

Surveillance capitalism, power of digitalization and children: a discourse analysis of parents and guardians

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Abstract

This study analyzes the perceptions of parents and guardians about the use of children's data by organizations that make up the so-called surveillance capitalism. We developed a quali-quantitative survey, which counted 565 respondents in the quantitative part, 107 of whom filled in an open-ended questionnaire corresponding to the qualitative stage of the research, commenting on their perceptions or concerns about the use of data by companies whose audience is children. The quantitative results showed that even noticing an increase in the volume of use of digital media and devices by children, parents, and guardians never or almost never read the consent form. Furthermore, the discourse analysis of the answers to the open questionnaire in the qualitative part of the research showed that the participants are silent about the responsibility of organizations that make up surveillance capitalism. Thus, parents and guardians attribute to themselves, third parties, or contextual situations any distortions in the use of digital devices and media by children and in the expropriation and exploitation of data by organizations. For the field of business, the findings represent an advance in discussions on the dark side of digitization, especially in Brazil, where the topic is still unpublished.

Keywords: Surveillance capitalism. Power. Scanning. Kids. Critical discourse analysis.

Capitalismo de vigilância, poder da digitalização e as crianças: uma análise do discurso de pais e tutores

Resumo

O presente trabalho tem como objetivo analisar as percepções de pais e tutores sobre o uso de dados das crianças pelas organizações que compõem o chamado capitalismo de vigilância. Para tanto, desenvolveu-se uma pesquisa quali-quantitativa, que contou com a participação de 565 respondentes na parte quantitativa, sendo que 107 deles preencheram uma pergunta aberta optativa, correspondente à etapa qualitativa, comentando sobre suas percepções ou preocupações acerca da utilização de dados por empresas com foco no público infantil. Os resultados quantitativos apontaram que, mesmo percebendo um aumento no volume de uso de mídias e dispositivos digitais pelas crianças, pais e tutores raramente (ou nunca) leem os termos de consentimento. Além disso, a análise de discurso das respostas à pergunta aberta, na parte qualitativa do estudo, mostrou que os respondentes se silenciam a respeito da responsabilidade das organizações que compõem o capitalismo de vigilância. Dessa forma, atribuem a si mesmos, a terceiros ou a situações contextuais as eventuais distorções no uso de dispositivos e mídias digitais pelas crianças, bem como na expropriação e na exploração dos dados pelas organizações. Para o campo da administração, os achados representam um avanço nas discussões sobre o lado obscuro (*darkside*) da digitalização, especialmente no Brasil, onde o tema permanece inédito.

Palavras-chave: Capitalismo de vigilância. Poder. Digitalização. Crianças. Análise crítica de discurso.

Capitalismo de vigilancia, poder de la digitalización y los niños: un análisis del discurso de padres y tutores

Resumen

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar las percepciones de padres y tutores sobre el uso de datos sobre los niños por parte de las organizaciones que conforman el llamado capitalismo de vigilancia. Para ello, se desarrolló una encuesta cuali-cuanti, que contó con la participación de 565 encuestados en la parte cuantitativa, de los cuales 107 respondieron una pregunta abierta opcional, correspondiente a la etapa cualitativa, comentando sus percepciones o inquietudes sobre el uso de datos por empresas que se enfocan en la audiencia infantil. Los resultados cuantitativos mostraron que, aun notando un aumento en el volumen de uso de medios y dispositivos digitales por parte de los niños, sus padres y tutores nunca o casi nunca leen los términos de consentimiento. Además, el análisis del discurso de las respuestas a la pregunta abierta, en la parte cualitativa de la investigación, mostró que los participantes guardan silencio sobre la responsabilidad de las organizaciones que conforman el capitalismo de vigilancia. Así, atribuyen a sí mismos, a terceros o a situaciones contextuales las distorsiones en el uso de dispositivos y medios digitales por parte de los niños, así como en la expropiación y explotación de datos por parte de las organizaciones. Para el campo de la administración, los hallazgos representan un avance en las discusiones sobre el lado oscuro de la digitalización, especialmente en Brasil, donde el tema permanece inédito.

Palabras clave: Capitalismo de vigilancia. Poder. Digitalización. Niños. Análisis crítico del discurso.

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of digital devices and connectivity (Leonardi & Treen, 2020) enabled the adoption of resources such as big data (Davenport, 2014) and the internet of things, for doing personal and work activities, by structuring new ways of living and raising challenges and opportunities (Davenport, 2014). Among the characteristics of this digitalized society is the importance of users' data as a resource (Couldry & Mejías, 2019; Vianna & Meneghetti, 2020), leading organizations to seek their accumulation in a model of capitalism named surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019). It consists of accumulated personal data, arising from relationships and interactions among individuals and through digital platforms, which are processed in algorithmic systems (Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020; Srnicek, 2017).

The result of this processing is known as datafication (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Leonardi & Treen, 2020), which allows organizations to negotiate users' information in order to influence their behavior (O'Neil, 2016; Zuboff, 2019). Datafication brought about changes in social relations within and around organizations, giving rise to new power relations, which must be mediated by terms of consent (Belli & Venturini, 2016) and digital governance (Chandler & Fuchs, 2019).

In the case of organizations that make up surveillance capitalism, their financial results have grown, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Collins, Ocampo, & Paslaski, 2020), showing a research gap regarding ethical limits and the consequences of this new model of society. The pandemic highlighted the inequalities in accessing digitalization and its resources (Beaunoyer, Dupéré, & Guitton, 2020), the formal flexibility of privacy (Fahey & Hino, 2020), and the adoption of new digital tools (Gasser et al., 2020), which demand investigation on the new contours of social and organizational life that involve the digitalization of society.

In the area of organizational studies, recent research has explored this phenomenon or related themes on the relationships between individuals and digitalized organizations (Bucher, Schou, & Waldkirch, 2021; K. T. Elmholdt, C. Elmholdt, & Haahr, 2021; Walker, Fleming, & Berti, 2021), even through special calls (Blevins & Ragozzino, 2019; Etter, Ravasi, & Colleoni, 2019; Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2021). However, despite the recent attention given to the topic, the relationship between organizations and a potential surveillance and datafication of children had not been addressed yet (Mascheroni, 2018). The importance of these studies rests on a potential tension between the relevance of new technologies in children's lives, and the regular presence of digital media and social networks, as well as their derivatives, like games and channels, in their social and educational development (Marsh et al., 2017; Rideout, 2017; Scantlin, 2008).

Likewise, the potential for surveillance and data expropriation of these tools also arouses interest and concern in the academic community (Holloway, Green, & Livingstone, 2013; Lupton & Williamson, 2017; Marsh et al., 2017; Rideout, 2017). Hence, historically constituent aspects of Organization Studies, such as criticism of mainstream, instrumentalism (Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007), and power performance (Fleming & Spicer, 2014), may reshape this scenario.

Therefore, this paper analyzes the perception of parents and guardians regarding the use of data expropriated from children by organizations that operate through digital media, devices, and platforms. In this case, we characterized children as individuals up to 12 years old (Lei nº 8.069, de 13 de julho de 1990). To this end, we prepared a survey with 24 statements, to be answered on a Likert scale, plus one open-ended discursive question and an optional answer at the end. There were 565 respondents, of which 107 answered the final open question.

The article brings two main contributions. The first is practical, regarding the Brazilian reality, and is supported by data from the quantitative stage. It shows, for example, that more than 50% of the participants say that children under their responsibility have their own digital device, and 66% say they rarely or never read the consent forms that regulate the relationship between children and digital devices, platforms, and media. Hence, we provide society's actors interested in this topic a scenario where different stakeholders are held accountable and controlled by the actions of digitalized organizations, except themselves.

The second main contribution of the article is theoretical, and focuses on studies on surveillance capitalism and the dark side of digitalization. Thus, the answers to the discursive question showed a phenomenon of non-accountability of platform organizations for the collection and use of children's data, which was observed through the silence of parents and guardians on the use of children's data and their application in defining published content, advertisements, and

control of the child audience of users. This theoretical contribution combines aspects discussed in organizational studies, and suggests the need for dialogue with different areas, such as law, psychology, and pedagogy in discussions on digital organizations. Finally, the methodological contribution regards the development of a mixed methods approach, in order to better explain a recent phenomenon.

We organized the paper as follows: after this introduction, we present the theoretical framework, addressing the power of digital platforms and applications, as well as the power of the surveillance capitalism model. Then, we show the relationship between digitalization and children, and present the research method. The next section shows research results and the categories that emerged from the analysis. The last section presents the final remarks.

THE POWER OF PLATFORMS AND DIGITAL APPLICATIONS

Studies on power analyze both small groups and the internal environments of organizations and their links, and the relationships among organizations (Perrow, 1991; Thompson, 1956). Therefore, different concepts and approaches emerged from these studies, viewing power as a positive or negative, legitimate or illegitimate phenomenon, among other variations of forms and applications (Weber, 1999; Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006; Haugaard & Clegg, 2009).

Despite changes and adaptations in the concepts, power is at the base of the relationships of social organizations, expressing itself politically, as a form of domination (Weber, 1999; Haugaard & Clegg, 2009). We observe this overlay between the political dimension and the concept of power in the establishment and maintenance of rational organizational systems (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). Such systems aim to solve tensions between the goals of individuals and those of organizations, in their relationships (Clegg et al., 2006; Fleming & Spicer, 2014).

As organizations prioritize the relentless search for efficiency in their processes (Bunderson & Reagans, 2011), we observe an exercise of domination within and around them, related to economic factors and even overlapping ethical issues (Barley, 2010). This power manifests itself, in different ways, in the social bonds within institutions. Internally, it can happen when a process is inefficient and requires a correction (Clegg et al., 2006). Thus, power refers to the managerial activity, for the proper direction of the conduct of individuals and the manager himself, in a mode of self-domination (Clegg et al., 2006; Haugaard & Clegg, 2009).

In addition, power can manifest itself as a 'power over' and a 'power for' (Pansardi, 2012), where one social relationship is affected by a party that has priority over another, and for achieving a certain goal. Finally, organizational power can be linked to achieving certain goals through third parties, even if not all involved share such goals (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). In the age of digitalization, critical researchers are paying attention to the power asymmetry that pervades the relationships between organizations that develop and manage digital platforms, and end users (Fuchs, 2021; Poell, Nieborg, & Van Dijck, 2019). This power involves concentrating in few organizations, and the opacity of the relationship between organizations and their users (Gillespie, 2018), since they are unaware of the system to which they relate, and find it difficult to leave it (Barwise & Watkins, 2018; Poell et al., 2019).

THE POWER OF ORGANIZATIONS IN SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM

Digital technologies have affected the development of a new way of living (Van Dijck, 2013), influencing organizations' daily life (Davenport, 2014) and people's private life (Zuboff, 2019). As a result, we observe new forms of power manifestation in social relationships (Fleming & Spicer, 2014; Pansardi, 2012), mediated by information technology, especially platforms and algorithms (Beer, 2009; K. T. Elmholt et al., 2021). This new social reality, which relies on interactions through digital media and connected devices, has different names, of which the term "surveillance capitalism", coined by Zuboff (2019), is one that is currently consolidated.

Surveillance capitalism represents a system composed of organizations that, unlike analogical ones, first rely on individuals, their social relationships, and their behaviors as main resources (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Leonardi & Treen, 2020; Zuboff, 2019); then, they work through digital platforms (Poell et al., 2019; Srnicek, 2017). Finally, algorithms mediate their management

(Kellogg et al., 2020). At the highest levels, we find organizations like Facebook, Amazon, Google, Microsoft, and Apple (Couldry & Mejías, 2019; Foer, 2017). These companies, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, have combined an increasing number of customers and users of their tools, reaching high financial results (Collins et al., 2020).

We see these institutions' expression of power through new ways of management and relations with individuals, other organizations, and the state, with four characteristics. First, they collect unstructured or semi-structured data (Kitchin, 2014), originating from fragmented social behaviors and interactions (Lindgren, 2017), which demand complex structures and knowledge to be ordered and quantified, in a datafication process (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Leonardi & Treen, 2020). Therefore, surveillance capitalism organizations hold exclusivity over the form and content of the information they share with users and partners (Constantiou & Kallinikos, 2015).

Second, the ubiquity of digitalization in our lives, through connected devices (Mosco, 2017) and numerous platforms, each with its own operating rules, makes it difficult to control their action (Gillespie, 2018).

Third, the neoliberal characteristics that pervade the age of digitalization (Fuchs, 2014) shifted the responsibility for the control over algorithms and digital platforms to the proprietary organizations themselves, in a phenomenon of private self-regulation called "digital governance" (Chandler & Fuchs, 2019). In this case, relationships are mediated by terms of consent, developed unilaterally by organizations that own platforms, media, and devices, and imposed as a non-negotiable condition for their use (Venturini et al., 2016).

Finally, technologies such as big data are able to capture and process large volumes of data, providing new opportunities to organizations (Davenport, 2014), like customized ad services (Ruckenstein & Granroth, 2020), offered by Google and Facebook. Thus, algorithms process users' data (O'Neil, 2016; Zuboff, 2019) to meet, exclusively, the goals of these organizations and of their managers (Fleming, 2019; Morozov, 2018).

THE POWER OF DIGITALIZATION AND THE CHILDREN

In recent years, there have been important calls for papers on digitalization, in the area of organizational studies (Alaimo, 2021; K. T. Elmholt et al., 2021; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Schwarzkopf, 2020). These involve mostly social media, datafication, and platform work. In Brazil, studies focused on the dimension of platform work (Franco & Ferraz, 2019) and surveillance capitalism platforms (Vianna & Meneghetti, 2020). Hence, there is a lack of studies on children's use of these technologies.

Given the inseparability of digital media and platforms from people's lives, the phenomenon of digitalization and surveillance capitalism also affects children's environments of learning and leisure, including home and school (Morgade, Aliagas, & Poveda, 2019). Therefore, the development of media content for children, previously focused on cinema and television, today includes the creation of digital content from early childhood (Wartella & Robb, 2008).

Authors who study child development and technologies, as well as the importance of new technologies in children's lives, call attention to the role of digital media and social networks in children's social and educational development (Marsh et al., 2017; Rideout, 2017; Scantlin, 2008). However, the potential for surveillance and data expropriation of these tools also arouses interest and concern in the academic community (Holloway et al., 2013; Marsh et al., 2017; Lupton & Williamson, 2017; Rideout, 2017).

Playful interfaces (Shah, 2019; Zuboff, 2019), together with the uncertainties that cross the terms of consent and the legislation that regulate the capture of user data (Belli & Venturini, 2016; Obar & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018), can result in an environment of asymmetric relationships. Thus, we observe the prosperity of digital environments that place children, parents, and guardians in the condition of dominated, while surveillance capitalism organizations are dominators (Brito, Dias, & Oliveira, 2018; Nyst, 2018); Vianna & Meneghetti, 2020; Zuboff, 2019).

This surveillance capitalism related to children's data manifests itself in toys and devices that are not always designed to collect their data, such as home appliances and smartphones, but that end up doing so (Harris, 2017; Zuboff, 2019), collecting up to 72 million data from children below 13 years old (Baraniuk, 2016). In the so-called 'internet of toys' (Holloway, 2019; Mascheroni & Holloway, 2019), the purchase of games, toys, television channels, media, and social networks, by a child or his guardian, whether paid or not, ensures data exchange between this system and the child for long periods, until there is a disagreement about the terms of consent (Holloway, 2019; Lupton & Williamson, 2017).

Despite the similarities with the datafication process of adult users, surveillance capitalism also affects children in other ways. Games, drawings, songs, and expressions learned through digital devices and media can influence and manipulate children's behavior more efficiently than traditional television advertisements (Martinez-Pastor & Núñez, 2019). A research carried out in a United Kingdom elementary school showed that the languages developed by children in their games and jokes are being replaced by languages, songs, and rules from social media (Burn, 2014).

RESEARCH METHOD

To analyze parents and guardians' perceptions on the use of data by companies that work with digital media, devices, and platforms, we adopted a methodological approach characterized as a mixed or pragmatic method (Tashakkori, Johnson, & Teddlie, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), of a single strand (monostrand), where data collection and inferences take place in a single phase. The mixed method seeks to gather the strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods (Elliott, 2005), integrating them to achieve a more complete understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). Thus, collected quantitative data are descriptive, and focus on the observation of related patterns and attributes (Duncan & Edwards, 1997). These data are then processed and converted to allow a qualitative analysis of quantitative data.

Data Collection

For data collection, we adopted the within strategy (single strategy), where quantitative and qualitative data are collected by the same instrument, which is considered efficient (Tashakkori et al., 2009). This is a combination of closed questions, answered on a Likert scale, with open questions, to explore more fully the perceptions of respondents about a given behavior (Huston, 2001; Tashakkori et al., 2009).

Data collection involved the application of a questionnaire with 24 statements, regarding children's consumption of digital media and devices, and the behavior of parents and guardians about the terms of consent, with a five-point Likert scale for response options. At the end of the questionnaire, there was a space for free comments on the use of children's data by platforms or organizations that manage them.

To reduce the possibility of participation of respondents who did not fit the research target population, at the beginning of the data collection instrument we made explicit that parents and guardians of individuals up to 12 years old, considered children by the Statute of Children and Teenagers (ECA) (Lei nº 8.069, de 13 de julho de 1990), should participate. In addition, it is a simple mixed methods sample (Tashakkori et al., 2009), and non-probabilistic (Bickman & Rog, 2008), efficient for the investigation of scattered groups.

We collected data between September and October 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, using the Google Forms platform. We shared the link on researchers' social networks, and through third parties, in family groups, friends, social networks, and email groups. In the first 10 days, the survey was boosted by new releases in two opportunities, reaching 565 respondents, and there were no more responses in the last four days. Of the 565 respondents, 107 also answered the optional discursive question.

Data Analysis

Data analysis follows Creswell and Tashakkori (2007), for whom the procedures for qualitative and quantitative data analysis are carried out separately, and later integrated, in order to assign greater strength to inferences about a given phenomenon (Bryman, 2007). Therefore, we analyzed quantitative data through descriptive statistics, to present participants' profile regarding the research goal (Pallant, 2013). This procedure supported the analysis of the discursive question's answers, for which we chose the critical discourse analysis (CDA), considered an adequate approach to study "how the abuse of social power and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimized, and resisted, in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 466).

To do this, we used CDA as a basis, from Van Dijk (2004, 2015), Van Dijk and Coelho (2005), and Iñiguez (2004). We also examined Orlandi's papers (2007a, b) for analyzing the silences that pervade the analyzed speeches. CDA is part of critical social analysis (Fairclough, 2012), which considers the social actions present in the object of investigation – the discourse (Iñiguez, 2004). The purpose of CDA is to investigate, understand, and expose how the abuse of social power, domination, and inequality are formed, through the social practice of the discourse (Iñiguez, 2004; Van Dijk, 2005).

For developing CDA in the present research, operationalization comprised two complementary moments. First, we used Van Dijk's (2004, 2005) guidelines in the semantic analysis of discourses and their interpretation; then Orlandi's guidelines (2007a, b), seeking to explore the silence (or silencing) present in the answers.

We chose the semantic discourse analysis because it is "a broader semiotic theory about the significant and symbolic behavior of a given discourse" (Van Dijk, 2004, p. 36). Or, in a more general concept, the discourse's interpretation, composed of an objective and a subjective representation, which depend on contextual factors that determine the meanings to which the researcher will pay more attention (Van Dijk, 2004). Thus, this paper relies on the semantic analysis of the language acts present in the subjective answers of research participants, by processing them and assigning meaning to discourse expressions, using interpretations of different elements.

In order to understand the discourse elements and the interpretations of language users, we adopted abstract and concrete interpretations, according to Van Dijk's guidelines. The author observes: "the former (abstract interpretation) are interpretations of discourses and their elements, through systems and their rules, while the latter (concrete interpretation) are interpretations of language users" (Van Dijk, 2004, p. 37). Therefore, these interpretations are related, since "an abstract linguistic (grammatical) semantics usually intends to exemplify some aspects of the concrete interpretations of language users, when they are explained in psychological models" (Van Dijk, 2004).

This leads to what Van Dijk (2004) calls microstructure and macrostructure, or local coherence and global coherence of the discourse. While the microstructure represents the relationships among sentences or propositions, in addition to the connections among elements of the discourse, the macrostructure represents the global set of the discourse, the topic or subject to which it refers. According to the principle of fundamentality, "the macrostructure of a discourse must be a function of the corresponding meanings of its sentences" (Van Dijk, 2004, p. 40).

Hence, in the analysis of research results, we present the elements that formed these levels of structure, and which allowed defining the analytical categories of the research. For presenting the results, we initially show the descriptive statistics of quantitative data. Then, we present the critical discourse analysis, based on qualitative data of the discursive question.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

As for the respondents' profile, 80% were between 26 and 45 years old; 84% completed higher education; and more than 80% were fathers or mothers of the children. Regarding children's habits, more than 50% use a smartphone to watch videos or online games, nearly always; 56% have their own cell phone; 22% ask to buy games, children's channels, or similar, through the device; 37.5% have already used terms learned on channels like Discovery Kids, YouTube, Netflix, and Disney Channel, among others; and over 20% have already mentioned the desire to become a youtuber or digital influencer. The average daily use of smartphones by children is more than 4 hours for 19.6%; between 3 and 4 hours, for 15.9%; and less than one hour, for 21.3%. In addition, after the pandemic started, 75.5% of the respondents said that the use of games and apps by children increased, while 79.8% reported an increase in watching children's channels.

Regarding the terms of consent, 42.9% of the respondents said they never fully read them for games and apps used by children, while 23.1% rarely do so. Only 10.3% said they read. 45.5% said they did not know where to find the consent terms for games and apps, while 25.5% said they believe that data collected through games and apps are not used legally or ethically.

Among the data presented in this quantitative stage, two main factors can be analyzed qualitatively. First, there has been a significant increase in children's use of games, apps, and channels during the pandemic. Second, a significant number of them have their own digital device, while parents or guardians, for the most part, never or rarely read the consent terms of media and devices used by minors. Almost half of the respondents do not know where to find these documents, which mediate the relationship between organizations and children. Therefore, kids have a certain autonomy, combined with an increase in the frequency of use of games, apps and channels, while parents or guardians seldom check these terms.

Discursive Answers

Analyzing the open answers, we observed two main aspects related to studies on surveillance capitalism. The first was the accountability assigned to other actors and factors, other than the organizations that constitute the surveillance capitalism, considering what they present on their platforms, channels, and digital media. The second was the lack of answers that focused on the discursive question's proposal, that is, respondents did not mention the companies' data, but other subjects. These two characteristics guide the presentation and critical discourse analysis of the answers.

Response Analysis

This first analysis was based on Van Dijk's (2004) guidelines, and we selected answers and analyzed micro and macrostructures. The first sought to understand the relationships between sentences and propositions, as well as the connections among the discourse elements. The second, in turn, relate to the global discourse and the meanings of its sentences. To better show the assessment to the reader, first we present some answers chosen from the survey, and then the relationships between micro and macrostructure.

I can no longer see light at the end of the tunnel for this pandemic. I advise my children not to send personal data. However, it is very difficult to control the use of cell phone and computer during the pandemic, as children have online classes and play games even during class, because they find them boring. In addition, there is nothing to distract them, as they can do nothing, not even leave the house or go to the market. I have already hired private teachers to help with this, but even so, it is very difficult to compete with games and apps – TikTok, Pokémon, and others. Children are being imbecilized by the constant use of cell phones, and developing a very harmful addiction. They get nervous if they lose the online game. I think this is an aberration, but I can't take their cell phones away as they have to participate in class. And there's not much to offer, since tours are limited. I don't see any action from the government or educational entities concerned with this situation, such as teaching classes in alternative places. They are losing their childhood (Respondent 16).

I was thinking about this today, and sometimes I feel like a monster for allowing such interaction. My daughter adopts behaviors from the characters of her TV shows, and this is highly harmful. However, I live in a tiny apartment and I can no longer see an end for this pandemic. I eventually give in to distract the child, but I am aware of the harm that this practice has on her education (Respondent 133).

Microstructure

1. The accountability of the father, mother, or guardian – The first aspect examined showed that, in the two answers above, they use terms that personalize what happens in the digital environment. We observe this phenomenon when respondent 16 says, at the beginning of the answer, “I advise my children not to send personal data”. Another moment when the personalization phenomenon occurs regards respondent 133, when he says “I was thinking about this today, and sometimes I feel like a monster for allowing such interaction (between the daughter and digital media)”. Then, he attributes the interaction between his daughter and television programs to the fact of living “in a tiny apartment”.
2. Dependence on digital devices and media – Respondents also report that both children and adults themselves are dependent on digital devices. For their entertainment or learning, these devices are necessary, as respondent 16 says, “I cannot take their cell phones away when they need to participate in class”. In turn, respondent 133 relates the daughter’s dependence on the consumption of television programs to the need to “distract the child”, given the scenario of the pandemic and the size of the apartment they live in.
3. Pandemic – Both respondents attribute their children’s high consumption of digital media and television programs to the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondent 16 says, “it is very difficult to control the use of cell phones and computers during the pandemic”, reporting that children consume digital games even during online classes. Similarly, respondent 133 says he does not see “an end for this pandemic”, indicating that the moment makes him give in to his daughter’s consumption of digital media and television programs, in order to keep her distracted.

Macrostructure

The objective analysis of sentences, terms, and propositions used by the respondents allows us to observe that parents actually notice a higher dependence and influence of digital devices and contents on their children, confirming studies that observed the effects of digital media and technologies in children’s development (Marsh et al., 2017; Rideout, 2017; Scantlin, 2008). This use is such that parents and guardians also noticed the influence of these media on their behaviors, replacing analogical for digital relationships (Burn, 2014). However, children’s possible dependency on technology is attributed to the behavior of parents and guardians, because of the structure they provide to children in the pandemic. This may relate to the legitimacy achieved by new technologies such as big data, given the numerous opportunities they provide for organizations (Davenport, 2014), and their direct relationship with the idea of efficiency (Clegg et al., 2006).

In brief, we observed that a potential legitimation of the power and control that surveillance capitalism organizations exercise is linked to an ideology that considers technology a solution to problems in general. At the same time, there is a latent concern with the volume of media use, which is parents’ responsibility. The very terms that parents assign to themselves, such as “monsters”, show that the focus of concern is far from being the use of data, but rather children’s habits and parents’ actions. This argument is supported by a perception of dispute between digital devices and parents’ will, where the former “win” in the face of the latter’s helplessness in the current pandemic.

My two daughters have one iPad, for which we stipulated 1h30 of use per day, in a relay method: 10 minutes each one. During this period, they can use game apps or watch Netflix. Usually, they use the iPad from 8 pm until 9:15, 9:30 pm. After that, we do some activities to slow them down: play memory games, domino, and get ready for bed... We read 2 or 3 books, and the day is over. They don't ask for the iPad during the day, because we agreed a long time ago that it would be just a little bit each day. They understand that there are other funny ways to play. We never use it at mealtime, and they don't ask for it either. What happens, occasionally, is that they ask for our cell phone to take pictures of their toys. I think the way we handle it is appropriate, and in balance with their psychosocial development (Respondent 115).

Here at home we have a schedule for TV and tablet. The child is 4 years old and got used to the routine. He (she) doesn't ask outside these hours (Respondent 62).

At home, I prefer to use Netflix or Amazon Prime, as they are channels where you can control the impact of advertisements. Channels like Discovery Kids broadcast more advertisements than cartoons. It seems absurd not to have regulatory laws for so many insertions, as well as in YouTube and mobile games. But I always explain to my son that they are trying to sell and "take his money"; I tell him to avoid watching and getting this vision. He seems to be aware, despite being 6 years old. He knows that we could buy it, but we don't need to. At home, we try to make toys with recycled material, and he ends up having more fun than with those toys of the latest generation, which he also has, but they are put aside (Respondent 39).

Microstructure

1. Ubiquity of the digital device – In the answers, we observed that the three respondents, with children aged 4 and 6 years old, treat devices like smartphones, tablets, and iPads, or platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime naturally, in their children's lives. We notice this naturalness when respondent 62 says that the child "has already gotten used to the routine" of using television and tablet at specific times. Also, respondent 115 reports the relay routine between the daughters for a certain period, saying, at the end, that the management – of the relationship between children and digital devices and media - "is appropriate and in balance with their psychosocial development".
2. Control over use – Respondents also said that they control the consumption of digital devices and television channels, usually defined by a maximum period of use. This control does not only involve the use itself, but also the channels and platforms accessed. Respondent 39 said that he prefers "to use Netflix or Amazon Prime, as they are channels where you can control the impact of advertisements". The speech in the first person indicates that the use, despite being the child's, works as a child's entertainment tool, and that channel control is a way of protection against overuse, since the respondent explains to the child that platform organizations "are trying to sell and take his money".

Macrostructure

Based on the answers, we observed that the presence of technology through digital devices and media is natural, as an inseparable element of modern life, including for children (Morgade et al., 2019; Mosco, 2017). Therefore, there is a tension between parents and guardians' search for controlling possible effects of the exaggerated use of media and digital devices, and their ubiquitous presence in children's lives. However, this control does not comprise reading the consent terms or possible restrictions related to data capture from children, but defining allowed and forbidden schedules and platforms. Hence, even with some restriction for use, the quantification of children's behavior (Coudry & Mejías, 2019; Holloway, 2019; Zuboff, 2019) is neither avoided nor questioned, nor are the terms of consent that mediate the relationships (Belli & Venturini, 2016; Obar & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018).

In short, we noticed that the participants' answers, once again, do not address the question presented, but express palliative ways that parents and guardians find to control what they consider most appropriate, given the ubiquity of digital devices. Therefore, we interpreted the answers as a program of consensual expropriation, that is, parents and guardians do not

question the forms of expropriation of children's data by platforms and organizations that manage them; they only control the moments when it takes place.

We (parents) prohibit children to watch youtubers, no matter who they are (Respondent 14).

We don't buy anything related to games or similar. We do not encourage the purchase of products related to games or characters, except when we think they stimulate creativity. We prefer to buy pieces to assemble, such as Lego and wooden blocks; we try to know cartoons and games. We do not allow them to download games without our presence. We restrict access to YouTube videos. We find it difficult to control what they access, so we limit it. We prefer television, children's channels. We don't allow them to watch youtubers. We talk critically about the subject and do not encourage them to make videos (Respondent 80).

Microstructure

1. YouTube and youtubers - Participant 14's answer is clear – "We (parents) prohibit children to watch youtubers, no matter who they are". The youtubers mentioned are individuals who produce content and broadcast it on YouTube. Participant 80 confirms the behavior of participant 14, and, besides not allowing children to watch youtubers, he finds it "difficult to control what they access (on the platform)".
2. Control by prohibition - The way parents and guardians find to ensure that children are not influenced and do not exaggerate consumption is by prohibition, and not by permission, as shown in the answers.

Macrostructure

The answers show a negative perception of the content produced and disseminated on YouTube. This is due to the influence that media have on children's development and behavior (Borzekowski & Robinson, 2001; Martinez-Pastor & Núñez, 2019). However, the digital platform belongs to Google's proprietary group, and is part of surveillance capitalism, with a pleasant interface and terms of consent not always clear about their objectives (Venturini et al., 2016; Vianna & Meneghetti, 2020). Thus, when parents and guardians turn their attention to YouTube, other digital platforms run by surveillance capitalism organizations find a more favorable environment to manage data arising from children's behavior (Holloway, 2019; Lupton & Williamson, 2017).

In brief, parents and guardians drive their concerns to the behavior of certain individuals who are ultimately content producers for some platform. Therefore, the domination of a system characterized as surveillance capitalism is not questioned, but rather the action of individuals who are not even part of the organizations.

Finally, the set of analyses presented here shows that the social structure where surveillance capitalism organizations operate legitimizes their actions, by relying on technologies for the development of their activities and of children themselves. Hence, parents and guardians' concern is focused on problems such as the volume of use of digital devices, especially during the pandemic, and the influence of one or another character – in this case, content producers –, but without questioning the performance of these organizations. We see evidence of this in two factors. First, the phenomenon of expropriation controlled by parents and guardians, by establishing schedules and conditions of use for the children. Second, the low frequency of consulting the consent forms that mediate the relationships between organizations and children.

The politics of silence, or the non-accountability of surveillance capitalism organizations

The macrostructures that emerged from the responses point to different directions when we analyze potential criticisms from parents and guardians to children's consumption of digital media and devices. However, what caught our attention was precisely what was not written. The discursive question clearly indicated that the space was for comments on the use of children's data by platforms or organizations that manage them. However, we observed the responsibility attributed to the parents themselves, to the structures they offer to children, to the pandemic, or to youtubers. This phenomenon is confirmed by converting quantitative into qualitative data, showing that parents and tutors noticed a significant increase in

children's use of games, apps, and channels during the pandemic, but they did not develop the habit of reading the consent terms, or did not know where to find them. This situation may not indicate respondents' full trust in platforms, but also does not assign the responsibility for the use of children's data to the organizations that generate them.

Thus, when mentioning forms of control, respondents put the responsibility on children, parents, and guardians, without mentioning the organizations' practices regarding data and the datafication process. Only respondent 39 refers to the absence of specific laws regarding the dissemination of advertisements on platforms and games that reach child audience. The absence, in the answers, of the organizations that make up surveillance capitalism and their practices highlights the importance of bringing this 'unsaid' to the analysis carried out in this article, given that "silence does not speak, it means" (Orlandi, 2007a, p. 30). But what does this silence (or silencing) mean? The author herself states: "therefore, there is a political declination of meaning that results in silencing as a way of not being silent, but of saying something, in order not to let others things be said. In other words, silence cuts out the saying" (Orlandi, 2007a, p. 32).

The silence of respondents regarding the use of data by surveillance capitalism organizations, found in the answers to the discursive question, is shown through quantitative data. Although more than half of the children have a device of their own, 66% of the respondents said they never or rarely read completely the terms of consent of the media and devices used by the children, and over 45% do not know where to find the documents that mediate the relationship between organizations and the children.

Such data confirm the idea of a technology that operates a system of rational organization (Fleming & Spicer, 2014), highly valued in a society known by the quest for efficiency (Bunderson & Reagans, 2011), naturalizing the wide presence of these media and devices in homes and among children (Morgade et al., 2019; Mosco, 2017). We observe this behavior of non-confrontation through the implicit acceptance of such companies' digital governance, which self-regulate the relationship between user and platforms, media, and devices (Chandler & Fuchs, 2019). This happens both by not reading the consent terms (Obar & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018), and by the unilateral development of these documents by the institutions (Venturini et al., 2016). In brief, silence regarding data use means the power of the dominant over the dominated (Haugaard & Clegg, 2009; Pansardi, 2012), through the subjectivation of this power (Fleming & Spicer, 2014) as something natural, positive, and unquestionable.

We observed that the answers' focus, which should be the use of children's data by surveillance capitalism organizations, is diverted to other factors. Respondents acknowledge problems in the use of media and digital devices regarding their influence on children. However, such problems are not attributed to the platforms or organizations that manage them and their algorithms, but to parents and guardians themselves, to the pandemic, and to youtubers. Hence, the political dimension of these organizations' power is present (Fleming & Spicer, 2014), when their domination over children, through their platforms and media, is shifted to these other actors. In addition, we can establish a parallel between the self-domination of scientific management (Clegg et al., 2006; Haugaard & Clegg, 2009) and a kind of self-flagellation of the respondents, regarding the consumption of media and devices by their children, especially during the pandemic.

FINAL REMARKS

This paper analyzed the perception of parents and guardians about the use of data by companies that operate through digital media, devices, and platforms. The findings are relevant to the area of organizational studies and topics related to technology and society, addressing mainly power of these firms. They show that, while children use digital devices a lot, access them, and are influenced by digital channels and media, their fathers, mothers, and tutors rarely read the terms that mediate this use. Through these data, we observe a form of organizations' control over individuals' data, since the volume of use of digital media and devices by children is high, while the control over the capture and processing of their data is weak.

As for the results of the discursive answers, they show the domination of users by organizations, which are the strongest part in this relationship, especially when represented by their economic power (Haugaard & Clegg, 2009; Weber, 1999), and political power (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). Platforms have assumed the role of the main source of information for their users and partners, leading to greater efficiency, while controlling their knowledge (O'Neil, 2016; Zuboff, 2019), and shaping their subjectivation (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). Therefore, research participants attributed the responsibility for children's dependence and the exaggerated use of devices and digital media to different actors, in a process of non-accountability of surveillance capitalism organizations.

The theoretical contribution of the research is to expand discussions in organizational studies, in two ways. First, by advancing the theory of surveillance capitalism regarding the phenomenon of non-accountability of organizations that dominate this area, achieved by including children in the list of individuals affected by the so-called 'negative side of digitalization'. Second, by combining aspects from different areas, such as law, psychology, and pedagogy, in discussions on digital organizations. The practical contribution of the research consists of the information it provides to those interested in the topic, by presenting data on the behavior of these individuals, regarding the consumption and control of the use of digital devices. Thus, there is a scenario where everyone can be accountable and controlled, except those who develop and manage the technologies. Finally, the paper provides a methodological contribution, by using a mixed methods approach, to better explain a recent phenomenon.

One limitation of the article is the number of respondents; despite being sufficient for a research with these characteristics, it represents only a part of society. As future studies, we suggest further exploratory research on the topics of digital organizations' power and children's behavior, considering that society faces a social design where the presence of these companies takes place earlier and with greater intensity in people's lives. Therefore, studies that analyze the role of surveillance capitalism organizations in children's effective consumption are welcome.

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