



Selected Papers of #AoIR2025:  
The 26th Annual Conference of the  
Association of Internet Researchers  
Niterói, Brazil / 15 – 18 Oct 2025

## FAN LABOR AS A SHIELD AGAINST PLATFORMS' UNSAFETY: THE PIPOCA & NANQUIM CASE

Thiago Costa  
FAAP University Center

Beatriz Blanco  
Centro Universitário Senac São Paulo

Digital platforms' governance model for cultural production is based on making content creators entirely responsible for producing, publishing and moderating their work (Poell, Nieborg, & Duffy, 2021), disavowing any accountability for violations and even crimes enabled by and committed on their infrastructures. This arrangement makes digital influencers especially vulnerable to harassment, overworking, and arbitrary politics regarding content management and unfair censure, as happened in episodes such as the Adpocalypse, when an arbitrary and unexpected change on YouTube's monetization politics heavily impacted LGPTQIAPN+ and other niche content creators (Kumar, 2019), and Twitch politics concerning women's bodies, which unclear and sexist rules keep female digital influencers anxious and lost about what is appropriated or unappropriated regarding in how they clothe and present themselves on livestreaming (Cullen & Ruberg, 2019).

Since content creators are on their own, they have been deploying multiple strategic approaches to keep themselves and their content safe despite platforms' lack of assistance. Many of them involve camaraderie as, for instance, self-organized groups focused on information exchange and mutual support among digital influencers. Moreover, often they mobilize their fanbase to deal with safety issues, such as harassment, asking the fans to mass report aggressors to make their claim more relevant to platforms through engagement, or to help them to contact platforms' representatives through sending multiple messages to their e-mail accounts or social media profiles. If these movements show how lively and potent collective mobilization on social media can be, on the other hand, they expose how big tech companies rely on unpaid work to keep their largely profitable structures viable. This happens especially in the Global South countries, that are at the margins of the tech industry and often do not have official headquarters or representatives of the biggest social media platforms in their territory.

Suggested Citation (APA): Costa, T. Blanco, B. (2025, October). *Fan Labor as a Shield Against Platforms' Unsafety: The Pipoca & Nanquim Case*. Paper presented at AoIR2025: The 26th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Niterói, Brazil: AoIR. Retrieved from <http://spir.aoir.org>.

One remarkable case representing these practices is the deplatformization of the video games-focused channel Xbox Mil Grau after the channel's presenters made racist and sexist statements during livestreaming and used their social media profiles to harass Black content creators in 2020. The victims' complaints were largely ignored by platforms until a coalition of fans and people working in the Brazilian video game industry, led by a Black gaming streamer, organized a mass report movement to draw attention to the case. Only after days of intense mobilization through hashtags, sharing of harassment proofs and classical fandom tactics such as asking for international celebrities to support the cause, Twitch and YouTube banned permanently Xbox Milgrau's channels, demonstrating that, to platforms' governance, engagement and visibility are more important to bring them to action than the severity of violations to their politics (Caetano & Blanco, 2022).

Fan labor co-opting by companies is a well-known phenomenon and fans' engagement is a goal for most of the entertainment companies nowadays. Fandom practices today are largely deployed by advertising, political communication and social activism, and companies rely largely on unpaid fan labor to profit from online communities (Stanfill, 2019). Nonetheless, this paper aims to analyze a less explored aspect of these practices: the deployment of fan labor as an alternative to platforms' lack of governance in Global South countries. We draw on a case study of the deletion and recovery of *Pipoca & Nanquim* YouTube channel to contextualize how Brazilian content creators learned to mobilize their fan bases to manage their vulnerability on social media platforms, and to face these platforms' unresponsiveness in cases of harassment or security issues.

On Saturday, January 25, 2025, the YouTube channel *Pipoca & Nanquim*, which specializes in content related to pop culture, was hacked by cybercriminals who conducted live broadcasts about cryptocurrencies and uploaded multiple videos on the same topic. On the same day, the content creators managed to regain control of the channel, expelling the hackers and removing all unauthorized content, believing that the issue had been resolved. However, two days later, on January 27, YouTube deleted the channel, claiming that its terms of service had been violated.

It is important to highlight that *Pipoca & Nanquim* is one of the most respected comic book and cinema-related channels within the Brazilian fan community. Established in 2009, it had 303,000 subscribers, over 2,000 videos, and 80 million views. The channel is so relevant that, in 2017, it enabled the owners to found the also-called *Pipoca & Nanquim* press, focused on printing and distributing comic books, mangas, and novels by Brazilian and foreign authors. All of this was abruptly erased without any contextual analysis, following the publication of videos created by criminals who sought to exploit the existing audience for financial fraud—despite having no connection to the legitimate channel owners.

The channel was reinstated later that same day, January 26, after a call for help was posted on the platform X (formerly known as Twitter), which garnered 55,000 views, 1,000 likes, 258 comments, and 448 shares. On Instagram, the same post reached 278,000 views. It is no exaggeration to say that, in addition to direct appeals to YouTube's support team, the swift recovery of the channel and the preservation of its

content were largely due to pressure - and labor - from the fandom. However, the owners of *Pipoca & Nanquim* have since reported a loss of organic reach on the platform, once again seeking support from their community to restore their visibility. Despite not violating any YouTube policies, they keep being punished by the algorithmic curation and can only rely on their fanbase to have some reparation concerning the episode in which they were victims.

Through a combination of case study methodology (Yin, 2009) and narrative interviews with the *Pipoca & Nanquim* team (Rosenthal, 2018), we propose an analysis of how fan labor is central for Brazilian content creators in regards to safety and acknowledgment by platforms' administration. And, since digital influencers must rely only on their engagement to protect themselves, we also question how this context affects people from social minority groups who work as digital influencers in Brazil, as long as beginner content creators or people producing socially relevant niche content, reinforcing oppressive structures despite the DEI discourse often adopted by digital platforms representatives.

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