-wing political extremisms through the internet, there is also the growth of progressive political action and also of Marxist and decolonial bias in social media platforms. Although not all of them make up our sample, we also consider Rita Von Hunty, Thiago Torres, Bárbara Carine, Hyatt Omar, Debora Baldin and Thiago Avila as examples of platformized intellectuals of the most diverse social, political and democratic flags.

Observing the wide possibilities in the exercise of intellectuality and the prominent place occupied by digital influencers, we seek to develop some articulations. This is, by definition, a person who creates content with commercial intent, «who builds a relationship of trust, based on authenticity with his audience (mainly on social media platforms), and relates digitally to several commercial actors through different business models for monetization purposes» (Michaelsen et al., 2022, as mentioned in Goanta & Bertaglia, 2023, p. 244). A market that has its origins in the relationship of celebrities and classic *socialite* figures, so widely popularized in the 2000s, a movement that comprises what Sabilia (2007) identifies as a poignant phenomenon of web 2.0 development.

Rojek (2008) presents categories of fame that can help us understand the point of bifurcation between influencers, *creators* and even intellectuals who have become celebrities, as well as those we understand as intellectual *creators* and who establish

their influence from a series of heterogeneous elements that enable the creation of their political personas. It is necessary to consider the socioeconomic weight of the scheduling of political agendas in society and the space granted to those who are *gatekeepers* of political praxis. Fame, for Rojek (2008), in its celebrity character, is recognized from three categories: 1) conferred; 2) acquired; and 3) attributed. The celebrity conferred refers to the connection of lineage, such as royalty; the acquired refers to personal achievements, as in the case of sportsmen; and the attributed when knowledge about oneself is a media fabrication, without much apparent reason. Intellectuals can fit into the logic of acquired celebrities, but the impact of their recognition goes through the mediation of capitalist structures and platforms run by big techs, which organize our social practices and imaginations (Poell et al., 2020). *Creators* who address topics in displeasure to the platformized logic face the historical silencing of the *media*. Only on very rare occasions they manage to obtain the space of celebrity intellectuals such as the philosophers Leandro Karnal and Mario Sérgio Cortella. Here we do not intend to discuss the value of the intellectual activity of these subjects, but only verify that there is not the same media space for more critical intellectuals, nor for Marxists and decolonials. For this reason, many progressive and/or Marxist intellectuals become content creators on their own digital social networks. For Dahlgren (2012), «these media-based practitioners have become increasingly important in recent decades in the dissemination of what counts as ‘ideas’ in modern society, even if the intellectual dimension can and should be challenged» (p. 98).

The manifestation of socializing ideas through a creative way by the creators of digital content who are also intellectuals in praxis is encapsulated in what we propose as the *platformized intellectual*. We believe it's possible to find intellectuals who have consistently acted as *creators* in various fields. However, unlike Ortiz (2022), we realize that the movement from influence to intellectuality is as possible as from intellectuality to influence. Acting as «symbolic mediators of culture» (Ortiz, 2022), intellectual digital influencers can mediate across different fields of knowledge and disseminate their arguments in such a way that they update the role of the Gramscian leading intellectual. This is precisely because these leaders are subjects suspended from their daily lives and capable of disseminating political information, generating entertainment from their languages from time to time, while also pointing to elements of reality present in the routines of their audiences.

Both influencer and intellectual have a relevant social role when connected and intertwined through platforms (regardless if these are socially mediated or political



parties in nature). After all, there is no effectiveness in doing social, political or cultural criticism in isolation. Just as «the work of influencers is only possible when this socio-technical network is activated» (Ribeiro, 2021, p. 272), intellectuals lack a relationship network to carry out their actions. This is because the relations of influence and leading intellectuality depend on a series of signs and factors that are intertwined with social experiences, which allow the assimilation of their symbolic meanings. Therefore, we reject the idea that the dissemination of information made by influencers is only seen as a result of intellectuality if worked in a «less accessible» way, as Ortiz (2022) asserts. This idea of the superiority of intellectuality distances the political discourse of many popular social movements and, in return, it distances itself from the essence of the political and social organization proposed by Gramsci.

Thus, we understand the possibility of observing platformization as a process to be disputed for political and social transformation, because, in dialogue with Heller (2016) we believe that «the appropriate criterion to evaluate the existing forms of socialism, as well as their internal axiological relations, is not the set of social values of capitalism, but the possibilities of value contained in socialism» (p. 27). There is a theoretical intertwining of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis with the performance of platformized intellectuals and their role played within the private apparatuses of hegemony (PAH). The intellectual is that subject who, suspended from his daily life, works for the effective suspension of his groups and through listening translates collective desires into actions for the transformation of the social order. Intellectuals have the potential to modify, through critical pedagogy and capacity for political and discursive articulation, the point of consensus of PAH. However, we emphasize the importance of not losing sight of the perspective that digital platforms themselves act as PAH through the monopoly of *big techs* hosting other private apparatuses of hegemony, which need to be subordinated to their operating and monetization logics (Nabarrete Bastos, 2022, 2020). This shows the relevance of disputes for this space and its transformation, in a task inseparable from intellectuality, whether platformized or not.

When reading the concept of intellectuality in Gramsci's thought, some interpretations end up approaching the class elitism the author himself intended. What we perceive is that intellectuality is not this thing restricted to academic groups or to models of intelligence standardized in renowned political and social experiences, but a social formation that develops in all fields of knowledge and experiences of cooperation and social sharing. Intellectuality is not only born in the bourgeoisie, but also expresses itself in the popular and ordinary. This is true even when the layers

of intellectuality are structured in the midst of social and political crises where there are only those to whom intellectuality is reduced to the forms of application originated from the division of labor, in occupations that are sometimes precarious; or those that develop in classes where intellectuality is applied in positions of command, either as more qualified workers or in the possession of the means of production as a bourgeois class. However, Gramsci's vision, as we mentioned, is one that observes intellectuality as a multiple space, which can be manifested from reflections that arise from the elites' spaces of sociability, but also from popular wisdom and the democratization of knowledge where the latter is intimately connected with the political struggles of the 'subalterns' (Semeraro, 2009).

Gramsci (1982) states that organic intellectuals are created in every social group, having an essential role in economic production: they provide said social group with homogeneity and awareness of their function in the economic, social and political field. The creation of a new intellectual conception of the world alongside its political practice is the way to overcome the economic-corporate level and move to the level of the struggle for the constitution of a new hegemony. This is the Gramscian cathartic moment, with which platformized intellectuals can also contribute. Communicative practice is a fundamental dimension for the exercise of intellectuality, going through different stages of expression and discursive circulation according to the development of information and communication technologies: orality, writing, mechanics, electronics and digital. In this historical context of mediatization and platformization, intellectual practice starts to deal with the logic of media and platforms to dialogue with society and public opinion: the scope and limits of intellectual activity in the context of mediatization and platformization are updated.

## Conclusions

The structuring power of the *Big Five* (Van Dijck et al., 2018) and its communicative networks –Alphabet, Google, Amazon, Meta, Apple, and Microsoft–penetrate daily life and the different productive processes of political and civil society, changing the organizational form of the extended Gramscian state. The dynamics of platformization concerns precisely organizations that overlap and find gaps to be filled within the system itself. As Nabarrete Bastos (2020, 2022) argues, digital platforms concentrate and organize in an expanded hegemonic apparatus that encompasses the expression of all others, the different domains of human activity, which are

subjected to their operationalization logic of algorithmic mediation. What characterizes private apparatuses of hegemony is their own materiality: when acting on digital platforms, other devices, including those massively ones, are in a private space that does not belong to them and need to be subject to its functionality, that is, to its engagement logic.

In this paper we tried to understand and discuss the potential and limits of PAH transformation in the action of platformized and subalternized intellectuals in favor of modifying the political logic of communicative praxis located in the context of platformization. Nabarrete Bastos (2020) attests that one cannot conceive the relations of engagement «without verifying the circulation and production of meaning beyond the online environment, without investigating the way in which the link with narratives and/or institutions takes place in everyday social interactions» (p. 201-202). It is in this interpretative path that we perceive as fundamental the praxis of platformized intellectuality, as it presents the potential for articulating the struggles inside and outside of networks, although it is essential to understand its limits of visibility and struggle in the context of platformization.

The placement of socio-political content on a platform follows the same logic of media activism, since they face the opposite force<sup>3</sup> of monetization and governance logics of digital platforms, which reduce the reach of these critical contents either at the scale of content creators or in the list of common users who expose left-wing political stances in their profiles.

What the communicative action of platformized intellectuals seems to try to accomplish is the motivation of practices, the raising of ideas, the objective and subjective development of transformative and sometimes revolutionary political praxis, which encourages careful attention to the possibilities of organization throughout the history of the 21st century. The dimension of political organization, the collective perspective of social struggles, is something that distinguishes the platformized intellectual from a digital influencer with progressive political positions. Although this

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<sup>3</sup> At the time we were concluding this article, we became aware that YouTube removed the channel Brasil de Fato RS and the podcast De Fato, important examples of popular communication, for allegedly having «serious or repeated violations of our spam policy, misleading practices and scams. Therefore, we have removed your YouTube channel».

concept is still new and therefore subjected to later developments, we have organized here some premises that point towards fruitful paths for research on political communication in digital platforms and dialogue with peers.

For Gramsci, the formation of new organic intellectuals from the popular strata is a central practice in the struggle for political hegemony, for the conquest of political-ideological leadership and the historical transformation and constitution of a new power bloc. We understand that digital influencers who work with or are engaged with popular classes, collectives, social movements or party organizations can play the role of intellectuals in the platformized society: their voices have the ability to articulate worldviews, reflect and refract the social and political struggles of contemporaneity. That is why we are motivated to study the influencers of the progressive field, who stand out for their visibility, the aesthetics of their productions and the depth of their theoretical formulations.

One of the aspects raised by Renato Ortiz (2022) to compare digital influencers and intellectuals is the fragmentary nature of the former in relation to the global dimension of the latter. Influencers would be limited to segments of social life, such as humour, religion, music, sports, etc. In addition, there are specificities regarding the technical support of their discourse (the platforms) and the entanglement between the usefulness of its content and its segmented audience, which qualifies and measures the status of the influencer according to the metrics of the influencer's performance. According to the author, due to the very nature of the segmented audience of digital platforms, influencers also formulate their content to suit the market profile of this audience. Even if they are progressive influencers, they are subjected to this fragmentary nature and the metrics of the platforms, which measure and qualify their work as influencers of a certain audience. However, we seek to present theoretical foundations that offer a perspective of intellectuality, which we consider elitist.

We seek to reveal through the theoretical debate that influencers and intellectuals can merge in the context of platformization through the creative activity of platformized intellectuals. Although this activity has limits concerning the logic of mediation of platforms, intellectual work is not restricted to platforms, just like the intellectuals of the twentieth century who had media visibility, yet their activity was not restricted to said media. If intellectual activity seeks to engage civil society in a project of hegemony or popular hegemony (Nabarrete Bastos, 2023), platformized communication of intellectual activity may have a relevant role for the visibility and organization of political

struggles. Likewise, the visibility in other forms of media that make up the media ecosystem cannot be neglected. Depending on the community context, for example, a radio post or a wall newspaper may have greater communicative potential than a YouTube channel.

We can say that, for these intellectuals, social media platforms have become more of a showcase, a way of exposing their ideas, rather than the core of their leading actions. Therefore, intellectual activity in contemporary times is not restricted to platforms, but has in these spaces an important means of communication and discursive circulation of political and social struggles.

### **Conflict of interests**

The authors don't have any conflict of interests in this matter, and look for the theme only as researchers.

### **Ethical responsibility**

The paper was carried out following all the ethical principles in human and communication sciences. According to Resolution 510 of the National Health Council for research in the Humanities and Social Sciences in Brazil, this is a low-risk study as it doesn't compromise any information that could affect the people involved with the research.

### **Authorship contribution**

LGN: hypothesis formulation, gathering investigative material, data collection and analysis, theoretical development, and writing.

PNB: theoretical and epistemological elaboration, writing, final text review, and research supervision.

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This paper has not used LLM (ChatGPT or others) for its writing.

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