

DOSSIER: ANTHROPOCENE AND THE LIKE

Intertwining LinkedIn's organizational practices with contemporary life beyond surveillance capitalism

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Abstract

This article maps the practical consequences of the content shared within the LinkedIn platform in its users' life. To explore the complex entanglement of technology and users and its practical consequences, the study adopts the Latourian framework of modes of existence (Latour, 2019) and the platform biography framework for studying the constituent dimensions of platformized social networks, proposed by Burgess and Baym (2020). The conceptual-theoretical tools and the metalanguage of the modes of existence promote understanding of who we are and what underlies our practices, while encompassing the transformations during this process. Digital or internet ethnography was used (Hine, 2015), which consists of adapting the traditional ethnographic method to the online environment. Based on the platform biography framework and the framework of modes of existence, the findings reveal elements that constitute the complex intertwining of LinkedIn and its users. These elements demonstrate the multiple dimensions that make up LinkedIn as a technology and platform-organization, creating conditions of possibility and impossibility for the constitution of different existences and meanings. The intertwining of technology and users and its practical consequences were investigated by combining these two promising frameworks that have been little explored in the area of organizational studies.

Keywords: LinkedIn's organizational practices. Modes of existence. Digital ethnography. Platform biography. Organization-platform.

Entrelaçamentos das práticas organizativas do LinkedIn com a vida contemporânea para além do capitalismo de vigilância

Resumo

O presente artigo objetivou mapear as consequências práticas vivenciadas pelos membros durante o uso da plataforma LinkedIn e a partir dos conteúdos que circulam dentro e para fora dela. Para explorar como ocorre o complexo entrelaçamento tecnologia e membro e suas consequências práticas, abraçamos o referencial latouriano (Latour, 2019) dos modos de existência; e o *framework* biografia da plataforma para o estudo das dimensões constituintes das redes sociais plataformizadas, proposto (Burgess & Baym, 2020). O ferramental teórico-conceitual e a metalinguagem dos modos de existência promovem o entendimento de quem somos e o que fundamenta nossas práticas, ao mesmo tempo que abarca as transformações durante esse processo. Para realização do estudo foi utilizada a etnografia digital ou para a internet (Hine, 2015), que consiste na adaptação do método etnográfico tradicional para o ambiente *online*. A partir do *framework* da biografia da plataforma e dos modos de existência os achados em campo revelam elementos que, de forma conjunta e interrelacionada, constituem o entrelaçamento complexo do LinkedIn e de seus membros (Latour, 2019). Esses elementos demonstram as múltiplas dimensões que compõem o LinkedIn como tecnologia e organização-plataforma, criando condições de possibilidade e impossibilidade para a constituição de diferentes existências e significados (Burgess & Baym, 2020).

Palavras-chave: Práticas organizativas do LinkedIn. Modos de existência. Etnografia digital. Biografia da plataforma. Organização-plataforma.

Entrelazamientos de las prácticas organizativas de LinkedIn con la vida contemporánea más allá del capitalismo de vigilancia

Resumen

Este artículo tuvo como objetivo mapear las consecuencias prácticas experimentadas por miembros durante el uso de la plataforma LinkedIn, a partir de los contenidos que circulan dentro y fuera de ella. Para explorar cómo se produce el complejo entrelazamiento de la tecnología y miembro y sus consecuencias prácticas, adoptamos el marco de modos de existencia latouriano (Latour, 2019); y el marco de la biografía de plataforma para el estudio de las dimensiones constituyentes de las redes sociales plataformizadas, propuesto (Burgess & Baym, 2020). Las herramientas teóricas conceptuales y el metalenguaje de los modos de existencia promueven la comprensión de quiénes somos y qué subyace en nuestras prácticas, al tiempo que abarcan las transformaciones durante este proceso. Para llevar a cabo el estudio se utilizó la etnografía digital (Hine, 2015), que consiste en adaptar el método etnográfico tradicional al entorno online. Desde el marco de la biografía de la plataforma y los modos de existencia, los hallazgos en el campo revelan elementos que, interrelacionados, constituyen el complejo entrelazamiento de LinkedIn y sus miembros (Latour, 2019). Estos elementos demuestran las múltiples dimensiones que conforman LinkedIn como tecnología y organización-plataforma, creando condiciones de posibilidad e imposibilidad para la constitución de diferentes existencias y significados (Burgess & Baym, 2020).

Palabras clave: Prácticas organizativas de LinkedIn. Modos de existencia. Etnografía digital. Biografía de la plataforma. Organización-plataforma.

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INTRODUCTION

Information society, network society, knowledge society, burnout society, surveillance capitalism, platform capitalism, and data economy are among the terms widely used to refer to the contemporary context in which digital technologies, such as the professional and corporate social platform and network LinkedIn, organize and direct everyday life (D'Andréa, 2020; Silveira, 2017; Zuboff, 2020). This phenomenon is understood by organizational studies as digitalization, "ways in which social life is organized through and around digital technologies" (Leonardi & Treem, 2020, p. 1602).

Studies on the organizational practices of platform organizations emphasize positive aspects of technological incorporation, such as increased efficiency and agility of processes (Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2020). Critical perspectives on platforms tend to focus on infrastructural and institutional aspects of the phenomenon, with little emphasis on how platforms shape and are shaped reciprocally by members in a socio-technical configuration (Poell et al., 2020). We emphasize that, throughout this article, we have chosen to use the term "member" instead of "user," as this is the nomenclature employed by LinkedIn itself, which is characterized as a community of professionals.

Research on LinkedIn generally addresses: strategies for job searching and career development; reputation and personal brand building; engagement; and, in particular, investigates the opinions of recruiters (organizations), agencies (HR professionals), or member behavior (Garcia et al., 2022; Pardim et al., 2022). LinkedIn is highlighted as a means for establishing professional networking, advertising and applying for job openings, professional training, and information gathering. Critical studies, such as Rodrigues and Pedro (2016), examine the platform through the lens of surveillance, subjectification, and control.

According to Khorshidi et al. (2025), LinkedIn has emerged as a dominant platform for professional networking and career development, but studies on this platform and its academic landscape remain scarce. These authors developed a bibliometric analysis and systematically mapped publications with LinkedIn as their central theme. As a result, they identified some publications have driven discussions about LinkedIn's role in professional interactions, strategic communication, and corporate reputation management. Regarding emerging trends, they identified a recent shift toward artificial intelligence (AI)-driven recruitment, privacy concerns, and LinkedIn's adaptation during COVID-19. They also highlight interdisciplinary convergence, connecting LinkedIn to educational technology, health networks, and computational social sciences. These findings point to LinkedIn's growing influence beyond the disciplines of people and business management, with increasing relevance in data-driven decision-making and knowledge dissemination.

Insights provided by bibliometrics have direct applications for researchers, human resource managers, educators, and corporate strategists. The growing integration of LinkedIn into AI-based hiring models calls for further research on algorithmic transparency, fairness, and predictive validity in job recommendations, for example. In terms of academic visibility, LinkedIn's role in digital studies, people's lives, professional brand building, and its influence is still largely unexplored. Future studies could examine how LinkedIn's algorithm amplifies or suppresses certain professional content, affecting professional mobility and information asymmetry in hiring practices. In addition, concerns about data privacy, ethical profiling, and AI-mediated decision-making require regulatory scrutiny and academic attention.

Finally, these authors suggest an agenda for future studies that aim to complement bibliometric analysis by employing qualitative research methodologies, theoretical perspectives, and empirical approaches to provide a broader understanding of academic knowledge about LinkedIn as its algorithms and member engagement evolve. They suggest the development of longitudinal studies that follow LinkedIn's adaptation to digital transformation; global changes in the workforce; platform governance; and emerging trends, as these will be crucial to understanding its sustained impact.

In the Brazilian context, a search carried out in the Spell database from 2019 to July 2025 resulted in four articles on LinkedIn. These studies address topics such as the digital presence of CEOs on the platform, the behavior of young people starting their careers, the application of LinkedIn to assist in research, and discussions on conscious capitalism in social media groups. In the proceedings of the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Administration (EnANPAD) meeting, an article was identified that addresses the phenomenon of digital micro-influencers. The findings of these searches demonstrate a lack of studies on the platform and the potential for problematizing its repercussions on life trajectories.

The necessity of critical reflections on organizational thinking and action with digital interconnections culminated in the creation of a Working Group (WG) at EnANPAD in 2021, focused on studies on “Platform capitalism, digitization, and control in the context of organizations,” theme 7 in the area of Organizational Studies. Following the conceptual evolution, the WG changed its name in 2022 to “Digital Platforms, Organizations, and Technology.”

To advance this discussion, this article, which is based on thesis research, aims to map the practical consequences experienced by members when using the LinkedIn platform, based on the content that circulates within and outside it. To explore how the complex intertwining of technology and members occurs and its practical consequences, we embraced Latour's framework of modes of existence (Latour, 2019) and the platform biography framework for studying the constituent dimensions of platformized social networks, proposed by Burgess and Baym (2020). Thus, following some suggestions by Khorshidi et al. (2025) for future studies, the article contributes by employing qualitative methodology, using complex theoretical frameworks that are under-explored in the field of management — Latour's modes of existence — and the platform biography framework to propose a different perspective on LinkedIn as a platform organization.

The theoretical-conceptual toolkit and metalanguage of modes of existence enhance the understanding of who we are and what underpins our practices, while also encompassing the transformations that occur during this process (Hämäläinen & Lehtonen, 2016). In this way, we can glimpse the meanings of the socio-historical and cultural moment in which we live, beyond adjectives such as platform capitalism, by understanding the ways in which the “interpenetration between digital networks and existential physical territories” occurs (Firmino & Bruno, 2023).

To address the stated objective, the article is divided into five sections, in addition to this introduction. First, in the theoretical framework, we present the notion of modes of existence (Latour, 2019) and the dimensions proposed for the analysis of platformized social networks (Burgess & Baym, 2020). In the methodological procedures, we discuss how digital ethnography, as described by Hine (2015), was operationalized during the research.

In the discussion section, we present consequences stemming from the possibilities and constraints from LinkedIn's technological configuration and organizational practices, which illustrate implications for members and characteristics of our era, analyzed from the critical theoretical perspectives that animate this article. Finally, in the concluding remarks, we point to the main findings of the research and suggest paths for future studies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MODES OF EXISTENCE AND BIOGRAPHY OF THE PLATFORM

The study of modes of existence is a project and an update of Latour's propositions, consolidating the quest he claims to have pursued for at least a quarter of a century to explain who we are (Latour, 2019). The author revisits discussions raised in previous publications, such as *We Have Never Been Modern*, to explain what modern people do and what they care about. In contrast to his earlier work in *The Anthropology of Science*, Latour does not describe the practices, ways of speaking, or ways of doing of moderns, but rather modes of being, from a pluralistic ontological perspective (Delchambre & Marquis, 2013).

Latour defines modern people as those who have strived to deny their ties to the past and carry out a work of purification by promoting dichotomies, such as the ruptures between society and nature, and science and politics. According to the author, modern people have failed in their efforts, because when we look at society as a network, hybrids proliferate. The present is poly-temporal, bringing together different times simultaneously (Latour, 2019). We have never been modern, because the work of purification did not happen and, therefore, modern discourse does not follow practical experience (Weber, 2016).

The notion of experience, borrowed from William James, is central to Latour's proposition of modes of existence. Experiences are all events in the continuous and immediate flow of everyday life, constituting a system through which realities and knowledge are established (James, 2004). Reconnecting the thread of experience is the task undertaken by Latour (2019) to understand how beings persist in the world. To describe and qualify existences, the author employs the concepts of network and prepositions.

Networks are sets of interconnected elements that work to establish certain realities. Prepositions, on the other hand, point to different possibilities of relationship and connection between the elements that make up a network: “and, by, if, or, because, then” (Melo & Moraes, 2016, p. 28), identifying the predecessors and successors of a course of action and delimiting the movements and trajectories of existing ones. Prepositions are the language used by Latour to qualify the countless relationships that can be established with and in the world.

For Latour (2019, p. 29), “the question of modes of existence” is “a question of metaphysics, or rather, of ONTOLOGY—certainly regional, since it concerns the Moderns and their pilgrimages.” For this reason, the author shifts his attention from anthropology to philosophy, to enable language to encompass the multiplicity of beings and worlds that constitute the cosmos and compare them. Latour is not proposing a new ontology, but rather a protocol, in an experimental way, to bring to light diverse existences, beings that are defined by contrast with other existences – such as is the case with technologies (Maniglier, 2014).

The difference between Latour's proposition and those who preceded him is not the content, but the diplomatic way in which metaphysics is brought into play to “negotiate encounters and confusions of ontologies in the plural.” In short, Latourian metaphysics is “relational, actantial, procedural, and flat” (Maniglier, 2014) and encompasses the differences that make up the world in order to increase the room for maneuver in establishing negotiations between modern political values (Dias et al., 2014).

Modes of existence are distinct ways of being related to different regimes of truth. They direct and comprise our actions in the world (Latour, 2019). Modes establish beings, rather than mere representations or discourses about reality (Dias et al., 2014). Every mode of existence is a mode of coexistence because, in contrast to the essentialist view, there is no being as a being, but only a being with others, with whom we need to be in relation in order to exist (Stangl, 2016; Weber, 2016).

Through the project on modes of existence, Latour invited researchers to engage in creative redefinitions and revisions (Gilbert, 2020). Based on the canonical questions listed by Latour for identifying modes of existence, Tummons (2020) studied the validity of educational assessment in the context of higher education as a social phenomenon, focusing on training teachers to become reflective practitioners.

In addition to identifying other modes, Latour's project sparked reflections among environmental scholars about the limits and possibilities of digital formats in academic practice, as well as on establishing harmony between the voices of ecology and the environment (Lousley & Posthumus, 2016). Another reflection prompted by this reference concerned how fictional beings, present in Japanese culture and the media world, in association with technological aspects and fan devotion, strain traditional ways of being and space-time relationships, dismantling barriers between humans and non-humans (Bissonnette, 2022).

Buzato (2016, p. 496) used the reference of modes of existence as a “reflective device” for “interdisciplinary teams to become aware of the ethical implications of translating entities into different modes of existence and to discover ways to protect these ethical dimensions in the thread of experience of the ‘members.’” Tummons (2021) notes that the reference framework of modes of existence has already been used, critically, to establish discussions in the fields of legal theory, politics, post-politics, and education. In the area of organizational studies, works that use this framework are scarce, such as that developed by Júlio and Fantinel (2021) to study the relationships between humans and other beings in the production of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the perspective of modes of existence, in this article, technologies are understood as more than non-human elements, based on the multiple relationships established with those who bring them into use (Tummons, 2021) and in light of their couplings and decouplings over time (Latour, 2019). This involves considering, in addition to the creators of technologies, the design of systems, the people who interact with them on a daily basis, reconfiguring their functioning and inspiring the creation of new functionalities, and the meanings and interests circulating in the network.

The theoretical-conceptual toolkit and the metalanguage of modes of existence provide insights into how certain quasi-human and quasi-object existences are constituted on the LinkedIn digital platform. However, this framework does not define the dimensions of analysis of the technology to be investigated and, therefore, we associate it with the platform biography framework developed by Burgess and Baym (2020) for the study of platformized social networks.

By systematically analyzing structures and dynamics without losing sight of constant transformations, the platform's biography allows us to "look closely at how characteristics help us see how [a platform] is organized, in whose interests, and how these arrangements have changed over time" (Burgess & Baym, 2020, p. 110). Like a human biography, a platform biography is always partial, incomplete, and susceptible to change depending on who writes it and when. The framework allows us to both deepen our knowledge of a platform and make comparative analyses between social networks, based on functionalities and key aspects through which its history can be told, such as: changes in hardware, software, and interface; practices and experiences of members; strategies and business models; and presentations by the platform itself and by third parties in multiple media.

The intertwined elements that shape a platform and should be considered as dimensions of analysis and forces that influence each other are: business model; aspects of technology design, such as technical infrastructure (software, algorithms, and APIs), interface features, functionalities, and the ecosystem of devices and services required for the platform to work; and aspects of the culture of use, such as communicative and expressive content; practices and understanding of members; and public discourse and media representations about the platform (Burgess & Baym, 2020).

The choice of theoretical and analytical procedural references presupposes that the research methodology, in order to maintain its consistency, must also be procedurally based; for this reason, we have chosen digital ethnography to conduct the research, which is described in the following section.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Ethnography is an anthropological practice defined by populating the world with differences and singularities derived from experience. It is a study with people, not of or about people. The goal of ethnography, from a contemporary perspective, is no longer to describe in order to explain people and realities, but to engage in dialogue with the diversity and provisional nature of the world, established by different ways of living (Ingold, 2019). Compatible with Latour's proposition, ethnography refers to descriptions that do not accept prior divisions, such as the dichotomies between nature and society, and subjective and objective.

The core of ethnography as a method is the study of experience as a process, a source of situated ways of being, existing in the world, and understanding realities (Hine, 2015). Traditionally, ethnographic studies focused on face-to-face encounters, in which synchronicity was established and observations could be made in situ. In the digital environments studied, interactions occurred predominantly asynchronously, through news readings, posts, reactions, comments, and reposts. Textualities and grammars (D'Andréa, 2020) imposed by the rules of the social network in a more global way and by the agreements of members and groups in particular were analyzed.

Based on this approach, we shed light on situated practices and meanings, following connections rather than focusing on a circumscribed location, based on specific and circumstantial LinkedIn engagements in people's daily lives (Hine, 2015). Immersion in the digital field, as in classical ethnography, consists of deep familiarization with the field of research through prolonged involvement (Hine, 2015). This occurred through engagement on the LinkedIn digital platform and in a virtual community, environments in which interactions take place. The practices and meanings produced in these contexts were observed in a hidden manner (Amaral, 2010), in relation to the existing technical possibilities and constraints. Immersion allowed us to explore the members' experience from multiple aspects, as well as to reflect on and adjust the research questions and strategies.

The role of the researcher in ethnographic immersion is to live with difference, to understand its reality and point of view more clearly, in a continuous movement of approaching and distancing (Ingold, 2019). In the digital fields studied, this interaction was mediated by algorithmic agency, which selects the content to be viewed by each member, constituting different, sometimes opposing, worlds within the platforms. This characteristic underscores the researcher's situated experience in the field.

The field was intentionally sculpted during the immersion, based on the research objectives, as well as the connections, flows, and relationships followed (Hine, 2015). Based on exploratory fieldwork, we chose to access documents, reports, and posts by members who contest the circulating content, both inside and outside LinkedIn, although the thesis is not restricted to these. The choice to contest is justified by providing an alternative view to the mainstream view of the platform, which extols its features and benefits in terms of employability and personal development.

The lack of restriction to LinkedIn as a platform for research is in line with the principle of digital ethnography of abandoning the search for a circumscribed location with fixed barriers, following changes in forms of connection and unexpected aspects, such as the repercussions of events initially considered insignificant. Following connections in the different environments in which the LinkedIn experience takes place allowed us to follow the flow of the experience, its antecedents and consequences (Latour, 2019), in order to understand certain events and chains of events.

The documents for the investigation were gathered between February 2021 and April 2023. Documents, reports, interview records, and observations that pointed to characteristics, functionalities, updates and improvements, promotional content, and recommendations for using LinkedIn were selected for review. Among these documents, events that generated mobilization within and outside the platform were filtered, resulting in practical consequences for the existence of members.

The research objectives were investigated based on the triangulation of elements related to the platform's operation, its algorithms, and the experience of its members, as found in:

- a) LinkedIn's official pages and documents (User Agreement, Cookie Policy, Privacy Policy, LinkedIn Engineering Blog, Reports issued by the platform);
- b) Reports on the technological dimension of the platform and the experience of members, published in blogs, newsletters, and technology websites, such as Baguete, CanalTech, Data Hackers, DigiLabour, Garimpo, Every, HRBrew, InternetLab, User Manual, TechCrunch, TAB, and TILT from Uol; and
- c) Reports on members' experiences on the platform, obtained through seven in-depth interviews and observations of posts, interactions, and comments on the platform itself and on a Facebook group that focuses on LinkedIn content.

The materials gathered totaled 365 hours of observation, 105 documents including news reports and official pages from the platform, 97 pages of interviews, and 85 pages of field notes. The data was recorded in a field notebook, the main tool of traditional ethnography (Ingold, 2019).

The analysis included the development of classifications and excerpts, taking into account the theoretical framework, but also the theories developed by the participants themselves based on their unique experiences, algorithmically mediated by digital environments. The resulting writing describes a specific cultural group, while also constructing it (Cesarino et al., 2023). Following this line of thought, the documents and reports on LinkedIn were analyzed not only as archives or static memories, but for their potential to produce the platform, realities, members, as well as ways of being and existing in the world.

In summary, the unit of analysis for this research was the member's experience on LinkedIn as a constituent of existences and a reflection of possibilities, constraints, collaborations, potentialities, and inhibitions arising from certain dynamics of and on the platform (D'Andréa, 2020). As an exercise in reflexivity, another characteristic of the ethnographic method, it should be noted that the cultural and sociability practices presented here are emerging and specific to the situated and circumstantial configurations of LinkedIn. The methodological approach supported the analyses described in the next section.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

An analysis of the constituent dimensions of LinkedIn (Burgess & Baym, 2020), including the evolution of its functionalities over time, indicates changes in the possibilities and constraints of members based on the platform's technological configurations. The LinkedIn biography intertwines with that of the member as solutions are used, tested, or rejected, and member practices are incorporated into the platform's design. An example of the incorporation of these practices was the creation of LinkedIn's official content creator program, launched after the growing dissemination of content produced by members on the platform.

This content circulating on the LinkedIn interface characterizes the communicative and expressive dimension of the platform, that is, what and how people post, comment, and share (Burgess & Baym, 2020). In addition to constituting LinkedIn's identity as a professional and corporate platform, this type of content participates in the trajectory of establishment and meaning of LinkedIn members.

This section presents situations in which events on and originating from LinkedIn affected the livelihoods of platform members, with repercussions also outside the platform, including social implications for the ecosystem in which LinkedIn operates (Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2020). Such key moments refer to associations that produce differences in the existence of beings: from a trajectory of apparent success to failure; from denunciation to criminal investigation; from exclusion to the validation of affirmative action; and from an experiment to algorithmic restriction in access to job vacancies (Latour, 2019).

Is anything acceptable to engage the audience?

Bait is a term that originated in marketing and has been appropriated by members of social networks in general, not just LinkedIn, to refer to posts that aim to attract the audience's attention, which can be either fake news or quality content. A LinkedIn member known for this type of practice was harshly criticized on X (formerly Twitter) for posting a long text reporting that he had sent his wife to the hospital, with a photo of her on a stretcher. The post, which initially appeared to be a case of domestic violence, actually referred to the payment of a cosmetic procedure for his wife (R. Prá, personal communication, May 21, 2021).

For the same post, the member was also heavily criticized on LinkedIn, given that he is a repeat offender when it comes to behavior considered inappropriate on the network. The criticism directed at him refers to his attempt to attract attention "at any cost." The author of the post responded to this criticism by claiming that he does not care about other people's opinions and considers them inappropriate. For Selma, one of the interviewees, this member's behavior is the result of individual factors, but also collective ones: "I think he is also a reflection, he is also a product of his environment, of a society that says we have to do what we have to do to make money."

In another situation, controversial posts by a businessman made him more visible on the network, which resulted in engagement with his content and business opportunities, but also in surveillance of his actions by members who disapproved of them. Given this visibility, a post on the entrepreneur's LinkedIn page advertising a job opening at the human resources (HR) company he founded had negative repercussions outside the platform.

According to this member's account (Prado, 2022), he wrote a sarcastic post when he was looking for a business partner. Another LinkedIn member reported the post to the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office (MPF), alleging that it was slave labor. Investigations were conducted, including contacting the entrepreneur's clients. As a result, the latter reports having gone bankrupt and lost approximately R\$ 300,000.

This example can be analyzed from at least two perspectives. The first, from the entrepreneur's point of view, is about cancel culture (Prado, 2022) and hatred of entrepreneurs, prompting a complaint without understanding the context of the post. The second reveals the relationships established in the course of the experience, resulting in practical consequences (Latour, 2019): the interpretation of the publication as slave labor and the impacts on the entrepreneur's personal and professional life.

Just another fanfic writer?

The posts by another LinkedIn member were widely commented on in a Facebook group included in the observations, due to the type of content disclosed. In his first posts, the self-proclaimed HR professional requested donations in light of his unemployment and lack of financial resources to support himself. In subsequent posts, however, he recounted stories about how the recruitment and selection company he had created was helping candidates find employment and professional repositioning, especially single mothers and people over 40, and about his actions in offering food or cash loans to candidates in need.

One of his posts even resulted in a report on the UOL website—founded in 1996 as Brazil's first content portal, and today a Brazilian internet content, products, and services company owned by Grupo Folha/SP. The member published a post on LinkedIn saying that he had been eliminated from a selection process carried out at a human resources company in the Piracicaba region due to racism. After publication, UOL readers pointed out inconsistencies in his account. This led UOL (2021) to investigate and, after deleting the original report, publish another one entitled "Allegation of racism in selection process in Piracicaba (SP) was false," as the company mentioned by the member did not exist, and there had never been an establishment of this type at the address indicated – inconsistencies that the complainant was unable to explain.

Among the practical consequences of this member's actions, we can highlight the financial loss suffered by people who helped him and were allegedly "deceived" by him; the blocking of people who offered help to the professional; and the outrage and permanent uncertainty about the veracity of the published content, which made it a frequent topic of discussion in the group observed (Pra, 2022). The member in question, in turn, came under investigation following complaints about his actions on LinkedIn.

Content moderation versus affirmative action

By recommending posts on certain topics and job openings, LinkedIn participates in defining realities and opportunities that people will have access to (Bucher, 2018; O'Neil, 2016). LinkedIn's global content moderation policy has even been blamed for actions that perpetuated historical social inequalities in Brazil. On March 19, 2022, LinkedIn removed a job posting by the Center for the Analysis of Liberty and Authoritarianism (LAUT), which expressed a preference for Black (black and brown) and indigenous candidates. The reason given by the platform, based on its content moderation and job posting policy, was that showing preference for certain individuals would be a form of discrimination (Ghedin, 2022; Nexo, 2022).

In light of this incident, the MPF requested clarification from LinkedIn regarding this policy. The MPF alleged and investigated a possible violation of fundamental human rights with the exclusion of the ad, as it referred to affirmative action. As a result of the repercussions of this issue, LinkedIn reviewed and updated its global policy on job postings and selection processes, allowing the disclosure of priorities in requirements according to affirmative action criteria. In countries such as Brazil, this is not considered discrimination; on the contrary, it is encouraged to overcome historically established social inequalities (Ghedin, 2022; Nexo, 2022).

In this example, we can recognize LinkedIn's content moderation and job posting policy as acting similarly to the predictive models cited by O'Neil (2016), as they can perpetuate injustices regarding entry and permanence in jobs, access to financing, and admission to universities, among others. The removal of the ad has limited equal opportunities among actors in a specific context. However, the mobilization of members and the MPF allowed for adjustments to be made to the platform's operation and technology, with the aim of preserving social justice.

LinkedIn Experiment

We use available personal data to research social, economic, and workplace trends, such as job availability, qualifications required for those jobs, and policies that help fill gaps in various industries and geographic areas. In some cases, we work with trusted third-party companies to conduct this research under controlled conditions designed to protect your privacy. We publish and allow others to publish economic insights, presented as aggregated, non-personal data (LinkedIn, 2020).

The excerpt cited from LinkedIn's privacy policy explains how members' personal data may be used in research aimed at improving the platform experience and access to job opportunities. However, it does not specify that this research may be conducted through experiments, such as those carried out by the platform between 2015 and 2019.

During the identified period, LinkedIn conducted an A/B test, which exposed groups of members to different content, varying the experience of algorithms, design, and features to identify which ones performed best. The test was conducted with 20 million members, based on the sociological theory of weak ties, in a partnership between researchers from LinkedIn, MIT, Stanford, and Harvard (Singer, 2022).

To this end, LinkedIn randomly varied the suggestion of contacts with whom members had weak (distant) and strong (close) ties, using the “People you may know” algorithm, which automatically recommends new connections based on data such as professional history and an assessment of the likelihood of sending and accepting new invitations on the network. The objective of the study was to verify which type of connection increased the possibility of obtaining better professional opportunities, in order to improve the algorithm itself and make job offers to members more equitable. The results of the research confirmed the theory of weak ties, demonstrating that people exposed to suggestions of more distant contacts doubled their access to work (Singer, 2022).

Although the intended outcome was to improve job offers for members, we can infer that during the research period, LinkedIn affected members' access to professional opportunities worldwide for a significant period of time, favoring some and disadvantaging others.

The events and reports presented throughout these subsections demonstrate that coexistence (Rabelo & Souza, 2021) on LinkedIn and the connections arising from this professional network have the potential to provide diverse experiences to members. LinkedIn, as a technical entity that exists independently of its creator, takes on uses other than those for which it was created (Latour, 2019), acquiring different meanings in the trajectory of its users, and can be both a source of income, business contacts, and knowledge, as well as a site of investigations and mental illness. It is possible to identify negative experiences, such as bankruptcy, fraud, and data leaks; and positive ones, such as changes in perspective on work and meeting demands that were not properly addressed through conventional channels. LinkedIn, as a platform organization, configures the existence of its members through its technology and functionalities, programmed based on the values and biases of its developers and its business model, which seeks to serve its various stakeholders (Bucher, 2018; O'Neil, 2016). This configuration does not occur in isolation, but in conjunction with the surrounding digital ecosystem and other mediators, such as member practices, content, social networks where discussions about LinkedIn take place, public discourse, media representations, and socio-historical-cultural intersections.

In summary, the findings in the field show that there are different ways of existing with and on LinkedIn, which are not limited to those presented so far and are related to the socio-historical-cultural context in a broader way. The course of action of members is established based on their experience of using the platform, as well as on reading content about what and how to produce, interact, and monetize on LinkedIn. Communicative and expressive content (Burgess & Baym, 2020) participates in the trajectory of these professionals and other LinkedIn members as they circulate within and outside this environment, constituting the platform's identity.

Other implications

The practical consequences arising from the relationship between members and the platform, reveal the implications of digital technologies and the organizational processes of platform companies, such as LinkedIn, for their members. Implications for members can also arise from data leaks, which raise concerns about the use of this data, as well as attempts at fraud. It is estimated that in June 2021, the data of 700 million LinkedIn members, equivalent to 93% of the total number of people on the platform, was leaked (Gabriel, 2021).

An experiment by a LinkedIn member demonstrates the consequences of fraud. He created a fake profile on the platform and claimed on Twitter (now X) that, within 24 hours, he was contacted by an investor interested in contributing to his fund (Prá, 2023). Creating fake profiles on LinkedIn can have other practical consequences, as reported in an article about UK residents who were manipulated by such profiles into providing confidential information about the companies they worked for (Corera, 2021).

In addition to negative consequences, content shared on the network can result in job offers and partnerships. For example, one member created and posted a spreadsheet on Twitter to evaluate the conditions of company bathrooms, which went viral, receiving numerous shares and likes. Due to the repercussions, the member added a call to action to this spreadsheet for their LinkedIn profile. As a result, they received several connection requests and a sponsor, “Metrea, a São Paulo company specializing in high-end bathrooms” (Renner, 2022).

Matheus Rangel, in his interview, reported that he started creating content on LinkedIn when he was unemployed. This practice resulted in job offers and allowed him to establish global connections, increasing his visibility:

The platform brought me two things that are very important [...] it strengthened my personal brand [...] it made me a reference in what people were looking for and, as a result, increased my visibility. And now I can give lectures [...] I live in the countryside of Rio. Where I live is so far away, so far away that when you breathe in dust, when you spit, a brick comes out. It's really rural. But the internet has no borders [...]. So today I've given lectures to people in Japan [...]. A group of people who worked at Toyota in Japan got together because they wanted to know a little more about the oil and gas industry [...] and they wanted to understand a little about China, Japan, Korea, how this chain works. I explained it to them in a very simple way, so they could understand what the sector is, but without getting too technical. I've given lectures at universities. This year, I went to UFRJ. Last week, I was at the Federal University of Espírito Santo and the Federal University of Santa Catarina. I've given lectures to people at UFPEL in Pelotas. [...] **From here in my city, I've been able to reach several places through LinkedIn.** Recently, I had to start a company to meet some demands as an influencer in this area, where I closed one of the biggest contracts of my life with a giant oil and gas company [...]. Until then, I had never thought about starting a company, and the contract was so big that I couldn't do that without [...] having something [...] structured. And that's where I got it, but LinkedIn was the tool that... that I use today to bring, yes, that scalability to my career, right? (Excerpt from interview, emphasis added).

Like Matheus, interviewee Marília acknowledges that her LinkedIn posts played an important role in her career, leading her to leave her salaried position to become self-employed and start her own business.

LinkedIn was an essential network for my career, because it was through it that I had the courage to resign from my job to really start freelancing and then become an entrepreneur, etc. Because the more content I produced, the more people identified with it [...] and I started getting proposals like, "Oh, I like what you write, let's talk about you writing for my brand." That's how it works. That's why I say that passive prospecting is very important. Because, whether you like it or not, you're not doing anything, in quotes, you know? You're not selling yourself. You're just writing. But what's going to sell you is your writing, your ideas, the way you think. So, it's always been like that for me. I think 90, 95% of my clients came through LinkedIn and, like, through people seeing me and not because I went after them. So, it's very important, you know? Especially for those who want a more flexible, more independent work model. In my case, for example, I'm from the interior of São Paulo. So, before the pandemic, it was unimaginable to think that I could work for an agency in São Paulo itself—which is, you know, the most important hub for communication—or in Rio de Janeiro. Today, I can work for literally any company anywhere.

LinkedIn can also be a platform for reporting issues and resolving problems. A transgender person, who is a LinkedIn Top Voice, reported a case of transphobia by an airline. They encountered difficulties changing their name on the company's registry, even though the change had been made 20 years ago. After posting this story on LinkedIn, she received messages of support and her post was shared by several other members. As a result, the airline changed her name in its records, and the company's CEO sent her an apology. In this case, LinkedIn was the "bridge" through which the request was fulfilled. The member even thanked the platform for the "unity" and "connections" (Prá, 2022).

The events and reports presented throughout this section demonstrate that, with LinkedIn, the content and connections arising from this professional network have the potential to provide diverse experiences for members. Furthermore, they problematize "the separation (and consequently the vertical and hierarchical relationships) between human beings (subject/mind) and other modes of existence (object/matter) at opposite poles, with a focus on relationships mediated by organizational processes" (Júlio & Fantinel, 2021, p. 446).

These experiences show that members' relationship with the platform is not just a matter of control and manipulation. The values that lead people to join it extend LinkedIn's use beyond a platform for advertising job openings, candidates, companies, and improving productivity, turning it into a network for solidarity, awareness, criticism, reporting, expanding

the reach of social agendas, and, consequently, promoting mental health. In this way, it is possible to create “other socio-technical practices and imaginaries” (Firmino & Bruno, 2023), not only in relation to digital technologies, but also to how and why we work.

Experiences that point to the benefits that can be obtained through the platform, in terms of employability and business opportunities, reinforce the importance of learning how to use LinkedIn correctly. To this end, members engage in deciphering the enigma (Stengers & Latour, 2015) of the platform's functionalities and codes of conduct—through use, courses, reading, participation in groups and training, observation of the behavior of other members and influencers, and hiring the services of experts in the use of the platform. Those who fail to decipher the puzzle are devoured: blocked, made invisible, investigated, prosecuted, and/or condemned to remain in oblivion and out of the job market.

The flow of relationships presented in this section, based on the framework of the platform's biography and modes of existence, reveals elements that, together and interrelated, constitute the complex intertwining of LinkedIn and its members. These elements demonstrate the multiple dimensions that make up LinkedIn as a technology and platform organization, creating conditions of possibility and impossibility for the constitution of different existences and meanings.

Contemporary consequences of LinkedIn organizational practices and implications for organizational studies

Research on digital platforms, within the scope of organizational studies, focuses especially on algorithmic management and the precariousness of labor relations resulting from the instability of established ties; lack of access to social rights; transformation of workers into digital cartographies; changes in the performativity of managerial control; and the impossibility of direct dialogue with managers (Newlands, 2020). Few studies are dedicated to understanding these platforms as organizations and the implications of their business models (Alaimo & Kallinikos, 2020). Poell et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of studying platforms as processes, suggesting the use of the term “platformization”. For the authors, studies on platforms have significantly explored the infrastructural and institutional dimensions of the phenomenon and need to expand investigations into how the practices and imaginaries of members are transformed by platforms — and, reciprocally, how members transform platforms, in a socio-technical configuration.

Along the same lines, Bailey and Barley (2020) reflect that management has devoted considerable effort to studying technologies in a situated manner in order to understand their incorporation into different organizational spaces, beyond their properties and uses as intended by developers. For the authors, future studies should be conducted by interdisciplinary teams that consider everything from the design to the social implications of these smart technologies in institutions such as family and marriage.

Despite LinkedIn's prominence in employment and recruitment studies, there are still gaps in understanding algorithmic hiring biases, long-term career outcomes, and norms about evolution in the workplace. For Khorshidi et al. (2025), there is a clear need for new research directions that address the role of LinkedIn's evolution in AI-driven recruitment, ethical issues in algorithmic hiring, and the platform's influence on individuals' career trajectories and lives. At the same time, the growing use of machine learning in profile rankings, skill assessment, and professional recommendations raises critical questions about bias mitigation, fairness, and transparency.

This study was guided by the advice and suggestions of the authors mentioned above, and some preliminary conclusions suggest that existence on and with LinkedIn is influenced by the dimensions that constitute it as a company and technology, which have practical consequences for the configuration of members' experiences. LinkedIn functions as an indispensable point of passage for the existence of its members: being or not being on the platform becomes a choice about whether or not to exist in that space. Similarly, its functionalities, as well as the content that circulates on it and spreads from it to other environments, configure and constitute worlds, which manifest themselves both in the maintenance of already consolidated paths and in the formation of new trajectories in the relationships established with work.

The administration area has been researching digital technologies, such as LinkedIn, without establishing deeper issues about the platform-organization itself, its business model, and its role as a mediating technology and constituent of realities for members. This research adds to studies developed by Administration and other prominent areas in digital media research, such as communication, which emphasize LinkedIn as a tool of neoliberalism and entrepreneurship, but without restricting themselves to these aspects, which would reduce the debate (Couldry & Hepp, 2018). The same would happen if the discussion emphasized exclusively the role of the platform as a strategic and functional tool for work and increased productivity.

Authors who are favorable to digital technologies, the optimists or apologetic ones, advocate the positive transformations resulting from technological advancements and their potential to promote social cohesion, drive innovation, and generate new knowledge (Fuchs & Chandler, 2019; Segata, 2016). Mainstream organizational and management studies, aligned with corporate practices, tend to emphasize these positive aspects and the benefits related to digitalization processes, such as: generating efficiency in work and its organization, creating new products and services, and the ability to reach and influence people. Little attention is paid to the unexpected and negative implications of digitalization for organizations, their processes, workers, and the impacts of their actions on the ecosystem and community in which they operate (Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2020).

On the other hand, pessimistic or apocalyptic theorists, as well as writers of dystopias, warn about the use of technologies as a form of social control, in addition to being a source of alienation and dehumanization (Fuchs & Chandler, 2019; Segata, 2016). Extreme positions regarding digital technologies are polarized between technophilia – together with technosolutionism – and technophobia (Pavloski, 2014), leaving out important discussions such as: whose interests technologies and their logics serve, what their purposes are, and who benefits from them.

The critical potential of the Latourian positioning as an alternative path to these ontologies is not in challenging them, but in presenting redescrptions of ourselves in the light of otherness (Maniglier, 2014). While concepts such as surveillance capitalism, platform, and networked society limit contextual characterizations, modes of existence expand analytical potential by encompassing diverse elements in the networks that seek to explain the present and future of organizations and life in society. The Latourian proposition highlights that technologies are more than just artifacts and instruments (Latour, 2019). The sociomaterial configuration of practices enacts organizational realities, reconfiguring workers, organizations, societies, and technologies themselves (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008).

In the field of organizational studies, there is no unified theoretical framework regarding platforms as a specific form of organization. They can be understood either as platform organizations, a particular type of formal organization dependent on the technological infrastructure of its digital platform, or through the organizing of the platform, its processes acting in the ordering of the social environment around it, both inside and outside formal organizations: technology development and provision; market regulation; network integration; and the orchestration of the emerging meta-organization (Rachlitz, 2023). This study presents how LinkedIn fits both definitions, pointing to the complexity of its constitution, beyond its definition as a technology of surveillance capitalism.

The biography of LinkedIn, including its business model, shows that digital platforms represent a special type of organization by merging with their technology. Its business processes and data practices are aimed at generating value for its stakeholders, ensuring the sustainability of the technology, as well as constantly articulating, maintaining, and increasing its number of members—who are dispersed across time and space. The separation between the platform organization and its environment is blurred, as the social order is reconfigured through its data practices. Members are not understood as workers, nor exclusively as customers in this relationship (Alaimo & Kallinikos, 2020).

LinkedIn as a platform-organization, considering its potential in the ordering of the social, cannot be reduced to its functionalities, its business model, its reports, and its rankings. Likewise, it cannot be reduced to its infrastructural and institutional aspects (Poell et al., 2020). Throughout the study, we looked at the different dimensions that permeate members' experiences on and with the platform and at the reciprocity of the human-technology-platform organization relationship in sociotechnical configurations. These relationships constituted particular forms of existence, highlighting implications for its ecosystem of insertion (Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2020), as members decipher (or do not) the enigma of how LinkedIn works.

The key moments in the formation of existences also raise debates about the ethical issues involved in the tests conducted by the platform and the role of algorithms in determining the content that members will see. These are topics that intertwine with career and life trajectories, addressing important issues identified as lacking empirical investigations (Khorshidi et al., 2025), which can be questioned and mitigated in their pervasive effects on individuals.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article mapped the practical consequences experienced by members during the use of the LinkedIn platform, based on the content circulating within and outside of it. It illustrates, through a critical reflection on organizational thinking and doing with digital entanglements, and beyond the labels attributed at the time: the meanings, organizational practices, and those of the members – characteristics of the contemporary period. It is worth noting that the framework used and practical experience reinforce that these meanings are not universal, but are in the everyday practices of LinkedIn members.

The complex entanglement of technology and members and its practical consequences were investigated through the combination of procedural and promising frameworks, which have been little explored in the field of organizational studies, namely: the modes of existence proposed by Latour (2019); and the platform biography framework for studying the constitutive dimensions of platformized social networks, proposed by Burgess and Baym (2020). We describe and qualify forms of existence – from an infrastructural perspective, but also from the standpoint of people – and the implications of organizational practices in the ecosystem in which LinkedIn operates.

By looking at different dimensions that permeate the experience of members on and with the platform, constituting particular forms of existence, this work presents some contributions to the academic literature. For organizational studies, the research advances the discussion about the unexpected and negative implications, beyond the benefits, of digitalization processes in organizations in relation to the ecosystem in which they are inserted (Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study did not explore the platform solely as digital technology, but as an organization constituted inseparably from its technology (Alaimo & Kallinikos, 2020), which points to particularities in its business model and its existence.

For internet studies, the research aimed to contribute by studying the digital platform LinkedIn as a process (Poell et al., 2020) and as a mediator in the constitution of realities and existences. To this end, infrastructural and institutional dimensions were explored, as is commonly investigated in platform studies, but it was also discussed how members' practices and imaginaries are transformed by LinkedIn—and, reciprocally, how members transform LinkedIn in a sociotechnical configuration. Thus, it contributed by working jointly with practices, imaginaries, and infrastructural aspects, broadening the analytical perspective. In this way, the research was not limited to aspects such as neoliberalism (Couldry & Hepp, 2018) and self-entrepreneurship, which could have narrowed the debate.

For the theoretical-conceptual toolkit of the modes of existence (Latour, 2019), the research sought to contribute by placing technology at the center of the discussion on the ontological turn (Hui, 2020) and embracing its empirical vocation (Fragoso, 2018). In this way, it added theoretical and empirical elements to discuss the role of technical objects in shaping everyday life and to explore the multimodal interweaving of the modes. Although other researchers such as Lemos and Pastor (2020) have explored the interweaving between the referential and digital phenomena, LinkedIn has, so far, not been studied in depth. Furthermore, the research explored the entanglement of modes of existence, pointing to multimodal possibilities and surpassing the two-by-two crossing, which would limit description (Gilbert, 2020).

The study also provided academic visibility for the role of LinkedIn in the lives and careers of its members, through mechanisms such as content selection and exposure. Additionally, it offered insights for further studies on the use of automated decisions by algorithms and artificial intelligence on the platform and related ethical issues, critical aspects identified as requiring theoretical and empirical deepening, according to (Khorshidi et al., 2025).

In summary, the potential theoretical contribution lies in the study of a digital platform that has been little explored compared to other social networks, analyzed across multiple dimensions (from the business model and technical infrastructure to the experiences, imaginaries, and practices of its members). For the field of management, the contribution focused on the practical consequences of platformization, distributed and imagined surveillance, and algorithmic performativity, characteristics of organizations like the platform-organization LinkedIn, in the existence of member-workers. As practical contributions, the materials used to construct the research—whether academic publications, journalistic pieces, or interview content—provide insights into the broader functioning of the platform and its algorithms, and offer guidance on work and employment.

LinkedIn is an environment for building personal, professional, and business brands; for sharing corporate experiences that can be experienced passively, actively, strategically, and in many other ways, depending on the connection established with the member. It is also a platform for studying and producing content. As content is published on and through the platform and circulates, due to the action of algorithms combined with human interaction—such as reacting, commenting, sharing, and taking screenshots—it resonates, reiterates, and/or redefines the corporate experiences of other workers, shaping opinions, worldviews, and ways of being and existing in the world.

Based on the discussions and limitations of the research, we suggest that future studies address questions that the academic literature has not explored in depth regarding LinkedIn, as well as those arising from the research experience, such as: a) what is the mediating role played by the platform in the practices of other organizations?; b) how do cultures of overwork, productivity, and toxic positivity, which are highlighted in the content circulating on LinkedIn, shape contemporary organizations?; and c) what is the role of influencers who discuss work relationships on LinkedIn in the dynamics of contemporary organizations?

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Claudia Simone Antonello: Conceptualization (Equal); Data curation (Supporting); Formal analysis (Supporting); Investigation (Supporting); Methodology (Supporting); Project administration (Supporting); Validation (Equal); Visualização; Writing – original draft (Supporting); Writing – review & editing (Equal).

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data set that supports the results of this study is not publicly available.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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