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REVIEW

Transformations of youth life in the digital age: work, knowledge and subaltern identities

Transformaciones de la vida juvenil en la era digital: trabajo, saber e identidades subalternas

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the study examined the influence of digital technologies on the configuration of subjectivity and youth identities in Cuba. It started from the concept of "technologically encoded sociality" to analyze how digital capitalism transformed the perception of success and autonomy in youth. It addressed the relationship between the labor market, access to information, and the processes of domination/emancipation of subaltern identities.
Development: the analysis included three main areas: the impact of digitization on youth employment, the circulation of knowledge and the transformation of subordinate identities. It became clear that young people faced job insecurity, despite the growth of digital opportunities. In terms of access to information, interaction on social networks and digital platforms changed the way young people consumed and generated knowledge, promoting new learning dynamics. The study also highlighted that self-help and entrepreneurship content influenced the perception of success, prioritizing economic growth and self-sufficiency over emotional stability.
Conclusion: it was concluded that digital technologies reconfigured youth identity in Cuba, establishing new dynamics in the workplace, socially and affectively. However, it was noted that digitization did not operate neutrally, but was permeated by market logic, affecting the aspirations and behaviors of young people.

Keywords: Digital Technologies; Subjectivity; Subaltern Identities; Labor Market; Youth.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el estudio examinó la influencia de las tecnologías digitales en la configuración de la subjetividad y las identidades juveniles en Cuba. Partió del concepto de "socialidad tecnológicamente codificada" para analizar cómo el capitalismo digital transformó la percepción del éxito y la autonomía en la juventud. Se abordó la relación entre el mercado laboral, el acceso a la información y los procesos de dominación/emancipación de identidades subalternas.
Desarrollo: el análisis incluyó tres ejes principales: el impacto de la digitalización en el empleo juvenil, la circulación del conocimiento y la transformación de identidades subalternas. Se evidenció que los jóvenes enfrentaron una precarización laboral, a pesar del crecimiento de oportunidades digitales. En cuanto al acceso a la información, la interacción en redes sociales y plataformas digitales modificó la forma en que los jóvenes consumieron y generaron conocimiento, promoviendo nuevas dinámicas de aprendizaje. Asimismo, el estudio resaltó que el contenido de autoayuda y emprendedurismo influyó en la percepción del éxito, priorizando el crecimiento económico y la autosuficiencia sobre la estabilidad emocional.
Conclusión: se concluyó que las tecnologías digitales reconfiguraron la identidad juvenil en Cuba, estableciendo nuevas dinámicas en el ámbito laboral, social y afectivo. Sin embargo, se advirtió que la digitalización no operó de manera neutral, sino que estuvo atravesada por la lógica del mercado, afectando las aspiraciones y comportamientos de los jóvenes.

Palabras clave: Tecnologías Digitales; Subjetividad; Identidades Subalternas; Mercado Laboral; Juventud.

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INTRODUCTION

The dispute over subjectivity is being reconfigured in the current context, marked by an attention economy, surveillance capitalism, and other phenomena. In its previous phases, capital needed to install in subjects a mode of appropriation of reality that would allow it to exploit natural resources better and the labor force, and even to establish limits that would situate each class in a well-determined space-time (status), now - through normalized attention (Touza, 2020) disguised under the sensation of privacy and independence - it constructs us from one sociality to another: technologically codified sociality. (Van Dijck, 2016)

It is here that the idea becomes clear that, for capital today, beyond the domination of territories or things, it is interested in dominating and colonizing human beings by orienting their conduct and behavior, an exercise that transcends the frameworks of virtual space-time and increasingly has repercussions on what we have been calling territoriality, space or physical reality and which Barbosa (2022) calls offline society.

At the heart of this dispute over subjectivity — a sociocultural dispute that calls for the understanding of the economic, the political, the historical, the biological, etc., as a cultural product — is affectivity and desire (Turkle, 2019); the latter seen not only as sexual desire but as the desire to transcend what includes certain conceptions of success, the mechanisms, and resources to achieve it.

Although this is not a new approach per se, returning to the subject in the current circumstances in which digitalization has profoundly transformed the labor market for young people, demanding new skills and modifying professional trajectories based on an Opening in technology-driven sectors, where young people are increasingly inclined to jobs that prioritize digital literacy and skills techniques, which to a large extent have been reconfiguring the identities of young people in general and those whose class, race, territorial identity, and gender place them in a situation of subordination in particular, constitutes a necessity insofar as it poses numerous challenges in terms of emancipation and depatriarchalization, especially in our context of most significant incidence.

1. A mode of attention that can be standardized, postulated as a norm that should govern behavior, linked to verification circuits that establish how much effort a particular attention has made concerning a standard of attention that serves as a measure. (Touza, 2020, p. 210)
2. "Technologically encoded sociality turns people's activities into formal, manageable and manipulable phenomena, allowing platforms to direct the sociality of users' daily routines" (van Dijck, 2016, p. 30)

DEVELOPMENT

Cuba

There are many studies worldwide on the relationship between digital technologies, subjectivity, the circulation of knowledge, the labor market, and subaltern identities today. However, when searching for Cuban authors and research, we could only find materials referring to the uses of ICTs by different sectors of the population and their influence on various aspects of the lives of adolescents and young people. Most of these studies come from disciplines such as sociology, psychology or communication sciences, pedagogy, and computer science, but not so much from the philosophical sciences. Thus, issues related to how the individual projects of our youth are articulated with the socialist social project, the transformations that this articulation has undergone as a result of the adoption of digital technologies, as well as the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic dynamics that these promote, have been at a disadvantage about studies carried out by other sciences. For this reason, this work aims: to analyze the transformations caused by the impact of digital technologies on the lives of Cuban youth today.

This paper explores how the current scientific-technological revolution, marked by the generalization and acceleration of digital technologies, is reconfiguring youth's lifestyles and processes of subjectivization. It results from the exploratory study carried out by the project "Subjectivities in dispute. Incidences of digital technologies in the production of subjectivities in contemporary Cuban society." The starting point for realizing the objective was three fundamental axes: transformations in the world of work, changes in the modes of circulation of knowledge and information, and impact on the domination/emancipation of subaltern identities.

The first line of inquiry examines how digital platforms and automation are redefining job opportunities and working conditions for young people. This involves addressing the growing precariousness of work, the gig economy, and the disjuncture between traditional academic training and the skills required by a digital market.

The second analytical axis examines how digital technologies are changing the ways in which young people access, produce, and share knowledge. Here, we consider the impact of social networks, e-learning platforms, and digital media on the construction of knowledge and its implications for critical thinking and opinion formation.

Finally, it presents how digitalization affects subaltern identities in their dynamics of domination/emancipation. This axis examines both the forms of domination and exclusion perpetuated through digital technologies and the new opportunities for emancipation, visibility, and collective organization that these technologies offer.

As part of an ongoing investigation, the study the study constitutes an approach to the transformations above. However, it allows for an approach, a necessary "trial and error" on how the use of digital technologies, the consumption of certain products, and the relationships established in the process have generated transformations in Cuban youth that range from changes in the priorities of young people in terms of the work context, diversification in access, production and sharing of knowledge, to the configuration of identities marked by a dual understanding of reality (virtual and physical) that conditions the previous axes depending on the level of awareness with which interactivity occurs.

Work

The digital age has profoundly transformed the job market for young people around the world. It demands new skills, changes

career paths, and alters the rules of the game in the capital-labor relationship.

Young people entering the labor market today are expected to possess digital skills that were previously optional. This shift has created opportunities in technology-driven sectors, where young people are increasingly inclined towards jobs that prioritize digital literacy and technical skills, a process accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Studies show that higher education and training significantly increase the likelihood of young people entering digital sectors, with programs such as the Pre-Employment Program (Prakerja) further boosting these transitions (Sinaga, 2023). However, this change is not without its challenges. Young people still face problems of underemployment and overqualification, with many unable to align their skills with market demands, creating a mismatch between labor supply and demand. Despite being "digital natives," today's young people must navigate an evolving labor market that often does not meet their expectations, requiring changes in management practices to bridge generational gaps (Mitan, 2014). Continuous skills development and lifelong learning are essential as technology advances, and critical thinking and problem-solving have become key competencies for securing employment in this new landscape (Mukherjee, 2023).

Digitalization also allows young people to overcome geographical barriers and access remote or hybrid jobs, broadening the job opportunities. It also reduces the opportunity gap between urban and rural youth by facilitating equal access to information, training, and employment, promoting the competitiveness of all youth sectors youth sectors in the digital labor market (Zinich et al., 2022).

On the other hand, it fosters the development of soft skills such as decision-making and self-management, which are essential in a constantly changing work environment. The digital skills most in demand in the youth labor market include competencies such as data and information literacy, digital content creation, and problem-solving. These skills are directly linked to the perceived employability of young people, who, by acquiring them, improve their job prospects in today's digital environment. In addition, transversal skills such as communication, collaboration, and digital security are also valued, especially when they are developed through quality educational programs that reinforce these competencies (Kee et al., 2023). Moreover, as we said, critical skills such as critical thinking, self-regulation, and continuous learning are becoming increasingly important in the digital economy as they enable young people to adapt to the changing demands of the labor market (Mukherjee, 2023). The digital transformation also highlights the need for supra-professional skills, which enable young people to position themselves in emerging professions better and manage the expectations of automation and artificial intelligence (Zinich et al., 2023).

In the digital age, the sectors with the highest job growth for young people include digital marketing, information and communications technology (ICT), and digital content creation. These sectors stand out due to the growing demand for digital skills, which are becoming essential for accessing well-paid and sustainable jobs. Initiatives such as the "Double You Digital Skills Initiative" in Nigeria show that digital marketing is one of the skills most in demand by young people, given its crucial role in the digital labor market (Tunji-Olayeni et al., 2021). Likewise, ICTs are a powerful tool for addressing youth unemployment problems, especially in developing countries, where training in these areas can generate new job opportunities (Yigitcanlar & Baum, 2008). In Africa, it has been pointed out that improving productivity in modern manufacturing companies, supported by ICTs, is key to the growth of youth employment (Filmer et al., 2014).

However, it does not have all the advantages, opportunities, and progress. Digital natives face several challenges in the workplace despite their familiarity with technology. One of the main challenges is the generation gap between young employees and older managers, who often have different working styles and expectations. This disconnect can lead to difficulties in communication and in adapting to the organizational culture, as digital natives tend to prefer more flexible and collaborative environments. At the same time, older generations may be more inclined towards traditional hierarchical structures. Furthermore, although digital natives are experts in the use of technology, they may lack soft skills such as conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, and time management, which are crucial in a work environment. They also face the challenge of balancing their high level of digital connectivity with maintaining concentration and productivity at work. These challenges can be compounded by employers underestimating their skills, leading to a lack of opportunities to demonstrate their potential in strategic or leadership roles.

Digitalization has also intensified the precariousness of youth employment by profoundly modifying the structure of the labor market, affecting both the modalities for jobs and the skills required. In particular, the expansion of the digital economy has fostered temporary hiring and the platform economy, reducing job stability and increasing dependence on informal or short-term jobs for young people (Tarasyev et al., 2022). The pandemic accelerated these changes, shifting many people into remote or digital platform-based jobs, which, while offering flexibility, increase instability and reduce job security. Furthermore, the speed with which these technologies are developing is outstripping the capacity of education systems, resulting in a skills gap and making it difficult for young people to find skilled jobs. Digitization, therefore, transforms employment opportunities and contributes to the growing precariousness of a generation facing increasing competition and less labor protection (Manokhina et al., 2022).

The forms of manifestation of Work 3.0 in Cuba are contextualized in private transportation, the delivery of food prepared by private restaurants and cafes to homes, the arts, in services, and others; these use APKs on the digital platform with the names Mandao, Mercazona, Comprando en Cuba, Lucy, D'Taxi, Alamesa, ToDus, E-firma, Viajando, Sandunga, Sijú, Trabajar en Cuba, Cubaempleo, Ya va, Excelencia, among others. They are used by accessing the WhatsApp and Telegram social networks (Diaz Campo et al., 2022).

The trends observed in ICT-mediated work in Cuba, when interviewing workers and former workers of businesses such as Mandao, Alameda or printing sites, or programmers hired by foreign companies, is that, in the first place, young technicians and professionals are overrepresented in these work environments and facing these opportunities. This coincides with the picture in the literature of an advantage of generations of digital natives over labor market requirements oriented to digital skills.

However, contrary to what has been observed about job insecurity outside of Cuba, in the Cuban context, digitalization offers

young people opportunities to access highly paid jobs inin the national and international private market. These jobs, although they share the insecurity of the platform and 3.0 economy already mentioned, or the informality that has characterized the private labor market in Cuba (Miradas a la economía Cubana, 2021, p. 173), this is "compensated" for, according to the interviewees themselves, by the high economic remuneration, which contrasts with the environment of labor guarantees of the state economy in which remuneration is relatively low. According to the interviewees, this makes private digital work much more attractive. Therefore, the political economy of digital labor in Cuba is a unique phenomenon that cannot be interpreted in the same way as how this phenomenon has developed in the globalized world and its consequences there.

Another element that influences this preference, and which the interviewees pointed out, is the (perception of) autonomy and free work that is experienced in many forms of cognitive digital employment, such as programmers and community managers, as opposed to the disciplines of a traditional workspace, with more guarantees but more supervision. This has already been described (Caffentzis, 2013) and coincides with the experience of platform and digital work worldwide.

Knowledge

Ideas circulate without their context. By extending Bourdieu's idea ("texts circulate without their context"), it would be worth approaching the nature of that condition. The capacity for circulation and the impact of a group of them is determined by the different structures and power relations that permeate their production. Ideas that are imported through multiple and varied formats do not necessarily "travel" with the context in which they were produced. It is impossible for them not to, a situation that is most often omitted during the long struggle that ends up hierarchizing habits. It happens that the "recipient" is always located in a different "production field" of ideas and has to reinterpret what he receives according to the references that give (and have given) meaning to his process of self-realization, which moves between private and public spaces. A key element in this reflection, then, is "references," a group of ideas that condition appropriation and are, in part, generators of "new ideas". However, it is possible that they do not escape the same mode of construction either, with the difference, perhaps, that the modes of selection (what ideas circulate, how they do so, through what means, who they will influence, how they would configure the social space) remain in a national normative context.

How do ideas circulate in Cuba? What changes did the emergence of digital technologies such as web platforms or devices such as smartphones bring about in this circulation? The first thing to note is that, at least in this proposal, the circulation of ideas is not restricted to the intellectual and/or academic sphere. This makes the social exchange of knowledge and learning beyond these boundaries more relevant. For this reason, we use a notion such as that of subjectivity (Guattari & Rolnik, 2006), which, despite what is reproduced, its processes of agency are not determined by individuality but by the register of the social, all the methods of social production shape, at least in theory, different types of subjectivity. In theory, the aforementioned irruption of digital technologies leaves the multiple nature of these types of subjectivity Open to reflection.

At the risk of reproducing a diagram, we present some details about the family and education (with their different levels) as nuclei in which ideas circulate. We do not deny that there are other spaces in which ideas circulate. We locate these because they are the ones in which digital technologies have the most significant direct and indirect impact in terms of transformations. The transformations that occur in other spaces in which ideas circulate affect, through the typical drag effect, family and education as the articulating axes of social dynamics. In both, these impacts are likely to have a greater resonance. This approach is based on the idea that our society is a modern project, and this means that in the long process of forming the nation-state, nation-state, a type of culture oriented towards comfort and well-being was established. In its different expressions and nuances, this ideal is affirmed in the standardization of a vision of society in which, at the individual level, the satisfaction of expectations (success) depends on the possession of material goods for consumption. At the collective level, work is done to generate progress through economic and scientific-technical development.

Transformations in the family sphere are directly related to the different ways of producing life. This means that they go through the process of (self) constitution of the "subject," an essentially historical process. Suppose the modern-industrial era needed a specific type of subject, a citizen who could behave in a way that respected the superiority of certain universal notions over their aspirations. From an architectural point of view, walls represent that historical moment well. They represent limits, the foundations that distinguish one space from another, even in an interior area. A house, for example, or any building with stairs and apartments, is delimited by walls that express discipline and restrictions. What makes the dynamics of an apartment functional is that daily activities are carried out at times that correspond to specific spaces in the interior layout (kitchen, bathroom, entrance, dining room). There is a delimitation that marks a space-time relationship. A synchronicity that exalts the clock as a perfect machine, efficiency in behavior.

With their irruption, digital technologies began to mold bodies without the need to reproduce a correlate anchored to a "common good" (concepts, values, identities). The issue is not, however, that there is an abandonment of these universal notions. Given the flexibility imposed by the contemporary context, these instances (family, work, etc.) have become customizable individual options, no longer established by an "a priori" or sure certainty shared by a community. Contemporary places (spaces) must allow for the rapid circulation of individuals (and goods), a device for increasing individual efficiency. Hence. Hence, space tends to be reduced to a purely geometric question and not one of movement orientation, of rhythm. They are constructed with transparent or reflective surfaces to create the effect of the "free deployment" of information.

As for direct interaction with digital technologies, changes such as dissociating language learning from bodily affective experience are possible (Berardi, 2016). When the relationship between signifier and signified is developed through a digital device, language development is dissociated from the emotional effect produced through physical contact. The question is not whether we are dealing

with a positive or negative result, but rather that the depth of language and communication, understood in terms of nuances and possibilities and not as an abstract entelechy, is reduced to an algorithmic operation. "Words then cease to acquire an affective meaning" (Berardi, 2016, p. 39). The effects of a process like this are usually evidenced in the loss of the ability to understand non-verbal language; signs that cannot be reduced to words are left out of the perception of a human being dependent on the operational instructions they receive from a device. Their participation in the exchange of meanings is precarious and fragmented. Psychic continuity is weakened and tends to disappear.

In 2009, during a debate on the impact of the Internet on Cuban culture, Desiderio Navarro pointed out that the Internet had burst onto the scene in the country with a significant time lag. Its use began to spread from a peripheral condition without having gone through the experience of living its development or having had the literacy that would allow for the critical assimilation of that process. In 2017-2021, according to data from the National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI), the growth of cell phone subscribers was 35 % and 21 % for internet users (ONEI, 2022). In 2018, there were 6 546 000 total users with Internet service; of these, 1 618 400 used mobile phones. At the end of 2021, the figures were 7 517 400 users with Internet service, and of these, 4 343 700 were connected via mobile phones. The data can be updated taken from other sources, and generally will show a similar trend. What is the impact of this consumption on institutional education in the country? Although this impact is usually approached from the possibilities offered by digital technologies through specific examples, a research interest that goes beyond the boundaries of solutionism should address how the structural configuration of education (as a system) has benefited. How many study programs have been modified, and how many disciplines have been introduced to change learning dynamics? The impact can be evaluated by determining the legitimacy of educational institutions as the nucleus for the circulation of ideas through which subjects are self-constituted. The data provided by ONEI on the different levels of education about enrolments, number of schools, and teachers could be cross-referenced with data on cultural consumption and population characteristics to get a closer view. The new media are better suited to forms of circulation of ideas that are fluid, brief, fragmentary, packaged, and reworked for the captive attention of multitasking and the dissemination of devices.

Digital technologies, subjectivity, and subaltern identities

Before beginning the analysis of the transformations generated by digital technologies' impact on the lives of young Cubans today, it is necessary to address certain concepts that guide our research: social totality, Digital Technologies, subjectivity, and subaltern identities.

To understand the interrelationship between digital technologies, subjectivity, and subaltern identities, it is essential to recognize that they all function in the same global context: social totality. This totality, as a philosophical concept, can be defined as:

"the void is the potential for something to be effectively filled in each singularity because in its effective moment, totality always needs to be filled; only in this way does it become concrete, that is to say, that it necessarily goes through each constituent element, the process of experience and its results, and the content that is all that is manifested, but only through the historical becoming apprehended and understood." (Chaverri, 2014, p.72)

By using this concept in analyzing digital technologies and their impact on the transformation of subjectivities, we aim to break with the logic that "confuses" them with social networks while deconstructing the apparent division between virtual and physical reality. In this way, digital technologies can be understood as the knowledge, mechanisms, tools, and processes created to solve humanity's problems and mediate social relations. This also leads to the understanding of a single subject that interacts with these technologies, which is relevant to this study because, by blurring the boundaries between the virtual and the physical, the possibility emerges of glimpsing the consequences of the behavior of these subjects in their life projects and in the social project in which they are inserted in one way or another.

As part of the social whole, the production of subjectivity takes place, understood in the same sense as Guattari and Rolnik:

Everything that is produced by capitalist subjectivation—everything that comes to us through language, the family and the equipment that surrounds us—is not just a question of ideas or significations using signifying statements. Nor can it be reduced to models of identity or identifications with maternal and paternal poles. It is about systems of direct connection between the tremendous productive machines, the tremendous social control machines, and the psychic instances that define the way of perceiving the world. (2015, p. 41)

Amid these processes of subjectivization, now conditioned by digital technologies and new forms of domination imposed by capitalism, subordinate identities are configured and reconfigured, corresponding to marginalized or subordinate social groups within a society. In this case, we focus only on young people. We assume them to be subaltern identities insofar as they constitute that set of subjects subordinated, in the first place, by the age group to which they belong and then by a sum of intersections: class, gender, geographical location, etc.

Despite the late access of our youth to digital technologies, these have now become tools for their daily practices. As in other parts of the world, digitalization has been reshaping not only the consumption of this age group but also their own identities. To carry out this thematic axis, interviews were conducted with 50 young people from Havana between the ages of 20 and 35. Of these, 25 were women, and 25 were men from different social strata, of varying skin colors, and heterosexuals.

The interview focused on the following aspects:

- Most used virtual platforms
- Online/offline sex/affective behavior
- Impact of self-help and entrepreneurship content on everyday life

- Notion of success

The study showed that not only Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook are frequently used by young people but also dating apps such as Lovely and Badoo. 60 % of the young people interviewed use one or both platforms not only to find a partner but also for casual sex, which may or may not result in physical intercourse.

When asked about online sex/affective behavior, it was found that only 20 % of those interviewed prefer to use their natural photos and are looking for a stable relationship. The rest stated that both their posts on Instagram and their interactions on dating apps and WhatsApp are for 1) casual sex with no commitment, 2) finding people who can satisfy their material needs, and 3) entertainment. 100 % regularly consume self-help and entrepreneurship content (reels, posters, videos) that have been useful for them to raise their self-esteem, focus their goals towards a notion of success linked to being their boss and achieving economic progress, and develop skills to enhance emotional detachment in sexual/affective relationships on and off the platforms.

It is worth noting that, despite the diversity in terms of age, skin color, gender, and profession, there are no significant differences in the responses given, except in some cases of black and mestizo men and women who still show habits such as smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol. The rest show a trend that links the notion of success with an almost excessive care for the body and health in a general sense, which is related to permanent control.

As for the impact of the use of digital technologies on the transformation of the identity of young Cubans, at least three major trends can be seen:

1. High consumption of self-help and entrepreneurship content that shapes a notion of success linked to control, economic growth, and emotional detachment.
2. Sex/affective behavior in which managerial skills are increasingly used to obtain benefits from other people, with a tendency to present narcissistic traits.
3. Low level of awareness about the consequences of actions carried out through the use of digital technologies in the daily life of subjects.

This study's still superficial approach suggests that technological mediation does not operate in a pure way in the Cuban context, as it does not in any other, but is inevitably crossed by the economic rationality of the market, which orients and signifies it.

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None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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