Platform capitalism and digital vigilance:
Higher Education under algorithmic surveillance[1]

Capitalismo de plataforma e soberania digital:
a Educação Superior sob vigilância algorítmica

Capitalismo de plataforma y soberanía digital:
la Educación Superior bajo vigilancia algorítmica

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Abstract: The automated collection of student behavioral data on digital platforms has become a fundamental practice of platform capitalism, reshaping the educational experience and intensifying algorithmic surveillance. This article aims to analyze the Privacy Policy of Coursera for Campus, using a qualitative, exploratory methodological approach based on bibliographic and documentary research. The results show that the platform not only collects and stores personal and behavioral information, but also shares it with commercial partners, inserting Higher Education into flows of financialization and commodification of data. It is concluded that Coursera's privacy policy exemplifies, in a paradigmatic way, the convergence between platformization, financialization of education, and algorithmic surveillance, putting at risk the digital sovereignty and autonomy of Higher Education institutions.
Keywords: Platform Capitalism; Datafication; Financialization of Education; Privacy Policies; Surveillance.

Resumo: A coleta automatizada de dados comportamentais de estudantes em plataformas digitais tem se consolidado como prática estruturante do capitalismo de plataforma, ao ressignificar a experiência educacional e intensificar a vigilância algorítmica. Este artigo tem por objetivo analisar a Política de Privacidade do *Coursera for Campus*, a partir de uma abordagem metodológica qualitativa, de caráter exploratório, fundamentada em pesquisa bibliográfica e documental. Os resultados evidenciam que a plataforma não apenas coleta e armazena informações pessoais e comportamentais, mas também as compartilha com parceiros comerciais, inserindo a Educação Superior em fluxos de financeirização e mercantilização de dados. Conclui-se que a política de privacidade do *Coursera* exemplifica, de forma paradigmática, a convergência entre plataformização, financeirização da educação e vigilância algorítmica, ao colocar em risco a soberania digital e a autonomia das instituições de Educação Superior.

Resumen: La recopilación automatizada de datos sobre el comportamiento de los estudiantes en plataformas digitales se ha consolidado como una práctica estructural del capitalismo de plataforma, al redefinir la experiencia educativa e intensificar la vigilancia algorítmica. El objetivo de este artículo es analizar la Política de Privacidad de Coursera for Campus, a partir de un enfoque metodológico cualitativo, de carácter exploratorio, basado en la investigación bibliográfica y documental. Los resultados evidencian que la plataforma no solo recopila y almacena información personal y conductual, sino que también la comparte con socios comerciales, insertando la educación superior en flujos de financiarización y mercantilización de datos. Se concluye que la política de privacidad de Coursera ejemplifica, de manera paradigmática, la convergencia entre la plataforma, la financiarización de la educación y la vigilancia algorítmica, al poner en riesgo la soberanía digital y la autonomía de las instituciones de Educación Superior.
Palabras clave: Capitalismo de Plataforma; Datificación; Financiarización de la Educación; Políticas de Privacidad; Vigilancia.

Introduction

Figure 1 – Example of a Terms and Conditions acceptance checkbox
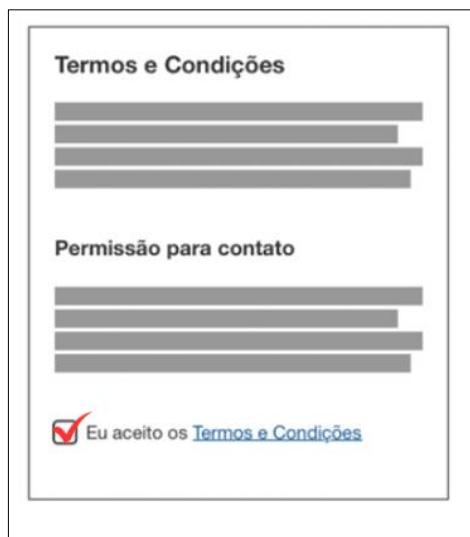
Source: Adapted from Iubenda (c2025, online)[4]

The act of accepting terms and conditions, seemingly simple and routine, as illustrated in Figure 1, synthesizes the way in which we daily consent to the collection and processing of

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[4] Available at: https://www.iubenda.com/pt-br/help/78933-exemplos-de-formulario-de-consentimento-no-gdpr-o-que-fazer-ou-evitar. Accessed on: Aug. 20, 2025.

our digital data. The gesture of ticking a checkbox has become so naturalized that we seldom reflect on its implications, yet it represents the acceptance of practices of surveillance and the commodification of personal information.

The increasing use of networked digital technologies in Higher Education, for example, has generated profound transformations in the ways of teaching, learning, and managing knowledge. This movement, often associated with the promise of democratizing access to education, must be problematized through critical perspectives that uncover the ideology of technocentrism and the discourses of technological neutrality.

In practice, digital teaching and learning platforms not only organize content and interactions but also structure dynamics of collecting, storing, and circulating users' personal and behavioral data, converting them into strategic inputs for capitalist accumulation (Srnicek, 2017). Thus, understanding the role of the platformization of education requires considering how neoliberal and market logics permeate pedagogical mediation – and how algorithmic surveillance directly impacts teachers' work and training, as well as students' autonomy.

In both Brazilian and international contexts, the hegemony of private digital education platforms deepens the dependence on transnational corporations, often headquartered in the United States or Europe, which concentrate economic and technological power. In light of Gramsci's reflections (1978), such hegemony materializes through the articulation between domination, expressed in the structural coercion that subjects educational systems to these corporations, and direction, consolidated through the consensus around the discourse of innovation and the democratization of access. This dependence calls digital sovereignty into question, as the management and processing of data from millions of students and teachers become carried out by companies whose central objectives are not pedagogical but commercial.

The discourse of efficiency and personalized learning, sustained by corporate narratives, conceals the reality of the financialization of education and the transformation of educational data into marketable assets (Afonso, 2021; Zuboff, 2021). In this scenario, the need emerges to critically discuss the implications of digital surveillance for teacher training and work, as well as for the protection of fundamental rights related to privacy and control over personal information.

Among the various platforms operating globally, Coursera[5] stands out. Through its branch Coursera for Campus[6] (Coursera for Universities, c2025), the platform has expanded its presence in the European and Latin American contexts, presenting itself as an innovative solution for Higher Education institutions. However, its privacy policy makes explicit the continuous monitoring mechanisms of students' interactions, which are converted into data subject to commercialization – either through internal platform improvements or through sharing with strategic partners. This practice aligns with the corporate model of data mining, in which each user action – from time spent on a page to interactions in forums – constitutes raw material for predictive analyses and profit generation (Mau, 2019; Muller, 2019).

From this perspective, education becomes increasingly subjected to a logic of datafication, in which the teaching and learning process is reduced to information flows that are continuously monitored, quantified, and analyzed by algorithms. While such data are presented as resources for improving the learning experience, they also sustain a business model centered on digital surveillance and control (Azevedo, 2023; Balieiro, 2025). This movement reveals the overlap between data extraction, discussed by Srnicek (2017), and the rationality of datafication, highlighted by Afonso (2021), both evident in the privacy policies of platforms such as Coursera. What is at stake is not merely the pedagogical effectiveness of digital tools, but the shaping of an educational environment that naturalizes surveillance and the commodification of personal information, to the detriment of pedagogical autonomy and institutions' digital sovereignty.

Given this scenario, the present article aims to analyze the privacy policy of Coursera for Campus, discussing its implications for Higher Education and, particularly, for data security and digital surveillance. This objective follows directly from the initial problematization of algorithmic surveillance and platformization, reinforcing the coherence between the investigative focus and the issues developed throughout the text.

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[5] It maintains collaborations with more than 350 leading universities and companies, offering flexible, accessible online learning aligned with labor-market demands. It is important to note that such an operation is only possible because Coursera functions as a digital platform, that is, an intermediary environment that connects knowledge-producing institutions to individuals and organizations on a global scale. Like any platform, it operates through the logic of bringing multiple actors together in the same space, increasing its relevance as the number of users grows. In this context, its initiatives – which range from practical projects and courses to professional certificates and degree programs – are examples of products that gain value precisely through their insertion into a platform structure (Coursera for Universities, c2025).

[6] Available at: https://www.coursera.org/campus?utm_content=corp-to-landing-for-campus&utm_campaign=website&utm_medium=coursera&utm_source=header&utm_term=b-out. Accessed on: Aug. 4, 2025.

Methodologically, this is a qualitative study (Sampieri; Collado; Lucio, 2013), of an exploratory nature, grounded in bibliographic (Gil, 2008) and documentary procedures (Evangelista; Shiroma, 2019). The documentary analysis focuses on the text of the platform's privacy policy, aiming to problematize how it makes explicit the extraction and processing of data from students and partner institutions. By articulating authors from critical theory – such as Srnicek (2017), Mau (2019), Muller (2019), Afonso (2021), Zuboff (2021), Azevedo (2023), and Balieiro (2025) – with the findings of the documentary analysis, the study seeks to demonstrate how education, when mediated by digital platforms, is traversed by practices of algorithmic surveillance and dynamics of financialization.

Based on the foregoing, the relevance of this study lies in contributing to the debate on data security and surveillance in education, highlighting how platform capitalism reconfigures the educational field by transforming data into commodities. The investigation enables an understanding of the tensions between pedagogical promise and economic exploitation by pointing out the limits and risks of platformization for teacher training, student autonomy, and digital sovereignty. In this sense, the study also seeks to address a gap still scarcely explored in Brazilian literature by offering a critical analysis of the privacy policies of educational platforms from the perspective of digital sovereignty.

For didactic purposes, the organization of the text is presented to the reader: in addition to this Introduction, the following sections discuss the theoretical considerations regarding the phenomena of platform capitalism, surveillance, and datafication; subsequently, the methodological procedures of the article are described, followed by the documentary analysis of the Coursera for Campus Privacy Policy. Finally, the Conclusion offers reflections that revisit and deepen the discussions developed throughout the article.

Platform Capitalism, Surveillance and Datafication: theoretical considerations

The contemporary debate on the interactions between education and networked digital technologies must be situated within the broader context of platform capitalism. According to Srnicek (2017), digital platforms constitute the dominant corporate model of the twenty-first century, grounded in the large-scale collection, extraction, and analysis of data. Within this logic, data are understood as a strategic resource, comparable to oil, whose value lies not only in their extraction but also in their ability to be processed, refined, and applied to multiple economic purposes. As the author points out:

> [...] generating the proper algorithms can involve the manual entry of learning sets into a system. Altogether, this means that the collection of data today is dependent on a vast infrastructure to sense, record, and analyse. What is recorded? Simply put, we should consider *data* to be the raw material that must be extracted, and the *activities* of users to be the natural source of this raw material. Just like oil, data are a material to be extracted, refined, and used in a variety of ways. The more data one has, the more uses one can make of them (Srnicek, 2017, p. 23, author's emphasis)[7].

Within this horizon, what is understood as platform capitalism, according to Srnicek (2017), is a corporate model characterized by several fundamental features: monopolistic power, resulting from network effects that amplify the concentration of users and render a small number of platforms virtually irreplaceable; massive data extraction, converted into a strategic resource for commercial purposes; disintermediation, through which platforms place themselves as direct mediators between producers and consumers, capturing value in every interaction; and algorithmic governance, which organizes, classifies, and guides behaviors through opaque systems of calculation. Such features demonstrate that platforms are not merely technical tools, but forms of economic and political organization that shape social practices on a global scale.

In the field of Higher Education, platforms such as Coursera do not merely mediate pedagogical practices: they transform student and teacher interactions into inputs for algorithms that, while personalizing learning trajectories, simultaneously sustain business models grounded in surveillance and the commodification of data.

This economic and political logic of technology is further developed by Zuboff (2021) through the concept of surveillance capitalism:

> The surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. Although some of these data are applied to the improvement of products and services, the remainder is declared as the proprietor's *behavioral surplus*, feeding advanced fabrication processes known as "machine intelligence" and manufactured into *prediction products* that anticipate what a given individual will do now, soon, and later (Zuboff, 2021, p. 22, author's emphasis).

For the author, the capture of surplus behavioral data – that is, data that exceed the initial purpose of the service offered – constitutes the foundation of an economy driven by continuous monitoring. In the educational sphere, this practice means that information about

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[7] In Portuguese: "[...] gerar os algoritmos adequados pode envolver a entrada manual de conjuntos de aprendizagem em um sistema. Ao todo, isso significa que a coleta de dados hoje depende de uma vasta infraestrutura para sentir, registrar e analisar. O que é registrado? Simplificando, devemos considerar os *dados* como a matéria-prima que deve ser extraída e as *atividades* dos usuários como a fonte natural dessa matéria-prima. Assim como o petróleo, os dados são um material a ser extraído, refinado e usado de várias maneiras. Quanto mais dados se tem, mais usos podemos fazer deles".

students' performance, habits, and even emotions can be transformed into a commodity, whether to improve internal algorithms or to be commercialized with third parties:

> [...] the competitive dynamics of these new markets lead surveillance capitalists to acquire increasingly predictive sources of behavioral surplus: our voices, personalities, and emotions. Surveillance capitalists have discovered that the most predictive behavioral data come from intervening in the game in order to encourage, persuade, tune, and herd behavior in pursuit of profitable outcomes. [...] it is no longer enough to automate information flows *about us*; the goal now is to *automate us*. In this stage of the evolution of surveillance capitalism, the means of production are subordinated to increasingly complex and comprehensive 'means of behavioral modification'. [...] (Zuboff, 2021, p. 23, author's emphasis).

Thus, the promise of efficiency and pedagogical innovation conceals a logic of technological domination, which shifts the center of the educational process from critical formation to the algorithmic management of behavior.

In the Portuguese educational context, Afonso (2021) problematizes this process through the notion of datafication. According to the author, the

> [...] *datafication* of education comprises the collection of data at all levels of the educational system, especially regarding teaching, learning, and school management. The data serve multiple purposes and are gathered through the use of a wide range of tracking, detection, and analytical technologies. The use of digital platforms and the reliance on algorithms enable forms of processing and analysis of increasing complexity (Afonso, 2021, p. 7, author's emphasis).

This phenomenon converts human experiences into continuous flows of data that are later organized into metrics, reports, and performance indicators. Although frequently presented as tools for management and improvement, such processes reduce education to numbers and statistics, promoting a technocratic rationality that tends to empty its formative, critical, and emancipatory dimensions.

The social effects of this paradigm are identified by Mau (2019) and Muller (2019) in their discussion of the rise of a metricized society. In such a society, all aspects of life are subjected to processes of quantification, ranking, and comparison. The educational field, in this sense, becomes a privileged space for the experimentation of metrics, in which the quality of education is measured by statistical indicators and algorithms rather than by pedagogical or ethical parameters. This obsession with measurement legitimizes surveillance practices and creates an environment in which the value of the student is reduced to numerical performance, emptying the subjective and collective dimensions of the educational experience.

In this scenario, metricization assumes a disciplining function: by transforming learning trajectories and teaching practices into numbers, indicators, and graphs, it establishes patterns of normality and productivity that begin to shape institutional decisions. International rankings, performance indexes, and automated assessment algorithms reinforce the idea that the value of education can be translated into comparable metrics, creating pressures on universities, teachers, and students to conform to external and often market-oriented parameters. As Mau (2019) argues, this can amount to a regime of permanent auditing, in which every action must be quantified and justified through data. Muller (2019), in turn, warns that this logic shifts the educational purpose toward performance goals, obscuring critical, ethical, and civic dimensions of the formative process.

The critique of this dynamic is also articulated through the concept of algorithmic governance, developed by Azevedo (2023). This refers to the process by which pedagogical, administrative, and even evaluative decisions come to be guided by algorithms, which are in many cases opaque and unintelligible to their users:

> [...] algorithmic governance [...] presupposes periodic evaluations that generate data not only regarding curricular content but also social, economic, political, cultural, geographical, and demographic information, which are transformed into indicators, classifications, comparisons, records of performance (positive or negative), and cases perceived as successful (in terms of meeting targets) that, from a managerial perspective, become guides, *benchmarks*, and examples of 'best practices' to be followed or replicated in educational systems [...] (Azevedo, 2023, p. 154, author's emphasis).

Algorithmic governance redefines school and university environments by shifting authority away from teachers and institutions toward systems of automated calculation. Such a configuration expands surveillance over faculty and students by establishing subtle yet intense forms of digital control that directly impact pedagogical autonomy and the sovereignty of educational institutions.

In this context, Balieiro (2025) argues that we live under a regime of digital control, in which surveillance is not merely an occasional or residual practice but rather a structural element of how platforms operate. The collection of behavioral data, combined with the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning, intensifies the capacity to monitor and predict conduct, instituting a logic of anticipation that reshapes educational relationships themselves. Thus, the student ceases to be viewed as a subject of learning and becomes interpreted as a set of data to be exploited. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that this dynamic can be understood through the lens of critical education, as indicated by authors such as Gramsci (1978) and Saviani (2011), for whom formative processes constitute social practices embedded in broader political disputes.

Bringing these contributions together reveals a theoretical convergence that positions education within the lens of platformization and digital surveillance. On the one hand, the promise of innovation and democratization; on the other, the reality of financialization, data commodification, and algorithmic governance. This tension underscores the importance of critically analyzing documents such as the privacy policies of educational platforms, which not only legally regulate the use of data but also reveal the place of education within the global digital economy.

Methodological procedures

It should be noted that this article is methodologically grounded in a qualitative approach, as it seeks to interpret, in a critical manner, the meanings and implications of the collection of educational data within the context of platformization. As emphasized by Sampieri, Collado, and Lucio (2013), qualitative research makes it possible to explore phenomena in their complexity, privileging the understanding of meanings attributed by subjects and institutions within their social and cultural contexts.

This is an exploratory investigation aimed at problematizing a topic that is still expanding within the educational field: data security and digital surveillance. Exploratory research is particularly suitable when the objective is to broaden knowledge about a given issue, allowing for the development of hypotheses and the formulation of new questions (Gil, 2008).

Regarding technical procedures, the research articulates two axes: (i) bibliographic, based on the review and analysis of works that discuss platform capitalism, algorithmic surveillance, and datafication in education, with emphasis on authors such as Srnicek (2017), Zuboff (2021), Afonso (2021), Mau (2019), Muller (2019), Azevedo (2023), and Balieiro (2025). This theoretical framework supports the critical interpretation of the problem under investigation; (ii) documentary, centered on the analysis of the Privacy Policy of the Coursera for Campus platform. As explained by Evangelista and Shiroma (2019), documentary analysis enables the examination of institutional records as legitimate research sources, unveiling both their explicit statements and the implicit contradictions present in their formulation.

The empirical object therefore consists of the privacy policy made available by Coursera, a U.S.-based educational technology company that offers digital courses and academic degrees in partnership with internationally prestigious institutions. The choice of this document is justified by the fact that it explicitly outlines, in normative terms, the ways

in which the company collects, stores, processes, and shares personal and behavioral data from students and institutional partners.

The analysis focused on identifying excerpts that address automated data collection, the sharing of information with third parties, the use of predictive analytics, and mechanisms related to targeted advertising. These elements were problematized in light of critical theory, in dialogue with the concept of platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017), the notion of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2021), and the perspective of educational datafication (Afonso, 2021).

Thus, the methodology adopted enables the articulation of documentary examination with theoretical reflection, highlighting how data collection and management practices within Coursera align with a broader logic of the financialization of education and algorithmic surveillance over subjects. Based on these procedures, the analysis that follows seeks to demonstrate how the elements present in the privacy policy directly correspond to the theoretical categories previously discussed.

Documentary Analysis of the Privacy Policy of the Coursera for Campus Platform

The Privacy Policy of Coursera for Campus reveals how the educational platform is embedded within the logic of platform capitalism and makes explicit the practices of algorithmic surveillance operating in the educational field. The document analyzed, available on the company's institutional website[8], is structured into sections that regulate the collection, use, sharing, and retention of users' personal information. At first glance, the text adopts a tone of neutrality and transparency, claiming to value data protection and respect for privacy. However, a critical reading reveals a series of ambiguities and contradictions that call into question the real purpose and scope of these practices.

Coursera states that it collects basic personal data such as name, email address, and payment information, in addition to behavioral data related to students' interactions with the platform: usage time, browsing patterns, clicks, responses to activities, engagement in forums, and even performance metrics. Such breadth demonstrates that the student is not merely a user of an educational service but a constant producer of information that is transformed into business inputs. In this sense, every digital gesture becomes data that can be stored and analyzed. The document makes explicit: "We collect […] account registration details such as name and email, details of Content Offerings you undertake […] identity verification data,

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[8] Available at: https://www.coursera.org/about/privacy. Accessed on: Aug. 4, 2025.

and information about your use of our site and Services"[9]. This excerpt highlights the collection of registration data such as name, email, and identity credentials, which allow for the individualized identification of the student. Although such data are justified as requirements for registration and authentication, they also constitute valuable material for commercial segmentation strategies.

In addition, the platform records information such as course progress, grades, completed activities, and interactions in forums, which constitutes the collection of academic data. Although presented as necessary for pedagogical monitoring, such data enable detailed mapping of formative trajectories that go beyond educational management, reinforcing the logic of measurement, standardization, and the potential market exploitation of learning practices.

In the same movement, the policy highlights references to the logging of usage time, browsing patterns, clicks, and engagement metrics, which pertain to behavioral data:

> When users come to our Site, we may track, collect, and aggregate information indicating, among other things, which pages of our Site were visited, the order in which they were visited, when they were visited, and which hyperlinks were clicked. We also collect information from the URLs from which you linked to our Site. The collection of this information may involve recording the IP address, operating system, and browser software used by each user of the Site. [...] (Coursera – Privacy Notice, c2025, online)[10].

Such information reveals the intensity of participation and the ways in which users interact with the platform. As Srnicek (2017) observes, this constitutes the capture of behavioral surplus which, once refined by algorithms, generates economic value for the business.

A critical aspect to examine as well is the use of machine-learning algorithms and predictive analytics, explicitly mentioned in the document. The platform states that it uses data to predict learning trajectories, recommend content, and identify patterns of dropout risk. Although such mechanisms are presented as strategies to "improve the educational experience," their real function is to expand control over student behavior by anticipating actions and standardizing trajectories. The text itself highlights:

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[9] In Portuguese: "Coletamos os Dados Pessoais [...] incluindo detalhes de registro da conta, como nome e e-mail, detalhes das Ofertas de Conteúdo que você realiza [...] dados de verificação de identidade e informações sobre seu uso do nosso site e Serviços".

[10] In Portuguese: "Quando os usuários acessam nosso Site, podemos rastrear, coletar e agregar informações indicando, entre outras coisas, quais páginas do nosso Site foram visitadas, a ordem em que foram visitadas, quando foram visitadas e quais hiperlinks foram clicados. Também coletamos informações das URLs a partir das quais você acessou nosso Site. A coleta dessas informações pode envolver o registro do endereço IP, sistema operacional e software de navegador usados por cada usuário do Site. [...]".

> We use your Personal Data for […] conducting research relating to Content Offerings, sharing information with our Content Providers and our suppliers, direct marketing, and performing statistical analysis of the use of our site and Services […] (Coursera – Privacy Notice, c2025, online)[11].

Such a configuration, as Azevedo (2023) indicates, characterizes a process of algorithmic governance in which pedagogical and administrative decisions are transferred to automated systems that are opaque and inaccessible to users. The student's freedom of choice is therefore constrained by recommendations that, far from being neutral, are guided by commercial calculations and statistical models.

Moreover, the policy makes explicit that data may be shared with commercial partners and third-party service providers, including online advertising companies. At this point, one observes the materialization of what Zuboff (2021) calls surveillance capitalism: the capture of behavioral surplus that exceeds pedagogical purposes and is converted into commodities traded in an increasingly lucrative data market. The document is explicit in stating: "We may disclose personal information […] to advertising partners in order to show you advertising that is more likely to be of interest to you" (Coursera – Privacy Notice, c2025, online)[12]. In this regard, the collection of browsing and device data (such as IP address, cookies, access history, and geolocation) connects the educational experience to the broader ecosystem of digital tracking and behavioral advertising. The student who, in principle, should be protected in their privacy becomes the object of invisible extraction processes, often without full awareness of the extent to which their information is being used.

Likewise, the analysis shows that Coursera uses data for personalized advertising, a practice that reinforces the transformation of education into a field of commercial exploitation. The logic of personalization, presented as a pedagogical strategy, is instrumentalized for the purposes of targeted marketing. Thus, the boundary between the learning space and the advertising market becomes increasingly tenuous, confirming Afonso's (2021) critique of educational datafication, in which the entire teaching and learning process is converted into a data flow that can be monetized.

This process of datafication connects to what Mau (2019) and Muller (2019) describe as a metricized society, marked by an obsession with indicators, rankings, and measurements. Coursera's privacy policy legitimizes the idea that the value of the educational experience can be translated into numbers and engagement metrics, reinforcing a technocratic and neoliberal

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[11] In Portuguese: "Usamos seus Dados Pessoais para […] conduzir pesquisas relacionadas a Ofertas de Conteúdo, compartilhar informações com nossos Provedores de Conteúdo e nossos fornecedores, marketing direto e realizar análises estatísticas do uso de nosso site e Serviços".
[12] In Portuguese: "Podemos divulgar informações pessoais […] a parceiros publicitários para mostrar anúncios que sejam mais do seu interesse".

model of educational management. In this model, critical and civic formation is subordinated to quantification, ranking, and constant comparison among individuals and institutions.

Another critical issue concerns data retention time, which the platform does not clearly delineate. Instead of establishing strict timelines and transparent criteria for deletion, the document indicates that data may be stored "[...] no longer than necessary [...] depending on the purposes [...] and/or as required to comply with applicable laws" (Coursera – Privacy Notice, c2025, online)[13]. This vague and generic wording creates room for the indefinite retention of personal information, contradicting the principles of limitation and minimization established in legislation such as the Brazilian General Data Protection Law (Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados – LGPD), Law n. 13.709 (Brazil, 2018), and the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 (European Union, 2016). In this context, one can observe the asymmetry between corporate discourses of ethical commitment and practices that increase users' exposure to risks of misuse and data leaks.

Moreover, the documentary analysis shows that Coursera not only collects and shares data, but embeds them within a global ecosystem of information circulation in which universities, technology companies, service providers, and advertisers form a complex network of interests. This circulation fragments the notion of privacy, as information ceases to be controlled by the individual and becomes integrated into opaque chains of processing and reuse. As Balieiro (2025) argues, this constitutes a regime of digital control, in which data governance escapes both the individual and even educational institutions, subordinating educational sovereignty to transnational corporate logics.

By critically examining the document, it becomes clear that Coursera naturalizes surveillance as an integral part of the educational process. The constant monitoring of students' actions is presented as a requirement for innovation, personalization, and efficiency, but in fact consolidates a pedagogy of surveillance, in which learning also means being constantly observed, evaluated, and converted into data. Such a practice reinforces the asymmetry between central and peripheral countries, as foreign platforms can assume control over sensitive information from students in other regions, undermining digital sovereignty and the autonomy of public universities.

Thus, far from being a mere legal document, the privacy policy functions as an expression of a business model that transforms data into commodities and subjects

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[13] In Portuguese: "[...] não mais do que o necessário [...] dependendo dos fins [...] e/ou conforme exigido para cumprir as leis aplicáveis".

education to neoliberal rationality. The promise of democratization and personalization of learning therefore conceals the commercial nature of automated data collection, whose implications for teacher training and educational practice must be continuously problematized.

It is also important to note that Coursera's operation is embedded within the logic of network effects. According to Srnicek (2017, pp. 53-54):

> With network effects, a tendency towards monopolisation is built into the DNA of platforms: the more numerous the users who interact on a platform, the more valuable the entire platform becomes for each one of them. Network effects, moreover, tend to mean that early advantages become solidified as permanent positions of industry leadership. Platforms also have a unique ability to link together and consolidate multiple network effects. […][14].

The section of the policy in which the company states that it uses personal data to "[…] analyze how the student interacts with the Site, its features and content, and our Services […]" (Coursera – Privacy Notice, c2025, online)[15], including through machine learning and artificial intelligence tools (Coursera – Privacy Notice, c2025), demonstrates how each individual interaction is incorporated into a feedback mechanism that increases the platform's value as a whole. By understanding users' demands and integrating them into the development of new products, Coursera strengthens its already established leadership position, consolidating competitive advantages in line with the monopolistic tendency identified by Srnicek (2017): the more users and data circulate on the platform, the more valuable it becomes.

This movement, moreover, connects directly to Zuboff's (2021) reflections on instrumentarian power. The collection and analysis of interaction data, while enabling a better understanding of user demand and leading to improvements in the platform (Coursera – Privacy Notice, c2025), function as mechanisms that not only *know* but also *shape* student behavior. This becomes even more evident in the section of the policy that authorizes the sharing of personal data with content providers and business partners:

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[14] In Portuguese: "Com os efeitos de rede, uma tendência à monopolização é construída no DNA das plataformas: quanto mais numerosos são os usuários que interagem em uma plataforma, mais valiosa toda a plataforma se torna para cada um deles. Além disso, os efeitos de rede tendem a significar que as vantagens iniciais se solidificam como posições permanentes de liderança no setor. As plataformas também têm uma capacidade única de se conectar e consolidar vários efeitos de rede. […]".

[15] In Portuguese: "[…] analisar como o estudante interage com o Site, seus recursos e conteúdo e nossos Serviços […]".

> We may share your Personal Data with Content Providers and other Coursera business partners so that Content Providers and other business partners can share information about their products and services that may be of interest to you. [...] (Coursera – Privacy Notice, c2025, online)[16].

In this case, the use of information goes beyond the educational sphere, guiding practices of behavioral inducement in favor of third-party commercial purposes. It is, therefore, the materialization of what Zuboff (2021, p. 23) describes:

> Instrumentarian power knows and shapes human behavior in favor of the aims of third parties. Instead of weapons and armies, it asserts its will through the automated medium of an increasingly ubiquitous computational architecture composed of networked 'intelligent' devices, objects, and spaces.

An omnipresent computational ecosystem whose algorithmic architecture directs individuals' choices, replacing traditional forms of coercion with subtle mechanisms of surveillance and market-driven persuasion.

In this way, the examination of Coursera's privacy policy confirms the dual movement theorized by Srnicek (2017) and Zuboff (2021): the consolidation of a monopolistic position through the exploitation of network effects, and the constitution of an instrumentarian apparatus that converts personal data into tools for predicting and shaping human behavior. Taken together, these practices reaffirm the centrality of the platformization of education as a space in which the logic of informational capital overrides pedagogical and ethical parameters.

Final considerations

The analysis of the Coursera for Campus Privacy Policy made it possible to problematize how the educational field, when mediated by digital platforms, becomes embedded in the model of platform capitalism and, even more intensely, in surveillance capitalism. The document investigated proved revealing: far from merely regulating the legal use of data, it expresses the corporate logic that converts education into a source of extraction and commercial circulation of personal and behavioral information.

Revisiting the objective of analyzing the Coursera for Campus privacy policy and discussing its implications for Higher Education – particularly regarding data security and digital surveillance – it became clear that Coursera collects multiple types of data – registration, academic, behavioral, and browsing data – and uses them for purposes that

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16 In Portuguese: "Podemos compartilhar seus Dados Pessoais com Provedores de Conteúdo e outros parceiros de negócios do Coursera, para que Provedores de Conteúdo e outros parceiros de negócios possam compartilhar informações sobre seus produtos e serviços que possam ser do seu interesse. [...]".

extend beyond the pedagogical sphere. The practice of sharing data with commercial partners and advertisers demonstrates the transformation of student life into a commodified asset, in alignment with the discussions of Srnicek (2017) and Zuboff (2021). Furthermore, the lack of clarity on data retention periods and the use of machine-learning algorithms for predictive analytics reinforce the process of datafication (Afonso, 2021), in which the educational experience is reduced to metrics and engagement statistics, legitimizing surveillance and control practices.

These dynamics directly affect the digital sovereignty and autonomy of Higher Education institutions, especially in countries such as Brazil. Algorithmic governance (Azevedo, 2023) and the regime of digital control (Balieiro, 2025) establish a pedagogy of surveillance in which the promise of personalization masks the intensification of technological dependence and the commodification of knowledge. By reinforcing a neoliberal rationality, such platforms weaken critical formation and transform the educational process into an object of economic exploitation.

Given this scenario, it becomes urgent to reaffirm the centrality of the protection of educational data as a fundamental right, by promoting public policies that ensure transparency, regulation, and clear limits on the use of information. It is also necessary to strengthen initiatives that promote digital sovereignty—whether through the adoption of free and community-based technologies or through the development of institutional solutions that preserve teacher and student autonomy. Acts of resistance to the platformization of education must prioritize human dignity and proportionality, reclaiming the public, critical, and emancipatory nature of schools and universities. For this reason, further studies are essential to uncover practices of algorithmic surveillance and the commodification of teaching, in order to reveal their impacts on teacher autonomy and student privacy.

It follows that Coursera's privacy policy exemplifies, in a paradigmatic way, the convergence between platformization, the financialization of education, and algorithmic surveillance, placing digital sovereignty and the autonomy of Higher Education institutions at risk. Exposing and analyzing such practices is not merely an academic exercise but a gesture of defending education as a public good (Azevedo, 2021). It is incumbent upon the educational field to resist this privatizing logic and to reaffirm policies that restore privacy, digital sovereignty, and critical formation as pillars of an effective educational project.

In an interview originally published in the Logos Journal and translated by Moscardi (2022) for *Revista Das Questões*, Srnicek notes that platforms function as organizational infrastructures capable of connecting individuals and enabling forms of collective action previously unfeasible. Even though it is not possible to predict whether such structures will

allow for the political "seizure" of platforms, it is essential to understand the material changes they produce, since such awareness constitutes a fundamental condition for formulating strategies and political action in the present.

In this direction, the need becomes evident for strategies that place human dignity, autonomy, and the emancipatory purpose of education at the center of debates on technology and digital sovereignty. It is a matter of reaffirming that education must remain guided by public and formative aims, rather than being subordinated to the logic of control and data extraction that characterizes the current model of platform capitalism.

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