# INTERAÇÕES

*sociedade e as novas modernidades*

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# *Prefácio*

O artigo que inicia o volume 40 da Interações aborda a experiência de jovens adultos na Nigéria na utilização da aplicação TikTok, durante o período de confinamento decretado naquele país, em contexto da pandemia de COVID 19. O objetivo principal da investigação de Udenze e Uzochukwu foi perceber em que medida a utilização do TikTok contribuiu para minimizar os efeitos negativos do isolamento resultantes do confinamento. Tendo como enquadramento teórico a Teoria dos Usos e Gratificações de Katz e Blumler, os autores fizeram um estudo qualitativo baseado em entrevistas a jovens adultos com idades compreendidas entre os 19 e 31 anos. A análise temática das entrevistas, suportada pela perspetiva das etapas de Braun e Clarke, permitiu-lhes concluir que a partilha de vídeos curtos da aplicação TikTok ajudou os jovens adultos a gerir os efeitos negativos do confinamento, tendo um impacto positivo no seu bem-estar. Os autores sugerem que a aplicação TikTok poderá ser utilizada por indivíduos e psicoterapeutas no tratamento de pacientes, em contexto de confinamento compulsório.

O artigo seguinte, da autoria de Delali Dovie, analisa as experiências vividas pela população idosa no Gana durante a pandemia de Covid 19 em quatro dimensões: social, cuidado infantil, autocuidado e humanitária. A autora entrevistou cinco homens e cinco mulheres, selecionados através de uma amostragem intencional. As conclusões do seu estudo mostram que os idosos entrevistados desenvolveram uma miríade de estratégias de resiliência e de adaptação ao ambiente de isolamento em contexto pandémico, assumindo novos papéis sociais e ampliando as suas atividades quotidianas. A autora destaca o fortalecimento dos laços estabelecidos entre os idosos e os seus netos, colmatando a lacuna de cuidado infantil que o encerramento das escolas trouxe e aliviando as mães que trabalham. Por outro lado, a socialização entre idosos e crianças, apesar de desenvolvida fora do ambiente da sala de aula, permitiu que as crianças continuassem academicamente focadas. Por fim, a autora enfatiza a necessidade de reflexão e estudo das dimensões sociais, psicológicas, do autocuidado e do cuidado infantil, em contexto de pandemia.

Julian Affonso de Faria e Cláudio Márcio Magalhães procuram estabelecer uma relação entre o tráfego legal e ilegal de dados obtidos a partir da vigilância do cidadão

e o fenómeno da desinformação, essencialmente centrado na difusão de notícias falsas que, atingindo uma escala elevada, ameaça os alicerces dos regimes democráticos. A questão de partida da sua investigação é a seguinte: em que medida o capitalismo de vigilância contribui para a economia política da desinformação? Segundo os autores, "o capitalismo de vigilância e a política da desinformação constituem uma das maiores preocupações da sociedade nos tempos atuais. O grande desafio é enfrentar tais fenômenos, seja com leis específicas, seja com políticas públicas, sem cercear o direito dos cidadãos à liberdade de pensamento e de opinião" (p. 76). Para os autores, a solução não passa pela implantação de ações de censura, mas sim pela aposta nas políticas de educação, de forma a dotar os cidadãos de um nível de sentido crítico que lhes possibilite diferenciar o verdadeiro do manipulado.

No artigo "Arielismo versus cosmopolitismo: a reação brasileira ao 11/09/01 como narrativa cultural e trabalho de identidade", Laura Robinson analisa o trabalho de identidade através do discurso brasileiro face aos acontecimentos de 11 de setembro de 2011, utilizando uma perspetiva construtivista social. Ao examinar a forma como as normas culturais offline dos participantes de fóruns de discussão digital são transformadas através da interação online, a autora centra-se num dos temas centrais dos estudos globais sobre os média, cultura e identidade. A sua investigação, desenvolvida a partir dos dados retirados dos fóruns de discussão digital organizado pelo Jornal *O Estado de São Paulo*, aponta para a existência de duas atitudes dominantes, que a autora identifica como arielista e cosmopolista, completadas por uma terceira, circunscrita a um pequeno grupo de expatriados brasileiros autoproclamado como americanófilo. A autora conclui que as diferentes posturas em reação aos acontecimentos de 11 de setembro de 2011 continuam atuais, refletindo o abismo entre esquerda e direita no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos.

Reuben Connolly Ross parte de uma discussão inicial sobre o Centro Comercial Amoreiras para, de forma bastante original, explorar criticamente as mudanças mais recentes na paisagem urbana e arquitetónica de Lisboa. Para o autor, as Amoreiras são um símbolo das aspirações consumistas do Portugal no período pós-revolucionário e da ascensão das políticas neoliberais que, a nível global, foram invadindo os regimes capitalistas, agudizando as suas desigualdades e contradições. Como Reuben Connolly Ross destaca as "suas torres refletem as mudanças económicas e turbulências políticas que ajudaram a produzir formas urbanas radicalmente novas; seu tamanho imponente resume os efeitos devastadores do desenvolvimento espacial desigual; seus designs kitsch incorporam uma visão caleidoscópica de um futuro incerto"

(p.114). As Amoreiras, conclui o autor, ao marcarem o aparecimento das tendências pós-modernas em Portugal, servem como ponto de partida para uma reflexão sobre os rumos que o Portugal moderno está a tomar.

O artigo de Camila Costa Feijó examina o paralelo entre as revistas femininas no Brasil e as comunidades virtuais no Brasil. À medida que as antigas revistas femininas iam perdendo assinantes e leitores, foram surgindo comunidades virtuais constituídas por mulheres como espaços de troca de informação e de conselhos. A autora utilizou uma pesquisa qualitativa combinando uma revisão bibliográfica com a análise de informação retirada de dois grupos do Facebook (Fashionismo e Modices). O seu estudo mostra que as mulheres utilizam agora novos discursos e novas formas de identificação que vão para além dos conteúdos das antigas revistas femininas. Por outro lado, e mais importante ainda, agora as mulheres não se limitam apenas a serem consumidoras de conteúdos, mas são também produtoras, o que contribui para o seu empoderamento. Curiosamente, as novas formas de representação das mulheres, resultantes da sua participação nos espaços digitais, não anularam as revistas femininas, já que continuam a existir várias publicações digitais, embora se observe uma mudança no discurso utlizado.

No ensaio que encerra o volume, Deepak Gupta destaca duas dimensões no programa de vacinação de COVID 19, designadamente, a garantia do acesso equitativo e o desenvolvimento de estratégias de marketing que incentivem mudanças de comportamento positivas por parte dos cidadãos, já que a disseminação de desinformação está a ganhar popularidade, especialmente nos média e nos espaços digitais. Apoiado pelas informações recolhidas através de uma entrevista realizada a um informante-chave, ex-especialista da Organização Mundial de Saúde, Deepak Gupta defende que só através das políticas públicas será possível alcançar um equilíbrio entre sustentabilidade ambiental, desenvolvimento económico e indicadores positivos a nível sanitário. Assim, conclui, não será a lógica política, mas sim científica que deverá conduzir as principais decisões a serem tomadas em questões de saúde pública. Segundo as suas palavras: "é, portanto, hora de testemunhar mais da ciência na política do que da política na ciência" (p. 138).

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# *Preface*

The article that begins volume 40 of Interações addresses the experience of young adults in Nigeria using the TikTok application during the lockdown decreed in that country in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic. The main objective of the investigation by Udenze and Uzochukwu was to understand the extent to which the use of TikTok contributed to minimizing the negative effects of isolation resulting from confinement. Using Katz and Blumler's Theory of Uses and Gratifications as a theoretical framework, the authors did a qualitative study based on interviews with young adults aged between 19 and 31 years. The thematic analysis of the interviews, supported by the perspective of Braun and Clarke's steps, allowed them to conclude that sharing short videos from the TikTok application helped young adults to manage the negative effects of confinement, having a positive impact on their well-being. The authors suggest that the TikTok application can be used by individuals and psychotherapists in the treatment of patients in a context of compulsory confinement.

The following article, by Delali Dovie, analyzes the experiences lived by the elderly population in Ghana during the Covid 19 pandemic in four dimensions: social, childcare, self-care and humanitarian. The author interviewed five men and five women, selected through a purposive sampling technique. The findings of their study show that the elderly people interviewed developed a myriad of strategies for resilience and adaptation to the isolation environment in a pandemic context, taking on new social roles and expanding their daily activities. The author highlights the strengthening of the bonds established between the elderly and their grandchildren, closing the gap in childcare that the closing of schools brought and relieving working mothers. On the other hand, socialization between the elderly and children, although developed outside the classroom environment, allowed the children to remain academically focused. Finally, the author emphasizes the need for reflection and study of the social, psychological, self-care and childcare dimensions in a pandemic context.

Julian Affonso de Faria and Cláudio Márcio Magalhães seek to establish a relationship between the legal and illegal traffic of data obtained from citizen surveillance and the phenomenon of disinformation, essentially centered on the dissemination of fake news that reaching a large scale, threatens the foundations of democratic re-

gimes. Their research question is: to what extent does surveillance capitalism contribute to the political economy of disinformation? According to the authors, "surveillance capitalism and the policy of disinformation are one of the greatest concerns of society today. The great challenge is to face such phenomena, either with specific laws or with public policies, without restricting the citizens' right to freedom of thought and opinion" (p. 76). For the authors, the solution is not the implementation of censorship actions but the investment in education policies in order to provide citizens with a critical sense level that enables them to differentiate truth and manipulation.

In the article "Arielism Versus Cosmopolitanism: Brazilian Reaction to 9/11/01 as Cultural Narrative and Identity Work", Laura Robinson analyzes identity work through the Brazilian discourse in relation to the events of September 11, 2011, using a social constructivist perspective. By examining how the offline cultural norms of digital discussion forum participants are transformed through online interaction, the author focuses on one of the central themes of global studies on media, culture and identity. Her investigation, based on data taken from digital discussion forums organized by the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, points to the existence of two main attitudes that she identifies as arielist and cosmopolitan, completed by a third one limited to a small group of Brazilian expatriates self-proclaimed as Americanophile. The author concludes that the different postures in reaction to the events of September 11, 2011, are still current, reflecting the chasm between left and right in Brazil and the United States.

Reuben Connolly Ross starts from an initial discussion about the Amoreiras Shopping Center to, in a very original way, critically explore the most recent changes in Lisbon's urban and architectural landscape. For the author, Amoreiras are a symbol of Portugal's consumerist aspirations in the post-revolutionary period and of the rise of neoliberal policies that, at the global level, invaded capitalist regimes, sharpening their inequalities and contradictions. As Reuben Connolly Ross points out, "Its towers reflect the economic changes and political turmoil that have helped produce radically new urban forms; its imposing size epitomises the devastating effects of uneven spatial development; its kitsch designs embody a kaleidoscopic vision of an uncertain future." (p.114). The Amoreiras, concludes the author, by marking the emergence of post-modern trends in Portugal, serves as a starting point for a reflection on the directions that modern Portugal is taking.

Camila Costa Feijó's article examines the parallel between women's magazines in Brazil and virtual communities in Brazil. As the old women's magazines lost sub-

scribers and readers, virtual communities emerged, made up by women, as spaces for exchanging information and advice. The author used a qualitative research combining a literature review with an analysis of information taken from two Facebook groups (*Fashionismo* and *Modices*). Her study shows that women are now using new discourses and new forms of identification that go beyond the contents of the old women's magazines. On the other hand, and even more important, now women are not limited to being content consumers but are also producers, which contributes to their empowerment. Interestingly, the new forms of representation of women, resulting from their participation in digital spaces, did not set aside women's magazines, as there are still several digital publications, although there is a change in the discourse used.

In the essay that closes the volume, Deepak Gupta highlights two dimensions in the COVID 19 vaccination program, namely, the guarantee of equitable access and the development of marketing strategies that encourage positive behavior changes on the part of citizens, as the dissemination of misinformation is gaining in popularity, especially in the media and digital spaces. Supported by the information collected through an interview conducted with a key informant, a former specialist at the World Health Organization, Deepak Gupta argues that only through public policies will it be possible to achieve a balance between environmental sustainability, economic development and positive health indicators. Thus, he concludes, it is not political logic but scientific logic that should drive the main decisions to be taken in matters of public health. In his words: "it is therefore time to witness more of science in politics than politics in science" (p. 138).

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# Promoting Mental Wellbeing: Young Adults' Experience on TikTok during the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown in Nigeria

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## Abstract

From the last quarter of 2019, the world witnessed the emergence of the COVID -19 virus that shook it to its knees, and Nigeria is not an exception. While countries were struggling with strategies on how to manage the virus, the lockdown option became paramount. During the period of the lockdown in Nigeria, most persons, especially young people, could not visit places of their choice. Hence, social media became their source of solace. This study examines the experiences of young adults in using TikTok to minimise the negative effect of isolation during the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria. The authors interviewed ten young persons between the ages of 19 to 31. A thematic analysis of the interviews using Braun and Clark (2006) steps for conducting thematic analysis revealed four overarching themes that describe the participants' experiences on TikTok during the lockdown. Prominent among the themes, the study uncovered how TikTok short videos excelled in impacting the research participants therapeutically; easing boredom, and impacting positively on their mental health. The present study suggests that TikTok short videos could be a phenomenon that could be adopted by individuals or even health professionals, especially psychotherapists in managing or treating patients in similar situations like the COVID-19 compulsory lockdown.

**Keywords:** social media, TikTok, short videos, isolation, COVID -19.

## Promoção do bem-estar mental: experiência de jovens adultos no TikTok durante o confinamento pandémico do COVID-19 na Nigéria

### Resumo

A partir do último trimestre de 2019, o mundo testemunhou o surgimento do vírus COVID -19 que o atingiu brutalmente, e a Nigéria não foi uma exceção. Enquanto os países lutavam para encontrar estratégias para controlar o vírus, a opção de confinamento tornou-se fundamental. Durante o período de confinamento na Nigéria, a maioria das pessoas, especialmente os jovens, não puderam visitar os lugares que quisessem. Consequentemen-

te, os média sociais tornaram-se a sua fonte de consolo. Este estudo examina as experiências de jovens adultos na utilização do TikTok para minimizar o efeito negativo do isolamento durante o bloqueio COVID -19 na Nigéria. Foram entrevistados dez jovens com idades entre 19 e 31 anos. Uma análise temática das entrevistas usando as etapas de Braun e Clark (2006) para conduzir a análise temática revelou quatro temas abrangentes que descrevem as experiências dos participantes no TikTok durante o bloqueio. Proeminen- te entre os temas, o estudo revelou como os vídeos curtos do TikTok se destacaram em impactar terapeuticamente os participantes da pesquisa, aliviar o tédio e impactar posi- tivamente na sua saúde mental. O presente estudo sugere que os vídeos curtos do TikTok podem ser um fenómeno que pode ser adota- do por indivíduos ou mesmo por profissio- nais de saúde, especialmente psicoterapeutas no manuseamento ou tratamento de pacien- tes em situações semelhantes, como o confi- namento obrigatório do COVID -19.

**Palavras-chave:** média sociais, TikTok, vídeos curtos, isolamento, COVID -19.

## INTRODUCTION

The use of social media has had a considerable effect on our personal and profes- sional lives. Today, social media is being appropriated and domesticated in different areas of human endeavours, influencing the way we communicate, stay connected, and transmit information (Udenze, 2021; Udenze & Ugoala, 2019) . The unique char- acteristics of social media offer benefits to many youths compared to other com- munications media; their public nature, speed, and accessibility contribute to users' social development and knowledge (Wells & Mitchell, 2008). A recently introduced social media platform known as TikTok is currently popular among young people. TikTok is a mobile video creation and sharing application established in 2014 under a first name known as Musical.ly. The app has spawned into the most downloaded Apple iOS video app among adolescents between the ages 13 - 18, comprising half of the 500 million monthly users (Cheng & Dong, 2018).

Zhu et al. (2019), write that TikTok, a is micro-video sharing social media that permits users to create short videos that last for some seconds, and then share it with a wider TikTok community. Compared to other social media platforms, TikTok has more than 500 million active users, with more than 1 billion downloads (Wearesc- cial, 2019). TikTok affords a simple user interface for creating videos, with users be- ing able to insert their preferred music choices and special effects into their recorded video (Yang et al., 2019). Currently, the app has seized the attention of young audi-

ences around the globe, especially at this moment of the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, TikTok has surpassed Instagram as the third most downloaded social network in the world, only behind WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger (Mariele, 2019).

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study explores young adults use of TikTok and its impact in minimising the negative effect of isolation; loneliness during the COVID -19 pandemic lockdown. Specifically, the secondary objectives of this are:

- To ascertain to what extent the participants have rediscovered themselves during the lockdown.
- To determine whether the participants were able to manage their TikTok accounts amidst other social media accounts during the pandemic.
- To investigate whether the participants were able to expand their network of online/offline friends during the pandemic.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Examining Tiktok

TikTok is a short video creation and sharing app owned by a Chinese firm called ByteDance. The app is popularly known as Douyin in China it was launched in 2016. After its merger with musical.ly, a similar app, it re-debuted in 2018 (Klug, 2020). On TikTok, users can create, post and share 15 seconds to one-minute videos with the community. These short videos can be viewed by anyone with an account or access to the direct video link (Klug, 2020). In contrast to similar social media platforms like Vine, TikTok allows users to add attributes such as stickers, text, or visual effects to videos (Lu & Lu, 2019). Creating videos on TikTok is predominantly based on musical snippets, often popular songs, and users lip-syncing the lyrics and performing to the music (Anderson, 2020). Besides, when users add matching hashtags, users create collections of thousands of videos related to a song snippet or sound (Anderson, 2020).

TikTok videos often involve incorporating filters and other characteristics offered by the app. For instance, the speed manipulation attribute allows users to slow down

the music track or speed up the video recording to better sync moves, gestures, and lip-syncing to the music and to precisely edit the video (Bresnick, 2019). Overall, the features of TikTok encourage users to create, remix and join so-called challenges by using hashtags that are associated with challenges (Bresnick, 2019). The app's unique feature, "duets", allows users to initiate a side-by-side split-screen video and react to it, almost in the form of call and response (Bresnick, 2019).

A widespread practice on TikTok is the creation of performances by users through contextual knowledge, transforming a line of lyrics into a new statement, meme, or viral phenomenon. This is usually done by adding text elements and emojis in the video or hashtags in the video caption to create the targeted context (Klug, 2020). Strapagiel (2019) states that TikTok popularised "Old Town Road" by Lil Nas X and has been noted as the first example of a viral TikTok meme becoming a chart-topping hit. Bresnick, (2019) and Anderson, (2020) suggest that the app could be described as an exploratory audiovisual avenue for users rather than a social media platform that engender connection.

As a core algorithm-driven app, this part helps the app to determine which videos the users see (Anderson, 2020). Unlike other apps, for instance, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Tumblr that present feeds for scrolling, TikTok presents one video at a time, and the user must swipe up for the next video (Anderson, 2020). The app is downloadable in the Apple, Android and Amazon app stores. While there is a way to view videos and a button to upload a video, there is no search function, and many of the features appear to be limited (Anderson, 2020). It is possible to view and search on the app without having an account, but as with all social media apps, an account is required for full engagement. When creating an account, the potential user is asked to choose their interests from a list that includes animals, comedy, food, sports, beauty and style, art, gaming and science and education (Anderson, 2020). As of January 2020, the app had around 800 million users, with its most monthly downloads ever (113 million) in February 2020 most likely favoured by COVID-19 related social distancing and the compulsory social isolation (Klug, 2020). According to Xu et al. (2019), women are the largest users of TikTok, and most of its subscribers are young people.

**Short Videos and Isolation**

The utilisation of social media in health is not new (Heldman et al., 2019; Deng et al., 2019); besides, social media has been widely adopted by patients, and healthcare

professionals, with a plethora of studies reporting its usefulness in patient empowerment, health promotion, patient- physician relationship building, and public health surveillance (Tengilimoglu et al., 2017; Richter et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2018). However, one of the crucial questions raised by scholars is whether young people's presence in the cyberspace help them have a sense of belonging and mitigates the loneliness that young adults often experience (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Przybylski et al., 2013; Dzogang et al., 2017).

Since its launch in 2018, fewer studies have been carried out on the social media platform, TikTok. While there are a few studies on TikTok, there are a few scholars who have examined why TikTok has become popular (Xu et al., 2019) and the impact of short video apps on social isolation (Baecker et al., 2014; Zamir et al., 2018). The impact of TikTok videos in mitigating the negative impact of isolation amidst the COVID -19 pandemic is, however, arguably under-researched. Studies have explored the motivation to engage and participate in user- generated-content on social media. Consequently, the Uses and Gratification theory (UGT) argues that every platform is unique and independent, thus, TikTok needs to be studied independently to fully understand its workings in this regard (Phua et al., 2017). Besides the apparent gap of literature on TikTok, it is evident that there are inadequate studies on the influence of short videos during the COVID -19 pandemic. Hence, these gaps present the opportunity for the researcher to investigate the platform.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current study is driven by Katz and Blumler's (1973) Uses and Gratification Theory, which explains how and why people seek and consume a particular media to satisfy their needs. The theory is a reaction to the conventional mass media research emphasizing the sender and the message (Oliver & Nabi, n.d.).The UGT disagrees with other media effect theories such as the Magic Bullet Theory that questions what media do to people: the passive audience approach. Instead, the UGT focuses on the active approach; what people do with media? The audience has power over their media consumption and assumes an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives (Peirce, 2007). Unlike other theoretical perspectives, the UGT holds that media content consumers are in charge of choosing media that meet their desires and needs to achieve gratification.

In other words, this theory has a user/audience-centred approach. This explains why the participants of this study actively used TikTok for their needs and gratification during the lockdown period in Nigeria. Furthermore, the theory opines that media is a pervasive product, and the audiences are the consumers of the same product. With the advent of social media, this assertion is widespread, and media products could be found almost on every device, both mobile and immobile. Hence, because of social media's common availability, the study population used the platform during social isolation to mitigate boredom and made other striking discoveries about themselves. The Uses and Gratification theory is mostly dependent on *why* active audiences make certain decisions based on their expectations and desires. Besides, Perse (2014) argues that studies have revealed that audience gratifications can be derived from at least three different sources:

- Media content.
- Exposure to the media.
- The social context in which one is exposed to the media.

## METHOD/PROCEDURE

The current study adopted a qualitative perspective; precisely, thematic analysis was employed in analysing the interviews. Thematic analysis is an approach used for identifying codes, patterns or themes in a qualitative study. Qualitative methods are incredibly diverse, complex and nuanced (Holloway & Todres, 2003), and thematic analysis is a fundamental method for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2006); this reason makes the method very flexible and easily adaptable. The foregoing assertion is one of the reasons this study adopted thematic analysis as its method.

This study purposively adopted ten young adults that are using TikTok during the COVID -19 lockdown as its population. The reason for this population is because, reflexively, the main author, a young male adult, equally got immersed in TikTok during the pandemic; he has the knowledge and experience of using the app. Scholars (Peshkin, 1988; Eisner, 1999) have affirmed that it is critical to be aware of our subjective selves and the role that the reflexivity self plays in research because being aware is better than assuming we can be rid of our personal views. Being aware of

the subjective-self entails knowing the qualities that will enhance the current study as well as the belief the researcher has about using TikTok amidst the pandemic. The authors believe that these attributes and their firm understanding and knowledge of using TikTok put them in the right position to conduct the current study. In pointing out their reflexive self in this study, the authors intend to "see what counts," as Eisner (1999) argues that the ability to see what counts is what differentiates a novice from an expert. The author carried out the study with an open mind rather than being confined to only seeing what they think should be in the study. By using the app during the pandemic, the researchers gained insights into the experiences of young adults use of TikTok rather than to allow their biases to interfere with what they see.

Due to the difficulty of meeting face-to-face amidst the COVID -19 pandemic, a majority of the interviewees opted for a technology-mediated interview, thereby, making the researcher adopt computer technology to conduct the interviews. The author employed the use of email, WhatsApp messenger, and telephone calls in carrying the interviews with the ten interviewees (5 males, 5 females) that are resident in five different states in Nigeria, Abuja, Anambra, Delta, Enugu, and Benue state. The ages of the interviewees range from 19 to 31. Adler and Adler (1998) argues that six to twelve interviewees are ideal when studying a population that is difficult to access. The present study adopted ten interviewees because the respondents were challenging to locate due to the lockdown, and the novelty of TikTok also made the research population scarce. However, the quality of the analysis and the dignity, and time invested in analysing interviews are fundamental rather than quantity (Baker & Edward, 2012), and qualitative research is built on a convincing analytical narrative that is based on richness, complexity and details rather than on statistical logics.

One major pitfall of technology-mediated interviews is the inability of the researchers to thoroughly study the body movements of the participants- the kinetics of interviews. However, the responses from, especially, the WhatsApp messenger interviews revealed how some of the interviewees used emojis to express their feelings. For ethical concerns, the study did not use the real names of the participants; instead, it used code names; for instance, "interviewee 1."

For the purpose of clarity, the study followed Braun & Clarke (2006), steps for conducting a thematic analysis. Hence, the data for the study was analysed following the laid down steps:

**Familiarising with the data**: the researchers immersed themselves in the data by repeatedly reading the interviews in order to grasp a deeper sense of it. Besides,

the data was collected through interactive means; the author began the analysis with some prior knowledge of the data and some inceptive initial analytic interests and insights. During this stage, the author took notes and made ideas for possible coding.

**Generate initial codes:** This stage was initiated after the researchers have read and got familiarised with the data, and have generated an opening list of ideas about what is interesting the data. The researchers started producing initial codes from the data at this phase. The researchers are concerned with addressing the research objective and analysed the data with this in mind. The researchers coded each segment of data that captured something interesting about the research objective. The interview text was coded gradually. Hence, doing a more inductive analysis, the study used line-by-line coding to code every single line. Open coding was employed; that means there were no pre-set codes; the codes were developed and modified through the coding process. The coding reduced the abundant interview transcript into a manageable piece. There are different ways to code, but the coding was done manually, using pens and different colour of highlighters to make through the transcript. It is pertinent to state that the coding process and procedure is an integral part of data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994), as researchers are organising data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). Nonetheless, the coded data is different from the units of analysis, that is, the themes which are (often) broader. The themes, which was developed in the next stage, are where the interpretative analysis of the data happens, and in relation to which arguments about the phenomenon being examined are made (Boyatzis, 1998).

Boyatzis (1998), states two approaches or levels to conducting thematic analysis-the semantic level and latent level. A thematic analysis usually focuses mainly on one level, and in some cases both. With a semantic perspective, the themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data, and the researchers were not searching for anything beyond what a respondent said or what is written. While the latent approach goes beyond the explicit or semantic meaning to interpreting hidden insights in what a participant said or a text. For the present study, the authors focused explicitly on the semantic level in the analysis of the interview.

**Search for themes:** This stag re-focuses the analysis on a broader level of themes, rather than codes. It entails the sorting of the different codes into prospective themes and aggregating all the necessary coded data extracts within the identified themes. Precisely, the researchers analysed the codes, and considered how different codes combined to form an overarching theme. As Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, there are no laid down routes or rules about what makes a theme. A theme is essentially

characterised by its significance. For instance, we had several codes that are related to healing, therapeutic, and relieving effects of TikTok. These codes were merged into an original theme called "The Therapy of TikTok". At the end of this phase, with a collection of themes, or sub-themes, and all excerpts of interviews that have been coded in relation to them becomes evident. At this point, we start to have a sense of the significance of individual themes in relation to the study. The themes for this study were predominately descriptive, i.e. they described patterns in the data relevant to the current study's research objective.

**Review themes:** At stage four, the researchers refined, modify and developed the preliminary themes that were created in stage three. At this juncture, it was clear that some themes are not really fitted. For instance, separate themes were collapsed into one. In doing this, the researchers considered Patton's (1990) dual criteria for judging categories, that is, internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. The authors were able to achieve a reasonable degree of coherence within themes, and each theme is distinct from the other. Also, the researchers garnered all the data that is relevant to each theme. To achieve this, the authors used the 'cut and paste' function in Microsoft Word.

**Name and define themes:** Haven got a satisfactory thematic map of the data, the authors defined and further refined the themes that were presented analysis, and these themes were analysed within the data set. By "defined" and "refined", the authors identified the import of what each theme is about, and determined what aspect of the data each theme captures. The researchers tried to maintain simple themes. Getting a theme to say or do too much might cause it to be diverse or complex. The authors achieved this by going to and fro the collated data extracts for each theme and organising them into a distinct and coherent account with an accompanying narrative. Overall, the essence of naming and defining themes is to identify the essence of what each theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Writing the report:** As with the tradition with research, the end of every study produces some sort of report. In this study, the authors' report of the analysis provides sufficient pieces of evidence of the themes within the data set. They chose vivid instances that capture the essence of the point they demonstrated, without unnecessary complexity. The analytic narrative went beyond the description of the data to arguments in relation to the research objectives.

## RESULTS

After the analysis of data, the study uncovered four overarching themes- "The Therapy of TikTok", "Expanded Networks", "Novel Discovery", and "Epiphany-Striking Realisation". This section of the paper discusses these themes in detail.

### The Therapy of TikTok

The most overarching pattern/theme found after the analysis of the interviews is the therapeutic impact of TikTok short videos. A predominant number of the interviewees pointed out that amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok became a healing and relieving partner. In the words of interviewee 5, … *TikTok videos have really help me a lot during this coronavirus period, at least watching the videos make me relax and think less…..* Another interviewee; number 9, states that *I don't know what would have become of me if not for TikTok. When I make videos I am surprised by the numbers likes and comments I received, and these likes and comments go a long way in making me happy despite the depressing effect of the COVID -19 virus on me….* Again, interviewee 7 further pinpoints the therapeutic impact of TikTok videos, precisely, on mental health. *"Staying at home is a very difficult work, and mentally, I was not stable at all. I am always thinking about my studies, friends at school, and church. In fact it is crazy, but discovery TikTok was my saviour I must tell… the videos are so funny and creative, it helped me so much, and I must tell you, I got my senses back to a great deal.*

This particular finding is central to the main objective of this study. As mentioned earlier, a significant number of the interviewees pointed out the healing impact of TikTok videos. In another words, we could say that the interviewee found a virtual therapist that enabled them to manage the negative effect of isolation during the COVID -19 pandemic**.** Despite the argument of other studies (Tiggeman & Slater, 2013; Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015; Glazzard & Stones, 2019) that social media could impact negatively on the mental health of young people, this finding on the contrary found that in certain situations, especially, as we have seen in the current situation of COVID-19, social media, and precisely, TikTok could be a great therapist, helping young people to minimise the negative effect of isolation.

## Expended Networks

Amid the isolation, the interviews attested that they expended their networks. What this means is that the interviews disclosed that through the discovery of Tik-Tok, a new network of social media, they were able to make more friends both online and offline. Interviewee 2 asserted thus: …*with the boredom of the isolation I was able to establish some level of friendship through TikTok, though I don't know most of them personally, we bonded during the COVID isolation period…* In similar term, interviewee 8 explained how he made both online and offline friend. …*discovery TikTok is a plus for me, and I found that some of my old secondary classmates were on it. …to my surprise I stumbled on someone that looks like me, and the resemblance is so huge, and today we are good friends.* Interviewee 6 reiterated how she has made more friends online and purposely searched through TikTok to see if he can find the short videos of her offline friends. … *It has really added to the numbers of social media platform I am currently on, and the number of connections I have… I intentionally asked some of my friends if they are on TikTok, and if they say yes, I go and check out their videos to really see what they are posting.*

Some of the statements by the interviewees corroborated some of the arguments (Ellison et al., 2007; Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009) that people use social network sites to search for new friends, and also consolidate on existing friendships. The use of TikTok short videos during the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the interviews to make new friends online, also search and consolidate their existing friendship.

## Novel Discovery

Amidst the COVID -19 lockdown, a significant number of the interviewees indicated that they discovered TikTok during the period just like Klug (2020), argued that the short video app became famous as a result of the COVID-19 related social distancing and the compulsory lockdown. Interviewee 10 said. …*saw a TikTok video for the first time on Twitter when Donjazzy was making some funny joke… and I decided to explore it myself, very hilarious thing…* In the words of interviewee 1, "*The corona thing made me know what TikTok is… I was just seeing videos, especially on Instagram, and the way the video are made are so exciting and creative.* Interviewee 5 further described how the app became his favourite when he explored it. …*this app is the bomb*

*at the moment, though I have been on TikTok since late January but the lockdown period made my discovered more things about it.* At some point in the text of the analysis, other interviewees expressed their excitement at the discovery of TikTok. This excitement may be related to the negative effect of the lockdown, for instance, boredom.

Currently, the short video industry is booming, and TikTok plays a pivotal role in the Internet industry. The reason for the increasing popularity of TikTok is that it has a variety of personal marketing modalities, and its algorithm technology engenders its booming usage (Xu et al., 2019). Besides, the COVID -19 pandemic and its antecedents have further popularised the app, making it one of the most downloaded during the lockdown (Yanitsa, 2020; Most Popular Lockdown Apps, 2020).

### Epiphany- Striking Realization

Aside from other themes as discussed above, the analysis of data revealed that the participants of the study experienced moments of striking discoveries of their talents. During the period of the lockdown, it is safe to say that many of the participants may have experienced boredom. However, their experiences of idleness and boredom lead them to discover TikTok, and through the creation of 15 minutes TikTok videos, *epiphanic* episodes were unearthed. These words were the words of interviewee 3: … *my videos have become very popular among my network and in fact these videos I made during this COVID period as made me to discover some hidden talent about me. I could be a comedian, you know!* In the same light, interviewee 10 revealed how the likes and comments he gets made him feel like a mini-celebrity. *The comments and likes are big, and they are very encouraging… I am a COVID -19 mini-celebrity now… maybe I will take this thing to another level, and finally make some money from these videos.… I never believe I can have many followers on TikTok as I have at the moment, and the followership is equally adding up on my other social media handles like Instagram and Twitter… I see myself becoming an influencer if I keep up the numbers.* The preceding thought was the thought of interviewee 4, a female interviewee.

The above theme strengthens the argument (Akram & Kumar, 2017; Udenze & Oshionebo, 2020) about the positive effect of social media on society. Precisely, on the importance of short videos on social media, this finding aligns with Liu et al., (2019) argument on the importance of short social media videos, especially when they are packed with extensive entertainment features. This significant finding is due

to the participants utilisation of the artistic attributes of TikTok. As mentioned earlier, TikTok allows users to add attributes such as stickers, text, or visual effects to videos, and creating videos on TikTok is predominantly based on musical snippets, often popular songs, and users' lip- syncing the lyrics and performing to the music (Lu and Lu, 2019; Anderson, 2020).

## DISCUSSION

This study attempts to explore how young adults use TikTok in minimising the negative effect of isolation; loneliness during the COVID -19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria. Consequently, the findings of this study are discussed, and new ideas on this subject are revealed.

The participants of the study reported some positive impact of subscribing to TikTok short videos during the period. A significant number of the interviewees aver that the time they spent on TikTok positively impacted on their mental health, and it also mitigated boredom, thereby reducing the negative effect of the compulsory isolation. As a participant rightly responded, "discovering TikTok was my saviour…" Despite being subscribed to other social media platforms, the present study found that the participants used TikTok to increase the volume of their online and offline networks- friends. There was a sudden of realisation of hidden talents by the interviewees as they used TikTok during the pandemic. A considerable number of interviewees in the present study reiterated how they could possibly create careers like stand-up comedians, brand influencers, and even become celebrities.

However, in spite of the findings by other scholars (Tiggeman & Slater, 2013; Sampasa- Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015; Glazzard & Stones, 2019) that social media could impact negatively on the mental health of young people, the findings of the current study are on the contrary. Instead, in a specific situation, especially, as we have seen in the current situation of COVID -19, social media, and precisely, TikTok is a healer, helping young people to curtail the negative impact of compulsory isolation. This finding strengthens the belief the social media can indeed be a source of managing our mental health. The COVID -19 lockdown came with many negative effects, and we can imagine the pressure that may be exacted on our mental health if we are to stay in compulsory isolation without any form of entertainment or cyber-interaction. The novel discovery and utilisation of TikTok short videos enabled the participants of the present study to man-

age their mental health and further rediscover themselves. Due to the funny features of TikTok videos, as found by this study, the authors claims that TikTok short videos could be a phenomenon that could be adopted by health professionals, especially psychotherapists in managing or treating patients.

Further, another implication of the present study is, through the discovering and use of TikTok short videos during the lockdown, this study argues that social media may be an avenue that could assist young people in discovery and harnessing their hidden talents. Despite the findings (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014; Singh et al., 2017; Lad, 2017) that social media has impacted negatively on young people endeavours like academic, business, entertainment etc. Studies have shown that young people are the most users of social media sites, and from this finding, it is safe to argue that social media platforms are not necessarily bad, but the use to which individuals, particularly young people put it to makes it bad or good to the individual. While TikTok helped the participants of the present study to mitigate the negative effect of the lockdown during the COVID -19 pandemic, the same app also helped the participants to discover hidden, but marketable talents about themselves.

## LIMITATIONS/DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

TikTok is a new phenomenon that has witnessed a booming rise among social media users, especially young people. This research is a step toward understanding the therapeutic impact of TikTok on young adults amidst the COVID -19 lockdown. Hence, this study contributes to the dearth of literature on TikTok studies, and the use of social media by young people in minimising the negative effect of isolation, especially on their health. Nonetheless, the author draws attention to some of the limitations of the study.

While qualitative research methods are flexible and are ideal for garnering an in-depth understanding of attitudes and experiences, future studies may employ a quantitative approach. One advantage of quantitative methods is its utilisation of a large sample size. Besides, future studies could use mixed methods or what other scholars call triangulation. Despite the arguments that young people often use social media, and TikTok is not an exception, as we have seen in the body of this paper, and even as the present study has explored, further studies should investigate the utilisation of the app by older people. Future studies could equally explore age differences in

the usage of the app. The utilisation of social media in the health and related sectors cannot be underestimated, and as a funny and creative short video app, future studies could seek to ascertain how health professionals may be using the app to further health issues.

## CONCLUSION

Although social media has challenged human endeavours, forcing us to incorporate them into our daily lives, but the outbreak of the COVID -19 pandemic has made the world to further appreciate the existence of Web 2.0. We are aware of how institutions and organisations reverted to purely online administration, and the present study which sought to investigate how the short video app, TikTok helped young adults to manage the negative effect of the COVID -19 lockdown found some positive impact of the app on their health during the lockdown. Importantly, the results of the present study, which is a considerable contribution to knowledge in the limited literature on TikTok studies is that the short video app helped the interviewees to manage the devastating impact of the lockdown by improving their mental health and further helped rediscovered themselves. However, future investigations are necessary to validate the conclusions that are drawn from this study, and the data of this study suggest that we still have a huge vacuum to cover as it pertains to TikTok and health-related studies.

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# Pearls in the COVID-19 pandemic: The case of older adults' lived experiences in Ghana

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## Abstract

This study investigates older Ghanaian adults' lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic along the trajectory of social, healthcare, childcare, self-care and humanitarian dimensions and how they navigated the effects thereof, utilizing interpretive methodology based qualitative dataset. The sample [n=10] was selected using purposive sampling technique. The paper finds that the current pandemic poses significant social challenges. The restrictions on human social movements has implications for social isolation. Social isolation can lead to loneliness and depression. Essentially, loneliness and long-term social distancing physiologically have the propensity to decrease the ability of an individual to fight infections and inflammations. In conse-quence, the study participants adopted a myriad of survival strategies such as social bonding with grandchildren, keeping busy, fending for and socialising children outside the traditional classroom environment and yet keeping them focused academically. These activities facilitate social interaction among older adults and children with implication for bridging the childcare gap that the closure of schools has brought about with some form of relief for working mothers. It also serves as an income generating avenue in disguise albeit meagre. In conclusion, more reflection on and the study of the social, psychological/emotional, self-care and childcare challenge dimensions of the pandemic is imperative.

**Keywords:** older adults, COVID-19 pandemic, challenges, coping mechanisms, childcare.

## Pérolas na pandemia COVID-19: o caso das experiências vividas por idosos no Gana

### Resumo

Este estudo investiga as experiências vivi-das pela população idosa no Gana durante a pandemia COVID-19, ao longo da trajetória das dimensões sociais, de saúde, de cuidado infantil, de autocuidado e humanitária e a forma como eles percorreram os seus efeitos, utilizando um conjunto de dados qualitati-vos baseados em metodologia interpretativa. A amostra [n = 10] foi selecionada usando a técnica de amostragem intencional. O arti-go conclui que a atual pandemia apresenta desafios sociais significativos. As restrições aos movimentos sociais humanos têm impli-cações para o isolamento social. O isolamen-

to social pode levar à solidão e à depressão. Essencialmente, a solidão e o distanciamento social de longo prazo, fisiologicamente, têm a propensão de diminuir a capacidade de um indivíduo em combater infeções e inflamações. Em consequência, os participantes do estudo adotaram uma miríade de estratégias de sobrevivência, como o vínculo social com os netos, mantendo-se ocupados, cuidando e socializando as crianças fora do ambiente da sala de aula tradicional e, ainda, mantendo- -as focadas academicamente. Essas atividades facilitam a interação social entre adultos mais velhos e as crianças, colmatando a lacuna de cuidado infantil que o encerramento das escolas trouxe e aliviando as mães que trabalham. Também serve como uma forma disfarçada de gestão de rendimento, embora escassa. Em conclusão, é fundamental que haja mais reflexão e estudo das dimensões sociais, psicológicas / emocionais, do autocuidado e do cuidado infantil da pandemia.

**Palavras-chave:** população idosa, pandemia do covid19, desafios, mecanismos de enfrentamento, cuidados infantis.

## INTRODUCTION

The novel coronavirus is one of the most recent deadliest global pandemics which has affected both developed & developing countries (Chanda-Kapata, Kapata, & Zumla, 2020). The World Health Organisation (WHO) on 12 January 2020 officially announced that the novel coronavirus first affected the inhabitants of Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China in December 2019, caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). Novel coronavirus cases have shown significantly lesser mortality rates than the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (WHO, 2020). Inasmuch as COVID-19 infects people age notwithstanding, there is evidence that suggests that two (2) groups of people are at a higher risk of contracting the severe COVID-19 disease namely older persons and individuals with underlying medical conditions are the most at risk groups. This study focuses on the former category of people. Further, older individuals are predisposed to diverse challenges such as neglect, maltreatment and violence, financial constraints or poverty (De-Graft Aikins, Kushitor, Sanuade, Dakey, Dovie, & Kwabena-Adade, 2016; UN, 2020), isolation or loneliness that may complicate such a situation.

The current coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has induced various problems that up until now are insufficiently addressed, some of which are reflective of under-

lying social and other challenges worldwide (Rothan, & Byrareddy, 2020). In addition to medical and technological, social as well as psychological problems and underlying philosophical challenges require better addressing in order to further improve the approach to this pandemic and arguably to future pandemics and other global crises with the plight of the elderly in focus.

The COVID-19 disease was declared a pandemic by WHO on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). This disease has caused a lot of havoc to human lives in diverse ways across the globe. For instance, social confinement became mandatory, affecting the entire population entailing older persons. Such confinement has affected the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of older people. These public health measures, albeit necessary, have the propensity to impact older individuals' health and well-being, due to the restricted face-to-face relationships with their significant others; cancellation or plans postponement; uncertainty about the future; and the potential threat that the virus may pose to themselves and their families. Essentially, the mental health impact of the economic recession cannot be ignored and may be cumulative.

Argumentatively, The Public Health Agency notes with Sweden in focus that susceptibility to the virus pertains to the fact that "high age is the main risk factor. This is shown in available studies on the outbreak of COVID-19. Therefore, those who are 70 years or older are in a risk group" (The Public Health Agency, 2020). In consequence, the Public Health Agency, which has the national responsibility for the public with the emergence of the pandemic alleged that "people over 70 need help limiting their contact with other people . . . Now is the time to try to isolate them as much as possible" (Press Conference, 2020).

Yet, active ageing is the view that the negative aspects of ageing can be countered through an active lifestyle (FUTURAGE, 2011). According to Blaakilde (2007), this view in combination with the concept of 'successful ageing' makes it the duty of older people to demonstrate a high degree of activity in order to show that they are not being a burden on society. However, research has revealed that older people subjected to child-like treatments have the propensity to develop passivity, decreased independence, a withdrawal from responsibility and the acceptance of a marginalised role in society (Nilsson, Ekstam, & Andersson, 2018; Nilsson, Ekstam, Axmon, & Andersson, 2021). It is plausible from the previous paragraph that being categorised by state authorities as old and vulnerable could have an impact on the self-image and future health of the individuals within the targeted age group. A potential consequence that was not sufficiently considered in the discussion of how society should deal with the

outbreak of the pandemic. Following this analogy, the fact for Foucault demonstrates that different epidemics such as leprosy, the plague, and later smallpox among others have been historically handled differently, serving as empirical examples to describe three historically different forms of exercising power. Foucault points to a gradual, but partly overlapping, shift from a sovereign force directed at the individual in pre-modern society, entire population in modern society, what is known today as policy, to the evocation of a new mentality, what Foucault calls "governmentality", among the citizens, through neoliberal individualisation and responsibilisation in post-modern society, where individuals take increased responsibility for governing themselves (Foucault, 2007; Sarasin, 2020).

Social distancing has come forth as one of the essential protocols guarding against the COVID-19 pandemic which encompasses measures such as avoiding crowded places and not leaving homes unnecessarily (Singu, Acharya, Challagundla, & Byrareddy, 2020). Social distancing has been the key to flattening the curve and decreasing transmission of COVID-19. In neighbourhoods that are crowded, social distancing may not be feasible. This puts individuals living in crowded neighbourhoods at a higher risk of becoming ill with the virus, as well as increases the rate of transmission of the same. A thin line exists between trying to decrease the spread of COVID-19 and preventing the progression of economic decline. It is evident that social distancing and quarantine methods are helping to flatten the curve, however, at the expense of the country's economic stability (Singu et al., 2020). During the lockdown, nonessential workers were directed to stay at home and only go out to the grocery store or to a pharmacy if needed. Social distancing was to be followed strictly during lockdown.

An individual's well-being base is constituted by social support. A study has showed that higher amounts of social support were associated with lower levels of atherosclerosis in women predisposed to a higher risk for CVD. IG (2020) demonstrated in a study in California that social support among Mexican adults served as a barrier against the detriments of the discrimination they encountered.

People have been running errands for the elderly who are more vulnerable to falling ill with the virus. During times of a global health crisis in which there is a call for social isolation, such as is in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to find ways to maintain communication and social cohesion to preserve each other's well-being.

Older people encounter challenges due to their inability to care for themselves, loneliness due to the loss of family relations including social change, the lack of spouses and children, modernisation, urbanisation, migration, multiple careers including busy work schedules (Dovie, 2019). This has significant implications for coping with the situation at hand.

Coping refers to a state of capability between the individual and the environment that allows a person to maintain a sense of well-being or satisfaction with quality of life. Coping strategies may be active, confrontational and purposeful or they may be passive, emphasising avoidance, minimisation of threat, or resignation. Adaptation refers to a range of behaviours an individual uses to meet demands namely developing habits to confront problems and to manage frustration and anxiety (Quadagno, 2014).

Three adaptive skills are especially helpful in coping with stressful life situations (Quadagno, 2014, p. 162). The first is the ability to marshal social support, which provides a buffer against stress. Second, ability to compensate for losses in social roles by substituting new roles in order to feel less lonely, remain more active and involved in relationships and find greater meaning in life. Third, ability to modify one's environment either architecturally or by moving to a more suitable home can reduce stress and enhance life satisfaction and emotional well-being.

Gender determines who gives care and who receives the same (Schatz & Seeley, 2015). In East and Southern Africa, both men and women live with impacts of the care deficit. However, sexual division of labour has meant women predominantly fill the void in care (Oppong, 2006).

Ghana still has a high burden of infectious diseases and a very growing burden of non-communicable diseases (De-Graft Aikins & Apt, 2016) that must also be tackled within available resources. There is an increasing burden of chronic diseases or conditions among other health challenges (Dovie, 2019) which may be compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. That notwithstanding, little was known that less than three months into the new year of 2020, the majority of the world will be fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. This virus is causing havoc and it is not selective in whom it attaches itself to, whether poor, wealthy, an older adult, or a new-born child. Older persons and individuals who have chronic heart diseases, lung diseases, diabetes, cancer and hypertension are at higher risk for more serious COVID-19 illnesses and deaths (UN, 2020). This is because the immune systems of human beings grow weaker with age, making it more challenging for older adults to fight off infectious diseases. Further,

chronic diseases are more common with age, with the propensity of compromising the immune system and making people more vulnerable to serious health complications. However, the advice given, and how the elderly are able to protect themselves varies between wealth and crucially, age. For many families there will be a concern about how to entertain children while also conducting and keeping up to date with schoolwork, adults' own respective work responsibilities, as well as financial worries (Marston, Musselwhite, & Hadley, 2020).

The risk for severe illness with regard to COVID-19 increases with age, with older adults at highest risk (CDC, 2020). According to WHO (2020) COVID-19 has especially changed older adults' ability to stay socially connected and how they are perceived, lack of physical contact with other family members, etc, and other activities; and anxiety and fear of illness and death. Older persons risk being disproportionately affected by physical distancing measures, since isolation could have a serious effect on their mental health (UN, 2020). Restrictions on normal ageing is recognised, little research has been conducted or exists on the adaptation strategies used to alternate such restrictions (Hsieh, Wu, & Tang, 2016). Further, many COVID-19- older person related studies (e.g. CDC, 2020; Musango, Nundoochan, & Kirigia, 2020; Rivera-Rodrigues, & Urdinola, 2020; Singu et al., 2020) focus on the health impacts of the disease and thus overlook socio-economic factors. There is yet to be out in Ghana, work on the resilient responses of older adults to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is on the basis of this that this study was set out to fill such a gap in the Ghanaian literature, The objective of this present study is therefore to explore older adults' lived experiences based adaptation strategies employed in coping with the effects of COVID-19 pandemic including a potential to shift the perspective on older persons from that of vulnerability and risk to strength and opportunities.

Use is made of conceptual framework comprising the framework of Engel's (1980) biopsychosocial model and Lazarus' (1993) coping theory and engaged in study design, data analysis and writing of this paper. These frameworks conceptualise mutually influential relationships between individual, biological and contextual factors as important to older people's experiences, impacts, coping, adaptation and well-being (Engels, 1980; Lazarus, 1993). These theoretical frameworks support a strength-focused approach and consideration of the multi-level factors – such as those presented in this paper – that pertain to experiences, challenges and coping among the Ghanaian older adult.

Coping methodologies are viewed as those endeavours, both conduct and mental, that a person utilises to suppress, diminish or limit and endure distressing occasions (Sreeramareddy et al., 2007). Coping approaches are additionally categorised into emotion-focused and problem-focused coping techniques (Lazarus, 1993). Whereas emotion-focused coping techniques comprise concentrating on the positive, self-criticism, unrealistic reasoning, minding your own business, separation, and decrease in anxiety, problem-focused coping techniques consist of looking for social help.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Setting
The study was conducted in Tema in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

### Design
The study adopted interpretive phenomenology to investigate the lived experiences of Ghanaian older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach of phenomenology enabled the researcher to gain in-depth understanding of the interconnections between participants' lived experiences vis-à-vis COVID-19 pandemic impacts. Interestingly, the lived experiences are holistic and inter-related such that it is sometimes difficult to delineate one experience from the other.

### Target Population and Sampling
The target population was older Ghanaian citizens who were willing to take part in the study. Persons who had experienced the COVID-19 pandemic were recruited for the study. The study was explained to all the participants and those who volunteered and met the inclusion criteria (60+, resident in Tema, experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, informed consent) were selected. Suffice it to say that per these criteria, the study participants were purposively selected.

### Participants and Data Collection
Ten (10) participants were purposively selected (5 women and 5 men) through purposive sampling. Individual interviews were conducted in English, audio-taped, transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis procedures. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and rigour was ensured through prolonged engage-

ment and member checking. The ages of the study participants ranged from 60 to 84 years, whereas their educational backgrounds ranged from middle school leaving certificate to doctorate degree level (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Participant demographics.*

| Respondent | Gender | Age | Marital status | Education | Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | Female | 75 | Married | Diploma | Retired Social worker |
| R2 | Male | 70 | Widower | Middle School leaver | Retiree |
| R3 | Female | 71 | Divorced | Middle School leaver | Retiree |
| R4 | Male | 65 | Married | First degree | Retiree |
| R5 | Female | 69 | Widow | Middle School leaver | Retiree |
| R6 | Female | 67 | Widow | Middle School leaver | Retired Teacher |
| R7 | Male | 84 | Widower | Doctorate degree | Retired Lecturer |
| R8 | Female | 73 | Divorced | Diploma | Retired Labour officer |
| R9 | Male | 75 | Married | First degree | Retiree |
| R10 | Male | 66 | Married | First degree | Retiree |

Source: Field data

### Data Collection Procedures

The individual interviews were conducted in English. The interviews lasted between 40 to 45 minutes. In order to elicit free individual expressions, open ended questions were posed. In furtherance to that, probes were used to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The author who is experienced in qualitative interviewing collected all the data. However, the choice of location and time of interviews were at the convenience of the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded with a digital voice recorder with the consent of the participants. The ten (10) interviews were conducted in this study between March and October, 2020. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and field notes were written on context and non-verbal behaviour during the interviews. Reflections during data collection were also written as part of field notes to ensure that the views of the participants of the study were duly represented. The study was conducted at individual participants' homes and/or chosen locations in Tema.

The researcher's positionality and subjectivity including the participants' shaped the epistemological process, and to some extent obfuscating the notion of voice in the presentation of data. Sharing of knowledge is an integral aspect of the research process in this paper including the demonstrations of how the data are meaningful,

appeal to diverse audiences and engage stakeholders in the relevance of the study. The use of voices/quotations or texts depict an interpretation of findings. This in fact is the researcher's way of acknowledging that the voices of researcher's and the research participants are not the same. However, they are interconnected. In essence, the material generated in this paper are co-constructions, representations of interactive processes between the researcher and research participants.

Incorporating the voices of the researcher with those of the research participants in the process of dissemination is a significant component of the qualitative research. Structurally, the paper stresses and honours the participants' own voices as generative of meaning and knowledge in the presentation of this qualitative research write up. This style of dissemination effort is reminiscent of the positionality of the researcher in relation to choosing what to be included or not.

### Data Management and Analysis

In this study, concurrent data analysis was undertaken following the processes of qualitative analysis proposed by Collaizzi's (1998) phenomenological method in seven distinct stages: the audio-taped data were transcribed. Thereafter, the transcripts were (1) read and re-read to fully understand the lived experiences of the participants. The transcripts were coded and similar codes were grouped together. The author including an independent person coded the data independently, after which differences were discussed in order to ascertain a consensus on the most appropriate code for a piece of data. Using thematic analysis, they systematically coded all data and then organised the codes, based on some similarity, into larger and larger categories that may lead to a hierarchical structure of codes and subthemes. Themes, along with supporting excerpts from the data, are presented in the final report, including description of those themes in relation to the research questions. (2) Significant descriptions were extracted from the transcribed interviews of identified phrases or sentences that were directly related to the participants' COVID-19 pandemic experiences. (3) The meaning of each significant statement were outlined. (4) The first three steps for each description, and creation of themes based on which formulated meanings of the descriptions were repeated. Two independent persons from Tema were purposively recruited to develop themes generated in the study. Further, generated themes and sub-themes were discussed and discrepancies were resolved by going back to the data and making sure that the theme and sub-themes accurately represented the participants' worldviews. (5) Exhaustive descriptions were integrat-

ed from the results. (6) The exhaustive descriptions were summarised to formulate the fundamental structure of the phenomenon; and (7) In the study, trustworthiness was maintained through a number of processes. First the author collected all the data which ensured that similar questioning techniques were used. The utilisation of the thematic analysis approach ensured that themes were fully developed. Member checking - asking participants follow-up questions were undertaken as a way of confirming the themes and sub-themes generated during thematic analysis. This ensured that any gaps in the data were filled and the participants reviewed and confirmed the themes generated as a true representation of their worldviews.

A detailed audit trail was kept in ensuring that significant emphasis was placed on the methodological and analytical decisions made throughout the study and that the researcher critically reflected and evaluated the decisions made, with a reflection on decisions pertaining to key research methodology. This was undertaken by maintaining a log of all research activities, the development of memos, maintaining research journals, and documented all data collection and analysis procedures throughout the study. Also, this entailed the collection of raw data; data reduction and analysis notes; data reconstruction and synthesis products; the writing of process notes; materials related to intentions and dispositions; as well as preliminary development information. The examination of these sources of data facilitated better assessment as to whether the findings of the study are situated in the data, etc, and a reflection of how the study unfolded.

The data was managed with NVivo software version 11. In the process of data management. The analytical process proffered by Bazeley and Jackson (2014) was followed, using five (5) distinct steps. A project was created that comprised all the documents, coding data and related information that assisted in the process of data analysis while saving the NVivo project. The transcribed interview files were labelled. Qualitative data files were imported. Chunks of data were then coded. This included finding obvious themes as well as auto-coding. The codes formed a pattern. The passages of texts were compared and contrasted for ways in which they were similar and different. A thematic multi-case analysis was employed, the comparative concentration of which was on individual cases as well as the preservation of their uniqueness.

A chunk of data in the project document under a particular node was taken through the highlight of the requisite text using the mouse and pulling the highlighted text to the identified node using the coder. This included finding obvious themes as well as auto-coding. Subsequently, multiple codes were assigned to the

same chunk of the texts including going through the same process. The codes formed a pattern. The passages of texts were compared and contrasted for ways in which they were similar and different. The emergent concepts, for example, were all retirement aspiration and paid work in retirement responses. As part of the final step, there was a review of the following: the start of the analysis, going further with concepts, categories and themes including narrative and discourse. Memos were used to tell the story of the research by adding descriptions. The knowledge developed from the data was reported.

The resultant activities were recorded in discussion memos. These strategies were integrated into the process of learning from the data. A thematic multi-case analysis was employed, the comparative focus of which was on individual cases including the preservation of their uniqueness. Miles and Huberman (1994) have succinctly expressed the goals of this type of analysis including generalisability.

The themes appeared as major findings and were used to create headings in the results section of the article. The interrelation between themes involved the use of narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis. The themes were interconnected into a storyline. From these explorations, the researcher sought to understand how people construct meanings and actions, as preparations for understanding why people act the way they do (Charmaz 2006). The final step entailed the selection, filtering and viewing of the predefined report for the study.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Tema in the Greater Accra region, Kasoa in the Central region and the Ashanti region were locked down due to the COVID-19 pandemic from March 30th to April 19th 2020. However, in the April 19th 2020, the lockdown was lifted after three weeks of its existence.

### Challenges
The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic cut across socio-cultural, health and humanitarian dimensions. These have been articulated below.

### Socio-cultural dimension

Prior to the upsurge of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana, the study partici-
pants found themselves in a variety of living arrangements that ranged from living
alone through living with a caregiver and a daughter and her family via to living
with spouses. These have been exemplified as follows:

> A week prior to the COVID-19 pandemic induced lockdown, my caregiver left
> for her parents', leaving me alone. As a result, my daughter arranged for me to
> go stay with my younger sister for a while because she was outside the region
> (Maamle).

> I live alone so the lockdown further prevented me from receiving visitors even
> from my children (Ekow).

> … because of my retirement from active service, I am a bit isolated from
> masses of people as used to be the case anyway. But with this COVID-19 pan-
> demic's lockdown, this has been further compounded (Kofi Jones).

> I have been living with my daughter and family ever since her first birth about
> four years ago. And so I have been with them before the emergence of the COV-
> ID-19 pandemic (Adzo).

> I have lived alone for many years but than during the pandemic if I had fallen
> sick I'd have called my neighbours for support (Yaa Serwa).

The findings show that from the viewpoint of the experiences of the pandemic, it
was also observed that on the one hand, the closing of schools made children avail-
able at home 24 hours per day, producing company and bonding between grandchil-
dren and grandmothers, parents/guardians and children. This is indicative of firming
up social relationships. From hindsight, this may have implications for children who
may not see their school colleagues or class mates again due to the pandemic, result-
ing in negative social relations because of the propensity not to see friends and/or
colleagues again. On the other hand, the role of the educational system in socialising
children has been clearly articulated including the fact that it assists in providing par-
ents and/or guardians to support them in terms of the number of man hours that are

spent supervising little children (and/or school going children) as well as caring for them. This is a depiction of the sharing of childcare related workload(s) among teachers and parents and/or guardians. Noteworthy is that this has been a situation since time immemorial but it has become very critical particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also seeks to bring to the fore the invaluable contribution of teachers and therefore schools to the upbringing of children worldwide. These facts have been demonstrated in the statements below:

> I understand that the virus affects older individuals more and so my children were particular about that. More importantly when I was at my sister's, I was comfortable because she had 4 grandchildren who were at home due to the pandemic, and who kept me busy with grandma this, grandma that such that I never wanted to leave the place since I enjoyed the company of the little children so much (Maamle).

> I was handling children between one month and 4 years old and so I was quite busy with such during the initial stages of the pandemic. My 4 year old grandson is a handful, he had started school long before the pandemic and having him at home full time was tedious, and I must confess a lot of work. The situation has been the same since March 2020 till date. He keeps me constantly on my toes (Adzo).

Arguably, parents have had these children and therefore it is their prerogative to spend time with them. The key challenge with this is the tedious nature of it.

The other issues of concern brought on board by the pandemic entail the fact that parents were more often than not, not at home with their children as has been the case prior to the emergence of the pandemic. However, with the pandemic, parents and/or guardians were at home to a large extent particularly because of the lockdown and the running of shifts at work places induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is on the basis of this that Asaaba intimates that:

> My daughter was on maternity leave during this whole time up until somewhere in July 2020. But her husband had some time off during the pandemic, which was spent at home. Other than that they were very often out of the house due to which the little ones hardly saw them. He is often asleep either before

they leave for or return from work. This situation was not made any better with the traffic situation in our vicinity.

The proceeding quote above alludes to the fact that the pandemic has provided the opportunity for parents to see and bond with their children, a situation that seemed impossible except for vacation periods on school calender(s). This is reflective of some form of positive experience as far as the pandemic is concerned. On the other hand, the pandemic resulted in truncating the educational system and trajectory of children for nearly a year, and which could have culminated in the loss of learning or enculturation moments.

The findings show that none of the study participants had to run errands for themselves because most of what had to be done such as shopping were done for them by significant others namely sister, daughter and husband among others. In addition, the participants stated that along with the closure of schools was the turn to the use of the internet by some grandchildren which if not supervised may turn out to be problematic. But the key concerns to some of the older adults are their immobility especially during the lockdown interspersed with issues of social or physical distancing as well as the propensity of child marriages in the case of the girl child. The following observations were made:

I was not going out during the period. Besides all purchases were done at the time by my sister and others (Maamle).

My daughter and her husband do all the shopping for the house (Adzo).

Because there is no schooling for now, anytime my granddaughter is free she is online chatting and surfing the net. That is not bad, but I think this has to be supervised (Jojo).

The effects of the pandemic for me is mostly the issue of immobility but for the girl child in particular, it is child marriage (Akuba).

The police are seen on the streets enforcing social distancing, decongestion, the wearing of masks and even on our screens (Fosu).

Invariably, inasmuch as these voices are suggestive of the protection of the elderly from being infected with the coronavirus disease, it may be an indication of perhaps over dependence of older persons on significant others, thereby ascribing to them a 'vulnerable connotation. This may have implications for old age related dependency among study participants, thus barring attributes of self-reliance including what Nilsson et al. (2018) and Nilsson et al. (2021) denote as 'withdrawal from responsibility.

### Health dimension

From the viewpoint of health, the Ghanaian government's COVID-19 response strategies are to stop the importation of cases into the country via the closure of the nation's borders; containment of cases and slowdown spread; care for the sick - people with positive cases; minimisation of impact of pandemic related measures - financial issues supported by the Ministry for Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP) minister; boost domestic capacity and self- reliance e.g. produce PPEs locally with implications for the well-being of older adults.

The study also shows that none of the study participants had contracted the coronavirus as at the time of data collection. They may have stayed clear of it for one reason or the other, despite the fact that they are older, bearing in mind that not everybody will be infected by the virus, notwithstanding the fact that the region of study – the Greater Accra Region is the most infested region in Ghana. Sam said:

> I have high blood pressure but that has been kept under control. I was really worried on hearing that the COVID-19 pandemic affected older people most, predisposing them to their untimely deaths. That was all over on the news but I have narrowly escaped thus far. However, if there were to be any crisis or emergency regarding that I would have called my children to intervene (Sam).

### Humanitarian dimension

The humanitarian dimension refers to the provisions made in aid of the vulnerable (or vulnerable groups) in the society such as older persons This has become necessary because the pandemic has affected tens of thousands of people in diverse ways namely the loss of work, the lack of medical care and supplies as well as food supplies. At the global, national and local fronts, there are a myriad of organisations - e.g., Feeding America; No Kid Hungry, Meals on Wheels, the Seattle Foundation,

the CDC Foundation, NYC organisations, Save the Children and a host of others working to ensure food, aid and medical supplies are provided to the needy in society.

Older people may have benefited from donations from all walks of life, however, the most directly related donation to them has been articulated in Table 2. These have been disaggregated as follows: Naro Aged Care (120 packages); Tobinco Foundation (150 packages); MaMere (50 packages); Mission 50Plus (Osu=50; Larteh=150; Akropong 150); 50 Plus and Counting SDA (100 packages); Arklifestyle (100 packages); James Town Elders (100 packages); and Association of Ghana Elders (AGE) for 8 organisations (500 packages) (C. Mate-Kole, personal communication, April 16, 2020). The above mentioned ageing based organisations on receiving these packages on behalf of the elderly, distributed them to older people. These are reminiscent of societal response to the effects of the pandemic. It is for this reason that Rudnickand (2020) argues that societies are measured in part in relation to how they rise to the occasion of collective crises.

Table 2

*Donations distributed to the elderly*

| Item # | Organisation | Items | Ageing group | Quantity received | Source |
|--------|-------------|-------|--------------|-------------------|--------|
| 1. | Centre for Ageing Studies in collaboration with Minister/ Ministry of Finance | 1,470 food packages | Naro Aged Care | 120 packs | Personal communication |
| | | | Tobinco Foundation | 150 packs | |
| | | | MaMere | 50 packs | |
| | | | Mission 50 Plus | 350 packs for 3 organisations | |
| | | | 50 Plus and Counting | 100 packs | |
| | | | Arklifestyle | 100 packs | |
| | | | Jamestown Elders | 100 packs | |
| | | | Association of Ghana Elders (AGES) | 500 packs for 8 organisations | |

### Emerging issues

In terms of emerging issues the study participants observed that because everybody is focusing on the disease and for his/her self and so accusing others is no longer

the central focus, albeit in the short-term. Thus, the Ghanaian witch camps may not receive new entrants. They stated that:

> I have observed that there has been a reduction in witchcraft accusations. Perhaps, it is because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Abeiku).

By and large, the challenges that older individuals experienced encompassed social isolation, loneliness (both existing including that intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic), immobility to socialise, tiredness beyond the ordinary level, inability to socialise among others.

## OLD PEOPLE'S COVID-19 PANDEMIC'S COPING MECHANISM

Two (2) main coping strategies were used by the elderly in this context, namely social coping and reactive coping.

### Social coping:

Some of these social coping mechanisms are a bit restrictive especially that which bars older persons from going out to socialise and/or interact with their significant others mostly in terms of physical contact and/or being in crowded places.  This may have implications for social isolation but this has also been tempered with interaction through other means such as telephone calls, What's App, sleep or more relaxation and a host of others. This also entails listening to news on both television and radio. However, this conduit falls short of physical contact in addition to all the above but suffice it to say that it is so because the situation demands that. Significantly, staying indoors for the older people studied has become an alibi to the COVID-19 pandemic as they are of the preception that it is the only way to avoid being infected with the virus. It is for this reason that Akuba had been indoors during the whole COVID-19 pandemic. She has survived thus far by receiving food and medical supplies from her daughter and younger sister. Yaa Serwaa also lamented about her inability to attend church services with implication for her spirituality. The voices below show that:

> I have stayed indoors throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic up until now. In fact, I have not gone past the gate. I have always been inside. I

basically interact with my daughter and the caregiver. Also, I receive frequent telephone calls from my children who are both outside and within the country. I rather listen to the news more by watching the television. I also chat on What's App. I also sleep more, well, because I have nowhere to go to under the circumstances (Kwamina).

I live with my younger daughter who runs errands for me and my younger sister too buys me food supplies and prepares meals for me. I hardly visit the salon to do my hair. I just do not want to contract the disease. You see, I do not visit others and no one too visits me. I prefer that. You know, we heard that older persons easily die from the disease and this is really discomforting. But so far, so good (Akuba).

I do not go out often except if I needed to purchase groceries and so I normally get to the market for those items that are needed. I do not even go to church anymore. This is a testament of the pandemic to my religious practices but you know, all shall pass (Yaa Serwaa).
I am more often than not on social media, especially Facebook, What'sApp and Twitter for news, information and hilarious depictions for chats from family and friends (Kwamina).

I became a full time nanny, keeping me busy, mobile and active (Adzo).

I resorted to the use of telephone conversations more these days (Maamle).

I often play videogames on the internet and make video calls in order to overcome boredom (Fosu).

I bump elbows with others presently, without necessarily shaking hands with them, which though is the traditional way of going about it (Jojo).

This kind of sedentary life has implications for other health challenges.

*Reactive coping:*

This category of coping mechanism to the pandemic is related to undertaking an action that is intervention oriented. This kind of coping strategy served as a dual means of intervention, where the older person involved earn a token, keeps busy while filling the childcare gap created by the pandemic by virtue of the closure of schools, a great challenge to working mothers in particular. This has created an avenue for the nurture of school going children who thereby allow their parents the time to work including on shift basis. For instance: Essi says:

> I live with my foster son and I am less engaged. In June 2020, a neighbour and a mother came to the house and asked if she could leave her son with me, go to work and return. I took the child and not long after that several other mothers brought their children for the same purpose. As a result, I now have about 20 children aged from 5 – 12 years, who are brought to me daily from Monday to Friday, and whom I care for and teach. I earn a token from this task.

These coping mechanisms can further be categorised into problem-focused and emotion-focused coping mechanisms. The problem-focused coping mechanisms on the one hand entail relaxation, telephone communication and/or conversations, listening to the news on television, chat on What'sApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc, make video calls as well as play videogames. Keeping busy, fill the childcare gap created by the pandemic, earn a meagre wage, social bonding with grandchildren, fending for and socialising children outside the traditional classroom environment and yet keeping them focused academically. Essi's resort to teaching and/or care for children is an indication or a demonstration of a degree of activity by way of not being a burden to society and therefore a depiction of active and successful ageing as posited by FUTURAGE (2011) and Blaakilda (2007) respectively. This may also be a reflection of individuals taking increased responsibility for governing themselves (Foucault, 2007; Sarasin, 2020).

Another angle to Essi's coping mechanism or activity is the need on the part of working mothers and/or parents to work in order to be able to cater for their families. COVID-19 responses in Africa have been documented as having unintended social consequences of exacerbated poverty, widespread hunger and food insecurity, as well as state and domestic violence (Divala, Burke, Ndeketa, Corbett, & MacPherson, 2020). COVID-19-related disruptions may have lifelong implications for chil-

dren and adolescents, given that these are sensitive developmental phases (Desmond, Sherr, & Cluver, 2020) even the elderly in low- and middle-income countries with the most stringent restrictions. Indeed, Essi's coping techniques potentially shift the perspective on older persons from that of vulnerability and risk to strength and opportunities. This category of coping techniques lay emphasis on the significance of technology in contemporary times and periods of crisis such as the pandemic.

On the other hand, emotion-focused coping techniques pertain to social distancing, social isolation and loneliness. These seek to lessen the impact of the pandemic.

## DISCUSSION

This study explored the lived experiences of older Ghanaian adults, the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic including coping strategies. These can be grouped into three categories namely: impact on social life and friendly relationships, impact on daily life and routines, and impact on health and wellbeing, and the results were considered on behalf of the biopsychosocial perspective (Engel, 1980).

The results show that age is not an unproblematic governing principle. Instead, in addition to protecting a vulnerable group, the age-based recommendation meant deprivation of previously assigned individual responsibility and, consequently, autonomy. It is shown how the participants handled this tension through varying degrees of compliance and resistance (and/or positive defiance).

The findings intimate that older persons were predisposed to socio-cultural, health and humanitarian dimensions of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, to which the lockdown was the major processor. These led to social isolation, immobility, the lack of social interaction and/or socialisation. These were coped with through the conduit of mass media, social media among others. Hence, Marston et al. (2020) argue that putting citizens in lock-down leaves them with psychological effects on a usually highly mobile population. Marston et al. (2020) maintain that older people's mobility is linked not just to destination, though that is important, but to a sense of identity, independence and freedom. Technology can help, if people have access to it and know how to use it. Technology complements day-to-day activities, leisure (e.g. videogames, streaming music and TV) (Dovie et al., 2019; Genoe et al., 2018), holidays (e.g. online booking of hotels, travel) and maintaining social connections

via social media platforms (e.g. Facebook) as well as communication platforms (e.g. What's App, Viber), (Dovie et al., 2019; Marston et al. 2020).

There are two (2) dimensions to technological use namely facilitators and distractors. Older people have been admonished to balance the facilitators of technology use (i.e. sharing of information and feeling secure) against the detractors of technology (i.e., feelings of apprehension of use, privacy, security). Marston et al. (2019) offered several recommendations that included the need for positive promotion of technology, focusing on the positive opportunities to improve one's health and wellbeing, creating peer support networks in relation to learning new technologies and how intergenerational relationships can be enhanced through technology.

Social media platforms such as Facebook (Dovie, 2019; Marston et al., 2020) can offer support for communities in times of crisis, such as COVID-19. For instance, a private Facebook group has been created for residents in Stony Stratford, a town on the outskirts of Milton Keynes with Facebook group membership of approximately 415 that enabled information to be shared across the community. Therefore, residents who may get COVID-19 infection are able to access support (e.g. groceries, collection of prescriptions), (Marston et al., 2020), while also ensuring the most vulnerable can be cared for. Additionally, this group offers its members a point of contact for sub-groups within this particular group; consisting of various streets which already have an existing communication/What's App group for communication and sharing of information. Each existing What's App group has a detailed/specific point of contact, which in turn may assist the respective residents to communicate within this digital connectivity neighbourhood. Existing What's App groups help to keep one another up to date with information and support. For instance, information such as downloadable leaflets on self-isolation has been shared by group members (Marston et al., 2020).

Stated differently, based on the global impact of COVID-19 on countries and communities alike, a myriad of technological devices have the propensity to provide a basis for maintaining social connections with friends, family, social networks and/or the wider community. Evidentially, Marston et al. (2019) have established the fact that those who already have a social media account such as Facebook can chat with their friends. For those who did not have a social media account – and this includes both young and older adults had multiple ways of maintaining contact through the utilisation of a smartphone device with communication tools (App's) such as What's

App. This suggests that social media platforms such as Facebook can offer support for communities in times of crisis, such as COVID-19 pandemic.

Beyond the dependence on family relations, social networks, technology can be used as a weapon in fighting against social isolation on condition that the elderly know how to use it or that they are technologically savvy (Dovie et al., 2019). Men and women are affected differently—older women are more likely to say they feel lonelier than older men (Dovie, 2019). What is essential is that during physical distancing sessions, older people should be able to access social connectedness and through technology. Per adventure, through this means there could be the monitoring of them in relation to their well-being and needs and health. The COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the rate of witchcraft accusations against older people. The disease has truncated prophesies against the elderly more or less.

Social isolation, among older adults has a higher likelihood of psychological and medical risks. The major risk factors entail the physical limitations that older persons are faced with, which have the propensity to impact mobility and their ability to do things by themselves (Norotney, 2019; Robbinson, 2019; Shaw, 2020). At best, these older people feel disconnected living on their own and not having support from relatives or social connection to others enshrined in the formation of friendships, involvement in regular social interactions, etc. Social isolation may also lead to loneliness and depression. It is worth stating that physiologically, loneliness and long-term social distancing may decrease the ability of a person to fight infection and inflammation (Hawkley, & Cacioppo, 2010; Holt-Lunstad, 2020; Saladino, Algeri, & Auriemma, 2020; Zabetakis, Lordan, Norton, & Tsoupras, 2020). Strikingly, the stress and anxiety induced by loneliness cases may foster a change in white blood cells including the creation of more issues for older people. Social isolation can be perceived as a method targeted at improving public health but how can the adverse effects of social isolation be combated, especially in the elderly, during the COVID-19 lockdown? In terms of how to help older adults fight loneliness during COVID-19, it has been observed that social isolation can be dangerous for older adults (Jones, 2020). However, such can be assisted. According to Clifford Singer (2018) "we are a social species. Our social networks (i.e., families, tribes, communities, etc) enable us to survive and thrive". Yet studies (e.g. Heck, Frantz, Frizzo, François, Ludwig, Mesenburg, Buratti, Franz, & Berlesi, 2021) have argued that insufficient social distancing may contribute to COVID-19 outbreak.

Cities, towns and villages, and people at large revolve around various activities, from attending weekly church services to organising and attending funerals, going to the pub and cinema among others. These leisurely activities are their only connection with like-minded individuals, and possibly their own access to socialisation and communication. Keeping in touch by phone or video call will make a world of difference to them and show them that someone cares (Stubbings, 2020).

The study participants have also coped with the effects of the pandemic by self-isolating themselves. Bumping elbows as a way of greeting rather than shaking hands or kissing a cheek or two. Stories of panic buying, witnessing drones on the streets of Mediterranean cities, ghost trains into cities, and connecting with neighbours who in a previous time a nod of the head at best would have sufficed. Marston et al. (2020) opine that it should not be underestimated that many citizens with pre-existing mental health issues may start to experience greater anxiety, cabin fever and increased health related issues due to self-isolation. Yet, there has not been any news about prospective mental health issues arising from this pandemic, not only for those with pre-existing diagnosis but for those that do enjoy going to work, for those whose only contact and communication are with work colleagues. Most significantly is the impact that the COVID 19 crisis has on the future of individuals and the health and social care services.

Police have been seen on the streets trying to enforce the COVID-19 pandemic laws in Ghana with force in lieu of attaining conformity. Marston et al. (2020) argue that the Brits do not have law enforcement or the military patrolling the streets, nor are there drones flying down and across streets, parks and highstreets in a bid to identify citizens breaching curfews or undertaking any unnecessary activities.

The COVID 19 virus is the cruellest stress test of institutional and individual health and social care activities. Institutionally, the health and care sectors rely heavily on adult family members (Hadley, 2015). However, the present study's findings show that social coping is social support based. Harnessing social support during the COVID-19 pandemic is a significant adaptation skill, which is consistent with Quadagno's (2014) articulation. Similarly, the provision of educational services to neighbours' children fills the knowledge gap in the country's schooling system due to COVID-19. This serves as a new social role as well as a means of financial boasting. The ability to adapt to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic utilising social support and social role skills is reflective of social participation. Adaptation to COVID-19 challenges is therefore tantamount to fighting the associated isolation or lone-

liness ascertainable through "…. social networks (i.e., families, tribes, communities, etc) that enable older people to survive and thrive" (Singer, 2018). It is worth noting that the ability of the older adults to adapt to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is indicative of the pearls in the pandemic.

The study further outlined childcare modalities as an emergent factor. This child care arrangement aka learning alibi by mothers and/or parents is contrary to the argument by (Tetteh, 2005) that women will either be 'career oriented' or 'home oriented' (p.81). It also shows the integration of family life with work outside the home (Tetteh, 2005). According to Myers and Indriso (1986, pp. 26-27) childcare denotes "the process of attending to a child's basic need of shelter, protection, food, clothing and health". By contrast, the research found that childcare transcends these stipulations to encompass educational needs during this COVID-19 pandemic era. But prior to the pandemic, some of the childcare arrangements include taking the children to work; use of school facilities; children taken care of by informal caregivers namely househelps, grandparents, neighbours and a host of others (Tetteh, 2005). These are however used based on the specific needs of the mothers and/or parents involved.

It is imperative for parents and/or guardians to plan learning including nutritional routines (Zabetakis, Lordan, Norton, & Tsoupras, 2020) for older adults including children and together have open conversations – take the time, protect children's online learning, stay in touch with children's educational facilities. This is because irresponsible parenting alongside with the COVID-19 pandemic are major setbacks to the fight against the menace of child marriages and teenage pregnancies. The economic hardship that the pandemic has exerted on people or couples with the closure of schools in the country could force children's parents to give off their children for marriage(s) as an alternative sources of income for the family. Furthermore, child marriage and teenage pregnancy could thwart girl child development in particular, which in the longer term could affect the community and national development.

From a conceptual framework point of view, problem-focused coping is the point at which a person connects with the surrounding through direct activity, critical thinking, and dynamic fundamental leadership. Holland (2001) indicated that immediate action includes changing the circumstance/occasion or changing oneself to eradicate the stressors. In general, problem-focused coping procedures are planned for diminishing the anxieties of the circumstance or stressor as reflected in this paper via the impacts of the coronavirus disease. This is done by increasing the resources for managing the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Consequently, prob-

lem-focused stratagems and confident thoughtful techniques of coping are adaptive coping tactics that lessen stress experienced by individuals. Further, social isolation and social distancing are reminiscent of emotion-focused coping techniques which are planned for lessening the effect of the apparent stressor if the stressor cannot be changed or maintain a strategic distance from stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) such as the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, it has been argued that emotion-focused stratagems, for instance, evasion and negative thoughtfulness in light of a stressor are maladaptive strategies for coping. Even though these techniques for coping may diminish a person's feelings of anxiety, they encourage long-term well-being (Shaheen & Alam, 2010). In summary, based on the adaptation of Engel's Biopsychosocial model (Engels, 1980) and Lazarus' (1993) coping theory, the positive and negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on older people are presented, focused on their experiences, challenges, as well as the coping strategies identified.

## CONCLUSION

This paper is an articulation of older adults' experiences and challenges of and coping against the COVID-19 pandemic in urban Ghana. Older adults were able to develop incredible resilience due to the adaptation strategies they resorted to. The adaptation strategies served as a better way to understand how older adults address difficulty in their social roles and daily activities. Significantly, rather than being victims the study participants served as significant responders to the COVID-19 crisis by playing multiple roles in society, including as caregivers, educators, etc.

In conclusion, more reflection on and study of social and psychological/emotional challenges as well as underlying impact issues related to the current pandemic and more generally to global crises is needed. Older persons are at a disadvantage due to individual and structural discrimination, and they are more likely than their younger counterparts to be vulnerable to negative health outcomes.

It is therefore recommended that future research should explore the following: first, the experiences of older folks who were directly affected by COVID-19, second, ascertain the social change dynamics of COVID-19 on social institutions in Ghana and third, investigate mental health issues that may have been induced by the pandemic.

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# O Capitalismo de Vigilância e a Política da Desinformação

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## Resumo

Como o capitalismo de vigilância contribui para a economia política da desinformação? Esse artigo tem como objetivo demonstrar a estreita relação entre o fenômeno que tem dominado o mundo cibernético – o tráfego legal e ilegal de dados obtidos a partir da vigilância do cidadão – com outro fenômeno contemporâneo, a desinformação, centrada principalmente nas notícias falsas que deixaram sua excepcionalidade para se transformarem em ações orquestradas capazes de abalar práticas democráticas. Para tal, realizou-se uma exposição de casos sintomáticos de acontecimentos contemporâneos com o objetivo de ilustrar uma breve revisão da literatura com as temáticas sobre Capitalismo de Vigilância, Cidadania e a Política da Desinformação. Chegou-se à conclusão que a adoção de políticas públicas relacionadas à educação e regulação do tema, sem a violação de direitos humanos fundamentais dos indivíduos, é a melhor forma de proteger a sociedade dos efeitos nefastos desse fenômeno contemporâneo.

**Palavras-Chave:** vigilância digital, *big data*, *fake news*, cidadania, democracia.

# Surveillance Capitalism and the Policy of Disinformation

## Abstract

How does surveillance capitalism contribute to the political economy of disinformation? This article aims to demonstrate the close relationship between the phenomenon that has dominated the cyber world - the legal and illegal traffic of data obtained from citizen surveillance - with another contemporary phenomenon, disinformation, centered mainly on false news that left its exceptionality to transform into orchestrated actions capable of undermining democratic practices. To this end, an exhibition of symptomatic cases from contemporary events were held in order to illustrate a brief review of the literature on the themes of Vigilance Capitalism, Citizenship and the Policy of Disinformation. It was concluded

that the adoption of public policies related to education and regulation of the theme, without violating the fundamental human rights of individuals, is the best way to protect society from the harmful effects of this contemporary phenomenon.

**Keywords:** digital surveillance, big data, fake news, citizenship, democracy.

# INTRODUÇÃO

A monetização dos dados pessoais trouxe uma nova ordem econômica que utiliza informações extraídas das pessoas, através da vigilância, como matéria-prima gratuita para práticas comerciais. Trata-se do "Capitalismo de Vigilância", um novo modelo de negócio que procura prever e modificar o comportamento humano como forma de controlar o mercado e produzir receitas (Zuboff, 2018). Ocorre que o uso de dados como mercadoria pode trazer prejuízos consideráveis aos cidadãos. Além da violação da privacidade e intimidade das pessoas, o capitalismo de vigilância pode também influenciar e modificar o comportamento humano, desinformando e induzindo o indivíduo a tomar decisões que podem impactar negativamente a sua vida e a vida das outras pessoas.

Para Orlowski (2019), as grandes empresas de tecnologia têm como modelo de negócio a venda da "certeza" de que seus anunciantes terão o máximo de sucesso em suas campanhas publicitárias. Para tanto, é necessária a obtenção de muitos dados através do rastreamento infinito dos hábitos das pessoas. Tais dados são usados para criar modelos que preveem as ações dos indivíduos cujo objetivo é descobrir o que deve ser mostrado para eles, a fim de manipular os seus hábitos de consumo. O produto vendido por essas empresas é a gradativa e imperceptível mudança no comportamento dos cidadãos, para que eles vejam o mundo da forma que o anunciante queira. Portanto, num mundo onde se tornou fundamental ter conexões virtuais, a comunicação e cultura passam a estar irremediavelmente ligadas às práticas da desinformação e manipulação (Orlowski, 2019).

As empresas que praticam o capitalismo de vigilância, após extraírem e refinarem os dados pessoais dos cidadãos, criam modelos de previsão comportamental e vendem tais informações para quem quiser e puder pagar, sejam grandes corporações, sejam governos autoritários (Frazão, 2019). E é nesse sentido que a economia política da desinformação é alimentada diretamente pelo capitalismo de dados, uma vez que

para se manipular alguém é preciso ter amplo acesso a seus dados.

Considerada uma das maiores ameaças à democracia, a economia da desinformação consiste no uso de aplicações na internet com o fim de propagar informações falsas ou manipuladas em prol de algum grupo político (Brisola & Bezerra, 2018). Essa estratégia normalmente é utilizada em redes sociais digitais como WhatsApp e Twitter, tendo em vista o seu baixíssimo custo operacional e seu efeito de propagação de informações em rede.

O presente trabalho visa investigar como as práticas do chamado capitalismo de vigilância podem ser utilizadas para alimentar a política da desinformação e como tal fato pode afetar as bases da democracia. Para tanto, utilizou-se uma pesquisa bibliográfica a partir de uma revisão de literatura sobre os temas propostos, bem como uma pesquisa documental, analisando dados e informações oriundos de fontes primárias.

Nosso percurso metodológico parte do conceito do fenômeno Capitalismo de Vigilância e de como a monetização dos dados pessoais alimenta uma cultura de vigilância que viola dos direitos dos indivíduos relacionados à sua cidadania. Após, apontamos as estratégias da política da desinformação, ressaltando a sua face mais perigosa, as chamadas *fake news*. Depois de demonstrar como a segurança de dados se tornou uma preocupação mundial, apontamos possíveis caminhos para a sociedade se proteger dos fenômenos pesquisados.

## A CULTURA DA VIGILÂNCIA E O CAPITALISMO DE DADOS

Os dados são o novo petróleo. Esta é uma das frases mais repetidas no meio econômico nos últimos anos. E não por acaso. O avanço das tecnologias de informação levou os dados pessoais a ser um produto incansavelmente procurado por empresas que surgiram com o capitalismo de vigilância. Assim como foi a terra na sociedade agrícola, as máquinas a vapor e a eletricidade na sociedade industrial, e os serviços na pós-industrial, a informação é o novo elemento estruturante da nossa era (Bioni, 2020).

Neste sentido, a monetização dos dados pessoais constitui uma preocupação mundial, uma vez que as consequências desse novo capitalismo de dados não se restringem apenas à seara econômica. A sociedade em geral, a democracia e os direitos dos cidadãos, são vítimas dessa nova forma de vigiar visando o lucro.

Segundo Bioni (2020), com o avanço da tecnologia e o novo modelo organizacional das empresas em rede, o consumidor passou a participar de uma forma mais ativa do ciclo de consumo, uma vez que a publicidade passou a ser direcionada com base na preferência dos consumidores. Nessa lógica, é necessária uma monitoração constante do comportamento das pessoas, uma vez que suas informações pessoais acabam se tornando a matéria-prima a ser explorada por esse tipo de atividade econômica (Zuboff, 2020).

O comportamento humano exposto no mundo digital tornou-se, portanto, uma mercadoria valiosa nesses tempos de sociedade de informação. E para conseguir essa mercadoria empresas de extração de dados usam diversos tipos de métodos.

Para isso, segundo Zuboff (2018), o componente principal do capitalismo de vigilância é o *big data*. Sobre tal fenômeno, pode-se afirmar que:

> O *big data* é constituído pela captura de *small data*, das ações e discursos, mediados por computador, de indivíduos no desenrolar da vida prática. Nada é trivial ou efêmero em excesso nessa colheita: as "curtidas" do Facebook, as buscas do Google, e-mails, textos, fotos, músicas e vídeos, localizações, padrões de comunicação, redes, compras, movimentos, todos os cliques, palavras com erros ortográficos, visualizações de páginas e muito mais. Esses dados são adquiridos, tornados abstratos, agregados, analisados, embalados, vendidos, analisados mais e mais e vendidos novamente (Zuboff, 2018, p.31).

Assim, não são poucas as fontes de dados que alimentam o capitalismo de vigilância na sua nova lógica de acumulação de capital. Dentre tais fontes estão a "internet das coisas", onde uma rede de sensores inteligentes e dispositivos conectados à internet podem monitorar todos os passos de uma pessoa em tempo real; os bancos de dados governamentais e corporativos, inclusive aqueles ligados à intermediação de pagamentos eletrônicos, bancos, operações por cartões de crédito, planos de saúde e às agências de avaliação de crédito; os dados decorrentes das câmeras de vigilância públicas e privadas, que podem ter sua origem desde simples *smartphones* até satélites, ou mesmo no Google Street View e Google Earth. Por fim, existem ainda os

dados gerados por pesquisas no Google, músicas do Spotify, páginas no Facebook, blogs, redes e vídeos no YouTube (Zuboff, 2018).

Neste sentido, Zuboff (2020) conceitua o Capitalismo de Vigilância como uma nova lógica econômica que reivindica a experiência humana como matéria-prima gratuita para práticas comerciais, onde a produção de bens e serviços é subordinada a uma arquitetura global de modificação do comportamento humano. A autora ainda afirma que:

> O capitalismo de vigilância reivindica de maneira unilateral a experiência humana como matéria-prima gratuita para a tradução em dados comportamentais. Embora alguns desses dados sejam aplicados para o aprimoramento de produtos e serviços, o restante é declarado como superávit comportamental do proprietário, alimentando avançados processos de fabricação conhecidos como inteligência de máquina e manufaturado em produtos de predição que antecipam o que um determinado indivíduo faria agora, daqui a pouco e mais tarde. Por fim, esses produtos de predições são comercializados num novo tipo de mercado para predições comportamentais que chamo de *mercados de comportamentos futuros.* (Zuboff, 2020, p.18,19).

A conceituação do Capitalismo de Vigilância feita por Zuboff, entretanto, não está isenta de críticas. Para Morozov (2019), a autora peca ao não considerar que o capitalismo de dados pode apresentar uma atuação assimétrica em diferentes partes do mundo. Assim, da mesma forma que o capitalismo industrial possuía um padrão específico de exploração para os centros de poder e consumo e outro para a periferia, o mesmo acontece com o capitalismo de vigilância. Ainda segundo Morozov (2019), Zuboff não define o que há de "capitalismo" no capitalismo de vigilância, uma vez que não aprofunda na sua relação com o desenvolvimento com o capitalismo neoliberal.

Apesar das críticas sofridas por Zuboff, não resta dúvida de que a extração dos dados pessoais além do que seria necessário para a melhoria dos serviços que justificaram a sua coleta, torna-se um negócio lucrativo que se retroalimenta indefinidamente. A economia movida a dados e o capitalismo de vigilância encontram-se umbilicalmente ligados, uma vez que a extração de dados, devido à sua importância econômica, é diretamente proporcional ao aumento da vigilância (Frazão, 2019).

## CAPITALISMO DE VIGILÂNCIA, DESINFORMAÇÃO
## E A CORROSÃO DA DEMOCRACIA

O fenômeno da desinformação não é algo novo, trata-se de um conceito antigo que nasce ligado principalmente a projeto militares de contrainformação e espionagem (Brisola & Bezerra, 2018). Segundo Serrano (2010), a desinformação é fruto de mecanismos muito mais complexos do que uma mentira grosseira. São ações que buscam construir um cenário intencionalmente determinado, mediante a divulgação de informações manipuladas, fragmentadas e retiradas de sua historicidade. O objetivo é distorcer a realidade e confundir. Nem sempre se trata de uma informação falsa, mas também de uma informação que manipula fatos (Serrano, 2010).

Para Brisola e Bezerra (2018), uma das características da desinformação é a oferta de uma visão maniqueísta de mundo, com oposições bem claras entre bem/mal, certo/errado, branco/preto, nós/eles. Além disso, utiliza-se também a bandeira da opinião pública para incluir em suas informações a opinião que se quer propagar. É comum, por exemplo, o uso de expressões como "o povo brasileiro clama por justiça!". A linguagem utilizada valoriza a emoção antes da crítica e embora possa sugerir distanciamento e neutralidade, na verdade carrega envolvimento e parcialidade. Outra característica da desinformação é a prática de impor etiquetas positivas ou negativas a determinados grupos com o objetivo de formar ou manipular a opinião pública (guerrilheiros esquerdistas, terroristas islâmicos, manifestantes vândalos, por exemplo). Neste sentido, as pessoas tendem a se acostumar com tais etiquetas e perdem a sua capacidade de avaliar situações de forma crítica (Brisola & Bezerra, 2018). No entanto, não se pode desgarrar a desinformação também do seu aspecto enquanto disputa narrativa – entre grupos, entre políticas, entre culturas – em que essas palavras ganham conotações distintas, podem ser informação para uns e desinformação para outros.

A política da desinformação é fruto de uma crise identitária onde as pessoas são tragadas pelo pensamento hegemônico em razão de estarem imersos em uma avalanche de informações. Trata-se, portanto, de um sistema informacional que molda a opinião pública de acordo com seus interesses, que podem ser políticos, ideológicos ou econômicos, utilizando uma série de artifícios e mecanismos, dentre os quais se encontra a divulgação das *fake news*. A desinformação nem sempre é ilegal, mas a sua abrangência pode afetar a democracia, os processos políticos e as políticas públicas (Brisola & Bezerra, 2018).

Serrano (2010) define a política da desinformação como um complexo de ações que tem como objetivo construir um cenário intencionalmente determinado, podendo estar presente em livros de história, jornais de ampla circulação ou em discursos políticos. Nos dias de hoje, devemos mencionar também a forte presença da política da desinformação em redes sociais e aplicativos de mensagens instantâneas.

Para Brisola e Bezerra (2018), a fim de atingir os seus objetivos que podem ser econômicos, políticos e/ou ideológicos, a política da desinformação utiliza diversas estratégias, tais como:

a) O alinhamento aos interesses do poder econômico e do poder político nos meios de informação e comunicação;
b) Dificuldade do leitor ou usuário de identificar as origens, contextos e motivações dos fatos e informações;
c) Elaboração de notícias de forma resumida, sem visão crítica, baseadas em fontes cujo interesse não é claro;
d) Excesso de informações, a fim de que haja uma dificuldade de selecioná-las;
e) Aderência a sentimentos e a comoção, ao invés da razão;
f) Adesão a uma visão de mundo que já vem pronta;
g) A utilização da emoção como foco maior da informação;
h) A utilização de uma linguagem que sugere uma neutralidade, a fim de dar a uma opinião com o aspecto de informação isenta.

A política da desinformação preenche um vácuo deixado num momento em que a informação profissional produzida por jornalistas enfrenta uma crise sem precedentes, tanto no Brasil quanto no mundo. Segundo o pesquisador e professor Bruno Souza Leal, do Departamento de Comunicação Social da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), a perda de credibilidade do jornalismo profissional tem sido recorrente em democracias no mundo inteiro. No Brasil, tal fenômeno pode ser explicado por dois cenários distintos. O primeiro cenário trata-se de uma característica mundial onde o advento da internet fez com que a informação circulasse por outros canais e também por uma grande diversidade de mecanismos e processos que vão muito além dos veículos tradicionais de jornalismo (PRAE, 2020).

O segundo cenário apontado pelo Professor Bruno Leal (PRAE, 2020), diz respeito à estrutura de comunicação em massa herdada da ditadura militar no Brasil, com base numa produção centrada nas cidades do Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo,

distante, portanto, dos aspectos regionais do país, bem como em razão das empresas jornalísticas brasileiras estarem concentradas nas mãos de poucos agentes, ou seja, são controladas por algumas famílias e grupos empresariais muito específicos. É preciso observar também que as polarizações em torno das ideologias políticas, bastante acirrada nos últimos anos, também proporcionam um terreno fértil para o crescimento da política da desinformação, especialmente com a divulgação de *fake news* (Brisola & Bezerra, 2018).

Embora o termo *fake news* tem sido utilizado de forma abrangente, se confundindo com o significado da desinformação, é certo que esta vai muito além das notícias falsas e pode ter objetivos econômicos, políticos e ideológicos. Segundo Brisola e Bezerra (2018), as *fakes news* constituem apenas uma das faces da política da desinformação, uma vez que se tratam de artigos e informações travestidos de notícias, intencionalmente e verificadamente falsos com a intenção deliberada de enganar o leitor.

O fenômeno da propagação das notícias falsas, umas das faces da desinformação, é também fruto do alcance global da internet, dos aparelhos celulares inteligentes e das plataformas digitais que ampliaram a capacidade de comunicação do ser humano. Uma notícia espalhada através de um aplicativo de mensagens, por exemplo, pode alcançar milhões de pessoas sem que sua origem ou veracidade sejam identificadas (Galhardi, Freire, Minayo, & Fagundes, 2020).

A política da desinformação também encontra campo fértil nas plataformas reguladas por algoritmos pertencentes a grandes corporações como Facebook e Google. E neste ponto, o capitalismo de vigilância e a desinformação possuem estreita relação com a economia política da comunicação (EPC). A EPC, de uma forma crítica, aborda os interesses comerciais das empresas de comunicação na produção de conteúdo, entendendo que os meios de comunicação de massa são também indústrias que fabricam produtos culturais. Neste sentido, a produção de bens culturais e artísticos são apenas formas de produzir audiência que será trocada por faturamento publicitário gerando lucro os seus produtores (Rêgo & Dourado, 2013). E as plataformas digitais possuem um papel de destaque neste contexto.

Bolaño (1996) afirma que o desenvolvimento de mega sistemas de informação, criados para fomentar o processo de acumulação de capital é a base de uma grande internacionalização da indústria cultural, razão pela qual o setor das telecomunicações se transformou em elemento central para a rearticulação do padrão de desenvolvimento capitalista. A economia política da comunicação possui como um dos seus elementos

centrais o fato de que todas as formas mediadas de comunicação envolvem o uso recursos materiais escassos. Assim, a nossa compreensão de mundo, bem como a nossa possibilidade de transformá-lo, são determinados pelo modo em que o acesso e controle sobre esses recursos escassos são estruturados (Bolaño, 1996).

Bolaño (1996) considera correta a ideia frankfurtiana de que os meios de comunicação de massa são entidades econômicas que cumprem uma função econômica direta, através da produção e distribuição de mercadorias, e também uma função indireta, através da publicidade. A estruturação das redes telemáticas globais por grandes empresas tem início com a internacionalização produtiva e financeira ocorrida na economia mundial a partir dos anos 1990. Logo, há uma forte correlação entre a globalização da economia e a mudança estrutural dos sistemas de comunicação. Neste sentido, a indústria cultural é o ponto de partida para a constituição de uma cultura capitalista mundial, onde a globalização produtiva conduz à globalização da publicidade e com ela, da cultura industrializada que lhe serve de suporte (Bolaño, 1996).

Como dito, as plataformas digitais algorítmicas contribuem de forma importante neste contexto, uma vez que se guiam, principalmente, por interesses comerciais. Trata-se de meios de comunicação de massa que são uma excelente ferramenta para os negócios do capitalismo de dados. Como consequência, a desinformação prospera de forma acentuada nesse ambiente. Embora os conteúdos encontrados nessas plataformas sejam em sua maioria, de teor pessoal ou familiar, existem também conteúdos noticiosos que são postados por jornalistas, especialistas, políticos e celebridades. Neste cenário, a produção de notícias é transferida das empresas jornalísticas tradicionais para os usuários de tais plataformas, de forma que a imprecisão do que é notícia ou não, alimenta a desinformação (Castro, 2020).

Não podemos esquecer que os veículos jornalísticos tradicionais nem sempre são sinônimos de confiabilidade. Entretanto, nas plataformas o usuário muitas vezes assume a produção e distribuição de informações, ao lado ou no lugar de um jornalista, que seria o mediador a definir o que é notícia e de que forma a divulgar. Castro (2020) denomina tal fenômeno como "onimediação desigual", ou seja, todos exercem alguma mediação ainda que em graus díspares. Ocorre que nas plataformas algorítmicas o critério de avaliação aplicado aos conteúdos, na maioria das vezes, é de ordem pecuniária, ou seja, a prioridade será data ao que pode trazer um maior retorno financeiro. O chamado valor-algoritmo é a pedra de toque de uma economia da informação, baseada em conteúdos que não são necessariamente

notícias na concepção tradicional. Esse modelo de negócios praticado pelas plataformas transforma essa economia da informação em uma verdadeira economia da desinformação (Castro, 2020).

Na onimediação desigual defendida por Castro (2020), o valor-algoritmo não está ligado à qualidade da informação mediada em termos de reputação e credibilidade, mas sim na capacidade de captar a atenção dos usuários das plataformas. Para tanto tão importante quanto aquilo que é exibido ao usuário, é o conteúdo que ele divulga para chamar a atenção de outros usuários. O sucesso das viralizações depende do encadeamento desses dois processos.

Ocorre que o esquema de publicidade da internet enseja que a desinformação se transforme facilmente em um filão de negócios, uma vez que as notícias falsas viralizam muito mais rapidamente do que uma informação verdadeira, fato que gera uma receita considerável via publicidade. É muito mais fácil conseguir cliques em anúncios de publicidade quando se compartilha uma notícia sensacionalista, usualmente falsa (Castro, 2020). Um artigo embasado em um levantamento feito no Twitter por pesquisadores do MIT, concluiu que naquela plataforma digital, os boatos se alastram mais depressa e para um universo maior de pessoas do que notícias verdadeiras (Vosoughi, Roy, & Atal, 2018).

Em um trabalho publicado recentemente, o professor de psicologia e ciência neural da Universidade de Nova York, Jay Van Bavel, afirmou que as pessoas tendem a acreditar em notícias falsas em razão de um fenômeno chamado de viés de confirmação, ou seja, a tendência dos indivíduos de buscarem informações que reafirmem suas próprias convicções e crenças, seja por meio de memórias seletivas, seja por meio de fontes que reafirmem o seu modo de ver a vida. Os seres humanos, em geral, têm uma tendência de aceitar e compartilhar evidências que reafirmem a sua visão de mundo, bem como de rejeitar tudo aquilo que a contradiz (Galhardi et al., 2020).

Também neste sentido, em entrevista à BBC News Brasil, o psiquiatra e diretor da Associação Brasileira de Psiquiatria, Cláudio Martins, apontou que pessoas que compartilham notícias falsas, experimentam uma sensação de bem-estar semelhante à que sentem aquelas que suam drogas, uma vez que são estimulados no cérebro mecanismos de recompensa e prazer imediatos. Tais sentimentos, além de impulsionar a transmissão compulsiva da mesma informação, também impedem o desenvolvimento de senso crítico sobre a questão (Galhardi et al., 2020).

Assim, o modelo de negócios das plataformas algorítmicas funciona da seguinte

forma: os algoritmos estimulam a disseminação de desinformação tendo em vista que uma notícia falsa gera muito mais retorno em termos de visualização de publicidade do que uma informação verdadeira. Quando mais cliques, maior o valor-algoritmo e maior é a divulgação da informação. Seja ela verdadeira ou não. As plataformas digitais algorítmicas, na visão de Castro (2020), se expandiram juntamente com a hegemonia do neoliberalismo e o seu funcionamento guarda muita afinidade com a lógica de mercado neoliberal, ou seja, os conteúdos são avaliados pelo prisma da sua circulação e capacidade de gerar publicidade, predominando aqueles que conseguem maior repercussão. São meios de comunicação de massa que estimulam a produção de conteúdos, nem sempre verdadeiros, para a venda de publicidade.

Como dissemos, não há nada de novo no fenômeno da desinformação. O que é novo é a velocidade que ela se propaga no meio digital. E tal fato se dá, principalmente, em razão do capitalismo digital fazer da desinformação um produto altamente rentável, uma vez que produzir e compartilhar narrativas falsas atraem muitos cliques. (Morozov, 2018). E é neste ponto que o capitalismo de vigilância atua como meio facilitador para a divulgação da desinformação.

O capitalismo de dados, ao contribuir para a política da desinformação, viola os direitos dos cidadãos em diversas esferas. Para Marshall (1967), a cidadania se divide em direitos civis, políticos e sociais. Os direitos civis se traduzem nos direitos necessários à liberdade individual, tais como liberdade de imprensa, pensamento, direito à privacidade, à igualdade perante a lei e também o direito à justiça. Os direitos políticos consistem no direito do cidadão de participar do exercício do poder político, ou seja, de organizar partidos políticos, votar e ser votado. Já os direitos sociais significam os direitos de participação na riqueza coletiva, reduzindo as desigualdades e garantindo um mínimo de bem-estar coletivo.

Para o exercício de uma cidadania plena, é necessária observância desses três elementos de forma concomitante. A violação a um deles importa em violação aos demais. Pode até ser possível haver direitos civis sem direitos políticos. Entretanto, o contrário não é viável. Na ausência de liberdade de pensamento, por exemplo, os direitos políticos podem servir muito mais para justificar governos do que para representar cidadãos. Por outro lado, sem direitos civis e políticos, os direitos sociais tendem a ser arbitrários e não alcançar a sua verdadeira função (Carvalho, 2002).

Assim, a corrosão da democracia por parte da desinformação estimulada pelo capitalismo de vigilância começa com o desrespeito aos direitos à privacidade e liberdade de expressão e termina com a violação ao direito de participar do governo

da sociedade tendo como fundamento os valores democráticos. Para se ter uma ideia, em julho de 2015 foram divulgados conteúdos de *e-mails*, documentos internos e faturas da empresa italiana *Hacking Team,* que demonstram que países da américa latina como Brasil, Colômbia, Equador, Honduras, México e Panamá compraram licenças para o uso de um *software* chamado *Remote Control System* (RCS). Este *software* espião é capaz de acessar qualquer tipo de informação contida num telefone celular ou mesmo em um computador, tais como contatos, chamadas de áudio e vídeo, *e-mails*, geolocalização em tempo real, senhas, microfone e *webcam* (Acha, 2016).

Segundo um informe da ONG *Derechos Digitales,* o vazamento de informações da *Hacking Team* revelou que, no Equador, o RCS foi utilizado pelo governo de Rafael Correa para vigiar o seu opositor Carlos Figueroa. No México, a grande maioria das autoridades que adquiriu o *software* espião não estava autorizada a exercer atividades de vigilância. Além disso, os documentos divulgados indicaram que a *Drug Enforcement Agency* (DEA) norte-americana intercepta todas as comunicações de todos os cidadãos colombianos. Segundo os mesmos dados, o Brasil gastou cerca de 67.900 euros para aparelhar a sua Polícia Federal com o RCS (Acha, 2016).

Os sete países que compraram o RCS possuem legislações que preveem sanções que visam impedir esse tipo de invasão em computares e *smartphones*. A tecnologia utilizada pela *Hacking Team* é muito mais invasiva que uma mera interceptação telefônica determinada por uma ordem judicial. Desta forma, exemplo acima demonstra como o capitalismo de dados também pode violar o direito ao devido processo legal e o princípio da legalidade.

Em 2013, o ex-analista da Agência de Segurança Nacional (NSA) dos EUA, Edward Snowden, divulgou documentos secretos da NSA comprovando que a inteligência americana monitorava de forma ilegal mensagens de e-mail, Skype, bem como todo tipo de informação trocada em redes sociais e na internet, ferindo as liberdades individuais e invadindo a privacidade de cidadãos e autoridades em todo o mundo. Dentre as autoridades espionadas estavam a ex-presidente brasileira Dilma Rousseff e seus principais assessores, e também o então presidente do México, Enrique Peña Nieto. Além de pessoas, Snowden revelou que a NSA e a CIA teriam espionado também empresas como a Petrobrás, o Google e a rede Swift, que reúne vários bancos privados, além do Ministério das Relações Exteriores da França (BBC, 2013).

Na época o governo dos EUA sofreu severas críticas da comunidade internacional e também da sociedade civil americana, por ter espionado indivíduos e empresas que

não possuíam qualquer envolvimento com o terrorismo e, por isso, não representavam qualquer risco para segurando dos EUA.

O documentário "Privacidade Hackeada" (Karin & Noujaim, 2019) relata como a empresa de marketing político britânica denominada *Cambrigde Analytica* manipulou os dados pessoais de cerca de 87 milhões de usuários do Facebook, quando trabalhava na campanha eleitoral de Donald Trump à presidência dos Estados Unidos da América e também do *Brexit,* plebiscito que decidiu pela saída do Reino Unido da União Europeia. No caso da eleição norte-americana, a Cambrigde Analytica utilizou dados captados por um aplicativo instalado dentro da plataforma Facebook para influenciar a eleição presidencial em favor do então candidato Donald Trump. A estratégia era identificar eleitores que ainda não tinham definido o seu voto ou que podiam mudar de ideia, a fim de influenciar o seu comportamento para que votassem no candidato republicano.

Segundo Karin e Noujain (2019), através da análise dos dados extraídos do Facebook, foi criado um modelo capaz de prever a personalidade de cada adulto nos Estados Unidos. A partir daí, conteúdos personalizados foram enviados a cada eleitor pertencente ao público alvo através de blogs, vídeos, anúncios e notícias falsas, para que este enxergasse o mundo da forma que a Cambridge Analytica queria e votasse em seu candidato. A campanha de desinformação nas redes ligou a candidata republicana Hillary Clinton à velha e corrupta política, definindo-a como "perigosa", "psicopata" e "mentirosa", além de convocar os eleitores indecisos a "derrotar a desonesta Hillary". Para enviar mensagens personalizadas era preciso ter acesso a dados pessoais. Ocorre que esses dados foram extraídos sem o conhecimento de seus proprietários.

Ao investigar a atuação da Cambridge Analytica na campanha do *Brexit*, o parlamento britânico concluiu que as leis britânicas não estão adequadas a essa nova realidade, razão pela qual não é possível uma eleição livre e justa naquele país. Além do Reino Unido e dos Estados Unidos da América, a Cambridge Analytica também atuou comprovadamente em eleições na Malásia, Trinidad e Tobago, Lituânia, Romênia, Quênia e Gana. Em todos esses países o modo de operação foi sempre o mesmo. Extrair dados das pessoas sem o seu conhecimento e utilizar esses dados para descobrir qual é a melhor forma de manipular suas ações, notadamente nos processos eleitorais (Karin & Noujaim, 2019).

Assim como nos exemplos da eleição de Trump nos EUA e da campanha do *Brexit* no Reino Unido, a disseminação de notícias falsas também foi sentida nas eleições

presidenciais brasileiras de 2018, onde a extrema direita supostamente conseguiu sua vitória graças ao poder viral de conteúdo de desinformação amplamente divulgado em redes sociais (Galhardi et al., 2020). Tanto que foi criada no Brasil uma CPMI (Comissão Parlamentar Mista de Inquérito) com o objetivo de investigar os ataques cibernéticos que atentam contra a democracia e o debate público, além da utilização de perfis falsos para influenciar os resultado das eleições brasileiras de 2018 (SENADO FEDERAL, 2021).

Os exemplos citados demonstram de forma inequívoca como o Capitalismo de Dados viola um dos elementos mais importantes da cidadania, a democracia. E o caminho utilizado passa pela política da desinformação.

## UMA PREOCUPAÇÃO MUNDIAL

Nos últimos tempos, a segurança de dados tornou-se uma preocupação mundial. Na União Europeia já vigora, desde 2018, a Regulação Geral de Proteção de Dados (GPDR, na sigla em inglês), uma norma que amplia a proteção de dados dos cidadãos daquele bloco econômico. Os Estados Unidos da América também são uma referência neste aspecto, possuindo uma farta legislação sobre o tema, tais como a Lei de Privacidade da Comunicação Eletrônica (ECPA), de 1986, que proíbe a interceptação de mensagens telefônicas e eletrônicas (incluindo e-mails) e garante a segurança de informações tanto durante a transmissão, quanto no seu armazenamento e a Lei de Proteção da Privacidade de Crianças (COPPA), que institui regras para websites e serviços *on line*, visando a proteção à privacidade de crianças e adolescentes de até 13 anos na internet. Existem também normas setoriais de proteção como a Lei de Portabilidade e Transparência de Seguros de Saúde (HIPAA) e a Lei de Privacidade (*Privacy Act*) que fixa diretrizes para a coleta, armazenamento e disseminação de dados por agências federais (Valente, 2018).

Na América Latina, diversos países também já possuem legislações relativas à proteção de dados, como por exemplo, Chile, Argentina, Uruguai e Colômbia (Valente, 2018). O Brasil passou a fazer parte do rol de países que possuem uma legislação específica para a proteção de dados pessoais a partir da criação da Lei 13.709 de 2018, já em vigor (Brasil, 2018).

O Poder Judiciário Brasileiro também tem se posicionado sobre o tema. Em uma decisão recente, o Supremo Tribunal Federal suspendeu a eficácia da Medida

Provisória 954/2020 (Brasil, 2020) que previa o compartilhamento de dados de usuários de telecomunicações com o IBGE, para fins de produção de estatísticas relacionadas à Pandemia do Covid-19. As ações foram propostas pelo Conselho Federal da Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil e por partidos políticos como o Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira – PSDB, o Partido Socialista Brasileiro – PSB, o Partido Socialismo de Liberdade – PSOL e o Partido Comunista do Brasil (STF, 2020).

Dentre outros argumentos, - alegou-se que a Medida Provisória violou a Constituição Federal no que se refere à dignidade da pessoa humana, à inviolabilidade da intimidade, da vida privada, da honra e da imagem das pessoas e ao sigilo dos dados, uma vez que obrigava as empresas de telefonia fixa e móvel a disponibilizar ao IBGE a relação dos nomes, dos números de telefone e dos endereços de seus consumidores, pessoas físicas ou jurídicas, mesmo sendo para a produção de estatística oficial durante a pandemia do novo coronavírus. A Suprema Corte Brasileira decidiu que tal compartilhamento violaria o direito constitucional à privacidade, à intimidade e ao sigilo de dados, uma vez que a relativização de tais direitos pela Medida Provisória 954/2020 deveria observar os princípios da razoabilidade e da proporcionalidade, o que não ocorreu na prática (STF, 2020).

Ainda na esfera jurídica, também tramita no Congresso Nacional a Proposta de Emenda à Constituição (PEC) n. 17/2019 (Senado, 2019), que visa incluir a proteção de dados pessoais entre os direitos fundamentais do cidadão. Neste caso, a proteção dos dados pessoais deixaria de ser um corolário do direito à privacidade para se tornar um direito fundamental autônomo.

Também no âmbito da sociedade civil existe uma séria preocupação com relação à extração de dados pessoais sem o conhecimento de seus proprietários.

Uma matéria publicada em um portal de notícias *on line* (Tilt, 2020), relata o caso de um afro-americano que foi preso na cidade de Detroit, porque um programa de computador concluiu de forma errônea que a foto constante de sua carteira de motorista era idêntica à imagem de um ladrão de relógios capturada por câmeras de vigilância. A mesma reportagem informa ainda que diante da imagem de várias pessoas segurando um termômetro, o programa de análise de imagens denominado "Google Vision" reconhece um binóculo nas mãos de uma pessoa de cor branca e uma arma na mão de uma pessoa negra. O caso citado demonstra que a interpretação de dados de forma enviesada pode gerar sérios prejuízos para a honra e imagem das pessoas.

Em 2019 foi descoberto que o sistema de segurança residencial da Google, *Nest Secure*, trazia um microfone embutido em seus dispositivos sem que a empresa tivesse

informado aos seus usuários sobre o fato. Em resposta, a empresa Google afirmou que houve um erro ao não informar nas especificações do produto a existência do microfone (Duong, 2019). Na China, até o final de 2020 o governo pretende concluir o seu novo Sistema de Crédito Social (SCS), uma espécie de ranking de confiança do governo no cidadão onde o comportamento de toda a população chinesa será monitorado e pontuado. Através de tecnologia de reconhecimento facial e inteligência artificial, as atitudes dos chineses passam a valer créditos positivos ou negativos. Assim, esse sistema de controle social irá definir, com base na pontuação de cada indivíduo, se este terá direito a comprar passagens aéreas, conseguir um novo emprego ou matricular seu filho em uma escola de qualidade, por exemplo (Braun, 2018).

Os exemplos citados demonstram que as práticas do capitalismo de vigilância (devendo ser incluída também neste rol, a política da desinformação), seja por empresas privadas ou por governos, constitui uma preocupação mundial por ser uma séria ameaça não somente à democracia, mas também aos direitos civis tais como privacidade, igualdade e liberdade. E que são práticas inerentes e intrínsecas da Economia da Desinformação e que, como tal, devem-se ser estudadas e combatidas, em consonância.

## CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

Diante da evidência de que o capitalismo de vigilância também utiliza de suas práticas pouco ortodoxas, para dizer o mínimo, para alimentar a política da desinformação, surge a seguinte questão: como as pessoas podem se proteger da manipulação no mundo digital?

Segundo Morozov (2018), alguns países europeus propuseram diversas soluções equivocadas nos últimos anos, tais como abrir centros de combate à desinformação, como as *fake news*, e multar quem as espalhar pelas redes sociais (como sugerido por autoridades alemãs); o banimento de todos os memes da internet (proposta do partido governante da Espanha), ou mesmo criar comissões de especialistas para averiguar a veracidade ou não das notícias (conforme solução proposta pelo chefe antitruste da Itália).

Viu-se que soluções que pensem o problema como uma questão de mercado, apenas sugerem soluções mercadológicas, as quais, portanto, não têm, necessariamente,

compromisso com o interesse público, a manutenção da democracia e a defesa dos direitos humanos. Assim, caminha-se para o inevitável e necessário estabelecimento de políticas públicas que, de alguma forma, deverá prever e impor algum tipo de regulação pública. Como já acontece na Europa e nos EUA, e timidamente no Brasil, o sistema judiciário já demanda dos poderes executivos e legislativos referenciais para julgar os já inúmeros casos, e, enquanto isso, legisla por conta própria, estabelecendo multas milionárias e obrigações às empresas, em um recado claro que a auto regulação não funcionou e que o Estado democrático precisa fazer sua parte. E que a sociedade civil deve acompanhar esses movimentos e, através de suas organizações públicas e privadas, os órgãos de comunicação social, os sistemas educacionais, as instituições representativas das diversas dimensões da sociedade, entre outros e outras, tomem os dados pessoais como algo tão importante a ser defendido como os demais diretos humanos.

Não há dúvida de que o capitalismo de vigilância e a política da desinformação constituem uma das maiores preocupações da sociedade nos tempos atuais. O grande desafio é enfrentar tais fenômenos, seja com leis específicas, seja com políticas públicas, sem cercear o direito dos cidadãos à liberdade de pensamento e de opinião. A censura não resolverá o problema, uma vez que não se protege um direito violando outro. A solução também seria investir em educação para que se formem cidadãos dotados de senso crítico para saber diferenciar uma informação confiável de outra manipulada.

Nenhuma é uma solução de fácil aplicabilidade. No entanto, todas elas se iniciam no debate, na pesquisa e na análise que esse trabalho se propôs, um entre muitos de já existem e que, obrigatoriamente, ainda devem acontecer neste período de atribulações informacionais que a Humanidade transpassa. Só pela ciência, pelo conhecimento e pelo respeito aos direitos humanos se encontrará uma esperança do uso das tecnologias modernas de informação e segurança para uma verdadeira comunicação social.

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# Arielism Versus Cosmopolitanism: Brazilian Reaction to 9/11/01 as Cultural Narrative and Identity Work

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## Abstract

This research examines identity work vis-à-vis Brazilian discourse regarding the events of September 11, 2001. The data is drawn from Brazilian nationals and expatriates participating in a digital discourse forum hosted by the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*. In discussing the events of 9/11/01, Brazilians also make sense of what it means to be Brazilian and what it means to be human. As the data show, Brazilians frame their reactions by drawing on larger understandings of the social world. The two most dominant stances come from Brazilians adopting what can be called Arielist and cosmopolitan stances. In addition, a small group of Brazilian expatriates join the fray as self-proclaimed Americanophiles. In examining these dynamics, we see that identities result from the process of identity construction best framed from a social constructionist perspective. In these three cases, identities emerge from interaction, engagement, and reaction to competing identity frames. Through the ongoing dialogue interactions, Brazilian participants implicitly make statements about their self-conceptions and visions of Brazil's place in the world during this historic event. Significantly, the complementary and oppositional stances in reaction to 9/11/01 continue to persist almost twenty years after the attacks in the ideological frameworks around national identities circulating in both Brazil and the U.S. at present. In this way, the discourse from 2001 foreshadows the impending political chasm between right and left in both Brazil and the United States and provides an impetus for future research.

**Keywords:** arielism, Brazil, identity, terrorism, discourse, digital interaction.

# Arielismo versus cosmopolitismo: a reação brasileira ao 11/09/01 como narrativa cultural e trabalho de identidade

## Resumo

Esta pesquisa examina o trabalho da identidade vis-à-vis o discurso brasileiro sobre os acontecimentos de 11 de setembro de 2001. Os dados são provenientes de brasileiros e expatriados participantes de um fórum de discussão digital organizado pelo jornal O Estado de São Paulo.

Ao discutir os eventos de 11 de setembro de 2001, os brasileiros também entendem o que significa ser brasileiro e o que significa ser humano. Como mostram os dados, os brasileiros enquadram as suas reações com base em entendimentos mais amplos do mundo social.

As duas posturas mais dominantes vêm de brasileiros que adotam o que pode ser chamado de posturas arielistas e cosmopolitas. Além disso, um pequeno grupo de expatriados brasileiros entra na discussão como autoproclamado americanófilo. Ao examinar essas dinâmicas, vemos que as identidades resultam do processo de construção de identidade melhor enquadrado por uma perspetiva construtivista social. Nesses três casos, as identidades emergem da interação, engajamento e reação a estruturas de identidade concorrentes. Por meio das interações de diálogo em curso, os participantes brasileiros implicitamente fazem declarações sobre as suas autoconcepções e visões do lugar do Brasil no mundo durante este evento histórico. Significativamente, as posturas complementares e de oposição em reação ao 11/9/01 continuam a persistir, quase vinte anos após os ataques, nas estruturas ideológicas em torno das identidades nacionais que circulam atualmente no Brasil e nos EUA. Dessa forma, o discurso de 2001 prenuncia o abismo político iminente entre direita e esquerda no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos e fornece um impulso para pesquisas futuras.

**Palavras-chave:** arielismo, Brasil, identidade, terrorismo, discurso, interação digital.

## INTRODUCTION

This research examines identity work vis-à-vis Brazilian discourse regarding the events of September 11, 2001. The data is drawn from Brazilian nationals and expatriates participating in a digital discourse forum hosted by the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo.* In discussing the events of 9/11/01[1], Brazilians also make sense of what it means to be Brazilian and members of humanity. As the data show, Brazilians frame their reactions drawing on larger understandings of the social world. The two most dominant stances are articulated by Brazilians expressing Arielist and cosmopolitan stances. In addition, a small group of Brazilian expatriates join the fray as self-proclaimed Americanophiles.

The research addresses one of the core problematics in global studies of media, culture, and identity. It examines how individuals and groups craft context-dependent identities when interacting in digital venues. The work addresses these interrelated areas of inquiry by examining how Brazilian digital discourse forum participants draw upon offline cultural norms in online spaces and how these offline understandings are transformed through online interaction. By examining how individuals make sense of 9/11/01 as an event with global implications, this study ascertains how

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1 In this chapter, September 11, 2001 is always referenced with the year 2001 to differentiate it from September 11, 1973, the day of Pinochet's coup d'état in Chile.

virtual forum participants simultaneously employ identity work to frame competing interpretations of the same event.

These findings shed light on both the past and the present. The contested identity work and spirit of dissent performed in these fora in 2001 finds their corollaries in more recent identity work sparked by the rise of populist movements in Brazil, the United States, and other countries. In this way, the chasms in identity-work that emerged around 9/11/01 may be seen as an ongoing process that is accelerating into the future. Therefore, this article provides an impetus for future research to understand the deeply rooted nature of ideological schisms that predate the current environment of crisis and polarization.

## SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

There is great debate on how collective identities and meanings are continuously generated (Fine, 1993; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2000). However, this project treats identity construction from a social constructionist perspective. Within the social constructionist paradigm, the processes by which individual identities and collective identities are formed are analogous, both processes giving rise to revisable identities. (Beiner, 1999; Calhoun, 1994; Hall, 1996; Jenkins, 1996). Broadly speaking, the theoretical orientation for this research is drawn from Giddens' claims that identity becomes a reflexive project of self constitution for modern selves, and that the construction of collective identities simultaneously involves processes of affiliation, inclusion and differentiation (1991). From this perspective, collective identity is a "relational achievement" that is constantly being forged anew (Gergen, 2001), and for which the construction is never completed (Hall, 1996). As this indicates, this "relational achievement" must be understood in conjunction with historically specific developments and practices, because identities are constructed within historically situated social and institutional sites. "The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure (...) constructed through, not outside difference" (Hall, 1996, pp. 4-5). According to social constructionism, identities are not only revisable, but are essentially open-ended.

The way in which one constructs one's own identity is constrained and conditioned by the ways that others construct it. Every collective constructs its identity categories in dialogue with other collectives that are constructing their own identity categories.

When a collective defines its own identity categories, it is also defining itself for other collectivities. Further, in claiming the identity attached to their collectivity, members of the collectivity internalize the identity categories originating within other collectivities, thereby remaking others' identity categories into their own (Jenkins, 1996). In this process, power differentials play a very important role. External identifications may be experienced by members of a collectivity as coercively imposed upon them against their will; constructed self-understandings may "crystallize" or respond to the coercive force of external identification (Brubaker & Cooper, 2001).

Certain identities may be embraced by the actor, while other collective identities are imposed. However, the boundary between the two is not always clear. According to Brubaker and Cooper, "Self–identification takes place in dialectical interplay with external identification, and the two need not converge. External identification is itself a varied process. In the ordinary ebb and flow of social life, people identify and categorize others, just as they identify and categorize themselves" (2001, p.15). As the conflicting identity categories produced and imposed by forum members reveals, self identifications interact with identifications that are delivered by other social actors. Through interaction, these two forms of identification either reinforce or weaken one another. The social constructionist approach to identity highlights these processes of inclusion, affiliation, and differentiation that result in the formation of collective identities. Through this recursive process of identity formation, further divisions are inscribed, and new identity categories are created.

Processes of collective identity formation have long been of interest to scholars interested in political movements and disasters (Fominaya, 2007; Fominaya, 2010; Fominaya & Feenstra, 2020; Harvey, 2017). However, relatively few have targeted the role of media in the complex relationships between identity formation and terrorist events. A few notable exceptions include Fominaya's work on the 2004 Madrid bombings. According to Fominaya and Barberet (2013), the politics of victimhood is central to different understandings of terrorist acts, the roles of victims, and the roles of perpetrator. While these concepts are central to previous treatments of 9/11/01 and identity formation, very few studies have analyzed these processes in the case of Brazil.

According to Lasmar (2020), post-9/11 Brazil has not positioned itself as a key player in the global "war on terrorism." According to other studies, (Robinson, 2005; Robinson, 2008; and Robinson, 2009), identity work in reaction to the attacks has been marked by anti-American, anti-anti-American, and pro-American identity

work in Brazil, France, and the United States. As these previous studies show, the negotiation of these identities takes place through moral metaphors including Lakoff's (2002) concepts of retribution and absolute goodness. Finally, these ideologically driven identity camps and constructions have remained stable over time many years after the initial attacks in 2001 (Robinson, 2017).

## OVERVIEW OF THE CASE STUDY, DATA, AND METHODS

This chapter explores how these identity processes take place in discourses generated in response to 9/11/01. The data are drawn from the 1844 posts generated in *O Estado*'s forum in the fall of 2001. This forum was chosen as it was the only national daily Brazilian newspaper with a forum dedicated specifically to these events. Entitled "The First War of the Century," the forum was open twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week from September 11, 2001 through October 29, 2001. During this time, the Brazilian forum received 3000% more activity than other forum hosted by the site. Forum staff reports that response to 9/11/01 is a defining moment that ignites record participation in the newspapers online discussion spaces. The sampling frame is all 1844 posts or contributions to the forum from September 11, 2001 through October 29, 2001, when the forum ends. Each day's postings were recorded in a digital format that preserves the sequencing experienced by the participants. In addition to forum posts, I conducted interviews in São Paulo with members of each forum staff.

Regarding the forum populations, the present research examines how individuals in online spaces make meaning through digital interaction: how they read others' presentations of self and react to them. While it was impossible to obtain socio-demographic information for the forum' user populations, it should be stated that there is reason to believe that the forum population most likely came from the economically privileged classes in Brazil. While the forum was open to the public and free-of-charge, only those individuals who had the economic means to use or acquire a computer, the phone toll costs, and the internet service provider fees could truly participate. In 2001, these were relatively costly barriers to participation making it likely that only the upper-middle classes truly had the opportunity to participate in *O Estado*'s forum.

Concerning analysis, in order to advance it at the semantic level, I exploit the techniques of "frame" analysis devised by researchers studying offline political discourse (Gamson, 1992). In this way I combine coding with more interpretive approaches. Traditionally coding schemes accommodate only "objective" coding categories such as direct reference, interactivity, and illocutionary status (Stromer-Galley & Martinson, 2004). Issue frames elude such coding schemes and require an interpretive strategy aimed at teasing apart the meanings of the various underlying frames used by individuals. Here I take my cue from the work done by cultural sociologists interested in offline discourse on political topics (Fisher, 1997) and political sociologists who use frames to analyze multi-party exchanges regarding controversial political issues such as nuclear power and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Gamson, 1992). I employ the concepts of positions and frames in my interpretive analysis of forum discourse. Three primary identity frames emerge from the discourse: Arielist, cosmopolitan, and Americanophile.

Finally, a few notes regarding my translations of text from the Portuguese originals are in order. All names and user handles have been replaced with pseudonyms. Any historical or factual errors in posts are left uncorrected. Any politically incorrect, profane, or other objectionable terminology is also translated or transcribed from the original text. For example, the term "third world" or any of its variations is a direct translation of the original Portuguese text that stays true to the original, as are the terms "developed" or "developing countries." Some of the statements are objectionable as is recognized by the participants themselves who accuse their rivals of making unacceptable statements. Any and all statements made by participants are translated to participants' voices and points of view—they in no way indicate my personal views.

## ANALYSIS

As the analysis reveals, Brazilians discussing the events of 9/11/01 primarily draw on Arielist, Cosmopolitan, and Americanophile frames. Brazilian Arielists critical of the U.S. frame their own identities in terms of the damages done by the United States. By contrast, Brazilian cosmopolitans situate their identity as members of humanity as a supranational collectivity. Finally, a small group of Brazilian expatriates living in the United States express distinctly Americanophile identity framings.

**Arielism**

In immediate response to 9/11/01, much of the discourse on the forum is critical of the United States and interprets the events of 9/11/01 as the result of a mosaic of American wrongdoings. This angle of vision stems from a larger Arielist framework. Arielism is based on an essay by José Enrique Rodó, the Uruguayan writer, at the turn of the nineteenth century (Yúdice, 2004). Rodó's essay is drawn from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and reinterprets some of the main characters as symbolic representations of the United States and Latin America.

In this play, Caliban is a monstrous figure, in contrast to the spirit Ariel who represents natural goodness and liberty. For Arielists, the United States takes the role of Caliban, brutal, uncivilized, and treacherous. This interpretation dovetails with Arielist critiques of American "utilitarianism" (Yúdice, 2004) that threatens elements of Brazilian culture. Those espousing the Arielist framework traditionally characterize the United States as the evil Caliban and Brazil (or Latin America) as the innocent spirit Ariel. Social actors relying on this framework place the United States in the role of Caliban that is synonymous with malevolence towards the rightful order. Within this framework, Ariel is always framed as an agent for good, while Caliban is always judged as the powerful evildoer. McPherson (2003) argues that such Arielist interpretations may go so far to equate powerlessness with virtue and to equate power with depravity.

From this general framework, Brazilian Arielists apply these interpretations to the specific events of 9/11/01. In the hours and days following the attacks, Arielists symbolically extend the characterization of powerlessness to all those harmed by the United States since World War II. For them, The United States is a global Caliban responsible for the thousands of civilian deaths due to military engagements since World War II. Arielists frame American foreign policy as an ongoing onslaught directed at multiple Ariels. They buttress this interpretation by causal logic attributing blame to the United States for military and economic violence done to countries around the world through American foreign policy:

> (...) North Americans[2] commit terrorism by calling it defense, bomb schools,
> kill civilians (...) now they feel it in their own skin what it means to bomb a

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2 Some Arielists employ the terms "North American" or "Unitedstatesien" to replace "American."

country, what it means to be on the receiving end of the intolerance they created themselves. When will this hypocrisy stop? They are the largest arms dealers dollar for dollar (...)

Another writes:

Americans have made themselves into the world's sheriff. Without anyone's leave, they attack any country as a preventative measure before even deciding if they are right or wrong. If we look at history we will see that the authors of this act could be Japanese to avenge Hiroshima and Nagasaki (...) could be Lebanese to avenge the death of Kadafi's daughter (...) But particularly the Palestinians would be right to react this way (...) they [Americans] see the world through the arrogance of the powerful, they had to believe that one day they would pay for this (...)

These Arielists collectively envision the United States' foreign policy since the 1940s as repeatedly using preventative strikes without establishing others' culpability. They see a world in which many collectives who have been wronged through preemptive strikes desire to avenge themselves. Symbolically, they describe many Ariels united against the evil Caliban. For these reasons, Arielists believe that damaged parties would be justified in reacting.

In addition to referencing foreign policy as blameworthy, Arielists also refer to covert actions by the CIA, including the CIA's operations in South America contributing to the rightwing coup d'état that took power in 1964. Such individuals draw attention to what they perceive as the disconnect between the United States' claim to represent liberty and its covert activities that aided the military dictatorship:

The country of liberty and democracy sponsored dictatorships in all of Latin America and the world, from the coups d'états to the subsequent assassinations, exiling, and torture. They sponsored them using the argument that they were defending liberty (...) In sum, official Unitedstatesien terrorism was also seen as legitimate through its propaganda and by the Western press as the defense of "democracy and liberty" (...) perhaps it would be a good time for the United-statesien people to reflect on their state's bellicose foreign policy.

Highlighting the paradoxal character of the foreign policy of the United States, as the self-described country of liberty that sponsors dictatorships abroad, Arielists blame the United States for the decades of military rule in South American countries, including Brazil. For them, the United States is directly responsible for the assassinations, exile, and torture practiced by the right-wing dictatorships in this continent. They contend that American arguments about democracy and liberty are in reality propaganda that seeks to legitimize "Unitedstatesien terrorism." Therefore, they argue that the 9/11/01 attacks should force Americans to reevaluate their country's aggressive covert activities that should be unmasked as "terrorism":

> (...) the same United States that called itself democratic and a friend of liberty, financed, trained, and helped the implantation of political repression in Brazil, the Escola Superior de Guerra,[3] was created under the supervision and in the image of the American model (...) the terrorism that must be combated above all is political and economic (...)

In referring to the Brazilian military dictatorship as aided and abetted by the CIA, these individuals implicitly frame a rupture between American rhetoric defining the United States as a democratic defender of liberty and its CIA activities in South America. Moreover, in so doing, they bolster important Arielist arguments that link foreign policy to economic injustice by equating terrorism with any and all American activities employed to strengthen the United States' political and economic agendas.

In addition, they make critiques of economic despotism as another way the United States acts as Caliban. Long before 9/11/01, Latin Americans critical of the United States have done identity work based on inclusion and exclusion to define the worthy and the unworthy (McPherson, 2003). This is especially salient in terms of larger arguments that link the United States' military and economic agendas (Ross & Ross, 2004). Arielists believe that covert activities, foreign policy, and military engagements are part of the United States' goal to maintain economic despotism over developing nations. Arielist Brazilians indict the United States government for wronging other countries and non-American collectives through what they see as the unjust wielding of American economic power:

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3 For those unfamiliar with Brazilian culture, the Escola Superior de Guerra is a federal institution of higher education for military training in Brazil; this individual compares it to the National War College in the United States.

> Hunger is the true violence done to humanity. But not just in Africa, there are other countries (...) All of the American governments and some of its populations are guilty, those that do not understand other cultures and believe that everyone must obey them, including Africans, Asians, and those of us in South America. We live in hunger and eternal economic crisis because of the guilt of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

For Arielists, the United States is culpable of bringing violence to humanity by regularly forcing less powerful nations—other Ariels--into submission. As less powerful Ariels, they are constrained to live in abject conditions in order to enrich the United States in its capacity as a malevolent Caliban.

Moreover, they update the Arielist agenda in terms of globalization as a new form of power relations oppressing the virtuous or powerless nations. For them, the economic crisis imposed on developing countries is interpreted as part and parcel of the unilateral globalization forced on the world by the United States to exploit others:

> The terrorist act committed against the biggest symbols of American military and economic power marks a new and maybe definitive turn in the world conflict between nations that are oppressed and exploited (...) the NEW WORLD ORDER dictated by the G7 countries (...) this new world is being GLOBALIZED UNILATERALLY (...)

For these Brazilian Arielists, globalization is a tool that allows developed nations led by the United States to oppress developing nations. Guided by the United States, these economically powerful Calibans oblige relatively powerless developing states to submit to their will to their own detriment. Such Arielists believe that the United States uses globalization in order to impose what they define as a new world order without regard to other nations or peoples.

Significantly, Arielists connect their critiques of foreign policy to these economic arguments. For them, American military acts are part and parcel of the United States' economic tyranny: both are interpreted as tools used by the United States to pursue its own interests as the global hegemon. Arielists believe that American economic imperialism is guilty of everyday genocide and death around the world. For them, the deaths caused by the 9/11/01 are but a drop in the bucket compared to those caused by the United States through its economic and foreign policies:

> The U.S.A. has always killed people everywhere to a far greater degree than the terrorists, and in the same way or through worse acts. Black people, poor people, innocent people that do not even know that they are killed by Americans with their protectionist laws, globalization, wars incited to sell arms, which is their big business.

Arielists believe that Americans create protectionist laws that are yet another fang of globalization that results in countless deaths, as do the wars that they think the United States brings into being simply to promote its arms industry. From the Arielist perspective, 9/11/01 creates an opportunity to remind the world that American economic gain is fueled by foreign policy seeking to protect American interests. This frame of American economic terrorism links together protectionist laws, globalization, and arms industries that Arielists describe as being actively wrought by the United States, producing economic destruction in developing countries. According to these Arielists, one cannot divorce economic and political motives, as one individual expresses: "(...) let us see these facts as a lesson. As is notorious, the U.S.A. maintains a highly interventionist foreign policy with the goal of protecting its economic prosperity (...)" Arielists believe that the United States actively seeks to bolster its economic agenda through interventionist foreign policies without any regard to its victims. From this standpoint, they argue that because the United States is guilty of promulgating foreign policy backing economic interests, 9/11/01 must be understood as a strike against politically upheld economic terrorism.

In parallel, these Arielists use analogies such as that of David and Goliath. Framed as a liberation from the long subjection to the American Caliban, 9/11/01 takes on a carnivalesque quality in the sense that power relations are turned upside down. On 9/11/01, Caliban has been made weak, and Ariel has been made strong. The attacks thus serve as a warning:

> Let this attack serve as a warning to American leaders that no one is invulnerable, omnipotent, or omnipresent. No one on earth! No one is stronger than another just as David destroyed Goliath. Let this make Americans more respectful of the weak and the oppressed.

From this point of view, there is a fundamental imbalance in the globalized world created by American lack of respect of the weak and oppressed. Arielists hope that

the United States will stop oppressing others now that it finds itself on the receiving end of violence. They express satisfaction and concur that the United States will be forced to re-evaluate its economic and political policies, "The world must change from now on. Globalization must change certain ideas and respect every country's needs." For them, Caliban is finally forced to examine the error of his ways:

> I believe that the American government may still suffer more losses if it does not revise its leadership in this world in the process of globalizing. Furthermore, such globalization can only lead to a "unified hand" favoring the U.S.A.(...) What kind of world is this in which one sole Country can glorify itself to the detriment of so many other nations?

Another writes: "American foreign policy must change. Political and economic-oppression pushed by the U.S.A., that arrogantly treats everyone like its backyard, rouses much hatred against this country." For Arielists, if the United States does not cease to trample the rights and injure the welfare of developing nations in the ruthless pursuit of profit and political power, it will continue to be the victims of Ariels who cease power to balance the moral scales.

### Cosmopolitanism

While popular, Arielism is not the only discourse employed by Brazilians discussing 9/11/01. In this case, some individuals identify with supranational imaginary communities as salient "imaginary communities" (Anderson, 1991). In the week following September 11, 2001, Brazilians also express their horror at the violence of the attacks whether or not they like the United States. These Brazilians adopt a cosmopolitanism stance critiquing the attacks because they are damaging to supranational identity categories such as "humanity."

According to Beck, there is an increasing shift towards the use of cosmopolitan identities via transnational social networks that transcend national boundaries (2000). Tomlinson also identifies the salience of cosmopolitan identity frames that may take the form of universalizing cosmopolitanism or pluralizing cosmopolitanism in reference to the globalization of culture (2000, p. 406). While a number of scholars have discussed varying facets of cosmopolitanism (Szersynskiand and Urry,

2002), according to Kleingeld and Brown (2002), the most common cosmopolitanism is "moral cosmopolitanism." At the most inclusive level of definition, moral cosmopolitanism is the "moral ideal of a universal human community" (Kleingeld and Brown, 2002) that involves the capacity to live ethically both globally and locally (Tomlinson, 1999). It is this moral cosmopolitanism that is most widely embraced by Brazilians discussing 9/11/01.

Cosmopolitans challenge Arielists by constructing different interpretations of the events of 9/11/01. Cosmopolitans envision responsibility for the attacks in terms of humanity and the human condition. For these individuals, the events of 9/11/01 demonstrate the worst of which humankind is capable. They frame humanity as trapped by the human condition and, therefore, collectively guilty of the attacks. Finally, in contrast to Arielist insistence on political interpretations, cosmopolitans express greater concern regarding the victims' suffering, as well as the families' anguish in losing loved ones.

When confronted by Arielists applauding 9/11/01, cosmopolitans explicitly denounce the Arielist framework as immoral. Regarding economic despotism, for cosmopolitans, it is illogical to make this connection because economic inequalities are not related to the events of 9/11/01:

> Do you know what this is? 30 years of Propaganda in Brazil saying that all poor people are good guys and all the rich are Machiavellian creatures that have meetings every night to plan how they will go exploit the innocent and honest ones who have no money. We know this isn't truth. It is always good to remember that in Brazil, the rich are those of us participating in this forum (...) or are all of us evil beings that are going to hell (...)

Cosmopolitans refute claims of economic despotism as "propaganda." For them, Americans are as guilty of being Calibans as are the economically privileged participants in the Brazilian forum. On a larger level, they argue that economic dominance and manipulation is a failing common to all of those with power: "It is pure hypocrisy to mourn for the victims and, at the same time, believe that what happened in the United States was deserved. Arrogance is inherent in all of the rich, independent of their origins." In making these arguments, cosmopolitans declare the powerful of any nation as equally responsible for the wellbeing of the economically powerless.

In like manner, cosmopolitans state that the Arielist stance regarding foreign pol-

icy and loss of life is hypocritical. Cosmopolitans point to the double standard that implicitly gives some lives more value than others:

> What I see in this forum is that many compare wars in Kosovo, Bosnia and others that happened with the terrorist attacks that occurred in the United States. When they do it, they pointedly put a feeling of "revenge" against the Americans into their words. In reality, the majority do not perceive that in making these comparisons many of them are really saying that the death of one person from a poor country should have greater value than the life of one wealthy American.

For these individuals, Arielists do not grasp the significance of 9/11/01 because their reactions are based on political views and arguments conceived a priori to the events. Cosmopolitans repeatedly uphold the sanctity of life for people of all nationalities.

In keeping with this framework, cosmopolitans believe that, if the sanctity of life is equal for all peoples, all victims will be shown compassion. For this reason, cosmopolitans register moral indignation in response to Arielist satisfaction:

> I am shocked by what has happened in the U.S.A. and yet even more so by what I have read in this forum. Anyone with a conscience should mourn the death of thousands of civilians and ask God to comfort the families of the unfortunates. But there are people who manage to see this act of insane terror as something good. As if it were deserved! How can these people deserve to die!

These cosmopolitans see Arielist satisfaction as unconscionable: "It is amazing that in such a time people can put forward reasons to justify such a barbaric act!" Further, cosmopolitans challenge them to remember the humanity of the victims' loved ones:

> What kind of talk is this? The people that lost their lives deserved it? Simply by being American? Imagine the families' desperation looking for their relatives. They are lives and lives that were lost. How many fathers, family men, died, people who never think of political oppression. We should cry for this tragedy

just as we should cry help people who die of violence in Brazil, who die in the drought of the Nordeste[4], etc. We are all human (...) right?

In sum, cosmopolitans accuse Arielists of not having their priorities straight: "Some participants here valorize political stances more than the sanctity of human life."

Cosmopolitans also engage in larger commentaries on what it means to be a member of humanity. Certain individuals frame humanity as the ultimate symbolic perpetrator of 9/11/01. Because humanity is capable of great evil, as members of humanity we are all guilty:

History repeats itself here like WWI and WWII. It looks like governments have not learned their lesson. What has happened is the fruit of greed, religion, politics, economics, in short what we call being human.

These arguments are anchored in a basic understanding of human nature as capable of great wrongdoing as one individual expresses, "Man, like hatred, is the worst of animals." Yet another individual expresses his shame at being human: "I believe that what I am thinking is not terribly different than what the rest of the world is imagining. We are ashamed to be part of the same race as those responsible for this!" Another asks:

Have we come to this point? How is it possible that the human race has decided to bring itself so low? I feel horrible. I would like to be any beast, even a crawling cobra rather than belong to such a barbaric species of animal!!! We are all guilty in this tragedy. We all carry within us the feelings of hatred and intolerance. What will we do next? More attacks, counter-attacks to the point of total annihilation?

Yet another individual expresses the following impression: "Horror... horror... horror... I feel shame to be a human being." As one individual summarizes, 9/11/01 is part of human suffering brought about by human hands: "Human beings are the greatest guilty party in all of this that has happened, for through global greed humanity respects no one, no even for its own shadow."

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4 For those unfamiliar with Brazilian culture, the Nordeste is the North East region of Brazil. Like certain regions in the United States, this region of Brazil is often associated with great economic insecurity.

Cosmopolitans believe that 9/11/01 marks a moment to reconsider what it means to be human. Brazilian cosmopolitanism represents this ideology as a pro-human stance that symbolically divides the world into human and inhuman acts:

> When we experience days in which our feelings and actions are marked by perplexity, fear, sadness, discouragement, and insecurity, we are forced to reflect on what we have done, what we are doing, and what we are leaving for the next generations. It was not only the U.S.A. that was victimized in these attacks (...) all of humanity suffers the consequences of the inhuman acts committed today.

Like many cosmopolitans in the Brazilian forum, this person refers to the terrorist acts as "inhuman." Other individuals echo "An attack of these proportions demonstrates to the world the extreme treachery of these groups of terrorists (...) the death of thousands of people, innocent victims of this brutal attack is an inhuman act." Another rebukes the Arielists:

> We are witnessing here one the most appalling events in contemporary history. After which followed a merry-go-round of burlesque and stoic reactions; there are some who applaud and those that are horrified and this inevitably elicits a reflection on the strange nature of humanity. Someone said that human beings are the only animal that will stop to watch a fire. In this line of thought, human beings are the only animal that will do many other things, such as believing it to be heroic and just that thousands of people died as victims of terrorist acts.

For cosmopolitans, regardless of nationality, each of us has the choice to be human or inhuman, a choice that they define as the ultimate identity marker:

> It was truly a shocking event, without precedent in the history of the civilized world. For me it was obvious that there are two worlds that are absolutely different: the first is made up of people who are born and work for their neighbor, for society. People like us, who despite whatever difficulty, in the day-to-day struggle for what is best. The second type of being, which we cannot call human, only is born to grow up to sow hatred, destruction, unjustified death, in truth the horsemen of the Apocalypse who decide who will live and who will die. We

must not allow ourselves to be influenced by this feeling of hatred and in turn
create more destruction.

In sum, for cosmopolitans: "This war is horrible for all humanity. Mankind must
unite and not kill himself in wars of this kind."


### Americanophilia

Finally, a small cadre of Americanophiles join the melee. Not surprisingly, many
are expatriates or have lived in the United States. These Americanophiles use many
of the same arguments as cosmopolitans to reject Arielist stances. However, in ad-
dition, this small group vigorously champions the United States by making positive
statements about the United States, its economy, its political system, its values, and
its people. Further, these Americanophiles critique Arielists on a number of grounds,
including what they frame as the veracity of their statements, their logic, and their
hypocrisy. Significantly, many of these assertions emerge as responses to Arielist
rhetoric that prompts Americanophiles to critique the Arielists of betraying Brazil by
refusing to solve problems in their own country. For this reason, although American-
ophiles may be loyal to Brazil and be proud of being Brazilian, they often use Brazil
as a foil to the United States.

Americanophiles frame a disjuncture between Arielist hypocrisy and American
agency. They accuse Arielists of concentrating on American wrong-doing, rather
than critically evaluating their own responsibilities in Brazil:

> Let's hide behind the story that we are poor miserable things, discriminated
> against by the U.S.A. who are the great villains, usurpers, thieves, exploiters (...)
> Until what point are we going to blame others for our own afflictions and dis-
> grace. The Brazilian people's problem is to believe that it is competent, capable,
> and superior. "Oh but the U.S.A. is clipping our wings" If people were so com-
> petent and superior we would not still be a developing nation (...) People don't
> need Americans' help, no we are full of villains in our own house!

Americanophiles frame Arielists as hypocrites who routinely criticize Americans
without acknowledging Brazil's own problems.

Unhappily, many ignorant people who watched this unjustifiable act are celebrating –including in Brazil! As if the U.S.A. were responsible for us having an incompetent government and a people, in its majority, preoccupied with having fun (...) worried more about vacation, Carnival, and soccer) rather than taking a definitive position on issues concerning social justice (...) I am from São Paulo and have lived in Boston for six years and was critical of American thinking until I understood that "citizenship" is more than a word in the dictionary (...) We have other problems in the U.S. but nothing compared to the indifference that one sees in Brazil for example (...)

Americanophiles charge Arielists with blaming the United States for all of Brazil's problems without doing anything to help Brazil themselves: "(...) For those who consider Americans 'belligerent and bellicose' cast your eyes on your own morning newspaper and see the violence of your own people against your own people. Ah! Stop blaming society."

Americanophiles believe that this hypocritical disconnect is at the root of Arielist frames. Americanophiles argue that Arielists insist on irrationally considering the United States culpable no matter what it does. In addition to blaming the United States for Brazilian problems, they charge Arielists with blaming the United States for both action and inaction. Americanophiles frame Arielist arguments as a vicious circle in which the United States will be blamed for any decision:

Today it is easy to criticize the U.S.A. and to say simply that they are reaping what they have sown, but at the same time, in addition to wanting the U.S.A. to be a country that doesn't intervene in any way, economically, militarily, or culturally in any other country, we want them to be responsible for the hunger and AIDS in South Africa, for the hunger and drought in Brazilian Nordeste, for the hole in the ozone layer, for the destruction of the Amazon, for the senseless holy war in the Middle East, for the rising price of petroleum, and many other things(...)

Americanophiles argue that Arielists blame the United States as an imperialist for any economic, military, or cultural intervention in another country. At the same time, the United States is culpable for failing to solve world hunger, AIDS, and global warming. Americanophiles argue that the United States is put into an eternal catch 22, alternately blamed for its power and blamed for not using its power.

In addition, Americanophiles challenge the Arielist argument that if the United States were not so omnipresent, other countries would inevitably thrive:

> The American people may be imperfect, but the reasons that many are writing about, the "justification" that the Americans "deserved," is the consequence and fruit of MUCH ENVY. I have lived in Los Angeles for 12 years and live with the American people. The United States, for those who are poorly informed, fought hard to have all that it does. Many complain about American society, but are very happy to have the opportunity to visit Orlando, Miami, Los Angeles, even New York. Therefore, for those who hide their envy with their irrational, heartless opinions, simplify your messages and say "I support what happened in New York because I am VERY ENVIOUS of the United States." I love Brazil passionately, but will not tolerate Brazilians who want to stick a knife into the United States without seeing (or better, DOING!!!) anything to better their own country.

Another adds that should the United States cease to be a superpower it would change nothing because Arielists would continue to fail their own country and simply find another Caliban to blame:

> (...) should they [Americans] not share all of their inventions with the rest of the world, should they not be multi-national, spread into the entire world, polluting it with their rules, ideas, norms…Maybe then other countries would have the chance to grow, turn themselves into decent countries, to combat hunger, thirst, and the health of their peoples. Or perhaps some countries would continue to be just the same as they are today? Continue to look for someone to blame, their own countrymen, their government, or maybe God? Maybe one day they will finally get to the point of saying, "God leave me alone because you are suffocating me and I can't manage to be decent, rich, dignified, because you won't leave me alone, you are suffocating me!!" (...) in this forum there is a deep feeling of envy towards Americans. In the end, we would all like to be great, rich like they are, and feel great and rich (...)

For Americanophiles, Arielist rhetoric blames the United States for what it has done, what it has not done, and what it should have done. They charge Arielists with

cloaking their "envy" by twisting anything to frame the Americans in a negative light consistent with their Arielist-Caliban understanding of the social world.

For these reasons, Americanophiles frame Arielists as not only ignorant but in denial and intent on deceiving themselves at their own peril, thereby potentially endangering Brazil:

> Reading the posts here (...) I think Brazilians should limit their posts to soccer and carnival. They are very clever at those.(...)those that defend anti-American terrorism, just wait. Terrorism will arrive at your door before you can say "bye bye" (...) For those against arms: you just wait. The time will come when you will wish had one at your disposition. Such are ignorant people. They are against anyone more powerful, but in the moment of truth want their help. Ai! From their own ignorance they see others as hypocrites!

Even more important, Americanophiles assert that Arielists are potentially opening the doors to the terrorists who respect no one and may well target Brazilian cities next:

> It was not only an attack against the U.S.A. It was an attack against anyone, any country that values law, order, and peace. Today it was New York City. One day in the future, it would be São Paulo, Belo, Rio or Recife. Those who want to blame President Bush simply do not understand what is at stake. These terrorists are religious fanatics who value death more than life (...) their own lives and the life of the entire world.

Another picks up this thread and argues that, were Brazil powerful like the United States, Arielist views of 9/11/01 would be transformed:

> (...) we might even be a little arrogant, show the world that we were important, that to destroy a building here in Brazil with 20,000 people who die wouldn't go unnoticed, these 20,000 people who would be missed, because in the first place they would be human beings leaving families and friends, and probably the world would lose some brilliant minds. We would say that God gives life, so only he can take it away. We wouldn't think that it is normal that some crazy, envious, bitter person thinks he has the right to crash a plane and kill thousands of

people. We would think that anyone trying to excuse this crazy, envious person (...) was crazy and envious. Only we don't have the courage to admit this. May the Lord be with us and guide those who died innocently to Paradise.

Finally, Americanophiles remind Arielists that Brazil itself is a powerful county that could be viewed as a Caliban by other Latin American countries casting themselves as Ariels confronted by a Brazilian Caliban:

> Know that in Latin America, countries like Argentina, groups in Uruguay, Paraguay, Columbia, and Chile think the same things [about you] that you do respecting the United States. They nurture the same hatred for the Brazilian way of life. From one side of their mouths, Argentineans call us despots; from the other they call us idiots. What if one day one of these countries were to send a group of terrorists to destroy the Brazilian way of life. How would it be if afterwards, Latin American countries began to write in a forum like this one that "those terrorists were right because of Brazilian despotism"? (...)

For Americanophiles, Arielists are so determined to fit the events of 9/11/01 into their a priori agenda, they are putting Brazil at risk by failing to see that Arielist framework can be used to create a Brazilian Caliban.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis has shown how three identity options are collectively constructed by members of the online discourse forum. In each case, each group treats identity as a reflexive project of self constitution in which members claim authority to speak for the collective. In each case, this claim to authority is challenged. Although they draw on complicated narratives, essentially all three groups reduce 9/11/01 as a choice between two polar opposites. For Arielists, the choice is between the weak and powerful interpreted as the world versus the United States. For cosmopolitans, the choice is between humanity and inhumanity. For Americanophiles, the choice is between the United States and the terrorists. All of these choices are based on the construction of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991) that are associated with the construction of symbolic collective identities. Each identity is the result of processes of affiliation,

inclusion and differentiation as discussed by Calhoun (1994). Here it becomes clear that such identities are the result on interaction and dissensus underscoring Gergen's (2001) claim that identity must be seen as a "relational achievement," as well as Hall's claim that identities are transmutable: "a constructed form of closure (...) constructed through, not outside difference" (Hall, 1996, pp. 4-5).

In the case of Arielism, we see this process play out via identity work drawing parallels between Brazil and Ariel, the underdog protagonist who is faced with the United States as Caliban, the hegemon culpable of many of the world's problems. This vision of power relations drives Brazilian Arielist response to 9/11/01. In the case of 9/11/01, Arielists extend this older framework to create identity bridges between all Ariels as the world at large as the innocent victim of Caliban or the United States. When Brazilian Arielists frame the United States as responsible for provoking the 9/11 attacks through political and economic terrorism, they draw the lines of "us" and "them" based on a priori definitions of power and powerlessness as markers of moral purity and moral impurity. Arielists frame the United States as driving the terrorists to commit what they frame as a coup of the dispossessed against their powerful oppressors. According to Arielists, the United States uses its foreign policy to enforce its economic supremacy as part of a global economic imperialist regime in which the United States regularly humiliates developing nations. Using this causal frame, these Arielists believe that this degradation is responsible for violent outbursts on the part of the humiliated. For such Brazilian Arielists, this humiliation is linked to the perceived low esteem in which the rest of the world is held by the United States; further it is a legitimate reason for violence and unrest. All of these framings serve the central identity project driving Arielist identity work that *others* the United States as the immoral *them*, set in opposition to the terrorists, the world's have nots, and the Arielist Brazilians claiming to speak for this collectivity.

By contrast, Brazilian cosmopolitans position themselves against Arielists by employing arguments about the sanctity of life for all peoples regardless of nationality. Whether or not they have negative opinions regarding the United States, these Brazilian cosmopolitans respect all lives lost on 9/11/01 as human lives. They defend 9/11/01's victims as members of humanity, in many cases despite their American nationality. In many ways, expressions of cosmopolitan identity are an explicit reaction to the Arielists. Regardless of their disapproval of various aspects of the United States, individuals who are horrified by Arielist posts are quick to identify themselves in opposition to the Arielist stance. Doing so is significant as it valorizes the sanctity

of human life as the most important identity frame dividing the human "us" from the "inhuman them." In so doing, they challenge Brazilian Arielists who claim that Americans have forfeited their membership in the human family by virtue of their government's foreign policies. Brazilian cosmopolitans counter that all humans must be considered members of the human family when human life and wellbeing are at stake, no matter what their governments may have done. Rather than refuting the claims of Arielists and denying their allegations of wrongdoing by the United States, they deploy the depoliticizing frame of global humanity. For cosmopolitans, the 9/11/01 attackers targeted fellow members of the human race. In so doing, the terrorists demonstrate the very worst of which humans are capable. Any attempt at excusing such conduct is unconscionable because it contravenes what they characterize as basic morality common to all.

While the previous arguments are largely put forth by Americanophile Brazilians who self-identify as living in Brazil, their arguments are also championed by a group of Brazilians living in the United States. Most of the Americanophiles live or have lived in the United States. Like cosmopolitans, Americanophiles make the distinction between imperfect foreign policy and terrorist agency. However, Americanophiles go further and refute what they consider to be Arielist revisionist history that casts American foreign policy as the culprit causing 9/11/01. For them, rather than embodying a monstrous Caliban, the United States is caught in a catch 22 in which it cannot be judged fairly. For this group of individuals, identity work is fraught with tensions. On the one hand, many are deeply attached to Brazil; as one writes: "I love Brazil passionately…" On the other hand, these Americanophiles are so appalled by Arielist discourse that they strike back by accusing Arielist of betraying Brazil. According to the Americanophiles, Arielists continue to waste their vital energies against an imaginary Caliban when they should be working to solve problems closer to home. Here they attempt to defend the United States but in so doing create an identity that on certain levels separates them from other Brazilians on the forum.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESENT

In examining these dynamics, we see how identities are socially constructed; identities are created via interaction, engagement, and reaction to competing identity frames. Finally, although these competing identity options are ostensibly a discussion

of September 11, 2001, in many ways the ongoing debate is also a discussion of what it means to be Brazilian and even what it should mean to be part of humanity. As we have seen, through the ongoing dialogue interactions, Brazilian participants implicitly make statements about their self-conceptions and visions of Brazil's place in the world during this historic event.

Further, these discourses and identities have not lost their salience. On the contrary, almost twenty years after the 2001 attacks, the identity discourses emerging from reaction in 2001 have increased in explanatory power. At time of writing in 2021, despite its travails, Brazil's meteoric rise on the world stage continues. From Lula to Dilma to Bolsonaro, Brazil's rollercoaster political ride is emblematic of the deepening ideological divides in both Brazil and the U.S. As this indicates, the identity discourses alternately positioning Brazil or the U.S. as victim or hegemon may help understand the rapid rise of populist presidents Bolsonaro and Trump. Therefore, while Arielism has been associated with left-of-center politics, with the rise in right-of-center populist, its animating ideas may be useful to understanding the adoption of these identity narratives by Presidents Bolsonaro and Trump (Robinson, 2021).

## FUTURE WORK

Twenty years after 2001, in 2021 we are now living in a much larger global crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic, which has ravaged Brazil and the U.S. alike. Like the attacks of 2001, reaction to the pandemic has been ideologically charged in both Brazil and the U.S. However, it has yet to be seen if roles in the Arielist scenario will be recast with new protagonists and antagonists. Going forward, scholars should ask questions including: Who will be the players on tomorrow's world stage? Will some Brazilians continue to self-identify using Arielist frameworks despite Brazil's increased power and the diminished power of the United States? Or will other Brazilians envision themselves as the new Caliban of Latin America or will this role continue to be the unique purview of the United States? Or will yet another post-pandemic scenario play out with China emerging as the global Caliban and those harmed by the pandemic as a new class of Ariels collectively harmed and helpless? Future work would do well to map out these discourses, identity stances, and positions in the post-pandemic world.

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# Learning from Lisbon
# Or, how postmodernism conquered Portugal

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## Abstract

The Amoreiras shopping centre in Lisbon is an icon of Portuguese postmodernism. When it first opened in 1985, its kitsch design stood out conspicuously amidst a landscape of smart Pombaline shopping streets, social housing tower blocks and tourist-friendly houses clad in "traditional" *azulejo* tiles. But it also reflected a pivotal moment in Portuguese history and still stands today as a reminder of the consumerist aspirations of post-revolutionary Portugal, the neoliberal policies that have come to dominate life in many Western nations and the stark contradictions of global capitalism. Departing from an initial discussion of Amoreiras, this short essay critically explores recent transformations to Lisbon's urban and architectural landscape and traces their political and economic origins. In so doing, it suggests ways in which postmodernism might be considered a relevant concept for describing contemporary Portuguese society.

**Keywords:** postmodernism, architecture, urban history, Lisbon, Portugal.

# Lições de Lisboa
# Ou como o pós-modernismo conquistou Portugal

## Resumo

O centro comercial Amoreiras, em Lisboa, é um ícone do pós-modernismo português. Quando abriu pela primeira vez em 1985, o seu design kitsch destacou-se de forma conspícua no meio de uma paisagem de elegantes ruas comerciais pombalinas, edifícios de habitação social e casas turísticas revestidas de azulejos "tradicionais". Mas também refletiu um momento crucial na história portuguesa e ainda permanece hoje como uma lembrança das aspirações consumistas do Portugal pós--revolucionário, das políticas neoliberais que passaram a dominar a vida em muitas nações ocidentais e das contradições gritantes do capitalismo global. Partindo de uma discussão inicial sobre as Amoreiras, este pequeno ensaio explora criticamente as transformações recentes na paisagem urbana e arquitetónica de Lisboa e traça as suas origens políticas e económicas. Ao fazê-lo, sugere formas através das quais o pós-modernismo pode ser considerado um conceito relevante para descrever a sociedade portuguesa contemporânea.

**Palavras-chave:** pós-modernismo, arquitetura, história urbana, Lisboa, Portugal.

The Amoreiras shopping centre watches over Lisbon, its bright colours and reflective surfaces glistening in Portugal's perpetual sunlight. When it first opened its doors in 1985, its kitsch design stood out conspicuously amidst a landscape of smart Pombaline shopping streets, social housing tower blocks and tourist-friendly houses clad in "traditional" *azulejo* tiles. Its glass towers rose high into the sky, its monumental scale dominating Lisbon's urban landscape. Inside, its 45,000 square metres of shady and disorienting spaces enveloped the unsuspecting visitor in an intoxicating state of frenzied consumerism; on the ground level, it even contained its own small church, lending ironic new meaning to George Ritzer's famous description of shopping malls as "cathedrals of consumption" (Amoreiras Shopping Center, n.d.; Ritzer, 2010). And so, when over 10,000 visitors (Amoreiras Shopping Center, n.d.) passed through the doors on its opening day, it was no surprise that Amoreiras "captured the public's imagination in a spectacular way" (Broadbent, 1990, p. 9) – and quickly became an icon of Portuguese postmodernism.

The centre was designed by Tomás Taveira, a controversial architect who first gained notoriety in the 1980s for having helped introduce postmodernist architecture to Portugal. Having initially studied in Lisbon during the 1960s, he later completed his postgraduate studies in the United States, returning with a sense that "architecture must be, beyond everything, art: provoking emotion, the controversial, the contradictory" (Taveira, 2002, p. 18). So, if Charles Jencks once defined postmodern architecture by its "radical eclecticism," by its tendency towards "the vernacular, towards tradition and the commercial slang of the street," it was no surprise that it could later be seen in Amoreiras (Jencks, 1978, p. 6). In fact, one might even detect similarities to other postmodern landmarks: the decorative flourishes of Michael Graves' Portland Building, perhaps, or the reflective surfaces of John Portman's Westin Bonaventure Hotel. But Amoreiras, insisted Taveira, was different. "We haven't sought a simple image of progress," he says. "We didn't design the buildings so that they were an affirmation of technology." Instead, he claims, "they are placed in the position to affirm a possible architectural culture for our country and for Lisbon in particular" (Cardim, 2013, p. 153). To understand that desire, its origins must be traced back several decades.

**Figure 1**

*The Amoreiras shopping centre, 1985 (Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa)*



Under the *Estado Novo*, Portugal's forty-year long dictatorial regime, most major industrial development and economic growth had been severely repressed. Led by António de Oliveira Salazar, the country's economy remained largely agricultural, most of the population lived in rural areas and private enterprise was controlled

by just forty prominent families. The regime especially opposed industrial growth whenever it was seen to encourage "modernising" trends such as consumerism and secularism; Portugal was a devout Catholic nation, socially conservative and largely peripheral to the European and world economy. Architecturally, this conservatism manifested in two distinct ways: on one hand, the regime often rejected modernist trends seen elsewhere in Europe and, on the other, it enforced the development of a nationalist architecture based on the "eternal spirit" of the Portuguese people. As such, most major architectural projects during the *Estado Novo* generally stressed a continuity with Portugal's past, favouring neo-classical and "traditionalist" styles, while reluctantly embracing only an attenuated modernist aesthetic. Yet, this decidedly parochial approach was not without its detractors; at one point, Salazar lamented that young Portuguese architects were not producing buildings that "[fit] our race and our climate," instead "subserviently following foreign models" (Carvalho, 2018, p. 147).

By the final years of the *Estado Novo*, however, things were beginning to change (Baklanoff, 1992). In 1968, when a stroke left Salazar bed ridden, his replacement by Marcelo Caetano coincided with a period of great economic transformation and political reform. A surge in foreign investment helped fuel the expansion and diversification of the country's nascent manufacturing industry. A subsequent rise in wages opened up new channels of social mobility, boosting demand for consumer goods. And a wave of migration to Portugal's major cities greatly accelerated processes of urbanisation. The Portuguese economy was opening up, but even bigger changes would soon take place to the very nature of global capitalism itself. In the early 1970s, following years of sustained post-war growth, the world economy was plunged into recession when the Bretton Woods system collapsed, followed by the so-called oil crisis of 1973. As David Harvey notes, this led to a "troubled period of economic restructuring and social and political readjustment," which would ultimately usher in an "entirely new regime of accumulation" (1992, p. 145). And so, on the eve of its peaceful "Carnation Revolution," Portugal stood poised to embrace a world of great economic uncertainty.

It was during this time that the first small shopping centres emerged in Lisbon and Porto. When Apolo 70 opened to great fanfare in 1971, it comprised a modest 41 shops spread across two floors; its sleek, space-age interiors designed by renowned artist Paulo Guilherme d'Eça Leal. A new Portuguese consumer culture was surely emerging, though it was not until the late-1980s that larger, American-style shopping malls were constructed. Following Portugal's accession to the European Economic

Community (EEC), a precursor to the European Union (EU), a new wave of foreign investment and market liberalisation sparked a veritable bonanza of consumerism: the CascaiShopping complex was opened in 1991, strategically located in Lisbon's wealthy western suburbs, followed by a succession of shopping centre openings up and down the country. By 1997, this culminated with the completion of Colombo, one of the largest shopping complexes in Europe, its postmodern arcades and faux town squares incongruously themed around Portugal's so-called "age of discoveries." It offered over 400 shops, dozens of restaurants, a health club with two swimming pools, a 10–screen multiplex cinema and, of course, a church.

**Figure 2**

*The Apolo 70 shopping centre, 1977 (Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa)*



Meanwhile, with the opening of each successive shopping centre, Lisbon's urban landscape was becoming increasingly fragmented. For centuries, the city's *baixa* district, with its grid-patterned streets and smart Pombaline architecture, had served as its main commercial hub. But a mixture of neoliberal reforms, combined with

the increasing prominence of the private property market, as well as a lack of inter-municipal cooperation, resulted in a process of sprawling suburbanisation and the emergence of multiple, geographically dispersed commercial centres (Lund Hansen, 2003; Tulumello, 2015). Between 1991 and 2011, Lisbon's city centre lost over a third of its population, while the broader metropolitan region gained over 300,000 new residents (Lestegás, 2019). Arguably, this process of urban restructuring (culminating in major urbanisation projects such as EXPO '98 and the POLIS Programme) marked the emergence of what Manuel Castells ominously calls "the Wild City," later reformulated by Edward Soja as the "post-metropolis," a bewildering new reality in which "the contemporary city seems to be increasingly unmoored from its spatial specificity, from the city as a fixed point of collective reference, memory and identity" (Castells, 1977, p. 427; Soja, 2000, p. 150). By the turn of the new millennium, shopping malls such as Amoreiras had largely overtaken "traditional" shopping streets as Lisbon's principal commercial spaces.

**Figure 3**
*The Colombo shopping centre, 2020 (Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa)*
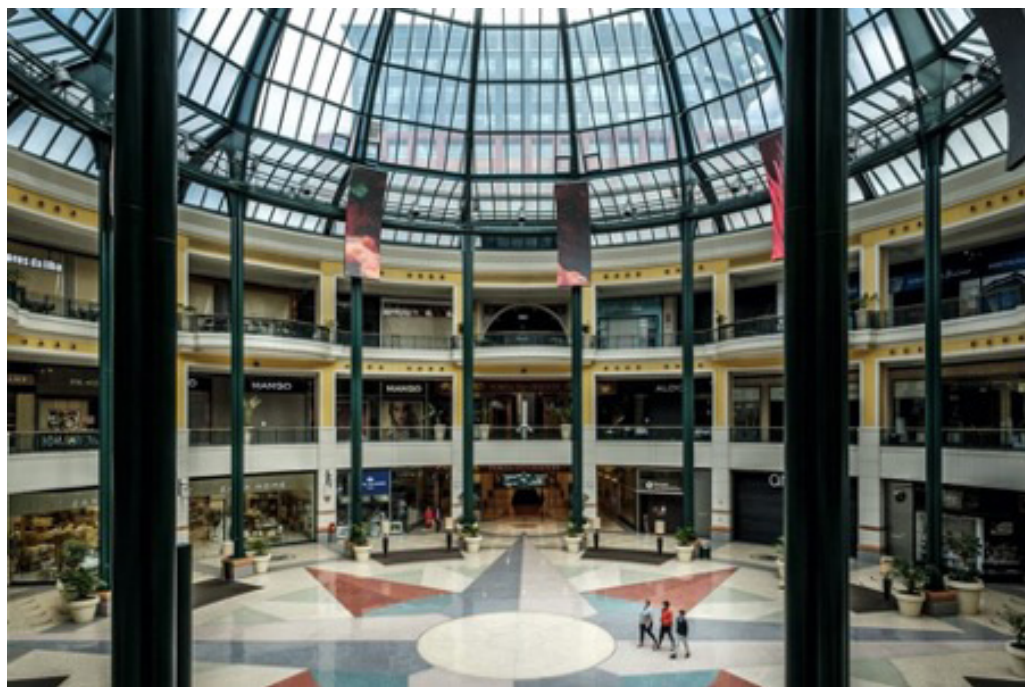
The financial crisis of 2007–8 only deepened the contradictions of Portugal's "postmodern condition" (Lyotard, 1984). When the world economy once again entered recession, the effects on Portuguese society were devastating, including massive job losses and increased unemployment, a rise in emigration and the significant worsening of social inequalities. By 2011, the country was compelled to negotiate an unprecedented "economic adjustment programme" with the EU and IMF, including a financial bailout package of some 78 billion euros (European Union, 2014). The right-wing PSD/CDS-PP government at the time, led by Pedro Passos Coelho, swiftly introduced deep structural reforms, allegedly designed to boost potential growth, create jobs, and improve economic competitiveness. Instead, a rapid liberalization programme resulted in the large-scale deregulation of a number of key economic sectors, the introduction of policies specifically designed to attract further foreign investment and, crucially, the affirmation of tourism as an integral part of Portugal's post-crisis economy.

Today, the tourism industry exceeds 16% of Portugal's gross domestic product. Each year, it contributes over 30 billion euros to the country's economy and employs nearly a million of its citizens (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018). In Lisbon in particular, it has fuelled a relentless process of tourism-driven gentrification, as many inner-city residents are priced out of their homes and the short-term rental market gains increasing prominence (Lestegás, 2019; Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2019). The result has been "a tacit change in land use from residential to tourist uses that residents experience as a process of social injustice" (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2019, p. 3). Meanwhile, the cultural impact has been equally serious; as tourists travel to their holiday destinations, notes John Urry, they "gaze upon or view a set of different scenes, of landscapes or townscapes," which are hastily "objectified or captured through photographs, postcards, films, models and so on" (2002, pp. 1, 3). Thus, local cultures are unceremoniously transformed into material things that can be endlessly reproduced, recaptured and redistributed around the world; a "society of the spectacle," as Guy Debord famously writes, in which "everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation" (2005, p. 7).

Back at Amoreiras, its bright colours and reflective surfaces remain an enduring symbol of how the country has changed over the past few decades. Today, the shopping centre welcomes, on average, over 12 million visitors each year; according to promotional material, it has now become "an obligatory stop for residents and tourists" alike (Amoreiras Shopping Center, n.d.). And yet, beyond its significance

as a mere shopping destination, Amoreiras also stands as an uneasy reminder of the consumerist aspirations of post-revolutionary Portugal, the neoliberal policies that have come to dominate life in many Western nations and the stark contradictions of global capitalism. Its towers reflect the economic changes and political turmoil that have helped produce radically new urban forms; its imposing size epitomises the devastating effects of uneven spatial development; its kitsch designs embody a kaleidoscopic vision of an uncertain future. Indeed, perhaps Taveira's "radical eclecticism," so boldly expressed in the Amoreiras shopping centre, really did mark the emergence of a certain postmodern sensibility in Portuguese culture. But, above all, Amoreiras compels us to consider what modern-day Portugal has become, where it might be going and – most urgently of all – what lessons can be learnt.

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# O paralelo entre as revistas femininas e as comunidades virtuais no Brasil

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## Resumo

Este artigo investiga como as revistas femininas estão sendo substituídas pelas comunidades virtuais na internet. A análise de conteúdo realizada mostra a necessidade das mulheres procurarem novos espaços de debate e criar identificação com temas relacionados com o feminismo e não apenas sobre beleza. As revistas especializadas no público feminino foram uma das primeiras formas de ascensão das mulheres aos meios de comunicação. Entretanto, essas publicações, assim como o jornalismo em geral, enfrentam dificuldades e estão sendo canceladas ou adaptadas para o meio digital nas últimas duas décadas. Portanto, as comunidades virtuais analisadas nessa pesquisa (Fashionismo e Modices) são uma oportunidade para desenvolver novas interações e debates graças aos recursos do Facebook, entre outras redes que disponibilizam recursos para criação de comunidades. Agora, ao invés de lerem revistas onde são sexualizadas, as mulheres também estão criando o seu próprio espaço nas comunidades virtuais, como esse artigo identificou e contribui para futuras reflexões sobre o tema.

**Palavras-chave:** revista feminina, comunidades virtuais, Facebook, jornalismo especializado, feminismo.

# The parallel between women's magazines and virtual communities in Brazil

## Abstract

The paper investigates how the women's magazines have been replaced by virtual communities on the internet. The content analysis shows a need for women to look for other spaces to debate and create identification with the topics related to feminism and not only beauty. The women's magazines were one of the first forms of women's rise in mass media. However, these publications, as all journalism, face difficulties and have been closed or adapted to the internet. Thus, these virtual communities analysed (Fashionismo and Modices) are an opportunity to develop new interactions and debates with new sources on Facebook. Instead of reading magazines where they are sexualized by mass media, women now are creating their own space in virtual communities, as this papel identified and contributed to future reflections.

**Keywords:** women's magazine, virtual communities, Facebook, specialized journalism, feminism.

# 1. INTRODUÇÃO

Em busca de representatividade e criação de identidade, foi na televisão e nas revistas femininas que as mulheres as encontraram no último século, e por vezes, até antes dele, mesmo que muitas publicações tenham cedido às pressões publicitárias com o passar dos anos. A afirmação é baseada nas ideias de Naomi Wolf (1992), que critica como a cultura de massa reproduziu modelos quase inalcançáveis que levaram mulheres à exaustão. Essa crítica inicial auxilia a introduzir o que este trabalho propõe questionar: estariam as mulheres migrando das revistas femininas para os grupos de Facebook , dentre outras redes sociais, em busca de novos espaços de debate e, principalmente, representatividade?

O jornalismo de revista foi um dos principais responsáveis por incluir a figura e os temas femininos nos medias de massa. Entre as características gerais das revistas femininas, como salientam Gabrielle Bittelbrun e Daisi Vogel (2010), estão a influência da moda e da literatura através de temas como comportamento, beleza, lar, independência feminina e sexualidade. A partir de então, a mulher teve recursos para se sentir representada e identificada ao longo dos últimos dois séculos, o que não acontecia anteriormente.

A forma como a imprensa feminina criou um padrão marcado pelas diferenças de gênero sob conceitos limitados, ocorreu a partir de matérias sobre como a mulher deveria se comportar, vestir e procurar um marido, além da valorização em excesso da beleza feminina (Rodrigues, 2004). Em seu estudo, Luciana Rodrigues (2004) identificou 58 propagandas de produtos diversos em uma revista feminina de 218 páginas, sendo 90% de produtos de beleza ou moda.

As antigas revistas sofreram transformações com o crescimento da internet e muitas publicações impressas tornaram-se somente digitais, assim como o seu conteúdo também mudou. Contudo, não é sobre elas que se irá referir nesse trabalho. O foco é nas novas formas de comunidades virtuais que as mulheres criaram para conversarem, trocarem informações, conselhos e, em alguns casos, expandirem seus conhecimentos sobre o universo feminino, pois historicamente os movimentos feministas tiveram de lutar contra publicações que estimulavam cada vez mais a compra de cosméticos para que a mulher atingisse a "perfeição" (Wolf, 1992).

O que se pretende nesse estudo é ampliar o conhecimento com relação à formação de novas comunidades virtuais focadas no público feminino que surgem com grande audiência através dos grupos de Facebook. Não por acaso, elas ganharam força

enquanto as revistas femininas perdiam assinantes e leitores, que estão sendo recuperados após reformulações editoriais nos anos recentes. A questão principal desta pesquisa é se esses espaços online seriam a nova forma de as mulheres buscarem se informar, debater e empoderar, ocupando uma parte da lacuna criada pelas revistas femininas, que somente nos últimos anos mudou seu discurso.

A metodologia aplicada neste trabalho consiste em uma pesquisa qualitativa executada inicialmente por meio da revisão bibliográfica que, segundo Gil (2002, p. 44), "é desenvolvida com base no material já elaborado, constituído principalmente de livros e artigos científicos". Em um segundo momento optou-se pela escolha de dois grupos no Facebook a partir de um critério que os colocasse em proximidade no número de membros e também conforme a sua origem e temas. A análise dos grupos foi qualitativa, observando que esse método permite "uma descrição detalhada de um meio social específico, uma base para construir um referencial para pesquisas futuras e fornecer dados para testar expectativas e hipóteses desenvolvidas fora de uma perspectiva teórica específica" (Gaskell, p. 65). A partir disso foi possível identificar como os grupos analisados criam no ciberespaço um ambiente seguro de representação e interação para as pautas das mulheres.

## A CRISE DAS REVISTAS FEMININAS

Não podemos definir uma única causa para a crise das publicações femininas no Brasil e no mundo, especialmente no século XXI, pois é resultado de uma união de fatores: a necessidade da adaptação ao formato digital; as crises econômicas e diminuição da verba publicitária; a emergência dos temas a respeito da igualdade de gênero. Conteúdos que nas décadas de 80 e 90 fizeram sucesso, como as dietas milagrosas e as regras de comportamento social, não prometem mais o corpo "perfeito". Identificamos isso com uma breve pesquisa em sites de revistas que existem há alguns anos e agora contam com editoriais que tratam sobre saúde e bem-estar, não apenas emagrecimento, caracterizando uma mudança de posicionamento e discurso.

Em agosto de 2018 a Editora Abril anunciou que 15 títulos seriam retirados de operação[1] no Brasil, sendo a maioria revistas com enfoque para as mulheres, como a

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1  Disponível em: https://jconline.ne10.uol.com.br/canal/cultura/sociedade/noticia/2018/08/06/editora-abril-anuncia-o-fim-de-dez-revistas-saiba-quais-349838.php

Cosmopolitan e a Elle. Outras tradicionais, como a Revista Cláudia[2], sofreram cortes e reestruturações. Com isso, abre-se a lacuna referida acima: se as mulheres não têm mais espaços como esses, para onde migra esse público? Além do aumento dos debates de gênero em todo o mundo, questionando os padrões aos quais a mulher é submetida na sociedade, surgem também novos espaços para levantar questões consideradas importantes a esse público. O objetivo proposto aqui é refletir sobre esse crescimento ao mesmo tempo em que as revistas femininas sofreram mudanças, traçando semelhanças com os novos meios e considerando as devidas diferenças, tanto de plataforma quanto de linguagem. O tema abordado se mostra relevante no âmbito em que discute não apenas o jornalismo, mas também abre um novo debate acerca das comunidades virtuais como instrumento de empoderamento feminino.

É em meio a esse contexto que surgem grupos majoritariamente femininos no Facebook, conforme se verá a seguir, mas também em outras redes sociais não abordadas aqui. Debates no Twitter, grupos formados por mulheres na Twitch, entre outras redes, também exemplificam os novos espaços que eram exclusivos das revistas. É fato que o crescimento se deve ao sucesso das redes sociais, mas também pode estar atrelado a essa carência de uma representatividade que seja fiel à realidade e com debates questionadores.

## 2.1. A semente da representação feminina na comunicação de massa

Segundo Wolf (1992, p. 83), as revistas sempre estiveram diretamente ligadas ao comportamento feminino e alterando o papel das mulheres, pois "sempre emprestaram charme àquilo que o sistema econômico, seus anunciantes e, durante a guerra, o governo precisavam naquele momento obter das mulheres". Na imprensa em geral, Buitoni critica que a figura representada da mulher seguiu um padrão: branco, integrante da classe social alta e que consome produtos de beleza e moda para se expressar como uma mulher independente, em especial a partir de 1970 (Carneiro et al., 2017).

Em suas pesquisas, Bittelbrun e Voguel (2010) afirmam que os primeiros modelos semelhantes a uma revista são de 1663, na Alemanha, tratando de temas como moda e beleza. É importante entender que isso variou conforme cada época, afinal, em 1800

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2 A revista foi lançada pela Editora Abril em 1961, em São Paulo, sendo pioneira no segmento e atingindo um público-alvo constituído por mulheres entre 25 e 40 anos, preferencialmente de classe média.

as preocupações das mulheres eram diferentes do que em 1900 e, posteriormente, nos anos 2000.

A primeira publicação nesse estilo seria de 1693, *O Mercúrio das Senhoras*, sendo a pioneira a tratar de temas domésticos relacionados com a mulher. Outras publicações semelhantes surgiram, incluindo a Godey's Lady's Book e a Harper's Bazzar, ambas no século XIX. As mulheres se identificaram com essas revistas, pois era uma forma de se sentirem representadas e, muitas vezes, menos entediadas na sociedade em que viviam.

No Brasil, as revistas surgiram no início do século XIX. Segundo Íria Baptista e Karen Abreu (2010), a primeira publicação teria sido *As Variedades ou Ensaios de Literatura*, em 1812. De acordo com elas, somente em 1827 tem-se registro do que seria a primeira revista feminina em solo brasileiro: *Espelho.* Como defende Wolf (1992), essas publicações cediam aos seus tempos no mundo todo. Se era interessante que as mulheres ficassem em casa no pós-guerra para não tomar os empregos dos homens, era isso que as matérias estimulavam. Se era vantajoso ao governo que as mulheres tivessem mais filhos, então as matérias falariam sobre gravidez. Isso reflete o pensamento da sociedade de massa (Ferreira, 2016), mas não obrigatoriamente os temas relacionados à beleza e ao corpo foram negativos para as mulheres, pois também impulsionaram que se abordasse sobre saúde, bem-estar e o empoderamento do corpo feminino. Esse conteúdo se profissionalizou ao longo das décadas com o aprimoramento do jornalismo e foi um instrumento importante para as mulheres conhecerem melhor o mundo e o seu lugar nele. De fato, as revistas tiveram e ainda têm função social para as mulheres em muitos momentos de suas vidas. Como o foco dessa pesquisa é o Brasil, destaca-se uma de suas principais revistas de segmentação feminina durante décadas: *Claudia*, iniciada em 1961 sob o slogan *"a revista da mulher brasileira"*. Em muitos momentos de sua história a revista fortaleceu a figura feminina além dos seus estereótipos e convenções sociais, mas também abordava dietas e modelos inalcançáveis de beleza:

> Mesmo abordando temas tradicionalmente associados à mulher, como lar, espiritualidade, marido e filhos, Claudia propunha também um discurso emancipado, reforçando ideais de independência feminina, manifestados na seção "A arte de ser mulher", a partir de 1963, com Carmen da Silva. Além de ser uma das primeiras mulheres a assumir de fato uma função em uma redação jornalística brasileira (Duarte, 2007), Carmen da Silva quebrou tabus ao tratar de assuntos

nunca antes abordados nas revistas, como machismo, independência feminina
e problemas sexuais (Bitterlbrun & Vogel, 2010, p. 167).

Ainda segundo Bittelbrun Vogel (2010), a revista chegou a ter uma tiragem de
500 mil exemplares por mês, incluindo reportagens sobre comportamento, profissão
e maternidade. Hoje, há muitas mulheres brasileiras nascidas entre as décadas de 70
e início dos anos 90 que foram influenciadas por anos pela revista. Para Bittelbrun e
Vogel (2010), as revistas ditas "femininas" caracterizam-se justamente por essa proxi-
midade e temas do cotidiano das mulheres, que eram abordados diferentemente dos
jornais diários. A maioria das revistas recebia cartas de suas leitoras compartilhando
casos pessoais. Depois, isso migrou para o e-mail e, atualmente, para as redes sociais,
significando que as mulheres confiavam naquela publicação, sentiam-se próximas e
acolhidas.

Conforme a publicidade se tornou um meio para o jornalismo se difundir e lucrar,
mais as revistas femininas se propagaram. Isso está associado à crítica feita por Wolf
(1992):

> A ascensão das revistas femininas resultou de grandes investimentos de capi-
> tal, aliados à expansão da alfabetização e ao aumento do poder aquisitivo das
> mulheres da classe trabalhadora e da baixa classe média. Começara a democra-
> tização da beleza. As revistas recomeçaram a publicar anúncios na virada do
> século. Enquanto as sufragistas se acorrentavam aos portões da Casa Branca
> e do Parlamento, a circulação das revistas femininas duplicou mais uma vez
> (Wolf, 1992, p. 81)

Essa afirmação estimula a pensar se o que originou as revistas feministas também
não causou parte das críticas direcionadas a elas. Hoje, há um crescimento das pautas
de empoderamento feminino e que questionam os modelos impostos anteriormente
pelas publicidades que eram majoritários nas revistas femininas, e em muitos casos,
ainda o são. A diferença no discurso da imprensa feminina desde 1960 está eviden-
ciada em estudos como o de Amanda Jesus (2017), destacando que até metade do
século passado as revistas especializadas no público feminino eram despolitizadas,
com o estímulo ao consumismo se intensificando a partir de 1950 e o mercado divi-
dindo um espaço discreto com publicações feministas. Outro fator importante para a
mudança foi a influência de outros meios de informação, como a internet, ampliando

as editorias e a forma como reproduziam a imagem da mulher (Jesus, 2017), que desejam ver mais corpos reais, mais mistura de raças, mais política, mais economia e mais moda inclusiva nos conteúdos que consomem.

## 3. FACEBOOK: UM NOVO MUNDO DE POSSIBILIDADES

Ao contrário das revistas, o Facebook e as redes sociais em si são novidades do século XXI. Desde 2004, o Facebook se apresenta como uma rede de infinitas possibilidades, dimensionando a conexão entre as pessoas que estão por trás de seus perfis online. Os grupos criados na rede unem pessoas que possuem algum interesse em comum. Conforme salientam Brian Gaines e Jeffery Mondak (2009, p. 16), "a rede social facebook emergiu como um fórum central de interação social e comunicação", sendo fundamental para a interação social.

Segundo consta no próprio site, a sua missão é "dar às pessoas o poder de criar comunidades e aproximar o mundo". Assim, o Facebook assume esse papel de um dos criadores de comunidades virtuais ao redor do mundo junto a outras redes sociais existentes. Graças às dinâmicas que comporta, ele é um campo aberto de análises principalmente com relação ao comportamento humano.

É importante esclarecer que as comunidades virtuais, embora mais recentes, caracterizam a forma como a sociedade se comporta na Comunicação Mediada por Computador. Conforme Raquel Recuero (2002, p. 227), "'comunidade virtual' seria o termo utilizado para os agrupamentos humanos que surgem no ciberespaço". Portanto, não há erro em reconhecer os grupos de Facebook como comunidades virtuais, mas precisamos observar tais comunidades para além da referida rede. A ideia de "comunidade", em sua significância ampla, pode ser atribuída como "uma relação social na medida em que a orientação da ação social (...) baseia-se em um sentido de solidariedade: o resultado de ligações emocionais ou tradicionais dos participantes" (Weber, 1987, p. 77). Para que essa noção se adapte ao virtual, é fundamental que as interações no ciberespaço sejam de trocas e laços sociais (Recuero, 2002).

No Facebook, há grupos de todos os temas e dimensões possíveis. Muitos são focados em notícias locais ou promovem a união feminina, instigando um empoderamento quase espontâneo, mesmo que nem sempre criados com esse objetivo. Graças a isso, os grupos se tornam uma ferramenta social para que as mulheres encontrem representatividade e apoio em um ambiente online. Os grupos permitem que "um

certo número de pessoas possa juntar-se online, em simultâneo, para partilhar informação e discutir temas específicos" (Correia & Moreira, 2014, p. 175). Seguindo essa lógica, há dois grupos criados por mulheres brasileiras que se assemelham e podem responder à principal questão desse trabalho.

O primeiro deles explica logo em seu nome do que se trata: Modices / Moda, Feminismo e Cultura. Essa designação poderia ser o slogan de qualquer revista que vendeu milhares de exemplares no Brasil nas últimas décadas. O grupo originou-se de um blog: Modices[3]. Ou seja, um canal que já estava presente e consolidado no ciberespaço conforme as suas características particulares em um meio online. O blog foi criado por uma jornalista, a mesma responsável posteriormente pelo grupo, e trata de temas voltados para o empoderamento feminino e a cultura. Na sua página principal é possível ler: "A desconstrução começa aqui", criando um espaço para que cada mulher possa se identificar, aprender e se informar. Tudo isso é projetado diariamente para o grupo, onde os mesmos temas são apresentados e discutidos.

Quase da mesma forma surgiu outro grupo: Fashionismo[4], também originado de um blog homônimo. Embora criado por uma arquiteta de formação, Tereza Chamas, é considerado um dos pioneiros no Brasil em blogs de moda, beleza, decoração e cultura. Como define a criadora do blog, "No Fashionismo você encontra tudo sobre o adorável universo feminino".

Ambos blogs se assemelham ao jornalismo praticado nas revistas femininas, dimensionando isso atualmente para os seus grupos do Facebook. A afirmação se comprova através dos temas abordados: beleza, moda, profissão, direitos, relacionamento, saúde, etc. No entanto, isso agora não obedece a demanda comercial — dentro de suas perspectivas — mas, sim, as regras estipuladas em um consenso entre seus integrantes e se adequando às características e possibilidades da plataforma online em que funcionam.

### 3. 1. Ocupando a lacuna

Para Patrícia Nascimento (2002, p. 18), "define-se revista como uma publicação periódica de formato e temática variados que se difere do jornal pelo tratamento visual". A autora ainda salienta que a segmentação também é outra característica marcante. Já quanto ao jornalismo de lifestyle, que também se aproxima das revistas

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3 Disponível em: https://www.modices.com.br/
4 Disponível em: https://fashionismo.com.br

femininas nas temáticas, Adriana Matos (2016, p. 26) afirma que "é possível definir jornalismo de lifestyle como uma vertente distinta do jornalismo, uma vez que este aborda os seus públicos como consumidores fornecendo-lhes não só informações, mas também conselhos".

Essas definições são importantes quando se observa os dois grupos de Facebook citados. Em primeiro lugar, salienta-se que ambos, conforme citado acima, surgiram de blogs, que por sua vez têm papel fundamental no ciberespaço. Tais blogs podem ser mais ou menos pessoais, mas têm a possibilidade de um alcance universal e, muitas vezes, de estimular debates e promover interações entre os usuários da internet. Assim como uma revista tem o seu guia editorial, os grupos analisados nessa pesquisa também possuem as suas "regras". Ambos são claros nesse quesito e solicitam para que cada novo membro confira as regras sob pena de ser excluído do grupo, afinal, elas são importantes para o bom convívio entre todos. Quanto ao número de membros, o Fashionismo possui atualmente cerca de 10 mil membros, já o Modices contabiliza 14 mil. Ambos são grupos fechados e apenas quem é aceite, após solicitar sua entrada, é que poderá ver e interagir com as publicações.

Os dois grupos não são excludentes ao público masculino, mas os homens não são a maioria. Esse dado tem relevância e auxilia a responder como as mulheres estão procurando outros meios para além das revistas. Se antes liam a Claudia para saber como ser uma profissional melhor no mercado de trabalho ou a Elle para saber como se vestir para uma entrevista de emprego, agora há possibilidade de fazer isso nos grupos e, conforme a investigação constatou na sua observação, assim o fazem.

Tais grupos podem ser definidos como espaços onde as mulheres estão interagindo e compartilhando informações, experiências e, sobretudo, visões. Elas estão se identificando umas com as outras e abordando pautas atuais, afinal, não se discute mais como a mulher deve se comportar no casamento, como na década de 70. Agora, discute-se como a mulher deve sair de um relacionamento infeliz ou até mesmo abusivo. Neles também há "variedades"— ou "lifestyle" — como troca de indicação de filmes, debates sobre notícias de entretenimento, entre outros. No Fashionismo, há publicações onde as mulheres debatem temas políticos e criaram uma nuvem online de compartilhamento com reportagens relevantes sobre acontecimentos no país e no mundo. Já no Modices, foi criada uma postagem exclusiva para divulgação de vagas de emprego com a intenção de oportunizar que mais mulheres tenham acesso ao mercado de trabalho.

É principalmente através de todas essas evidências, desde as semelhanças até as diferenças com relação às revistas femininas, que tais comunidades virtuais, como podem ser denominadas, estão promovendo o empoderamento feminino e sendo um novo canal onde as mulheres sentem-se seguras — afinal, são fechados — e próximas umas das outras para falarem sobre o mundo e sobre si.

## 4. AS MUDANÇAS SÃO REALIDADE

O surgimento das primeiras notícias é associado justamente aos debates observados em espaços públicos séculos atrás, com relatos que depois eram estampados em jornais da época. Posteriormente, isso influenciou as teorias de Habermas quanto à Esfera Pública. Sendo assim, os espaços de esfera pública dos séculos anteriores foram determinantes para o surgimento da imprensa. Conforme a Revolução Industrial permitiu que um número maior de tiragens fossem impressas, as revistas aumentaram sua abrangência e criaram outro espaço de debate e discussão, como o são até hoje, na verdade.

Partindo desses apontamentos históricos, por que não seriam os grupos de Facebook os novos espaços onde a opinião gera debates e, sobretudo, identificação? Por que não seriam eles a atender e determinar como a nova sociedade — centrada na era digital — debate entre si? As mídias sociais já possuem esse poder, mas criar grupos de segmentos específicos que se assemelham às revistas femininas é uma realidade já em vigência, como os dois grupos analisados comprovam. É importante avaliar que as comunidades virtuais são espaços onde há construção de laços sociais, debates, interações sociais, capital social, conflitos, competição, cooperação e outros comportamentos de sistemas sociais (Recuero, 2005). Essas observações auxiliam a entender a relação das mulheres com o espaço digital que encontram para repetir a busca pela informação e identificação como já o faziam nas revistas.

A internet, e o próprio webjornalismo, trouxeram novas formas de se fazer o fluxo de informações e os debates de temas que antes eram restritos a espaços como as revistas. Isso acontece não somente no Facebook, mas também no Twitter, Instagram, Discord, entre outras redes que surgem anualmente. A maneira como as pessoas se envolvem com os debates noticiosos também mudou, criando ambientes onde é possível reforçar sua opinião e replicar debates por ainda mais tempo (Prado, 2011). Desta forma, os debates sobre emagrecimento e beleza, antes criticados nas

revistas femininas, não está excluído dos novos ambientes cibernéticos, mas ganhou novas formas de ser expressado, com vieses mais plurais, debates que se estendem em postagens com milhares de comentários e, no caso das comunidades, sem a necessidade da mediação de um veículo que segue determinadas linhas editoriais.

Para Recuero (2002, pp. 229-230) e Jones (1997) é determinante para que se possa caracterizar grupos como o Modices e Fashionismo. Isso porque entre as principais características que Jones (1997) designou para as comunidades virtuais, está o fato de ser "um espaço público comum onde uma porção significativa do grupo de comunicação mediada por computador interativa de uma comunidade ocorre".

O próprio Facebook está atento ao fenômeno e potencial dos seus grupos. O criador da rede social anunciou mudanças[5] para fortalecer essa ferramenta do Facebook, buscando estimular a produção e disseminação de conteúdo de uma forma diferenciada. Para isso, algumas opções novas foram disponibilizadas nos últimos meses, oferecendo a possibilidade de visualizar com mais clareza os dados dos grupos, um filtro para pedidos de associação, publicações agendadas, entre outras novidades. Atualmente, embora o Facebook tenha cerca de 2 bilhões de usuários, somente 100 milhões são adeptos aos grupos, mesmo que eles estejam em crescimento.

## 5. CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

Dadas as devidas proporções, os grupos de Facebook ampliam a interatividade entre os seus membros, o que representa uma vantagem em comparação com as revistas e é uma possibilidade em aberto nas comunidades virtuais em geral. Cada meio possui as suas características e limitações, por isso nem sempre esses grupos compartilham informações que tenham sido checadas e não são mediados sempre por jornalistas (o caso dos grupos analisados na investigação pode ser uma exceção), permitindo que *fake news* sejam propagadas. O que se pretende constatar é tanto as semelhanças entre ambos — grupos de Facebook voltados para o público feminino e revistas femininas — quanto o fato de o comportamento das leitoras dessas revistas ter migrado para esses grupos.

A partir das observações e informações coletadas para a investigação, acredita-se que as revistas e as comunidades não são excludentes entre si, mas complementares. As revistas não se extinguiram com a existência dos grupos, enquanto que os

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5 Disponível em: https://postcron.com/pt/blog/grupos-no-facebook-fique-por-dentro-das-novidades/

grupos criaram mais possibilidades às mulheres. Se ambos forem bem aproveitados, podem ser utilizados em conjunto (hipótese que pode servir de base para estudos futuros). Há, sim, possibilidade de o crescimento desses grupos estar associado à falta de representação real da mulher na imprensa brasileira, mas é necessário que se esteja claro que esse não é o seu único fator.

As comunidades virtuais analisadas são espaços que estão atuando positivamente na formação e empoderamento das mulheres que os integram. Há postagens nos grupos que criticam revistas femininas que ainda estimulam temas considerados como opressivos, mas há também reportagens compartilhadas com elogios a respeito da forma como retratam as mulheres. O que se identificou é que as mulheres estão em busca de identificação e novos discursos. A diferença agora é que elas não são apenas consumidoras desse conteúdo, mas também produtoras, o que é tema para uma nova e futura discussão ainda mais longa.

É principalmente através de todas essas evidências, desde as semelhanças até as diferenças com relação às revistas femininas, que tais comunidades virtuais estão promovendo o empoderamento feminino e sendo um novo canal (complementar) onde as mulheres se sentem seguras e próximas umas das outras para falarem sobre o mundo e sobre si. Portanto, a conclusão do paralelo proposto entre as revistas femininas e as comunidades virtuais sugere que, de fato, esses novos ambientes no ciberespaço estão suprindo a demanda das mulheres por uma nova representação, mas não obrigatoriamente anulou as revistas (uma breve pesquisa na internet nos encaminha para uma série delas no modelo digital), embora possa ter estimulado a mudança no discurso das publicações. Por fim, recomenda-se estudos mais profundos neste sentido, que possam abranger uma observação detalhada do comportamento e consumo das mulheres na atualidade com relação à comunicação de massa e às comunidades virtuais.

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# In a War with the Virus: Science, People and Politics

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## Abstract

The world, attacked by a malicious virus in the last quarter of the year 2019 termed it as SARS-CoV-2 (WHO) and manifestation of the 'disease' caused due to this virus was dubbed as COVID-19. Transmitting through respiratory-tract, it has already impacted millions of people, with a high mortality in vulnerable age groups.

It is reckoned that the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic is a major public health concern with equally dire health consequences with critical environmental and economic impacts. Scientific community developed multiple vaccines and repurposed drugs for the COVID-19; however, the vaccination against this pathogen still throws a huge challenge of low uptake across the world. There are two dimensions to COVID-19 vaccination programme, i.e. ensuring equitable access and the positive behaviour change marketing strategies.

People acknowledge that this pandemic is primarily a 'behavioural practices' issue, including at community levels. The outrage of the 'infodemic' (spread of misinformation) is gaining currency especially through social media and digital space.

The technical area of health communication has assumed a high-level of tilted 'political communication' in many countries. It is, therefore, time to witness more of science in politics than politics in science.

The article includes a key informant interview with a former WHO expert.

**Keywords:** vaccine-hesitancy, inequity in immunization access, pandemic behaviours, social & behaviour-change.

# Em Guerra com o Vírus: Ciência, Pessoas e Política

## Resumo

O mundo, atacado por um vírus malicioso no último trimestre do ano de 2019, chamou-o de SARS-CoV-2 (OMS) e a manifestação da 'doença' causada por esse vírus foi apelidada de COVID-19. Transmitindo-se pela respiração, já afetou milhões de pessoas, com alta mortalidade em faixas etárias vulneráveis.

Estima-se que o surto da pandemia COVID-19 é um grande problema de saúde pública, com consequências igualmente terríveis para a saúde, com impactos ambientais e económicos críticos. A comunidade científica desenvolveu várias vacinas e medicamentos reutilizados para o COVID-19; no entanto, a vacinação contra esse patógeno ainda representa um grande desafio de baixa absorção em todo o

mundo. Existem duas dimensões no programa de vacinação COVID-19, nomeadamente, garantir o acesso equitativo e desenvolver estratégias de marketing de mudança de comportamento positiva.

As pessoas reconhecem que esta pandemia é principalmente uma questão de 'práticas comportamentais', inclusive em nível comunitário. A indignação do "infodémico" (disseminação de desinformação) está a ganhar popularidade, especialmente por meio dos média e do espaço digital.

A área técnica de comunicação em saúde assumiu um alto nível de "comunicação política" enviesada em muitos países. É, portanto, hora de testemunhar mais da ciência na política do que da política na ciência.

O artigo inclui uma entrevista com um informante-chave, ex-especialista da OMS.

**Palavras-chave:** hesitação de vacina, desigualdade no acesso à imunização, comportamentos pandémicos, mudança social e de comportamento.

## INTRODUCTION

The humanity was mercilessly invaded by a virus in the later months of the year 2019. This pathogen was termed as SARS-CoV-2 (*belonging to the family of Corona viruses*)(Tang et al., 2020) by the World Health Organization, wherein the manifestation of the 'disease' caused due to this virus was dubbed as COVID-19. With its transmission route primarily being through respiratory-tract - like many other pathogens causing Influenza - it has managed to adversely impact millions of people, including with a very high mortality in some vulnerable age groups and people with co-morbidities.

The outbreak which initially, as documented so far, occurred in a seafood market in Wuhan, China spread across countries through human-to-human transmission and the subsequent community spread within a short period (WHO, 2020 cited by Sarkodie & Owusu, 2020). Simultaneously, on March 11, 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic after the infectious viral disease spread across 114 countries with 118,000 confirmed cases and 4291 deaths (WHO, 2020 cited by Sarkodie & Owusu, 2020). Within the first quarter of the year 2020, the national governments braced up to learn about the entirely 'unknown threat' that had descended upon, thus causing fear, insecurity and helplessness of the health systems in coping up with the rapidly growing numbers of human morbidities and mortality due to the COVID-19 infections.

## THE NEXUS: HEALTH CONSEQUENCES, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

In the absence of available therapeutics and vaccines to contain this new virus until early 2021, a number of prevention behavioural practices were propagated by the scientists and clinicians. These included, maintaining physical distance with other individuals of at least 6 feet, frequently washing hands with soap and water, and wearing a face mask. The practice of social distancing, though still not strictly adhered to in most settings, and the other significant corrective measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 through human-to-human transmission has its own environmental, health and economic impacts. While the global pandemic has led to an ostensible enhancement of the health system and a relative decline of carbon emissions, economic development surely is the casualty and hence, deteriorating. Therefore, wherein the air pollution has demonstrated a global decline during the pandemic, health related municipal and medical waste has witnessed a steady increase. Science, innovation, research and development underpin COVID-19 containment measures implemented across countries. The emergence of the novel coronavirus, i.e. SARS-CoV-2 resulting in COVID-19, as a global pandemic once again triggered the necessity of reckoning the environment-health-economic nexus. Therefore, the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic is a public health concern with an equally dire health consequences and highly critical environmental and economic impacts (Wang, Horby, Hayden, & Gao, 2020).

During the ongoing period of the global pandemic, multiple measures have been enforced in order to contain the further spread of COVID-19 (Gautam & Trivedi, 2020). Some of the many such measures include quarantine, continued travel bans and restrictions, social (physical) distance enforcement and lockdown of a large geographical area such as city, town or a certain village, which yields complete closure of public places. These containment measures put in place to reduce health outcomes of the global pandemic have adversely impacted sustainability and economic development. Many studies are demonstrating the environmental impact of COVID-19, however no study has yet explicitly informed on the larger health and economic implications of the global pandemi (Gautam & Trivedi, 2020).

## ODYSSEY OF VACCINE RESEARCH,TREATMENTS AND LAUNCH

With an outbreak of the novel corona virus disease COVID-19 in the later months of 2019, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, it has spread rapidly around the globe. Considering the potential threat of a pandemic, scientists and physicians were racing to understand this new virus and the patho-physiology of this disease to quickly discover every possible treatment regimens together with effective therapeutic agents and vaccines (Liu et al., 2020).

Scientific research has classified four classes of corona viruses termed as alpha, beta, gamma, and delta. The beta corona virus 'family' includes severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) virus (SARS-CoV), Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) virus (MERS-CoV), and the COVID-19 wherein the causative agent is SARS-CoV-2. This is similar to SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV, SARS-CoV-2 that attacks the lower respiratory system to cause viral pneumonia, but it may also affect the gastrointestinal system, heart, kidney, liver, and central nervous system leading to multiple organ failure (Zhu et al., 2020), as is documented through multiple layers of clinical findings.

The world community put forth a concerted effort in developing effective drugs and vaccines against the existing and potential future corona virus infections and other highly pathogenic virus outbreaks in the beginning of the year 2020 itself. It was indeed a desperate response. And it was necessary to reduce overwhelmingly drastic impacts on human life and worldwide healthcare systems, which continues to remain weak. As is experienced, the costly and relentless process involved with the clinical drug development, the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the value of developing relatively broad-spectrum antiviral drugs and the critical need for applying innovative approaches such as artificial intelligence to further facilitate studies on discovering appropriate drugs. Due to the long drawn and lengthy processes of new drug development, the employed strategy of drug repurposing became one of the chosen solutions for immediate treatment of SARS-CoV-2 infected individuals in 2020.

During the early months of the onset of the pandemic, 175 patents emerged and disclosed vaccines for non-corona viruses that may have relevance to SARS and MERS, wherein 188 patents were directly associated with anti-SARS and anti-MERS vaccines with a good immune response (Richardson et al., 2020). In the initial months of vaccine research and development, 15 patents disclosed information about inac-

tive and live-attenuated virus vaccines, 28 patents described DNA vaccines, 21 patents disclosed information on viral vector vaccines, 13 patents disclosed information on VLP *(virus like particle)* vaccines, and three patents focused on mRNA vaccines.

Needless to emphasize, it was crucial and equally critical, to develop safe and effective vaccines to control the COVID-19 pandemic, eliminate its very spread, and in the endcontrol its future recurrence. As research demonstrates, the SARS-CoV-2 virus shares significant sequence homology with two other lethal corona viruses, i.e. SARS and MERS, the vaccines identified in these patents related to SARS and MERS viruses were also potentially considered in facilitating the design of anti-SARS-CoV-2 vaccines. The key to management of the pandemic is the optimum delivery and uptake of vaccines, whichever 'product/make' is accessible to the communities in each country.

## COVID-19 VACCINATION - BOTTLENECKS AHEAD

The global vaccination coverage of routine immunization remains at around 85%, with no significant change visible in the past several years. It has rather deteriorated in the recent years. A considerable large size of population continues to pose a major challenge as it suffers from limited access to immunization services. The gap in immunization coverage, both amongst well and poorly performing countries, is widening annually. For example, polio still continues to be endemic in a couple of countries, while the newer vaccines, such as for COVID-19, still throw a challenge of low uptake in many regions across the world. Poor access to health facilities, or a complete lack of it, for vaccination programmes, insufficient and inappropriate use of available resources, poor technical capacity and least empowered immunization decision-making bodies, lack of political will, civil conflict and war, and natural disasters – all of these contribute to under-immunization. Therefore, there are two dimensions to COVID-19 vaccination programme, i.e. ensuring equitable supply/access and logistics and the 'demand-generation'/positive behaviour change marketing strategies.

The public health programmes have been struggling for many decades in reaching out to communities and delivering the vaccination programmes. Despite the efforts invested in the supply aspects of vaccinations, social scientists continue to face challenges with the demand generation dimensions of the immunization programmes.

Social scientists are facing an uphill task of ensuring optimum vaccine uptake in many communities (Gupta, Agarwal, & Bhasin, 2019). Therefore, while supply and logistics throw challenges in ensuring equity i.e. equitable access to all, a significant emphasis on the 'health seeking behaviour' aspects in communities also plays a significant role in achieving nearly cent percent immunization coverage. COVID-19 vaccination is no exception; as it is already posing a mammoth logistics' challenge for the health systems in the countries. Yet, in some select communities the demand-generation aspects, i.e. making communities accept COVID-19 vaccination remains a major bottleneck for the political leadership and health communication experts.

## ADDRESSING AN UPHILL TASK: PANDEMIC APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOURS

Multiple scientific studies demonstrate that much of the growth in the field of health communication was stimulated by the AIDS response which started in the decade of 80s, especially when there was no antiretroviral treatment (ART) available and the only tool on hand was prevention through focused social and behaviour change. It is also noteworthy that the earlier gathered communication lessons and experiences for improving maternal & child survival and for encouraging family planning underpinned these early HIV prevention communication strategies. Clinicians, scientists and communication experts are emphasizing on how people need to strictly adhere to pandemic appropriate behaviours, such as hand-washing, face masking and physical distancing, including ensuring getting a jab in the arms – whenever it's accessible. Preventive behaviour is the key to emerging out of the pandemic as recommended by the health experts. Therefore, current pandemic is primarily a 'Behavioural Practices' challenge which can well be managed by the strategic communication strategies under the already well researched Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE) model.

Most people have reckoned that this pandemic is primarily a 'behavioural practices' issue, both at individual and at community levels. As a result, such people will adopt practices as are being disseminated by the credible and trusted sources. Yet, there will always be a few hard-core 'laggards' who defy acceptance of any positive change. Such segment of population, of course, have their own reasons based on myths, rumours or incorrect beliefs. Conspiracy theories and a vast sea of misin-

formation is playing abound, though it was at-work even before the launch of the COVID-19 vaccination drives. The outrage of the 'infodemic' *(spread of misinformation during pandemic)* is gaining currency especially through social media and digital space. People ought to understand that this virus is an absolute new pathogen which is, even after over a year, still being researched and studied, including its fast emerging mutants. Therefore, in the initial months of the pandemic, the leading health agencies, respective national health departments, scientific community, clinicians and epidemiologists struggled to find out the more realistic mode of transmission, correct therapeutic/clinical treatment protocols and the research on vaccination. The initial bottlenecks included delay in declaring the pandemic and the immediate next was discouraging use of face-masks barring exception of health providers! Promoting '*avoidance of face-masks*', nevertheless did a huge damage, during the pandemic's evolutionary months, leading to unchecked spread of virus.

## 'PELTZMAN EFFECT' –
## A CHALLENGE TO RISK-COMMUNICATION EXPERTS:
## IMPACTING BEHAVIOURAL PRACTICES

Right from the onset of the current pandemic, populations across the globe have become familiar with the concept of "risk compensation". In other words, in most situations which are perceived as risky, individuals tend to adjust their respective behaviours, thus compensating to minimize that specific risk. Therefore, people who perceived the SARS-CoV-2 as a major threat to health, in most cases, would wear appropriate masks, wash their hands regularly, and maintain physical distancing by avoiding large crowds, especially when cases began to surge. However, the effects of risk compensation tend to dilute away over time as the 'fear and risk' threat start wearing off.

With the gradual rise in COVID-19 cases across the continents, which is attributed to the possible "pandemic fatigue," also observed is the decreasing adherence to risk reduction strategies in many populations. It is further adding to complications in public health efforts.

With the start of the year 2021, COVID-19 vaccines were rolled out across the globe, which surely created much needed optimism and euphoria. However, public health experts and risk-communication professionals will have to be appraised of another vital feature of risk compensation. It is noteworthy that the vaccine nearly

served as the panacea to the pandemic risks; therefore, further weakening the critical adherence to other pandemic appropriate behaviours, like regular hand washing/ sanitizing, physical distancing and face-masking. This phenomenon, in which individuals respond to safety measures with a compensatory increase in risky behaviour, is named the "*Peltzman Effect*" after University of Chicago economist Sam Peltzman who first described it in 1975 (Hedlund, 2000).

Even at a subconscious level, those who have not received a vaccine may slack in wearing face-masks and in maintaining physical distancing in crowded places, when these people know that others are receiving the vaccine for a last few months. Therefore, as the number of people who are vaccinated increases, the Peltzman effect may also evolve due to a higher misplaced sense of security in an assumed 'herd immunity' much prior to the expected widespread immunity is truly present in the communities. Hence, it throws a challenge to the communication experts and public health teams because, unfortunate that it is, the very optimism that is essential to encourage widespread acceptance of the vaccine shall undoubtedly end-up contributing to the overconfidence among people, which can ultimately worsen this effect.

It is critical to understand that for the current pandemic, a Peltzman Effect may manifest in varied ways for different groups of populations, including patients. Widespread misinformation and a highly politicized public health landscape have resulted in a wide spectrum of behaviours in response to COVID-19 (Kim, Marks, & Clemens, 2021). Among those who refuse to practice pandemic appropriate behaviours - the "anti-maskers," or those who reject social-distancing guidelines - the Peltzman Effect will be nil.

Social and behavioural scientists have been contemplating whether or not the COVID-19 vaccinations would result in increased risk-taking behaviour? A set of studies sought to seek answers within the context of the Peltzman Effect. It therefore, identified four lead factors as the possible contributors to risk compensation, while these are apparent in the COVID-19 pandemic (Kim, Rowland-Jones, & Gea-Mallorquí, 2020). Undeniably to present an increase in a risky behaviour, a measure must first be '*visible*', this is the criterion well met with the COVID-19 vaccination due to discussions and publicity it has generated world over. Every individual who receives the vaccine will be very well aware that they have done so. The subsequent two points, i.e. '*motivation*' and '*control*' - go together. Risk compensation is more likely to occur if people are highly motivated to take on the risky behaviour and if it is within their control to do so. Naturally, both of these well apply to the current pandemic, because

it is both personally desirable and relatively easy to return to a pre-pandemic lifestyle free of face-masks and physical distancing. And the final factor, which is the overall '*effectiveness*' of the intervention, entirely depends on the vaccine.

Unfortunately, it is observed that the highly technical area of public health communication, in case of health emergencies and disasters the risk-communication, is still being largely managed by the 'generalists' and in some contexts, even has assumed a high-level of tilted 'political communication' in many countries. However, it's time to witness more of science in politics than politics in science!

## A CRITICAL DENOMINATOR: RISK COMMUNICATION & STRATEGIC HEALTH COMMUNICATION

The overall paradigm of strategic health communication remains uniform, while the core methodologies, communication content and outreach strategies change in case of disasters, pandemics and outbreaks. For example, we cannot strategise to communicate pandemic messages the way we design communication interventions for sexual & reproductive health (SRH), age-at-marriage, family planning or even promoting breastfeeding. Some risk communication frameworks have been potentially employed in deciphering the challenges of wide-spread disease control and pandemics. When people are really concerned, stressed, or outrageously upset, they want to know that you care before they care what you know (***Trust Determination Theory***); when people have difficulty in hearing, understanding, and remembering bulk of information and thus they focus most on what they hear first (***Mental Noise Theory***); and again when people are highly stressed, or upset, they often focus more on the negative than on the positive (***Negative Dominance Theory***); similarly, the gaps between risk perceptions and reality often become wider during such difficult times (***Risk Perception Theory***) (Renn & Levine, 1991).

At different stages of pandemic or an outbreak, these core communication frameworks serve as a common denominator in planning and designing targeted activities. Unfortunately, most agencies are either withholding or rolling-out bulk of information without paying apt attention to its purpose, without clearly understanding the risk-factors' profile of its focused target audiences and missing out in addressing the critical gaps in tailoring of messages. There is a need for local leaders, trusted and credible celebrities to reach out to masses with customised do's and don'ts. For com-

munication experts, it's critical to observe that the leaders not wearing an appropriate face-mask on TV are popularizing a rather dangerous trend leading to a risky behavioural practice in these pandemic times.

It can be easily construed that the success of risk communication of the pandemic is dependent on: (1) Timeliness of communication, (2) Simplicity, directness and consistency of the message, (3) Appropriateness of the selection of channels/tools, (4) Transparency in information sharing, and (5) Public faith and trust in the communicator (Gupta, Jai, & Yadav, 2021).

## VACCINATION -
## EQUITY IN DISTRIBUTION | INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

As per the available records by middle of March 2021, over 20 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been donated directly to 81 low and middle-income countries, as part of rapidly growing vaccine diplomacy. India and China are leading the charge, now in almost direct competition to be viewed as the most generous vaccine donor. As on March 18, India that prefers to grant vaccines, has announced 8.1 million doses directly supporting 37 countries; whereas China has donated 7.9 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to 33 countries. In comparison to China, India's vaccine diplomacy is not entirely focused on a locally developed vaccine; instead it is a locally manufactured one, i.e. Covishield (by AstraZeneca) - an Indian produced vaccine.

Under its vaccine outreach initiative, the immediate focus for India has been its neighboring SAARC countries; wherein Afghanistan and Sri Lanka have each received 500,000 doses, Nepal 1 million, Myanmar 1.7 million, and Bangladesh 2 million. However, India is now expanding upon their immediate region. For some manufacturing countries, such as India and China, supporting global mechanisms including COVAX in disseminating vaccines has also been a priority. India has supported the vaccine delivery of an additional 16.5 million doses through the GAVI run COVAX initiative.

As per the data available on 18 March, 2021, an additional 10 countries have announced direct donations of vaccines to countries: Australia, Barbados, Chile, Dominica, Israel, Romania, Senegal, Serbia, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela. Australia is the third-largest donor with a grant of 3 million COVID-19 vaccines, specifically supporting Cambodia and 8000 to Papua New Guinea. Similarly, the UAE donated 670,000 doses of Sinopharm and Sputnik V to various countries in Asia and Africa.

The author engaged with a leading epidemiologist and the former WHO Director, Dr. Jai. P. Narain[1] in a direct conversation – a KII[2] - on varied aspects of the current pandemic, including on vaccine skepticism and hesitancy for COVID-19 jabs in the arms and filling-in the communication gaps therein. A few excerpts are reproduced below:

1) *Dr. Narain, the SARS-CoV-2 infections are swinging in waves world over, especially it came more as a rude shock when most people perceived that humanity is getting very close to winning this war with the virus. Why are we experiencing such a trend? And how far are the mutant viruses actually responsible for such a state of upswing?*

**Answer (JPN):** I believe, there is no one single factor but multiplicity of factors responsible for the current wave of COVID-19. Most important of all perhaps is the sense of complacency and the pandemic fatigue set in among people as they have had to endure restrictions over a long period of time. As a result, people are no longer following the basic Covid prevention protocols such as mask wearing, social or physical distancing and hand hygiene. Given that most societies, such as in India, staying away from social gatherings, like family gatherings or from sports events and festivals which create a conducive environment for the pathogens and a fertile ground for the diseases transmission. Moreover, young people seem to feel that 'it cannot happen to us' and do not follow the Covid-appropriate behavior, putting elderly at home at a much higher risk.

The emergence of new strains of coronavirus, also called variants in many countries such as UK, Brazil and South Africa is of great concern as these are at least 50% more infectious and could at times be more deadly. Addressing all these factors expeditiously is therefore, critical if we are to contain the spread as soon as possible and sustain our gains over time.

2) *Scientific teams have varied opinions as regards whether or not the origin of the pathogen (SARS-CoV-2) was through Wuhan in 2019. Don't you think it's important to study the virus's origins, wherever it emanated from, and thus, aid further studies in*

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1 Formerly Director of World Health Organization, SEARO; Ex Sr. Advisor, Government of India on Epidemiology and EIS (Epidemic Intelligence Service); Global Health Advisors Alliance
2 Key Informant Interview (KII)

*learning how this pathogen evolves further? It just might be more useful in determining stopping of its mammoth spread.*

**Answer (JPN):** Yes, indeed! Understanding the origin is crucial as such information can help understand natural history of disease and to find ways to prevent current and future pandemics. In this pandemic, the specific mechanisms of its emergence in humans remain unknown. Discovering where the virus came from could help scientists understand how the virus most likely got introduced into humans and teach public health leaders how to avoid such situations.

Scientists and epidemiologists have been issuing repeated warnings for decades that multiple viruses are poised to emerge again and again, thus challenging public health as never before. They also called for enhanced pandemic prevention and control efforts through building core capacities in epidemiology and laboratory diagnosis. This was borne out by emergence of novel Coronavirus in 2019 in China, which quickly spread world over. The risk of similar Coronavirus or influenza viruses emerging in the future remains high and needs appropriate steps be taken by all countries. Inter-country collaboration is also important to share information, expertise and essential supplies to minimise the health and social impact of the pandemic.

3) *Needless to emphasize, management of this pandemic is a clear commentary on political governance, health systems in each country and every nation's preparedness for addressing such health emergencies. It even reflects how much of national resources were and are being allocated under the health budgets, including for any possible health emergencies. Although the virus has somehow managed to invade nearly every corner of the globe, a few handful of nations have managed its spread, prevention strategies and clinical treatment better than the most others. How do you view this situation and how do we foresee the future priorities for the countries?*

**Answer (JPN):** Many lessons have been learnt from this pandemic. Most importantly, it has highlighted on the urgent need to invest in public health now and in the future. In many countries, expenditure on health as percentage of GDP is abysmally low. This must change; otherwise we will not be in a strategic position to fight the emerging infections. We also need to build a strong and robust health system and emergency management capacity as a backbone of health response, as is also required under IHR (2005). And embrace modern technology such as big data management,

and communication and information technology including use of social media for good and meaningful impact. International collaboration and coordination in science and technology can help rapid sharing of disease data and scientific progress, ensuring development and equitable access to new diagnostics, treatment and vaccines. Finally, it has highlighted the need to focus on behaviour change communication, building trust and community engagement as an integral part of the 'holistic society approach' as bedrock of disease prevention. These are just a few examples.

4) *We need to reckon the fact that immediately after the SARS-CoV-2 cases were detected, initially in Wuhan and subsequently across many countries in Europe, the technical guidance from the DG-WHO publically emphasized that masks are not for general public, instead only the health providers should ensure use of appropriate face-masks. Many weeks and months were lost in this dilemma until such time when it was again propagated that every individual must practice wearing a three-layered face mask covering. Do you think much damage was already done then with such public messaging?*

**Answer (JPN): A**s stated already that SARS-CoV-2 was an entirely new virus detected only a year ago. We are still trying to understand the virus and its characteristics, its transmission dynamics and how to better manage and prevent it. As we gradually began to understand the science behind the disease, the recommendations on how to prevent have also evolved. The recommendations by WHO during early part of the pandemic that masks are not meant for general public, instead only for health care workers, was based on the priority setting keeping in view the availability of logistical supplies and existing capacities to quickly produce them. Since health care workers were and continue to remain at a greater risk of COVID-19, hence the need to ensure that health workers get the precedence in receiving limited available supplies.

5) *Vaccination, to mitigate the current pandemic, has been developed by the scientific community at an unprecedented speed. However, there are issues emerging after these are being rolled out, especially so in respective governments' ability in effective roll-outs, ensuring supply chain and strategically covering the needs of the communities. What do you think are the reasons for such supply management issues?*

**Answer (JPN):** In keeping with the pace at which the virus was spreading around the world, the science too has made an unprecedented progress in developing vac-

cines at a record time and the roll out is already underway in many countries. There are however, supply and demand issues resulting in gross and unacceptable inequity in vaccine distribution and access in the world. Many countries have resorted to 'vaccine nationalism' as rich countries purchasing most of the global vaccine supplies -- a few countries have ordered the amount enough to vaccinate their populations many times over, while most low and mid-income countries are at risk of going without vaccine for their populations.

On the other hand, India which produces two of the vaccines indigenously has been generous in donating vaccine to many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Contribution by India to WHO-coordinated COVAX facility is ensuring global access to vaccines and trying to bridge the gap between supply and demand. The world's dependence on India for the vaccine can be seen from the fact that as many as 84 countries have so far received India-made vaccines, either through grant, commercially or via WHO's COVAX programme. By the middle of March 2021, India had exported more vaccine doses than that administered at home.

*6) Refereeing to the vaccination again, there are still many individuals and communities that are hesitating in taking the jab in their arms. Vaccine hesitancy remains yet another missing link in addressing this pandemic. What do you think should be an effective strategy in ensuring that vaccines are widely accepted?*

**Answer (JPN):** The issue of vaccine hesitancy and the reasons behind it are complex. The reluctance to accept vaccination has occurred especially during the initial stages of the vaccination programmes. Hence, understanding and communicating with those who have doubts about the COVID-19 vaccines and explaining in the personal risk and potential benefits associated with vaccination holds the key. Some of the steps for addressing vaccine hesitancy include communication and building trust, being honest about side effects upfront prior to the jab, providing re-assurance on a robust vaccine safety and effectiveness, with focusing on protection of self as well as the community.

It is to be clarified that the number of vaccine-hesitant individuals far outnumbers those who refuse the vaccine; therefore, counselling of or one-on-one communication with this group might be more effective. The reasons behind vaccine hesitancy go beyond just a knowledge deficit. In some cases, these have political dimensions too. Nevertheless, health care physicians as a trusted source of information can play a key role in driving vaccine acceptance.

7) *As we know that there are certain vaccine manufacturing hubs in the world. With the knowledge transfer taking place between scientists, researchers and pharmaceutical companies, many countries are still far from receiving the required vaccine doses for their populace. How best, do you think, the vaccine distribution should be organized that ensures equitable dissemination of supplies?*

**Answer (JPN):** In many low- and middle-income countries, vaccination has not even started which is a catastrophe as hospitals fill up with COVID-19 cases. Swift action is needed to correct this injustice. The best way to end this pandemic, stop future variants and save lives is to limit the spread of the virus by vaccinating quickly and equitably, starting with health workers. This is why WHO called this a catastrophic moral failure, the price of which will be paid, unfortunately, with lives and livelihoods in the world's poorest countries.

To ensure the vaccine equity, all countries must make vaccination a priority and work together in solidarity to ensure that vulnerable populations in all countries are protected first of all. WHO too has issued a call to action and for support to COVAX facility created in partnership to facilitate rolling out of vaccines quickly and equitably at a global level. In this endeavor, the world leaders, vaccine manufacturers, regulatory bodies, ministries of health and all governments have a pivotal role to play in their respective areas.

8) *In order to emerge unhurt or least affected out of this pandemic, what would be your strong recommendations for the specific groups, i.e. national governments, community leaders, health workers and the people?*

**Answer (JPN):** To end this pandemic and save economies, it is critical to strictly follow basic COVID-19 precautions, expand testing, tracing and treatment strategy, and vaccinate populations quickly. To do so, health must be foundational or central to all the development policies and investing in primary health care as a key strategy for ending this pandemic and preparing for the next one.

I should like the national governments to invest urgently in public health in particular epidemiology and laboratory services, enhance health workforce capacity building, and develop data systems on disease trends and vaccine supply, distribution and ensure delivery and equitable access for all those who need it. It is critical for Ministries of Health to develop core capacity at all levels of health services to

be able to detect early and respond rapidly to public health emergencies. Intensified implementation of the 3T strategy of 'test, track and treat' is fundamental to disease prevention and mitigation. The community leaders and people have the responsibility to continue taking Covid precautions such as wearing a mask, avoiding crowded places, washing hands frequently, and practicing social distancing. And equally critical, get vaccinated with two doses as recommend to protect self, their families and others in the society.

And finally, we must augment funding substantially for public health action and for basic and applied research including on disease emergence to prevent such tragic events from occurring again.

## CONCLUSION

Global COVID-19 curve is being closely watched by the respective governments, international development actors and health experts. Urgent answers are needed to the questions that are being asked about the challenges before the governments and health experts, the envisaged role of communication in spreading awareness and bringing sustained behaviour change about Coronavirus, its implications and vaccine related research. It includes critical need for fostering innovative approaches, as deem required, for managing equitable supplies and logistics of COVID-19 vaccination and the demand generation and heightened use of these vaccines in the communities, especially the vulnerable, socially excluded and hard-to-reach populace.

It is well established that the post-COVID-19 era is expected to rekindle and further foster environmental degradation, while improving and sustaining the health system to recover and rebuild livelihoods and thus, ensuing economic productivity. On the contrary, it is also demonstrated that the after effects of the pandemic will have a sustained societal effect on offices/workplaces, public places and social and cultural events, which shall, in turn, directly impact the economic transition. Therefore, governmental efforts across the globe are required to strike a fine balance between environmental sustainability, health outcomes and sustained economic development due to the potential post-pandemic effects; this is more so keeping in view the commitments made by the governments and the international development partners under the Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In nutshell, not political but scientific logic should determine the pathways of public health and the key decisions being made with regard to the current scourge on humanity, i.e. the COVID-19 pandemic.

Varied infectious diseases, especially resulting from RNA viruses subject to multiple mutations and genetic recombination, as well as cross-species transmission, will continue to throw up a challenge of a serious global health threat, as is viewed by the scientific community. This is also exemplified by the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19. As was witnessed during the two former major outbreaks of coronavirus infections that caused the SARS and MERS respiratory illnesses, unfortunately the world continues to remain under prepared to effectively manage the current COVID-19 outbreak. It is widely evidenced by the fact that COVID-19 has already resulted in hundreds of thousands of human mortalities worldwide, needless to mention a much greater number of serious and long haul morbidities. While vaccinations offer a partial respite to the humanity from serious morbidities and infection causing death, the most effective weapon against the virus remains 'Prevention', i.e. continued adherence to key pandemic appropriate behaviours, though making a choice between 'livelihoods' and 'life' is a serious question that still looms large.

Time is now when the people out rightly need to invest full faith in science. In other words, people need to assimilate and follow what the scientific community is propagating, while the politics of pandemic has no space in the global war against the drastic virus.

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# FICHA TÉCNICA

CAPA: Imagem de fundo, a partir do quadro de Paul Klee, Der Paukenspieller (O Tocador de Tambor), 1940.