Preface

(In)Equalities and Social (In)Visibilities in the Digital Age

The influence of new technologies in public and private spheres of society, rather than a reformulation, has given rise to a new social field and directly interferes with how we perceive the world, relate to it and to others. One should note that in Pierre Bourdieu›s (2001) theory, field arises as a configuration of socially distributed relations.

Progressively, a universe of socialisation has emerged and consolidated: cyberspace. Although virtual, it exists and produces effects. It can be defined as the space boosted by the different digital communication platforms and assumes itself as an individual communication model, allowing the receiver to be simultaneously emitter. Space of flows (Castells, 1996), cyberspace translates the social dimension of the Internet, enabling the diffusion of communication/information on a global scale. This causes an intense process of inclusion and exclusion of people in the network.

The reference to info-inclusive and info-excluded societies of the digital scenario is imperative when it is reflected in the geography of the new socio-technological spaces. The dynamics of these territories are directly associated with the way social, demographic, economic and technological variables condition each other, revealing the potential for dissemination of information and knowledge through technologies.

In this special issue of the journal Interações we propose a reflection on (In)Equalities and Social (In)Visibilities in the Digital Age. The articles in the volume present research results and/or theoretical reflection on social visibilities and invisibilities created by dynamics of media and digital inclusion and exclusion, relations between the digital and inequalities in different geographical, social and professional contexts, digital literacy and vulnerable social groups, conditioning created by technology to the individual in social context, among others.

The volume opens with an essay by Chris Campanioni that asks the timeless question "Who are you?" to investigate the current culture of AI-catfishing, social media metrics and its manipulation. The article has the particular interest, today, of linking the rising of fake news with the "widespread rise of fake users", understood these ones

as "the various impersonations of self even and especially through AI", within a critical articulation of politics, economy, body and identity, in the context of the digital, that points to the possibility of disintegration of "identity-performance, and its utopic potential".

Important normative points from an emancipatory perspective are also made by Mateo Stochetti in the second essay of this volume. We would like to highlight his premise that "without the possibility of truth, political behaviour is deprived of its moral dimension". Stochetti restrains himself from explicitly linking his argument to obvious contemporary events in the international scene, yet the argument is quite relevant for a critical assessment of such events. The article further presents an interesting insight on the concept of social construction of reality, in connection with the concepts of (in)visibility and truth, making it relevant not only to a public interested in communication, media and the digital, but also to a public interested in more general social theory and epistemology.

Luca Cigna reviews the debate on digital inequality, presenting us with the 'state of the art' on the subject. Cigna organises his review considering conceptual and methodological aspects, and also dimensions concerning social structure, globalization and politics. The author highlights the complex and multidimensional character of digital inequality, and its prominence within social inequalities in general in contemporary societies.

The ensuing articles present researches about a variety of specific groups, contexts and/or aspects concerning inequalities and invisibilities in de digital age, and the challenges and avenues to overcome these last ones.

Daniel Calderon departs from the three levels of digital divide, operationalised in five barriers (access, skills, motivation, emotions and utility) to study personal processes of Internet appropriation among young people in Madrid. The author identifies significant asymmetries and barriers among the youngsters, which relate to their sociocultural background and technological socialization. This article contains also a very relevant literature review on the three levels of the digital divide, performing very well as complimentary to Luca Cigna literature review in the previous article.

Natasha Chuk's analysis concerns the fact that, particularly within social media, shy and socially vulnerable people are an invisible and disadvantaged group. The focus on this type of group makes us look into "the ways that socialization, self-expression, and individuality have shifted, allowing new perceptions and ways of being to emerge". Media tools available to people "can both ameliorate and exacerbate shy-

ness". So, for the author, the point is to promote awareness of the flexibility and possibility of customisation of tools, such as the ones concerning privacy and visibility, so that alternative uses and platforms can emerge that make possible "the ability to conceal and reveal information with a sense of agency, and provide the opportunity for the user to perform accordingly".

Delali Dovie finds out that digital literacy makes a difference in planning retirement in Ghana, with implications for social inclusion and exclusion, and also that this difference is notorious in comparing formal and informal sectors workers. Thereby, the challenge is to increase the digital literacy of groups such as the informal sectors workers, in order to overcome such inequality in the facility and quality of retirement planning. The article is also interesting within the wider field of social literacies research.

Indhira Suero and Bernardo H. Motta research the connection between the adoption, or not, of new digital media and the survival and growth in publishing industry, focusing the case of the black press in the USA. To carry this research, the authors found methodological difficulties – mainly concerning contact with privileged informers – which itself are revealing of particularities of this research topic, and of the connections of organizational and technological issues with (in)visibility and (in)justice issues. Here, the core problem is trust, and the proposals that the authors advance to overcome it – furthering qualitative, ethnographic research in this field – are itself quite illustrative of the state of invisibility in this industry.

Ioana Ionita focuses the role of digital tools in food activism, as an instance of action against social injustice, in Romania. The main conclusion is that such role still is an incipient one, and that is because it is "severely limited by (…) legislative, bureaucratic and infrastructure impediments". The particularity of the article is to focus not on the invisible or disadvantage group itself but on structures and practices of solidarity from others towards it, which performs as a last reminder that (in)visibilities, (in)equalities and (in)justices are always social relations.

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Inês Amaral
Maria João Barata
Vasco Almeida