DIGITAL FOOD CULTURES: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND FOOD ACTIVISM IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

CULTURAS ALIMENTARES DIGITAIS: MOVIMENTOS SOCIAIS E ATIVISMO ALIMENTAR NO AMBIENTE ON-LINE

CULTURAS ALIMENTARIAS DIGITALES: MOVIMIENTOS SOCIALES Y ACTIVISMO ALIMENTARIO EN EL ENTORNO EN LÍNEA

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Nutrition is a social practice that encompasses the fulfillment of physiological needs and cultural, symbolic, and historical aspects. From a sociological perspective, this phenomenon reflects social inequalities, distinction dynamics, hierarchies, choices, and coexistence. It can also be viewed as a form of identification and social differentiation through traditions, rituals, and dietary taboos that define individuals' identity and social belonging. Dietary practices are cultural expressions that reflect a specific social group's historical peculiarities, geographical characteristics, and social relations.

In the contemporary context, the intersection between dietary practices and the digital world has generated new dynamics, especially in the convergence encompassing artifacts and agency, resulting in activism that manifests distinctly in form and content to foster engagement. These dynamics permeate how food is produced, marketed, consumed, and promoted. However, more significantly, they lead to politicizing everyday routines and food-related activities. Within these contexts, human and non-human agents operate in a timeless temporal domain, in spaces devoid of boundaries, limitations, or distinctions, playing roles in previously unimaginable experiences regarding the interaction between daily dietary practices and global technologies.

The revolutionary process triggered by the advent of information technologies and the subsequent rise of digital media platforms has enabled the emergence of a new dynamic in the agri-food system, present at the intersection between dietary routines and the Internet. This domain stands out for its comprehensive range of activities, including, among other actions: the digitalization of production, logistics, and marketing procedures in the food sector, as well as the substantial use of social media platforms for dissemination, expression of protests, and implementation of product and service boycotts. With the emergence of digital platforms and the Internet, food-related interactions have transformed substantial importance.

Currently, gastronomic culture, for instance, pertains not only to the taste and presentation of food but also to the manner in which we consume and interact with others online. From culinary blogs, social media, and online recipes to food delivery services, the digital world has transformed the way we experience food culture. The digital revolution has also significantly changed how we eat and experience different flavors. The advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has allowed people to daily share their recipes and create online communities with others who share similar tastes.

The debate surrounding nutrition remains intensely discussed and continues to present innovative approaches in contemporary times. This phenomenon is primarily attributed to its

interdisciplinary nature, fostered by interconnected, diverse fields (CONTRERAS; GRACIA, 2011; AZEVEDO, 2017). Despite nutrition being the subject of considerable current research, gradual and limited progress is observed in adopting and deepening theoretical and conceptual resources by analysts and individuals interested in this field (PORTILHO, 2020). This observation suggests the importance and urgency of critically investigating digital food cultures.

Within the diversity of themes and approaches in food studies, digital food culture is a novel concept encompassing representations and practices related to food on digital media platforms. This term originates from food culture studies, socio-materialism, and digital sociology, incorporating discussions on social movements and socio-environmental issues throughout its conceptual structure. However, the scope of interest of this approach is not confined solely to this point. Such inquiries only cover the fundamental elements of this concept, considering the polysemic nature of the online environment and food culture. The term "digital food culture" emerges due to the convergence between fields of study in cultural sciences and communication and the social, economic, and political spheres that permeate digital society.

To examine the dynamics governing the production, preparation, and consumption of technologically mediated food and establish the initial delimitations of the notion of "Digital Food Culture," Lupton (2020) drew upon literature concerning the sociocultural dimensions of digital technologies. Initial focuses on the food theme in digital environments, analyzing discursive and visual content in food-focused blogs and exploring the ethical and aesthetic issues underlying dietary behaviors (LAVIS, 2015; LEWIS, 2018; LUPTON, 2018; 2020). Subsequent investigations directed their attention toward evaluating sociotechnical imaginaries and emerging food trends, such as three-dimensional food printing (DONNAR, 2017; LUPTON, 2017). These studies deepened the understanding of the impacts of digital technologies on individuals' dietary routines and choices, with particular attention to how these subjects have reacted to these innovations.

From this perspective, Lupton (2020) outlines digital food cultures as a cutting-edge approach that encompasses diverse representations of social group identities, cultural expressions, lifestyles, routines, practices, customs, knowledge, and traditions related to food, as well as their integration into the context of mediation provided by digital technologies in people's everyday lives. These dimensions are driven by the individual or collective interests of numerous connected users and adopt various configurations of digital interaction,

encompassing TV series and films, blogs, websites, advertisements or reports, discussion forums, applications, games, and a multitude of other possibilities to intertwine food and the digital environment.

The approach of Feldmann and Lupton (2020) is pioneering and revolutionary in the sociological field, yet it lacks a more in-depth explanation of the concept of digital food cultures. Much of this conceptual gap is justified by its focus on case analyses restricted to some areas of the world, notably Oceania, Western Europe, and the United States, with limited or no examination of experiences in Asia, Africa, or Latin America. The intersection between digital food cultures, gender diversity, and ethnic-racial issues is also overlooked.

Given this scenario of conceptual limitations, we propose a slightly broader definition of digital food cultures. In this sense, we understand digital food cultures as a set of actions, choices, behaviors, and routines involving food, which in different ways relate to the use of information and communication technology tools, spanning both the online and offline realities – that is, where daily food-related experiences are influenced by and influence the mediation of technological artifacts. In other words, digital food cultures are digital projections of dietary everyday life that manifest in digital environments, facilitating the convergence of various ways of living, approaching, and interpreting food-related experiences. Using the term in the plural expresses how diverse individuals interact with technological artifacts, such as smartphones and computers, and the varied benefits of digital media platforms and applications related to dietary dynamics in all their multiplicity. The term also signifies the diversity of practices, routines, behaviors, distinctions, agents, and activism grounded in a plurality of ethnic, racial, class, and gender characteristics.

It is essential to expound on the current ramifications resulting from the evolution of these dietary dynamics, with a focus on the intricate everyday interactions shaped by digital platforms. The scenario highlights a progressive dissolution of distinct boundaries between the analog and the digital domains. Mobile devices, such as cell phones, and other communication mechanisms are now intricately integrated into the culinary experience, simultaneously playing a decisive role in gastronomic choices, serving as a link to the world through food, and acting as channels for the public display of food preferences and selections. The growth of dynamics inherent to digital food cultures cannot be comprehended without the convergence of these two relatively autonomous trends: the comprehensive integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in dietary practices and the process of

"spectacularization" of daily life, with the routine exposure of the private sphere, notably the act of "eating".

Studies on digital food cultures investigate a wide array of narratives, experiences, practices, routines, and representations of food on social media by users. Specific themes have received greater emphasis within this scope, encompassing everything from health-promoting strategies, sustainability-focused initiatives, and food as a political agenda to highly profitable digital maneuvers employed by major conglomerates and food industries to expand and diversify markets (SANTOS, 2022). What is observable is the utilization of the Internet as an augmentation of individuals' dietary routines, where patterns of purchasing, marketing, and consumption are reshaped in light of the interests of connected users. In summary, the critical discussions within this theme revolve around sustainability, solidarity, inequalities, gastronomy, bodies and emotions, health, spirituality, influencers, politics, and the future of food.

To illustrate some of these focuses, bodies, and emotions represent the cluster of moralities linked to food. Body worship, the pursuit of healthy and fit bodies, beauty standards, fetishism, repression, shame or guilt related to eating, strict diets, obsession, self-monitoring, and bodily discipline, among others, are circumstances or scenarios that manifest and are digitally mediated by users on the Internet. The meanings generated in this type of digital sharing of food encompass a "mix" of experiences and social behaviors and can be associated and interpreted as affective forces, pleasure, desire, delight, and a sense of community, but also as feelings of shame, greed, repulsion, disgust, guilt, fear, outrage, and embarrassment (KENT, 2020; LUPTON, 2020).

Health and spirituality encompass dietary styles grounded and motivated by ethical concerns, nutrition, fitness, environmental dimensions, religious choices, and considerations regarding non-human animals. Social media platforms have been utilized as fertile environments for sharing similar interests among users, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and thoughts about dietary routines. In practice, what studies on the health and spirituality axes indicate is that nutritional habits tend to be interwoven with other dimensions, as is the case, for example, with political discussions surrounding sustainability or racial debates (BAKER; WALSH, 2020; SANTOS, 2022). In this scenario, when a user shares their health-conscious dietary routine and justifies that, in addition to their attention to physical appearance, their concern for the environment and the cessation of human and non-human animal oppression also play a role, their practices denote a type of intertwined food culture.

Moreover, Scott (2020), in their studies of online vegan communities, identifies that this dietary style is advocated by users as a transformative agent in their social realities, contributing not only to ending animal exploitation but also encompassing other aspects of nutritional practices, such as sustainability, and, in this context, being perceived by adherents as a morally superior life choice. From this perspective, Braun and Carruthers (2020) point out that users of vegan blogs often describe their consumption practices and dietary regimes through metaphors of a religious and spiritual nature. The presented observations suggest that food, beyond being an inherently intertwined dimension with other aspects of human experience, has been used, particularly in digital technologies, as a tool for social branding and influence. Thus, what tends to define demarcation are the differentiation strategies presented by users, such as the visual quality and healthfulness of foods and the moral, religious, ethical, and aesthetic values that a particular routine conveys.

A wide range of public figures, bloggers, and influencers have encouraged and transformed the ways in which food is frequently portrayed on social media. These actors employ various strategies to present culinary experiences to social media audiences and potential consumers, significantly influencing dietary and consumption choices overall. With considerable persuasive power in the online sphere, these "professionals" are increasingly sought after by individuals seeking information about more exclusive and exotic foods, refined meat preparation techniques, healthy eating, recipes, cultivation guidance, updates related to food, healthy lifestyle, restricted dietary alternatives, veganism, among others. They primarily utilize culinary skills, lifestyles, ethical principles, and personal dietary consumption practices to attract new followers inspired by their approaches.

Regarding political discussions and the future of societies' food, it is imperative to emphasize that we have observed, in recent years, an increase in the number of major conglomerates in the food sector, directing a more significant portion of their profits and investments towards the exploitation of digital technologies for large-scale marketing. These companies possess greater purchasing power, primarily economic interests, and little concern for the common good. They have invested in programs, campaigns, and advertisements on social media platforms, especially Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, utilizing celebrities, influencers, and public figures to endorse foods that are often unsustainable and harmful to human and non-human health. In contrast, there has been a significant rise in digital initiatives by organizations, collectives, independent activists, social movements, and various

forms of mobilization centered around pursuing food justice and sustainability in the digital sphere (CROSS, 2020; MANN, 2020).

These digital initiatives aim to counter the expansion of profit-driven production and consumption practices, promoting dietary routines that are more democratic and fair to both human and non-human animals and that encourage the reduction of environmental harm. It is evident that the possibilities and sharing of dynamics related to food and digital technologies are diverse, sophisticated, and continuously evolving. Thus, social media can be understood as environments of mutual interaction that influence users' identity formation, also holding promise for constructing meanings and discourses among people (CHERRY, 2006; 2014; LUPTON, 2020; SCOTT, 2020).

Analyzing dietary routines from a sociological perspective through the lens of digital cultures in the context of global technologies presents itself as a challenging yet pressing and crucial exercise in the current era characterized by the amplification of communication and social interaction forms. The contributions of this approach are broad and encompass various areas of scientific research on food, substantiating itself as a mechanism of utmost importance for promoting interdisciplinary connections among the diverse fields that permeate the food universe. In line with the studies of digital sociology (LUPTON, 2015; NASCIMENTO, 2016), the approach to digital food cultures also seeks to understand the political-cultural manifestations that occur on the internet as a result of the complexity of symbols and meanings provided in this type of interaction (BAKER; WALSH, 2020; LUPTON, 2020; SCOTT, 2020).

Faced with the vast array of situations, events, and online food experiences, the conceptual imprecision that permeates digital food culture becomes evident. The fundamental questions that arise when addressing this highly contemporary theme are as follows: what can indeed be characterized as digital food culture within this universe of information and communication technology possibilities? What are the minimal conditions for such appropriate characterization to occur?

This dossier is the first in Brazil and Latin America to encompass a variety of topics and discussions about food culture and its interfaces with global information and communication technologies. The intrinsic challenges in organizing a work whose object of study is innovative and of recent emergence on the international scene are of considerable magnitude, especially in selecting articles that demonstrate theoretical-conceptual and methodological maturity. Adopting the digital food culture approach within the context of the Global South will tend to

be gradual, considering the lack of case studies from these regions in the initial stages of conceptual formulation.

As previously emphasized, the concept reveals notable asymmetries between the Global North and the Global South, privileging regions with histories of advantage at the expense of other localities equally characterized by significant cultural diversities. Areas such as Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean boast relevant cultural studies on food, consumption, and dietary practices, representing potential data sources to be explored in the medium and long term for analyzing digital food cultures. However, it is imperative to emphasize that the lack of visibility of these cultural realities, which could constitute a valuable addition to investigations into dietary habits on the Internet, has not compromised the potential of the approach in studies related to food. On the contrary, this gap has further stimulated agendas and interests in the subject, propelling its expansion and development.

The book "Research Methods in Digital Food Studies," published in 2021 and edited by Jonatan Leer and Stinne Gunder S. Krogager, was the first global work to address methods and techniques for researching digital food cultures. This text is written in English and currently lacks a critical analysis of its composition in the Brazilian context, which has hindered the dissemination of the theme, the filling of possible gaps, and the expansion of its impact. The work serves a significant theoretical-methodological role in exploring studies related to digital food, revisiting established approaches that can be applied to social phenomena in the media, and pointing out potential intersections between methods and techniques aimed at investigating digital food activism, among other aspects. Nonetheless, the ethical boundaries that delineate the conduct of research on social media platforms remain a relevant issue and a research agenda to be considered.

Regarding digital food policies, Mann (2020) points out that the increasing connectivity among individuals, stemming from new forms of sociability enabled by digital technologies, could potentially offer visibility to marginalized voices, share the experiences of these users with the world, and allow these public discourses to be inserted into global agendas addressing food justice issues. This perspective has not been fully realized.

On the one hand, scientific work involving users on social media platforms encounters ethical principles in data collection, where access to images and discussions shared on networks does not necessarily evoke researchers' rights to publish without considering the privacy of these individuals. On the other hand, the architecture and information infrastructure of social media exhibit biases that have been strongly criticized in the literature on algorithms

(NAKAMURA, 2010; LITTAL, 2018; MANN, 2020; ROSHANI, 2020; SILVA, 2020). These studies indicate that access to media is not equitable for the most marginalized and economically disadvantaged social groups compared to more privileged strata of society. When entry is successful, hierarchies often emerge based on racial distinction and the hypersexualization of black women. Thus, contemporary food conflicts are also marked by digital inequalities, which, in turn, are predominantly translated through algorithmic racism and social differentiation based on race, class, and gender (SANTOS, 2022).

Social media has been used as privileged platforms for social movements engaged in food activism. Some analyses presented in the book "Digital Food Cultures" succinctly address the observed changes in the online expression of dietary practices. Activists turn to the internet as a means and strategy to expand and disseminate their causes globally, establishing connections with other initiatives aligned with their agendas. This phenomenon, which has intensified in recent years, mainly driven by the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing measures, has led to the formation of global networks of food activism. These networks primarily focus on struggles for food justice and environmental sustainability, seeking to induce social transformations through policy influences (MOTTA; MARTÍN, 2021; MOTTA, 2021; TEIXEIRA; MOTTA; GALINDO, 2021).

In the current global context of technological advancement and digitized social dynamics, there is a growing need to stimulate studies that aim better to understand the impacts of technologies on daily dietary practices, revealing the connections these impacts unveil in other spheres of social life. Food has become a fertile field for political, economic, social, and cultural debates, and among the numerous reflections arising from these interconnected dimensions in social reality, initiatives that foster broader discussions about the future of societies' diets, the common good, and environmental care stand out—the global food system (ABRAMOVAY, 2021).

Other topics emerge on the contemporary research agenda concerning food and deserve to be highlighted as suggestions for future investigations. These topics encompass the application of the concept of big data in inquiries dealing with massive volumes of digital data, the analysis of sustainability in digital food contexts, the exploration of food markets in the digital sphere, the study of agri-food systems, the investigation of digital and cybercultures in the realm of food, consumption dynamics, dietary patterns, discussions about surveillance and control in society, among others. These subjects bring together a series of questions that have

played a crucial role in shaping the perspectives that will influence our future in food within the context of digital technologies.

Beyond this brief introduction, the dossier titled "Culturas Alimentares Digitais: movimentos sociais e ativismos alimentar no ambiente on-line[3]" presents an exclusive interview with Deborah Lupton, one of the authors who coined the concept of digital food culture in the book "*Digital Food Cultures*". It also features the translation of the article "*Digital food culture, power and everyday life*", by Zeena Feldman and Michael K. Goodman; the article "Distinção, digitalização e legitimação: a incorporação das redes sociais no campo gastronômico brasileiro[4]", by Camila Grumo; the article "*Kanhgág eg vẽjẽn*: a construção do espaço alimentar digital[5]", authored by Gabriel Chaves Amorim; and the article "Veganismo não é dieta: disputas discursivas e práticas sobre relações entre diversos animais humanos e não humanos , mapeados em debates on-line[6]", by Rodolfo de Moraes Santos Cerqueira.

The exclusive interview with Deborah Lupton, coordinated by researchers Marília Lud David, Maycon Noremberg Schubert, Daniel Coelho de Oliveira and Arthur Saldanha dos Santos, offer significant contributions to the field of digital sociology studies and their connections to food cultures, encompassing the social studies of science and technology. Throughout the conversation, the author delves into the emergence of digital technologies, their implications in social theory, and the challenges that manifest in people's everyday lives. Moreover, the ramifications of this digitalization landscape in the context of scientific research are emphasized. The author also reflects on the changes that have permeated individual food dynamics, practices, and routines in the current context of technological advancement and intensified use of social media.

The translation of the article "*Digital food culture, power and everyday life*" authored by Zeena Feldman and Michael K. Goodman, offers a unique contribution that broadens the scope of scientifically developed reflections on food cultures in international literature, following the publication of the book "*Digital Food Cultures*". This serves as an introduction to the special edition of the European Journal of Cultural Studies, aimed at delineating distinctions, parallels, and intersections between the realm of food and the digital universe, to

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[3] In English, it would translate as: Digital Food Cultures: Social Movements and Food Activism in the Online Environment.

[4] In English, it would translate as: Distinction, digitalization, and legitimation: the incorporation of social networks in the Brazilian culinary field.

[5] In English, it would translate as: Kanhgág eg vẽjẽn: the construction of digital food space.

[6] In English, it would translate as: Veganism is not a diet: discursive disputes and practices regarding relationships between diverse human and non-human animals, mapped in online debates.

provide a critical approach to the capacities, paradoxes, and impacts of digital food culture on everyday life.

The first national article within this dossier is titled "Distinção, digitalização e legitimação: a incorporação das redes sociais no campo gastronômico brasileiro", authored by Camila Grumo. The text examines the relationships that unfold between the process of naturalizing social networks and the dynamics of social distinction. To achieve this, the author investigates the profiles of eight São Paulo restaurants and national and international gastronomic guides on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Additionally, the study analyzes articles and interviews with chefs and restaurant administrators available in the media. The findings indicate that restaurants' adoption of social media has become a common practice in recent years, often encouraging themselves. This transition to the digital environment within the restaurant context has garnered significant interest in the commercial sector, encompassing even those establishments lacking prominent chefs for digital promotion.

Subsequently, Gabriel Chaves Amorim's article, "*Kanhgág eg vẽjẽn*: a construção do espaço alimentar digital", examines the culinary field from a cultural perspective, mediated by digital technologies. The case study focuses on an online community that centers on the cultural and identity aspects of typical Kanhgág foods, executed through ethnographic means. The study highlights social media as a suitable resource for propagating generational sociability, preserving food memories, sharing recipes, traditions, and digital, gastronomic, and indigenous activism.

The article "Veganismo não é dieta: disputas discursivas e práticas sobre relações entre diversos animais humanos e não humanos, mapeados em debates on-line", authored by Rodolfo de Moraes Santos Cerqueira, explores the controversies surrounding the concept of veganism, encompassing meanings, and practices present in forums of groups on the Facebook social media platform. The results underscore the necessity of interpreting interactions between "humans and non-human animals" based on approaches considering the multiple inequalities involved in the vegan practice, revealing particularities in conflicts within these communities and influencing the adopted configuration in each vegan practice.

In this brief space, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to Deborah Lupton for sharing such inspiring insights, with recognition also extending to Marília Luz David and Maycon Noremberg Schubert, for their support in conducting the interview. We are also thankful to Zeena Feldman and Michael K. Goodman, for their kindness in sharing the excellent text for the unprecedented translation in the Brazilian context. We congratulate Camila Grumo,

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We wish you an excellent read!

The organizers,

Daniel Coelho de Oliveira

Arthur Saldanha dos Santos

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