Vampires on the Web. The explotation of youth culture

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Abstract
In recent years, several studies have analysed the skills and strategies that young people develop in digital environments and their relationship with cultural franchises within their transmedia universes. This article, clearly theoretical, aims to offer a critical analysis of the commodification of the creative work that young people produce on the web. Digital environments offer few possibilities for democratising public discourse. The online media production of teenagers is usually based on acts of false participation, since their possibilities of influence are very limited. At the same time, their actions in these digital environments are used to sustain a model of cognitive capitalism through processes of alienation and free labour that result in the advent of an information feudalism that transfers the goods of youth culture from the collective intellect into private hands.

Keywords
Youth culture; empowerment; commodification; fans; participatory culture; transliteracy.

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1. Introduction

The advent in 2004 of the so-called Web 2.0 brought with it two essential elements that were completely unknown in the sociotechnical model that was dominant in previous decades. On the one hand, an explosion of connective possibilities between the different spaces that any Internet user could find online by breaking down the structure based on the "fenced gardens" that governed the Web 1.0. On the other hand, the emergence of a myriad of technological tools and digital and interactive media offered the user potential possibilities for the creation and dissemination of media contents that were unthinkable in previous times. These tools gave the citizen unknown attributes for the exploitation of creativity and collaboration to achieve greater participation in the public debate and media sphere. The year 2004 marks the beginning of a, perhaps overly celebratory, current of thought on citizens' media empowerment that reconfigured the role of media users, going from the one-way, functionalist mass media broadcast model of the 20th century to a multidirectional, more horizontal and more democratic system where messages also circulate from the audience to the media.

A substantial number of voices both inside and outside the academia have celebrated in an extremely optimistic way the arrival of the new communication paradigm 2.0 as a context in which citizens' capacity to significantly influence public discourse is increased, based on the use of new digital and interactive tools. In 2006, Jay Rosen used the expression "the people formerly known as the audience" to title an article on the website pressthink.org and it soon became a sort of mantra advocating for citizen media empowerment. With this expression, Rosen refers to the field of power established by those eminently passive receivers from the past who began to take control of the public narrative. Rosen compares the broadcast model, where predominantly unidirectional media such as radio ruled, against the invention of podcasting, which empowers the citizen who, at the same time, discovers new uses and the potential of audio communication. In parallel, the recording, editing and distribution of video, which once belonged exclusively to the major media, is also being placed in the hands of users through media and/or platforms born in the heat of the media earthquake 2.0. From this perspective, the making of news and narratives is transformed, going from an authorship inserted in traditional and massive media to a task shared between corporations and publics.

2. Participatory culture: a concept in dispute

Based on these first ideas, numerous conceptualisations have emerged and, with different nuances, assume the renewed participatory possibilities of citizens in the public media sphere. Benkler (2006) and Jenkins (2006) are two of the authors who represent the most optimistic views of citizen empowerment in digital media and platforms. Both authors defend the ability and possibilities of users to connect through the social production in virtual environments. According to their theories, on the Internet citizens make use of digital resources to create and share content through social networks. Individuals organise and interact with each other in ways that constitute the essence of a structurally open media environment.

In the same techno-utopian line, different authors begin to introduce terms such as participatory media, open media, collaborative media, social media, open-source and citizen media. Such concepts as citizen journalism, street journalism, democratic journalism, volunteer journalism, and journalism 3.0 have been formulated based on the contributions of Gillmor (2004). Note that all the rhetoric analysed around the media participation of citizens is based on the discourse of potentiality and access to new technological tools as an engine of media empowerment for the population. Optimistic currents of

thought depart from clearly technocratic conceptions that assume that the mere inclusion of technology will suppose a significant change in communication models and processes.

In contrast to these optimistic views on the democratisation of the media model, in the last decade another academic trend started to conceive media and digital platforms from more problematic positions. The contributions of Sunstein (2009) and Prior (2007) present a digital citizen who uses the resources at his or her disposal to create relatively closed structures, which is far removed from the utopian vision. Prior claims that the online media production of the average citizen is based on a structure of evident polarisation, especially when considering the political commitment of netizens. Sunstein's perspective is similar as he argues that Internet users tend to activate certain filters to enclose themselves in echo chambers designed by themselves. In the same vein, Pariser (2011) describes a world in which the ubiquitous recommendation systems contribute to a personalised diet of digital contents precooked by the user. Turow (2011) documents a commercial media system that divides consumers into defined niches. Both Pariser and Turow perceive the Web as a conjunction of closed structures that exploit and manipulate our social identities through the use of a network of platforms whose business model is based on the management and commercialisation of user data. Pariser (2011) concludes that "what is really problematic about this change towards personalisation is that it is completely invisible to users and, as a consequence, it escapes our control". On the other hand, the transformation of citizen participation into free labour for media companies is another essential element of the new socio-technical scenario. The insertion of user generated content in the digital spaces of large professional media companies entails undeniable benefits for the sustainability of the market through the generation of user engagement with the media brand that grants such participation, always constituted as a form to reinforce in the user a clear feeling of belonging to a community that leads him to the consumption of the products of the franchise.

Citizens use the digital information highways to perform multiple actions. A research led by Scolari and published in 2018 frames the different uses that teenagers (the most active demographic in the digital universe) make of interactive media. This taxonomy includes the following dimensions: production, management, performance, media and technology, narrative, aesthetics, ideology, ethics and informal learning. All these elements can be reduced to two central aspects that are based on the definition of what kind of individual uses and contents can be considered insignificant, mere informative noise thrown into the virtual channels, and which ones end up acquiring true relevance. Allen (2015) proposes the categorisation of discourses into two types: the expressive discourse (the one that has a limited impact and is limited to small communities) and the influential discourse (the one that has relevance in the decision-making mechanisms that define the lives of a significant number of citizens and/or influences the adoption of certain political actions). Although influential messages do not cease to have an expressive dimension, it is evident that only a small minority of the expressive discourses end up becoming significant in terms of scope, dissemination, propagation and inclusion as part of the discourse circulating in the public sphere. In a digital environment characterised by the overabundance of information that competes for the limited attention of the public, the two substantial elements of the relevant discourse are its visibility and its dissemination. The questions derived from this assumption are: Who dominates the influential discourse in the digital public sphere? What barriers and biases must the average citizen overcome so that his expressive discourse becomes influential? What are the opportunities for user generated content to become part of the media discourse? What are the patterns followed by the propagation and visibility of online content? What factors are decisive in the conversion of the expressive discourses into significant ones?

3. Digital environments and learning

In this context, numerous authors begin to speak of the Web as a space where, in parallel, learning dynamics take place outside formal and traditional educational environments. These learnings are enhanced by the possibilities of creation and participation offered by the new digital instruments due to their interactive nature. These new media and platforms increase the possibilities for the generation of a vernacular creativity that is relatively free from the rigid hierarchies of the official culture. These creative practices are considered as an underlying principle of the existence of many spheres of current society, a dimension that is present in Richard Florida's concept of "creative class" (2002).

Jenkins et al. (2009) pointed out the educational competencies that young people display when they interact and produce content on digital platforms. These skills were collected and grouped in several dimensions by Aparici and García-Marín (2017):

− Simulation. It is the ability to interpret and build dynamic models that represent the real world, expanding its cognitive capacity and allowing the management of high volumes of information and experimentation with complete data configurations.

− Appropriation. It is the ability to reuse and remix the media content available in online circuits through processes that generate significant learning through the adoption of new forms of cultural expression.

− Multitask. Increasingly, young people interact in a media environment characterised by the simultaneous exposure to stimuli from different screens which requires greater dispersion of attention to deal with the logics of the 20th century.

− Critical judgement. It is based on the ability to assess the credibility of information sources. The traditional school system tends to grant the status of absolute truth to the classical knowledge resources on which it continues to be based (the words of the teacher and the textbook), so it continues to show an evident formative deficit related to the development of critical analysis towards documentary sources. Once young people penetrate virtual environments and social networks, where anyone can introduce their own content regardless of its quality and reliability, competencies are needed more than ever to evaluate the different resources found and critically analyse the perspectives and interests that dominate such materials.

− Transmedia navigation. It assumes the ability to manage the flow of information and discourses through multiple modalities and languages. Young people are increasingly connected to cultural products through the consumption of different content expanded in multiple media that offer specific parts of the discourses that teenagers reconstruct in a personal way, joining the different pieces in dynamics of constructive consumption. In this way, many young people, as users of transmedia cultural products, hunt and gather the clues or pieces that make up the narratives distributed across different media platforms and languages. This idea is forged from the process by which audiences "harvest information from different sources to create a synthesis of the story, which implies a dynamic of creative consumption" (Beddows, 2012).

‒ Ubiquitous learning. Social networks have boosted the use of mobile devices as central platforms for access to knowledge and communication, so that the ability to achieve meaningful learning at any time and space is fundamental in our days.

On many occasions, these skills are developed by young people in a collaborative manner through production processes driven from within communities of practice, governed by the logics of participatory culture and collective intelligence. In its origin, the concept of community of practice was used in the field of learning theory. Anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) coined the term while studying different educational models. In its original definition, the concept of community of practice referred to those groups of people that act as a living learning space for their members. Once articulated, the term began to be applied to other fields: business, organisational design, government action, professional associations and civil society.

Communities of practice are made up of individuals who engage in a collective learning process on a shared theme or passion. In their online version, these groups are configured based on the idea of constant interaction in digital spaces in order to achieve their proposed purposes and develop their practical dimension based on a wide range of activities. The resolution of problems, the reuse of goods, the coordination and construction of synergies, the search for experiences and the request for information are the most common. In these communities of practice that are built on digital networks and platforms, young people shape their own digital and participatory culture (Jenkins, Ito and Boyd, 2016) through the adoption of a wide range of strategies that lead them to the acquisition of the necessary skills and abilities to function in virtual circuits.

"Transliteracies. The transmedia competencies and informal learning strategies of teenagers" is one of the main lines of researches developed in recent years on this subject. The study, developed over three years (2015-2018) in the communities of Madrid, Catalonia, Valencia, Galicia and Andalusia, aims to understand the transmedia creative practices of the most active young people, with special emphasis on competencies and their informal learning strategies. Five teams were established in each of the communities for the execution of the field work. These teams worked in several educational centres with students between the ages of 12 and 15 years. Each team used the following strategies and data collection instruments:

‒ Development of videogame and participatory culture workshops. The first were analysed by means of ethnographic observation techniques, while the participatory culture workshops (consisting of the production of textual and/or audiovisual materials) were examined through content analysis based on a form that included 55 indicators divided into 4 different dimensions: basic data of student generated content, narrative competencies, aesthetics competencies and competencies linked to ideology and values.

‒ In-depth interviews (a total of 10 per team) with the most active young people during the development of the workshops, in order to hear their discourse about the creation of online content and identify their production strategies. The data generated by these interviews was analysed with *NVivo 11 Pro*, a computer program for qualitative and mixed methods research.

According to this research, which had the participation of the authors of this article, young people are especially active on the Web when looking for information to answer questions related to their studies and their physical appearance, to follow fashion trends and to compare relevant information about their

favourite cultural products. Other aspects on which they seek information are related to entertainment: solving questions related to video games, solving problems with their digital devices, listening to music, watching movies and commenting on publications about certain events. This is indicated by three of the interviewees:

> Of course, for nails and hair; because I have a friend who straightens her hair very well and I cannot do it like she does, so I look for tutorials to see how it is done. Makeup, beauty and things like that, there are a lot of channels about this.

> I mainly search for information on YouTube; there will always be tutorials about anything; YouTube already has tutorials about everything.

> For example, I read the stuff about Johnny Depp from one of his followers, who retweeted it said he believed it was very serious what had happened with Johnny Depp and since I knew what was going on, I looked for it and I thought it was not true. And I usually do it that way with everything. When they talk about something I do not know, I look it up.

One of the activities that young people carry out the most on the Web is the creation of content, especially of a photographic nature. The representation of daily life and ubiquity are the essential characteristics of this type of material: any aspect of daily life, even the most banal and insignificant, can be photographed at any moment and in any circumstance. The development of this activity has been particularly present in the increasing popular Snapchat, a social network that does not allow users to comment on pictures and eliminates them after 24 hours. Photographic editing is also very popular. Young people look for the most interesting networks to see, comment and share the images of other users and to create their own photos, retouch them and enhance them with attractive effects.

> No, I edit them. Yes, I edit them with a program called *PicsApp*, which has many filters and retouching options to… increase light… to enhance the picture and make yourself look more beautiful. And you can also add text, you put another photo on top and you can cut it out.

Creativity is not only confined to the field of photography but extends to the fields of music and video. According to our study, many young people download backing tracks from the Internet to create their songs by adding their own voice. These songs can be accompanied by audiovisual materials that imitate the music videos of their favourite singers. The video productions also represent their daily life, since they usually show the trips they made with their friends, their parties, congratulations to their loved ones or the competitions in which they participate.

Written work is also part of the creative productions of young people on the Internet. Writing down positive or negative opinions about videogames or shocking events, and recreating stories about books or movies are very common activities among the most productive young people in digital spaces. The search for fun and pleasure, not money, is the main motivation for the realisation of this creative work:

> We don't do it to make money, but because we like it, and because we are drawn to it.

In the field of video games, the strategies of young people are linked to the discovery of errors, the recording of gameplays and their online dissemination, and the detection of tricks and traps to go up in the rankings, gain greater relevance in their communities, and attract more followers.

Young people want to be recognised in their online communities and, to achieve this, they produce all this wealth of creative work. Their status on the Web is important and receiving feedback and praise and gaining relevance is fundamental for their motivation. They are fascinated by all the applications that allow them to create; they investigate their utilities and make the most of them. They look for people who have managed to achieve their goals and try to imitate them. Young people look for ways to create their content and sometimes try to reach a professional level that allows them to publish their work. This is explained by some of the teens interviewed:

> Yes, you can write your own stories and publish them yourself, and many people have managed to publish their novels thanks to Wattpad.

> Ploutub is a tool like Audacity, it is designed to record audio; so you should have some knowledge about it. There are people who can sing... -There is a boy from the neighbourhood who sings but he does not use it; he records with his mobile, but I like having a better sound. I created a studio with a friend; we built a studio at his place. The first thing that we had to do was to buy everything: monitors, a laptop, the interface...

Through the production of these materials young people develop a wide range of competencies, some of which were already mentioned. In our study, we detected four more competencies that should be added: work planning and organisation, adoption of a collaborative culture, knowledge of new interactive digital media's languages and genres and privacy management.

Collaboration is one of the most internalised competencies among young people, who are constantly focused on the search for feedback and on commenting on the contents of other users. Collaboration also occurs when users give instructions to their friends or strangers on how to use software suitable for their creations and when users make recommendations on what to consume in the media. These processes are very present in videogame culture, since playing online in a collaborative manner is a widespread practice. Playing with friends or strangers to achieve more ambitious goals is a very common task, just like coordinating game teams to get higher scores or because it is a requirement to advance the game:

> I formed a team with a friend from school. He wasn't interested in video games but when we were in secondary school, I told him to download it and try it out and he liked it. I found the other team when I was playing and seeing other players. I recognise one of them, then added others to the call and ended up meeting five people. One time I was chatting with ten people.

As mentioned, the most productive young people develop the capacity to understand the language and characteristics of the new interactive digital narrative models. They are able to distinguish the new audiovisual genres characteristic of media platforms such as YouTube and various text and audio formats, and are also capable of explaining their possible expansions and recognising their aesthetic differences:

> These are the most recent videos that have been uploaded, and here are all the channels that I follow, which are many. So, for example, this girl has uploaded a video on her wardrobe and this one has talked about a book convention in America, which is very interesting. Book hauls are the books they have read that month, and they tell you about what they are doing, their

opinions and it is quite interesting, because you can learn. This, for example, is a "get ready with me", where they show you how they get ready to go out.

Risk assessment and privacy management online is another competency acquired by teenagers, who begin to be aware of the consequences of sharing certain personal data and begin to implement security and privacy filters when share information with others. They also check what other people share about them, and control and monitor their images and creations:

> There are things that I don't like about social networks because you do not know where the things you post are going to end. For example, on Facebook, I had a friend who uploaded a photo and ended up in an ad and she was like "what am I doing there? I do not like that.

Teenagers are aware that they are active and constant consumers and increasingly show a more responsible attitude towards the adoption of preventive measures to avoid possible dangers. However, on rare occasions they are critical of the exploitation that large digital companies make of their data and their productions on the Web.

4. The exploitation of online creativity

The activities carried out by young people in virtual environments end up being commercialised by cultural franchises and digital platforms, which turn teenagers into fans that produce value for the market, as Jenkins, Ford and Green (2015) have shown in their study on content creation and economic profitability in the current network culture. Along the same lines, Sokolova (2012: 1572) demonstrated that the collaborative novel *Metro 2033,* whose creation involved the participation of many fans who made comments and proposed alternative storylines through a web page launched for this purpose by the author, was a commercial success as it capitalised successfully all the interest generated during the production process. Likewise, Scolari and Establés (2017) documented the production and online activism of the followers of the Spanish television series *El Ministerio del tiempo* ("The Ministry of Time"), who managed to stop the cancelation of the series several times through their actions in different social networks.

At this point, it is necessary to reflect on how the actions of young people produce economic value for digital corporations and how the market exploits the creativity of young people online. In short, it is important to identify the operating mechanisms of informational capitalism. Savage (2007) locates the origin of the commercialisation of youth culture in the late 1940s, after the end of World War II. In this context, American families began to offer their children all those goods and comforts that the previous generation had not been able to enjoy due to the Great Depression. In this way, the notion of teenager emerges as a term associated with marketing and defines a subset of young people who still live in their parents' house (Hine, 1999) and to whom specific products should be allocated for their consumption. During the 20th century, theories about youth culture and practices continued to evolve, but what remained constant was the view of these teenagers as a type of consumer with specific needs and segregated from the rest of society, which gave way to the creation of an interesting niche market for large commercial brands and cultural franchises (Jenkins, Ito and Boyd, 2016: 33).

At the same time, the online media production of young people is usually based on acts of false participation, as numerous studies have shown. Hindman (2008), in his research on the political blogs

created by American citizens not linked to the media (who could be considered independent and amateur), claims that we must recognise the new types of exclusivity generated, paradoxically, by the total opening of the Internet, which follows the winners-take-all model. Hindman showed that American bloggers who write about political issues and make a greater impact on the Web come from a population sector that is linked to what has been traditionally considered to be the dominant culture, which does not represent the ordinary American citizen at all. These media creators have a very defined profile: white men educated in prestigious institutions, with brilliant careers, executive occupations and positions of high responsibility. This study shows that there are very obvious limitations in the web for the construction of meaningful discourse by people who are not part of the established power.

In the same vein, Berrocal, Campos-Domínguez and Redondo (2014) claim that a large part of the scarce content generated by consumers of political information through YouTube only serves to reinforce the message of the major media actors and mainstream trends, and that it reflects a low level of empowerment and critical capacity. Most of the opinions that consumers share in these videos are linked to what Sunstein (2010) calls the "cascade of conformism", as these comments are very brief messages that reaffirm the message of the majority. Similar results were obtained by Torrego and Gutiérrez (2016) in their study on the participation of young people in the social network Twitter. Clua, Ferran-Ferrer and Terren (2018) argue that even when young people organise mobilisation actions in social networks, their possibilities of influencing public discourse are very limited: "The political demands of young Spaniards do not achieve the status of controversies needed to be included in debates in the public sphere". Meanwhile, Sokolova (2012: 1581) highlights the existence of an obvious paradox in which young people receive opportunities for creativity and self-expression, which were unknown in previous times, but at the same time there is a total commodification of their creativity promoted by the new business models of the big media companies.

The Internet is configured as a dilemmatic space where non-profit peer-to-peer collaborative practices and open source networks converge with platforms that seek the economic benefit from hierarchical approaches that establish clear vertical power structures between digital companies and their users. In the side of collaboration and participation, the theories of the "gift economy" stand out. It is a concept developed in the field of anthropology. Jenkins, Ford and Green (2015: 90) go back to Lewis Hyde's book *The Gift* (1983) to characterise this type of communities where there are constant flows of free gifts in a sort of moral economy that does not compensate with material goods but with status and prestige. Hyde's work makes a brilliant differentiation between the concepts of value and worth which are linked, respectively, to the commercial and gift logics. The goods that are exchanged through commercial transactions have value as they can be translated into money and they are measurable. The products exchanged in the gift economy have worth, which is understood as the characteristics of an object on which we cannot put a price. In this sense, Jenkins, Ford and Green (2015:92) explain that the meaning of a cultural transaction cannot be reduced to the exchange of value between creators and their public and that it also has to do with what members of the public can communicate about themselves to the world by using that cultural good.

In the predigital world there were already numerous examples of this type of process based on the gift economy. For example, the potlatch was a ceremony practiced by indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest coast of America. It was a feast in which tribes exchanged gifts. The generosity of these peoples served to rank and stratify these tribes according to the volume and wealth of the gifts they offered to the other tribe without expecting anything in return. The greater the gift given, the greater the importance, fame and prestige acquired by the leader of the giving tribe. Usually these gifts were

goods in the form of preserved food produced in periods of great harvests. In this way, the people who did not have many material goods could improve their situation through these gifts, which were not disinterested, since they sought to raise the status of the community that offered them.

The principles of the gift economy explain many of the contemporary practices we find in the digital world. This practice of gift-giving in exchange for status is present in the work of YouTubers who spend a lot of time recording and editing their audiovisual productions, in the thousands of Wikipedia contributors and editors, in the fan-made cultural productions that fill digital forums with reflections and interpretations about popular culture products, in the millions of blogs that populate the digital world and in the podcasters that make their audio recordings available for the free download for any Internet user.

In this line, the contributions of Sennett (2013) serve to address the theories that claim that the economic reward is the only thing that drives someone to do a job. "Artisans from the old days were also rewarded with intangible forms: recognition or reputation, status, satisfaction and, above all, their pride in a job well done" (Jenkins, Green and Ford, 2015: 83). Following this logic, young people do not carry out their digital productions for commercial purposes, but for the mere pleasure of sharing information and knowledge with a community. However, as we saw with the indigenous peoples from North America, these gifts cannot be considered to be completely disinterested. The search for recognition is the main objective behind the creation of these media texts, which are donated to a community in which, in addition, any person gets much more knowledge than the knowledge that he or she offers.

Exchanges in these communities based on the gift economy have, apparently, a spiritual or symbolic character, far removed from the mercantile laws of supply and demand. The relationships that young people establish in these spaces privilege the field of the symbolic, situating themselves in the realm of a kind of moral economy that defines the need to weave fair relations between the creators and the members of the community who only perform the consumption of these contents.

Faced with these views, there are some who defend a more critical perspective on the creations of young people online and the principles of the gift-economy. These theories show the material nature of the cognitive work that takes place in digital environments. The work structure that characterises the Web 2.0 systems is oriented to the production of affections and social relationships that end up influenced by the same patterns that govern the production of material goods because their activity has real and significant consequences for the functioning of big companies. The only difference between material and cognitive work is that the latter does not modify things physically in the first instance, but rather affects the emotional and communicative aspects of human relationships. However, this cognitive work becomes material when placed under the market principles that guide all this production towards the generation of economic benefit (Fuchs, 2015). In this context, the gift economy and cognitive capitalism not only are not in conflict but coexist in a symbiosis where the collaborative and participatory practices of young people are promoted and sponsored by big capital (Barbrook, 1998).

In this way, the informal learning strategies and actions of young people in the networks produce a double process in which, on the one hand, teenagers acquire a set of competencies without critical perspective and, on the other, there is a parallel commodification of their activity by large tech companies through the free labour dynamics of their users. The productions of teenagers are configured

with a new form of exploitation and the resurgence of new practices of alienation of the action of young people online, since such actions do not imply any control of the users over the modes of production (Terranova, 2000). Dijck and Nieborg (2009) argue that the rhetoric of co-creation and the cooperation between users and brands when it comes to producing content on the Web forgets the manipulation by capital of a digital space that should be democratic and collectivist. In the same sense, Drahos and Braithwaite (2002) use the concept of "information feudalism" to refer to the transfer of knowledge assets from the collective intellect into private hands.

Fuchs (2008) offers a useful model to explain the multiple forms that digital companies implement to develop these processes of commodification of individuals' creative action in virtual platforms. Fuchs proposes a broad taxonomy for the functioning of the digital economy. On the one hand, it distinguishes between the hardware industry (which includes computer equipment and peripheral devices) as well as infrastructures such as the networks that support the Internet), the software industry and the content industry. A second category distinguishes physical goods, digital products and services (the latter consist of goods based on social relations, that is, goods that help users achieve connectivity and social expression). Another category describes those aspects related to distribution, distinguishing between goods that are provided in the online environment from those that are exchanged in the analogue world. In the same way, it is necessary to distinguish those organisations that are oriented to obtain benefits from those that are based on the gift economy. The last dimension distinguishes whether the goods or services provided have an exchange value (in the case they have an economic cost to the user) or just a use value.

The combination of the different aspects of this taxonomy offers different business models that are present in cognitive capitalism. On the one hand, we find the IBM model, based on the sale in the market of hardware (physical) and offline products. A different model is that of Microsoft, which is dedicated to the sale of digital software products. In an even more remote position, we place the Google model, which is based on a digital information platform that offers users online content and metainformation through the free use of its platform and obtains benefits through the sale of advertising. The Wikipedia model focuses on digital cooperation through the addition of content in a virtual platform that is governed by the principle of the gift economy and the absence of the profit-seeking logic. Very different from this last model is the one we find in social networks, where the action of young people develops in a deeper way. These networks present a model that is based on the free use of their platforms to feed users' relationships, where an obvious benefit is sought, which is generated from the selling of ads, the sending of personalised announcements to users and the sale of the data generated in such platforms. In digital platforms and social networks, young people constantly create and reproduce content and profiles that contain personal data, social relationships, affections, communications and communities. In this model, all online activities are stored, evaluated and commercialised. Users not only produce content, but also sets of personal data that are sold to advertising companies, which are able to present individualised ads depending on users' interests. Users are, therefore, productive consumers that generate goods and benefits that are intensively exploited by capital (Fuchs, 2015). In turn, the exploitation model of social networks and digital platforms is based on a "time economy". The longer the user remains on the platforms of these digital media, the greater the chances of receiving advertising content that he himself generated from his browsing patterns and actions on such a platform. All the activity that young people carry out is converted into a commodity to be exploited by the market. The novelty of this model is that this exploitation does not take place during the time traditionally considered "remunerated", but during the leisure time of individuals, while the places dedicated to production are no longer confined to the

workshop and the office. The production of inputs for the market has become ubiquitous. As discussed below, the digital economy has managed to extend the time and space in which people engage in the production of goods for large companies.

5. The fan 2.0

The relentless technological advance of recent decades has boosted productivity of society, which is now able to provide more goods and services by spending a lot less time on work. The main consequence of this increasing efficiency of the productive force is the extension of the leisure time people spends, in principle, for purposes other than paid work. This increase in leisure time, combined with digital technologies, generates great possibilities for collaborative production and a cognitive surplus (Shirky, 2010) that can be used for the benefit of society. In parallel, the increase of the time dedicated to non-productive activities generates greater possibilities for consumption, which is an essential element for the development of the market society where everything (or most) of what is produced must be sold. The novelty in our digital era is that now that the leisure time is used not only for consumption but also becomes time for free labour for companies in the digital economy that, thus, save on production costs. This "iTime" (Agger, 2011) is characterised by the constant availability of the consumer, its compulsion to connect, the extension of the time dedicated to work for the private sphere, the commercialisation of connectivity and web traffic and the conversion of paid work into unpaid work.

In this scenario, a large part of the connections that young people generate online takes place in the context of the great cultural and entertainment franchises that, increasingly, seek fan creation as a way to enhance the identification of audiences with their products and with the objectives of their strategies. Tapscott (1995) argues that the action of fans linked to brands is a key element to understand the new marketing standards of the late 20th century and early 21st century, which are based on the transition from products to experiences, from physical sale space to the ubiquity provided by digital devices and from traditional processes of promotion and advertising to the dynamics of communication and dialogue between brands and users. "Young people want to be involved in the co-innovation of products and, if they are allowed, they lay the bases for the establishment of rich and lasting experiences" (Tapscott, 2009: 212). The possibilities that brands offer to users and fans to be part of the design of products and services do not go far beyond mere superficiality and people are rarely part of the discourses of the large cultural franchises and mass media (Aparici and García-Marín, 2018).While fans believe they have found a space of freedom and expression in networks and virtual environments, the reality is that, in parallel, these spaces are configured as a modern version of the state's great ideological and control apparatuses that Althusser and Foucault theorised decades ago. For Lipovetsky (2014), today's society is living a new modernity that promotes new ways of relating to others and a new hierarchy of objectives and principles. The protagonist of this stage is an individual that is hyper-consumerist by nature and has a brand fetish (Correa, 2017: 223).

The arrival of the Internet has not favoured the true empowerment of the fan, but quite the opposite: the web has reinforced the ties and generated a digital creator in charge of sustaining the economic benefit of the large online platforms and the profitability of the products of the great cultural franchises. The communicative model led by brands in the 20th century posed a one-way and vertical relationship with fans, who were only treated as a product to be sold to advertisers. In the digital age, young people continue undergoing processes of commodification that are remodelled and intensified. Fuchs (2015: 156) has identified some of the key features of this fan 2.0:

- Creativity and social relations. The audience of the broadcast era produced cultural meanings from the contents of the mass media; while the fans 2.0 not only produce this kind of meaning, but also contents, communications with other users and social relations, so that its activity multiplies his value and therefore the profits of digital businesses and cultural franchises also multiply.

- Surveillance. Broadcasting media use audience measures that are no longer mere approximations to the characterisation of its members. Digital social media monitor, store and measure all online activities of the fans on their platforms, so they have very detailed profiles of users' interests obtained through real-time monitoring that is configured as a feature inherent to the production that takes place in these media, where personal data are sold as merchandise. The digital economy offers a greater exploitative dimension of fandom: the user of the platforms produces contents for the maintenance of large companies (digital platforms such as iTunes) while generating data (goods) for third parties (advertisers).

- Cooperation and alienation. As it happens in other fields dominated by unpaid work, the digital fandom is governed by processes of coercion. Large digital companies have been able to monopolise the provision of certain services such as the creation of vast networks of social connectivity and, therefore, are capable of exercising an invisible form of coercion on users, who are reluctant to abandon such platforms in order to maintain their social relationships and avoid an obvious impoverishment in communicative terms. For Fuchs (2015: 229), the alienation that the digital social media power system builds is based on four dimensions that affect fans completely: a) in relation to subjectivity, since an evident symbolic violence is practiced on subjects under threat of social isolation and diminishing of opportunities in case of abandoning monopolistic social platforms; b) in relation to the objects of their creative work, since their human experiences are placed under the control of capital; c) in relation to the instruments used in their work, because the platforms are not owned by users, but belong to private companies that commercialise users' online activity; and d) in relation to the product of their work, since these companies are the only ones that exploit the benefits generated by users' work.

- Dual character. The fans use digital social media to meet their own social needs and, at the same time, commercial needs established in the market. The processes that constitute the commercial side of these services are hidden behind the social relationships that these media drive among users. These companies are presented as organisations that aim to offer social connection and spaces to share and not as companies in search of the greatest possible benefit.

The fan 2.0 is the paradigmatic individual of the performance society (Han, 2015), whose participation and creativity in virtual environments is established between infotainment, fear of rejection and consumerism. These are the factors that generate "submission in a society that is already extraordinarily and jealously guarded and controlled" (Correa, 2017: 230).

6. Conclusions

Since the advent of the Web 2.0, two lines of thought were established around the potential of the new digital tools for citizen empowerment. There were basically two types of scholars: the pessimists (those who highlighted the dangers of the Web and its possibilities as an instrument for crime and the control of citizens) and the optimists (those who only saw the positive aspects of the Internet as a tool to

democratise the public space and the access to culture and human knowledge). Far from placing ourselves in any of these extremes, it is essential to take a critical position towards the commercial drift that the Web 2.0 has experienced after almost a decade and a half of development,

Young people build their own culture based on their actions and creations on the Web by using a wide range of strategies and getting themselves involving in communities of practice and affinity where they produce content in different media languages and, in parallel, acquire key competencies in the sociotechnical reality of the 21st century. The Web is configured as an informal learning space where the most active young users develop their skills for transmedia navigation, ubiquitous learning, and the appropriation and remixing of diverse expressive substances in order to build their own materials. They simultaneously generate prototypes and simulations, develop competencies for planning and organising work, adopt a collaborative culture and learn how to manage their privacy in these digital environments.

However, the actions and productions of teenagers and the collaborative practices carried out within communities of practice, far from empowering their creators, serve to nourish the machinery of cognitive capitalism. The theories of the gift economy hide the neoliberal dimension of online production under the false carpet of the reward with status and recognition of the works produced on the Web, a work that, unlike what is defended by these theories, is never immaterial, but ends up being converted into capital for large digital companies and cultural franchises.

In the same sense, the rhetoric of transmedia narrative gives the fans and followers of the products of popular culture a false active and protagonist role in the construction of the narratives of these products. The reality is that the ability of fans to influence the narrative development of these large companies is very limited. The fans and followers of these brands are never part of the narratives, and instead are configured as part of the product through the exploitation of their actions and contents, based on dynamics of free labour for these companies, constituting evident processes of alienation of the creativity of young people.

Despite carrying out creative work on the Web, teenagers do not cease to assume the role of consumers of the media and cultural products that brands offer, while engaging in a superficial participation that has little relevance in the narrative development of the stories. The creative work of teenagers serves to provoke a greater emotional bond with brands, which is used to trigger future acts of consumption and promote their feeling of belonging to a community (Esnaola, 2017). All the strategies and content generated by users and fans are clearly irrelevant due to their lack of visibility and due to the companies' failure to design truly collaborative and participatory user experiences. These strategies are key to consolidate the current market model in which the free labour of youth culture reinforces an informational capitalism that works in an efficient and invisible way.

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