

GLOBALIZATION OF CONSUMPTION, LIFESTYLES AND 'VIRAL SOCIETY'

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Abstract: This text discusses the central globalization process of products and services' consumption, and its influence on social agents' lifestyles. For instance, drinks, food, information, or mall's goods' consumption. Some of the phenomena associated with or resulting from global consumption are as follows: post-salariat, hyper-consumption, hypo consumption, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic consumption, citizenship of consumption, polyphony of consumption, consumption traps and the recent 'viral consumption' and 'viral lifestyle', originated within the Covid-19 pandemic. This new situation of health and social crisis generates anti-pandemic resistances. One strategy of resistance occurs via the consumption of information, which, among other activities, has increased exponentially in cyberspace and cybertime, due to the social pressure exerted by Corona virus. In this perspective, today we are witnessing the transformation of insufficient or inflated information's consumption about the Covid-19, into more profound, pertinent, and useful knowledge about this pandemic.

Keywords: globalization of consumption, viral society; viral consumption; viral lifestyles; knowledge flows

Resumo: O presente texto debate o processo central da globalização do consumo de produtos e serviços, e a sua influência nos estilos de vida dos agentes sociais. Por exemplo, consumo de bebidas, alimentação, informação e bens ou serviços de centros comerciais. Alguns dos fenómenos associados ou decorrentes do consumo global são os seguintes: o

pós-salariado (ou pós-salariato), o hiperconsumo, o hipoconsumo, os consumos hegemónico e contra-hegemónico, a cidadania do consumo, a polifonia do consumo, as armadilhas do consumo e os recentes ‘consumo viral’ e ‘estilo de vida viral’ originados na pandemia do Covid-19. Esta nova situação de crise sanitária e social gera resistências anti pandémicas. Uma destas estratégias de resistência ocorre no quadro do consumo de informação que, entre outras atividades, tem aumentado exponencialmente no ciberespaço e no cibertempo, devido à pressão social exercida pelo Corona vírus. Numa tal perspetiva, assiste-se hoje à transformação do consumo ora insuficiente ora inflacionado de informação sobre o Covid-19, em conhecimento mais profundo, pertinente e útil sobre esta pandemia.

Palavras-chave: globalização do consumo, sociedade viral; consumo viral; estilos de vida virais; fluxos de conhecimento

Introduction

The present essay essentially aims to analyze the phenomenon of consumption and the respective lifestyles within contemporary societies. This text is part of a set of studies that seeks to understand, in particular, how consumption and ways of life that underlie it, are being transformed by the Corona virus pandemic. However, in order to reach updated conclusions, first of all we need to carry out an exercise on the genealogy of consumption across human societies, in the era of globalization.

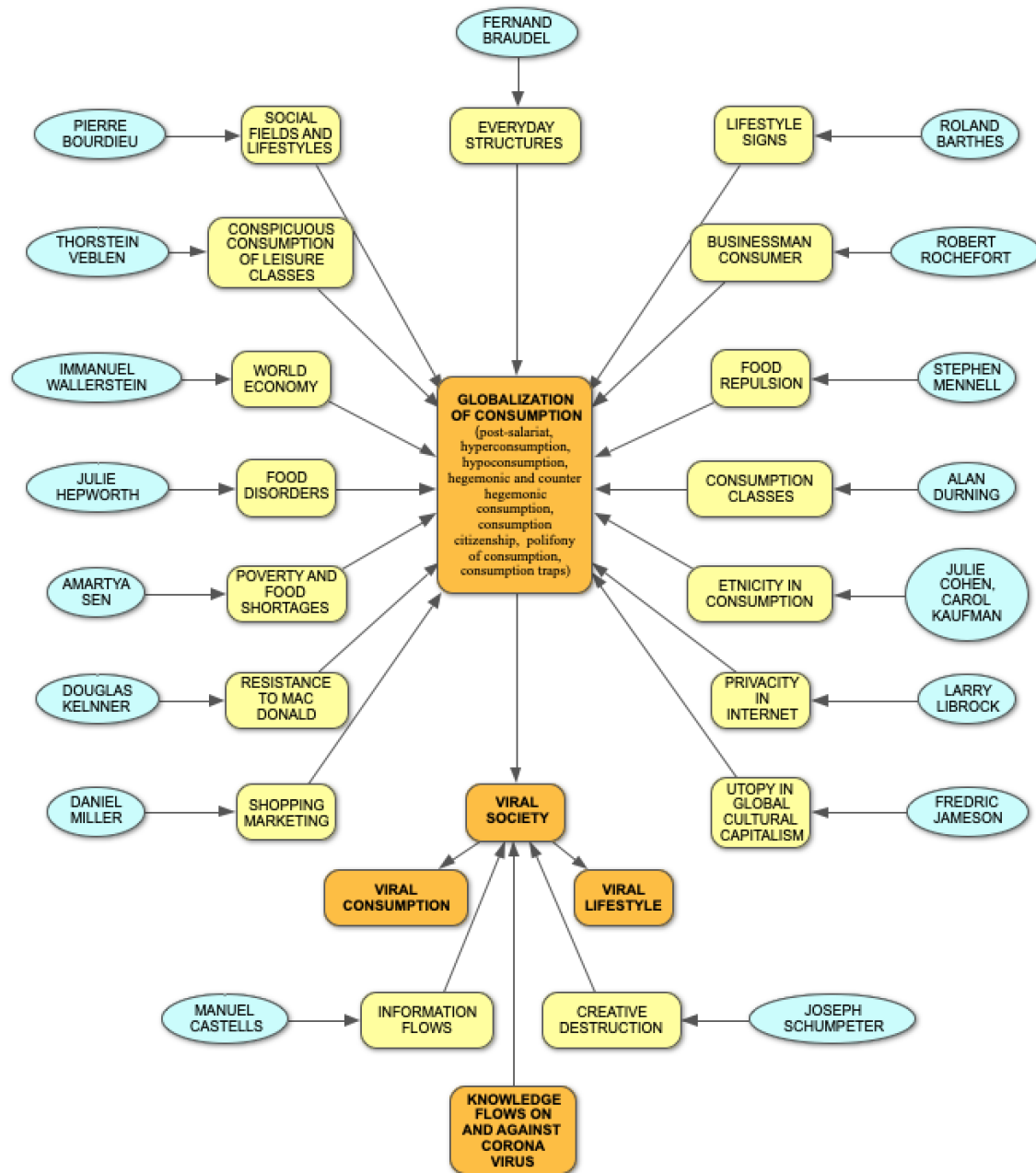


Figure 1 Globalization of viral consumption and lifestyles

For example, Sociology and History of consumption contextualize this social phenomenon in the economic processes that precede it, that is, the production, distribution and circulation of goods and services.

A question immediately arises: how do products and services fit into the globalized economy and societies, and within the history of consumer activities and inherent lifestyles? To answer this question, we will try to demonstrate the following hypothesis: in the world economy, since the middle of the 15th century, there has been a process of globalization of consumption, which has led to the hegemony of certain product paradigms and respective

lifestyles. Here we will give the following examples, among others: socio-economic activities developed around a very popular consumer product, drinks, especially those taken in Western Europe, which inaugurate unique lifestyles. Or the phenomenon of malls (shopping centers), one of the most paradigmatic symbols of the consumer society. Or the case of social processes that occurred in cyberspace, in terms of information and knowledge flows about Covid-19.

1. Globalization of consumption and hegemonic lifestyles

On the one hand, Fernand Braudel demonstrates that beverages have always played a relevant economic role at the global level. However, their historical and social significance goes far beyond this first utility, still functioning as emblems of power, as vehicles of access to knowledge, or as legitimization of the underlying lifestyles.:

Drinks are not just food. They have always played the role of dopants, evasions: sometimes, as in certain Indian tribes, drunkenness is even a means of communicating with the supernatural. In any case, alcoholism has never ceased to increase in Europe during the centuries we have been dealing with. Then came the exciting exotic: tea, coffee, not forgetting this unclassifiable 'dopant', which is tobacco in all its forms. (Braudel, 1991, p. 194).

Europe and its colonial empires formed the backdrop for the development of alcohol production and consumption, one of the most mythological drinks in the West and, later, on the planet. This type of drink, although it has appeared all over the world in different forms, was gradually associated with a symbolic brand image of the West. “In Europe still (...) the great innovation, the revolution, is the appearance of brandy and cereal alcohols, in a word: alcohol. The sixteenth century, so to speak, created it, the seventeenth century pushes it forward, the eighteenth century makes it vulgar.” (Ibidem: 206).

However, alcohol will suffer competition from other beverages from the colonies, responsible for new sociocultural rituals that, together with those developed around alcohol, will contribute greatly to the definition of modern sociability (*Ibidem*, p. 213).¹

The various drinks will contribute, in particular, to the circumscription of distinguishing practices in the affluent classes, especially in the first periods of their introduction. “In reality, all civilizations need food luxuries and a series of stimulants, 'dopants'. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the madness of spices and pepper; in the 16th century, the first alcohol; then tea, coffee, not to mention tobacco. The 19th and 20th centuries will have their new luxuries, their good or hateful drugs.” (Braudel, 1991, p.224).

For his part, Pierre Bourdieu, defines a *social field* as a reticular set of relative positions of power, the maintenance or subversion of which is undertaken by certain social agents, based on the mobilization of different types of capital, and within the context of the current situation of the general structure of the field. The objective relationships that are established among the different field social agents in competition for the conquest of parts of that market, constitute a field of forces whose structure at a given moment is at the origin of the struggles aiming at conserving or transforming it. In particular, the social fields of production are closely linked to the social fields of consumption. “... the general operating laws valid for all fields and, more specifically, for all fields of economic production, are specified according to the characteristic properties of the product.” (Bourdieu, 2001, p.356). Likewise, the social fields of production and consumption are part of a global order at the national and planetary level.² “The new bourgeoisie is the initiator of the ethical conversion demanded by the new economy from which it draws its power and its profits and whose functioning depends as much on the production of needs and of consumers as on the production of the products themselves. ” (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 61).³

In addition to the previous historical and sociological sense, it is necessary to view consumption and lifestyles as daily modes of writing and reading, where the common man

¹ “At the same time, or almost, that alcohol, Europe, at the center of world innovations, discovered three new drinks, exciting and tonic: coffee, tea, chocolate. All of them brought from overseas. Coffee is Arab (after being Ethiopian), tea is Chinese, chocolate is Mexican.”

² “This economic field is based on a national basis (*Ibidem*, p. 61), making small producers uniform and secondary (*Ibidem*, p. 278). At a global level, a global economic field has been formed, a set of subfields to each of which corresponds to a given industry and the respective companies and products in competition.” (*Ibidem*, p. 280).

³ [The original text, in French, is as follows:] “La nouvelle bourgeoisie est l’initiatrice de la conversion éthique exigée par la nouvelle économie dont elle tire sa puissance et ses profits et dont le fonctionnement dépend autant de la production des besoins et des consommateurs que de la production des produits mêmes.”

produces and consumes daily 'social texts'. In other words, consumption can also be understood as a sociosemic region for the production and circulation of signs, according to some conceptualizations from semiotics, from the School of Cultural Studies or from poststructuralist authors.

A garment, an automobile, a kitchen, a gesture, a movie, a song, an advertising image, a set of furniture, a newspaper headline - here are some seemingly very heterogeneous objects. What can they have in common? At least this: these are all signs. When I move on the street - or in life - and find these objects, I impose on everyone, necessarily without realizing it, the same activity, which is that of a certain reading: the modern man, the man of the cities, spends time reading. Read, first and foremost, images, gestures, behaviors: (...) this aperitif (whiskey, pernod, chablis-white) [tells me] the lifestyle of those who invites me. (Barthes, 1987, p. 149).

2. Post-salariat

In the next pages, some central consumption processes in contemporary times, derived from their globalization, will be analyzed in detail. With regard to the current phase of the world economy, since the end of the 19th century, *conspicuous consumption* and *conspicuous leisure* have been exercised by the “*leisure classes*”, as an instrument to legitimize an elitist lifestyle, in the view of Veblen (1994). From it derive the most recent consumption configurations, gradually transformed into the broader phenomenon of consumerism.

To understand such transformations in the sphere of consumption, it is necessary to consider the production processes that condition it. The recent changes in the salariat regime, namely the post-salariat regime, have brought about a new generalized situation in relation to employment.

The end of the salariat model does not mean the abandonment of the legal form of an open-ended employment contract, even though its frequency decreases as the different statutes of individual entrepreneurs progress and when the wages are already developing, in an impressive way, the precarious salary (...) At the rhythm of professional life - is it justified to

continue talking about 'career'? (...) there will probably be several successive statuses: salaried at the beginning of his career, stipendiary on his own account, wage earner following a restructuring situation, undergoing training for a certain time, salaried again but in part-time, then a liberal consultant. Some will even share their activity among different split times, each of which is governed by a different status.” (Rocheffort, 1997, p. 45).

Such a situation of risky and precarious employment, associated with the neoliberal flexibility that characterizes the current phase of post-Fordist capitalism, has profound effects on consumption modes. The stages of this consumption revolution are essentially as follows: in the 50s and 60s of the 20th century, normalized production and mass consumption crystallized, supporting the celebrated 'consumer society', which will be attacked, in particular, by the situationists and by Marcuse. In the following two decades, the growing centrality of the outsourcing of jobs and the qualification of the workforce, engenders a deep segmentation of consumers and an offer based on and directed to new nascent lifestyles. The 1990s introduced a sharp increase in unemployment, accompanied by a situation of insecurity and risk on the consumption scene. In particular, the relations between production and social reproduction, between work and leisure, between the public and private space of everyday life, appear radically modified. “Consumption, therefore, will fall outside the scope of satisfying the expectations of private life, encompassing that of new professional needs. Interpenetration of places and times of work and leisure, family and social life.” (*Idem*, p. 63).

In this context of increased porosity between the sphere of production and the sphere of consumption, the 'consumer-entrepreneur', according to Robert Rocheffort, gradually adopts attitudes similar to the head of the company, becoming more active and conscious, through the assumption of precariousness, but also the autonomy of his condition, followed by an adequate response to the countless threats that plague him. These risks are, in particular, partial employment, the invasion of private spaces by commercial relations, the increase in social inequalities, threats from poor or contaminated consumer products, etc.

Therefore, the activities of consumption and consumerism have acquired a nature that oscillates between survival and protagonism. Consumerism, in particular, must be defined as the sedimented backdrop of the current consumption situation, that is, the most characteristic phenomenon of the current stage of the world economy, in the consumption

arena. In fact, the ultimate goal of global capitalism, maximum profit on a planetary scale, is largely pursued through ideally unlimited access to the exchange and enjoyment of goods and commodities, in a word, the *global consumption*.

The means for this intermediate desideratum consists in the promotion and even in the cult of the desire and pleasure of the respective symbols or simulacra, as well as in the lack of information or insufficient information in relation to its potential dangers. More concretely, such a process can be seen in three major stages of the re-appropriation of goods and services by the consumer, and not just in one: (a) *pre-purchase*, that is, planning, information, knowledge and desire to acquire an object or service; (b) the *purchase* itself, that is, the exchange of a commodity for the corresponding price, fixed or negotiated, at the purchase moment or buy on credit in a medium or long term; (c) and *post-purchase*, or the use and abuse of the object, through its social recognition in terms of legitimacy of a person, a social group or a social class, or through its recall after its disuse. I understand disuse as the expiration of a commodity within specific socio-symbolic systems, for example, fashion. This secundarization of the commodity stems in particular from the incessant dialectic between their overvaluation and their undervaluation, in terms of exchange value.

In this order of ideas, it is worth retake Immanuel Wallerstein, when this sociologist of globalization speaks of the three typical forms of adjustments, operated in the world economy, to increase global levels of profits, within the framework of the 'dilemma of capitalist accumulation': (a) the lowering of component costs, which takes us directly to the sphere of production; (b) the increase in effective demand, which brings us close to the sphere of social reproduction or consumption; and (c) technological innovation. As for the second adjustment, which more directly contextualizes our debate, the author advances that one of the means of carrying out this type of adjustment is to raise the absolute level of remuneration for work, which contradicts, apparently, the movement of increased profits pursued by the capital holders. The solution to this opposition operates through the 'geographic disjunction', that is, in parallel to the increase in salary in the most favored regions of the globe, new measures are taking place to increase the number of workers with low wages, in other areas of the world-system (Wallerstein, 2014). Therefore, according to this author, the nature of consumption, which derives in large part from the salaried regime, changes within the process of globalization, especially in the most recent phases of expansion of the world economy.

3. Hyperconsumption

It is in this perspective that one can better understand one of the most salient features of the consumption of drinks and the foods associated with them, in the current world economy: the dialogue between the repulsion of food and its overconsumption.

The first aspect was studied by Stephen Mennell for the central countries, pointing out three important causes for the refusal to eat (1985, p. 295-303): the inability to enjoy food, due to lack of learning in this sense; fear of the effects after its ingestion, such as the disapproval caused by bad breath; the social derogation, that is, the fear of appearing to be a lower class than the one to which one aspires to belong.

Also in this context, note the consequences of a voluntary deficient diet, such as anorexia, caused by the ideology of fashion and the inherent need to build lean bodies, synonymous with elegance. Some writings by feminist authors circumscribe the biological, social, political and cultural outlines of the phenomenon.

N.J. [one interviewee] describes how a woman's symbolic use of food involves a continuum of eating disorders. Anorexia nervosa is at one end of the spectrum and symbolic of unmet needs and self-imposed isolation from the woman's need to ask for anything and draw attention to her needs when in fact she has enormous needs. Bulimia nervosa is construed as movement, and 'vomiting as progress ... that would also symbolize capacity for her to actually take things in, relationships wise. In contrast to the construction of anorexia nervosa through symbolic interpretations and a continuum of eating disorders, psychiatric discourse constructs these disorders as separate conditions and categories. (Hepworth, 1999, p. 88).

As for *hyper consumption*, or overconsumption, the increase in obesity globally testifies, contradictorily, to the success of fast food. Such a 'plastic food', when taken in small quantities, but many times a day, and due to its unbalanced composition in fats and calories, contributes to this result.

4. Hypoconsumption

In the case of some of the peripheral countries, the problems, although globalized, are different. The characteristics of these countries are similar to those attributes of European societies in the pre-capitalist historical periods, where poverty and hunger were constant, with the persistence of *hypoconsumption*, that is, scarce consumption for the basic needs of the populations. In addition, this food shortage is an involuntary situation, or rather, due to inequalities at the global level, between North and South, between increasingly wealthy countries and increasingly poorer countries.

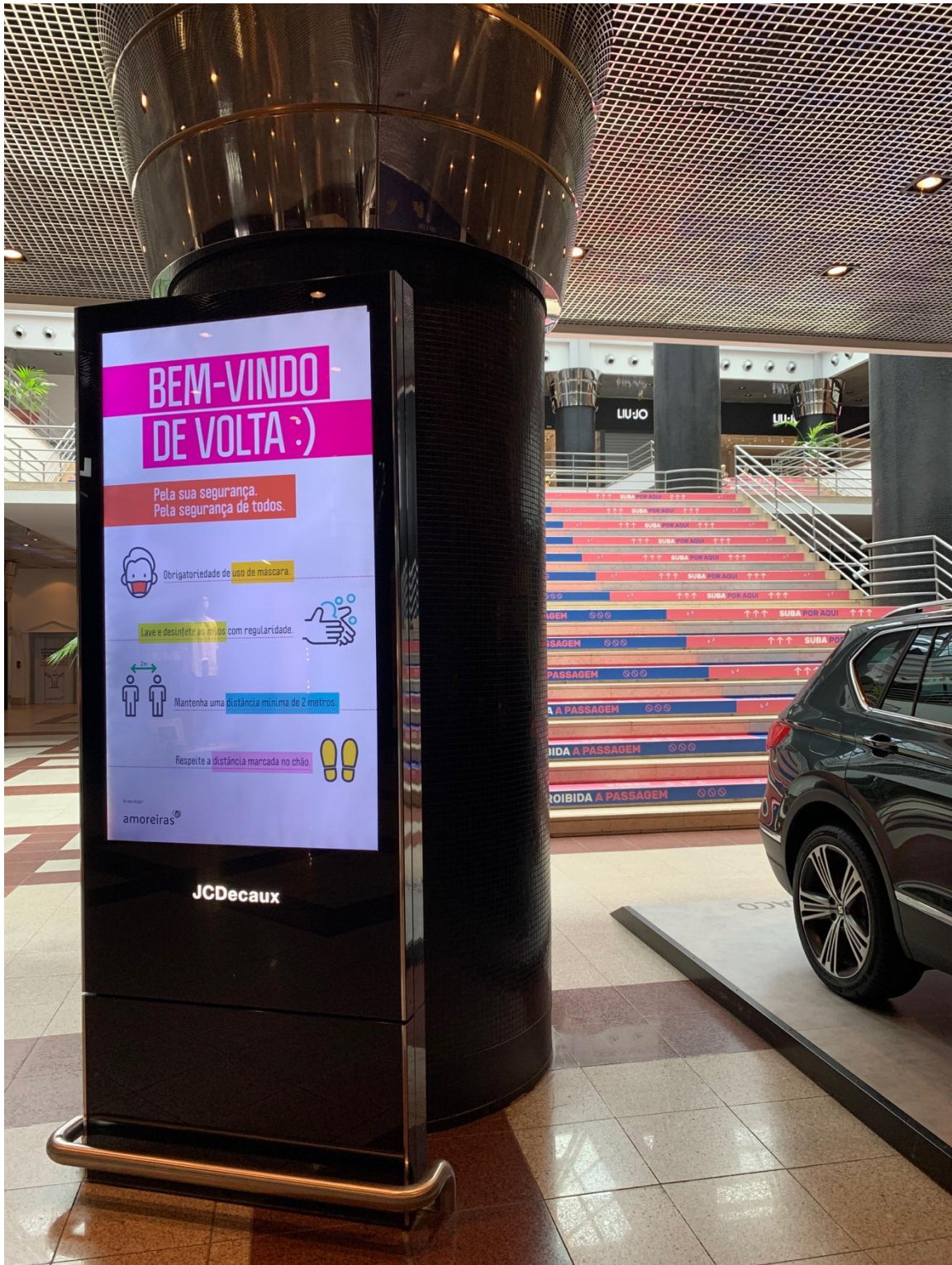


Figure 2 Hegemonic consumption and viral consumption under Covid-19, at Amoreiras mall (shopping center), June 6, 2020

In *How Much Is Enough?*, Alan Durning divided the world into three consumption classes: overconsumers, sustainers, and marginals. The overconsumers are the 20% of the world's people who consume roughly

80% of the world's resources - that is, those of us whose lives are organized around automobiles, airplanes, meatbased diets, and wastefully packaged disposable products. The marginals, also 20% of the world's people, live in absolute deprivation. If we turn to measurements of income rather than consumption, the figures are even more stark. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report for 1992 introduces the champagne glass as a graphic metaphor for a world of extreme economic injustice. (Korten, 1999, p. 3).

A stimulating study on poverty, connected to world food shortages, was undertaken by Amartya Sen. In view of the analysis of the famines that favor the supply of food, the author proposes an analysis of the allocation of rights related to possession and exchange of resources. In fact, starving is not so much related to the fact that there is not enough food to eat, but more to the fact that people do not have enough food to eat. Property relations are a kind of rights-granting relationships, within which the problem of hunger in particular, but also the issue of poverty in general, has to be analyzed. "Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat. While the latter can be a cause of the former, it is but one of many possible causes. Whether and how starvation relates to food supply is a matter for factual investigation." (Sen, 1986, p. 1).

A field where this problem of consumerism is reproduced in a somewhat dramatic way is *consumer credit*, an area that was the subject of legislative measures by Prime Minister José Sócrates, in a previous Portuguese legislature (Amaral, 1999, p. 6-7).

5. Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic consumption

Such a consumption situation often proves to be insufficient and even unequal, in terms of access to the consumption of certain goods, for example, as for the real options to choose the type of meal and drinks to take, even for those who, in principle, have access to most goods and services. Hence the theoretical and practical proposals, by some defenders and supporters of utopian society regimes, seek to transmute consumerism or *hegemonic consumption* into *counter-hegemonic consumption*. This counter-consumption is defined as the process of looking for and propose alternative ways and modes to consumerism, either

through more democratic consumption practices (for example, more widely informed and discussed consumption), or through more radical ways. In other words, the objective of the full exercise of *consumer citizenship* must be operated, according to its propagandists, in terms of means of action and public intervention, through counter-consumption. This counter-consumption, in contrast to the more individualized or even individualistic consumption, aims to establish the link between the economic act of consuming, the political awareness of the choice of the product, and the ethical sense that the consumption is not harmful neither for the consumer himself, nor for the consumer community, within a given society or within the world-system.

Therefore, in contemporary post-colonial societies, in contrast to the *global consumer*, there are various consumer identities, or configurations of *local consumers*, based on localized communities, defined on the basis of ethnicity, gender, age, social class, etc. These plural consumers practice is diversifying consumption and, under certain circumstances, may constitute the first front of citizens who undertake counter-consumption or counter-hegemonic consumption, different or opposed to hegemonic consumption.

6. Polyphony of consumption

In order to better delimit this phenomenon of *polyphony of consumption*, a potential generator of various counter-consumption alternatives, let us relate this activity with the identification variable 'ethnicity', as well as the institutions that frame them, in terms of similarities or ethnic differences. Let us see what goes on in purchasing decisions in a central country, but within a minority, the North American black community.

The results of an investigation (Cohen; Kaufman, 1991, p. 25) revealed an important similarity in the relative influence of white and black spouses in purchasing decisions for nine specific products. There are no significant differences between the wife's levels of independence between the two ethnicities. Instead, both blacks and whites are independent of wives for four products (i.e., half of the decision areas studied). To the extent that black couples are no more dependent on women than white couples, the notion of wife dominance in black families is not supported. This research also found two significant differences between the decision making of black and white spouses. One difference suggests that black husbands play a more independent role in some product purchasing decisions than white husbands. The second difference between the production of decisions by white and black

spouses, centers on the greater propensity of whites to participate in the construction of syncratic decisions.

Let us next take the case of a Jamaican woman living in London, as a complementary example of the constraints of ethnicity in consumption. Daniel Miller (1998) states that she felt and showed a positive identification containing many elements of her identity as Black. At the same time, she externalized a specific cultural trajectory influenced by her past in Jamaica, expressed in cultural domains such as food preferences or previous connection to the Seventh-day Adventist church, but she also manifested a more general sense of being black in England, evidenced in her personal relationships. and the pluralism of ethnic food in her home.

7. Consumption pitfalls

In short, in order for these individual but plural consumption to become collective counter-consumption, and to be able to be inserted in consumer movements on a global scale, as an alternative to hegemonic consumption, *critical consumers* seek to guard themselves, to a greater or lesser extent, against three major types of consumer traps.

The first is the *global consumption trap*. Global consumption is a hegemonic way of consuming, the only legitimate one, although linked to local forms of consumption. One paradigmatic case is the model of eating behavior promoted by fast food. Douglas Kellner (1999, p. 196) illustrates a case of resistance struggle against the multinational Mc Donald's, on the initiative of two British activists, Helen Steel and Dave Morris, who accused this corporation of practicing low wages, deceptive publicity actions, involvement in deforestation, etc. McDonald's sued them, which they responded, along with other supporters of the dispute, on a website on the Internet, where a large amount of information about the transnational company was concentrated, which brought considerable negative publicity to this firm, although the result the judicial process has ended in an ambiguous situation. And May 1, 2000, a Mac Donald was attacked in London, in protest against the "MacDonaldization" of society and culture.

London celebrated the 1st of May with some scenes of violence in the marches held yesterday. In an anti-capitalist demonstration that brought together more than 1,000 people in front of the British

parliament, a group of 20 'anarchists' assaulted a McDonald's restaurant and threw bottles at the prime minister's official residence. (...) a 'more radical' group responded to the agents with stones, beer cans and traffic pins." (Violence hits McDonald's, 2000, p. 37).

The problem of the harmful effects of standardized food took on such proportions that, at the beginning of the 21st century, a measure to combat it was taken by the United States government itself, aiming at improving public health and reducing spending on medical care: "Raising taxes on products that cause obesity can be an original way of tackling the problem, which affects half the population of the United States. The idea came from a group of American scientists ..." (Fat pays tax, 2000, p. 26).

In addition, the consumer increasingly wants to be informed and to guard against some *marketing and advertising pitfalls*, especially electronic ones, under the risk of becoming not only an info excluded, but an irresponsible consumer, particularly in relation to his/her own body and health. One of these most insidious and worrying ambiguities are 'cookies', that is, files that are sent, by the advertiser, to the user of an information network, to collect that user's personal data.

Larry Leibrock (1997, p. 160) warns that privacy and control on the Internet transcend the process of 'cookies'. Some of the functions that 'cookies' allow, such as the detection and organization of websites, can be achieved by other means (i.e., their registration). Therefore, a categorization and classification scheme is required, reflecting the levels of personal information that consumers are willing to share. Privacy does not consist of 'all or nothing', it is conditional, and therefore it is necessary to define a hierarchy of data security.

At a more localized level, the consumer will have an interest in demystifying the *pitfalls of buying*, and knowing how to manage, in the sense of his interests, the social, interactive and intersubjective relationships that are established in this act of acquiring a good or service, simultaneously economic, social, political and cultural. The main relationships in the purchase are those that condition the interaction of the consumer in co-presence with the product, as well as those that complement or oppose the seller and the buyer. That is, the contact with the merchandise and the contract with the point of sale of a good or a service provision, respectively. In effect, these constitute the last traces, although fetishized, of the production process that gave rise to them, and where other social relations

were established. If so, the social relations of production are complemented by *social relations of consumption*, which express specific dominations, in addition to the relations of exploitation inherent in production:

Writers who concentrate on the logic of commerce tend to assume that contradictions in the commodity presentation are themselves evidence of the ability of commerce to fool the consumer. Thus [some of them] attack the marketing of dairy goods that literally cream off the fat content in order to provide a wide range of low-fat goods such as milks and yogurts but then use the same fat to make high-fat cheeses and creamed goods. From the point of view of working with shoppers, however, there is probably nothing better suited to the tasks of shopping than a range of goods that exhibit contradiction. (Miller, 1998, p. 143).

Indeed, if this 'fat / thin' opposition appears to offer the consumer a choice, the options (s)he makes are part of pre-established dichotomies, which do not always coincide with the real contradictions of the food process.

However, as we have already mentioned, under pressure from ecologists and other citizen movements, the world consumer arena is beginning to manifest some transformations, in the sense of awareness - not only by the consumer, but also by the traders themselves, or even by producers - regarding the dangers to public health inherent in consumption. In such a perspective, in which the alternative options go in multiple directions, sometimes opposite, it is necessary to be aware that the alternative route of counter-consumption, like others, is not simple, being subject to ambiguities, deviations and even successive errors, within global capitalism or cultural capitalism analyzed by Fredric Jameson (1991, p. 209). This author states that it is the limits, the systemic restrictions and repressions, or empty places, in the 'Utopian project' that are most interesting. In truth, only these testify to the ways in which culture, or a system marks the most visionary mind and contains its movement towards transcendence. Quoting Walter Benjamin, Jameson underlines that History progresses more through failures than via successes.

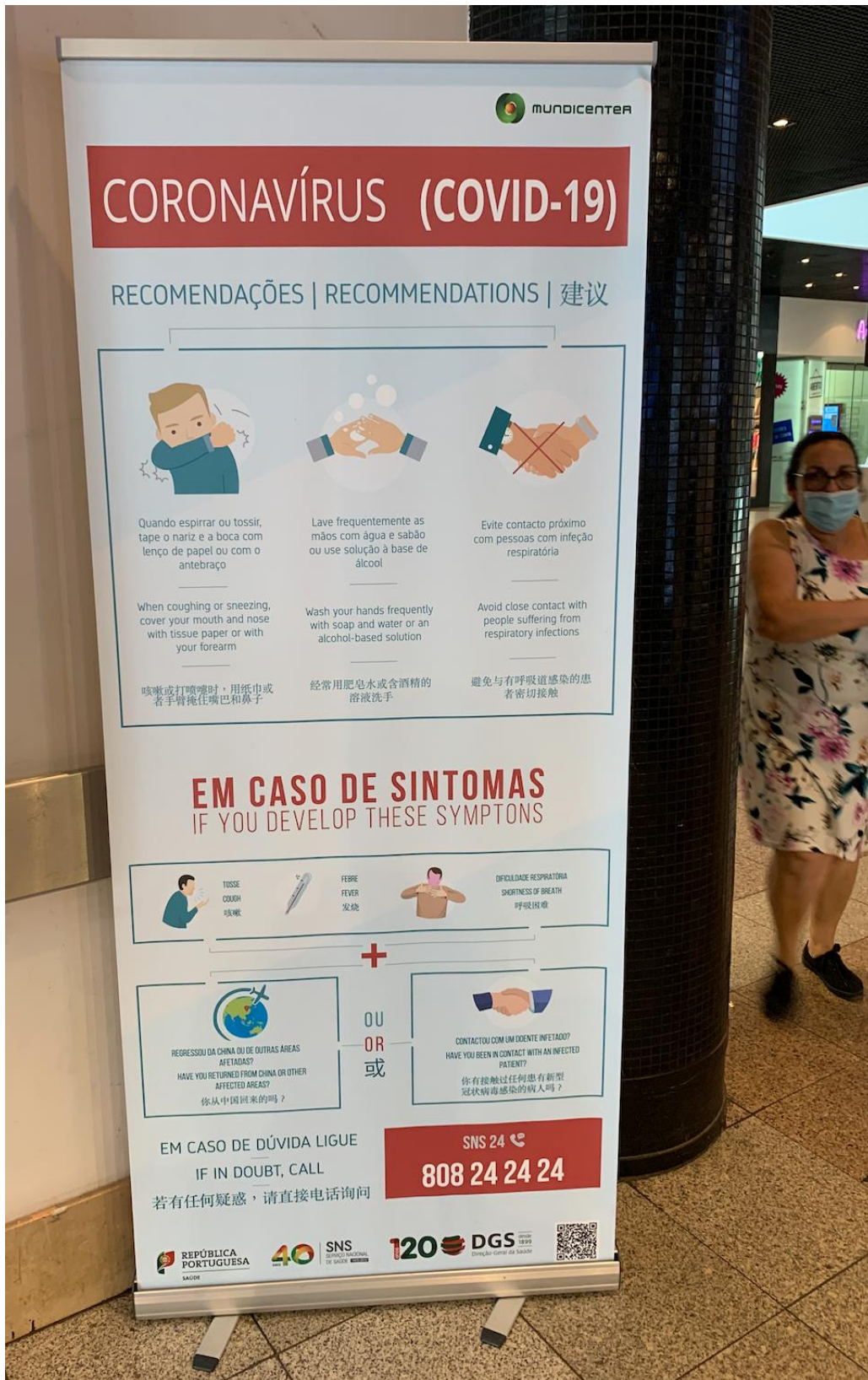


Figure 3 Citizenship of consumption and viral lifestyle at the Amoreiras mall (shopping center), July 21, 2020

8. What consumption and lifestyle may occur in the 'viral society'?

The consumption processes discussed above can undergo a radical overhaul during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the unprecedented nature of these phenomena, it is too early to advance clear, relevant, or definitive ideas on these issues. Therefore, and as a provisional conclusion, the following words will just advance some previous intuitions and questions for future studies. For example, taking up some of the concepts discussed above, how do hyperconsumption or excessive consumption, as well as hypoconsumption or scarce consumption, work in the contemporary economic crisis, generated by the Corona virus? As for hegemonic or dominant consumption, will they reproduce, or will new alternative or counter-hegemonic consumption arise? In political terms, will it be possible to build a consumer citizenship, which effectively deals with the diversity of consumption that circumscribes the polyphony of consumption, in order to avoid consumption traps? Finally, will all this define new consumption configurations and unprecedented lifestyles, which could be called '*viral consumption*' and '*viral lifestyles*', within a hypothetical '*viral society*'? Let's start by trying to define what can be understood by 'viral society'. It seems to emerge a sort of configuration of the social, whose characteristics are affected by the Corona virus, within this configuration's structures, contexts, practices, agents and utilitarian or symbolic objects. And within the framework of the respective socioeconomic, political, cultural, discursive, ecological spheres, e.g., inside socioeconomic structures, political practices or cultural agents. Moreover, how can this new virulent reality be transformed into a healthier, more inclusive and supportive society, inside the everyday life of a less confined and more resilient and sustainable urban fabric?

To such aim, it may be useful to inquire into the social contexts where the virus spreads, irremediably and immeasurably. For example, regarding the city's problems, several studies, sociological and historical, were carried out by the present essay's author, dealing with the theories of the city (Andrade, 2018e); the modes of sociability and solidarity in establishments of urban public drinking, such as the tavern, cafes and bars (*Idem*, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1992, 1995, 2000, 2003); urban public art (*Idem*, 2010; 2009); austerity and the urban scene as a context for political action and activism (*Idem*, 2015).

If, within these urban contexts and the respective practices that take place there, sociologists wish or plan to research the social agents who carry them out, they will find, in addition to the citizens who live there, the circulating actors or travelers, who may act as potential vehicles for the spread of the virus, such as tourists, migrants or other local inhabitants. Several more recent essays, in the form of texts produced in projects coordinated

by the author at the Communication and Society Research Centre at the University of Minho, focus on the social agents acting either in the 'pre-viral society' or in the viral society. For example, tourism agents (Andrade, 2020a, b, e, f; 2018 a, b, c); public art actors (Idem, 2020c, d); the participants and activists in social movements, such as SOS.ART.PT, of which the author is one of the co-founders. This cultural movement, since March 2020, is developing solidarity actions for visual artists affected by the Covid-19 crisis (Idem, 2020 g, h, i, j, k, l, m).

Let me discuss now a concrete social context, the mall or shopping center, which is one of the temples and times of contemporary consumption. At the Amoreiras shopping center, since March / April 2020, in full bloom of the Corona virus, it was possible to see some advertising signs, including health advice about the pandemic in the public space (Figure 2). This is a case of consumer citizenship, in which it calls for the care to be taken in the current context of health crisis. However, this poster also means a greeting to the customer's return, expressed in the message "Welcome back" plus the smiley ":", after the first days of their uncertainty and relative absence. Such social salutation is revealed to be indispensable for the maintenance of trade in the shopping center, where the polyphony of consumption, hyperconsumption, hegemonic consumption, and even some consumption traps often play as protagonists.

In any case, this example eloquently illustrates a present and irreversible '*viral consumption*'. It is a way or a mode of parallel consumption, derived from sanitary pressure and 'social confinement', caused by the phenomenon, global and local, of the pandemic. This 'viral consumption' inaugurates a new '*viral lifestyle*', where certain types of health information become ubiquitous, like the advertising billboard seen inside Figure 2. In addition, note the inscriptions on the stairs, which read, on the left: "Passage prohibited" and, on the right, "Go up here". Like a traffic policeman, the shopping center regulates the commercial order, the social way, the sanitary direction, and the urban sense of possible path circulation. The commercial space of the mall thus uses the architecture itself of its public space, to shape the consumption and lifestyle of consumers, in spite of its undeniable social utility. As mentioned above, the placard corroborates these attributes of the shopping center, in the contemporary conjuncture of viral society. However, in this case such object of public communication focuses on health recommendations, which gives it a social and semiotic meaning more directed to democratic citizenship, through health advice for all passersby in the public space of global and legitimate consumption.

In recent years, one of the social contexts where citizens, migrants and tourists circulate with greater intensity and depth, is cyberspace. More recently, since 2020, due to the pandemic of the Corona virus, the activities developed in confinement occur, more and more, in digital social locations. So, in what way the consumption of goods and services in virtual media, condition or redefine the lifestyles of internet users and, in general, the social agents in the viral society?

One of the possible answers to this question can be found in terms of the new and innovative social roles of users within the digital economy and, in particular, in digital social networks.

Contemporary economic and financial crisis is closely associated with social innovation. This process profoundly influences cyberspace's phenomena within our globalized communications paradigm. The correspondent debate on the articulation of crisis and innovation was reconceptualized by Marx, Nietzsche, Sombart, Schumpeter, David Harvey, etc. However, Manuel Castells elaborated an economic but also communicational explanation, which seems to us closer to the current crisis. Castells uses the notion of "space of flows" created and shared by globalized capitalism, across information and communication networks at cyberspace. The aim of this chapter is to reflect on "information and knowledge flows" in the present crisis conjuncture. For example, within Facebook content privacy is being debated and even engenders reluctance on user fidelity. In fact, social networks shouldn't deliver just information flows but also knowledge flows, which may become central means of production/consumption. (Andrade, 2018d, p. 269).

One of the means and methods discussed in this text is *creative destruction*, a concept developed by Joseph Schumpeter (2009), based on Marx and Sombart. Among other issues and hypotheses to develop in the coming years, it is urgent to know the following: how a possible 'creative destruction' of contemporary society, partly caused by the Corona virus, may have an impact and effects, less or more durable, structural, or cyclical, in the processes of globalized consumption and in the consequent lifestyles, within the 'viral society'?

One hypothesis that seeks to answer this question is the following: as noted before, information consumption, among other activities, has increased exponentially in cyberspace due to the social pressure exerted by Covid-19. This trend creates a lifestyle more confined

to private spaces of the home or of virtual locations separated from the ‘physical’ urban public space. In such places of confinement, in one hand, social actors hope to obtain daily information on the pandemic. Often such content is predominantly quantitative, on the situation of the evolution of contagions, e.g., statistics on the number of deaths or the quantity and variations of vaccines available. However, on the other hand, more and more citizens are seeking practical knowledge (recommendations, etc.) on how to deal with the pandemic. Moreover, they are gradually listening to reflective knowledge, such as debates about the meaning of freedom or the utility of prudence in what regards the social urban fabric of the new viral city. In this way, it is possible that creative destruction happens, in large part, in terms of transforming the mere information about the virus, into deeper and more useful knowledge about this pandemic.

Knowledge flows can be interpreted sociologically, and partly, as a process of creative destruction, as noted supra, in the sense that information flows associated with digital social networks and the correspondent consumption of information are being dialectically annihilated in part, and often transformed into knowledge flows.

In fact, information flow crisis is manifested through contradictions between the competing economic value of raw information on users and content, and/or the more sophisticated economic value of knowledge about users demographic characteristics articulated with users’ content properties [that is, content produced and shared by users]. (*Idem, Ibidem*, p. 279).

Conclusion

In short, the viral society has come to us harshly, and it is there to permanently redefine contemporaneity. That is why it is up to everyone, both the State and civil society, to reflect and act on, among other social processes, confined consumption and the resulting viral lifestyles that are becoming global, but which can never be subscribed by non-conformed citizens with viral society.

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