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Click farm platforms and informal work in Brazil

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The Southern Centre for Inequality Studies (SCIS) is the first research institute of its kind in the global South. It draws on the intellectual resources of the University of the Witwatersrand and partner institutions in South Africa and beyond, to host an interdisciplinary research and policy project focused on understanding and addressing inequality in the global South.

The Future of Work(ers) Research Project explores how digital technologies are reshaping the world of work and the impact of these changes on inequality. It conceives of the development and application of digital technologies as a contested terrain. It is particularly interested in how collectives of workers are shaping which digital technologies are developed, how and to what end; and the economic and social policies that have been leveraged in response.

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Abstract:

This paper analyses work on click farm platforms in Brazil and argues that work on these platforms updates and reproduce traditional informal work in the country. The methods involve digital ethnography on click farm platforms, WhatsApp and Facebook groups and YouTube channels, and worker interviews. The findings present relationships between informal work and work for click farm platforms in these dimensions: a) culture and language, especially from WhatsApp groups, functioning as an extension of click farms; b) vocabularies and practices around "resale" as a sign of informal work in the country; c) the role of YouTubers in spreading neoliberal discourses; and d) boundaries around the piracy market and illegality. The paper contributes to debates on the taskification of work through digital labour platforms and the widespread neoliberal discourse and identity. First, the click farm platform deepens the mechanisms of micro-work platforms by presenting new layers of "fauxtomation" and "ghost work", in a platform labour circuit marked only by Brazilians – consumers and workers. Second, it reveals the articulation among discourses of neoliberalism, entrepreneurship, and informal work in the context of the global South.

Key words: platform labour; micro-work, click farms; neoliberal identity, Brazil.

Introduction

People who spend their day liking, commenting on and following profiles on social media platforms as a work activity at the behest of other platforms: these are click farm platforms, or simply click farms. The literature (Lindquist 2018, 2021; Ong & Cabañes, 2019) points to their existence mainly in Southeast Asia, operating in spaces similar to call centres, with each person using several cell phones at the same time. In Latin America, especially in Brazil, click farms present themselves as platforms connecting customers who need "real followers" to workers, and are an important and not sufficiently explored element of the platformisation of labour (Casilli & Posada 2019).

This paper argues that click farm platforms update and renew traditional informal work in Brazil. This happens through the roots these workers have in informal work, in the language and interaction of platform workers. In a context of high unemployment, workers know about click farms through YouTube channels promising extra and easy income by selling courses and mentoring. This is a gateway to multiple markets on and off the platforms. It involves selling and buying fake accounts and bots, with the possibility for a worker to resell followers to another worker (Grohmann et al., 2022). WhatsApp groups act as hubs for parallel markets, which challenge the borders of illegality, which are always blurred or unclear. This is in line with research on informal work in Latin America (for example, Pinheiro-Machado, 2017), now with added layers around platform labour, including algorithmic management (Wood 2021).

Thus, this paper analyses the relationship between click farm platforms and informal work in Brazil from the following viewpoints: a) the marks of Brazilian digital culture in the interactions between workers, in terms of language; b) YouTubers as skill makers, responsible for the initiation of neoliberal and entrepreneurial ideology on click farm platforms and its circulation; c) practices and discourses about reselling accounts, photos and bots as an update on the traditional resale markets in the region; d) boundaries between the piracy market and illegality at work on click farm platforms. The paper contributes to debates on the taskification of work through digital labour platforms and widespread neoliberal discourse and identity. First, the click farm platform deepens the mechanisms of micro-work platforms by presenting new layers of "fauxtomation" and "ghost work", in a platform-labour circuit marked only by Brazilians – consumers and workers. Second, it reveals the articulation amongst discourses of neoliberalism, entrepreneurship and informal work in a context of the global South.

Digital labour platforms and the role of click farms

The expression "gig economy" has been used to understand the growing use of digital platforms to carry out work activities (Woodcock & Graham, 2019). However, this is a word of Eurocentric origin, originating in the context of the 2008 crisis in Europe, in which more people started gig work. However, a gig economy is the historic norm in the economy of Latin America. Informal work is a feature, not a bug, in the Latin American working class (Muñoz, 2017). It was the ordinary state of most workers before the emergence of digital technologies. What is new is the subordination of workers to digital platforms and their mechanisms (Poell, Nieborg & Van Dijck, 2019), in a context of platformisation of labour (Casilli & Posada, 2019; Grohmann & Qiu, 2020). Thus, platform labour intensifies and renews the old informal work through new modes of control and exploitation.

The literature on platform labour (such as Casilli, 2021; Howcroft & Bergvall-Kareborn, 2018; Vallas & Schor, 2020) has suggested many typologies of digital labour platforms. In general, workers can work on the streets or from their homes through digital platforms. Among the platforms, there are the so-called micro-work platforms (Casilli, 2019; Gray & Suri, 2019; Roberts, 2019). The labour on these AI platforms accelerates the platformisation of labour, through the process of "taskification of labour" and data production for automation. On these platforms, workers perform data tasks in a fragmented way. The best known are platforms where workers are data annotators, such as Amazon Mechanical Turk, Appen and Lionbridge.

There is a geopolitics of micro-work platforms, with most workers located in the global South, especially in Latin America (Grohmann & Araújo, 2021; Miceli & Posada, 2021). In Brazil, there are around 50 micro-work platforms operating in the country (Braz, 2021). According to Jones (2021: 13), "Microwork truly represents not the phoenix of the South but a further twist in our planetary crisis of work". Thus micro-work platforms represent "the sum of the same processes of sluggish growth, proletarianisation and declining labour demand that have ballooned the informal sectors of countries such as India, Venezuela and Kenya" (Jones, 2021: 13).

A lesser-known type of micro-work platform is the click farm platform. These are web-based platforms where workers are paid to click, follow and like accounts on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. The clients of these platforms are influencers, politicians, celebrities and organisations that want to boost their social media accounts. Click farm platforms promise their customers "real followers". They outsource these tasks to workers for less than a penny a task (Grohmann et al., 2022). They also act as parasite platforms in relation to the infrastructure of social media platforms – that is, in a 'platform tree' (Van Dijck, 2021). In this way, workers are forced, by the click farm platforms, to scam the social media platforms (Grohmann et al., 2022).

Most click farm platforms are located in Southeast Asia (Lindquist, 2018; Lindquist, 2021; Ong & Cabañes, 2019) and Latin America. Thus, they are only found in "peripheral platform capitalism", as an expression of the world of work in the global South, and a specific type of the present of work and workers. Platform labour does not work the same everywhere. Click farm platforms connect low-tech workers from the periphery – considered unskilled or hidden (Raval, 2021) – to the infrastructure and logic of social media platforms, generally from the North. Paraphrasing Pinheiro-Machado (2017: 3), they are not victims of platformisation, but "active actors in the distribution of cheap goods across borders in the global South" (Pinheiro-Machado, 2017: 3).

The main click farm platforms in Brazil are GanharNoInsta, Dizu, FarmarSocial and SigaSocial, all based in Brazil, in cities such as Goiânia, Goiás State, and Santa Rosa, Rio Grande do Sul State. Most of them define themselves as digital marketing companies focused on social media. Dizu, for example, presents itself as "an innovative startup that found a way to supply the pain of people who want to become famous and the pain of people who are interested in earning extra income through the internet and thus remunerate them". The statement equates the "pain" of those who want to become famous to those who need work platforms such as these to manage their survival. This already reveals, in some way, relationships between platform labour and the creator economy.

The type of fauxtomation (false automation) of click farms does not exactly relate to artificial intelligence like other microwork platforms, but to the workers behind clicks, comments, and followers – they are like human bots. Gray and Suri (2019) call this "ghost work". But Noopur Raval (2021) warns to go beyond perspectives that call workers "ghost" or "invisible" or "hidden", because, although there is little media or political coverage in relation to them, they are fundamental to sustaining the platform economy.

Click farm platforms in Brazil delve into the mechanisms of platform labour and its circuit (Qiu, Gregg & Crawford, 2014). The geopolitics of these platforms in Brazil means Brazilian customers (in general Brazilian influencers) and workers, as we explained in a previous paper (Grohmann et al., 2022). Unlike other microwork platforms, all steps of the work are in Portuguese, which makes it easier for workers in the country.

The value for each task is lower than on other microwork platforms such as Amazon Mechanical Turk, Appen or Lionbridge (Grohmann & Araújo, 2021) and has varied over time – an instability that also happens with other types of digital labour platforms. Until March 2021, one of the platforms paid R$[1]0.01 for each share. Then there was a change in the payment system and the amount fell to R$0.006 a task. One of the platforms also states: "The value may seem small, but the number of actions performed per day can have a good extra monthly income,

[1] Brazilian reais.

considering that you spend a few seconds to perform each action!" (Ganhar no Insta, 2022) That is, the platform's discourse reinforces the idea present in other platforms in the sector (Casilli, 2019) that the work and workers are not skilled and that it is just "extra income" – something which also appears in discourses on delivery platforms, for example, as Anwar and Graham (2021) argue. Instability is also related to which social media platforms are included in click farming. In the beginning, workers could even be paid to dislike YouTube videos. Currently, YouTube is no longer available. The platforms present now are Instagram, TikTok, Kwai and Facebook, with Instagram being the most used.

The literature on platform labour (for example, Woodcock & Graham, 2019) and specifically on micro-work (Braz, 2021) have pointed out the difficulty of reducing those who work for these platforms to just one profile. For example, those who work for Appen, and Lionbridge tend to have higher levels of academic education than Amazon Mechanical Turk (Grohmann & Araújo, 2021). In the case of click farms, the profile of workers has a strong previous relationship to informal work outside the platforms. This is also because, unlike other micro-work platforms, all click farm tasks are carried out in Portuguese, through activities that can be carried out on cell phones. Working through platforms in Brazil – more so in activities that can be carried out by cell phone – has a strong articulation with informal work in the country (Abílio, 2021). There is also a strong presence of women working for click farm platforms. Remote working via platforms can intensify forms of gender exploitation, in conjunction with domestic work and reproductive work (Altenried, 2020; Posada, 2022), given the multiplication of work on different fronts.

The literature on click farms oscillates between connections with the disinformation industry (Ong & Cabañes, 2019; Ong & Tapsell, 2022) and illicit digital economies (Lindquist 2021). The accent is on the creation and circulation of fake profiles as an integral and central part of the digital economy, as follower factories. Lindquist (2021) even speaks of click farms as "impostor infrastructure". The perspective of work - and workers - in click farm platforms has not yet been sufficiently explored in the literature on the topic.

Research methods

To understand worker's entry into and involvement in the click farm ecosystem, we adopted a multi-methodological strategy. This included a digital ethnography of click farm platforms, WhatsApp and Facebook groups and YouTube channels, in addition to interviews with click farm workers. It is important to state that we adopted these different research methodologies before entering the field and coming back to the literature. This was a very reflexive and challenging process that took a lot of effort and discussion for the whole team. All research

was carried out with click farm platforms in Brazil and Colombia. The multi-methodological strategy enabled a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, especially regarding the relationship between click farm platforms and informal work.

All steps of the digital research were in accordance with AoIR's *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0.* (franzke et al., 2020), especially regarding issues, analysis, storage and dissemination of data. We also followed Salganik's (2019) four ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, justice and respect for law and public interest[2]. Our first strategy was designed as participant observation and ethnography on click farm platforms, on WhatsApp and Facebook groups. To conduct this ethnography of the internet, we've followed the three principles stated by Hine (2015): embedded, embodied, and everyday. This means that our exploration of this research field took into consideration that these platforms are completely embedded in our experiences of everyday life. In this sense, we started observing and watching all the movements during a period of six months.

As we mentioned above, we focused especially on the Facebook group "Ganhar no Insta", in Brazil, which concentrates workers and people who want to work on or for the platform. However, due to the similarity of content, we also observed the group "Ganhe Dinheiro Com Sua Rede Social". The groups focus on, in the first case, workers from Ganar no Insta, who, according to the advertisement, can work whenever and wherever they want, with no limit to earnings, making it ideal for workers who want to have an extra income; and, in the second, earning money on the internet, using different platforms, websites and applications, by responding to emails, surveys and so on. During the observation period, the "Ganhar no Insta" Facebook group had more user interaction than the "Ganhe Dinheiro com Sua Rede Social". We realised that, as a popular social media, Instagram attracts more workers than any new platform, especially when the advertisements don't say which platform it is. We have already observed 20 WhatsApp groups on click farms, and analysed 50 YouTube videos on the issue, especially on channels whose people teach and mentor workers for click farms.

We were also concerned that our own presence in the field should give us insights into and interactions with the workers, and help us to understand their tasks and their profiles. Our own bodies became part of this observation since we used our own mobile phones. Even though we had created a profile just for researching, it was impossible to disconnect from the notifications and messages on all these groups, so a sense of anxiety also permeated our bodies.

[2] Regarding public interest specifically, we tried to accommodate it by presenting our data in a form accessible to the whole of society. As a result, we created the animated video *Working for Click Farm Platforms in Brazil*, which has two episodes. You can see the first one here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3k_0fBQN2xU.

Our last methodological step was conducting interviews with workers. The interviews took place between September 2021 and January 2022 and were conducted only with women workers from Brazil. To select the interviewees, we observed the activities in the groups of click farms on Facebook, especially Ganhar no Insta, and then we got in touch with workers through Facebook and WhatsApp. We interviewed eight workers by video call (with the camera turned off) and by audio messages on WhatsApp, using a structured interview format.

It is important to note that the identities of these workers were kept confidential. An important fact is that most of the interviewees said that they found a way to increase their financial income in the click farms, but they knew that this is an unstable and insecure job, so they are always trying to find "formal work". We describe this informal work and other cultural aspects below through some data that stood out during the research.

Findings

Here we present relationships between informal work and work for click farm platforms in Brazil. This is divided into four dimensions: a) culture and language; b) vocabularies and practices around "resale" as a sign of informal work; c) the role of YouTubers spreading neoliberal discourses; and d) boundaries around the piracy market and illegality.

Culture and language of informal work

In Brazil, knowledge of other languages is not required to work on click farms, unlike other microwork platforms. Click farm platforms are all Brazil-based, in Portuguese, located mainly in medium and small cities, with workers across the country. The main platforms are GanharNoInsta[3], Dizu[4] and SigaSocial[5]. This means that Brazilian platforms were designed considering the culture and language of Brazilian workers. The platforms, in their materiality and interfaces, talk to workers using informal language to connect with workers.

Workers communicate with each other through WhatsApp and Facebook groups, which function as an extension of the click farm platforms. In these groups, there are traces of Brazilian digital culture and signs of informal work. Informal work, as non-standard employment, is a historical norm in Latin America for the working class in shops and on the streets, for example. In these workplaces, there was a construction of signs and language specific to this type of activity, related to popular commerce. Informal work means a "lateral mobility between a series of contingent activities marked by instability and inconstancy, as well as between legal and illegal expedients.

[3] https://www.ganharnoinsta.com/
[4] https://dizu.com.br/
[5] https://www.sigasocial.com/

It is a type of work fully dependent on 'making do' on a daily basis" (Silva, 2011: 59). This type of work practice and language is reproduced by click farm workers in Brazil, who have a history of informal work. In WhatsApp groups, workers exchange tips and produce emerging, contradictory, and entrepreneurial solidarities (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020; Soriano et al., 2020), and they also advertise job vacancies and opportunities. This means that there is a mixture of mutual aid and competition amidst the struggle for economic survival.

In Facebook and WhatsApp groups, most of the vacancies advertised are more directly related to click farm platforms. The posts only describe the advantages of these tasks and the vacancies. A strategy by workers in both countries is to publish screenshots of PayPal banking transactions to ensure transactions are secure. These posts also ensure that activities can take place in parallel with other jobs. Many of these posts refer workers to groups on Telegram specialising in these topics. Thus there is also a role for digitised finance (Paraná, 2020) in updating informal work in the context of click farm platforms, with payment using social media (Swartz, 2020).

The research reveals a strong gender component in the social composition of click farm workers in Brazil, in line with other research on home-based work and digital platforms (Altenried, 2020; Tubaro et al., 2022). That is, crowd work is combined with care work and reproductive labour, intensified by platform labour. Women are the majority in WhatsApp and Facebook groups. Many of them lost their jobs during the pandemic and had to survive through click farm platforms, often with the help of their families (Posada, 2022). These are reports from two women interviewed: "I ask for cell phones from husband and son to work with multiple devices at the same time"; "I was once a waste picker. With the pandemic, even that was competitive. I have two children to take care of and I need to work". Brazilian men exposed their financial difficulties more, and also thanked the platforms for the increase in payments: "Thanks, GanharNoInsta. I see that I am evolving with the values. It's not easy, so don't ever give up. Go up!"

There are cultural markers of Latin America, and specifically Brazil, in the language and interactions of click farm workers. There is a Latin American reproduction of entrepreneurial rationality (Dardot & Laval, 2013), as "neoliberalism from below" (Gago, 2017). This is a mixture of Catholic ethics – there are often thanks given to God – with economic logic, which reveals the everyday life of Brazilian families. WhatsApp and Facebook groups, in the context of click farm platforms, are the place for updating Brazilian culture, with language playing a central role. There is production and circulation of meanings (Silverstone, 1999) in interactions between workers which reinforce feelings of recognition and identification, and occur both in content and in form.

One of the main elements of language is the use of emojis in posts, sales and advertisements as a cultural aspect of the use of social media, especially WhatsApp (Pereira, Camargo & Parks, 2021) in Brazil, where visual and audio-visual consumption is central. These emojis serve both to generate feelings of identification (such as heartsat the end of every post) and to reinforce elements of entrepreneurship and financial value. Emojis are central elements in sales and reseller adverts in WhatsApp groups, signalling, for example, opportunity and urgency.

There is also circulation of popular sayings, such as "time is money", and phrases with emotional appeal: "I will always want to turn your dreams into reality"; "The person who chooses whether they want to rest or earn money in their spare time". These statements signify an approach to financial ideology through choices and dreams. There are also direct promises of money: "Do you want to automate your sales and earn more than 4 thousand *reais* (Brazilian money) like I did?"; "I will help you overcome the financial crisis that we are in Brazil". The apparent solidarity with the other worker actually involves the reproduction of neoliberal ideology. Thus, the help only makes sense if it accepts the meritocracy, but from the apparent proximity of another worker. For example, workers use expressions related to popular and informal imagination, such as "Pay attention [to] my jewellery" to attract the attention of other people who want to buy beads: "I have a good price, great quality, one of the best on the market", and "call me, inbox". Discourses about entrepreneurship also appear in the groups: "Imagine getting paid to do something you already do in your daily life"; "I will offer you a great tip for you to start entrepreneurship".

Therefore, the emojis and the language typical of the informal popular market in Brazil is combined with a discourse of entrepreneurship, circulating entrepreneurial and neoliberal meanings among click farm workers. These languages signify a reproduction of neoliberalism from below and, at the same time, of the very language of informal work through the context of click farm work.

Resale and informal work

Brazil has a history of reselling products as an informal working-class practice. This ranges from toys – many from Paraguay (Pinheiro-Machado, 2017) – to cosmetics and beauty products (Abílio, 2011). According to Abílio (2011), the resale of cosmetics in Brazil reveals the intense relationships between the female workforce, labour exploitation and capital accumulation. Furthermore, there are connections between brand consumption and labour: "They are resellers whilst also consumers of the products, taking on the sales risk without any guarantees" (Abílio, 2011, p. 99). Thus the circulation of goods in informal and popular markets in Brazil has historically occurred through the resale of products.

Click farm platforms update resale – as a sign of informal work – for the platform labour context through the sale and resale of fake accounts, photo packs and bots, transforming all workers into potential resellers, operating in the parallel markets on the edges of the click farms. There are a number of sellers and resellers of social media accounts in WhatsApp groups. Informal commerce through resale is another element of informal work renewed through click farm work. The activities of skill makers and the circulation of messages in WhatsApp groups work to spread the messages of resellers and their visibility labour (Abidin, 2016). Therefore, click farm workers not only work by clicking and liking the platforms, but also strengthening the entire parallel and informal circuit related to click farms. There are no click farm platforms without reselling social media accounts.

WhatsApp plays a central role, as an infrastructure (Van Dijck, 2021; Pereira, Camargo & Parks, 2021) in updating informal work. The vocabulary of "resale" is updated through the sum of language and cultural brands, skill makers, neoliberal ideology and infrastructure. Some of the discourses are: "Come profit, come resell"; "You can now resell followers to all social media and offer your own value"; "Extra income opportunity! Access our platform and become a great reseller", "Make money promoting ads and earn up to R$10,000 per month selling followers". Resellers also promise gifts in case of referral to new friends. In addition, they promise to "reset" social media accounts that don't work ("Bought it, tried it! If you get blocked, I'll reset it right away!").

The main resale objects are related to social media accounts, especially Instagram. Resellers can sell accounts, photo packs and followers. The price is higher if the followers are from Brazilian accounts and names. If the followers come from accounts considered "foreign", they cost less. Resellers also sell social media accounts, mostly of women, but also meme pages. Accounts are more expensive if they have a lot of followers and lots of photos. Reseller-workers sell photo packs, mostly of women, and promise that they are neither celebrities nor bloggers. This means that the resale of accounts, photos and followers works in an articulated way, with the purpose of boosting multiple social media accounts. Thus, the resale around click farm work is related to the economy and infrastructure of the platforms (Van Dijck, 2021; Poell, Nieborg & Duffy, 2021).

Being a reseller in the click farm platform circuit means being inside a work and commerce process, and, from the workers' point of view, an opportunity to earn money. This circuit is peripheral, informal and outside ofthe platform labour, although it is part of the same context, as these work activities only exist because of the social media platforms. The circuit tends to infinity, as workers are always called upon to also be resellers. One of the ads states: "make money from Instagram, TikTok, Youtube and other social media. Make money posting ads and earn up to R$10,000 per month selling followers." Other ads stated, "Work with us and make a profit! You can use it for

your own use or for resale" and "Come resell with us, we have the best prices in Brazil". Thus, all workers are potential resellers. This explains the rapid circulation of advertisements in all groups, as people can only earn money through reselling activities. As an advert for a woman worker-reseller said: "No experience needed. Even a 9-year-old with no experience could do this job". Some discourses appeal to emotions to boost workers' resales: "Hello, are you sad? Are your resales weak? Do you feel unhappy? This is complicated, isn't it? But wait, I have the new solution. With our disclosures, you can boost your sales 100%".

Credibility, authority and trust are central arguments for reselling social media accounts. One of the ads said that, with more followers on Instagram, people can have more credibility and authority: "Be more credible on Instagram! Increase your followers! Packages from R$3". In addition, building solidarity and competition among workers (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020) is related to trust, also through informal circuits. Some adverts stated: "Follow the list of trusted Instagram account resellers with experience in the business" and "We do not recommend buying from anyone not on the list as we do not know if they are trustworthy or honest". That is, workers try to protect each other against potential fraud or scams (Grohmann et al., 2022).

Thus, the resale of social media accounts is an expression of reproducing informal work in Brazil in the context of platformisation of labour as both language and work practice. These worker-resellers, therefore, support, in informal and low-tech ways, major themes related to the creator economy (Cunningham & Craig, 2021) and disinformation-for-hire (Ong & Cabañes, 2019). One of the ads stated: "I have Instagram for resale with themes related to reality shows, celebrities, K-pop".

In addition, working in the circuits around click farm platforms is the gateway to a series of informal work activities with "low tech" characteristics. This is present in adverts such as: "Come check out the best prices for followers and high quality! We work with Instagram, TikTok, Twitch and Facebook. And we also sell likes, comments, views on IGTV, Reels and lives. We also resell Netflix accounts and unlimited internet!". This produces a mix between platform labour and the legacy of informal work in Latin America (Franco, 2021).

Thus WhatsApp groups are the enabling infrastructures of these parallel markets, as places for trade, communication and organisation amongst workers. They are a synthesis of what Soriano and Cabañes (2020) call "entrepreneurial solidarity", and have taken place in groups of platform workers from different sectors. There is, at the same time, a feeling of mutual help among the members of the groups and reinforcement of an entrepreneurial neoliberal rationality, which is a contradiction that cannot be resolved. Workers share both tips for working and advertisements for resale of accounts and bots. In this way, there are networks of solidarity – as emerging forms of

organisation – and they simultaneously transform groups into yet another facet of the market and neoliberal ideology.

YouTubers and neoliberal discourses

Brazilian workers discover click farm platforms mainly through YouTube channels promising extra and easy money: "Know how to make money on the internet". YouTubers work as central links in reproducing and updating the symbolic meanings of informal work through click farms. If the WhatsApp and Facebook groups reveal the circulation of meanings around neoliberalism and entrepreneurship, the people mainly responsible for activating these discourses are the YouTubers.

They act as skill makers (Soriano & Panaligan, 2019) and are responsible for transitioning people who want to start working for click farm platforms and providing informal learning to them. According to Soriano and Panaligan (2019: 1), skill makers are "specialist coaches who attract and train platform workers into this labour market and the 'skill-making economy' which is playing a crucial role in the local popularity and viability of platform labour". This notion of "skill maker" is critically understood as a sign of neoliberalism and entrepreneurship. Thus these YouTubers are coaches responsible for initiating workers and helping them transition to an entrepreneurial "mentality". Many YouTube channels feature imperative titles such as "Make easy money!", "Make money fast" and "Make money passively".

In Brazil, the main YouTuber who helps people transition into click farm work is Sávio Augusto, who calls himself a "digital entrepreneur". He gives tips and sells courses on working on click farm platforms. In general, the creators are male, white, aged between 20 and 40 years, and talk about topics such as entrepreneurship and digital marketing. The aesthetics of the videos are kitsch, with many colours and using many fonts on the same card, trying to draw the attention of workers to earn extra and easy income. These YouTubers present their role as training, education and pedagogy, in an informal way. They teach people how to work, adapting and building fissures in platform practices (Ferrari & Graham, 2021), as forms of circumventing platform logics and building worker agency (Grohmann et al., 2022). They do tutorials, mentorships and courses as a way of preparing skills for work – not for freedom (Freire, 2000), but to follow a neoliberal and entrepreneurial grammar, including training for tools, software, and techniques.

The most prominent words in YouTube videos are money, time, micro-task, payment and dollar. The content of the videos on YouTube is dedicated to explaining to workers how easy and simple it is to work on click farm platforms. One of the examples is: "You need to dedicate yourself and invest time in this work, as if you were

in a company, to get results". Thus the discourse tries to relate the informal work of click farm platforms to a formal job in an aspirational way (Duffy, 2016). The discourses of the YouTubers reinforce meanings that, if workers make an effort, they will get good results and a good amount of money: "It's not easy, but if I did it, you can do it"; "It's boring, but it's worth it".

On the other hand, YouTube comments reveal feelings of gratitude towards learning from skill makers. Workers often call YouTubers "friends" and ask for more tips to make more money on click farm platforms. On the Brazilian channel, workers always reinforce that they can only earn money due to the efforts of the YouTuber, and also call him friend: "Congratulations, very good! I started using these platforms thanks to you, my friend, over a year ago. May God bless you for your work"; "Hello Sávio, I started using these platforms on your recommendation"; "Good morning, Savio. You teach in an easy way, anyone can understand. You should record a course. I would be the first person to buy it. You explain very well, step by step. I'm very satisfied with your channel"; "I'm starting to work for these platforms today. Your videos are helping me to understand. You will still grow a lot in your life!"; "Sávio, I want to be your student in a more orderly way. Can you help me?".

There are mentions of God and aspirational discourses which are at the same time related to capitalism (Illouz, 2007) and platform practices (Poell, Nieborg & Duffy, 2021). Thus the workers' comments reveal desperate quests for survival, wanting to learn how to use platforms faster to make more money, while showing gratitude towards and recognition of creators. There are even children and teenagers asking for tips on working on click farm platforms.

The YouTube channels are a hub for the production and circulation of neoliberal and entrepreneurial ideology, in terms of training and mentoring. However, the reinforcement and spread of these discourses occur in WhatsApp groups. That is, there are also "skill makers" in these groups, who activate their discourses especially by selling e-books to increase sales and mentoring with quick sales strategies, in addition to promising access to more than 30 000 groups, so they can sell social media accounts. In WhatsApp groups, workers announce that they have "open mentorships", and ask those interested to inbox them.

An example is the e-book *How to Profit from Selling Instagram Followers: Simple, Easy, No-Investment Strategies to Turn Your Free Time into a Sales Machine*. It is authored by a reseller present in many WhatsApp groups and is part of a company "focused on training entrepreneurs and aspirants with a focus on services for social media". The company states that its "mission is to promote entrepreneurship in a simple and objective way. There are more than 5000 students enrolled in our training." The e-book states that "all products and materials produced by the company

are made for educational and informal purposes". Thus the e-book confirms that skill makers mix neoliberalism from below and informal work.

The e-book promises that Instagram will be a "gold mine" for workers and that they will be able to sell their first social media accounts within hours. The material teaches how to put prices on accounts and how to publicise sales in WhatsApp groups. One of the tips is to create a professional Instagram account, simulating being a PR agency and having at least 10 000 followers, to "gain authority". The e-book recommends that the worker position themself as a company that specialises in selling followers and services for social media. The material also guides the worker to look for target audiences such as influencers, gamers, musicians and health workers: "You need to understand potential customers in a smart and organised way". There is a proliferation of discourses in line with Silicon Valley discourse (Marwick, 2018), such as "Think outside the box", "innovation", "disruption" and "See you at the top". The e-book ends with an invitation for workers to join the WhatsApp group to "learn strategies to further increase their income".

These strategies of YouTubers as skill makers mean the circulation of neoliberal ideology is territorialised in Brazil, as an aspect that articulates informal work and entrepreneurship in the context of platform labour.

Boundaries around piracy markets and illegality

On one of the YouTube channels, one of the followers asks: "Is selling and buying followers a legal practice?" The answer was: "It's not illegal, but Instagram doesn't like it". This is an example of the undefined border between legal and illegal in click farming, something that has long been typical of informal and popular economies in the global peripheries (Pinheiro-Machado, 2017), and which is intensified in the context of platform labour. Piracy markets – and also illegal ones – are an important and constituent part of the informal market in Brazil, well before platformisation. There are borders around illegality that are intensified in the context of platform labour, especially in click farm work.

On the one hand, click farm platforms discursively play with questions of honesty/dishonesty of workers, as a form of coercion so that they do not create fake profiles. They claim that they have fake account detection and that they do not allow such practices on the platforms. On the other hand, platforms such as Instagram understand such practices as breaking the rules and block suspicious accounts. Thus workers who are blocked do not receive the money from click farm platforms (Grohmann et al., 2022).

This scenario only exists because of the parallel and informal markets to resell fake accounts, which supply the multiple profiles used by workers on the click farm platforms. The informal markets that exist in WhatsApp

groups open perspectives beyond click farm work, as workers resell and buy a little bit of everything, as an updated brand of informal work in the global peripheries. This ranges from selling unlimited internet and streaming service accounts to selling fake money. Therefore, click farm work can be the beginning of illegal practices and markets (Pinheiro-Machado 2017), and a means of survival through piracy and illegality.

Some of the adverts in the groups said: "I teach people how to take data from other people. It could be by phone number, email, name, or license plate"; "Selling credit cards on behalf of other people. It's not a cloned card, it's not a lost card. You pay $120 and get a $1300 card"; "I resell unlimited Netflix"; "Come and see my scams and scammers"; "Come and see my resellers at Bet365, Lacoste, unlimited internet and fake bank screens"; and "Fake money promotion. Take advantage of the fact that the material is very good, with a low price". Thus there is the emergence of scams, fakes and frauds, as a deep layer of click farm work and platform labour (Grohmann et al., 2022).

In general, there are no major questions on the part of workers regarding the ethics around the creation and resale of fake accounts for social media platforms. They understand this as part of a quest for economic survival in a context of extreme unemployment. This is related to a feeling on the part of workers that click farm work is responsible for creating opportunities for financial survival in a country where informal work and unemployment are features of the economy.

Conclusions

The central argument of this paper has been that informal work in Brazil is updated and reproduced through work on click farm platforms and in their parallel markets. This forms a continuity with historical practices in popular and informal markets on the global peripheries, involving resale practices and undefined borders around illegality and piracy. However, platform labour and its mechanisms – especially in relation to social media platforms – add new and deep dimensions to informal work and workers in the global South. All actions have, as their ultimate purpose, a relationship with boosting social media accounts. In this way, "low tech" Brazilian workers support activities, economies and infrastructure related to the platformisation of cultural production (Poell, Nieborg & Duffy, 2021). In Latin America, the creator economy depends on these informal, parallel and sometimes illegal markets, with poorly paid workers who need to create many fake accounts to survive, and with a strong emphasis on gendered labour (Altenried, 2020; Tubaro et al., 2022).

Language is a central element of this updating and renewal of informal work through click farms, mixing coaching, entrepreneurial, aspirational and neoliberal rhetoric with forms (such as emojis) and slang typical of

informal popular markets – such as street markets – in Brazil. The intense use of WhatsApp with emojis aligns with the consumption of Brazilian digital culture, and it is a place that works as a hub for the production and circulation of a neoliberal ideology.

YouTubers are an important link in sustaining this ideology, as skill makers, who are responsible for training, mentoring and initiation into the universe of click farm platforms and parallel markets. They also sell courses to teach people "social media entrepreneurship" and how to earn extra income the easy way. Thus, YouTubers teach people to work in line with neoliberal ideology. Workers feel identified with YouTubers, feeling belonging and giving recognition, treating them as friends and as people who help them a lot.

Resale has long been central to Brazilian informal markets. It takes on new contours in the context of platform labour. The word resale is used many times by workers, in a clear connection between the past and the present of work. All workers are also transformed into resellers of fake accounts, followers, photos and bots, with advertisements spread across all groups. Resellers point to a type of "4.0 informal work" on the part of click farm work, which begins with activities directly related to click farm platforms while also paving the way for illegal and piracy practices.

This paper contributes to studies on platform labour by focusing on click farm platforms, which are under-researched compared to location-based platforms for ride hailing and delivery. It showed how click farm platforms update and renew traditional informal work in Brazil. It also points to the complexity of the relationship between informal work and platform labour that needs to be taken into consideration in discussions on how to regulate the platform economy

Specifically, the paper presents contributions to debates on taskification of work and widespread neoliberal discourse and identity. First, the click farm platform deepens the mechanisms of micro-work platforms by presenting new layers of fauxtomation and ghost work, in a platform labour circuit peopled only by Brazilians, both as consumers and as workers. Second, it reveals the articulation of discourses of neoliberalism and entrepreneurship with informal work in a context of the global South.

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