

Social research in digital environments in COVID-19 times: theoretical and methodological notes

Pesquisa social em ambientes digitais em
tempos de COVID-19: notas
teórico-metodológicas

Investigación social en ambientes digitales en
tiempos de la COVID-19: notas
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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and the sanitary measures of social distance brought impasses to Social Research and its future. Research in digital environments was already booming, but now that face-to-face activities are temporarily suspended, it becomes an alternative to enable the continuity of studies. Understanding it better is an epistemological and methodological need for all researchers. Thus, the objective of this essay is to propose some theoretical and methodological considerations on qualitative research in the different digital environments formed by the Internet 2.0. We point out some introductory aspects and tensions considered strategic for those who are going to start their work in social networks supported by the Internet. We organized the article based on the following topics: (1) digital sociality; (2) the “digital environment” and the blurring of boundaries between real-virtual; (3) the redefinition of the meaning of “field” in the digital environment; (4) the different cultural uses of digital platforms; (5) platforms as producers of discursive genres; (6) the production and extraction of collections. The essay seeks to demonstrate that research in digital environments reveals an exponential field of possibilities, whether to explore the forms that this sociality assumes in our daily lives, or to modulate our (inter)subjectivities, as it allows the production of identity narratives and performances, associations for different purposes, among many other possibilities. However, it demands an understanding of social action based on the synergy of the socio-technical-cultural contexts that structure it.

COVID-19; Internet; Social Media; Qualitative Research; Methodology

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The COVID-19 pandemic caused by the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and the sanitary measures applied to face it have raised questions and dilemmas for social research and its future. Researches aimed at the production of a knowledge that is developed from the understanding of the interpretation of the action of individuals and groups ¹, and which are usually carried out based on daily coexistence and face-to-face conversational exchanges with the subjects, are suspended. Studies involving fieldwork, those of ethnographic or observational nature, which plan interviews and group activities are now being revised due to the conditions imposed by the pandemic ². And, probably, it is not just a matter of waiting a few months for “normality” to be restored. The phases of readaptation of social life can be long and even suffer setbacks, in case new waves of contagion are identified ³.

Based on the recommendations of the World Health Organization for social distancing, computer-mediated communication assumes fundamental importance as the strategic way of managing the daily life ⁴. Even before, from what was called Internet 2.0, with the creation of platforms capable of providing interactivity between Internet users, the Internet gradually demarcated new foundations in terms of culture and sociality ^{5,6,7}.

If, from 2010 the consolidation of new fields of study was observed, such as Digital Sociology ^{8,9} and Digital Anthropology ^{10,11}, the prohibitions of face-to-face contact during and after the pandemic can cause digital methodologies to become a necessity for social research. It is worth mentioning that this field has been considerably expanding in the healthcare area already, in which studies on changes in the doctor-patient relationship after Internet 2.0, consumption of medicines and self-care, evaluation of healthcare information disseminated online, associativism, identities built from experiences of illness, prevention, and several other themes are multiplying – themes that proliferate with the diversification of online interaction ^{12,13,14,15,16}.

If research in digital environments was restricted to a group of specific studies within the area of social research, at this moment, to better understand it becomes an epistemological and methodological need for all researchers. Certainly, this is not an indistinct solution to all research, considering that such decisions involve a coherent reading of the objectives of the study, which may indicate the need for investigative dynamics that articulate the online and offline spaces, seeking to capture the different performances and interactions in these spaces and the way technologies interact in social practices.

Thus, the objective of this essay is to propose some theoretical and methodological considerations on qualitative research in the different digital environments formed by Internet 2.0. We pinpoint some introductory aspects and tensions that we deem strategic for those who shall begin to deal with a set of texts (in its broad conception, in such a way to include text, images, sounds, and other media that consist in sociocultural manifestations) produced in sociality networks supported by the Internet. We organized the article according to the following topics: (1) digital sociality; (2) “digital environment” and the blurring of boundaries between real-virtual; (3) redefinition of the meaning of “field” in the digital environment; (4) different cultural uses of digital platforms; (5) platforms as producers of discursive genres; (6) production and extraction of collections. Our aim is not to extensively approach these topics, but to raise some questions about the sui generis nature of this field of social interactions, in a context mediated and induced by digital platforms.

Digital sociality

Sociality refers to new devices of common everyday life that are not based on the parameters of Western sociability (anchored in the innate assumptions of individualism, on the moral and societal forms by which individuals are grouped), but which value the affective and intersubjective arrangements that allow us to think about this gregarious power ^{17,18}. Hence, sociality will take on new shapes from the technological milestone defined as Internet 2.0. As of the 2010s, optical fiber enabled a massive amount of data to be exchanged between users, resulting in two important changes: total mobility through mobile devices and, mainly, the production of content by nonspecialists, considering that, from the creation of interactive interfaces and several tutorials, any user could create and insert it on collaborative platforms ¹⁹.

The advent and cheapness of technologies that give access to the platforms provoked a new wave of contents related to the banal and the daily life, which gained notoriety again at the end of the 20th century²⁰. Although many institutional, academic, business, and healthcare content gained importance in this new phase of the Internet, contents related to the intimacy of the everyday life have gained greater notoriety and visibility. Those who were once known as spectators now have the possibility of being the protagonists of their own life-video-blog-live, a true spectacle of the self²¹.

Sociality will thus be redefined based on human and everyday operations of appropriations and uses of these new digital technologies. It assumes a fluid, temporary, and gregarious dynamic based on interests linked to affections, sensitivities, and eroticism¹⁸. As Horst & Miller¹¹ and Miller & Slater²², explains, the Internet is part of a material culture that enhances cultural forms of relationships between people. From their cultural references, people create ways to relate to each of these media, triggering values, aesthetics, and moralities of their social group.

From platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tinder, etc., we can observe that the networks of digital interactions define and depend on the way that the “I” will present itself to the “others”, who in turn embody themselves in different ways in the discourse produced by this digital “I”. Thus, the “other” presents itself as a hidden audience that constantly mediates the way the self is presented on social networks. Not surprisingly, Goffman’s studies are noteworthy resumed^{23,24}. Aiming at being loved, appreciated, and applauded, individuals would be submitted to what Sibilia²¹ called “tyrannies of visibility,” in such a way to style and cultivate their images based on the characters of audiovisual media. Overexposure thus becomes an intrinsic characteristic of this digital sociality, in a palinoptic projection, where many people watch over many people²⁵.

Digital sociality takes place through several languages (verbal, corporal, algorithmic, multimedia) that are apprehended by the body, through the way with which the individual presents itself to the other in a performative manner. It is worth noting that these platforms-companies where interactions take place are aimed at obtaining profit, that is, they aim at the maximum dissemination of their content and propositions¹⁹. Therefore, overexposure will be stimulated in the capitalist yearning to diversify the form of marketing and persuasive power of their consumers²⁶.

Overexposure, which on the one hand enables to unravel the intimate spheres, consisting in a potential material for social research, on the other hand challenges the researcher in the ethical field, for example. To protect research subjects when there is such exposure is even more necessary. Hence, it is necessary to consider the “audience” effect in many of the communications that circulate on the Internet. It also demands to unveil the versions and narratives from the media and relational context in which it was produced and its multiple intentions for diverse audiences²⁷.

Digital environments: blurring the boundaries between real-virtual and technology-mediated research

Although it is possible “to inhabit and live alternative, specific lives from digital technology, through avatars in an immersive environment”²⁸ (p. 191) with the arrival of Internet 2.0, instead of consolidating a world parallel to the one conceived as real, what happened was a movement to digitize the everyday life. Smartphones, tablet computers, and watches have incorporated applications, that is, digital algorithms that allow different platforms on mobile devices. Thus, the meal ordered in a food application, the date arranged by a dating application, or checking the city traffic in a traffic application are examples of the reality that is being digitized. Therefore, the term “digital” will replace the term “virtual” to designate the environments provided by Internet 2.0. This notion of digital supports the notion of virtuality addressed by Lévy²⁹ (p. 11), who defines this imminence as being “every ‘deteritorialized’ entity, capable of generating many concrete manifestations at different times and in definite places, without being bound up with a particular space or time”. These ways of being do not correspond to opposite worlds, but rather to complementary ones.

Technology has definitely been incorporated and embodied in our daily lives; as Cristine Hine³⁰ summarizes, it is embedded, embodied, and everyday. Thus, any binarism between real-virtual, digital-analogue loses its meaning. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the Actor-Network

Theory (TAR), developed by Latour et al.³¹ over numerous publications, addressed technology as an actor that has capacity and starts playing a leading role in Social Theory. Digital platforms and environments are then studied as nonhuman actors. The very notion of “actor” changes with this theory, which starts paying more attention to the associations human and nonhuman actants make in networks than to their intrinsic attributes. The term “actant” will emphasize the alliances, flows, and mediations between humans and technologies, that is, actants are the mediators, the articulators of the network within and outside themselves in association with others. This open and unpredictable interaction is capable of producing knowledge and effects on the collective.

The arrival of Internet 2.0 also consolidates a paradigm shift in relation to the role of technology in social research. If, at first, it was merely conceived as an auxiliary mean to register a certain form of sociality and its dynamics, technology is currently the very space of subjects’ interaction and aggregation. However, the relevance of technology as the enabler of the production of field data is known. In his famous introduction to the work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski³² highlighted the importance of technology in portraying a culture respecting the scientific standards of his time. In addition to the field diary and participant observation, Malinowski suggested that the researcher should use all the available technological means (in his time, the voice recorder and the camera) to portray what he called “imponderabilia of everyday life”.

With the “digitalization of everyday life”, we can observe that the technology applied to social research does not merely work as an auxiliary tool for gathering data. This becomes the means by which the research subjects’ sociality is put into practice. We can say that the digital world encompasses all fields of interaction of social life, from the most intimate and private ones (such as affective-sexual relationships or applications aimed at controlling menstrual cycles, for example) to those in the macrosphere such as major transnational financial activities.

This paradigm shift in relation to the role of technology in social research has as its main practical consequence the awareness on the part of the researcher that technology has this double nature: if, on the one hand, it is the privileged locus in which interlocutors develop their interactions, on the other hand, it assists in the extraction, measurement, and analysis of data. Thus, all stages of the research will be mediated by the digital world, from its exploratory analysis of field recognition to the writing of the final text, and there will be little distinction between offline and online in this trajectory.

From the point of view of sociology, we can state that the digital world is a total social fact, as advocated by Mauss³³ (p. 21), that is, “*an activity that has implications throughout society, in the economic, legal, political, and religious spheres*”, in such a way that “*it informs and organizes seemingly quite distinct practices and institutions*”.

The different socio-anthropological uses of platforms

According to Silveira²⁶, the digital world is crossed by algorithms, thanks to its enormous success and effectiveness in our social, economic, and political relations. These finite sequences of programming that aim to provide a solution to a certain type of problem or search based on previous entries are presented by the market as something that we do not need to know how they work, as long as they fulfill their purpose. Algorithms are considered tools that, in addition to helping with everyday tasks, would direct these activities according to economic interests. They help us to find childhood friends on Facebook; assist in the sale of products on Instagram from their network of friends, and even gradually instill political ideologies through message sequences that are compatible with their search history; in short, there are many possibilities and they vary according to the associations with the informational environment.

Algorithms can be deemed as producing fields of interaction between individuals with specific rules and conducts that are materialized on platforms – which, in turn, attract millions of users worldwide. This variety of options of algorithmic interactions between people and the way in which individuals make their choices in this environment was the focus of a research carried out by Madi-anou & Miller³⁴ on the sociocultural use of digital platforms. The research project called *Why We Post* investigated the global impact of new social media. The study was based on ethnographic data collected over 15 months in China, India, Turkey, Italy, United Kingdom, Trinidad, Chile, and Brazil.

The authors highlighted the different cultural uses of platforms, such as the social role of the “selfie”, the famous self-portraits of the digital age, in the different countries addressed in the research.

Polymedia is one of the guiding concepts of the project, which is a conceptual tool that exposes internal connectivity in relation to external interpersonal communications. The authors state that we cannot treat each new media that appears on the market independently, considering that they are part of a broader ecology of different media ³⁴. For example, using e-mail can be a more socially applicable option than texting on a cell phone or even using instant messages available on a social networking website; commenting on friends’ posts is sometimes more socially appropriate than posting directly to their wall. Thus, the authors conceptualize “polymedia” as the environment that emerges from the wide range of communicative opportunities, which works as an “integrated structure” in which each individual means is defined according to relational terms in the context of all other media. Therefore, navigating in the polymedia environment becomes inextricably linked to the ways with which interpersonal relationships are established and experienced. As a consequence, polymedia helps to resocialize technology, considering that the choice responsibility changes from technical and economic concerns to moral, social, and emotional ones. Contrary to the perspective of technological determinism, “*the polymedia situation is one in which technology is mediated by interpersonal relationships and vice versa*” ³⁴ (p. 172).

Hence, researchers who conduct their investigation in a digital environment must be aware of the meaning and use each person attributes to a given application or platform, resulting from a set of relationships and webs of meanings of a certain culture. In any case, the constant questioning of the researcher as for the ways of saying, thinking, and acting expressed in online interactions are worth of consideration and are intersected with the shape and induction of behaviors that digital platforms produce from their commercial interests.

Platforms and discourse genres

From this socio-anthropological point of view of the action of mathematical codes, we consider that each digital platform demands from its users a certain way of composing their discursive production, a certain somewhat stable repertoire of themes and their own style, involving the gradual mastery of lexical and phraseological resources learned as appropriate for that communication as well as a way to structure the statements. Thus, we can recognize that the platforms build their own discursive genres, as conceptualized by Bakhtin ³⁵.

According to Maingueneau ³⁶, the web transforms communication conditions, changes the way we perceive genre and the very notion of textuality. The author suggests that the Internet has a “navigating” textuality in solidarity with new forms of reading based on hypertext or hyperdocument. It is not a matter of speaking of a text of a higher order, but of a contingent system built by the Internet user: “*The hypertext (or hyperdocument) is a set of texts, images and sounds – nodes – connected by electronic links in such a way to form a system whose existence is contingent beyond the computer*” ³⁶ (p. 155).

Thus, when researching the discursive production created on digital social networks, a good start is to question what are the most frequently addressed themes. What behaviors are shaped by that platform through the arrangement of the interactional functions offered? What grammatical and phraseological style is configured there? Is there a difference in the expressions used by people from different social groups and generations? What intertextuality does that communication have? Does it dialogue with other languages and texts?

The mottos of each platform, for instance, seem to suggest a discursive performance to its participants. Facebook wants you to say “what’s on your mind”, in a spiral of testimonies that aim to accumulate the important currency of recognition, which ranges from its most ephemeral manifestation (the “likes”) to comments and shares in the users’ “groups”. Twitter wants to be a sensor of the society “trends” (politics, behavior, fashion, etc.), a window for “seeing what’s happening in the world right now”. Initially associated with a space for “celebrities” to connect with their fans, it has popularized its profile, but it still marks the intense performance of public figures and those who seek notoriety. In the sign-up description, the question that is asked to the new user is “what makes you special?”. Users can be followed or have followers, in a clear reference to the creation of entourages. The popularity

reflected by the number of followers will confer the status of a digital influencer to those who have a robust “customer portfolio”. YouTube, with the motto “broadcast yourself,” invites its users to create and publish the most varied videos. From the “how to” tutorials, which inaugurated this interactional space, to the most varied artistic, journalistic, and educational manifestations as well as individual performances. Every person aims to have their channel and to join many subscribers. The platform also provides a manual with technical tips on how to make your channel popular. Instagram, in its turn, has the motto “to capture and share the world’s moments”. With a strong visual appeal, impregnated with its origin of space for editing and sharing photos, it currently allows for the production of texts, postings of videos, narratives, and manifestation of communities. As a newer platform, it has been quickly incorporating the functions and tools of older platforms.

We understand that the researcher can treat platforms as an utterance context in which the analyzed interactions and practices take place, taking into account the discursive genre that delimits them. As defined by van Dijk¹⁹, platforms are performative structures; they do not work as mere mediators of communication, but rather compose social behaviors. Thus, knowing the history of the website/application creation and their corporate intentions seems useful for the analysis. What communication functions and tools are offered and what do they suggest to the users? How do such tools interfere in the interactions between participants? Knowing which generation uses the website/application, if its usage varies between men and women and in different cultures can also be relevant to understand the discourses produced there.

Redefinition of the meaning of “field” in the digital environment

Research involving “fieldwork” shares the ethnographic heritage as for the production of knowledge based on participation in the daily life of a particular community, people, social group, or institution. “Being” in the field used to involve the idea of a certain geographically existing territoriality. In the field, researchers would lend their own bodies and subjectivities to an immersion in the world of the living, sharing situations from an epistemically different place with the research subjects³⁷. In digital research, these anchoring terms of the production of knowledge (territory, community/group, body) will be different. Although participation in “communities” is encouraged on different platforms, in digital sociality this sense is very peculiar and different from the original meanings idealized by Tönnies³⁸. Internet communities do not correspond to the idea of a shared past, to the belonging to a family, to a village, that is, to the locus defined by tradition and organic solidarity, as predicted by Durkheim. Assemblages that emerge on social networks and maintain bonds with each other do not have a territorial base, but a “cyber-place”, symbolically defined according to an interest theme, which can be elusive or more permanent, and in which a significant amount of interactivity occurs and remains^{20,39}. The sense of a geographically delimited territory is lost in online-offline borders, they are fluid and dynamic. A chronically ill person, for example, can circulate through several platforms and communities, producing a different narrative in each one of them. Hence, researchers are challenged to understand these different flows and transits as well as the interactional variations that present themselves in each online environment. Thus, the “field” of digital research is rather a flow than a “place,” a network of connections that intertwine different daily interactions, anchored in many platforms and technological environments, and the “offline” world. The idea of a field without territory or place is not new in the ethnographic tradition, as Hine³⁰ points out. This debate has already been addressed in studies on refugees and migrants; however, in digital studies, the concept of a multi-localized field has a new meaning, exploring its dimensions of connection and mobility⁴⁰.

Markham⁴¹ argues that the contexts mediated by the Internet can assume different meanings for the researcher, being interpreted as (1) a means for network connectivity; (2) a virtual place or world; and (3) a way of being, a totality. Depending on this non-exclusive heuristic point of view, researchers may adopt different postures in their fieldwork. The first perspective will pay attention to digital sociality understood as “*how techno-cultural microsystems of meaning merge through the convergence of many elements, including content, technological infrastructures, and usage patterns*”⁴¹ (p. 1130). Researchers are interested in individual and group practices that are culturally situated and in how they are experienced on the Internet, in this “culture of connectivity”. The very idea of “field” is resignified as

“network”, in which the interests of the study are located. According to the second perspective, the Internet is understood as an immersive, multipurpose, and performative environment. In the third perspective, the Internet is where day-to-day life takes place, reinforced by corporeality and its senses and imbued with the rules of culture; in short, a technology that mediates the daily life ¹⁰.

If the fieldwork has the pragmatic purpose of producing data, demarcating an empiricism for theoretical reflection, how will this researcher’s agency be in the digital sphere? The different qualitative approaches have an important statement in common: their data do not have immanent materiality, on the contrary, they only exist because they are constructed, that is, they are coproduced in the unique interactions between subjects involved in the research ^{1,32,42}. Even studies that are based on pre-existent documents, on material bases that directly or indirectly testify to social practices, it is worth remembering that this type of collection was also coproduced based on successive arbitrary decisions made by those who produced and compiled it. Nevertheless, fieldwork, whether on an observational basis or not, does not aim to compile data per se, but to produce an interpretive reflection through this set of materials. The challenge is to produce, through this collection, an intellectual work that allows a “dense description” of the meaningful networks that translate a culture or a social practice ⁴². Such a task is no different in digital research.

Likewise, the researcher’s alleged “control of observations” differs in the research conducted in a digital environment. The change in body and facial expressions, the vocal undertones, the “winks” aimed at signifying something different from what has been said will not always be noticed. Nor will the actions taken (online postings, comments) be understood without accessing the interactional contexts that make the generated reactions intelligible ³⁰.

Certainly, even within a face-to-face observational context, researchers never account for all the relationships and interactions, but choose central axes through which they believe there shall be a good result from the production of theories about the studied phenomenon. As Hine ^{10,30} warns us, the researcher in the digital environment must be used to “a perpetual feeling of uncertainty”, to being asked to make theoretically supported interpretations of events that only access superficial evidences. And is this not the case of research in the “offline world”?

Production and extraction of data

One of the main characteristics of the digital world is its ephemeral and volatile nature, causing the environments produced by it to be quickly transformed and modified. Hence, researchers must guarantee some type of materiality to the data extracted from these environments. If in the digital world the data are in the “cloud,” that is, in a hosting location that is owned by a company that makes this space available through a personal register and the creation of an account, it is paramount for researchers to create a storage location that does not depend on Internet access, a digital or analog environment to which they can have access offline regardless of the platform from which the data were extracted.

In addition to avoiding operational problems for accessing the Internet, the creation of a personal offline collection also prevents the research material from “disappearing” due to being removed from the Internet. Considering that the healthcare area deals with several themes that permeate the legal/illegal frontier, the chances of a material being suddenly excluded are very high. For instance, we can mention a survey we conducted on online challenges that involve risks to children and adolescents through videos hosted on YouTube whose postings are constantly taken down for violating privacy policies. This control can be done by algorithms or by the very users’ complaints.

The volatility and ephemerality of digital environments in Internet 2.0 are also observed with regard to data extraction tools. One of the most paradigmatic examples is the case of the application for Facebook data extraction, the Netvizz. When it was active, it directly accessed the set of routines and standards established by Facebook (Application Programming Interface – API) to use its functionality ⁴³.

After the complaint made against Facebook according to which this platform was selling confidential data to millions of Facebook users (the Cambridge Analytica scandal), data extraction from this platform for research purposes has been increasingly hindered by the company. Although the applica-

tion has helped more than 300 academic papers, it has been taken down. Some researchers believe that the trend is for all APIs to be closed and the release of data for research to become increasingly commercialized. Research may be increasingly limited with the allegation of violation of the privacy law.

Based on this statement, we can assume that this restriction can lead to a more “handmade” nature of research. For example, if researchers must know what was the publication that got more “likes” in a group of women with breast cancer, they will have to check each post within a certain period of time and make a ranking based on the variables chosen for the research. Thus, pasting the content of the social network into the Word software, creating tables in the Excel software to account the likes of a certain post, transferring the entire collection to a qualitative data processing software, or manually searching for images of a particular group are tasks that go entirely against the contemporary temporality of Internet 2.0 and the amount of data to be processed. Nevertheless, new tools will certainly be created and offered at a certain market value or, from an optimistic perspective, they will be considered strategic tools for the development of knowledge and will be offered and accessed for free.

Another aspect worth of investigation is the possibility of coproduction of collections with the research subjects. Digital research allows for much more than “conducting interviews” online. Research subjects can be (and many of them already are) producers and editors of content in different formats (photos, texts, videos, images). Researchers can ask subjects to produce content, by talking about their experiences, points of view, ideas, and discussing the meanings attributed to them ^{7,44}.

Another effect of the culture of digital connectivity manifested in the interactions of social networks, which can be a trap for inexperienced researchers, is to encounter an immeasurable amount of material (thousands of texts, emojis, emoticons, comments, videos, gifs, photos, etc.). It will be very unlikely to carry out an ethnography or an in-depth analysis aiming at covering all the manifestations that are presented there. Therefore, it is necessary to define the axis of relationships, dimensions, and focuses in a somewhat infinite set of empirical materials ^{7,45}.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the pandemic and its health restrictions have led to the overuse of the Internet ²⁷, elements that can help demystifying the forms of digital communication for many users (especially non-digital natives); on the other hand, the excessive use of these media can lead to a certain level of “impatience” with research approaches.

Conclusions

The context of the COVID-19 pandemic demand from us to adapt our studies, migrating to the environments of digital research. However, as human interactions are increasingly mediated by the Internet, research in an online environment consists in a heuristic requirement that goes beyond the emergency strategic solutions produced by the health contingencies of social distancing. This summons and challenges all researchers to better understand “the digital world”, broadening horizons beyond the limited understanding of a “place” where it will be easy to collect large amounts of data and carry out interviews online.

This “digital world”, although structured by algorithms in action on the various platforms, is effective through its own languages, it forges behaviors and interactional dynamics that make sense in the light of their technical-socio-cultural contexts. The concept of field-flow-network challenges us to accompany our research participants through the paths of their volatility and mobility, interpretively unraveling their different cultural uses and performances in each digital environment.

Research in digital environments unveil an exponential field of possibilities, whether for exploring the forms that this sociality assumes in our daily lives, or how it modulates our (inter)subjectivities, how it allows the production of identity narratives and performances, associations for different purposes, among many other possibilities. It also generously provides collections of almost all social practices that have ever been dreamed of. Therefore, this type of research demand from us the courageous exercise of creativity, intuition, and spontaneity – qualities that are combined with theoretical rigor, conceptual clarity, and the ethical respect for otherness.

Contributors

The authors equally collaborated to the proposal, preparation, and review of the text.

Additional informations

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Resumo

A pandemia de COVID-19 e as medidas sanitárias de distanciamento social trouxeram impasses para a pesquisa social e o seu futuro. A pesquisa em ambientes digitais já estava em franca expansão, mas neste momento de suspensão de atividades presenciais, torna-se uma alternativa para viabilizar a continuidade dos estudos. Compreendê-la melhor se torna uma necessidade epistemológica e metodológica para todos os pesquisadores. Assim, o objetivo desse ensaio é propor algumas considerações teórico-metodológicas sobre a pesquisa qualitativa nos diferentes ambientes digitais formados pela Internet 2.0. Pontuamos alguns aspectos e tensões introdutórias que consideramos estratégicas para os que vão começar seu trabalho nas redes de sociabilidade sustentadas pela Internet. Organizamos o artigo a partir dos seguintes tópicos: (1) a sociabilidade digital; (2) o “ambiente digital” e o borramento de fronteiras entre real-virtual; (3) a redefinição do significado de “campo” na ambiência digital; (4) os diferentes usos culturais das plataformas digitais; (5) as plataformas como produtoras de gêneros discursivos; (6) a produção e extração de acervos. O ensaio procura demonstrar que a pesquisa nas ambiências digitais descortina um campo exponencial de possibilidades, seja para explorar as formas que essa socialidade assume em nossos cotidianos, para modular nossas (inter) subjetividades, como permite a produção de narrativas e performances identitárias, associações para propósitos diversos, entre tantas outras possibilidades. Todavia, demanda uma compreensão da ação social a partir da sinergia dos contextos sócio-técnico-culturais que a estruturam.

COVID-19; Internet; Mídias Sociais; Pesquisa Qualitativa; Metodologia

Resumen

La pandemia de COVID-19 y las medidas sanitarias de distanciamiento social trajeron impases para la Investigación Social y su futuro. La investigación en ambientes digitales ya estaba en franca expansión, pero en este momento de suspensión de actividades presenciales se convierte en una alternativa para viabilizar la continuidad de los estudios. Comprenderla mejor se convierte en una necesidad epistemológica y metodológica para todos los investigadores. Por ello, el objetivo de este trabajo es proponer algunas consideraciones teórico-metodológicas sobre la investigación cualitativa en los diferentes ambientes digitales formados por la Internet 2.0. Puntuamos algunos aspectos y tensiones introductorias que consideramos estratégicas para los que van a comenzar su trabajo en las redes de sociabilidad sostenidas por la Internet. Organizamos el artículo a partir de los siguientes temas: 1. La sociabilidad digital; 2. El “ambiente digital” y la desaparición de fronteras entre lo real-virtual; 3. La redefinición del significado de “campo” en el entorno digital; 4. Los diferentes usos culturales de las plataformas digitales; 5. Las plataformas como productoras de géneros discursivos; 6. La producción y extracción de acervos. El trabajo busca demostrar que la investigación en los entornos digitales desvela un campo exponencial de posibilidades, sea para explorar las formas que esa sociabilidad asume en nuestros cotidianos, sea para modular nuestras (inter)subjetividades, al permitir la producción de narraciones y performances identitarias, asociaciones para propósitos diversos, entre tantas otras posibilidades. Asimismo, demanda una comprensión de la acción social a partir de la sinergia de los contextos socio-técnico-culturales que la estructuran.

COVID-19; Internet; Medios de Comunicación Sociales; Investigación Cualitativa; Metodología

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