CALL FOR PAPERS: SPECIAL ISSUE OF *ORGANIZATION*

Online Identities: the struggle for the digital self in and around organizations

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This Special Issue aims to spark discussion on the impact of new technologies on the online 'management of the self' in and around organizations. Digital technologies and social media are ubiquitous in the contemporary organizational landscape creating new challenges to how people and organizations create, regulate and resist identities in this "brave new world". At least since Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), scholars of many social disciplines have been interested in the impact of virtual and social technologies on individual identities.

"Digital technologies" is a growing topic of interest also in organization studies (Leonardi and Vaast, 2017), and to critical researchers in particular (Knights et al., 2007; see the upcoming special issue of *Organization* on "dark digitalization" to appear in 2021). Researchers have gone beyond initial praise for the emancipatory potential of virtual tools to examine actual practices of politics (Upchurch and Grassman, 2016; Husted and Plesner, 2017), resistance (Ossewaarde and Reijers, 2017; Kostakis, 2018; Munro, 2016), and emancipation (Martinez Dy et al., 2018) prompted by the online world.

However, the scholarly conversation on how online technologies create and regulate identities and how individuals and collectives resist them is only starting. The rich tradition of critical identity studies (Alvesson et al., 2008; Brown, 2015, 2020) which focuses on the micro-politics of identity (Watson, 2008; Zanoni et al., 2017), identity resistance (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Barry et al., 2006), regulation (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004; McDonald et al., 2008), and precarity (Collinson, 2003; Thomas and Linstead, 2002; Coupland and Spedale, 2020) – based on the works of Foucault, Butler and Lacan, among others – has still not explored the role of new online spaces in these processes (Barros, 2018). As yet, our field lacks a thorough exploration of the key role of corporations in managing online identities and of the ways individuals and collectives may create alternative virtual selves in and around organizations.

Scholars interested in online technologies have long examined identity issues. Initially, Haraway (1991) and Turkle (1995) argued that hybridization between humans and machines would enable individuals to engage in disembodiment (Slater, 2002) and decontextualization (Boyd, 2010) processes that open-up space for identity play (Turkle, 1999). In this performance, individuals now unbounded by place and body will be able to explore alternative identities. Digital affordances, such as interactivity, anonymity, visibility, persistence (Leonardi and Vaast, 2017), and more recently multimodality (Stöckl, 2004), will, it is argued, allow for new experiences of the self (Plant, 1995). The easier access to and creation of emerging online

communities may also help develop collective identities that support individuals' self-expression (Fox and Ralston, 2016) and facilitate special interest groups' political mobilization (Wall, 2007; Ackland and O'Neil, 2011) as in the case of Black Lives Matter and MeToo movements.

The initial emphasis on identity 'freedom' offered by the internet has, over time, made place for a greater focus on identity regulation (Poletti and Rak, 2014). This shift has been driven by the growing colonization of the online space by corporations and platforms exploring the economic benefits of the commercialization of user data. In these novel 'circuits of communicative capitalism' (Dean, 2009), online political subjects 'slacktivism' is commodified and monetized. New identity tools, designs, and underlying algorithms (Cover, 2014) reinforce the value of the data profiles collected and sold by organizations, which depend on authenticity' of self-representation (Haimson and Hoffmann, 2016). In this new world, public institutions and organizations also often exploit this wealth of available data to surveil, evaluate and control the online identities of employees and other stakeholders (Martínez-Béjar and Brändle, 2018). Digital cultures, heralded as spaces of belonging and self-expression, have been used and appropriated by corporations, extending their control to private spheres (Reed, 2018). And, despite the original neutral discourse of 'play', these increasingly corporatized online arenas may still resort to the 'default subject position' to the exclusion of gendered and racialized expressions, which are frequently reduced to stereotypical images (Sundén and Sveningsson, 2012; Wajcman, 2010). Relatedly, different contexts and regions constrain in different ways how digital technologies can be deployed by individuals to perform online identities (Miller et al., 2016).

This call for papers is an invitation for a critical appraisal of the impact of the evolution of the virtual environment on identity processes. The contemporary relevance of the virtual space for understanding identity construction and the struggles surrounding it has become ever more evident in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, which has triggered the sudden exponential rise in the use of remote technologies that blur the boundaries between life spheres across the globe.

Topics could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- What are the critical identity processes (identity construction, regulation, resistance, etc.) that virtual environments enable in and around organizations?
- How does the interaction of online and offline identities influence organization power dynamics?
- What are the new forms of identity regulation and control that organizations attempt to perform online? What are the roles of digital cultures in these processes?
- How do online self-management technologies influence the creation of the neoliberal subject? How do users re-appropriate them for resistance or emancipation purposes?
- How do virtual platforms influence (online) identity construction? How do their interface design, user policies, and underlying algorithms influence online self-expression? How do individuals use them for identity learning, construction, and change?
- What is the role of technology in the construction of collective and individual political subjects? How do they help to produce alternative political identities?

- What are the roles of the identity tools available on the virtual space? How do companies use those tools to regulate employees' subjectivity inside and outside of the workplace? How, in turn, do individuals subvert self-technologies and find spaces of self-expression and emancipation?
- How do virtual identities impact work/life balance and boundaries, particularly with the intensification of online presence in extreme contexts, such as the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic?
- How do users and companies exploit virtual affordances such as anonymity, visibility, interactivity, etc. to further their own identity construction and control projects?
- What is the role of affect and (virtual) embodiment in online identity processes?
- How does the growing online multimodality affect self-representation and identity regulation possibilities? How could media and communication studies contribute to the exploration of digitally mediated subjectivities in and around organizations?
- What new theoretical frameworks could help us understand the current virtual identity dynamics in the era of 'circuits of communicative capitalism'?
- How do alternative organizations create and exploit online collective identities?
- How do companies reproduce online gendered and racialized performances? How do actors use technology to deconstruct and change these practices?
- How are digital and online identities performed differently in different contexts worldwide?
- How can we use post-colonial views of identities to discuss online and digital identities performances and enactments?

We invite contributions that analyze how this new context brings novel opportunities, challenges, and problems for individuals and organizations in terms of the dynamics of identity regulation, control and resistance. Our goal is to encourage cross-fertilization between the fields of online and identity studies, from a critical perspective, in order to understand better the power implications of virtual environments.

Submission

Papers may be submitted electronically from 1 April 2021 until the deadline date of 1 May 2021 (final deadline) to SAGETrack at:

http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/organization

Papers should be no more than 10,000 words, excluding references, and will be blind reviewed following the journal's standard review process. Manuscripts should be prepared according to the guidelines published in Organization and on the journal's website:

http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200981/manuscriptSubmission.

For further questions about the special issue please use the guest editors' contact email:

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