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INFORMATIONAL DYNAMICS IN RESISTANCE AGAINST THE DESTRUCTION OF SOCIOBIODIVERSITY IN THE AMAZON: THE ROLE OF ONLINE MEDIA AND CYBERACTIVISM

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Introduction

The Brazilian Amazon is the site of several conflicts involving threats to its biodiversity, the traditional populations that live there (CPT, 2024). In the region, a harmful combination of disparities in power, knowledge and access to information also prevails, in addition to divergent views on how to deal with such conflicts (Instituto Igarapé, 2022; WAISBICH et al., 2022).

The advance of neo-extractive enterprises, which are the manifestation of global capitalism in countries such as Brazil, which still has abundant natural resources, threatens sociobiodiversity in the Amazon. Such advances have been accompanied by strong resistance from traditional communities, environmentalists and urban people, who stood up for defending life, territories and common goods. Resistance takes the form of epistemic and physical struggle. Brazil is the second country with the highest number of murders of environmental defenders, behind only neighboring Colombia (Global Witness, 2024).

Environmental conflicts are permeated by disputes over corporate, political and scientific interests, that have among their tactics the production of ignorance and disinformation Rajão et al., 2022; Miguel, 2022; Fearnside, 2017; Oreskes; Conway, 2010, Regattieri, 2023). This compromises the participation of citizens in crucial issues such as health and quality of life on the planet in these times of Anthropocene (Issberner; Léna, 2018; Svampa, 2019). The ecological crisis is, therefore, also an informational and communicational crisis, in which the interests linked to those primarily

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responsible for this situation are adopting informational strategies to delay actions that could be unfavorable to them.

However, the Internet and new information and communication technologies are also used as tools by those who resist the destruction of the forest and their ways of life. Traditional peoples, environmentalists and activists are increasingly using new technologies and digital media to ensure that reliable reports and information about the environment reach more people, thus countering disinformation on the subject. Tools such as digital platforms, websites, e-mail and other Internet-based devices have greatly facilitated movements as a global phenomenon (Vegh, 2003). The world of digital activism has broadened and stimulated large-scale political participation by minorities. One example is the presence of traditional populations, including indigenous peoples, in cyberspace. The production of content by these populations provides new forms of representation for these groups and increases the visibility, audience and engagement regarding their demands, while also speeding up the dissemination of reports against those who violate their rights.

The ongoing research investigates the information dynamics in communities that have resisted for years the invasion of neo-extractivist projects and the threats. The particular focus is on the role of new digital media specialized in disseminating information about threats to sociobiodiversity and violence to defender in the Amazon, giving them global visibility. The research methodology includes mapping media vehicles and other organizations specialized in covering conflicts in the Amazon in Brazil, the application of structured questionnaires to collaborators and activists, the conduct of in-depth interviews and a field study in two cities in the state of Pará . More than 80 news outlets, NGOs and associations of indigenous communicators that work with this mission have already been identified. The idea is to track the entire path of information, from its origin to its dissemination, including the production of information and verification of content.

Research question and objectives

The main objective of this research project is to identify how digital networks contribute to the resistance movement against the destruction of biodiversity. This means identifying the categories of actors involved and analyzing their *modus operandi*, that is, mapping the strategies of the different actors and the informational devices used.

The following secondary objectives stand out: 1. To analyze the relationship between neo-extractivist logic and socio-environmental degradation in the Amazon; 2. To identify the forms of resistance adopted by threatened communities and environmental activists in the face of disparities in access, production and dissemination of information and the disinformation propagated by neo-extractivist agents; 3. To identify the role of digital platforms in denouncing threats to socio-biodiversity in the Amazon; and 4. To systematize information dynamics regarding socio-environmental threats involving local communities and the dissemination of information on digital platforms.

Considering the aspects mentioned, this research is organized around a core of fundamental questions: What is the role of digital networks in the resistance movement against the destruction of sociobiodiversity? From this central question, others derive: (i)

where do the threats to sociobiodiversity in the Amazon come from and which agents participate? (ii) how do environmental activists, traditional populations and other groups articulate to denounce threats on the internet? (iii) what is the design of the information circuit, from its origin to its posting on digital channels?

Methodology

The research methodology includes a data collection of the main media outlets and organizations responsible for environmental activism in the Amazon in Brazil, with the application of structured questionnaires to collaborators, journalists and activists and the conduct of in-depth interviews. The second phase of the research was a field visit to two cities in the state of Pará - Belém and Santarém - to interview local leaders and activists. The idea is, on the one hand, to prepare a critical review of the literature with a view to rethinking forms of activism on digital networks to face current challenges. On the other hand, to identify the different forms of cyberactivism on the Internet.

Discussion of preliminary results

To date, more than 100 organizations have been mapped, including media outlets dedicated to socio-environmental coverage of the Amazon, indigenous communication collectives, NGOs and research groups. More than 30 people from different organizations have been contacted and 25 interviews have been conducted on the field research. The results highlighted here present some of the findings from the interviews with journalists during the first phase.

Among the challenges in covering the Amazon and keeping independent news outlets on the air, the interviewees highlighted the lack of funding, competition for resources, precarious work conditions, and the small teams. They also point out the high costs of covering the Amazon, with long distances, the need for well-trained reporters, and the dangers that the region involves, precisely because of the nature of the reports.

The interviews and the documental research already carried out reveal the importance of creating trustworthy digital networks so that information about reports of socio-environmental crimes can leave the forest and reach broader communication channels on the internet. The interviewees also point to the ambiguous role played by digital platforms, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, in the circulation of information in remote communities in the Amazon. These are often the only information channels that communities have to amplify their complaints and make it reach decision-making bodies or a wider audience.

The interviewees also indicate that the arrival of the internet via Starlink satellite has caused major changes in the information dynamics of the Amazon, especially in areas that were previously difficult to communicate with. The internet operator owned by far-right billionaire Elon Musk is viewed in a dubious light. On the one hand, it is seen as facilitating communication in isolated communities and investigations by journalists, while at the same time it also allows criminals - such as illegal miners and drug traffickers - to have access to the internet and means of communication in the middle of the forest.

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