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# **Modern Digital Media: How Digital Capitalism Shapes Behaviours, Values and Interferes with Identity Building**

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## **Introduction**

In the twenty-first century, the new form of accumulating capital is labelled as platform capitalism. The latter was defined as a form of advanced capitalism centred upon extracting and using users' activities as the natural source of its raw material: data. Nowadays, the data are a vital resource for lots of companies, which need digital communications for their business. After understanding the economic benefits of data-oriented business, companies have opted for a new business model, which could take all the advantages from the vast amounts of data recorded. As a consequence, web 2.0 has now become almost exclusively based on an ideology connected to marketing, to the transformation of users' data into value, and the platform has emerged as the new business model. During the twenty-first century, society has become more and more reliant upon digital platforms, then it is crucial to understand how they interact with each other. Indeed, online platforms are not exclusively an economic phenomenon, since platforms have penetrated societies affecting both social and cultural practices. In particular, the term platform society has emphasized the inextricable relation between online platforms and societal structures. The logic of communication and sharing proposed by modern digital media more and more hides that of exchange between subjects with unequal bargaining power. Communication, then, has become a material force of exploitation within platform society.

The convergence of surveillance and profit led to surveillance capitalism, which actively interferes with the behavior of people by persuading them to assume attitudes that generate greater profit: automated processes know and form the behavior of users on platforms. Over the past few years, contemporary digital platforms have penetrated society affecting both social and cultural practices. Since modern digital media, as social media, constitute the main mean of communication among teenagers, it is necessary to study and involve them in the context of the interpersonal connections in adolescents' lives. Therefore, it is important to consider the impact of cyberspace on the development of adolescent sexual identity. Finally, it is necessary to study how contemporary digital platforms made durable the production of gender as a binary category with platforms' design and advertising.

# **1. Chapter One: A Comprehensive and Theoretical Analysis of Digital Capitalism, Platform Capitalism and Platform Society**

## **1.1 Historical Premise on Capitalism**

According to Professor Ursula Huws (2014), the main characteristic of capitalism lies in the ability to survive the crises that repeatedly threaten to destroy it by creating new commodities. In this regard, Huws (2014) underlined that, when the logic of capitalist expansion reaches a saturation of markets, with a following crisis of profitability, it is able to find new areas to bring within its scope. Indeed, capitalism creates new markets generating alternative forms of production of both new goods and services. Even though capitalism can be considered a system with a continuous evolution, “it also has certain invariant features, which function as broad parameters for any given historical period” (Srnicek 2017:10). As pointed out by Srnicek (2017), the productivity growth of capitalism is due to a change in property relationships. For this reason, he emphasized differences between precapitalist and capitalist societies. In the former “producers had direct access to their means of subsistence: land for farming and housing” (Srnicek 2017:10). Moreover, survival was not directly connected to one’s production process: efficiency. On the contrary, in capitalist societies “economic agents are separated from the means of subsistence and, in order to secure the goods they need for survival, they must now turn to the market” (Srnicek 2017:11). Consequently, a person had to sell commodities to earn the money needed for buying subsistence goods. In this way, “production became oriented towards the market” (Srnicek 2017:11). In addition to this, Huws (2014) stated that those phases of capitalism were associated with the diffusion and constant demand of new technologies. Even Nick Srnicek argued that, when a crisis hits “capitalism [...] tends to be restructured. New technologies, new organisational forms, new modes of exploitation, new types of jobs, and new markets all emerge [...]” (Srnicek 2017:36). Therefore, the importance of new technologies lies both in their ability to continuously transform the work process and to deskill workers, in order to lower the cost of production and give rise to new forms of accumulating capital. In the recent history of capitalism can be identified three relevant moments for the new digital economy, that have determined the ways in which it developed and set the scene for today’s economy.

Firstly, the post Second World War period was characterised by a flourishing American economic activity, especially dominated by the manufacturing sector. In the latter, mass production was predominant, and it led to mass workers. They were trained to always repeat the same small activity all day long, instead to carry out several tasks. Therefore, Taylorist principles used to dominate the

organization of American factories. As pointed out by Brenner (2006), between the 1950s and the 1960s, both German and Japanese manufacturing sector increased their productivity. As a result, the global manufacturing faced with a problem of overproduction. Brenner (2006) stated that, by the mid-1960s, since American fixed costs were no longer able to compete with those of their Japanese and German rivals, occurred a crisis of profitability. The latter quickly hit also Japan and Germany, finally becoming global in 1970. During that period, “there is insufficient demand to allow the higher-cost firms to maintain their former rates of profit; they have been obliged to cease using some of their means of production and can make use of the rest only by lowering their price and thus their profitability. There is over-capacity and over-production, with respect to the hitherto existing profit rate” (Brenner 2006:28). At the same time, countries experienced a strong international competition and firms reduced workers' wages. All those changes led, without any obstacles or protection by governments, to an increasingly exploitation of workers.

The second relevant moment for the new digital economy occurred with the 1990s' boom. In fact, as pointed out by Brenner (2006), during the boom the first infrastructures for the digital economy were installed. As a consequence, the importance of the manufacturing was soon replaced by the telecommunications sector. The latter was “a vast new sector, and the imperative for profit latched onto the possibilities afforded by getting people and businesses online” (Srnicsek 2017:20). Perez (2009) observed that technology stocks increased by 300 per cent and reached \$5 trillion of market capitalisation in its peak period, precisely between 1997 and 2000. Those unprecedented numbers gave the possibility to that industry to gain trust of investors, who put large amount of capital into assets of the internet. At the same time, as affirmed by Schiller (2014), companies invested lots of money for databases, servers, software or new computing infrastructures. In this way a modernization process started, and “the 1990s tech boom was a bubble that laid the ground for the digital economy to come” (Srnicsek 2017:23). Therefore, the 1990s boom can be considered responsible of “today's fascination with the sharing economy, the internet of things, and other tech-enabled businesses” (Srnicsek 2017:19). Finally, the third relevant moment for the new digital economy was the crisis of 2008. During that period, as underlined by Srnicsek (2017), austerity spread in advanced capitalist nations, because of a class project to carry on the privatisation and reduction of the state. At the same time, the academic (2017) observed how tax evasion became easy for tech companies, since they did not have to move entire factories, but only intellectual property. Moreover, tax evasion permitted to American tech companies to easily have large amount of money available for new investments, while the rest of the companies were still having problems because of the crisis. In addition to this, tax evasion had a significant impact on countries' budgets, then the loss of substantial revenues was

attenuated with extraordinary monetary policies to relieve economic conditions. Last but not least, during the crisis of 2008, “workers have suffered immensely in the wake of the crisis and have been highly vulnerable to exploitative working conditions as a result of their need to earn income” (Srnicsek 2017:35).

## **1.2 Platform Capitalism**

Today’s post-2008 economy is the result of the different crisis explained above, which gave rise to new technologies, new systems of competition, new modes of capitalist accumulation, new forms of exploitation, exclusion or new profit seeking goals. As stated by Castells (2009), previous centuries were dominated by industrial capitalism, while contemporary society has experienced an evolution towards the primacy of information. The latter has developed in one of the main characteristics of the capitalist production and circulation process. In addition to this, Castells (1996) claimed that, though information has been central to human societies since a long time, the peculiarity of the contemporary usage of ICTs is that communication and information have emerged as a raw material for the production of surplus value. In this regard, nowadays, one of the main critical issues of contemporary digital platforms is the so called digital labor. The latter can be defined as the capital accumulation model of contemporary digital platforms, which exploits users’ time spent freely on platforms. Indeed, when users surf on platforms for content sharing, social networking or blogs, they create data, such as location data or browsing data. All this precious and free information, obtained by the unpaid labour of people on digital platforms, constitutes a data commodity, which is sold to advertising clients generating profit. In the twenty-first century, the new form of accumulating capital was labelled by Srnicsek (2017) as “platform capitalism”, a form of advanced capitalism which “came to be centred upon extracting and using a particular kind of raw material: data” (Srnicsek 2017:39).

### **1.2.1 The Data**

The data used to be considered as a marginal element of businesses before the widespread diffusion of internet, while nowadays they are vital resource for lots of companies, which need digital communications for their business. Big data can be defined as “the ability to collect and analyze a large volume of data which contains a variety of information in a timely manner” (Boutin and Clemens 2017:4). As pointed out by Boutin and Clemens (2017), their definition represents the dynamic nature of big data, since it takes into account also the three “Vs”: volume, velocity and variety. The latter “refers to the diversity of information data may contain” (Boutin and Clemens 2017:3). Indeed, companies which opted for a data-oriented business are interested in extracting both

one type of data from various consumers and a series of data from a category of consumers. Boutin and Clemens (2017) underlined that the variety similarly consists of sources where the data come from. In this regard, companies can extract the data using various platforms. A further characteristic of the data pointed out by the authors (2017) is velocity, which “refers to the velocity of data generation but also to the access to data and the way data is processed and analyzed” (Boutin and Clemens 2017:3). Velocity is fundamental, in fact, if the data are not extracted and analyzed rapidly, they can lose much of their value. Because of that, consumers’ data need to be continuously updated. Stucke and Grunes (2016) affirmed that nowadays leading firms can use the velocity of data to identify and predict trends before others. In this way, companies can find out new possible threats, such as small firms, and then acquire them, in order to avoid them to become new significant competitors. Stucke and Grunes (2016) demonstrated the importance of velocity taking Google as an example. They stated that, in monitoring search queries, Google is able to predict disease, such as flu outbreaks, even before the government health agencies. Therefore, “the monopoly can intercept or shoot down the threats long before they become visible to regulators and others” (Stucke and Grunes 2016:9). The last feature that defines big data, according to Boutin and Clemens (2017) is the volume of data, which is decisive for data orientated businesses because “advantages in data collection mean that the more activities a firm has access to, the more data it can extract and the more value it can generate from those data, and therefore the more activities it can gain access to” (Srnicek 2017:95). As pointed out by Srnicek (2017), in the system of platform capitalism, data are considered as a vital resource, the raw material that must be collected, while users’ activities are the natural source of that raw material. In this regard, the Professor claimed that “every action performed by a user, no matter how minute, is useful for reconfiguring algorithms and optimising processes” (Srnicek 2017:99). In this regard, Shoshana Zuboff (2019) claimed that every click, like or research constitutes a precious raw material to be tracked, analyzed and monetized by companies. Moreover, Zuboff (2019) underlined that the heart of capitalism’s logic of accumulation is constituted both by information and connection, through which companies get profitable behavioral data that grant huge profits. Companies also found a way to justify those violations by considering them necessary to grant internet services. “Privacy, they said, was the price one must pay for the abundant rewards of information, connection, and other digital goods when, where, and how you want them” (Zuboff 2019:52). Those justifications were immediately accepted by the users, unaware that platform capitalism was in that way rewriting new rules, new ways of easily accumulating profit in the digital world. Not only companies, but also industries began to extract behavioural data. The latter were used to maximize production processes, to control workers or to identify consumer preferences in order to

offer new services, and finally sell to advertisers. José van Dijck, Thomas Poell and Martijn de Waal (2018) asserted that the translation of every type of activity into data can be considered as a process of commensuration. The latter was defined by Espeland and Stevens as “the transformation of different qualities into a common metric [...] through rankings, ratios, or elusive prices” (Espeland, Stevens 1998:314). In particular, on online platforms, commensuration can assume the form of followers, comments, friends, shares or likes, enabling operators to “compare, sort and rank types of activities which were previously considered incomparable and unquantifiable” (van Dijck, de Waal, Poell 2018:46).

### ***1.2.2 Analysing the Data***

According to the logic of platform capitalism, data collection is not the only revenue source for companies, which give them absolute competitive advantages. In fact, it is equally important the analysis of raw materials generated by users of the platform. In this regard, Srnicek (2017) underlined that data-generating devices produce a vast repository of data which without an accurate analysis would lose its value. Indeed, together with improving the capacity to collect data, companies also have to develop appropriate means of analysis such as database organization, hardware, network infrastructure or algorithms. The latter “are sets of automated instructions to transform input data into a desired output” (van Dijck, de Waal, Poell 2018:9), and constitute an important technological component of the platform apparatus. In fact, van Dijck et al. (2018) explained that platforms need algorithms to automatically filter vast amounts of content and after that connect users to content, services and advertisements. As pointed out by Srnicek (2017), generating the appropriate algorithms may require the manual entry of learning sets into a system. Therefore, it is a myth that data collection and analysis are considered as completely automated processes. Another myth is that platform services are free. Fuchs (2011) argued that connections between data, content, users are the first source of profit, since social networks (such as Twitter or Facebook) are monetized both with them and advertising. Similarly, Google offers services such as email for free to get users on board, though it raises money through its advertising arm. The goal is to reach a balance between what is paid, what is not. Finally, because of the significant advantages of extracting and analysing data, the latter inevitably became protagonists of several capitalist functions in today’s economy. The data “educate and give competitive advantage to algorithms; they enable the coordination and outsourcing of workers; they allow for the optimisation and flexibility of productive processes; [...] and data analysis is itself generative of data, in a virtuous cycle” (Srnicek 2017:42). After understanding the economic benefits of data-oriented business, it was time for companies to opt



for a new business model, which could take all the advantages from the vast amounts of data recorded. The platform emerged as the new business model.

### ***1.2.3 Digital Platforms***

Digital platforms are defined by van Dijck et al. (2018) as a programmable architecture designed to organize interactions and position themselves as intermediaries between different users. The latter are customers, suppliers, service providers, advertisers, producers, physical objective or suppliers. Moreover, Bratton (2015) specified that users include also machines, that are an important addition when considering the internet of things. “At the most general level, platforms are digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact” (Srnicsek 2017:43). Platform’s possibility to mediate between such different groups is the reason behind their success. In fact, given that a platform is located between users, which is where activities occur, when a platform extracts data, it has the advantage to have direct access to record them. Therefore, platforms can operate wherever digital interaction takes place. The latter is one of the essential characteristics which makes platforms more than internet companies. It is possible to add that “a platform is fueled by data, automated and organized through algorithms and interfaces, formalized through ownership relations driven by business models, and governed through user agreements” (van Dijck et al. 2018:9). Data, as also illustrated above, are considered the raw material for better connectivity between platforms. Instead, ownership relations refer to the legal-economic status of the platform. The latter may be a for-profit or a non-profit. It is relevant to know the ownership status not only for any economic transactions of the site, but also for social interactions with users. Indeed, users should be informed about owner-consumer relationships since they may vary over the years. In this regard, a platform which operated on a for-profit basis may opt for a new business model which, on the contrary, operates on a non-profit basis. Business models outline the various means of monetization of the platform. Economic value gets created with data-extraction, data-analysis, advertising, and in particular with user valuation. “User valuation means that the more (regular) users a platform has, the more valuable a platform becomes; user valuations have pushed the stock market value of platforms that subsequently became takeover bait” (van Dijck et al. 2018:10). Therefore, user valuation is a crucial characteristic of digital platforms, which both create and are dependent on network effects. As pointed out by Parker et al. (2017), the business model of a digital platform can only be successful if it has the potential for network effects, since the value of a digital platform rises with the number of users and interactions among them. Therefore, the main goals of the platform are both to attract users and keep them as much active as possible. In this regard, Phang et al. (2015) claimed that users’ presence on a digital

platform is useless if they only sign up or passively observe. Van Alstyne et al. (2016) likewise underlined that the business models of some of the world's most successful platforms, like Uber, Snapchat, Airbnb or Facebook, are n-sided platforms or marketplaces based, since those have benefit from a vast number of active users. In sum, "if you want to join a platform for socialising, you join the platform where most of your friends and family already are. Likewise, the more numerous the users who search on Google, the better their search algorithms become, and the most useful Google becomes to users" (Srnicsek 2017:45).

Finally, platforms are governed through user agreements, also called terms of service (ToS). These sorts of legal contracts outline the relationships between users and platform owners. However, as observed by van Dijck et al. (2018), user agreements are long, difficult to understand and often undergo changes. For these reasons, most of the people accept terms of service by checking the box without even reading their content. In conclusion, van Dijck et al. (2018) stated that user agreements do a lot more than just delineate service conditions, they are also an instrument to impose norms with regard to privacy, to govern platform owners' relationship with users, clients or other partners. As a result, nowadays, web 2.0 is based on an ideology primarily connected to marketing, to the transformation of users' data into value. Fuchs (2015) claimed that the logic of communication and sharing proposed by modern digital media more and more hides that of exchange between subjects with unequal bargaining power. Communication, then, becomes a material force of exploitation within society. For these reasons, Fuchs (2015) sustained that in an age of digital capitalism, the latter exploits sociality of human beings on contemporary digital platforms as a weapon for domination and profit. In this regard, Srnicsek (2017) suggested that there are various types of platforms, and all have in common that the capitalist class owns them.

#### ***1.2.4 Types of Platforms***

Advertising platforms are the first types of platforms born, and nowadays they still have one of the most successful business models. A case in point is Google, which started to collect user data only to improve searches, but it soon realized that there was no way to earn from that data collected. Consequently, Google began to exploit users' information, search data or cookies to sell ad space to advertisers. Therefore, advertising platforms record and transform into data users' online activities in order to sell ad spaces to advertisers. "The extracted data moved from being a way to improve services to becoming a way to collect advertising revenues" (Srnicsek 2017:52). One of the main tools used to collect users' information and data is via HTTP cookie, which is a small piece of data stored on the user's computer by the web browser while browsing a website. Cookies are mechanisms for

websites to remember user's browsing activity, information, such as web-pages visited, names, addresses, clicks on certain buttons, items bought in an online store or logging information. In addition to this, authentication cookies are specifically used by web servers to gain further more information. In particular, their function is both to discover if the user is logged in a web-site, and with which account. One might think that cookies are simply an excellent tool that helps to generate revenue, without hindering the privacy of users, as the latter accepted the cookie policy, an information notice that aims to inform the user about the methods of processing personal data. However, even if cookies are legally enabled by terms of use and privacy policies, security vulnerabilities may allow hackers to reach user's credentials and to gain access to the website to which the cookie belongs.

Network effect is vital for advertising platform, because the value of the ad space on the digital platform rises with the number of users, interactions, and data extraction. As a result, there will be a greater gain for the owner of the platform. A way to lead users to spend as much time as possible on digital platforms is through targeted advertising. The latter is a form of online advertising directed towards an audience with particular characteristics, such as economic status, age, sex, income level, level of education or employment. Moreover, the focus can be on consumer values, interests, attitude, browser history or online activities in general. Therefore, targeted advertising capitalizes on consumers with strong preferences, leaving out those whose preferences do not match a particular product's attribute. On the whole, targeted advertising diminishes advertising waste, which is the reason why this particular type of advertising is increasing day by day. It is possible to add that, today, most targeted new media advertising uses a particular form of targeted advertising called contextual advertising, through which advertisements appear on websites or on mobile browsers. The advertisements are selected by automated systems based on the context of what a user is looking at. In particular, with a contextual advertising system, advertisements are displayed on the webpage or as pop-up. The latter is a graphical user interface display area containing an advertisement. It is usually a small window, that appears in the foreground of the visual interface. For instance, if a person is surfing on a sport website which uses contextual advertising, the user will surely see advertisements for sport-related companies. In addition to this, the advertising will be quickly changed, on the next possible product that could be appreciated by the user, if the latter doesn't click on the advertisement in a minimum time set by the advertiser. Another advantage of contextual advertising is that it is less irritating than traditional advertising. In this regard, its influence is much greater, because it shows only user's areas of interest. In this way the advertising increases its opportunity to be clicked. As a consequence, those clicks will generate revenue both for the server of the advertisement (such as

contemporary digital platforms) and for the owner of the website. Thus, this type of advertising, which characterizes advertising platforms, aims to maximize profit minimizing waste of resources. In conclusion, on advertising platforms not only time is money, but also user information has become a precious currency of exchange.

The second type is that of industrial platforms, such as Siemens, which developed both the software and the hardware to convert traditional manufacturing into internet-connected processes, not only to transform goods into services, but also to lower costs of production. Industrial firms “rely on extracting data as a competitive tool against their rivals, a tool that ensures quicker, cheaper, more flexible services. By positioning themselves as the intermediary between factories, consumers and, app-developers, these platforms are ideally placed to monitor much of how global manufacturing operates” (Srnicsek 2017:69). The final objective of industrial platforms is to reach and maintain a monopoly position.

The third type is that of cloud platforms, which own both the hardware and the software, and rent them. Then, lots of businesses find that practice very useful, since they do not have to spend time, money to develop their software and hardware system, they can simply rent them. The rental model of cloud platforms enables them to continuously extract and collect data. In this regard, companies as Amazon, the first major cloud platform, have direct access to new data sets every time businesses’ activities are moved onto cloud platforms. In conclusion, “cloud platforms are building up the basic infrastructure of the digital economy in a way that can be rented out profitably to others, while they collect data for their own uses” (Srnicsek 2017:64).

The fourth type is that of product platforms, as Spotify, that, as explained by Srnicsek (2017), gain profit by using other platforms to convert traditional goods into a service and by collecting subscription fees on them.

The last type is that of lean platforms, so called because of their aim to diminish as much as possible their ownership of assets, to outsource almost every possible cost, while reaching an high level of profit by reducing costs. Then, lean platforms own the software and data analytics, but fixed capital, maintenance costs and training are outsourced. Moreover, lean platforms are characterized by the outsourcing of workers, that enables companies to cut costs. Two of the most popular lean platforms are Uber and Airbnb because: “Uber the world's largest taxi company, owns no vehicles [...]. And Airbnb, the world’s largest accommodation provider, owns no real estate” (Goodwin 2015).

In all types of platforms previously analyzed, the most common current trends converge, such as: digitisation of life, data as one of the means of competition, surplus capital, surplus populations or tendencies towards outsourcing.

In conclusion, on contemporary digital platforms not only time is money, but also user information has become a precious currency of exchange. Indeed, platform capitalism developed both greater means for monopoly and competition. On platforms there is no more only competition over prices since most of the services are offered for free; while data-extraction, analysis, and the capacity to control data are essential elements of competition for major platforms against their rivals.

### **1.3 The Platform Society**

During the twenty-first century, society has become more and more reliant upon digital platforms, then it is crucial to understand how they interact with each other. In this regard, according to van Dijck et al. (2018), online platforms are not exclusively an economic phenomenon, they prefer a view of a connective world where platforms have penetrated the society affecting also social and cultural practices. Indeed, the authors, instead of talking about platforms, “prefer the term ‘platform society’, a term that emphasizes the inextricable relation between online platforms and societal structures” (van Dijck et al. 2018:2). As Couldry and Hepp (2016) underlined, platforms do not reflect the social, but they produce the social structures we live in. Moreover, the term “platform society” refers to a society where most of the interactions take place via the Internet. A further important aspect, pointed out by van Dijck et al. (2018), is that platforms are neither neutral nor value-free. On the contrary, they have specific values and norms inscribed in their architecture. The platform ecosystem: “looks egalitarian yet is hierarchical, [...] it seems neutral and agnostic, but its architecture carries a particular set of ideological values” (van Dijck et al. 2018: 12).

The Big Five platforms as Alphabet, Facebook, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft have an unprecedented power since they have created a system that made everyone who enters in the online world dependent on them. Platforms not only create network effect, they also can impose values and social norms. “Through its interfaces, algorithms, and protocols, a platform stages user interactions, encouraging some and discouraging other connection” (Helmond 2015). Indeed, platforms can build new values with their influence on how social and economic actors connect with each other. In addition to this, “a platform society is not a given but a dynamically evolving societal arrangement where public values are constantly shaped by different actors” (van Dijck et al. 2018:26).

Communication has been important to human society since day zero, and Fuchs (2020) defined it as the process through which a person build his/her sociality by experiencing relationships or becoming part of a social group. Communication, and in particular communication within contemporary digital platforms, is directly affected by the process of globalization. Global communications have changed the environmental, cultural, political and economic elements of the world, in fact,

information itself can be easily and quickly transferred as a valuable business asset from one country to another. Fuchs and Mosco (2012) claimed that communication has always been an important factor in the generation and sustenance of class inequalities. According to them, inequalities are emphasised when communicative technological advancements are exploited for profits, that is what happens with commerce on social media platforms. “The digital means of value creation use the relationship between labour and digital technologies along with the existing modes of social organisation within capitalism to continue alienating the workers from the means and products of their own production” (Fuchs, Sevignani 2013: 204). For these reasons, Fuchs does not agree with the concept of social media as a site culture of participation. According to him, social media are not fully democratised space, but rather they are an extension of the authoritarian social system. “Platforms often claim they serve the common good [...]. It is important, though, to investigate these claims” (van Dijck et al. 2018:24). Engaging in commercial activities through social media is different than other digital e-commerce platforms. While Amazon and E-bay are clearly e-commerce, where the user goes to buy goods, on social media is the communication itself that facilitates the exchange, that creates profit. To understand how social media exploit the values of communication to create profit, it may be useful to analyze the mechanisms of Instagram. The latter, in its most recent update has made an important change to the main interface, which denotes how the platform is increasingly exploited for shopping, to generate revenues. The news concerns the order of the numerous icons located in the upper and lower bar of the home of Instagram. More specifically, in the lower bar and at the centre (so in one of the points where the click is spontaneous) has been introduced the new shop icon. According to the company, the change is explained as a result of the advent of Coronavirus in everyday life. In fact, the company has noticed an incredible amount of shopping moving online, so Instagram decided to offer this new tool to its users. In addition to this, according to official data released by Facebook, 70% of shopping-addicted use Instagram to discover new products, while 130 million users a month tap on a shopping post to find out more. The latter feature, available only from mobile, allows users to access via social media the purchase of a particular product seen in a post that has attracted their attention. In other words, the ability to tag these products, as if they were people, makes it easier to buy a product. The ease of purchase of the product is also accompanied by the ease of sharing a shopping-post with someone, who in turn can re-share it with someone else. Therefore, thanks to the ease of sharing, users influence each other, eventually choosing similar products. The endless circulation of both commodities and money within contemporary social media platforms allow them to further accumulate profits. In fact, one of the characteristics of globalization of the media pointed out by Thompson (1995) is the growing

standardization and homogenization of media products made and distributed by the global media industries, because economy of scale is more profitable. According to Engels (1845), the culture of consumerism aims to convert human beings into machines for gaining revenue. For this reason, Pasquale (2015) claimed that, the platform society is not a perfect world, since social and above all economic processes are silently hidden inside interfaces, algorithms, data or users' information which are not subject to democratic control. The Internet was born as a means of research for scientists, social media as a mean of communication. Over the years, they have become social platforms in which business and consumers have taken over. In an exclusive interview given to Blasting News, the professor Rushkoff stated that people were impressed by digital technology and the reason why this is working against our social nature is that digital technology has been used as an extension of industrialism or consumer capitalism, rather than allowing them to develop independently. According to him, as long as capitalism is convenient for many people, it will continue to act like that. Furthermore, Rushkoff (2019) underlined that social media tend to encourage reductive slogans, which polarize discussions and make change impossible. Social media separate people, confine them to their own small categories, categorize them into targets, in order to create loyal consumers. Therefore, the platform ecosystem is based on personalization, values come under pressure and users are more and more isolated in their own ideological filter bubbles. The latter are described by Eli Pariser (2011) as a "state of intellectual isolation that allegedly can result from personalized searches when a website algorithm selectively guesses what information a user would like to see based on information about the user, such as location, past click-behavior and search history. As a result, users become separated from information that disagrees with their viewpoints, effectively isolating them in their own cultural or ideological bubbles" (ECPS 2021). Therefore, filter bubble is a one-way mirror that reflects people interests, while the algorithm-taker observes what a person clicks. Thanks to these algorithms, news feed is constantly evolving adapting to the interests of the user. In conclusion, lots of people still consider contemporary digital platforms only as technological tools and social media as a site culture of participation. However, as claimed by Gehl (2011), the platform society hides a system whose logic and logistics are about more than facilitating communication, chatting, sharing or searching. In the platform ecosystem are inscribed a series of ideological values, that influence thoughts, what to buy, daily life and, thus, how society is organized. The convergence of surveillance and profit, which characterize the digital economy and the platform society, leads Shoshana Zuboff to coin the term "surveillance capitalism".

## **2. Chapter Two: A New Form of Capitalist Accumulation: Surveillance Capitalism**

According to Professor Zuboff (2019), surveillance capitalism appropriates human experience by using it as raw material to be transformed into behavioral data. Some of these data are used to improve products or services, but the rest becomes private behavioral surplus, subjected to an artificial intelligence process to be transformed into predictive products, that can predict what users will do in the future. These products are traded in a "future behaviour market" (Zuboff 2019:18). Zuboff (2019) argued that thanks to this trade, surveillance capitalists have become very rich since there are many companies that need to know the future behavior of their possible customers.

### **2.1 The Logic of Surveillance Capitalism**

The big difference between surveillance capitalism, compared to digital capitalism, is that automated processes not only know the behavior of users of contemporary digital platforms but form them. Indeed, capitalism of surveillance actively interferes with the behavior of people, persuading them to assume attitudes that generate greater profit. Zuboff (2019) underlined that the surveillance capitalism feeds on every aspect of human life, thus nullifying the rights of the individual's autonomy. Another important aspect to remember is that "surveillance capitalism is not a technology, but a logic that permeates technology and transforms it into action" (Zuboff 2019:25). Then, surveillance capitalism is a form of market, which does not coincide with digital. It is capitalism that imposes a price of submission and impotence, not technology, not social media. Indeed, surveillance capitalism employs many technologies but cannot be equated to none. Technologies have always been at the service of the economy, yet every generation gets carried away by quicksand, and forgets that technology is the expression of other people's interests. According to Zuboff (2019), in modern times it means talking about the interests of capital, and nowadays it is the capital of surveillance that regulates the digital environment and marks approach to the future. Zuboff (2019) claimed that the main reason for the triumph of surveillance capitalism is that it is unprecedented, and what is unprecedented is inevitably unrecognizable. In the current logic of surveillance capitalism, the concept of data as a raw material is outdated. People are no more surveillance capitalism's customers, but the sources of its surplus, "the objects of a technologically advanced and increasingly inescapable raw material-extraction operation" (Zuboff 2019:10). Surveillance capitalism by producing a psychic numbing that inures people to the realities of being parsed, tracked and modified, it is able to impose an illegitimate choice that twenty-first century individuals should not take. Zuboff (2019) also affirmed that the ultimate aim of surveillance capitalism is not to impose behavioural norms such as obedience, but to produce



a behavior that reliably, definitively and surely leads to the desired commercial results. “This new level of competitive intensity characterized by the scope and action ratches up the invasive character of supply operations and initiatives a new era that I call the reality of business” (Zuboff 2019:10). In the business of reality there is the need of architectures based on machines that operate in the real world.

## **2.2 The Rhetoric of Inevitability**

Technology has often been used over the centuries to erase the fingerprints of power and absolve it of any responsibility. Zuboff (2019) argued that once again has been used the excuse of technology as an autonomous force that acts with inevitable results to justify the consequences of capitalism, and absolve it of all responsibilities. “Inevitability rhetoric is a cunning fraud designed to render us helpless and passive in the face of implacable forces that are and must always be indifferent to the merely human” (Zuboff 2019:224). Nowadays, the world is full of robotic interfaces where technologies implement the will of a few powerful platforms and protect them from every challenge. If all this logic does not seem bizarre, it is a serious problem, because it means that by now people are addicted to the system created by surveillance capitalism. In this regard, Langdon Winner (1977) observed that one of the characteristics of modern life is to accept technology without asking questions. Then, in modern life, changes and inconveniences repeatedly brought about by an evolving technology have been accepted as a matter of fact, as inevitable, simply because no one bothered to ask if there were other possibilities. In this regard, Zuboff (2019) confirmed that people accept that technology should not be impeded if society is to prosper, as a consequence they surrender to technological determinism. “Inevitabilism precludes choice and voluntary participation. It leaves no room for human will as the author of the future” (Zuboff 2019:226). A case in point is Google, which wants people to accept that its rules only reflect needs of autonomous processes, something uncontrollable, but Google was created by human beings who could control it, but who simply chose not to do.

## **2.3 The Dispossession of Human Experience**

Shoshana Zuboff (2019) considered the dispossession of human experience as the original sin of surveillance capitalism. Dispossession is not abstract. In this regard, the scholar affirmed that rendition defines the operational practices through which dispossession is achieved, with human experience that is exploited as a raw material for datafication. Zuboff (2019) indicated that the noun *rendition* originates from the verb render, a word whose double meaning perfectly describes what

happens between behavioural data and human experience. On one side, the verb outlines a process in which something is made up of something else originally given. Then, the verb describes the action of turning one thing into another. On the other side, render also defines how the thing that is changed gives itself over to the process: it sur-renders. According to Zuboff (2019), surveillance capitalism work on both sides described above. Indeed, on one side, surveillance capitalism's technologies are designed to render people experience into data, which often take place outside platforms' user awareness or consent. At the same time, every time a user come across a digital interface, makes that experience available to datafication, to render for the benefit of the surveillance capitalism its incessant tithe of raw materials. As a consequence, there can be no surveillance capitalism without rendering. "The very idea of a functional, effective, affordable product or service as a sufficient basis for economic exchange is dying. Where you might least expect it, products of every sort are remade by the new economic requirements of connection and rendition" (Zuboff 2019:237). Nowadays, rendition is in any aspect of human life, even inside houses with modern appliances used to build the so-called smart home. Privacy experts raised alarms, knowing that such appliances can have access to data stream, and they have virtually no security or legal protection. In this regard, surveillance capitalists who offer smart home products have proposed a singular way out. They affirmed that customers can opt in to data sharing, while customers who refuse to share their data, have a product with limited product functionality. Therefore, if a consumer decides to not submit information, the firm may not be able to provide certain services offered by their product. That is the aim of surveillance capitalism: to put the user, the consumer in the condition in which he or she is the problem. "Under surveillance capitalism, rendition is typically unauthorized, unilateral, gluttonous, secret and brazen. [...] Surveillance capitalists pursue the elimination of friction as a critical success factor in supply operations. The prediction imperative makes the boundaries and borders intolerable, and surveillance capitalists will do almost everything to eliminate them. This pursuit [...] transforms individual autonomy into a threat to surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff 2019:240). In the latter statement, Zuboff (2019) summarized the characteristics that delineate asymmetries of power that have led the professor to put the word "surveillance" in surveillance capitalism.

## **2.4 Inequalities Benefit Surveillance Capitalism**

Varian (2014) observed how social and economic inequality benefits the purposes of surveillance capitalism. Indeed, according to the scholar, inequality offers the opportunity to predict the future since the middle class and the poor often want what rich people have. Then Varian (2014) wondered and analysed what rich people usually have: personal assistants. Varian (2014) pointed out

personalization as the necessary good for stressed out masses bent under dual-career obligations, stagnant wages or indifferent corporations and public institutions. Varian (2014) considered the digital assistant as a vital resource for the masses of the twenty-first century in their struggle for a more functional life. The hunger of the masses for new needs has been immediately satisfied by the surveillance capitalists, who have converted needs into new opportunities for exploitation. In this way, in 2016, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella introduced the corporation's digital assistant: Cortana. However, Zuboff (2019) claimed that, although Microsoft, Google, and Samsung's aspirations to dominate voice capture, it is Amazon with its learning machine Alexa that has given the most telling case. In fact, according to Zuboff (2019), it is Alexa itself which denotes Amazon as a surveillance capitalist, not only a mere capitalist. For the scholar, talking to Alexa immediately makes the user to think about it as a conversation with a friend. As a consequence, the more the user thinks about Alexa as a confidant, a governess, a nanny, the more experience the user allows it to render, then the richer its supply operations increase. "Communication is the first human joy, and a conversational interface is prized for the frictionless ease in which a mere utterance can trigger action, especially market action. [...] Voice shopping is good for business and good for predicting business. [...] In this commercial dreamscape, words that were once conceived of as behind closed doors are eagerly rendered as surplus" (Zuboff 2019:260). Finally, Zuboff (2019) defined as fluid a conversation with Alexa, since words may encounter fewer obstacles in a conversation addressed to a digital thing than a conversation in a shop. Indeed, a person has less agitation, less inhibition, less concern about bank account's limits, less doubt or hesitation. "If life is a wild horse, then the digital assistant is one more means by which that horse is to be broken by rendition. Unruly life is brought to heel, rendered as behavioral data and reimagined as a territory for browsing, searching, knowing, and modifying. [...] everyday life is set to become mere canvas for the explosion of a new always-on market cosmos dedicated to our behavior and from which there is no escape" (Zuboff 2019:268).

## **2.5 The Totalitarian Project of Surveillance Capitalists**

The totalitarian project of surveillance capitalists aims to enlarge their control from the virtual to the real world, to the society. In this regard, Zuboff (2019) underlined how totalistic ambitions are also shared by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who outlined that Facebook's three big goals included understanding the world, connecting everyone, and building the knowledge economy. In this way, according to Zuckerberg every user can have all the necessary tools to share any content. Therefore, the most important thing that Facebook wishes to develop is the global community, where progress can help him to create the social infrastructure that requires not just nations coming together, but all

the humanity. In the light of that statement, surveillance capitalists as Zuckerberg failed to point out that “the magical age they envision comes at a price: Big Other must expand toward totality as it deletes all boundaries and overwhelms every source of friction in the service of its economic imperatives. All power yearns toward totality [...]” (Zuboff 2019:403). Zuboff (2019) affirmed that the fact that Big Other would have empowered each individual while solving all of humanity’s problems has ensured that instrumentarian power has flourished because there were few authorities to control its actions. In fact, the future global community wanted by capitalists of surveillance does not include laws, politics, authorities, perhaps because, as Zuboff (2019) observed, those are already obsolete concepts in their social vision. In conclusion, the third modernity offered up by surveillance capitalists is described by Shoshana Zubuff as a human hive, where “individual freedom is forfeit to collective knowledge and action. Nonharmonious elements are preemptively targeted with high doses of tuning, herding, and conditioning, including the full seductive force of social persuasion and influence. [...] we learn to sacrifice our freedom to collective knowledge imposed by others and for the sake of their guaranteed outcomes” (Zuboff 2019: 414).

### **3. Chapter Three: Modern Digital Media and Identity Building**

#### **3.1 How Modern Digital Media Interfere with Identity Building**

More and more authors believe that modern digital media, digital capitalism can interfere with sexual identity, in particular during the period of adolescence. The latter, according to Sadowski (2008), is a crucial time for identity development, since young people discover different ways to be in the world and present themselves. As pointed out by Erikson (1968), during the stage of adolescence there is a struggle between identity and identity confusion. In this regard, Steinberg (2008) underlined that during adolescence, the brain develops with strategies such as emotional and social reactions, decision-making, and identity exploration. Adolescence, as claimed by Khan, Gagne, Yang, and Shapka (2016), is a period characterized by both relationship and socialization. In this regard, for teenagers, it is very important to establish interpersonal relationships with peers or with their romantic partners. Since contemporary digital platforms, as social media, constitute the main means of communication among teenagers, it is necessary to study and involve them in the context of the interpersonal connections in adolescents' lives. Therefore, it is important to consider the impact of cyberspace on the development of adolescent sexual identity. According to Lloyd, "as these technologies become increasingly more entertaining and relevant to the targeted audience members, it is much more probable that adolescent audiences will adapt and use this information as a tool for the understanding of self and others" (Lloyd 2002:74). Therefore, for the author, mass media devices of the twenty-first century represent for teenagers a new chance both for exploring social-cultural behaviors and practicing them. In particular, for Lloyd (2002), mass media devices are one of the main ways adolescents collect information about their environment or societal attitudes. In this regard, he underlines that: "mass communications, particularly the Internet and television programming, including music videos, can be reconceptualized as opportunities for adolescents to identify cues for social behavior among their peer group as well as cognitively rehearse their own approaches to certain social interactions" (Lloyd 2002:88). Therefore, the information circulating on contemporary digital platforms can and does influence adolescents. In particular, they have a significant impact on the main stages of adolescence such as personal identity, and gender role orientation. Concretely, how can social media interfere with sexual identity, in particular during the period of adolescence. In line with Lloyd's thinking: "individuals internalize the symbols and images they observe in their immediate surroundings [...]. The impact of the media may be magnified during adolescence, especially if media images are being discussed and socially reinforced within an

adolescent's peer group" (Lloyd 2002:82).

Concerning the concept that media images are "discussed and socially reinforced within an adolescent's peer group", it is important to point out how Shoshana Zuboff analyzed the impact of social media on young people with two concepts: surveillance capitalism and the hypnotic social discipline of the hive.

Facebook is the perfect platform for surveillance capitalism to implement social pressure and change behaviors, especially of young people. In this regard, Zuboff (2019) wonders why it is so difficult for teenagers to disconnect from platforms like Facebook. According to the scholar (2019), Facebook has learned to use the psychological needs of adolescents, creating new obstacles to the process of developing individual identity and personal autonomy. Facebook's domination of social media is based on the fact that it derives from the typical needs of adolescents. In fact, Facebook was founded by young people, who imagined a universe directed to an audience of teenagers and university students. Later, social media has been opened to everyone, making the social world a register of friends and likes, that constantly enshrine the value of the person on the social market, feeding what Zuboff calls: "the hypnotic social discipline of the hive" (Zuboff 2019:463). The life in the hive produces new forms of social stratification, it is no longer only a matter of regulating or subjecting the rules but also pressure or be pressured. Life in the "hive" is defined as hypnotic because, in 2016, Facebook's marketing director for North America said that Facebook's design model was so engaging, that it had a hypnotizing effect. Because of the latter, it is possible to understand why it becomes increasingly difficult for young people to disconnect from the platform; where they are constantly seeking recognition, acceptance, and inclusion in the group. These typical characteristics of adolescence are dramatically emphasized by social media. In this regard, for many young people, social media can become a toxic environment, which threatens their development of individual identity. In this regard, Zuboff (2019) claimed that instrumentalism's radical indifference is operationalized in surveillance capitalism's dehumanized methods of evaluation, which create equivalence without equality. Indeed, Big Other's methods "reduce individuals to the lowest common denominator of sameness-an organism among organisms-despite all the vital ways in which we are not the same" (Zuboff 2019:377). As a consequence, lives of adolescents take place in a moral context of objectification, because surveillance capitalism exploits teenagers' behaviour for surplus and "leaves behind all the meaning lodged in our bodies, our brains, our beating hearts" (Zuboff 2019:377). Nodder pointed out that "much of our behaviour is determined by our impressions of what is the correct thing to do [...] based on what we observe others doing. This influence is known as social proof" (Nodder 2013:5). Facebook has been able to instrumentalize the concept of social proof

to generate revenue. Indeed, the company exploited that aspect of adolescent nature by using messages from friends to offer a service, make a product or propose a shopping-post. Therefore, Facebook can be considered as a prototype of instrumentarian society “[...] showcasing feats of behavioural engineering that groom populations for the rigors of instrumentarianism’s coercive harmonies. [...] the system tunes the pitch of our behaviour with the rewards and punishments of social pressure, herding the human heart toward confluence as a means to others’ commercial ends” (Zuboff 2019:468). For those reasons, Zuboff (2019) affirmed that life in the hive favors those who orient toward external cues rather than toward one’s own feelings, values, thoughts or sense of personal identity. As a consequence, teenagers to feel accepted by the group, by the hive, by the global community emphatically presented by Facebook, tend to homologate themselves by even suffocating their true selves, such as sexual identity. The latter, nowadays, is often a victim of the prejudices of society. This mechanism, in the long run, could lead to an increase of intolerance of what is perceived as different. In conclusion, in the twenty-first century, young people still have to struggle to express their true sexual identity freely, because of the pressures, values, behavioural norms that are created and imposed on contemporary digital platforms.

### **3.2 How Modern Digital Media Made Durable the Production of Gender as a Binary Category**

In modern digital media, sexual identity is not a problem only related to the period of adolescence. By studying platform design, it is possible to explore how gender is made durable by designers, who frequently program gender through sign-up pages or advertising. As Bivens and Haimson (2016) pointed out, the advertising industry capitalizes on segmenting society into categories, and it encourages each group to consume media and products. Therefore, the final goal of the advertising industry is to increase advertising effectiveness by separating each category from another with a highly divisive strategy. Thanks to data obtained with cookies, firms can easily track user’s activities, in fact, there is “a constant stream of real-time web use that can be matched against existing behavior and identity models—like gender” (Cheney-Lippold, 2011:168). Then, cookies might be used against identity models. Even though that, Bivens and Haimson (2016) underlined that the gender binary continues to be valued as a dominant audience segmentation device for advertisers since gender binary offers two large and profitable groups. The definition of gender is exploited as a “marketing logic of consumption” (Cheney-Lippold, 2011:167).

As mentioned above, contemporary digital platforms condition and shape user’s choices via the numerous suggestions that the user finds while surfing online. In this regard, Cheney and Lippold

(2011) stated that, instead of disciplining bodies based on societal standards, contemporary digital platforms have a disciplinary control based on advertisements' suggestions for how to behave that are continuously re-calibrated whenever they are considered unprofitable. If a person wishes to join a social media has to visit sign-up pages. The latter, according to Jensen and Potts (2004), are usually familiar to users, who fill them out quickly. However, sign-up pages represent a crucial moment in which most users accept "the categorization systems through which we are asked to identify ourselves—that we are more susceptible to recursive consequences of design decisions, such as the acceptance of the binary as normal and neutral" (Bivens-Haimson 2016:3). Consequently, in that moment, users uncritically allow being classified by the social media platform. However, as pointed out by Bivens (2015), the mandatory binary gender fields force a gender categorization schema that erases everyone who does not fit the binary. Bivens' (2015) study also claimed that changes to gender categories on contemporary digital platforms, such as the possibility for users to enter any label they wished, are useless if the gender binary is maintained in the database, "where custom non-binary genders are reverted back to a binary system based on the pronoun that is selected" (Bivens-Haimson 2016:4). Therefore, even genderless platforms can shape gender for advertising by offering gender targeting to advertising clients. In this regard, "platform owners' motivations for offering particular gender options is almost completely about data collection, advertising, and revenue opportunities" (Bivens-Haimson 2016:3). Van Dijck et al. (2018) stated that considering platform selection mechanisms involving human editors and algorithms, users have to question the main values that guide those mechanisms. As a consequence, if algorithms have mandatory binary gender fields, the latter is the mirror of a society, as well as mentality of people, still strongly binary. It is important to bear in mind that users may decide the fate of a platform. Indeed, "individual and users are most directly confronted with platform technologies embedded in interfaces and algorithms [...], the fate of a platform is determined by the collective behaviour of users. If many users decide to move to other platforms, a platform can very well fail" (van Dijck et al. 2018:47). In conclusion, the user should learn not to be a slave to the surveillance capitalism that shapes platforms according to its economic interest, on the contrary, the user should critically analyse a platform, and then decide whether to continue browsing it or not.



## **Conclusions**

Conclusively, it is thought that modern digital media are democratic platforms where everyone is free to express themselves, but they hide both hierarchies of power and discrimination. On contemporary digital platforms not only time is money, but also users' information has become a precious currency of exchange. Indeed, platform capitalism developed both greater means for monopoly and competition. On platforms there is no more only competition over prices since most of the services are offered for free. In this regard, data-extraction, analysis, and the capacity to control data are essential elements of competition for major platforms against their rivals. The platform society hides a system whose logic and logistics are about more than facilitating communication, chatting, sharing or searching. In the platform ecosystem are inscribed a series of ideological values, that influence thoughts, what to buy, daily life and, thus, how society is organized. The convergence of surveillance and profit, which characterize the digital economy and the platform society, led Shoshana Zuboff to speak of surveillance capitalism. Finally, modern digital media have penetrated society affecting social and cultural practices, also by shaping the construction of identity categories like gender, mainly during the period of adolescence, a crucial time for sexual identity development. In particular, surveillance capitalism nullifies the right of the individual's autonomy. Contemporary digital platforms not only influence sexual identity, but they also made durable the production of gender as a binary category with the design of platforms, which is even exploited for advertising. Last but not least: "social media platforms, particularly those platforms that achieve a great deal of popularity and profit, must bear responsibility for their design decisions. Their programming practices may inadvertently advocate for certain groups of people while alienating others. The values they bake into their software have the capacity to influence the next generation" (Bivens-Haimson 2016:8).

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## **Riassunto in italiano**

Nel corso di questo elaborato si è tentato di realizzare un'analisi per illustrare come il capitalismo digitale plasma comportamenti, valori ed interferisce con la costruzione dell'identità.

La presente tesi è strutturata in tre capitoli. La prima sezione presenta un'analisi globale e teorica riguardo al capitalismo digitale. Infatti, vi è una premessa storica sul capitalismo, e sulla sua capacità di sopravvivere alle crisi, che ripetutamente minacciano di distruggerlo. In particolare, nella storia recente del capitalismo si possono identificare tre periodi di crisi: il secondo dopoguerra, il boom degli anni '90 e la crisi del 2008. Nell'elaborato si è illustrato come la nuova economia digitale dopo il 2008 sia il risultato dei tre periodi descritti, i quali hanno dato luogo a nuove tecnologie, nuovi sistemi di concorrenza, nuove modalità di accumulazione capitalista, nuove forme di sfruttamento, esclusione e profitto. Il primo capitolo, quindi, dimostra come secondo la logica del capitalismo delle piattaforme, è importante sia la raccolta di dati generati dall'utente mentre passa del tempo sulla piattaforma, sia la successiva analisi dei dati prodotti. Infatti, entrambe sono fonti di reddito per le aziende, che danno loro vantaggi assoluti. Successivamente, il capitolo analizza le piattaforme digitali, le quali sono alimentate da dati, automatizzate e organizzate attraverso algoritmi e interfacce, formalizzate attraverso rapporti di proprietà guidati da modelli di business, e regolate attraverso i termini di servizio che devono essere accettati dagli utenti. Dopo di che, nel capitolo vengono presentate cinque diverse tipologie di piattaforme esistenti: le piattaforme pubblicitarie, le piattaforme industriali, le piattaforme cloud, le piattaforme di prodotto e le piattaforme snelle. Durante il ventunesimo secolo, la società è diventata sempre più dipendente dalle suddette piattaforme digitali, quindi si è ritenuto fondamentale capire come interagissero tra loro. Le piattaforme digitali, infatti, possono costruire nuovi valori con la loro influenza su come gli attori sociali ed economici si connettono tra loro. A questo proposito, il primo capitolo presenta il pensiero degli accademici José van Dijck, Thomas Poell e Martijn de Waal, che per primi hanno coniato il termine "platform society" (società della piattaforma) per definire le piattaforme digitali, non solo come un fenomeno economico. Essi, infatti, hanno presentato una visione di un mondo, in cui le piattaforme hanno penetrato la società influenzando anche le pratiche sociali e culturali. Il capitolo analizza, quindi, come piattaforme digitali come i social media tendono a incoraggiare slogan riduttivi, che polarizzano le discussioni e rendono impossibile il cambiamento. Infatti, si afferma che i social media separano le persone, le limitano alle loro piccole categorie e le classificano in target, per creare consumatori fedeli. Pertanto, si dimostra come l'ecosistema delle piattaforme digitali si basa sulla personalizzazione, e tutti i valori non in grado di essere sfruttati per generare profitto vengono messi sotto pressione. Di conseguenza, l'elaborato analizza il fenomeno delle cosiddette "filter bubbles",

per cui gli utenti sono sempre più isolati nelle proprie bolle ideologiche. Il primo capitolo si conclude avendo analizzato come nelle piattaforme digitali non solo il tempo è denaro, ma anche le informazioni sugli utenti sono diventate una preziosa valuta di scambio. Oggi, infatti, sulle piattaforme la concorrenza non è più solo sui prezzi, poiché la maggior parte dei servizi sono offerti gratuitamente; mentre l'estrazione dei dati, l'analisi o la capacità di controllare i pensieri degli utenti sono elementi essenziali per ricavare profitto. La convergenza di sorveglianza e profitto, che caratterizza la nuova economia digitale e la società della piattaforma, ha porta l'accademica Shoshana Zuboff a coniare l'espressione "capitalismo della sorveglianza". Quest'ultima sarà oggetto di analisi del secondo capitolo, nel quale viene presentata innanzitutto la principale differenza tra il capitalismo della sorveglianza, rispetto al capitalismo digitale. Nel primo, i processi automatizzati non solo conoscono il comportamento degli utenti delle piattaforme digitali, ma lo formano. Il capitolo continua con l'analisi della logica dietro al capitalismo della sorveglianza, il quale è una vera e propria forma di mercato, che non coincide con il digitale. Infatti, si afferma che è il capitalismo ad imporre un prezzo di sottomissione e impotenza, non la tecnologia, non i social media. Tuttavia, la tecnologia è usata come capro espiatorio per assolvere l'illimitato potere dei capitalisti della sorveglianza da ogni responsabilità. A tal proposito, il capitolo analizza la cosiddetta retorica dell'inevitabilità di cui si serve questo tipo di capitalismo per continuare a sfruttare senza limiti l'esperienza umana, rendendola la materia prima da trasformare in dati sul comportamento, i quali sono utilizzati per migliorare prodotti o servizi. Inoltre, si analizza come la disuguaglianza sociale ed economica sia un ulteriore elemento che porta beneficio agli scopi del capitalismo di sorveglianza. Il capitolo si conclude presentando il progetto finale dei capitalisti della sorveglianza. Un progetto che mira alla totalità, al controllo sia del mondo virtuale sia di quello reale, all'inclusione della società tutta.

Infine, il terzo capitolo analizza sia come i media digitali moderni interferiscono con la costruzione dell'identità individuale sia come hanno reso duratura la concezione di genere come categoria binaria. Poiché i social media costituiscono il principale mezzo di comunicazione tra gli adolescenti, nel corso dell'elaborato si è considerato necessario studiarli, e coinvolgerli nel contesto delle connessioni interpersonali della loro vita. Pertanto, si è analizzato l'impatto del cyberspazio sullo sviluppo dell'identità dei giovani. Per quest'ultimi è sempre più difficile disconnettersi dalle piattaforme digitali, dove sono costantemente alla ricerca di riconoscimento, accettazione e inclusione nel gruppo. Queste caratteristiche tipiche dell'adolescenza sono drammaticamente enfatizzate dai social media, che possono diventare un ambiente tossico in grado di minacciare lo sviluppo della loro identità individuale. Quest ultima, infatti, vuole essere annullata dal capitalismo che vuole generare l'equivalenza senza uguaglianza, perché rendere tutti gli individui uguali, significa che essi avranno

tutti gli stessi gusti, vorranno comprare tutti gli stessi prodotti, quindi i capitalisti della sorveglianza potranno guadagnare sempre di più grazie all'economia di scala a loro tanto cara. Perciò, anche l'identità individuale è un potente mezzo per gli scopi commerciali dei capitalisti, ai quali non interessano sentimenti, pensieri o valori se non per guadagnare. Di conseguenza, spesso gli adolescenti per sentirsi accettati dal gruppo, dalla comunità globale di social media come Facebook, tendono ad omologarsi anche soffocando il loro vero io, come l'identità sessuale. Questo meccanismo, a lungo termine, potrebbe portare ad un aumento dell'intolleranza nei confronti di ciò che viene percepito come diverso. Infatti, ancora oggi, l'identità sessuale è spesso vittima dei pregiudizi della società. Dunque, nel ventunesimo secolo, i giovani devono ancora lottare per esprimere liberamente la loro vera identità, anche a causa delle pressioni, dei valori, delle norme comportamentali che vengono create ed imposte sulle piattaforme digitali.

Infine, il capitolo tre analizza come l'identità sessuale non è un problema legato solo al periodo dell'adolescenza. Studiando la progettazione delle piattaforme digitali, infatti, è possibile notare come la concezione di genere come categoria binaria sia resa duratura attraverso algoritmi, pagine di iscrizione o pubblicità.

In conclusione, si pensa che i moderni media digitali siano piattaforme democratiche, in cui ognuno è libero di esprimersi, ma nascondono sia gerarchie di potere sia discriminazioni.