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Antagonisms in the discourse on user experience design in platform companies

Antagonismos no discurso sobre o design *da experiência do usuário em empresas plataforma*

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the complex role of design in the development of digital interfaces within platform companies, considering the influences of late capitalism and discourses associated with UX Design practices. Through interviews with 18 designers working in platform companies, we identified two predominant attitudes in professional practice: the Idealistic Attitude, focused on user well-being, and the Pragmatic Attitude, aligned with the capitalist system. The discussion emphasizes the various contradictions between the pro-user discourse and practices that aim to meet the commercial needs of companies. We observed the impacts of design from two perspectives: the discourse of positive impact on users' lives and validation through commercial results. There is also a notable tension between the proclaimed purposes of designers and the reality of gains for users, revealing the concept of "purpose" as a rhetorical strategy for companies to manage both their reputation and the work of their contractors. Finally, attention is drawn to the intrinsic incoherence in the practice of design within platform companies, and questions are raised about the position of design as an agent of social transformation in the face of the dualities of objectives it attempts to address.

Keywords: User experience design. Professional practice. Platform companies. Digital platform.

RESUMO

Este artigo investiga a complexa atuação do design *no desenvolvimento de interfaces digitais dentro de empresas plataformas, considerando as influências do capitalismo tardio e dos discursos associados à prática do* UX Design*. A partir de entrevistas em profundidade com 18* designers *profissionais que atuam em empresas plataformas, identificou-se como resultados duas atitudes predominantes na prática profissional: a Atitude Idealista, focada no bem-estar dos usuários, e a Atitude Pragmática, alinhada ao sistema capitalista. A discussão enfatiza as várias contradições entre o discurso pró-usuário e as práticas que visam atender às necessidades comerciais das empresas. Observaram-se os impactos do* design *sob duas perspectivas: o discurso do impacto positivo na vida dos usuários e a validação pelos resultados comerciais. Destaca-se também uma tensão existente entre os propósitos proclamados pelos* designers *e a realidade dos ganhos para os usuários, revelando a ideia de "propósito" como uma estratégia retórica das empresas para gerenciar tanto sua reputação quanto o trabalho de seus contratados. Por fim, aponta-se para a incoerência intrínseca à prática do* design *nas empresas plataformas, e questiona-se a posição do* design *como agente de transformação social diante das dualidades de objetivos aos quais tenta responder.*

Palavras-chave: Design *de experiência do usuário. Prática profissional. Empresas plataformas. Plataformas digitais.*

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INTRODUCTION

Based on the assumption that design is the product of a dialectical relationship with its environment — producing discourses and materializing culture in the form of artifacts while simultaneously shaping its imagination through interactions and exchanges — this article aimed to investigate and discuss the perspectives of professional designers within the context of creating digital interfaces for platform companies.

As a starting point, it was observed that, in this context, design is influenced by two main factors: the mode of production associated with late capitalism employed by platform companies, which is reflected not only in the mechanization of production but also in the circulation of goods facilitated by the introduction of electronic devices (Mendel, 1979 *apud* Valente, 2019), specifically within the Brazilian territory; and the ethical discourses associated with the professional practice of design, particularly those related to User Experience Design (UX Design). The first influence pertains to a dynamic and intense work logic characterized by principles of innovation and technological efficiency, while the second is based on humanist ideas that stress the importance of professional practice being dedicated to social and human well-being.

The result of these influences creates two distinct attitudes within professional practice that overlap in a conflicting manner, leading to a dissonant and even incoherent scenario.

The productive logic of platform companies

Platform companies are private organizations that develop, manage, and operate digital platforms, providing services and products through physical and digital interfaces. They utilize advanced technologies such as algorithms and artificial intelligence to structure their activities. These companies are increasingly integrated into people's lives; for instance, Uber and Airbnb are often cited as pioneers in this sector (Srnicek, 2017). Their primary operating logic relies on digital infrastructures, offering transportation and accommodation services without owning a single vehicle or property included in their services. Srnicek (2017), analyzing the economic emergence of platform companies, identifies three significant historical moments that contributed to the rise of these types of businesses:

- The decline in profits of American companies in the 1970s led organizations, which relied on Taylorist management methods, to seek process optimization and cost reduction through actions such as mass layoffs in non-essential business sectors and worker outsourcing;
- The emergence of "dot-com" companies in the 1990s encouraged the development and popularization of internet-related technologies, establishing a foundational infrastructure for an economy based on digital technologies;
- The 2008 financial crisis created an economic environment conducive to financial accumulation and risky investments, influenced by government responses

at the time. This climate made it acceptable to invest in organizations developing emerging digital technologies that were not yet consolidated.

Data extraction, analysis, and management are considered the key business differentiators of such ventures (Srnicek, 2017). Today, it is understood that the computing power of platforms is transformed into a profitable economic tool through algorithms that utilize data for their operations (Kenney; Zysman, 2016). As Zuboff (2020) explains, all collected data is used in two main ways: first, the data is used to improve the platform itself, enhancing its interfaces with the ultimate goal of gaining user loyalty. Second, artificial intelligence is applied to extract behavioral predictions, which are used to influence user behavior. These services and the associated data are sold and shared with other organizations that benefit from such predictions, constituting the largest source of revenue and profit for platform companies (Zuboff, 2020).

Therefore, the actions performed by users[1] within the interfaces of digital platforms become a strategic concern in the platforms' operational chain. The interface design is meticulously crafted to influence customer acquisition and retention. Consequently, users spend more time on the platforms, generating more data. This data is then used for mass behavioral predictions, which, once sold, can be appropriated by a multitude of other businesses for their own purposes. This creates a cyclical and feedback-driven model.

Within this context, design is recognized by the market as the discipline responsible for developing interface projects that yield more profitable results for companies. This is supported by the global consultancy McKinsey in its investigation into the relationship between investment in design and financial returns (Sheppard *et al*., 2018). Thus, in this reality, human online behaviors — the "user experience" — are transformed into commodities for large corporations (Zuboff, 2020).

From the perspective of countries in the global south, the services provided by platform companies reveal two facets. On one hand, the middle classes now have access to certain privileges previously restricted to the very wealthy, such as private drivers[2]. This new service alleviates public transportation issues for a segment of the population and can be seen as a strategy to fill the gaps left by state and political institutions (Basukie; Wang; Li, 2020), though it does not actually resolve or change underlying problems. On the other hand, there is a growing number of unemployed workers who survive through underemployment, masked by the emancipatory notion of empowerment or entrepreneurship, referred to as the "digital neo lumpenproletariat" (Beiguelman, 2020, p. 6). While our primary focus is on how this logic affects the Brazilian scenario, it is

1 Such actions are referred to by the author as "user experience." (Zuboff, 2020, p. 87).

2 Here we are specifically referring to the example of Uber. Despite being compared to taxi services today, the company originally emerged with the idea of providing a private driver service, not a taxi service. This can be identified both by the platform's name itself — "*über*," which means "superior" in German — and by the company's initial slogan — "everyone's private driver." (Slee, 2019).

acknowledged that the social impacts of platform companies are not confined to countries in the global south.

In this way, the discussion proposed by the German philosopher Haug (1997), although anchored in a different historical context, remains relevant:

> In a capitalist environment, design assumes a role that can be compared to the function of the Red Cross during wartime. It tends to some — of the less severe — wounds caused by capitalism. It addresses appearances, beautifying certain aspects and boosting morale, thereby prolonging capitalism much like the Red Cross prolonged war. Design thus maintains the overall organization through a particular configuration (Haug, 1997, p. 194).

The imaginary of UX Design

The scope of work defined for the practice known as UX Design can be characterized as: "UX Designers strive to create products that are user-friendly, minimizing friction and enabling users to accomplish tasks efficiently, with minimal distractions and obstacles" (Teixeira, 2014, p. 4).

However, the definition provided by Teixeira (2014) aligns closely with what researchers in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) characterize as usability: "usability is generally regarded as ensuring that interactive products are easy to learn, effective to use, and enjoyable from the user's perspective" (Sharp, Preece; Rogers, 2019, p. 14). Thus, we can observe that the UX Design approach diverges from other existing approaches, particularly within the fields of Information Sciences and Computer Sciences (True *et al*., 2017; Kou; Gray, 2018; Dedema; Zhang, 2019; Lasmar *et al*., 2019; Showkat; Choudhury, 2019).

The term "User Experience" (UX) originated from the practice of observing people interacting with advanced technology machines to ensure more efficient projects for them (Karlin, 1957); however, in the 1950s, UX was not yet formally treated as a project focus. In 1986, Brenda Laurel conceptualized "User Experience" for the first time, aiming to define a type of design thinking for computational artifacts. Laurel argued that the design of computer interfaces should consider not only machine aspects but also human factors. This idea was not entirely novel in design; many theories, tools, and techniques used in UX Design are documented and discussed under terms like "User-Centered Design" (UCD) or related concepts such as "Human-Centered Design" (HCD) or "People-Centered Design" (PCD) (Dantas, 2005). Even as early as 1949, Will Burtin stated that "man is both measure and measurer [...] He is an integral part of everything we can imagine and do. It is the most important part of a design" (Burtin, 1949, p. 101). However, Laurel is credited with popularizing the idea (later championed by Donald Norman)[3] that

3 In 1993, psychologist and researcher Donald Norman named his team at Apple the "User Experience Architect's Office" (Norman, 2015) to demonstrate that the group's actions would not be limited to just computer screens (Norman, 1996). His work gained such prominence that today many consider him the "father of UX Design."

human experience should be a central consideration in Computing projects, especially those involving human-computer interfaces (whether physical, digital, or service-oriented).

Laurel (1986) begins her text by contextualizing that, even in that decade, computers were utilized for a wide range of activities, both recreational and functional. She suggests that in order to accommodate all these possibilities, interfaces should possess suitable characteristics to facilitate such actions. Therefore, according to the author, interface design should prioritize proposing an ideal user experience tailored to specific contexts of activities.

To achieve this, the author articulates a central point in her proposal: the principle of mimicry. Laurel suggests that computers merely simulate the real world, akin to a theatrical play. This analogy underscores the divide between the digital world created by computers and the physical world that actually exists. Despite subsequent discussions on interfaces by scholars (Bonsiepe, 1997; Manovich, 2003), it is noteworthy how this notion of two distinct worlds continues to underpin contemporary debates about the internet, computer usage, and consequently, UX Design.

As Morozov (2018) points out, discussions about the internet often treat it as an entity separate from existing social and geopolitical structures. This perspective suggests that technological projects operate at an indisputable and purely technical level, disconnected from political, economic, and social life. This viewpoint is not exclusive to UX Design but is part of a broader ideology regarding technology. Álvaro Vieira Pinto (2005) argues that the concept of the "technological age" is used to attribute positive value to the present times, supporting a moralistic narrative that current technologies and the present era are superior to all past ones. This narrative implies that progress is an inevitable and natural movement, achieved through a cumulative process culminating in the present. However, Pinto contends that this rhetoric conceals relationships of domination and dependence, separating the ideas of technological development from the broader context of economic, political, and social production.

Thus, the original proposal of UX Design, where the real world serves as an ideal for interface designers to achieve, leads to the issue that computational interfaces, by mimicking existing structures, also reproduce existing social inequalities and problems. Consequently, the notion that an ideal user experience would simply replicate real-world experiences fosters uncritical thinking about interface design, suggesting that merely reproducing what already exists is sufficient and ideal.

This original idea of proposing "Ideal Experience" projects not only persists today but has also evolved. Currently, many designers declare that they aim to produce not only ideal experiences but happy ones (Costa, 2023). According to Hassenzahl (2013), one of the most cited authors in the field, UX Design is concerned with ensuring that users of all types of artifacts have positive experiences, with minimal friction and free from "pain." This aligns with what the South Korean philosopher Byung-Chul

Han (2021) describes: a trait of our contemporary world, which is addicted to pleasure and seeks to transform painful experiences into pleasant situations at any cost.

In a similar vein, another significant trait associated with the UX Design ethos is the idea of "user advocacy." Monteiro (2020) — a Portuguese designer who works as a consultant for Silicon Valley technology companies — argues in his code of ethics for designers that these professionals should act as "gatekeepers" (Monteiro, 2020, p. 30). Citing the ideas of Papanek (2017), Monteiro (2020) articulates that designers have both the responsibility and the ability to prevent projects with negative impacts on people from advancing and materializing in the world.

In line with this idea, various theories articulate how design plays a key role in building a better world (Papanek, 2017; Manzini, 2023; Norman, 2023). However, these theories often overlook that in "capitalist societies, the main objective of producing artifacts, a process of which design is a part, is to make a profit for the manufacturer" (Forty, 2007, p. 13). This suggests that the issue may not be limited to practices associated with UX Design.

We therefore observe that the ideology of UX Design is closely linked to a professional practice that tries to play both a heroic and shortsighted role. While aiming to alleviate people's pain and create a better world, the theoretical framework that defines UX Design makes it difficult to consider people as complex human beings and parts of social, economic, and political entities. Instead, it reduces them to the role of users of a device or customers of a service.

METHOD

The results presented are based on interviews[4] with professional designers employed by platform companies. The following topics were covered in these interviews:

1. User approaches;
2. Perception of the impact of design work;
3. Day-to-day activities and team organization;
4. Characteristics of the company where you work or have worked.

In the initial interviews, topics about training in UX Design and Strategic Design emerged spontaneously. These were then incorporated into subsequent interviews.

Interviews were conducted with 20 designers between July 2021 and January 2022. Two of these were discarded as the interviewees did not meet our selection criteria. We selected Brazilian designers who worked in companies managing digital platforms, with operations established in the Brazilian national territory and of significant relevance and popularity in the country.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then analyzed using the affinity diagram method (Holtzblatt; Beyer, 2017). This method involves breaking

4 The dataset used for this article and its resulting findings are an extension of the author's Master's thesis.

down the interviews into small excerpts that each reflect a single idea. These excerpts are then coded and simplified to fit and be readable on a single sticky note. Using an inductive method, the simplified excerpts are placed side by side and grouped by similarity, forming conceptual categories. Each group consists of a minimum of four and a maximum of six notes. The notes were color-coded to represent each interviewee, allowing us to observe how much each conceptual group reflected ideas that were more or less consolidated among the designers. This process was repeated for each level of conceptual categories, ultimately producing a taxonomic tree for each group of interviewees that summarizes the ideas derived from the interviews.

To ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, their names were replaced by codes, such as "Interviewee 1" or "Interviewee 2." The companies where the interviewed designers worked were also not named. However, it can be stated that the companies selected for this research, in addition to fitting the concept of platform companies, operated in activities such as logistics, urban private transport, food and beverage delivery, real estate services, and online commerce.

RESULTS

From the context presented and the interviews with UX Design practitioners, we observed a scenario of design practices within platform companies that allowed us to outline two main attitudes of professional performance. The first, referred to as the "Idealistic Attitude," is based on a propositional discourse that believes design activity is directly related to improving the well-being of users and consumers of digital products from platform companies. The second form of action, termed the "Pragmatic Attitude," adapts to the demands of the capitalist system of which it is part and bases the value and practice of design on business needs and results.

Charts 1 and 2 summarize the behaviors observed in each category of professional activity and provide quotes from the interviewees' statements that exemplify each of the behaviors characteristic of such attitudes.

Chart 1. Idealistic Attitude.

Conducts	Examples of Narratives
Being the voice and representation of users in platform company projects	"And I think the role of design is to bring these people to the discussion table because they won't be there." (Interviewee 9)
Validation of design work recognized through user stories	"We track [our impact] through stories [...] stories of people we sometimes talk to who say, 'Oh, [company name] changed my life!'." (Interviewee 4)
Belief in the positive impact on people's well-being as a result of the project	"Working with product design is about building bridges so that people can have their needs or pain points resolved with as little friction as possible." (Interviewee 18)
Ultimate goal is to benefit the user	"We look at all these social perspectives before making a decision, [...] maybe that's the big difference we've been practicing, this more human connection." (Interviewee 3)

Chart 2. Pragmatic Attitude.

Conducts	Examples of Narratives
Possibilities for user interaction guided by company needs	"In general, talking to the user will depend a lot on the time I have to complete the task, the depth of information I need, and how much I'm willing to risk." (Interviewee 14)
Validation of design work recognized through business metrics	"In terms of business metrics, specifically, there's a lot of tracking. So there's always tracking, sometimes even weekly, reports on things that are live." (Interviewee 12)
Creating good experiences as a strategy for acquiring and maintaining the customer base	"Having an experience much more suited to their [user's] needs, much more suited to their context. [...] In the end, it's about creating value for everyone. Not just for the end user, but for the company as well, because you'll have a product much more suited to your user. And then you'll have that converted into both conversion metrics and NPS, retention and everything, right?" (Interviewee 1)
Ultimate goal is to benefit the company	"The ultimate goal isn't necessarily to improve people's lives. The ultimate goal is to achieve economic growth for these platforms by solving problems." (Interviewee 13)

It is important to note, however, that these categories do not determine how groups of people act professionally as designers. Instead, they help to understand how the practice of design, as a discipline, is established within platform companies. Additionally, it is interesting to observe how these behaviors coexist and generate a sense of dissonance regarding the discourses and narratives associated with UX Design. For instance, in the following excerpt, the professional reveals both an idealistic and a pragmatic attitude within the same sentence: "*There are products that make (sic) this whole journey more friendly, reduce people's anxiety, right(sic)? The potential of design is to make people's lives easier and support the growth of companies*" (Interviewee 5).

In the speech, both an idealistic concern to "make people's lives easier" and a pragmatic attitude to "support the growth of companies" are evident, responding to the needs of platform companies. These concerns can indeed be seen as correlated: "*In the end, it's about creating value for everyone. Not just for the end user, but for the company too, because you'll have a product that's much better suited to your user. And this will translate into conversion metrics, NPS, retention, and everything else, right?*" (Interviewee 1).

In essence, as the statement suggests, designing for "good experiences" could directly correlate with commercial gains.

DISCUSSION

Design as representation

The idea of being a representative for users is a prevalent ideal in UX Design literature and is strongly reflected in the designers' statements. This conduct is nearly unanimous among these professionals. This approach to professional practice aligns with the design theory proposed by Kaizer (2022), who views design

as a political activity involving discussion and negotiation about the future of a common good.

According to the theory proposed by Kaizer (2022), the designer's role is seen as a dramatic dispute, where each agent plays a character in a defined scenario. In the context of platform companies, this theory suggests that designers, considering the imaginary of UX Design, act as "user advocates" within a delimited, "scenic" environment. This environment is exemplified in this research as platform companies that develop and manage the interfaces of digital products and services.

However, while the discourse on UX Design emphasizes "user advocacy," business parameters are established to define how and if interaction with the users will occur. User research is conducted with the aim of ensuring success or minimizing potential errors and risks associated with the launch of new products or services.

While interactions with users play an essential role in shaping design work by providing deeper insights into user expectations and challenges and enabling designers to make better-informed decisions about user behaviors, it is not the users' "pains" and needs that solely guide the decision to engage in such interactions. The decision to approach users is influenced by essential company factors such as the time allocated for the project, available budget, and risks involved in launching a product or service (*e.g.*, financial losses, brand positioning, and other risks).

Furthermore, when user design approaches are employed during the product development process, they are typically limited to user research, also known as experience research (UX Research). Such research often treats users merely as data sources and may not significantly influence the creative process. This contrasts with co-design[5] approaches, where users have the opportunity to propose design solutions.

Therefore, user research is used as an instrument to reduce the risks involved in launching new products, services, or functionalities, that is, essentially serving as a commercial tool. These practices and concerns are not new and are directly aligned with the operational models of large industries that employ cutting-edge technologies, such as platform companies. As American economist Galbraith (1977) describes, it is characteristic of production processes utilizing advanced technologies to have longer cycles, encompassing everything from product conception to delivery to the buyer. In other words, the creation of the product occurs far in advance of its availability to the consumer market. This production logic leads to escalating uncertainty about whether the desires and needs identified during the design phase will remain relevant by the time the product is sold. Galbraith (1977) points out that consumer research has long aimed — almost 50 years ago — to reduce this

5 Co-design can be broadly defined as a creative practice where designers and individuals without specific design training work together in a design process (Sanders; Stappers, 2008).

uncertainty: "Much can be known about the future conduct of the consumer market through research and market evidence. (Research into what the consumer wants and will want merges into research into how they can best be convinced)" (Galbraith, 1977, p. 25)

Furthermore, within the labor division employed by platform companies, designers are not always the ones who have direct access to the people being researched. It is not uncommon for user research to be conducted by specialized research teams or external consultancies. Consequently, the designers responsible for creating interfaces for digital platforms often have only indirect contact with users, relying solely on the research results conducted by third parties. In other words, end users of a product are viewed merely as a source of data, which may or may not be considered during the project's development, while designers work without real involvement with the users.

Thus, the practice of UX Design is observed to be aligned with Gonzatto and Amstel's (2022) argument about the procedures and theories in the field of "HCI," of which UX Design is a part. According to the authors, these procedures tend to characterize users solely as minds interacting with computers, neglecting their concrete and human aspects, such as their corporeality. In the pronounced practice of UX Design on digital platforms, there is an even greater abstraction of the concept of users. Individuals who interact with digital platforms are reduced to behavioral data collected from the platform itself, as Zuboff (2020) explains, or reduced to research data.

Therefore, the quality of user representation provided by designers occurs in a conflicting manner. Even though designers claim to care about the well-being of the people they design for, the work process results in indirect and superficial contact between designers and users. This approach encourages the mischaracterization of users as human beings, reducing them to mere numbers.

Impacts and validation of design work

Within the context of platform companies, the impacts of design can be classified in two ways. On the one hand, there is the discourse that the discipline of UX Design is responsible for ensuring that companies' final products generate benefits for their users. On the other hand, the value of design is seen in its ability to improve companies' financial returns.

In the first case, designers tend to take pride in their work for its positive impact on the lives of their users, especially those who could be categorized as "platform workers." Here, we observe both aspirational discourse promoting entrepreneurship and a pragmatic understanding of how digital platforms effectively ensure earnings and income stability for these workers. In both scenarios, designers often see this concern as a mission for themselves and their companies, also referred to as "purposes."

It is interesting to note how these impacts are often confirmed through customer stories from platform companies. Some groups of designers follow these stories in a non-systematic manner through spontaneous posts on social networks, user interviews, or company marketing efforts. It is curious to observe how designers collect and share these stories with affection, using them as examples to illustrate the value of their own work, whether it is stories from drivers, sellers, or other customers of platform companies.

However, acknowledging the operational logic of platform companies, which inherently prioritize fulfilling the business's desires and needs (Grabher; Tuijl, 2020; Valente, 2020), it is evident that the gains achieved within this framework of operations are not equitable. Numerous studies investigating work on digital platforms (MacDonald; Giazitzoglu, 2019; Wu *et al*., 2019; Dutra; Sepúlveda, 2020; Abílio; Amorim; Grohmann, 2021) underscore this reality.

Thus, we have identified that the notion of the positive impact of design is also leveraged for purposes that are primarily beneficial to the companies themselves. What designers perceive as the positive outcomes of their work often serve as rhetorical strategies to manage the reputation of platform companies (Costa, 2023), strategies to which designers themselves are subjected. The alignment of designers' work with company "purposes" can be interpreted as a managerial tactic aimed at motivating those who design and develop digital platforms. This practice can be viewed as a sophisticated application of Taylor's scientific management (Braverman, 1978), adapted for a field-like design, which traditionally distances itself from its material relations of production and consumption and emphasizes a narrative of autonomy and historical continuity "independent of the social circumstances in which they were produced" (Forty, 2007, p. 14).

On the other hand, in the second perspective observed regarding the impacts of design work, we see how the field is validated based on the commercial outcomes it can deliver to the company. Design's impact is measured by its contribution to acquiring customers, boosting sales, and reducing costs through process optimization. These outcomes are tracked using metrics such as return on investment, customer acquisition costs, production efficiency, among other corporate metrics that are constant concerns for design professionals.

Thus, it is evident that there is a significant emphasis on solving business challenges. This approach not only ensures the relevance of design within the corporation but also elevates its standing in the corporate hierarchy. This heightened relevance is recognized as designers become increasingly involved in strategic decision-making about the company's future, a practice often referred to as "Strategic Design."

In summary, within the context of platform companies, design appears to pursue two distinct objectives: serving the companies' pursuit of continual and substantial profits, and addressing the problems, desires, and needs of users.

Despite occasionally aligning social benefit with profit, design seems to play a reconciliatory role that is fraught with challenges. While it aims to address social welfare and political issues in its discourse and production, it often acts in ways that contradict these stated goals.

CONCLUSION

This article explores the complexity of design within the context of producing digital interfaces for platform companies, emphasizing the contrasting influences of late capitalism's mode of production and UX Design discourses. The findings underscore two predominant attitudes among professional designers: the Idealist Attitude, focused on enhancing users' well-being, and the Pragmatic Attitude, which aligns with the imperatives of the capitalist system.

In the discussion on design as representation, the research underscored the dichotomy between pro-user discourse and the practical realities within platform companies. Factors such as reducing users to behavioral data and designers' indirect involvement in user approaches were identified as compromising the authentic and humanized representation of users.

The impacts of design were also analyzed from two perspectives: the discourse of positive impact on the lives of users, particularly platform workers, and the validation of design through commercial results. When contrasting these perspectives, a disconnect emerges between the proclaimed purposes by designers and the actual benefits for users. Ultimately, what designers label as "purpose" often functions as image-building strategies for platform companies, which also extend into management strategies aimed at the designers themselves.

Finally, we highlight the inherent incoherence in the practice of design, particularly evident in professional roles within platform companies. Here, the pursuit of profit and commercial outcomes frequently intersects with stated social and political aspirations. We acknowledge that this dual objective, balancing corporate demands with addressing user needs, creates a discordant landscape not unique to UX Design. However, this field is notably susceptible to superficial and rhetorical discourses around empowerment and entrepreneurship. This prompts us to question the effectiveness of UX Design as a catalyst for genuine social transformation.

Finally, it is crucial to reconsider the practice and discourse of design, aiming for a more integrated approach that reconciles the divergent elements present in its execution. In pursuit of alternatives to the exploitative logic of certain digital platforms, ideas like platform cooperatives, as articulated by Trebor Scholz (2016), offer potential pathways. One significant guideline proposed by Scholz is "Codetermined work: work platforms should involve workers from the moment the platform is programmed and throughout its use" (Scholz, 2016, pp. 79-80). Within the realm of design itself, practices such as Co-Design (Sanders; Stappers,

2008) and Participatory Design (Iversen; Alskov; Leong, 2012) are already well-established and studied. These approaches advocate not just consulting users and stakeholders, but actively involving them in the creative and decision-making processes. Moving forward, it is essential to explore how such alternatives can be integrated into current corporate frameworks to ensure tangible benefits for all involved in the use of digital platforms.

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