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Recalling McLuhan: The Power of Netflix and Digital Platforms in the Age of Digital Capitalism

McLuhan'ı Hatırlamak: Dijital Kapitalizm Çağında Netflix ve Dijital Platformların Tahakkümü

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how digital platforms have transformed media consumption habits through the theoretical framework of Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman. In line with McLuhan's proposition that "the medium is the message," the study emphasizes that platforms such as Netflix are not merely content providers but also structures that shape the user experience. Netflix constructs a structure that passivates users' media consumption through interface designs, automatic play mechanisms, and algorithmic recommendation systems, putting viewers in a continuous cycle of consumption. By analyzing the structural features of Netflix and digital media platforms, the study reveals how such platforms guide and control media consumption. Within the context of concepts such as the attention economy and surveillance capitalism, Netflix and similar platforms are shown to transform users into computable data points and manipulate their media preferences. Users' choices are determined through algorithms, and individual media consumption is progressively shaped in line with the interests of platforms. Additionally, the study examines Netflix's role in constructing popular culture. In a globalized media environment, platforms are seen to prioritize certain content and confine audiences within specific narratives. The study discusses, from a theoretical perspective that rather than promoting cultural diversity, these platforms disseminate content shaped by commercial objectives, thereby directing audiences' media consumption habits in line with economic interests. Digital platforms, such as Netflix, not only produce content that captures viewers' attention but also function as powerful agents of popular culture, guiding media consumption processes and redefining individuals' relationships with the media. In this context, this study aims to critically evaluate the impact of digital media platforms on today's media ecosystem and to reveal the structural transformations taking place in media consumption.

Keywords: Algorithm, Attention, Popular Culture, Homogenization, Media Ecology

Öz

Bu çalışma, dijital platformların medya tüketim alışkanlıklarını nasıl dönüştürdüğünü, Marshall McLuhan ve Neil Postman'ın medya kuramları çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Çalışmada McLuhan'ın "ortam/medyum mesajın kendisidir" tezi doğrultusunda, Netflix gibi platformların yalnızca içerik sağlayıcılar değil, aynı zamanda kullanıcı deneyimini şekillendiren yapılar olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. Netflix, izleyicileri sürekli bir tüketim döngüsüne sokan arayüz tasarımları, otomatik oynatma mekanizmaları ve algoritmik öneri sistemleri ile kullanıcıların medya tüketim süreçlerini pasifleştiren bir yapı inşa etmektedir. Çalışma, Netflix'in yapısal özelliklerini analiz ederek, bu platformların medya tüketimini yönlendirme biçimlerini ortaya koymaktadır. Dikkat ekonomisi ve gözetim kapitalizmi gibi kavramlar bağlamında ele alındığında, Netflix ve benzeri platformların kullanıcıları hesaplanabilir veri noktalarına dönüştürdüğü ve onların medya tercihlerini manipüle ettiği görülmektedir. Kullanıcıların tercihleri algoritmalar aracılığıyla belirlenmekte ve bireysel medya tüketimi giderek platformların çıkarları doğrultusunda şekillenmektedir. Bunun yanı sıra, çalışmada Netflix'in popüler kültür inşa etme süreçleri de ele alınmaktadır. Küreselleşen medya ortamında, platformların belirli içerikleri öne çıkararak izleyicileri belirli anlatılar içine hapsettiği görülmektedir. Çalışmada kültürel çeşitliliğin yerine, ticari hedeflerle belirlenen içeriklerin yaygınlaştırıldığı ve izleyicilerin medya tüketim alışkanlıklarının ekonomik çıkarlar doğrultusunda yönlendirildiği kuramsal olarak tartışılmıştır. Netflix gibi dijital platformlar, yalnızca izleyicilerin ilgisini çeken içerikler üretmekle kalmayıp aynı zamanda medya tüketim süreçlerini yönlendiren ve bireylerin medya ile kurdukları ilişkiyi yeniden tanımlayan güçlü popüler kültür yapıları olarak işlev görmektedir. Bu anlamda bu çalışma, başta Netflix olmak üzere dijital medya platformlarının günümüz

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medya ekosistemi üzerindeki etkilerini eleştirel bir çerçevede değerlendirerek, medya tüketimi ile ilgili yapısal dönüşümleri ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algoritma, Dikkat, Medya Ekolojisi, Popüler Kültür, Tekdüzeleşme.

INTRODUCTION

Marshall McLuhan's (2012) 1964 thesis, "The medium is the message," offers a perspective that warrants revisiting in light of the hegemony created by today's digital platforms. According to McLuhan, it is not the content of the messages conveyed to us through media tools that transform social behavior and cultural codes but rather the form and nature of the medium itself. This thesis was expanded further by Neil Postman in 1985 with the statement, "The medium is the metaphor itself." The Postman (2000) claims that technology and devices are not merely tools but also cultural practices that reshape people's perceptions of reality. This study will examine how the structural features of digital platforms (interface, algorithm, etc.) function as "messages" and "metaphors" in the case of Netflix.

Netflix, which began as a DVD rental service in 1997 and transitioned to digital streaming in 2007, has become a global cultural powerhouse, particularly since 2015. Unlike traditional media (such as cinema, television, and newspapers), this apparatus is based on the platform's user experience, user data-driven personalization, and unlimited consumption logic, which signifies the construction of a new economic order, as defined by Zuboff (2019) as surveillance capitalism. Thus, it becomes clear that Netflix's success is as much about the behavioral engineering it has developed as it is about the content it offers. In this new engineering model, based on the culture of connectedness expressed by Jose van Dijck (2013) through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, users become an integral part of the data production process under the illusion of "personalized preferences" offered by these platforms.

Within this context, the main argument of this study is as follows: Within this context, the main argument of this study is that Netflix and other digital platforms reshape users' attention, sense of time, and daily lives. They achieve this not through content popularity or view counts, but through technical elements such as interface design, algorithmic systems, and the devices where the platform operates. As demonstrated in all studies conducted to date, the autoplay feature traps viewers in a passive consumption space. At the same time, the 'binge-watching' model reduces the depth of narratives to a consumption object that prioritizes the "next episode" culture. Postman's (1985) critique of "entertainment that kills" takes shape here: even documentaries that critique technology, such as The Social Dilemma, become part of the system they criticize.

Following the introduction, the second section explores the structural characteristics of Netflix as a medium, drawing on the perspectives of media theorists such as McLuhan (2012) and Postman (2000). The third section analyzes the political economy of the user-platform relationship through concepts such as data, surveillance, and digital subjectivity. The fourth section examines how platforms have evolved into machines of popular culture, shaped by their content production and algorithmic recommendation systems. Finally, the conclusion emphasizes the importance of media literacy and discusses possible alternatives in the face of rising digital power.

The study explores how Netflix and other digital platforms guide their users and how these guidance mechanisms construct a media culture and popular culture universe. It examines how structural elements, such as interface design, algorithmic content recommendations, data-driven personalization, and autoplay, influence individual media consumption habits. The effects of digital platforms on the viewing experience are examined within conceptual frameworks such as Byung-Chul Han's (2015) attention economy and Zuboff's (2021) surveillance capitalism, exploring how users' consumption practices are turned into calculable data points.

In this context, the study theoretically analyzes how Netflix and other digital platforms function as a medium by addressing the following questions:

- How do Netflix and similar digital platforms shape the user experience in line with McLuhan's (2012) thesis that "the medium is the message"?

- How does Postman's criticism of "entertainment that kills" display itself in the context of Netflix and other digital platforms?

- How do the algorithmic recommendation mechanisms of digital platforms shape user subjectivity?

- How do these platforms construct a popular culture universe as an environment? How do they influence viewer behavior in this context?

- Within the framework of concepts such as surveillance capitalism and the attention economy, what are the dynamics that transform Netflix users into mere consumers?

This study aims to demonstrate that Netflix and other digital platforms serve as a significant pop culture machine, transforming individuals' media consumption habits and cultural perceptions, beyond merely providing content. The theoretical framework discussed in the study provides an interdisciplinary perspective on how digital platforms influence the consumption of series, films, or, more broadly, content.

In line with this aim, the study, while primarily grounded in theory, adopts a critical approach to examine the structural and ideological functioning of digital media platforms. Rather than relying on quantitative or empirical data sets, it analyzes selected examples and theoretical models to assess how user behavior, broader media structures, and forms of cultural production emerge within the logic of digital platforms. In this respect, the study aims to contribute to the literature at a theoretical level by bringing a critical approach to contemporary media theories, discussing the relationship between media theory and digital platforms through current concepts such as interface design and algorithmic governance, and examining how it transforms contemporary media consumption.

1. Bringing McLuhan Back into the Spotlight

Marshall McLuhan's (2012) thesis that “the medium is the message” is one of the fundamental concepts of modern media studies. While studies and theories in the field of cinema and media focus on the function and discourse of content, McLuhan focuses more on the structural characteristics of the medium that gives the message and the individual and social transformations that these characteristics can bring about. This approach provides an important perspective on how today's digital media platforms have altered both their own structure and user behavior.

According to McLuhan (2005), each new medium reorganizes individuals' senses, changing the way they perceive themselves and the world around them. Technologies and media can be perceived as extensions of human senses or organs. For example, while vehicles such as wheels and bicycles are extensions of the foot, devices such as radios and televisions represent an extension related to direct communication. In this sense, all technologies develop a different form of perception in humans. For example, the invention of the printing press gave rise to a primarily visual culture, while the invention of the radio created a primarily auditory culture. In this connection, television has created a completely different form of perception by blending visual and auditory experiences.

> Information rains down on us suddenly and continuously. As we continue to acquire knowledge, new information rapidly replaces the old. Our electronic world forces us to move from data classification to semantic networks. Instant communication enables all

> environmental and experiential factors to coexist and interact actively, making it impossible for us to progress step by step. (McLuhan and Fiore, 2012, p. 63)

If we evaluate McLuhan's theory, digital platforms are not only tools that provide content to viewers, but also powerful extensional tools that shape their entire experience. This extensionality and the current function of digital platforms can be associated with McLuhan's distinction between “hot” and “cold” distinction between media, as McLuhan argues that hot media have a high-resolution, structural system that requires conscious participation from the audience. In contrast, cold media have a low-resolution structure where the audience is active and fills in the gaps themselves. To better understand how platforms like Netflix shape user perception and experience, it is useful to revisit McLuhan's classic distinction between "hot" and "cold" media, which categorizes media based on the level of audience engagement they demand.

> McLuhan divides media into two categories: hot and cold. The fundamental principle distinguishing hot media from cold is this: if the medium extends a single sense and leaves little for the audience to complete, it is hot media (radio, cinema, photography). If it provides little and requires much to be added by the audience, it is considered cold media (e.g., television, telephone). Hot media have low viewer participation, while cold media have high viewer participation and completion rates. Television is a cold medium because it provides little information, thus requiring active participation by the viewer to complete the message. This is done by connecting the dots and lines on the television screen. This is different from a hot medium, as a hot medium provides a great deal of information to a single sense (e.g., the press). McLuhan applies these concepts of hot and cold to people, cultures, dance, clothing, cars, and sports as well. (Erdoğan and Alemdar, 2005, p. 155)

This conceptual framework helps highlight how digital platforms, by minimizing the need for active interpretation through automated flows and high-resolution interfaces, operate more like hot media, passivating user agency and encouraging uninterrupted consumption. However, McLuhan's (2020) distinction is not only relevant to the devices mentioned above, but also to today's digital technology devices. In these devices, new technologies have replaced old technologies, “viewers” have been replaced by “users,” and rating devices have been replaced by algorithms. As Erken (2017, p. 50) points out, these definitions created during the digital revision of hot and cold tools are not fixed and unchanging. These distinctions should be reevaluated through the lens of evolving technological tools, accepted as a general ecological definition. For *“what needs to be revised is not the inherent characteristics of the tools themselves, but their data transmission capacity and the hardware capable of flawlessly transmitting the message.”*

Undoubtedly, the most important examples of this equipment and infinite capacity are today's digital environments. Digital environments such as Netflix are “hot tools” that completely shape and change “users'” viewing or content consumption habits due to many structural elements, from content to interface design, algorithms, personalization recommendations, and automatic playback. All this experience transforms into an experiential space that shapes their relationship with everyday life, parallel to their relationship with the medium.

This field of experience is also the most important functional aspect of Postman's new approach to McLuhan's thesis, since the medium (television) is not merely a tool for Postman, but a metaphor through which social values are conveyed to viewers. For Postman, television and similar media have revolutionized the way information is transmitted, a development that has never been seen before in history. In these media, even the most serious individual and social issues are trivialized by being turned into entertainment or something that can be consumed. In this context, the media creates an ideological framework for how its consumers perceive the world. This ideological framework

(Postman, 2020, pp. 120-121) is evident in all content, from new types of news programs that incorporate music and effects to innovative advertisements.

In this regard, for Postman, television is a device that shapes individuals' perceptions of the world and creates pure disinformation through entertainment. For Him, disinformation does not mean false information. According to him, disinformation (2020, p. 122) means *"misleading (irrelevant, unrelated, fragmented, or superficial) information, that is, information that creates the illusion of knowledge about something, yet distances people from gaining knowledge."* Thus, television and other media tools, while pretending to entertain and inform, do not inform the audience but rather manipulate them through content, shaping individual and social norms.

Another important criticism Postman makes on this subject is that these tools embody a "hidden curriculum" through entertainment. The hidden curriculum is, according to the Giroux, "those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life" (Giroux, 2025, p.41) For Postman, the function of television and media tools is the same as that of schools at this point;

> The first point to be made about television and school is to observe that each of them is a curriculum. A curriculum, as commonly defined, is a course of study whose purpose is to train or cultivate both mind and character. Schools are generally acknowledged to have curricula, although typically it is not acknowledged that they are curricula. But of course, they are. Everything about a school has an effect - intentional or not - on the shaping of the young, and a "course study" surely includes all the conditions under which learning takes place. Sometimes these "conditions" are referred to as the "hidden curriculum," although it is not clear from whom it is supposed to be hidden. The total school environment is the most visible thing about school and is certainly what is most remembered about school by everybody in later years. (Postman, 1979, p. 163)

In this sense the process of basing everything on entertainment, as emphasized in Postman's media criticism, is evident in the content strategy of Netflix and other digital platforms. For instance Netflix's structure, which draws users into a never-ending cycle of consumption, fundamentally changes the viewer's relationship with this environment, giving concrete form to the structure criticized by Postman. This situation which manifests itself in the analysis of users' consumption habits, recommended content, and the resulting "individual preferences," illustrates how our ways of thinking and desiring are manipulated. It materializes in what Postman (2006) refers to as "technopoly," a new world order where technology has become an absolute power that determines social values.

2. Digital Platforms as Medium: Architecture, Algorithms and User Experience

With the advent of the digital age, particularly the internet, the media ecosystem has undergone a radical transformation. Social media and digital platforms, which have replaced traditional forms of media, have evolved from mere content delivery tools into systems that shape social behavior thanks to the new interaction models they have established with their audiences. Global platforms such as Netflix have constructed a media order that has completely changed users' viewing habits and all aspects of media consumption (time, genre, location, etc.). McLuhan's criticism of television and similar tools is equally applicable to today's digital platforms. Understanding this transformation requires more than just content analysis; it involves examining all the tools that shape the user experience, from how the content is presented to the technical structures used to reach the audience. McLuhan's and Postman's thesis is quite explanatory in this context. As media, these digital platforms serve ideological functions in social transformations and forms of meaning production through their structural characteristics in addition to the messages they carry. The power of these digital platforms

lies in their hidden yet effective structure, which directs users toward specific consumption patterns and behavioral systems in a hegemonic manner.

Although McLuhan and Postman's theories were originally associated with earlier media environments such as print, radio and television broadcasting, their conceptual frameworks remain highly useful and valid for analysing contemporary digital platforms. Today most digital platforms as well as modern broadcasting interfaces, mobile applications and algorithmic personalisation systems can be understood as extensions of the sensory, cognitive and behavioural patterns described by these theorists. In this context Netflix's interface, auto-play mechanisms and recommendation architecture do not represent a deviation from McLuhan's or Postman's views and they are not outdated theoretical assessments. Instead they can be seen as a more advanced stage of the media logic they defined.

Unlike traditional media forms, Netflix offers a general experience built on user interaction. This experience is shaped by the platform's design principles that encourage users to consume content. As McLuhan (2012) pointed out, each new media form expands human senses in different ways and reconfigures how they perceive the world. Just as the printing press strengthened written culture and radio strengthened audio culture, the viewing format offered by Netflix should be considered a new media form that transforms social behavior. In this sense, Netflix's entire product design, from interface design to user experience design, is designed to draw users into a continuous cycle of consumption.

In the context of Tara McPherson's (2018, p. 232) assertion that *"we must remember that computers are themselves encoders of culture,"* the design mechanics of platforms like Netflix, such as auto-play and infinite scrolling, transform viewers into subjects who consume without thinking. In particular, the automatic playback mechanism that begins with a countdown when an episode of a series ends bypasses the user's conscious decision-making and preference process, causing them to surrender to a passive flow. This structure directly aligns with Byung-Chul Han's critique of transparency and the attention economy. As he also notes, *"the digital transparency (...) brings forth economic panoptica. The goal is not the moral purification of the heart but maximal profit, maximal attention"* (2015, p. 44). Digital platforms like Netflix fragment users' attention with very short stimuli, eroding their capacity for deep thinking and transforming them into mere consuming entities. This strategy of increasing viewing time prevents users from maintaining a critical distance from the content they consume, directing them toward automated consumption. This is precisely the new economy described by Davenport and Back, where attention is the most limited resource for capital accumulation (Davenport and Back, 2010). In this economy, platforms like Netflix create a new form of media that centers on a consumption process where they constantly control the user's attention rather than the content itself.

Although digital platforms appear to develop and offer features aimed at user activity, such as profile customisation, selective viewing, or personalised recommendations, these applications largely operate within boundaries defined by the platform itself. In this sense, what appears to be active participation generally reflects an experience shaped, framed, and constrained by algorithmic structures. Therefore, in this context, user activity should be understood not as complete autonomy, but as a managed and highly directed form of interaction.

Another platform feature that ensures the sustainability of this media form is the content recommendation system, which utilizes users' past data using filters and algorithms. In this system, users become trapped within a specific category, or the topics and subtopics deemed appropriate by the algorithm. For example, a user who watches Stranger Things is likely to see recommendations for nostalgic science fiction content with similar narrative structures, such as Dark or The OA, when they return to the main screen. The algorithm's logic is straightforward: it utilizes information about the types of content the user has consumed at specific times, based on their past data, to make

recommendations. Netflix's early recommendation engine, Cinematch, generated personalised suggestions by analysing users' past ratings and viewing habits. As Gibson Biddle (2025), the company's former Vice President of Product, explains, this system later became the foundation for Netflix's evolving personalization approach.

Pariser's (2012) concept of the filter bubble is clearly at work here. The principle behind the filter bubble is quite simple: it involves software that predicts what users will like based on what they or other users have liked online, communicating with other software that predicts what users will do next based on who they are and how they behave, thereby creating an information universe. In this universe, the filter bubble gives rise to three fundamental dynamics that have never been seen before. First, users are alone in their consumption of content on these digital platforms, whereas on cable TV, they are surrounded by other viewers. Second, the filter bubble is invisible and imperceptible. It operates based on criteria determined by data from Google and other internet environments. Third, users do not choose to enter this bubble. Although the concept of filter bubbles is controversial in the literature and does not affect all users in the same way, it is still useful for understanding recommendation-based media environments. While users decide what to watch when they turn on any channel on TV or digital platforms, this means surrendering to algorithms that cannot be avoided. (Pariser, 2012, pp. 10-11) This phenomenon is akin to the audience being trapped in an echo chamber, where only the urge to stay within that medium is triggered. This media, referred to by Mark Andrejevic as "automatic media," refers to *"communication and information technologies that rely on computerized processes governed by digital code to shape the production, distribution, and use of information"* (Andrejevic, 2020, p. 29). Algorithms reduce users to predictable profiles and make recommendations in line with the platform's economic interests. This practice complicates media consumption, limiting users' opportunities for critical thinking and exposure to diverse content.

Another factor contributing to this limitation is the binge-watching model. In this new form of viewing, platforms directly intervene in users' habits, creating a clear contrast with traditional media. While the weekly episode format of traditional television allows viewers time to reflect on and discuss what they have watched, digital platforms encourage users to consume entire seasons at once. As Kulak (2020, pp. 48–49) points out, this psychology of binge-watching creates a sense of urgency. It can be compared to substance addiction through categorical analogies such as "binge drinking," where the desire to feel better keeps the viewer engaged in continuous consumption.

The general experience created by these digital platforms and the applications within them, where users sometimes spend weeks, is significant in terms of adapting Walter Benjamin's (2002) concept of "aura," which he claimed was lost in the age when *"it can be reproduced through mechanical reproduction,"* to the digital age. For instance, the historical references and political commentary in The Crown, the philosophical inquiries in Black Mirror, and the dystopian world of Dark, which resonates with contemporary anxieties, are all rich in thematic depth. However, due to the binge-watching phenomenon, such content is often consumed rapidly and without reflection. This reduces complex narratives to superficial experiences. Postman's critique of "entertainment culture" is relevant here: serious themes are increasingly packaged as consumable media products in the digital age.

All the technical details and objects used by platforms are examples of this new entertainment culture. The 'skip intro' button/function, which has become indispensable on almost all platforms, is an important example of this structural transformation. The opening credits of a series or film are not merely a starting point but also a cinematic element that helps build the narrative atmosphere of the series or film, providing information about it and serving the narrative. However, Netflix and other digital platforms present this section to the viewer as if it were an initial obstacle, making it skippable, thereby transforming the viewer into an abstract consumer focused solely on following the sequence

of events rather than the artistic integrity, the rhythm of the narrative, what it conveys, or other elements. What is important here, as stated in previous sections of this work, is to consume what is presented to the user by the platform with full attention and consideration. This tendency reflects the discussions of *"individual attention management and perceptual disorder"* emphasized in Jonathan Crary's (2013) work: the user is under constant pressure to 'progress' and misses what they are watching. For example, when the lyrical opening of Game of Thrones is skipped with 'skip intro', viewers miss out on many key clues and narrative elements, such as the families in the series, their positions within that universe, the images associated with the families, and their histories.

Similar pressure to progress can be seen in Netflix's interactive content experiments (e.g., Black Mirror: Bandersnatch). Under the guise of giving users freedom, it hides the fact that the platform's predefined algorithm parameters limit the choices users believe they are making. This brings to mind Alexander Galloway's definition at the beginning of his book Protocol: *"The founding principle of the Net is not freedom, but control."* (Galloway, 2004, p. 15) Thus, the user navigates within an algorithmic matrix, and "freedom" is merely the ability to move between the options permitted by the system. In this context, Netflix's message as a medium is clear: control appears to lie with the user, but it is with the platform at every stage.

3. The Political Economy of the User-Platform Relationship: Data, Surveillance and Computable Subjectivity

As stated in previous sections of this study, Netflix and other digital platforms have evolved into large-scale economic and ideological systems that extend beyond simply providing content in today's media landscape. They view users as data and direct their media consumption habits. Unlike traditional media systems, digital platforms such as Netflix promise a "personalized viewing" experience; however, they closely monitor and record user behavior, making them a component of the data production process. This model not only integrates users into the system but also establishes an algorithmic control model that reduces users to predictable and controllable data points based on their behavior. In this context, Zuboff's concept of "surveillance capitalism" offers a critical framework for examining the experiences provided by digital platforms in greater depth. According to Zuboff (2021), surveillance capitalism refers to the continuous monitoring of users through digital services they use voluntarily, the analysis of data generated because of their use, and the reprocessing and commercialization of this data in line with companies' economic interests.

> Surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. Although some of these data are applied to product or service improvement, the rest are declared as a proprietary behavioral surplus, fed into advanced manufacturing processes known as "machine intelligence," and fabricated into prediction products that anticipate what you will do now, soon, and later. (Zuboff, 2021, p. 20)

For Zuboff, Google is the pioneer of this surveillance-based capitalism, and together with a few other large companies, it has invented a massive profit and surveillance machine at an unprecedented speed, without regard for contemporary concerns, under the guise of liberating individuals and with the rhetoric of empowering the web. This machine *"operates through an unprecedented asymmetry in knowledge and the power that accrues to knowledge. Surveillance capitalists know everything about us, whereas their operations are designed to be unknowable to us."* (2021, p. 24).

Behind this unknown lies the business models of digital platforms that they do not want users to know about. As mentioned in previous sections of this study, the basic economic model of Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, and other platforms is not only based on the sale of content on the platform but also on the ability to record all user activities within that environment and thereby guide their future

behavior in every way. To fully understand how this process works, it is necessary to examine the relationship that platforms like Netflix establish with users more closely.

From the moment a user signs up for Netflix, the digital identity created by the platform is shaped not only by the content they watch but also by the micro-data recorded at every stage of the user experience. The user logs in to the platform and is prompted to create a profile in the first stage. During the profile creation process, when asked to specify their preferences in terms of what they will watch (Series, Movie, Documentary), they begin to provide data about their preferences to the platform's algorithms. Here, the free choice model, as mentioned in the previous sections of this study, refers to a choice made by the user in a maze. All data, from the color the user selects for their profile to their profile picture, is made meaningful by the algorithm. In the next stage, details such as what kind of content the user consumes, viewing times, where exactly they pause, what kind of scenes they rewind, at what point in the series/movie they lose interest, or how long they continue to watch it are analyzed by machine learning-based algorithms on these platforms. All this data is used to determine and recommend content that will keep the user's interest and attention focused on the platform. However, this process is not simply a personalization mechanism based on the user's individual preferences. As Gillespie (2014, p. 169) puts it, these *"are now communication technology; like broadcasting and publishing technologies, they are now 'the scientific instruments of a society at large."*

This is where José van Dijck's concept of "platform society" comes into play, in which he analyzes the ideological functioning of digital platforms. For Dijck, the importance of the concept does not only lie in the economic relationship between individuals and these platforms. There is another kind of disagreement here: *"the term also refers to a profound dispute about private gain versus public benefit in a society. (…) While platforms allegedly enhance personalized benefits and economic gain, they simultaneously put pressure on collective means and public services."* (van Dijck et al., 2018, p.2) This pressure also creates a hegemonic apparatus that radically shapes social norms while directing user interactions.

> Technological and economic elements of platforms steer user interaction but simultaneously shape social norms. Although a platform's architecture affords a particular usage and users are often met with a finite set of possible options, they are not "puppets" of the techno- commercial dynamics inscribed in a platform. Through its interfaces, algorithms, and protocols, a platform stages user interactions, encouraging some and discouraging other connections (Helmond, 2015, as cited in Dijck, 2018, p.11); for example, inserting a "like button" in the right- hand corner of an interface activates more "liking" than an insertion in the left- hand corner. Indeed, one could argue that any major platform is a recalibration laboratory where new features are constantly tested on users (Benbunan- Fich, 2016, as cited in Dijck, 2018, p.11).

While these calibrations produce a limited world based on algorithms that determine users' consumption habits and produce content tailored to them, the situation that emerges is much more complex. Among the effects of the platform on users is a system that encourages repetitive consumption and behavioral habits, not cultural diversity, by limiting them to a specific genre or series. However, another unrecognized element is the economic value here.

Couldry and Mejias (2019) introduce the concept of data colonialism to describe this domination by platforms. Just as in history, the owners of capital have exploited physical resources and labor in one form or another with data colonialism. In this new form of colonialism, digital capitalism, technology companies exploit and capitalize on human life through whatever data they can obtain. To achieve this, these platforms utilize sophisticated algorithms discussed in the previous sections. In this system, all consumption fluidity is monitored and recorded; clearly, many platforms become a control system

that directs users' media consumption habits and serves the capitalist economy. In this system, data colonization revolves around three key elements: data is constantly mined, new data relations are constructed at every moment, and these relations are subjected to capitalist manipulation. When using any digital platform, users unwittingly hand over their data to large companies, and this handover becomes an economic opportunity for them. Data is used not only to predict user behavior but also to shape and direct that behavior. This is not just a software system focused on consumer habits but one that profoundly affects everyday life, from political preferences to social perceptions. The inequalities that this new form of colonialism creates in terms of data ownership and control appear to users as a set of processes in which they must voluntarily participate. However, this kind of data colonialism extends beyond an economic model, transforming societies and individuals into data points that shape and predict them (Couldry and Mejias, 2019).

This is what Zachary Kaiser (2023) refers to as the production of computable subjectivity. In his book on user experience design and its effects on users, Kaiser (2023) argues that the interface design of a digital product and, in general, the design of how the user will use the interface experience is, from the very beginning, about life itself, *"how they behave in the world, how they imagine a society, or how they treat each other."* According to him, the interface;

> The interface is more than an object or a thing. It is a moment in time where the histories, ideas, and assumptions underlying a particular technology meet the user's ideas about themselves and about others. In doing so, the interface helps produce new ideas about people, and therefore also has certain implications for how they conduct themselves in the world, how they imagine society, and how they treat each other. (Kaiser, 2023, p. 4)

In this sense, Kaiser's contribution is important because algorithms that encounter users through digital platforms, on the one hand, seem to plan how users can use the application more "smoothly," while on the other hand, they produce users as calculable subjects through the data they collect. This is precisely where Kaiser's concept of 'computable subjectivity', which he examines and defines in his book, comes in: *"when an individual believes they are both computing—meaning they operate according to computational processes—and computable meaning they can be entirely understood by computers, and no part of them escapes this."* (Kaiser, 2023, p. 5)

It is precisely because of this calculability that users are trapped within these digital channels and consume content in their own media universes, which are composed of only certain types of content. For instance, suppose a user regularly watches documentaries or movies with conspiracy theories. In that case, the platform's recommendation algorithms will suggest more content similar to their interests, creating a media consumption cycle that reinforces the user's existing ideas. One of the most prominent examples of such algorithm-driven referrals is captured in Netflix's documentary The Social Dilemma. What is interesting is that this documentary itself is presented to users as part of the algorithmic media ecosystem and reproduces the system that the platform criticizes. As Bauman (2019) describes through the concept of "fluid modernity," everything in this universe is short-term, fragmented, and ends with the individual's loneliness before the screen, resulting from the weakening of social ties. In this sense, The Social Dilemma is an important example that visualises many of the dynamics discussed in this study. The film illustrates how interface design, push notifications and algorithmic curation shape users' attention patterns and gradually narrow their field of choice. This process aligns closely with the concerns expressed by McLuhan, Postman and Han. Although dramatised to enhance its narrative impact, the documentary effectively demonstrates how the ideological and behavioural guidance embedded in platform architectures translates into everyday user experience.

The 'cultural democratization' offered as a solution to this isolation should include a similar critique since, for example, Netflix's most-watched content around the world is often selected and marketed to appeal to Western audiences. Series such as Squid Game or Hakan Muhafız from Turkey combine local narratives with critiques of capitalism and universal cultural conflicts in a format that is easily acceptable in the Western market. On the other hand, Netflix's global listings do not feature content that Western audiences might find difficult to understand or that is not directly of interest to them. Almost all these digital channels claim to offer content on a global scale. However, in reality, they promote a culturally monopolized world by highlighting local narratives tailored for Western audiences. While some features of digital platforms, such as "Top 10" lists, claim to involve the audience in a collective experience, the collective spirit here actually serves the platform, as algorithmic manipulations shape these lists. Napoli's (2019) reading of Facebook, Google, and other giant technology companies is apt: the public image here is one of false publicity. Its sole focus is on producing cultural machines that focus on corporate profitability.

When these cultural machines are evaluated in terms of their economic aspects, it becomes clear that platforms are not only media providers but also big data companies. As a notable example of digital capitalism, these companies derive their revenue streams primarily from subscription fees. However, they are driven by producing new content through algorithms that analyze user behavior and market this content in a way that ensures users spend maximum screen time. Within this context, the relationship that most major digital platforms, including Netflix, establish with users is not only a practice of content consumption but also a vast field of experience that reveals the workings of digital capitalism. This radical transformation in the digital media ecosystem has transformed the relationship between the user and the platform from a passive model to one that prioritizes surveillance, guidance, and pure economic gain at the center of the content reproduction processes found in these media. Digital platforms, such as Netflix, have evolved into a significant surveillance machine that profoundly influences not only viewing habits but also individuals' cultural identities and their relationship with the media, treating them as calculable subjects and transforming them into data centers.

4. Platforms Beyond Content: New Actors in the Creation of Popular Culture

Digital platforms, such as Netflix, have become the most powerful actors in cultural production today, transforming from mere intermediary structures that provide content into ideological mechanisms that shape cultural practices, social values, and even individuals' perceptions of reality. As Appadurai (1996), who works on the cultural dimensions of globalization, points out, mediums and the flows that take place through them function not only as something that transcends geographical borders, but also as cultural systems shaped by global capital.

In this context, within the cultural system created by platforms such as Netflix, a new form of world perception is being constructed based on how this content is presented and how users consume it; in other words, how this content is culturally produced and consumed. This is a new form of production that enables individuals to contribute to the universe of popular culture without creating content. The first consequence of this transformation is the development of a popular culture system based on a globally standardized consumption of content. The "Top 10" lists and "Trending" sections of Netflix and many other digital platforms lead to millions of people consuming the same content.

These software tools create a global cultural monopoly, allowing platforms to highlight specific content in line with their economic interests. Cultural production is reduced to an algorithmic process that is not limited to being merely artistic or narrative. As platforms integrate local content from diverse cultures into a global market, they reshape it, requiring it to conform to specific aesthetic and thematic standards. The global success of Squid Game, for example, is a prime example of how Netflix's algorithms and marketing strategies work, not just the popularization of a Korean drama. By regularly

exposing certain content to millions of users, these platforms encourage the consumption of that content, suggesting that audience preferences are driven by the platform rather than being organic. Unlike the "global village" ideal envisioned by McLuhan (2020), the cross-cultural interaction offered by these platforms takes a form that is organized in line with their economic interests and based on profit maximization. According to McLuhan's conceptualization of the global village, local stories can only find a place in the global market on these platforms if they feature universalizable themes and formal arrangements. While universalization is achieved through the theme of resistance and criticism of heavy-handed capitalism in series like La Casa de Papel, the local socio-political context of Turkish series like Bir Başkadır or Fatma can only be globalized when it is presented as a highly intriguing "other." For this new system that creates popular culture, it does not matter what the story touches. Netflix's content and library strategy, as Lotz (2022) argues, has evolved since its inception with new iterations. The primary objective in iterating these versions is to maximize user-platform interaction.

The cultural impact of these platforms extends not only to the globalization of content but also to the transformation of perceptions of time and space. Just like everything else, space is no longer something we are physically present in everyday reality but a digital thing where all relationships are redefined. All social relations are redefined through these platforms. While traditional media involves collective consumption with family members or groups of friends, digital platforms offer an individualized media experience, building viewing habits on personal screens. This situation, embodied in Sherry Turkle's (2011) concept of "lonely togetherness," can be used to understand how this cultural transformation creates a practice of isolation. While Netflix's support for multiple profiles enables individuals to create new profiles tailored to their viewing habits, it also transforms media consumption from a social experience into an individual ritual, institutionalizing solitary consumption. Viewers can create a virtual collectivity by posting about the TV series and movies they watch on social media. However, as Byung-Chul Han (2015) emphasizes, such digital connections do not replace real social ties. Netflix and similar platforms claim to offer their users a social connection, while they trap them in their individual data bubbles and cultural worlds.

> When part of your life is lived in virtual places—it can be Second Life, a computer game, a social networking site—a vexed relationship develops between what is true and what is “true here,” true in simulation. In games where we expect to play an avatar, we end up being ourselves in the most revealing ways; on social-networking sites such as Facebook, we think we will be presenting ourselves, but our profile ends up as somebody else—often the fantasy of who we want to be. Distinctions blur. Virtual places offer connection with uncertain claims to commitment. We don’t count on cyberfriends to come by if we are ill, to celebrate our children’s successes, or help us mourn the death of our parents. (Turkle, 2011, p. 153)

According to Turkle, our emails and texts have replaced the voice of the postman or the sound of the horse-drawn carriage that we used to wait for when we experienced such situations in the past. (2011, p.153) This indication that the cultural impact of platforms has changed implies a transformation in historical and political memory, which is another important aspect. Regardless of the subject matter represented on these platforms and regardless of its seriousness, everything is reduced to entertainment, creating a universe of popular culture based on constant consumption. This industry categorizes all the films it offers within an ideological framework, rendering them into a consumer commodity that is removed from political and cultural criticism. This is precisely the framework in which Jameson (2022) critiques postmodernity: for the content produced on these platforms, history or any other subject becomes a reference to be addressed only on the axis of consumption, while everything is reduced to an aestheticized object of consumption. Even the most political content mentioned in the previous sections of the study is based on an action-oriented entertainment format.

This is precisely the commodification of reality. All notions of reality (even documentaries, such as The Social Dilemma, which describe the platforms themselves) summarize what Postman (2020) describes as the "perversion of technology from its purpose," embodied in his critique of technopoly —the universe of popular culture created by the platforms. On these platforms, beyond content, everything and anything is transformed into consumable images.

In this context, it is important to underline that Netflix and similar digital platforms are the most influential actors of contemporary cultural production, without forgetting that all these cultural moves of Netflix and similar digital platforms are to build a culture focused on profit and consumption. These platforms, which reshape social values and relations and are at the center of cultural production, are among the most important elements of surveillance capitalism. As McLuhan pointed out many years ago, the medium has become not just a tool but the message itself and even the universe of popular culture.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the effects of digital platforms, such as Netflix, on users and content consumption from a theoretical perspective within the framework of Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman's media theories, aiming to reveal how these platforms transcend mere content delivery tools and shape individuals' media consumption habits. In line with McLuhan's thesis that "the medium is the message itself," the way a platform interacts with the user leads to both individual and social transformations, regardless of the content it offers. Many structural elements of Netflix, such as its interface design, algorithmic content recommendations, and automatic playback mechanisms, function as systems that individualize media consumption, transforming the viewer into a passive consumer who constantly feels the need to watch something.

Postman's critique of "entertainment, but entertainment that kills" is discussed in the context of digital platforms in this study, and the analysis examines how digital platforms put users in a continuous cycle of consumption. While platforms such as Netflix appeal to a wide audience by increasing the accessibility of content, they also build mechanisms that make users' media consumption more superficial, creating a model of information transfer that is purely entertainment oriented. In this context, the personalized recommendations offered by the platform guide the user's preferences by presenting content that is of interest to them while at the same time undermining the critical thinking process. Postman's critique of the potential of media environments to produce entertainment-based disinformation is directly related to Netflix's interface design and content delivery that shape viewing habits.

Another important finding of this study is how digital platforms construct users as calculable subjects. Through Zuboff's (2021) concept of surveillance capitalism, an examination of Netflix's processes for collecting and analyzing user data reveals that the algorithms these platforms produce, based on audience preferences, direct users toward specific consumption patterns. Netflix and digital platforms not only monitor viewing habits but also establish a structure that radically shapes individuals' media consumption processes. Factors such as the content users are directed to, the type of viewing experience they have, and the duration of their viewing are regulated in line with the economic interests of the platform.

In this context, another question addressed in this study is the mechanisms by which digital platforms construct a large popular culture universe. These platforms are not only content providers but also ideological devices at the center of global cultural production. When evaluating how cultural content is shaped through algorithms and what kinds of narratives are highlighted, it becomes apparent that platforms encourage specific consumption practices, creating a vast popular culture universe that directs viewers toward ideological frameworks. In a globalized media environment, platforms such as

Netflix construct a general media order that keeps users within certain narrative universes by making content selection a non-random process.

In addition to this, the study also discusses how digital platforms can put users into a spiral of consumption within the context of the attention economy. In line with criticisms of the attention economy, it has been observed that digital platforms aim to maintain constant control over users' attention and turn them into passive viewers. While the autoplay mechanism encourages binge-watching of content, recommendation algorithms ensure that users remain in a certain pool of content. This process weakens critical media consumption, rendering individuals' relationships with the media even more passive.

As a result, Netflix and similar digital platforms are not only content providers but also function as a giant popular culture machine that manipulates user experience, directs media consumption habits, and radically transforms individuals' relationships with media. Drawing on the approaches of media theorists such as McLuhan and Postman, this study examined the effects of digital platforms on users. It sought to reveal how these platforms shape individual and social media practices. In future studies, the effects of these platforms on media consumption can be analyzed in a broader framework, and their relationship with the cultural and economic dynamics of digital capitalism can be examined in more detail.

Compliance with the Ethical Standard

Conflict of Interest: *The author(s) declare that they do not have a conflict of interest with themselves and/or other third parties and institutions, or if so, how this conflict of interest arose and will be resolved, and author contribution declaration forms are added to the article process files with wet signatures.*

Ethics Committee Approval: *There is no need for ethics committee approval in this article, the wet signed consent form stating that the ethics committee decision is not required has been added to the article process files on the system.*

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